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Email: info@austin-sparks.net

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"Loose Him and Let Him Go!" (Transcript)

by T. Austin-Sparks

Transcript of a message given at a conference in March 1966 in the USA.

Words which were not clear are enclosed in [square brackets].

We do pray again, our Father, that we may be able to get our priority established: my goal is God Himself, not this or that, or even blessing for ourselves, but *Himself*. We ask Thee that tonight we may really have a touch of God on our life. We pray that this hour may see, in the case of many here, a very definite impact of God upon the life. Take the Word, it is written that Thy Word is a hammer that breaketh rocks in pieces, as a fire that burneth, sharper than any two-edged sword piercing to dividing asunder, Thy Word is a lamp unto our feet, a light unto our path and many other things. Do see to it that it is the Word of the Lord in all these meanings and values that is spoken here tonight, for Thy Name's sake, amen.

I wonder if you know anything about the eleventh chapter of the gospel by John. Well, we had a whole day in it yesterday [possibly referring to "[The Glory of God](#)" series] and we have not exhausted it by a long way! We take another dip into it tonight.

And we just read a short section. John chapter 11, and from verse 38: "Jesus therefore again groaning in Himself cometh to the tomb. Now it was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Jesus saith, Take ye away the stone. Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto Him, Lord, by this time he stinketh; for he hath been dead four days. Jesus saith unto her, Said I not unto thee, that, if thou believedst, thou shouldst see the glory of God? So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up His eyes, and said, Father, I thank Thee that Thou heardest Me. And I knew that Thou hearest Me

always: but because of the multitude that standeth around I said it, that they may believe that Thou didst send Me. And when He had thus spoken, He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, come forth. He that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes; and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, *Loose him, and let him go.*"

It is that last clause that we want for this evening, that last verse: "He that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes; and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him and let him go."

I would just like to place alongside of that a fragment from the tenth chapter, chapter 10 and verse 10: "I came that they may have life, *and* have it abundantly".

We have said more than once that here we are in the presence of God manifested in the flesh in the person of Jesus Christ, His Son. And, being in the presence of God, we are being made aware of *God's mind* concerning man. What Jesus says is the expression of the mind of God for man.

Now, I think you have learned that what is written in this whole gospel by John is more than an earthly story, or a collection of sayings and doings on the part of Jesus Christ. It is in every one of those, in every part, a setting forth in one way or another of some eternal and unfathomable truth, because it comes from God. God is unfathomable, unsearchable, incomprehensible, profound beyond our understanding. He has a depth and a fullness never, never to be exhausted, either in time or in eternity, and anything that emanates from God in word or in deed, carries all that significance of God with it. This is not just human language. These are not just the words and works of a man. Every fragment contains the *profound depth of God*, and this chapter, which is marked out now in the organisation of the letter for our convenience as chapter eleven, is a wonderful example of what we have just said.

Every bit of it goes *far* beyond the thing itself that is said or done. It is *so* comprehensive, so far-reaching, so full of depth and meaning. I have been reading the gospel by John (and, of course, in it this chapter) for over sixty years, and I have spoken on it many times, in many parts of the world, but we are still in the presence of that which is beyond us. I am not just giving you something that has been said before. It's *always* divulging something which we have not seen or known before. Now that doesn't mean that what I say tonight you have never seen, but what I am saying is there is a fullness here that, whatever and however much you have seen, there is more yet that God *means* by the fragments of this chapter.

We are always wrestling with our limitations to both understand and grasp, and certainly to utter what is herein contained. And some of us are very poor at this business, and we know it. A little grandson of mine heard I was coming to America and he is in this country, and he said to his mother: 'What is Grandpa coming to America for?' And she said: 'Well, to preach.' And he said: 'To preach? He's not very good at that, is he?' And Grandpa fully agrees! Now you know what you have to put up with! My grandson says so, and he's about that size! Well, it's just like that, you know, that's just how we feel when we come into the presence of the divine stature of God's words.

And I think, those of you who have been here, especially yesterday afternoon, will realise something of the vastness of this chapter, but I trust that we shall see a little more, by no means the fullness, of what is in the fragment which we have just read, especially in the one verse, verse 44.

Now, before we come to that immediately, let me just say this word that is necessary, I think, and leads up to it.

