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## The Unveiling of Jesus Christ

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

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At the beginning of the book of the Revelation, we find, on the one hand, a situation of spiritual loss and failure, weakness, and many other conditions and features which even the Lord Himself, in all His grace, has to deplore. Through His servant John He sends a series of letters to seven representative churches, aimed at securing the renewing of the life of His people, and the restoring of those primary and primal values of their beginnings. Then, it was a situation of many difficulties - sufferings and trials and adversities from various quarters and of various kinds. The Christians at that time were both actually in a time of much adversity and were moving yet more deeply into suffering. To one of these churches the Lord said that they were *about* to suffer, they were *about* to be cast into prison; they were going to have tribulation for a specified time (2:10). It was a time when Christians both actually needed real help and stimulus, and needed to be prepared for further battles, further conflicts and further sufferings. These were the two main aspects of the general situation.

In the light of those facts, we stand back and ask: How did the Lord, and how does the Lord, meet that need? Indeed, we might say: How does the Lord ever meet a great need? What is that which alone will supply the need, and be the key to the problem, the answer to the demand, and the assured ground, both of recovery and renewal, and of fortification for the suffering? And the answer has ever been, and always is: A new revelation - an unveiling - of the greatness of Jesus Christ. That is the very platform, we might say, upon which and from which the Lord moves into these situations, and into all the situations that follow in this book. He prefaces everything with this fresh revelation or unveiling of His own personal greatness.

That has ever been the way. Abraham was called upon to take tremendous decisions, to make immense sacrifices. In his native country and city, with its marvellous and rich civilisation, he had a very full life indeed; and, without assurance that his movement would be justified, he was called upon to move under sealed orders. 'Get thee out... unto a land which I will show thee.' 'I will show... when you get there!' It was a tremendous move, very costly, and very testing. But if you have wondered how it was that Abraham went through, met all the tests, and at last survived, you have, I think, the answer in these words: "The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia" (Acts 7:2). If ever that happens, you have got something to move on; you have got a background; you have something that will again and again come to your rescue in a time of difficulty.

Moses was called upon to undertake a tremendous responsibility. We know the whole story now. Moses was not altogether ignorant of what he had to face, in Egypt and afterward; and we may wonder sometimes how he kept to the course and got through. But we know that he met God 'face to face'; it could be said equally that 'the God of glory appeared' to him. Reference is made several times in the Bible to that encounter with God in the bush. And we are told that "he endured, as seeing him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:27). That was the secret of his sustenance.

Joshua was called as a young man to face very great responsibilities and undertakings, in the ridding and clearing of that country of those ten kingdoms, getting that people in - such a people - he knew them! - to possess the land, and all that was bound up with it. And no wonder the Lord had to repeat one word to Joshua continually, to get him on the move. 'Be of good courage'; 'be strong and of good courage'; 'only be of good courage... only be strong' (Joshua 1:6,7,9). How did the Lord give to Joshua the basis? He 'lifted up his eyes' and saw the 'Captain of the host of the Lord' (Joshua 5:13,14). From that time it was all right; he could go on and go through.

Isaiah was a young man in a very, very difficult day, one of those very cloudy days in Israel's history. He was taking up his great prophetic ministry in the face of great difficulties and threatening problems. How did he get through? 'I saw the Lord, high and lifted up', he said (Is. 6:1). That is the answer.

Think of Paul - did ever a man have to face greater difficulties, oppositions and antagonisms and sufferings and perils, more than that man? How did he get through? He saw the Lord, or the Lord appeared to him. He saw the greatness of Jesus Christ.

Stephen triumphed as he saw 'the heavens opened, and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God' (Acts 7:56). So we could go on.

Some thirty years later, the Lord's people had come to a point where there was going to be a devastating blow struck at their corporate life. It was just on the point of that final siege of Jerusalem, when everything was going to be shattered and scattered; a great earth-shaking was about to take place; all that the Lord Jesus Himself had foreshadowed, '...not one stone left upon another...'; and all those other terrible things, were all about to take place within a very little time. How were the believers going to get through?

