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The Divinely Appointed Place of Christ

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"The unsearchable riches of Christ" (Ephesians 3:8).

"O the depth of the riches...! how unsearchable...!" (Romans 11:33).

"Things which eye saw not, and ear heard not and which entered not into the heart of man, whatsoever things God prepared for them that love him. But unto us God revealed them through the Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (1 Corinthians 2:9,10).

"Canst thou by searching find out God?" (Job 11:7). (You will notice that there is a marginal rendering which puts it this way: "Canst thou find out the deep things of God?" - "The Spirit searcheth... the deep things of God.")

We ought also to read from John's Gospel chapter 16, where the Lord is saying to His disciples that when the Spirit was come He would take the things that are His, and show them (verses 13, 14).

Three Key Words

Let us look at two or three outstanding words in the passage that we have quoted of the first Corinthian letter. You notice the three words - "prepared", "searcheth", "deep things" (lit. "deeps").

"Things God *prepared* for them that love him" - things which God made ready for them that love Him. The question of course immediately arises: When did God prepare, or make ready, those things? The word is used in different connections, and they throw light upon this question. You remember that, when the Lord was here on earth, there was a request made of Him by a mother

concerning her two sons, that, when He came into His Kingdom, they might sit one on His right hand and one on His left hand; and His answer was that that was for those for whom it was prepared (Matt 20:23). He could not grant that privilege - it was kept for those for whom it was prepared, made ready, by God. Again, the blessing of the Lord upon certain ones takes this form: "Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34). And the Apostle Paul writes of: "good works, which God afore prepared that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

We shall presently touch more definitely upon when that took place, but it is quite clear, I think, from these passages, that there was a long anticipation of something, going right back to the foundation of the world - more literally the 'laying down' of the world, the mapping out of the world. It was then that things were prepared by God for them that love Him.

Then this word 'searcheth': "the Spirit *searcheth* all things". The word does not mean to find out, to discover. It means to range: 'the Spirit ranges the deep things of God.' The Spirit's movement is deep, far and wide, ranging and exploring the whole realm of the things of God.

And then '*deep things*'. This very same word, in the singular, was the word which the Lord used to His disciples: "Put out into the deep " (Luke 5:4); and Paul used it of some of his own experiences when he said: "A night and day have I been in the deep" (2 Cor. 11:25). That will give anybody who knows anything about the sea some idea of the meaning of this word as it is employed here, in the plural, for "the deep things of God."

When we come into the realm of the things of the Spirit, and the ministry of the Holy Spirit, we are led into a very great realm, and we are going to ask this question - What are these deep things of the Spirit? We can only hope to think of some of them - perhaps only one - at this present time. What are these deep things, which have been revealed, though never explained? We must not confuse those two things. It is possible to reveal or uncover something, bring a thing into view, without explaining it, and we are not given the explanation to the deepest things of God. We are still left with very, very great questions about them, as we shall clearly see as we go on; nevertheless they have been uncovered, they have been brought to light as immense realities, and moreover brought to light for our good.

Christ God's Appointed Heir of All Things

One of the deep things of the Spirit which have been brought to light, and I think the first of them, is the place of Christ in the Divine scheme of things. Here is a very, very deep thing indeed, far beyond our fathoming, but nevertheless it is clearly before us in the Word, going right back again into past eternity. The writer to the Hebrews, speaking of the Son, says: "whom he appointed heir of all things" (Heb. 1:2). That is His place in the Divine scheme - "heir of all things". He was appointed - when? Well, before all things were created; because immediately it goes on to say: "through whom he made the ages". He was "appointed heir of all things".

You remember His parable in which He quite clearly intimated this - the parable of the wicked husbandmen who, having stoned the servants, espied the coming of the Son and said, "This is the heir come, let us kill him, and take his inheritance" (Matt. 21:38). This incidentally touches upon the deep things of Satan. It is an uncovering of Satan's deep work to rob Christ of His inheritance, and explains the Cross from the side of the enemy - the murder of the Heir with the securing of His inheritance in view. So Jesus, the Son of God, is revealed by the Spirit to be God's appointed Heir.

