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Living in the Reality of Christ

by T. Austin-Sparks

Transcript of a message given between 1961 and 1971 (exact year unknown) at Halford House Christian Fellowship in Richmond, Surrey, England. Words which were not clear are enclosed in [square brackets].

[Several] passages, firstly in the letter to the Romans, chapter 8, verse 15: "For ye received not the spirit of bondage again unto fear; but ye received the spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit Himself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are children of God: and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may also, that we may be also glorified with Him. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be *revealed* to us-ward."

Verse 29: "For whom He foreknew, He also foreordained to be *conformed* to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren."

The second letter to the Corinthians, chapter 3, verse 18: "We all with unveiled face beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are *transformed* into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit."

He foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son... transformed into the same image from glory to glory... we receive the Spirit of adoption and the Spirit beareth witness with our spirit that we are children... God dealeth with you as with sons.

It's always helpful to be able to speak about something that is understood, to which there is a background in the life and the experience of those to whom we speak and I know that I have that background this evening. Whether you are able to join in agreement with Paul in the way he speaks of it, "our *light* affliction, which is but for a moment", our *light* affliction... perhaps you don't feel you can altogether speak of it like that. But, anyway, we here tonight do know something about a background of affliction, of suffering, of trial, of difficulty, and adversity.

I don't suppose there's anyone in this room this evening who is a stranger to the language of difficulties and troubles and trials. And you, perhaps some individual if not all, but certainly collectively as a company, are just now sharing with many of the Lord's people in this world, the sufferings of Christ, or the *afflictions* of Christ; having a difficult time. And they are not getting any less; indeed, it seems to become increasingly painful as we go on. So I asked the Lord today for a word over against that background.

I just talk to you in this seemingly casual way, and yet [if the speaking may sound *ex tempore*,] the history and the exercise is not.

Well, we are on common ground when we say that that into which we have been brought by the Lord is no easy way. It's a difficult way, fraught with many perplexities and a very great deal of suffering, not peculiar to ourselves, but to a great number of the Lord's people on this earth. That we understand, we are talking a common language when we say that. But what does it *mean*? Really, what does it mean?

Now, here is another thing which we all can appreciate, and do appreciate, that *this* way, *this* kind of experience, *this* manner of dealing with us by the Lord, amongst other things, has the effect of keeping things in the realm of *reality*. Be aware of that, that when it's like that, anything just in the nature of our theories and ideas, well, that's no good at all. That's no good.

We are brought right up against *reality* when we come into our suffering and adversity and trial. We are right up against reality, and everything for us becomes of very *practical* account. That is, all that we have been taught, all that we have received by teaching and preaching, and think that we have and know, is brought to the point where: does it really work? Does it really work? Is it *real*, or is it, after all, just teaching [through] theory? Is it *real*? In what part of our being is it; is it just in our minds, has it only reached our minds or our emotions? Or is it right deep down there at the very centre of our being, a part of our constitution, and now for us it's a matter of life or death? Do you see what I mean?

And to anyone, anyone who is really meaning business with the Lord, it becomes a very, very *serious* matter as to whether this *does* work or not. If it doesn't, then it's not just being able to jettison it and take something else in its place, turn in some other direction; it means poignant disappointment. The very foundation of life is shaken. It becomes something of an anguish, if that should fail, if it should prove to be unsubstantial. It goes to the heart and carries with it nothing less than our very fulfilment of life, or disappointment in life. You realise that, when you're right up against it.

This is what arises: this whole question of the *reality* of our position. The *reality* of what we have heard and learned. The *reality* of things: whether they are real or after all, only in the realm of... well, ideas. Isn't it like that?

When it's like that, dear friends, when it's like that, then you have the explanation, *the* explanation of why it's allowed. That is, that is why we *do* have the difficulties and the trials and the sufferings; why the Lord *deals* with us in this way, because, you see, with the Lord, with the Lord things are (shall I use the word of Him?) *desperately* real, *essentially* real. *Everything* that is of the Lord is very real. And what is *real* with the Lord has got to become *real* with us. He is a *real* God! The reality of God has got to be established in us and it can only be done in this way. *Our very union with Him must be established upon the basis of sharing His reality.* "Conformed to the image of His Son", you see, is the basis and the object, according to the Word, of the Holy Spirit's activity.