The Lord took up a man - we do not know now exactly who it was; some say one and some say another - but He took up a man to write what we call 'The Letter to the Hebrews', and he begins with an almost matchless unveiling of the greatness of Jesus Christ! The Lord was saying through that

letter: If only you can get that as your foundation, you will go through it all. You will not go back as you are being tempted to do, as perhaps you are contemplating doing. If only you see how great your Lord is, you will go on. So He laid the foundation for survival of faith - for that is the issue; you know how it all comes up in the eleventh chapter - the survival of faith, on the ground of an apprehension of the greatness of Christ.

And then we come to this book of the Revelation, and again we are in the presence of these things: on the one side, spiritual declension, failure, breakdown, loss; on the other side, suffering, growing suffering, terrible afflictions for the Church. How will the one be remedied and recovery take place? What is the key to a renewing of spiritual life when it has reached a low ebb? How shall they go on through the tribulation and the tribulations, and come out in victory in the City of God? The Lord's only answer, His one answer, which has always been successful, and is the only one which will be successful in any situation of need, is a new unveiling of the greatness of the Lord Jesus.

But oh, these are but words! When we have said these things - and we would all agree that they are true - we are still so helpless, because it is the *thing* that matters - not talking about it! If only, by the Holy Spirit - and there is no other way, no other means - we could catch a new glimpse of His greatness, how many problems that would solve, questions that would answer, needs that would meet! How *overwhelming* it would be! - and when I say 'overwhelming', I mean, how much would be overwhelmed! A mighty tidal wave, making all these rocks, upon which we threaten to founder, as nothing; they are sunk beneath it, disappear from view.

Now that is not just language. Look - who is writing this? It is the apostle John. The apostle John? Yes, that man who walked with Jesus of Nazareth, listened to Him, watched Him at work, and, at supper, and at other times, sat next to Him, and put his head upon His shoulder - the most familiar picture of a man alongside of a man, in close, devoted, affectionate association. John always called himself 'the disciple whom Jesus loved': it showed that there was a sacred, holy familiarity between John and Jesus, marked by very human terms and language.

Yet that same man said: 'When I saw Him I *fell*, as one dead.' It is the same Jesus, and the same man; but - 'I fell to the ground as one dead.' And if that One had not, in His great mercy, come and laid His hand upon him, saying, 'Fear not, John: I am the first and the last; I am the Living One', John would have been there as a dead man. It was the same Jesus - but look at the transition from the 'Jesus of history' to the Christ of glory! That is the difference. From the John of the Gospels to the John of the Revelation it is a marvellous and mighty movement! He never felt like that when he walked with Jesus, devoted as he was. With his fullest consciousness of who Jesus was, he was at most perhaps sometimes awestruck and awe-inspired. It was not until he saw Him glorified that he went down, helplessly prostrate, like a dead man. It was a great transition from the Jesus of history to the Christ of glory.

Now, I take nothing whatever from the values and blessings of the Gospels, when I say that I am sometimes afraid that we may dwell too much upon the Jesus of history, and fail to remember that the men who wrote those four Gospels wrote them long after Jesus was glorified. You notice, they did not, at some point toward the end of His life, when they perhaps began to sense that He would not be with them much longer, get away and decide to write the story of that life - of His birth, and His manhood, and His teaching, and His miracles - as a mere human, earthly story. When they wrote, they had all the mighty facts and realities of His resurrection, ascension and heavenly glory, which they were seeking to crowd into that story of His life here, as those who would say: 'That One was

This One! That was not just Jesus of Nazareth - that was the mighty Son of God from Heaven! They were crowding every incident with the fullest apprehension that they had of the glorified Christ - Christ, who was now there at the right hand of God! They were not just writing a human story.

