

Responsibility For What We Have **"But Ye..."** and **Christ Our Life**

Three Messages by T. Austin-Sparks



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Have
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Christ Our Life

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Responsibility For What We Have

"They have Moses and the prophets, let them hear them.... If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, if one rise from the dead" (Luke 16:29,31).

That is a strange parable, or illustration, that our Lord gave about the rich man and the poor man and their places and conditions after having passed from this life! How much speculative teaching has been read into or made out of it! And yet, in truth, the Lord was not propounding a doctrine of life after death. Anything in that connection was quite incidental.

1. The Matter of Responsibility

What He was really touching, as the context shows, is the matter of responsibility. Whenever He came into touch with the existing traditional religious system this was the issue which He deliberately raised and pressed. If the after-this-life factor does have a place in the above story - and it certainly does - it is this factor of responsibility which dominates the situation.

The rich man represents those who:

1. have had every facility and possibility of obtaining a wealth of the things of God:
2. have accumulated all that information, or a great deal of it:

3. have, by reason of it, come to a place of spiritual complacency, smugness, and contentment, or even pride and superiority:

4. have not grown spiritually although so well provided for:

5. have failed to realize that every bit of spiritual provision is a trust; it must not stay with them, but must enrich the needy always at the gate, as represented by the beggar - the sufferer, the suppliant, the hungry.

2. Application to Us

There is no need to spend many words in order to try to make the Lord's meaning clear. It just amounts to this:

A. Have we available to us those Divine resources, those riches of Christ, those ministries - personal or printed - which are intended by God to make us spiritually wealthy and of Christly stature?

B. If so, are they just *THINGS* to us, 'teachings', subjects, themes, 'lines of truth', Christian tradition, interesting and informative treatises, etc? How much are we *REALLY* growing thereby'?

C. What is the interest value to the Lord Who gave them? Do they stop at us, or is 'our profiting' the gain of others? Not the passing on of truth as such, but the value of our life with the Lord.

The Lord has been strong, almost severe in His warning that a very big responsibility lies at the door of everyone who is in touch with His Divine resources, and that what has issued from them will find us out in eternity.

"But Ye..."

"And he said unto them, It is not for you to know times or seasons, which the Father hath set within his own authority. But ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you; and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:7-8).

"Now when they beheld the boldness of Peter and John, and had perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13).

"Not... times or seasons... But ye..."

The Lord thus turns the whole question of the new dispensation into a matter of people. The old dispensation commenced with a man. He was God's key to everything in the creation. And here, in the book of the Acts, we have the commencement of the new dispensation and the new creation; and it is focused in a Man - the Son of man - and in men.

The key to everything is - "But ye..." The disciples were interested in something objective to themselves, and yet in which they would have a place - the kingdom of Israel. That meant they were interested in the interpretation and fulfilment of prophecy - one of a good many themes and subjects; they were interested in teachings. But the Lord said, 'No, it is not teachings, nor truths; not a movement, an enterprise, a kingdom.' All that was to be subsequent to getting the men, and getting the men inwardly in the position which was necessary.

1. It is You

Well, that is a very simple word, but it really goes to the heart of things. What are we waiting for? What are we expecting? Is it a change in our position, circumstances, conditions, location, association? Are we waiting to be precipitated into some movement, for the Church to take action where we are concerned, for others to take responsibility for us? What is it? Well, let us note this: the Lord says, "Not... but..." Not any things like that, in the first place, but you: the man, the woman, in right relationship with the Lord, under the full government of the Holy Spirit, filled with love for Christ and for others: the man, the woman, whose eyes have seen the King. That is the key to everything. It may change the circumstances, it may change everything; but to change everything without that would not get us anywhere. The Lord says, 'It is you, everything waits for you'. It is not this and that which you can tabulate, something you may be either definitely or vaguely expecting in connection with a day when you will be in some other position and your job will change and you will be out in 'the work'. You will go on like that to the end of your life; you can have any number of changes but not be getting to the real goal. It is not this and that, but ye... The Lord gets us where He wants us and as He wants us.