First the Holy Spirit comes in, comes in as the Spirit of sonship. We know, don't we, that the first expression of a new convert, the very first expression is that word, "Father"! A new conception of God - it's been "God" before, if there's been any language at all, any titles, it's been, "God... God". A great God, but remote God. And from the moment of this *experience* of new birth, our language changes at once and it's now: "Father". The Spirit has commenced by putting into us the Spirit of Sonship and by new birth we are children of God. Upon *that* the Holy Spirit is going to carry out *all* His work right through our life, upon that one thing.

Now, Jesus is God's Son. There is, of course, a specific sense in which He is that, a difference there, *but* just as truly, just as really we are now, by the indwelling Spirit of God's Son, children of God. And the whole ground of the Holy Spirit's activity in our lives is going to be, and will be, *conformity*: making us according to the *form* of Christ, giving the form of Christ, into us, building the form of Christ into us, changing us into the form of Christ. And that involves two things.

There's the "us" side of it, which is, which provides the ground for the very *painful* aspect of this whole process: the *breaking down* of one kind of humanity.

The Breaking Down

Well, whether we know it or not at the beginning, we discover as we go on through the process, that there's something to be broken down. We talk about yielding and surrendering, but the further we go, the more we discover that that's not such a passive thing as we thought at one time. It's not just so easy as we imagined; there is something that has to be broken down all the time, even devastated!

There's the realm of our own minds, our own judgments, our own ideas; and we have to be devastated there, so that we just come to the place where we have *no* ability to cope with this spiritual situation. We'll come into a realm for which we have *no* natural qualification; mentally we're bewildered, we're stumped, perplexed, we have *no* understanding in this realm. And what can save you?

Just as the human frame is not constituted for life outside of this planet, and has to have artificial provision to live out there, so we are not spiritually constituted to live in heaven. We've got to have another constitution given to us, another provision, and mentally we know it! We are brought again and again to a place where it's *impossible* for us to interpret the Lord, to explain Him, to understand what the Lord is really doing. We are out of our depth altogether in this matter. And in other ways it is true. Not only mentally, but in powers of endurance; we are taken *beyond* our power of endurance, just at the end of all natural endurance. Isn't it true?

In every way we need, we need some kind of humanity, some kind of creation which we are *not*, naturally. And yet all the time there is the obtruding of this, our own natural life, into that realm and trying to force a way through, to *understand*. The most difficult thing for us to learn is not to lean to our own understanding. If we do, we are finished. We are bashing our head against a stone wall when we try with our own natural abilities to understand the ways of God. We're never going to do it!

The time will come when, with sufficient spiritual equipment and conformity to Christ, we shall, as He did, understand the Father. At the present it's not that way. On the one side there is this breaking down, breaking down. The word I've used is not too strong a word: *devastating* the one kind of man. I expect you all know something of what that means, being *devastated* in our own human life by the spiritual experiences, by the way into which we are brought.

Now, if we were in the world, we'd probably, while having our problems - there are people in the world who of course are at the end of their wits - nevertheless we might be able to make a job of it up to a point if we were just in that world where *natural* abilities are all that are required. We might do something about it. But here, it's no good at all. No good at all; we can't! On that side we are finished.

On the other side (because that is only one side and that is not all, this is the positive side) and the world we know very much of, what I just said on the one side, this is where you and I have got to realise that conformity to the image of Christ is not only a changing into the *nice* nature and the *nice* character of Christ. I think that's where the whole thing has been tied up: "It's quite true, it must be, that Jesus is, you know... the kind of person that Jesus is, and you've got to be like Jesus; you've just got to be like Him." Like the little child's hymn, "I want to be like Jesus, meek and mild" and so on. Alright, well, the character of Jesus is right, all that is nice about Him has got to be developed in us, but that is *not*, that is not the whole story.

You see, the Lord Jesus was a Man of a different order *and* there were these two things about Him: He *was* different - on the outside perhaps no different. Have you got that? But in His *essential* being, He was different. We could say that when He was here on this earth there was not *another* human being on this earth like Him. He was *essentially* different. And then there was something *more* to Him; not only different, but something *more* to Him than there was in any other man, or other person. He had *resources* that no other man had.

Different and More

Those are the two great realities about Christ! He is different, and He has more; there's something *extra* to Him!

Now, conformity to the image of Christ means those two things where you and I are concerned, and all true children of God: different. Different: not living on the same basis as other people, living on a different basis because [we're] different people, but having something extra, something that others have not got.