That is the only way in which to preach the Gospel from the Gospels. Do you notice, when after His ascension and His glorification they preached or they wrote, how little, how remotely little, they ever said about the three-and-a-half years? - just a fragment here and there. They said very little about His teaching and His miracles and His walk about Palestine. They were all occupied with *this* One who had been 'crowned with glory and honour' - that was their message. Yes, there was that other One - Jesus of Nazareth, 'who went about doing good, and healing all who were oppressed with the devil' - a sort of passing reference to that earthly phase, a summary... 'But God raised Him!' God honoured Him, *this* One! It will not get us very far just to be occupied with the incidents of His earthly life, however precious they are. If we are going on and going through, we need an apprehension of that fulness of glory that is His now - the greatness of Christ.

It is, indeed, just because men have robbed or stripped Him of His essential greatness, that we find, down the centuries, the deplorable conditions that have obtained. Our 'liberal' theologians have stripped Him of His Deity; with what result? Oh, devastating results in the impact of Christ upon this earth! They have made Him a lesser Christ than He is. The philosophers have just made Him one in their gallery of great and wise men. It was against that tendency even with the Christians in Corinth that Paul raged in his first letter - taking something from the Lord Jesus, and just putting Him amongst other great men. The gnostics of Colossae - what were they doing? They had a theory of angelic ranks and orders, from the highest order of angelic beings down to the lowest subordinate; and they put Jesus, perhaps at the top, but as nothing more than an 'angelic being', robbing Him of His essential Person. He is Very God!

The 'comparative religionists', all along and in our own day, are saying, Well, there are great founders of religions - there is Buddha, and Confucius, and Mohammed, and Jesus... and so on. You see the subtlety? - a comparative, not an absolutely Supreme and unique! And then there are the humanists of our time, inflating and glorifying man and humanity to such a point that, after all, humanity will be deified one day, will reach God-head - and Jesus is only, after all, the Super-Man! So it goes on, and it is all these things, this Satanic work, to reduce the size of Christ, to make Him less than He is, that has done so much mischief. If we lose, or fail to have, the essential greatness of Christ in our consciousness, ours is going to be a lesser spiritual life than it could be, and we shall break down under the stress and the strain of adversity. The only thing for every need is the recovery of His greatness.

Now here He is presented in the Revelation, and He is not presented in the language of Deity, although it runs very close. At some points, you cannot distinguish between the humanity and the deity. You do not know whether John is speaking of God or of Christ at certain points. The fact is, he is speaking of the One who is both. But the title, as we have already seen, by which He is presented in this matchless, incomparable unveiling, is 'Son of man'. Let us now consider the personal greatness of the Son of Man, who is, at the same time, Son of God, Very God.

We have referred to the Letter to the Hebrews, and we call it in now for our help in this matter. We read from it, and we begin with this *"effulgence of his glory"*, and then we read: *"Whom he appointed heir of all things"* - appointed heir of all things! - *"through whom... he made the ages..."* and so on. *"But one hath somewhere testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man, that*

*thou visitest him? Thou ... didst set him over the works of thy hands: thou didst put all things in subjection under his feet... We see not yet all things subjected to him. But we behold him who hath been made for a little while lower than the angels, even Jesus, because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour, that by the grace of God he might taste death for every man."*

Here is the Son of Man in *His own personal greatness*. See who He is: 'the effulgence...!', 'the express image...!' See His appointment: 'heir of all things'. See His instrumentality and agency: 'through whom the ages were made'. The Son of Man - how great this One is! You would not think that, when you see Him walking about Palestine - not all that! You do not recognise Him. But that same One is now here before John, with these devastating effects; that same One, now revealed, unveiled, as to what He is essentially in His Person; who He is; what position He holds. He is here as the Heir of all things come for His inheritance. And the rest of the book sees Him working it out - the securing of that inheritance of which He is the Heir, and, in the end, of a 'new heaven and a new earth'. What a glorious inheritance comes into view in the last chapters of this book! This is the Son of Man; this is His greatness! But we are completely defeated at any attempt at a true, not exaggerated, unveiling of Jesus Christ. There is His personal greatness.