We must recognise the aspect of this gospel. First of all, it is a backward aspect. That is, John wrote this gospel long years after all that is in it was completed. The whole thing was finished, as to the actuality of the content of this record, finished; and the Lord Jesus had left this earth. All that is here lay in the past when John wrote it. It was something completed as to history. John is writing from that standpoint, with the backward aspect. But then you will notice that the gospel itself is written on the forward aspect. That is, it was all written in the light of a day that was to come.

Jesus is heard here saying repeatedly: "In that day... in that day... in that day... when... when... when... in that day". And that related to the day of the advent of the Holy Spirit: "When He is come... in that day..." written for a coming day. And we are living in that day, the day for which this gospel was written, the day, the dispensation, of the Holy Spirit. And Jesus was making it perfectly clear that what He was saying and what He was doing in the flesh related to that day which was yet to be, the day when the Holy Spirit inaugurated the present dispensation. This gospel, therefore, is written for us precisely, because we live in that day.

And you, perhaps, are asking: 'Why this? Why is he saying this? It's simple, it's obvious. We know it'. Well, do we? I have said that, in order that we might recognise that this verse 44 belongs to us. It was written for us in the day in which we live, this very "day," dispensation day; it belongs to us.

One other word about that. The backward aspect of this gospel, written after it was all actually accomplished in history, was the *objective* side, when everything was outward. It was all outward. All that Jesus was doing was outward. His meanings were put into *outward* things, and ways, and means; the objective. The day for which all that objective was done and said, is the day of the *subjective*, when it is taken from history without and made history within, when it is no longer something just outside of us, it is now something to be planted inside of us. That is the real meaning, as you understand, of the coming of the Holy Spirit - to lay hold of everything in the Scripture which is there objective, and place it right within the centre of the life of the believer, so that it becomes a part of the very *inwardness* of the believer's life.

If we don't recognise these things, we may miss our way in reading the stories, and just think of them as wonderful stories of what Jesus *did*, and this one in particular, a wonderful story this, of the raising from the dead of this man Lazarus. A wonderful story! But it was *done* and it was recorded in order that it might become our *inward* experience, a very part of our own being.

Now, that is the foundation upon which we build what we have to say as to this whole gospel.

May I add another word, which I hope will have some value to you? It is always necessary, in the light of what we have said, necessary and important, to take account of the correspondence between the epistles in the New Testament and the gospels, because the epistles are, after all, only the *subjective* expression of the *objective* gospel. How can I put that to help you, more simply? When you read your gospels, if you like, read this chapter as we shall see as we go on. See it, and you see, well, there's the story, the account of what happened; all the parts of it, the phases of it, the stages of it. All that. Very wonderful! But when I come to the epistles I'm told what that means. It's there that I get the explanation for my own life of this. This will remain but history of two thousand years ago, until I come over to see what God meant that to be in my own life, and I find that out in the

epistles. Always read it in this twofold way as you read the gospels: this in the gospels somewhere is explained in the epistles. Read the epistles and you will say: 'This is explaining what is in the gospels.' So read it, your New Testament, in that way. We have to look at the book of the Acts and the epistles for the real meaning of the gospels, before we shall get the real inward value of the gospels.

Now we have said all that, we come to this verse in the eleventh chapter of John, 44: "He that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes (or as the margin says: 'grave bands') and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go." Do you know, you have a *vast* amount in the remainder of your New Testament (after John) that is exactly in keeping with that? It tells you what that means for us. Here it's what it meant for Lazarus and his sisters, now, what did that mean in God's mind for us?

First of all, it is possible for us to have *Life* by the word of Jesus Christ: resurrection Life, divine Life, that which is called eternal Life; it is possible for us to have *that* Life by which we have been brought from the death of our natural state into this newness of life by the fiat of the Son of God, and yet to be limited in every way while we have it. Limited in ministry - 'his hands bound'. Limited in progress - 'his feet bound'. Limited in understanding - 'a napkin around his head and over his eyes'. Those three things are three of the major things in the teaching of the apostles.

Let me repeat it, for it is so true, and it is true of *multitudes* today. And it is one of the problems in Christianity that, while through simple response to the Word of the Lord Jesus, they have been born again, they are His people, they are children of God, they have divine life, it is so possible, and is actually in numerous cases of *Christians* who have the beginning of the Christian life - quite true, quite real, yet who are limited in almost every way as to that Life, and that Life is limited in them. Here the symbolism is: bound hand, bound foot, bound head. The hands are the symbols of ministry, or fruitfulness of life. Fruitfulness of life! And will you tell me that there are not many Christians, Christians who believe in the Lord Jesus and have that saving faith in the Lord Jesus, whose ministrations of Life, whose fruitfulness of Life is exceedingly limited? Bound! Tied up!

