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## The Revelation of the Father

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

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Reading: John 16:1-17:26.

I want you just to pass your eye over that prayer again - "He said, Father... O Father... I come to thee. Holy Father, keep them... As thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee... Father, that which thou hast given me... O righteous Father."

"I manifested thy name... I made known... thy name", and, quite evidently, from this chapter and from the whole of this Gospel, the name which the Lord Jesus manifested and made known was "Father".

That may not impress us as it would have done those in His own time, for, with the Lord Jesus, there came in a revelation of God which was nothing less than revolutionary. Go back to the Old Testament and look at the manifestation of God in the names and titles which are given to Him there. They are many, wonderful, very great and very glorious, but they are usually very remote, and put Him in a place of holy and awful isolation. He is there the one who is unapproachable in Himself, and whose presence always created fear, even terror. If there was anything approximating to the coming near of God, even in those strange forms of manifestation called the 'theophanies,' when in the first place those visited thought it was a man and then afterwards realized it was the Lord, the people cried out in fear and terror. And the Lord said even to Moses, who was such an honoured, choice, faithful, devoted servant: "Man shall not see me and live" (Exodus 33:20). When a man wrestled with Jacob and subsequently departed, Jacob cried: "I have seen God face to face, and my

life is preserved" (Genesis 32:30). To him that was a most wonderful thing! Of course, he had met the veiled deity - the veiled God had come in man form - but, even so, Jacob recognized that it was the Lord, and the wonderful thing was that his life remained whole in him.

When the Lord Jesus came into this world He brought an altogether revolutionary revelation of God, and the one word which was on His lips more than any other was 'Father' - 'My Father', 'The Father'.

This seventeenth chapter of John's Gospel is, as you can see, the culmination and summation of all that has gone before of the life of the Lord Jesus and the manifestation of the Son of God with all His works and words. The end has come, for you will notice that the next chapter begins: "When Jesus had spoken these words, he went forth with his disciples over the brook Kidron, where there was a garden." Then the final scenes of his earthly life were enacted and the cross followed. So this prayer is the gathering up of everything by Jesus. He is gathering up the very purpose for which He came into this world, the meaning of all His teaching and His works, the meaning of His having been here in this world, and He is putting it into one marvellous word, or name: 'Father'. He is saying: 'I have done what I came for. I came to manifest THY name.' Note the way in which He puts it. He did not come to give people a doctrine, a truth or a teaching about the Fatherhood of God, as a theme or subject. He said, 'I manifested', or, for our purpose you could use the word: 'I demonstrated'. There is all the difference between a lecturer and a demonstrator! To 'manifest' is very practical; it is more than words or teaching, for it is showing in a living way the thing that you are desiring to have grasped and understood.

And so this matter of the Father God was manifested in a Person. The Person Himself was the manifestation. When you look at Him, listen to Him, watch Him, there is one deduction that you can draw, should and must draw: 'That is just what God is like.'

Whether it be with the little children, and His hands of blessing upon them, drawing them to Himself; or any of the many things that He did in healings, in comfortings, in restorings; or in any of the wonderful things that He said in parables, our conclusion should be: 'That is what God is like!' It is an expression of God as Father, and the Lord Jesus Himself is the manifestation of the Father.

Now, open that out and go right back to the beginning of history as the Bible gives it to us, and this conception is inherent in the very beginning. What was the conception with which the Bible opened, when God had completed His creative activities and got His man and the man's wife? It was a family. The FAMILY conception was there right at the very beginning, and in God's mind it was to be a family of His OWN children. He wanted a family of children 'after His own image and likeness', like Himself, and His heart was set upon this. There, at the beginning, He says: "Be fruitful, and multiply" (Genesis 1:22), and behind that is God's intention to have a family.

