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The Attesting of Christ

by T. Austin-Sparks

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Reading: John 9; John 8:12,13; Acts 1:8; 2 Cor. 4:3-4; Eph. 1:17-18.

The thing which governs this meditation and these Scriptures, the object which is predominating, is the attesting of Christ. You know that the whole gospel of John was written with that one object in view. John, in closing his gospel, sums it all up by saying, "There are also many other things which Jesus did, the which if they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that should be written." "But these are written, that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing ye may have life in His name." The whole purpose, then, was the attesting of Christ, and here amongst the many things is the story of this man. It is a continuous narrative. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world; He that follows me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12). "The Pharisees therefore said unto him, Thou bearest witness of thyself; thy witness is not true." Whereupon, in the sovereignty of God which is so mysterious until things are seen in relation to God's great object - the attesting of His Son - this man born blind immediately comes into the scene. The mysteriousness of the sovereignty is found in the somewhat superstitious question of the disciples: "Who sinned, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind?" The answer is "Neither did this man sin, nor his parents; but that the works of God should be made manifest in him", and the works of God are all summed up in this one thing - the attesting of His Son. There is a line for you to follow. We just hint at it at the moment.

There are many dark and mysterious things which look like tragedies in our human lives, the explanation and solution of which can only be found in relation to God's interest in and concern for His Son, that is to bring His Son into some place of glory. Yes, life is full of enigmas until we get the key, and the key is God's concern to glorify His Son, and then the dark things often become light, and mysterious things become plain. That is exactly what emerged here. The man was able to say, I

see! That covered the whole ground of mysterious providences, things he could not understand, but he came to see in the light of Christ. Christ is the key to every dark problem in our lives under the sovereignty of God. That, however, only by the way - it is something to follow out and think about, something to apply, something with which to test difficult and strange situations. What is it in relation to the glory of Jesus Christ that is bound up with the dark, enigmatical, problematical situation? Well, the object governing is that - the attesting of Christ, that ye may believe, that it may be manifested and established here as a testimony (Jesus is the Son of God) and believing, ye may have life. It is not just an objective thing - Jesus is the Son of God, part of our creed and doctrine. It is subjective also: "that ye may have life in His name", and that great fact becomes an inward reality in terms of newness of life. There are multitudes who are prepared to assent to that - Jesus is the Son of God, but they have not the glorious counterpart of life in His Name. It makes all the difference. We see how the attesting of Christ predominates. That is God's will.

So we went on to Acts 1:8. "Thou bearest witness of thyself; thy witness is not true" (John 8:13). All right, I will get other witnesses, I will get other evidence. So to His disciples He said, "Ye shall be witnesses unto Me... unto the uttermost part of the earth", and that indicates the essential method of the attesting of Christ, the essential method of Christ's vindication of all His claims for Himself, the essential method of establishing God's testimony concerning His Son. What is it? Well simply, as here in this story, personal examples. "I am the light of the world; he that follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life." That is your own testimony to yourself. All right, I will prove it, I will get personal examples of those who have the light of life, who no longer walk in darkness! The man is brought in here at once. "Ye shall be witnesses."

There is a sense in which, in the sovereignty of God, we are all called to fit into this great divine purpose of attesting His Son, Jesus Christ. Speaking now to those who are the Lord's, our business here can be almost entirely, if not entirely, summed up in that. It may take many forms of expression, it may have many sides, but the end and the issue of our having been on this earth at all in relationship with God will just simply be this, that by the power of the Holy Spirit, we have been instrumental in attesting Jesus Christ by being a personal example of that which He claimed for Himself, of taking up the challenge of darkness, the challenge of unbelief, the challenge of a closed door to Him, and by what we ourselves represent of a work done in us and going on in us, we are dispelling that darkness, breaking in upon that closed kingdom, and establishing the fact that Jesus is the Son of God. We are not just proclaiming a truth, a doctrine, but we are ourselves living examples of the truth. The Lord, you see, chose a man. He might have gone to work in other ways, but He picked upon a man, and that is always the Lord's way, to pick upon people, and the Lord's best instruments are those who have got a background which has no solution whatever, only Christ.