Oh, how many Christians are just tied up in this matter of real fruitfulness, real ministry - and when I use that word 'ministry' I am not talking about platforms and Bible preaching, but that ministrations of the Lord Jesus - ministrations of the Lord Jesus.

In this next chapter (and there ought to be no chapter divisions, it's only for convenience) Jesus came back to Bethany and there, it says, they made Him a feast. And Martha served and Lazarus was one of those that sat at meat. It would have been a poor lookout for that whole thing if Lazarus had still been tied up in his grave clothes! But, no, he is able, he's able to share with the others in his experience. And if you think I am trying to make something of nothing, look again, because it was at *that* point that the Jewish rulers took counsel to put *Lazarus* to death also, because by reason of *him* many believed. "By reason of him many believed!" That's what I mean by loosed hands, ministry, fruitfulness: many believed because of him. And is it not true that multitudes of Christians are not in that release of Life where many believe because of them? They remain as isolated, tied up, bound Christians. But in the meaning of hands of fruitfulness, hands of service, hands of the ministrations of Christ, hands of the testimony of Jesus, they are still in the grave clothes. And that is why Jesus said: "I came that they might have life", but, more than that, "have it abundantly". And Lazarus had it, the Life, but not abundantly, until he was loosed.

Now you get into your epistles with that fragment only, and see how much there is about the life of the believer being an effective life, a fruitful life, a responsible life, a life that is really producing something. Indeed, we could say this, that amongst the other things, this is one of the major purposes of all the letters that the apostles wrote: to get these Christians (and need I remind you again that more than ninety per cent of the New Testament was written to Christians? That's impressive and that is challenging!) and they wrote their letters to Christians who had Life, to have it more abundantly, that is, to be *loosed* in this matter of their newness of Life.

Well, perhaps that's enough for the moment on that, we're coming back in a minute to that, you see.

And what is true of the meaning of the hands is true of the feet, "bound hand and foot". Again, is it not true that many, many Christians, yes Christians, born-again believers, are making no progress in their spiritual life, are not going on? You meet them once, and three, six and ten years afterwards you meet them again, they are just where they were then, before. They have not gone on, they're just there, their feet are bound. They are not going on, they are not making spiritual progress, they are not gaining ground, they are not overtaking the course, they are not - to use Paul's phrase - "attaining". Attaining. They are in a state of spiritual stagnation, spiritual arrest. Their feet are bound. That is not God's idea. Jesus, Jesus - God incarnate - said: 'Let him go! Loose him, let him go. *Release* those feet that he may walk, that he may run in the way of My commandments.' That's God's idea for us. That's not only a statement of truth, it's a challenge as to where we are. Well, I say, on that we'll come back again in a minute.

What about this head, wrapped in a napkin about the eyes and about the mouth? The eyes in particular, for our purpose at the moment. Again, is it not true that there are many who are the Lord's who are not seeing more and more, and ever more of what He has for them and through them? Many Christians see no further than their hand before their eyes. It's a little world in which they live, a very short horizon of spiritual perception and understanding, apprehension and knowledge, spiritual knowledge - a small world. Their heads are wrapped around and their eyes are covered over. They have Life, but that's all.

Now, having said these things in order to indicate what we mean by the great fullness that there is here, even in a verse, let us look at this again and see.

Lazarus *came forth*, he had life, but at that moment when he came forth, he was still in contact with the grave; still in contact with death, in a way. There was still that about him, about him, which spoke of that sepulchre, and the limitations of the sepulchre. Again, what are these limitations? Well, we come over to the epistles. And don't be afraid, I'm not going to go right through all the epistles, but I'll give you just enough to indicate what is meant.

If you turn to the first letter to the Corinthians, and have any knowledge of what is in that letter, you will know what we mean by the "grave touch", the grave touch still upon born-again Christians. Paul opens that letter by addressing them as "saints", that means those who are the Lord's, but as he writes on and on, an awful situation is unfolded, isn't it? They have Life, oh, but you cannot say that they have it abundantly. The grave clothes are on them, that is, the grave touch is still there, and in the first letter to the Corinthians it is the grave touch of the limitations of the *natural* life. Christians, but bound and limited by the ties of the *natural* life. That's the word which the apostle uses specifically: "The *natural* man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God... neither can he know them". That is limitation, isn't it?