Do you notice that in the second phase of the Bible, that which we call the Patriarchs, it is the family which is the dominant, characteristic feature? 'Patriarch' is a Bible word, as you know, but do you know what it means? It just means 'the head of the family'. Perhaps you have not thought of that when considering Noah, Moses and Abraham and calling them by this high-sounding name 'the Patriarchs'! But right through that long and very rich phase of the development of history in the Bible there lies, deeply embedded, this idea of the family. And in the patriarchal families it was not only the father who was the head of the household. The eldest son was also the priest of the family, in union with the father. Fathers and sons were the divine idea, and if you like to make it singular you can, for you are looking right ahead to John 17!

And when you move still further on in Bible history and come to that section of the Old Testament which has to do with the kings, the monarchy, have you been impressed with the fact that, when that phase reaches its highest point in David and Solomon, the very conception and idea of monarchy, of government, of dominion, of reign, of a kingdom, lies with the father and son, David and Solomon? That was the peak of the monarchy. And if you look both into the Old Testament account and into the New Testament references to it, you will find that those words spoken by the Lord to David about his son, Solomon: "I will be his father, and he shall be my son" (2 Samuel 7:14), are taken up in the letter to the Hebrews and applied to the Lord Jesus. So God was looking THROUGH David and THROUGH Solomon - not just AT them - to His own eternal thought of the family.

You come to the next and final section of the Old Testament, the Prophets. And what is the cry of the Prophets? For in this section there is a cry, a sob, a groan, an anguish, a travail, and, for the most part, that is the spirit of the Prophets. They are burdened, men with a burden, a cry, a heartache, men who are expressing a travail. Listen again to Isaiah 53!

But what is it all about? God has lost His family! The family of Israel has been broken up and disintegrated. It has gone away from God and from His house. God is deprived of that thing for which He first of all created men, and then inculcated into the whole of His dealings with them. In the Prophets God is seen to be in a state of disappointment and sorrow. Listen to Hosea, for instance. There is a cry of deep anguish in that prophet's heart, and it all focuses upon this family conception.

Well, that has covered a lot of history, and there is more in it than that, but that is enough to show what was in God's heart, what His heart had been set upon, what He had hidden, in a way, in His dealings with men and in His constitution of things. This was a hidden desire and purpose in the heart of God.

Then the Son of God comes. Now you go through your New Testament and tabulate the number of times 'Father' and 'Son' occur in connection with God and the Lord Jesus. And then go on to the next step and tabulate the number of times that the Lord's people are referred to as His children, His sons, or as in a family relationship to Himself - 'begotten of God', 'born of God', and so on. It is very full and rich. We have only to mention it for a great deal just to come back to us and break upon us!

We said that the Son of God came from the Father: "I came forth from the Father" (John 16:27). And why? For one thing, to take up all that history from the creation, through the Patriarchs, through the monarchy, through the prophets, and gather to Himself the realization of this thing for His Father, in order to satisfy His Father. Dear friends, if you want to know what the Lord Jesus meant, and what it means where we are concerned when He said: "I came to do Thy will", it is this about which we are talking. The will of God is the family of God in which He is truly Father God, and His Son is truly THE Son, the eldest Son, "The firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29). Do you pray to know the will of God? Do you ask to know what God's will is? Well, of course, you may apply that to all sorts of things, but you must remember that the will of God is very comprehensive and specific, and is just this that we are talking about. The Son came, not only to speak of the Father, but to manifest the Father, so that He could say: "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father" (John 14:9). 'There is no further need for you to say "Shew us the Father"' (John 14:8). "I manifested thy name... I kept them in thy name." And, as we have seen, in this chapter alone He calls Him 'Father' six times - "O righteous

Father... Holy Father."

The Lord Jesus has come to give in His own Person the revelation of God as Father, and to redeem unto God His family. Those wonderful words in the early part of the Letter to the Hebrews: "He is not ashamed to call them brethren... I and the children which God hath given me... Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling" (Hebrews 2:11,13; 3:1) are the fruit of His REDEEMING activity.

Dear friends, it is a good thing to be redeemed, to have what redemption means in the sense of sins forgiven, deliverance from bondage, security unto eternal life, and all those blessings. But do we sufficiently recognize that it is a FAMILY He has come to redeem, and that we are redeemed as a family? We may be redeemed individually, but God's thought, and Christ's thought, was to redeem a family.

