

T. Austin-Sparks:

READING: John 11 and 12.

"Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that if thou believedst, thou shouldst see the glory of God?" (John 11:40).

"And Jesus answereth them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified" (John 12:23).

Chapters eleven and twelve have to be taken together, for they are part and counterpart. From the above citations from each it will be seen that, once again, the governing factor is the glory of the Son of Man as the Son of God.

Before we can rightly understand the subject-matter of the chapters we need to understand the meaning of glory.

What the Glory of God Is

The glory of God is the expression of the satisfaction of His nature. When and where God's nature - His very being - is satisfied, that satisfaction emanates, and there is a spirit of inexpressible joy, peace, rest, beauty, wonder, harmony, and life. All these elements are the components or constituents of what is called "Glory." When any person is filled with this spirit and experiences something of these elements, almost the only suitable and adequate exclamation is "Glory!"

"O, what a foretaste of glory Divine!"

If our whole life was gathered up into one particular object and concern, so that we had nothing else to justify our existence, and that object was a consuming passion, so that for it we lived, thought, planned, sacrificed, suffered, worked, and longed with an unutterable longing; and then that object was realized, reached, possessed: if that happened, we should be quite unable to shut it all in to ourselves it would break out and affect all around us. In its realm it would be what we would call "Glory" we should exclaim, "Isn't it glorious?!"

Well, lift it all into the so much greater and higher realm of Infinite God; make it eternal and not of time; spiritual and not merely temporal; immortal and not corruptible; and that - where it exists - is Divine glory, and it is affecting and wonderfully satisfying.

God's nature craves for that which corresponds to it. God's nature contains the elements of His purpose and desire. Out of His very being He has projected His purpose. To that purpose He has committed Himself; has planned, labored, thought, sacrificed, suffered, longed; and for its sake He is never resting. When He sees it, in its beginning or increase, in its principle or growth, His "good pleasure," satisfaction and joy are ministered to, so that those concerned register and share His satisfaction; and that is "Glory."

This, then, is the key to John's "Gospel," and to these two chapters in particular. Let us use the key.

Death - the Counter to Glory

Here is Lazarus. It is a fair and beautiful human scene. Strong affection between sisters and brother; a lovely home, to which Jesus turned when He could, knowing of a warm welcome, a deep understanding and appreciation - even if sometimes, under peculiar stress, there may have been a little domestic tension. This scene is broken into by sickness and - death!

Death is the enemy of all that is beautiful. Death is always death, whether it be our death or the Lord's death. When it says of Him that "He tasted death," it means that it was the bitterest and most devastating cup that He drank. Death is always the breakdown of Divine purpose, the contradiction to God's will; the veil over the Divine glory. Death - if it remains - is a closed door.

But more - death is no mere hap, chance, accident; the natural termination of a tenure of life! If the Bible is clear on anything, it is certainly clear on this, that death was not intended, but is the result of a wrongful exercise of choice - the exercise of choice in a manner contrary to the will of God. That exercise is called Sin, and its wages are not the grateful emoluments of services rendered, but judgment upon a state and position altogether

contrary to the Creator's mind.

Death declares that there is something that does not, and never can, bring satisfaction to God's nature. There is that which declares a Divine halt, not a Divine purpose. There is no glory in death! Some people may labor to sublimate death; others declare, "There is no death"; but the Bible just stands by its own definition and declaration: "the last enemy... death," and it is for "abolition," not bowing out or sublimating.

Such then is the setting of John 11.

We must next see the immediate implication of the Bethany scene and event; for there is something of deliberateness, both in what Jesus said about it, and in His strange behavior over it.

"This sickness is... for the glory of God."

"Jesus... abode... where he was."

"Lazarus is dead."

That is the death side. It had a twofold significance: the first is in chapter 11, and the second in chapter 12.

(1) Lazarus as Representing Israel

It is significant that this "Gospel" stands so largely in relation to a Jewish background. See, for example, the references to Jewish Feasts. Then see how everything is in contention with - or by - Jewish Rulers and Teachers. We saw this in our last chapter, in relation to the Shepherd and the flocks and folds. It is not possible to separate the "signs" (miracles) of John's Gospel from the spiritual state of Israel at the time. Hence Lazarus speaks of Israel's condition, need, and only hope.

We have to remember the affectional side. It is clearly stated that "Jesus loved... Lazarus." Lazarus was called "he whom thou lovest," and when Jesus wept the comment of the bystanders was: "Behold how he loved him." Whatever may have been the stem and angry attitude of Jesus toward the "blind leaders," and toward the cold and deadly system which Judaism had become, there is no question as to His love for Israel. See, for example, His tears and hear His lament over Jerusalem. If His way over Lazarus seems strange, it is not lack of love, but rather love's clear discernment of the only way of hope. Lazarus "is sick," and who will say that Israel was not desperately sick in those days? So desperately sick, and of such a sickness, that there is no remedy, no cure, no healing, no patching up. There will be no intervention to preserve and prolong that Israel. Israel must die; that is the only way of any hope or glory at all.

So Lazarus dies. But more - he is left in death until the verdict of nature is: "he stinketh." There is an Old Testament word which says that a consequence of disobedience in Israel - if persisted in - would be that they would become a byword among nations - metaphorically they would stink in their nostrils. How true that has become! So Lazarus sets forth God's estimate of, and verdict upon, Israel. "The wound has become incurable."