You see, this man was born blind. If he had recently gone blind or been blind for some years as the result of some sickness, they might well have argued that things had taken a turn for the better, there was some improvement, and sight had come back. But here is a man born blind, he never had seen, he did not know what the world was like at first hand. All he knew was what could be told him. He had no firsthand knowledge of a whole universe, and it was not possible for him to have that firsthand knowledge; only along the line that Jesus is the Son of God. And the most difficult, complex cases are the most promising as witnesses to Him. You think that your case is an exceedingly difficult one and your situation is beyond anything. You think that things have gone too far for any remedy. It may be just the very object that the Lord is looking for and that will come in, in a sovereign way in the great purpose of God.

And we are going to see, as we go along, that that is not just something at the beginning in what we call our salvation, our conversion. This sort of thing goes on. A background of great difficulty is the

background of great promise when it is brought into the great sovereign purpose of God.

Well, that is what God has in view - the predominant object is the attesting of Christ. This is called "the works of God", "...that the works of God should be made manifest in Him". The attesting of Christ. The method is personal examples, people who themselves are proofs by what has taken place in them.

Then the progressive measure. Every fresh attestation of Christ, every increase of Christ, that Christ becomes greater, becomes more, takes a larger and more wonderful place, is upon this same basis. It starts with this initial opening of the eyes. But that is not all. Some people talk about a second blessing. Well, that is all right, but do not make a doctrine of it. There will be a third and a fourth and a lot more after that! There is no end to this. Look at these simple principles in the story.

First, "The man that is called Jesus". Then, He is a good man; then, He is a prophet, and then at last, the Son of God. A very simple story, but it contains great truths. Progressive measure going from one degree to another in the attesting of Christ and the bringing in of Christ in final fulness. Christ is attested when we are first brought into the light. That is the dispelling of darkness indeed concerning that initial step. When the Lord told Paul why He had apprehended him on the way to Damascus, He said - "...to whom I send thee, to open their eyes, that they may turn from darkness to light and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive remission of sins and an inheritance among them that are sanctified by faith in Me" (Acts 26:17-18). The initial thing is eye-opening, the opening of the eyes in relation to the Lord Jesus, so that in that initial sense everybody who knows the Lord or who claims to know the Lord ought to be able to say with a deep strong and ringing note, I see! I see! Have you ever struggled and wrestled with a problem that is a problem in mathematics or some other realm and then suddenly, either the solution has been pointed out or you have discovered the answer, and you say, Oh, I see! and all the trouble has gone and you are out, you are free, that thing is mastered, you are on top, in a place of ascendancy. Suffer my being so simple, at the beginning of things - that surely is the first note or the first sentiment of a true new birth. The first thing that ought to mark anybody who really does have an experience of salvation, of Christ as Saviour, is that they say in that way, Oh, I see! I have been groping, blundering, stumbling on all this time, but I see now. That is just what this man said: I was blind, but I see, and being able to say that registered the work of God in this universe, the work which attested Jesus Christ, and we can only attest the Lord Jesus. He can only truly come into His divinely appointed place as there are men and women who to begin with in the initial sense are able to say, I see! - as seeing on the part of those who have been hitherto utterly in the dark, blind from birth, the miracle of new sight.

But I said that it is progressive, this measure. Here it is as to Christ seen in this man; but all the matter of fulness is along the same line. The fulness of Christ is wholly governed by spiritual seeing. That is why I take you right on to Eph. 1:17. There it is not to the unsaved, not to those whose eyes are blinded in that sense of the words in Corinthians - "the god of this age hath blinded the minds of the unbelieving lest..." (2 Cor. 4:4), but now it is believers - and, mark you, believers who have had a very wonderful experience of eye-opening. You remember the story of the conversion of these Ephesians. It was a very wonderful conversion. Steeped in pagan superstition, they had their eyes opened to the Lord Jesus in such a wonderful way that they gathered up all their superstitious books, piled them into a great heap, and the sum of their price is mentioned as no small figure. They sent them all up in smoke, and that was the result of seeing. All that which was precious before, for which they would have laid down their lives, for which like the superstitious heathen pagans, they would fight to the death - all goes up in smoke when they see. You have only got to see and the most precious things of this life and this world vanish as nothing. These Ephesians had had no small experience at the beginning, they had had a wonderful conversion, a very thoroughgoing