In the second Psalm, undoubtedly Messianic and prophetic, we read: "Ask of me, and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession" (Ps. 2:8). So His inheritance is the nations and the uttermost parts of the earth, Divinely appointed and ordained, and it cannot be set aside. And Heaven too - for He said on His resurrection: "All authority hath been given unto me in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18). He is the Heir possessing all authority in every realm. And He is Heir to the Church - for Paul prays that, through the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of revelation, believers might be able to see "the glory of his inheritance in the saints" (Eph. 1:18) - that is, Christ's inheritance in the saints. Here are some of the all things - the nations, the uttermost parts of the earth, the heavens and the earth, and within the Church. That is a statement of fact. It is a deep thing revealed by the Spirit.

But the point arises here: 'God has revealed them unto us by His Spirit'. These things, then, must have a very real meaning for believers. This will take us away from a superficial Christianity. If we can really grasp the meaning of this first thing for ourselves, as believers, it is going to exercise upon us a very salutary effect.

The Believer's Calling

The calling of believers is said to be in accordance with His eternal purpose. What is that? The eternal purpose is Christ inheriting all things: so that our being called, our hearing the Call, is a first work of the Holy Spirit in relation to Christ coming into His inheritance, according to something laid down with the foundation of the world. That makes conversion something very much bigger than just being saved, does it not? It is not just a matter of becoming a Christian. There is this immense background to our being called. The Holy Spirit has, so to speak, 'got to work' in relation to the appointed Heir of all things: you and I are coming under the hand of the Holy Spirit as a part of that inheritance. Our very calling in grace is according to that purpose, and our calling therefore is something tremendous. It is not only our calling. The beginning of our Christian life is not something merely incidental. It is fundamental to the whole scheme of things in relation to the Lord Jesus.

The Believer's Consciousness

I think it is true to the experience of most, if not all, of those who respond to the Spirit's influence and call, that, following that response, there comes into being, there settles down within, a sense of belonging, of being owned, possessed. We feel: 'I know now where I belong - this is really where I belong. I felt that I did not belong to anything or anybody before, but now I know I belong, and to Whom I belong.' It is a sense of being taken into possession. It is a matter of ownership.

That is why there springs immediately from the lips of those who have responded to the Spirit the word 'Father'. Paul says to the Galatians that the Spirit of God has been put into our hearts, and thereby we cry 'Abba, Father': and what does 'Father' mean if it does not mean belonging? And again, 'Lord': the first ejaculation of Paul after his apprehending was 'Lord'. We love that word, but we did not always love the idea of being 'lorded'. It is foreign to human nature to be lorded over. There is a revolt in the whole human race against being lorded over by anything or anybody, but it is the Christian's delight to use that word 'Lord' - *Dominus* - and to be 'dominated' by Him. 'Master' - that word is music to the Christian, as applied to the Lord Jesus; but how the natural man hates the idea of 'master'!

This is the consciousness that comes in. We are not compelled or forced; it is spontaneous. The Spirit has brought us home, brought us into our rightful ownership. This is how it ought to be. For

that was all arranged long, long before we had a being. We belong to Somebody, we are Somebody's, that is where we belong.

The Believer's Confidence

This leads surely to the believer's confidence. There is a tremendous value for us in the place of Christ in God's scheme of things. If really, in the 'before-times-eternal', we were made a heritage, included in the inheritance of the Son, and the Spirit calls, do you think there is going to be any difficulty in our acceptance? It is altogether out of keeping with this whole scheme of things to have any question at all as to whether we shall be accepted. If you had an inheritance, and that inheritance was brought within your reach, do you think there would be any argument as to whether it could be accepted? None at all. And so this very great, deep, blessed truth of Christ's inheritance in the saints gives us a ground of confidence as to our acceptance. There is no question about it, we belong to Him - why have any question as to whether we shall be accepted?