We leave that for the moment, and go to the second aspect.

(2) Lazarus as Representing Mankind

Throughout the "Gospel," and with Israel as an illustration, the state and need of mankind as a whole is revealed. There is a very significant change of title from chapter 11 to chapter 12. In 11 it is "Son of God" several times. In 12 that title is not used, but "Son of Man" is. There is a sense in which the former title was peculiarly the challenge and test to Israel at that time. Of course it is always so, in every realm, but Israel's day was closing and it would close on this issue peculiarly. The world's day is not yet at its close - although it may very nearly be. But it will be governed by the same issue as was Israel's.

The point here is that the transition from the immediate emphasis upon Son of God to Son of Man is just the widening of the circle to the whole race, for Son of Man is a racial designation, not only a national. What was true of Lazarus as representing the state and need of Israel is true of the whole human race. Incurable, sick unto death; dead, and stinking. That is the true verdict; that is God's attitude. The only hope is in resurrection, a new beginning, and that by and with Jesus Christ. That natural state of man can never bring satisfaction to God, therefore there can never be any glory there. It is a nature utterly different from God's.

So the events of Bethany pass by swift and direct transition to 12:24: the corn of wheat falling into the ground and dying, in order that a new organism may appear with a propagating life. Connected with this are the explicit

statements concerning the Cross (verses 31-34).

The Cross Is an End

What was it, and is it, that necessitated the holding back of Jesus until Lazarus had been in the grave four days? Why should it be a part of the drama that, when there is true description and admission made, the expression "he stinketh" should be the only appropriate one? The answer is that man at some time (we know when) became infected by a fatal virus called "self," and the essence of self is pride.

"God beholdeth the proud afar off."

"Jesus... abode... in the place where he was."

"Pride is an abomination unto God."

It is the selfhood of man, his self-sufficiency, self-importance, self-will, self-occupation, etc., which will not allow Jesus to be absolute Lord and God, that makes it necessary for the Cross to engulf him. There is no hope for him until he sees himself crucified with Christ and buried with Him! When Paul followed the infinite descent of Christ from the glory of equality with God as His right, down through incarnation and emptying, he concluded the emptying course with "Yea, the death of the Cross," as though nothing could so completely demonstrate the meaning of Christ's death; not a vestige of honor or pride, or respect, or glory. "My God... thou hast forsaken me."

It requires a true apprehension of the meaning of Christ's death to come to the place where it is not only a sentiment uttered, but a course taken -

"When I survey the wondrous Cross On which the Prince of Glory died,

[!] pour contempt on all my pride."

This nature governed by the self principle is in the way of corruption, and is ineligible for glory. Let it go where God has put it, and let us look to and hope alone in Jesus - "the resurrection and the life." There must be just as real a crisis in our lives as there was in Bethany. The state was incurable. Death was a terrible reality. Jesus met it at its uttermost point and, through the power of His own other and different life, completely overthrew it. These are the truths represented in Bethany and Lazarus - truths which are the substance of the Gospel, both for the saved and the unsaved, and borne out by all the subsequent New Testament teaching.

Resurrection - The Ground of Glory

In resurrection God starts all over again with a New Creation; and in a spiritual and real way that New Creation will receive the same verdict as that which was originally given concerning the material and illustrative old creation. "God saw that it was good." "God rested." "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." God, finding His nature satisfied, expresses that satisfaction. And then there follows the inclusive verdict: "We beheld his glory."

This can be put to the test in the simplest ways. When one, knowing himself or herself to be a sinner, hopeless and brokenhearted, with God afar off, turns and, seeing in Jesus God's way, says, "Lord, I believe!" - the issue is that the heart is filled with such a sense of rest, satisfaction, and joy, that the only suitable word to describe it is "Glory."

The same is true when a controversy has arisen between a child or servant of God and his or her Lord. The glory goes out. But let that whole matter be brought to the Cross and acknowledged to be what it is - a reasserting of the natural life or self - let that be put where God has put it, in the grave of Jesus, and once more rest and unspeakable relief fill the heart, and the glory returns.

So we note some other features of the glory.

There is the quick transition from the individual and personal to the collective and corporate. The next scene after the raising of Lazarus is the feast at Bethany. The feast is made for Him who is the Resurrection and the Life. They are eating and drinking together with Him on the ground of a new life. His glory is manifested, not only in the one, but in the many. This leads to a new act of worship. Worship is always the very essence of glory.

From one corn of wheat falling into the ground and dying there comes the "much fruit," many corns and ears of

corn; at length a mighty harvest, of which Jesus was the "Firstfruits."

In relation to the corn of wheat He said, "Now is the Son of Man glorified," and it was so! From Calvary - the Passover - came Pentecost, and who will say that Pentecost was not glory?

But - and there is always someone lurking in the shadows to spoil - it was not long before reactions set in and Judas and all his ilk set a counter-movement going. How the Devil hates to see Jesus glorified! How his jealousy and envy are stirred to overflowing hatred when he sees a company bound together in one life, feasting with Christ in worshipping love! Bitter, bitter is his spite at that, and he will ruin it if he can! So it was, and so it will ever be.

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Ps. 133:1). But Satan hates it, and sees in it the undoing of all his work to rob Christ of His inheritance. After the feast, Judas and the Pharisees. After Pentecost, Herod and the world.

But the far end of all is the glory - God's nature satisfied, and that satisfaction displayed in the New Jerusalem - "having the glory of God."