And you proceed into the letter and you find these people are just behaving as other worldly people behave. Their behaviour, their conduct, their procedure, is just exactly as worldly people go on. Someone has done a wrong to another believer, from one believer to another, and apparently it was in more than one case at Corinth, and the result was that this believer against whom the wrong was done thought this was criminal! This was worthy of being set right in the court of law in the world. So he hauled his fellow believer before the judge in the worldly court to get his rights. That's exactly what the world does! Exactly what the world does and that's an instance of a whole handful of things like that going on at Corinth. Some worse than that, divisions: 'There are divisions among you, and when there are divisions among you, are ye not carnal?' Not spiritual, but carnal!

Well, gather up the whole of that letter and it's a terrible story of those who have Life, who are the Lord's, just behaving as other people do, in the way of living, in the way that the world lives. And you find the women behaving as the worldly women did in their dress, [it's passed on] in their demeanour, in their behaviour, even in the assembly. Now, I don't pick out the women particularly, but I am indicating that here, here is the spirit of the world amongst believers in Corinth. And all that (you read it again in the light of this) all that is keeping them still in this bondage, in this limitation of their spiritual life, of the Life that they have. It's grave clothes!

And you're not surprised that at Corinth the world is not feeling the impact of their testimony, that the church in Corinth is not counting in the world, because the world has got into the church, and its members individually. In this sense the grave clothes are still on them, by reason of the limitations which come upon the spiritual life when the *natural* takes charge and governs, controls and directs. It's terrible limitation spiritually. Life? Yes, but not 'Life abundantly'. Do you see what I mean? So their testimony is bound still with something of the grave, and the letter, that letter to the Corinthians, was written in the same spirit, with the same idea, intention and object as: "*Loose them! Let them go!*". Paul is striving to get these Corinthians loosed, as Christians loosed, liberated, set free into the fullness of the Life which they have.

We pass from Corinthians into Galatians, and no one who knows that letter will dispute the statement that here you are in touch with the grave very truly. You know what all of the letter to the Galatians is about, don't you? And you know the two prominent words don't you? *Liberty!* Liberty: "Stand fast in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made you free, and be not entangled *again* with the yoke of bondage". *Sonship!* Not servanthood, and slavery, but sonship; the liberty of sons. They're the two great words of this letter, but what are the grave bands there in Galatia? They are the grave bands of tradition, of legalism, and all such things.

You know, dear friends, it's very, very easy to get tied up with these grave clothes! The *persistent* peril through the ages of Christianity is to crystallize itself into something set, something fixed. You have some light, some revelation, something of the immensity of truth, just a fragment of it, and it's not long before you begin to form that into a set system and make it the limit, and say, "This is, this is what you must believe, you must come within this horizon, and you must behave like this". And it becomes again a system of: 'You must, and you must not!', and there's no difference between that and the Old Testament, 'Thou shalt... thou shalt not!' And Christianity has fallen into that peril, and is continually doing it, circumscribing the great revelation, making Christ smaller than He is, crystallizing truth into something fixed and set: 'This is how...', and the meaning is: 'This is the ultimate'.

Now you notice that when the Spirit *did* come, as we have the record in the book of the Acts, the one thing that these old Jewish disciples experienced was a marvellous *emancipation* from that bondage of Judaism and its life. How the Holy Spirit was working all along against any fixed barriers! Peter, Peter will argue that he is a Jew, born, bred and dyed-in-the-wool, and that never anything unclean entered *his* mouth, according to Leviticus chapter 11. All right, Peter. You are putting your interpretation upon the Scriptures, and you are putting *your* limits upon what Christ has done by His Cross: "What God hath *cleansed* call not thou unclean". The Holy Spirit *reacted* to Peter's traditionalism, and legalism, and limitation and bondage, and made him go and do what he would never have done otherwise. How, again and again, right to his death, the words of the Lord Jesus to him, in the last chapter of this gospel, were made good: "When thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself, and wentest whither *thou* wouldst: but when thou shalt be old, thou shalt stretch forth thy hands, and another shall gird thee, and carry thee whither thou wouldst not" (John 21:18). That principle was being applied over Cornelius and his house, in Caesarea and the Gentiles - made to go whither he would not! He was saying: 'No, Lord', the Holy Spirit's saying: 'Yes, Peter'. "Whither thou wouldst not." Heaven's reaction to this legalistic limitation, the grave clothes on an apostle. And that was not the only battle that Peter had on that, but we'll not stay with it, you can read again.