Of course, He has done everything to make our acceptance a blessed reality and to dispose of anything in the way. What a ground of assurance! This whole question of assurance amongst believers is so often challenged by the Devil and every demon that he has, with the object of shaking confidence, shaking assurance, bringing in doubt. Why? - there is no ground for it at all. It is not contingent upon our worthiness, or anything about us - except that we believe it. Long before this terribly complicated make-up of ours had any acceptance, the whole thing was planned. We were given to the Lord Jesus, and we belong to Him. What a ground of assurance, then! It stands rooted in eternity; it stands rooted in the Divine counsels. If you've heard the Spirit's call, that is not just something belonging to this moment or to this life. That is something which ranges all the ages and goes right back to the beginning. I say again: What a ground of assurance!

And He will keep surely that which belongs to Him. "I am persuaded that he is able to keep" (2 Tim. 1:12). Is the Lord Jesus able to keep what is put into His hands and what really belongs to Him from eternity past? Is He able to keep it? What a ground of assurance for keeping! We need have no worry about tomorrow, about the future. He is able to keep. Oh, those mighty words of the Apostle - "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?" (Rom. 8:35) - followed by a catalogue of everything conceivable that might be thought to have the power of separating - only to be swallowed up by: 'I am persuaded, none of these things' - "we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." Why? Simply because we belong to Him.

The Church's Message

We have seen something of the believer's life, as to what lies behind the call, as to what accompanies the call, for assurance, for confidence for the future. What about the Church's message? You see, the Church's message is called a proclamation. The word most characteristic of the function of the messenger of Christ is that he is a herald. It is a herald's business to make a proclamation, an announcement, a declaration. What is the message? It is an announcement, it is a declaration, it is a proclamation - and, mark you, this means far more than may appear on the surface - that *all things belong to the Lord Jesus*.

Every unsaved man and woman belongs, by right, to the Lord Jesus. This world, in every spot, by right belongs to the Lord Jesus. Put your foot down just where you are and say, 'This place belongs to Christ by right!' The Holy Ghost takes account of that, stands on that. Oh, yes: although He has not got them, they belong to Him. But, you see, it raises tremendous issues. If you declare the fact that men and women belong to the Lord Jesus by every right of creation and redemption, as His

inheritance: if you declare it, if you make it known, then if they refuse they are held as guilty of rebellion against the rightful owner. It precipitates a very positive, clear-cut issue. If there should be reading these lines an unsaved person - any person who does not recognise the absolute ownership of the Lord Jesus - and you are not, in the presence of this declaration, ceding Him His rights, you are positively guilty of rebellion against God's appointed Heir. It raises a tremendous issue. And it goes beyond that. If you belong to the Lord Jesus, by right of God's giving and appointing, and you do not give Him yourself, you are robbing Jesus Christ of His rights. It is a very positive issue. You are in the category of a robber of God, and that is very serious.

So this is the proclamation. There is the good side, the Gospel side, of this. It is a grand thing, on the grounds which we have set forth, to know that I really belong to the Lord Jesus. Recognising and acknowledging that, there is no question as to whether He will accept what belongs to Him; there is no question as to whether he will keep what belongs to Him; there is no question as to the destiny of what belongs to Him. All I have to do is to believe and to cede to Him His rights.

This is the work of the messenger; the herald, the proclaimer. The Holy Spirit is said to be committed to this. If we make the right proclamation or take the right position in relation to Christ's place in God's scheme of things, the Holy Spirit comes in on that. It may be that very often the Holy Spirit cannot come in and precipitate issues because we are not clear-cut enough as to what this whole thing is about. It is about nothing less than Christ's Heirship of all things. Bring that in, and the Holy Spirit will come with tremendous conviction. We make the issue so much less - usually what the individual is going to get as the benefit of coming to the Lord Jesus - instead of primarily the rights of the Lord Jesus Himself. If we proclaim Him as Lord, the Holy Spirit will set His seal to that. In the unsaved or in the saved, when we cede anything to Him as Lord, let Him take His place as Lord on any point, the Holy Spirit bears witness. That is always His ground.

So the Spirit is committed to calling according to purpose, to sealing those who respond, to conforming them to the image of God's Son, and to guiding them into all the truth related to God's purpose.

That is Christ's place. It is a deep thing of God, it is a big thing, it is an immense thing, but this has been revealed, amongst many other things, to us by the Spirit. May the Lord strengthen us by His Word.