Now that, of course, is the very *heart* of prayer. Prayer brings us right into that realm of our *extra*, our extra. I wonder how much you are learning of this? Because, dear friends, it is one of *the* things that the Lord would take greatest pains about in this matter of *reality*: to make us know really that

we have got *extra* resources to draw upon; that a situation, a human situation, is *never* final and fatal until the Lord says it is. It looks as though you're now absolutely at the end and all possibility is closed down and that's the finish. But, for Christ (note: we can see this in His own life here) for Christ that was never accepted. A situation that *seemed* from all other human standpoints to be fatal and final, at an end, He never accepted that. He never accepted it! *He* never said, "This thing is impossible, it is now beyond us, this thing is hopeless", He never did! He never did. There were resources, you see, which were altogether *extra* to the last resource and the last recourse of men in this world. [It's like that.]

We are brought up against a situation that looks *desperate*, hopeless. Naturally, we have to write it off and say, "Well, that's the end of that." But! But in this realm into which we have been introduced, we have still resources that are beyond the human and the natural to [employ] and to apply. And the situation which seems (and *is*, from all other standpoints) a hopeless situation, can turn *completely* around in five minutes, or less than five minutes if, in the will of God, if so in that situation, we know how to lay hold of those extra resources and bring them in.

Now, I am not speaking fiction, I *know* this, I've seen it again and again. A situation; either a physical situation or a spiritual situation, which could *never* be touched. No more could be done about it. It's finished, humanly; no hope in it. But then a getting right down before the Lord and laying right hold of those *supernatural resources* which are the resources of *sons* of God, make no mistake about it, "If sons then *heirs!*" "What do you mean by that? An inheritance?" Yes! "Afterward?" Yes! But, we are heirs *now*, the inheritance is at our disposal now, to be drawn upon *now!*

We've Come into Our Inheritance Now

You have got, at the Bank of Heaven, a *tremendous* credit to draw upon. That's your inheritance now. Now! And if you and I only knew how to draw upon those heavenly resources and apply them to situations, we should see that we *are*, we are living in a realm that is not the natural realm at all! It is something quite different, it's other and it's extra. Man looks at it and says, "Hopeless! Can't do anything." The child of God looks at it and he says, "Yes, humanly, naturally, that is so, but, but... there's another whole realm upon which we are only going to begin to draw on now." Do you see that that *was* the life of Christ? Do you see that?

You say, "Oh well, you see, He was God incarnate; He had all these Divine powers!" No, don't make any mistake about that, that's just where we go wrong. Just where we go wrong! If it is true that He *emptied* Himself, He *emptied* Himself and took the form of a man, that is, He *accepted* the basis of *absolute dependence* on His Father for *everything*, for the next meal, the next meal in every day, He was dependent upon the Father. *He* knew what He meant when He said, "Pray like this: Give us day by day our daily bread...". "It's only a form of prayer, mere fiction, or idea...", not at all! That's *stark reality*: "God has got to provide Me with My very next meal." He lived on that basis - perfect dependence!

Now, if you looked at the lives of the men who had the closest walk with God and who represented God in the fullest way in this world, you will see (I'm thinking of Old Testament men at the moment) you will see that the one thing, the one thing that was more true of the lives of those men than anything else, was utter (I was going to say "*abject*") dependence upon God! God took all other ground from under their feet, He took it. Look at any one you like. He took all other ground from under their feet and left them on this only ground: utter, absolute dependence upon Himself. Think

of Moses. Think of Abraham. Think of Elijah. Think of Samuel. And these were the men who brought another world in, you see? They introduced a different *kind* of power, a different *kind* of resource and something *extra* - all the time something extra. And in these ways they foreshadowed Christ who brought that in in absolute fullness: *complete* dependence.

Complete dependence, or, as He said Himself, "For the words, the words that I speak, I do not speak them out from Myself." How then? "The works that I do, I don't do them out of Myself, it's the *Father* who does the works." See? Absolute dependence. And yet, being so other, He brought in extra power. God deals with you as with sons, in the same way as He dealt with His own Son. You and I in conformity to Christ have got to learn this: that there is never a situation that is hopeless until God says it's hopeless. No matter what men say, what we think about it naturally, until God says that's the end, that [that's the end, then] we accept it.