What is a family? Now, if you friends have a family, how happy and pleased would you be if every one of your children was a unit in himself or herself, living an independent life without any concern or consideration or interest in any other member of the family? Just so many isolated units in one place could not be called a home! Would you be happy about it if they all went off and never had any concern for the other members, but were just individuals? Well, they might be children of the same parents, but, if that was the situation, the parents would feel that the real meaning of parenthood had been lost. How God must feel about anything and everything that is other than a family concept and a family spirit amongst His people!

We hear so much about the Church, the churches and the local assemblies. Indeed, we can get very tired of that, for it can be so technical. But what is God's thought in companies of His people in any place? That they should be a representation of the family where His Fatherhood is the dominant thing, where His Son has the place that He ought to have, and where all are a unit. "I pray... that they may all be one" (John 17:20-21). How? 'As Thou, *Father*, and I are one.' The Father is revealing Himself in the Son and the Son is manifesting Himself in the Father. What perfect oneness there is between those two! "That they may be one, even as we are one."

The prayer of the Lord Jesus, right at the end, as He went to the Cross, was for the family. He went to the Cross to redeem the family, that out of His death and resurrection many sons should be born.

And there are not lacking some indications that there was a very real answer to His prayer at the beginning. You would never call those twelve disciples a family before Calvary! I should say: 'The Lord deliver us from families if that is one!' There was quarrelling, envying, striving and jealousy of one another. But look afterwards: "*But Peter, standing up with the eleven*" (Acts 2:14). And there is that wonderful second chapter of Acts when they "were all together in one place... they had all things common... and not one of them said that aught of the things which he possessed was his own" (Acts 2:1, 4:32).

Well, we have reached something of the family when the Holy Spirit brings Christ into His place, and God is Father over all. Paul had some conception of this. You know that in his letter to the Ephesians he prayed to the Father "from whom every family in heaven and on earth is named" (3:14).

So the Lord Jesus came, firstly to secure unto the Father the satisfaction of His eternal desire, the realization of His own ambition of heart, to redeem unto God a family; and not to leave it there, but

to bring that family to reign, to govern in the eternal kingdom. It is to be the governmental family of the ages to come. The means by which He is going to govern this world in the coming ages is by this family elevated to His throne. The far greater and more glorious counterpart of David and Solomon is the Father and Son. And then, to use another phrase from the Letter to the Hebrews, "many sons" whom He has brought to glory.

We cannot just say these things without reminding ourselves that the realization of this, both on the part of the Lord Jesus and on our part, if the Father is to find His satisfaction, is a costly thing. It is by way of travail. There is no family without travail. God has put it in the very constitution of this creation that the family is by way of travail, of suffering. In a word, someone has to be prepared to lay down their life for the family, and the Lord Jesus did it. And, dear friends, we are not going to have anything like this amongst the Lord's people unless we are prepared to suffer for it, to lay down our lives for it, to set aside all our own personal interests for it, really to put up with a lot, that we might bring to the Father that upon which His heart is so much set. It is the way of travail, of sacrifice, of suffering. For this His Body was broken, that we might share that Body as one family. For this His Blood was shed, that we might, in drinking His blood - in other words, His outpoured life - share as a family that one life.

So we come back and close where we began, with His prayer. What a cry it is! What an appeal it is! Shall we say: what an agony it is! 'Father, the world has not known, but these have known... Father, as Thou and I are one... that they may be one.'

Have you been all the time poised and adjusted, asking: 'Is the Lord saying something to me? Somewhere, somehow, I have violated this family spirit, family disposition, and grieved the Spirit of God, who is the Spirit of the family.' Is there something that He is saying to you and to me? How does this apply to us? Is it just a lovely Bible theme? God forbid! It was a prayer with Him, so let us make it a prayer, and a prayer that will have a very practical aspect, for sometimes we can go a long way towards answering our own prayers. And this matter is not ALL to be left with the Lord. He has done His part!