And then John says that when the Lord Jesus said that to Peter, He signified "by what manner of death he would *glorify, glorify* God". We haven't got the manner of death, but Peter long years afterward, or years after wrote: "I am about to put off my body, the time of my departure has come, even as the Lord Jesus showed me. Even as the Lord Jesus showed me, 'another shall gird thee'". Tradition says that Peter was crucified. Crucified! Only Jews could be crucified by Gentiles, Gentiles dared not crucify one of their own, only Jews could be crucified by Gentiles. Peter went that way, went that way. Because Paul had Roman citizenship they never crucified him, they executed him, beheaded him.

Peter was selected for this kind of death that his Lord died, 'even as the Lord has shown me', he is girded by another and carried whither he would not choose to go, but the way, the way of the Spirit is the way that goes against *our* limitations, our death clothes. He takes us in ways that we would never have thought of, indeed, our theology wouldn't accept that way, our doctrine perhaps might have been against that, our tradition would forbid it, but the Holy Spirit says: 'This is the way. Loose him, let him go.' That's Galatians, isn't it? I said to you that you need the epistles to explain the gospels, and one verse in the gospels contains all this!

I hasten to close with one other thing. You move into the letter to the Ephesians, and you, having come through the loosing of the hands in Corinth, and the loosing of the feet in Galatia to walk in the liberty and stand fast in the liberty, now you move to the head in Ephesians! It's taking the napkin from the head in Ephesians and doing it thoroughly, tremendously! Ephesians has to do with the napkin around the head.

What do we mean? Round the head! Paul hardly begins that letter before he is saying: 'I bow my knees unto the Father of *glory*, that He would grant unto you Christians, Ephesian Christians who have had the whole counsel of God given to you, to grant unto *you* a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, Christ, that the eyes of your heart being enlightened, that you might know, that you may know what is the hope of His calling, the riches of His inheritance in the saints, the exceeding greatness of His power to usward who believe.' 'That you may *know*... the eyes of your understanding enlightened' - the napkin off the head! It's a wonderful revelation this letter to the Ephesians. How great it is as to the eyes of the heart being unveiled, unbound, as to the greatness of

God's people's calling and vocation, the *immensity* of that for which we have been brought into union with His Son. How great it is! *How great it is*, beyond all our grasping, dear friends. Believe me, it's no exaggeration, "that you may *know*".

There's one little prefix missing in our translation which is the key to the whole thing. The apostle says: 'That you may know... that you may know', and in the New Testament we have that word given to us in part and in whole. It's not given to us in our translation, but it is just this: knowing, in itself, is applied to our beginning knowledge of the Lord. To quote John again: "This is life eternal, that they might *know* Thee, the only true God, and Him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ". "I know Him", this is Life, entering into Life, the receiving of divine Life. But when Paul is speaking about 'knowing', he is using a compound Greek word which we don't have in our translation. And it is '*epignosis*', *full knowledge*. You know, these Ephesians, you know by the space of two years he ceased not to preach unto them the whole counsel of God. They *knew*, and on the initial knowledge they had come to the Lord, but now he is praying, at the end of his life from his prison: 'that you may come unto *full knowledge*.' Full knowledge! It's more than Life; it's Life abundantly. It's more than seeing; it's seeing with a great range of divine purpose and meaning for our calling and our having Life.

Will you tell me that all Christians are like that? And that there are not many, perhaps some in this very place, around whose heads whilst, while having Life and being the Lord's, around whose heads there is no napkin obscuring their spiritual vision, limiting their spiritual sight, narrowing down the range of their comprehension of the great purpose of their calling? Real revelation, dear friends, is not (as our brother put it in his prayer) just information, it's *liberation*. It's liberation! To *see* and to see fully, or more fully, is to be released.

We have often said about this man Paul that there was nothing on earth or in hell, or in a combination of both, that would have changed the rabid, fanatical Pharisee into the greatest friend that ever Jesus Christ had, but light from heaven. Nothing could have done it - but it did it, it did it - light from heaven: the napkin taken off and the man set free to walk up and down in the greatneses of Jesus Christ.

I think we may see that one verse in the whole of John's gospel contains the Bible. Isn't it true? God's mind for man, God's *full* thought for His people: 'Loose him. He's got Life, but loose him and let him go!' "I came that they might have Life, and have it abundantly."