But as Son of Man, we have, in that very title, *His representative greatness*. To borrow again from the Letter to the Hebrews, where first He is appointed Heir of all things, then He is the 'Captain of their salvation', 'bringing many sons to glory'. The word 'captain' there would be better translated the 'Pioneer' of their salvation - the One who goes before to lead them into that into which He Himself has entered. Of course, that is the substance of this Letter to the Hebrews. He has gone before; He has entered into the heavens; He has "passed through the heavens"; He has gone the whole way, and reached the end, as the Pioneer of the many sons being brought to glory, whom He calls His 'brethren'. His representative greatness, as there at the end, in fulness, in glory - for *there* He represents all those whom He is going to bring and is bringing - how great it is! We read in the Revelation of a 'great multitude which no man can number out of every tribe and kindred and tongue... thousands... ten thousands of thousands...' Language is taxed to breaking point to describe the fruit of the sufferings of the Lamb! And He is the Representative in glory of them all. How great is His Person and His representation!

And then, *His official greatness*. That is seen through this book of the Revelation, and again in the Letter to the Hebrews. His official greatness, as High Priest - what a great High Priest He is, as according to that book; what a tremendous thing He does! Think of it: through century after century, sacrifices of lambs, and goats, and bulls and other things - blood enough to fill an ocean - all through the centuries, day after day, and never reaching an end in effectiveness where sin was concerned: but *He*, One Offering - only one! - went far beyond the millions of sacrifices on Jewish altars. How great was His sacrifice, and His priesthood, as He offered Himself without spot to God, once for all.

And here, in this book, as the other side of His official greatness, we have His description as 'King of kings, and Lord of lords'! What a thing to say, in a day when that tyrant at Rome was dominating the world, assuming lordship over all lordships, and seeking to subject to himself every power, not only in earth, but in heaven, since he claimed deity. In *that* day, the unveiling of Jesus Christ is 'King of kings' - yes, and Nero amongst them! - 'and Lord of lords'.

To sum up: I believe we would have very much better converts if they were presented with a very much greater Christ. To anyone who does not know in their own life and experience salvation in Jesus Christ, what it really means to be born again - to be really a 'child of God', and *to know it* - to be

able to join in heartily with this apostle John when he said, 'Beloved, now are we the children of God... Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God, and such we are!' - to any such I would say this. While Jesus would be your Saviour, the Forgiver of your sins, and many other things to you, He is far, far greater than anything you can imagine. Salvation takes its greatness from the measure of the Saviour. If you want a great salvation, see what a great Saviour He is. And remember that because of what He is, you need have no fears in putting your trust in Him; you need not fear that you may not be able to 'keep it up'! No, you won't, but He will; He will be able to keep you up - He is great enough! We need an unveiling of the greatness of Jesus Christ, to get a better kind of Christian.

For the recovery from our spiritual losses and declensions and failures, and deliverance from all these things which are so abhorrent to us and to Him, there is only one way, and that is, really to see His greatness. If we do that, we cannot live on a 'little' level. I recently went to the Planetarium in London. The thing that was with me, while listening to the lecture, and afterward, was, how ever can anyone be 'little' when they are dealing with these things all the time! I suppose it is possible even for a Fellow of the Astronomical Society to be a 'little' man in character (I am not implying this about this man, but it is possible!) But it is not possible to have a revelation of the greatness of Jesus Christ and remain a little person! Oh, for our enlargement, our ennoblement, our deliverance from our pettinesses, and all this which is so despicable! What is the answer? A new grasp of His greatness - that is all!

And then, if we are suffering; if we are knowing adversity and trial; if the clouds seem to be gathering, and increasing, how will we get through? Only by getting away, and asking, seeking, pursuing in prayer a new heart revelation, a new unveiling, of Jesus Christ, and that will surely do it.