

T. Austin-Sparks:

"Who being the effulgence of his glory, and the very image of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power" (Hebrews 1:3).

"The god of this world hath blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not dawn upon them" (2 Corinthians 4:4).

"Who is the image of the invisible God" (Colossians 1:15).

Our subject is the Greatness and the Glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, and these passages are amongst many which declare that greatness and glory. In Hebrews it is: "Who being the effulgence of his glory"; in Corinthians it is: "The light of the gospel of the glory of Christ"; and in Colossians it is: "Who is the image of the invisible God".

We begin by noticing the function of the Son of God, and that function is to be God's supreme representative of Himself. Those Scriptures state His function to be the very effulgence of God's image, the image of the invisible God, and that in Him is the glory of God. The all-governing truth of the Scriptures is that by the greatness and glory of His Son, God designs to show that He is God alone. To put that in fewer words: Jesus Christ, as God's Son, is the revelation of God. This defines the nature of Jesus Christ, and sets forth His greatness and His glory.

If we want to know the greatness and glory of Jesus Christ we just have to look at His vocation. When everything else is said about His coming into the world, this is the full, final, supreme thing: He came to reveal the invisible God. That is the function of God's Son, and everything for us rests upon our appreciation of Jesus Christ. For us our knowledge of Christ governs everything in time and eternity. You must weigh these words very carefully. For us, in this life, everything depends upon our appreciation of Jesus Christ, and in all eternity that will be our occupation.

If I were to ask you if you believe that the Apostle Paul had a large knowledge of Jesus Christ, I am quite sure you would say 'Yes!' For two thousand years men have been trying to get into the teaching of that Apostle about Jesus Christ and they are still at it today. More and more books are being written and published on Paul's teaching about Jesus Christ. Some of us have been studying that teaching for more than fifty years, but we are quite prepared to say that we know nothing about it yet. The Apostle Paul had a knowledge of Christ far, far beyond our comprehension. And yet, at the end of his life he was writing: "That I may know Him" (Philippians 3:10). Paul went out of this world saying: "That I may know Him", showing that it would take eternity to know Jesus Christ.

If that is true, then we are surely ready to say: "How great Thou art!"

This knowledge of Jesus Christ is inexhaustible and unending. It begins when we are born again, and is intended to be the education of the Christian throughout all his life here. The one desire and quest of every true Christian ought to be continually: "That I may know Him". Sometimes in speaking to some unsaved person we have asked: 'Do you know the Lord?', but if they knew what we were talking about, they would say: 'Who can know the Lord?' So we have to revise our phraseology and say: 'Have you begun to know the Lord?' And to Christians we have to say: 'Are you going on to know the Lord?'

If we did but know it, the purpose of all God's dealings with us is to bring us into a greater knowledge of His Son. You see, we never know anything about greatness unless we have a great need to know it. For the Christian, 'greatness' is not just a subject for the mind. For the child of God, 'greatness' is a matter of the heart, and we are therefore brought into situations where we must know something much greater than we do know. That is why God brings His children into impossible situations - that they may learn how great Christ is. It is those people who have had the deepest and the greatest trials and difficulties who know how great is the Lord. They know the greatness of the Lord Jesus more than others.

We must understand that the very object and purpose of the coming of the Holy Spirit was to make us know Christ. No one can "by searching find out God". You may spend all your life and all your energy trying to find God, and you will never find Him. There is only One who knows God, and that One is the Holy Spirit. He has come, therefore, to reveal Christ in our hearts. When the Apostle Paul said that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God... and he cannot know them" (1 Corinthians 2:14) he does not leave it there. He

tells us that "unto us God revealed them through the Spirit".

The very purpose, then, of the coming of God's Son into this world was to make God known. There are many parts of the purpose of His coming. For instance, Jesus said: "The Son of man came to seek and to save that which was lost" (Luke 19:10), and "I came that they may have life, and may have it abundantly" (John 10:10). The Apostle John says that the Son of God was manifested "that he might destroy the works of the devil" (1 John 3:8). These are parts of the purpose of His coming and they take their value from the whole purpose. That whole purpose, which includes all the parts, was to reveal God the Father.

We have, therefore, to get behind Jesus to God, and there we come to the whole comprehensive truth of the Bible. That is that God, Jehovah, is God alone. The Apostle Paul gives us that in one comprehensive statement. When God had raised Jesus from the dead and set Him at His own right hand, He "gave unto him the name which is above every name" (Philippians 2:9). If His name is above every name, then there is no name higher. If "in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth", if in His name the whole universe should bow, then Jesus must be God. God manifest in the flesh.