conversion, but now years afterwards, the apostle is praying for them that the eyes of their heart might be enlightened that they might see, might know, "what is the hope of his calling, what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, what the exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe". Here is, perhaps not final fulness, but fulness in great dimensions; it is vast. With all the centuries that have passed since those words were first penned, with all the exploring and investigation, with all the preaching and teaching, we are still far short of comprehending any one of those three great statements - the hope of His calling, the riches of His inheritance in the saints, the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe. What do you know about that? There is fulness. How is it to be? The same way - your eyes opened. So the Lord arranges this whole thing, step by step and stage by stage, and at each fresh stage we are found in a state of feeling that all that we have known and do know is as nothing. We need something more than ever has been if we are to go on.

The sovereignty is still operating. A new situation has arisen. It does not nullify all that has been, that still remains good and precious, profoundly true, but we have come to a new crisis, and unless the Lord gives us a new revelation of Himself, something is going to happen, something of a tragedy will mark our lives yet, and He arranges it in His sovereignty that we come to a place like that repeatedly, and then the new revelation over against the new dark background is a fresh attesting of His sovereignty, bringing glory to His Name. The Lord is working this thing out by degrees, until we all attain unto the fulness of Christ.

What, then, is needed for the next phase of the journey? Just to have our eyes opened again and yet more fully, and that to the Lord Jesus. What is our present stage? - the man called Jesus, a good man, a prophet, the Son of God, climbing all the time. It is a principle in the Divine activity in relation to the Divine Son - increasing vision, increasing glory, Christ coming into His own.

Finally, the inevitable consequence of having your eyes opened, of seeing. Well, the consequence for this man was - "and they cast him out". That, on the one side, is inevitable if you see. It was not the world, the outside world as we call it, the heathen world, the pagan world; it was the Jewish world that cast this man out, the religious world, and, sad to say, it is always true that even religious people, very devoted in their religion, cast out those who come to see something more of God's purpose concerning His Son. Strange, but it is true. The door is closed; ostracism arises, there is no place for you if you have seen. That is progressive. Immediately the first, initial step is taken on seeing, you know there is a world that will not have you, it is closed to you. And every fresh step of seeing, of having your eyes opened, which means walking more fully with the Lord, means that your world is narrowed, your place becomes more limited, and you will find that even sincere earnest Christians will not or cannot go with you. Unfortunately there are not many, even Christians, who say or take the attitude, "I do not see as you see, I have not got your light, but I believe you are right and I am going to maintain full fellowship with you!" There are not many like that, they do not go with you; in fact, they cast you out. It will be like that to the end. The further you go on in the light, the more alone you will be. The more you have your eyes opened, the fewer there will be who will go with you. Another world will open; it will be a much larger world to you, but it will be your world and not the world of the majority. The inevitable consequence on the one side is: "and they cast him out".

But I said it is a continuous consequence. There are no chapter divisions. Jesus heard that they had cast him out. "I am the good shepherd, I know My sheep." That is the next chapter. "My sheep hear My voice and they follow Me." There is the fold into which I will gather otherwise outcast ones. He has a fold for those whose eyes are opened, and He does not cast them out, He gathers them in. Those are just simple truths that are gathered up in this story. It is all a matter of seeing, but

tremendous things hang upon seeing. Our whole business, vocation, in the great work of God hangs upon our being able to say, not once, nor twice, nor thrice, but repeatedly in the course of our journey, I see! I see! What an emancipation that is, what a position of strength that is! Are you moving on in the way of the progressive measure of Christ by reason of a repeated opening of the eyes? How many times can you look back in your own lives as being able to say, in this crisis way, this epoch-making way, I came to see! That was a great turning-point in my life. I see! How much is bound up with that.

May we all be exercised about this if it is not true, either initially or as a continuous thing going on, and seek the Lord about it. As Paul did for those Ephesians, so let us seek for ourselves the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of our heart being enlightened, that we may know. Lord, lead us out into those far-distant ranges of Divine intention.