And one thing I want to say to you is, in the midst of all this trying, testing, and suffering, the Lord is trying to bring us to reality all the time.

Now then, what does this amount to? All that you heard, what does it amount to? All that you've received, you've been taught, what does it amount to? Does it stand you in stead in this hour? Desperate, desperate conditions and situations. Is it *real*? Now you have the *basis* of reality in the fact that you are children of God; that is, your basis is the basis of sonship. And *that* sonship means that you are different and therefore you *act* differently in situations.

Here it is a physical situation; your own or somebody else's. It may be your own or it may be someone else's, what verdict should you bring on that? What the doctor says, or what all the doctors in creation say? What all nature says? Is that the verdict? Or are you different? You say, "Yes, *naturally* that may be true, *naturally* that may be true." There may not be another [farthing in the ex-chequer,] naturally that may be true. Naturally it may be true that that's a dying person - death is the most certain end of that situation. *Naturally*, you see? Whatever it may be, perfectly true, perfectly true *naturally*, but the Spirit of sonship doesn't say that; doesn't say that. The Spirit of sonship says, "Wait a minute, there's God yet, there's another world yet that we haven't embarked upon, that we haven't brought in; a whole other world that's above this one. Heaven is *over* this earth, over this world, let's see what we've got there for this situation!"

Well, you have enough experience in many practical ways, don't you? You've got a history, yes, heaven, heaven knows how to meet the situation when you know you've no knowledge whatsoever of how it's going to be met naturally.

Do you see what He is doing with us? He's *trying to make heavenly sons and daughters of us* and it's a *very* practical thing. If I didn't *know* what I'm talking about, in experience, I wouldn't talk like this to you, it's no theory. Time and time again in my life it's been like that: this is, from all human standpoints, the end. It's hopeless. In *this* world, in *this* world it's finished; no way through. *Yet* faith brings in another realm, you see. Children of this world write it off; children of heaven don't. They say, "Wait a minute! That's true, but, we've got another whole world to draw upon yet!" We're different, [now we've] the extra, we've the more, we've the plus of God, of heaven.

See, faith is a very practical thing, just try it out, bring it in to a situation, and after all, it's not so abnormal, it's the normal, if you belong to heaven. Really, the normal thing is to draw upon heaven,

isn't it? You draw upon the realm where you *live*, there's anything to draw upon, when we belong to heaven.

I do see conformity to God's Son is like this, it is, of course, conformity to His nature, His goodness, His kindness and all that, there's that, but it's *more* than that. It's conformity to Him in this: that He is of a *heavenly* order, different, and that He *has*, as belonging to that heavenly order, He *has* resources that are not known here [to transform]. And conformity to Him means that you and I are different, and that we are learning *how* to draw upon those *extra* resources that no ordinary, natural person has, or knows anything about; to bring them in and apply them.

Now, in your prayer times, do remember that, when you are praying together. It's one thing, dear friends, for us to have our prayer meeting or our prayer times when we *ask* the Lord, and ask the Lord for this and that, but do we take a more positive and still more definite attitude over a situation and say, "Lord we definitely *draw upon* our resources for this, we definitely *take* what You have, and what we have in You, for this situation. We take it, we take it!" That's something more than just asking for this, that, [and the other thing]. I think that is what the Lord meant, the element of *faith*: "When you ask, believe that you *have!* You've got it!" The element of faith that says, "We *have* these resources."

The Lord teach us how to be like Christ in *this* sense, to recognise that we aren't as other people, in these matters. They, being in their realm, can only move up to the limits of their realm. We're different. We've got another realm, we belong to another realm. They are limited, we have got the extra, the extra.

Oh, may we grow up into Him as true sons who know how to really take responsibility and draw upon our resources, our inheritance in Christ.

I think that's all I'm going to say this evening, but the Lord extends us beyond ourselves, [I expect you already know that,] He just *stretches* us beyond our own measure all the time and gets us, as we've said, right out of our own depth, puts us *beyond* ourselves, completely beyond ourselves. Why? Why? Just because we *are* now *more*, supposed to be more than ourselves, bigger than ourselves, and have resources in ourselves in God. He is seeking to teach us, not that we are to be all the time at our wits end and helpless, and on the negative side, but we are learning how, on the positive side, to use the kingdom of heaven, to draw upon the kingdom of heaven of which we are now citizens and subjects.