We are saying that the Bible has one object, and that is to show that God is God alone, and that truth has been taken up by God's Son to be proved as right. The Bible approaches that fact, that truth, from many standpoints, but there is only one truth in the Bible, and that is: Jehovah is the Lord.

Now the Bible throughout is dealing with a challenge to that truth. In the unseen, spiritual realm there is a great battle going on to put God out of His place in this world. Whatever men and systems may do to displace God, it does not begin with men. It begins in that unseen world. It commenced there before this world was created. The Bible reveals that there was one with a great many followers who said: "I will be like the Most High" (Isaiah 14:14). It is as though that one said to God: 'Move over on your throne. I am going to be your equal.'

Now the impact of that challenge to God's sovereignty is registered upon men. We have read: "The god of this world hath blinded the minds of the unbelieving, that the fight of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should not dawn upon them." There is a much greater power behind the power of world systems which try to dethrone God, and this power against God is at work in every part of this world. In one part it is directly to repudiate the very existence of God, and in another part it is to put everything else in His place - money, pleasure and a thousand other things. It is very important that we should have our eyes open to exactly what is happening.

Just look at the realm of nature. Perhaps never before in history have there been so many upheavals in nature. Yes, catastrophe is the word. Every day, when we open our newspapers, we see something fresh of those disturbances in nature. What does it mean? God was the Creator of this world, and all things were created through and for Jesus Christ, and the mighty spiritual powers of this universe are trying to destroy God's creation. They are trying to say that God is not the master of this creation. There is a great schism in the whole universe. The powers of evil are concentrated upon breaking up everything. We can see it in the nations, for everything is breaking to pieces in the nations. We can see it in nature, and, perhaps most tragically of all, we see it amongst the Lord's people. There never was a time when there were more divisions amongst the Lord's people than there are today. This great work of schism is spreading over everything.

What does the Bible have to say about this? It shows that there is a necessity to demonstrate that God is the Lord after all, and that necessity was taken up by God's own Son. The Lord Jesus has come into the world to answer that challenge. That is exactly what He was doing when He was here on the earth. Was it in the realm of nature? The winds and storm were raised to tempest height by the evil powers to destroy Him, and He was lying quietly and restfully asleep in the back of the boat. The disciples came and woke Him, saying "Carest thou not that we perish?" He arose and rebuked the wind and the storm, and in doing so He used the very words that He used in casting out demons. It says: "And rebuking them, he suffered them not to speak" (Luke 4:41). In the original that is the word used here: "He... rebuked the wind and the raging of the water" (Luke 8:24). Do you think that He was only speaking to the sea and the wind? No, He was speaking to the evil powers out to destroy the Creator. He said to the disciples: "Where is your faith?" and they said to each other: "Who then is this, that he commandeth even the winds and the water, and they obey him?" The answer to that is: This is the One who created all these natural forces and is Lord over them.

There was a poor man full of evil spirits. His home and all his relationships were broken to pieces, for no man could tame him, or bind him with a chain. Here, then, is the evil power destroying human relationships. Jesus rebuked the evil spirits and cast them out, and perhaps that man's home and family was one of the happiest in the country. Such people want to go and follow Jesus wherever He goes, but Jesus says: 'Go home! I am not

interested in broken family life.' That is the work of the devil, and never in history were there so many broken families as there are today. The evil powers are seeking to destroy one of the most sacred things that God has created - the family - but some of us here could tell wonderful stories of how broken families have been reunited by Jesus Christ.

There are many other ways in which we could illustrate this, but the one great truth is that God's Son is going to reunite all things in Himself. That is what the Apostle Paul definitely stated: that God has intended to gather together into one all things in Jesus Christ. To 'gather together' is to 'reunite in one'. The last book of the Bible gives us a glorious picture of that having been done. Gathered into one, singing one song, will be people out of every nation. Yes, Vietnamese and Americans singing one song together, and Congolese and the missionaries from other countries singing one song. All the nations which have been at war in this age will have representatives singing together in glory. There will be a gathering together into one in and by Jesus Christ in the ages to come.

It was this great controversy in the universe that God's Son came into this world to settle. Jesus already has the victory in His possession and He is going to bring His Church into that victory. We look for that glorious day when all the divisions among the Lord's people will be healed and Jesus will have established the great truth: God is all and in all.

That is just the doorway into our theme. From now onward we shall move through the door into the reality of these things.