2. We are the Key

It is quite clear that is exactly how it works out. We can see that. Here and there are such people, men and women in whom, because of their utterly selfless abandonment to the Lord and because they are so full of the Spirit, the thing is happening. All that we long to see happening is happening with them, the work is being done, there is movement.

So do not let us wait for things. Let us at once recognise the fact where we are. We may not be moved elsewhere. This is to hold good just where we are now, without waiting for some change of time or place or situation or set of circumstances. It is not the thing outside of us at all: we are the key to it all. What is required is that both the Lord and others should be able to look on us and say 'They count, they express the Lord'. And, after all, it does not matter what we might get of official position and place in anything that is going. What is the value of that, however great it may seem to be, if it is not the expression of Christ? Let us ask the Lord to show us clearly just what has to be ruled out in our case - that of which He says, 'No, not that, but ye...'

We are apt to think that if and when the circumstances and conditions of our lives are changed and we are in another position than the one we now occupy, then something will happen, the purpose of God will begin to be fulfilled. The Lord would say, 'No; it is not circumstances, not conditions, at all; it is you.'

Some think that it is a matter of graduation and ordination and office, and that when they get into an official position, and have recognition there, then they will begin to fulfil the purpose of their lives. So they are waiting until they are either ordained or appointed to their work. The Lord says, 'No, it is not office, it is not ordination, it is not placing; it is you; you are the key.'

And alongside that, many are looking to the organization, the society, the mission, the church connection to which they are related, and expecting a new day for themselves to originate there, and that when the institution, whatever it may be, takes action, then the work of their life will begin. And the Lord says, 'It is not the church, the mission, the organization, the society, the institution; it is you.'

These men in Acts 1 were waiting for something to happen outside of themselves. They called it the restoring of the kingdom, the setting up of an order which would be a national - perhaps an international - movement: a new order outside of themselves in which they would find their place and probably be allocated, appointed or ordained to it. And the Lord simply swept the board of all those ideas and said, 'No, it is not that, it is you.' That is how

it proved, how it worked out. We individually may be the key to everything in the purpose of God.

Christ Our Life

Introduction

Are we satisfied with Him, apart from what He does or is able to do for us?

God has summed up and centered all things in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. This means that Christianity is not a number of things as in themselves, such as beliefs, doctrines, dogmas, practices, forms, rites, orders, or virtues. It is not salvation, regeneration, sanctification, power, life, joy, peace, etc, as *things*; it is just Himself...

Christ Our Life

"When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory."
(Colossians 3:4).

If we ask what is the very essence and heart of Christianity and the Christian life, the answer is that God has summed up and centered all things in the person of His Son, Jesus Christ. This means that Christianity is not a number of things as in themselves, such as beliefs, doctrines, dogmas, practices, forms, rites, orders, or virtues. It is not salvation, regeneration, sanctification, power, life, joy, peace, etc, as *things*; it is just Himself, and Himself as resident within those who have received Him as *Who* and *What* He is. He is the total of all that is necessary for God's glory and satisfaction, for which we were created. Nothing can be had or known as an *"it"*, apart from the *Person*. If we have *Him* and live by *Him*, we have all.

Failure to realize this inclusive fact in a living way is the reason for every kind of weakness, failure, and disappointment, both in life and in service. We may be craving for or striving after an *"it"*, whatever that *"it"* may be, but God will never depart from His position in relation to His Son. Many people have striven with such soul intensity after *an it* as to have become psychic or occult, and they have got an *"it"*; but it is not from God, and the end will prove that to be so.

Adam, at the beginning, was ensnared into a deception in this very way. He had all things *in God* and by an *abiding in God*, a life of dependence and trust, the *"all things"* were to be enjoyed and ever enlarged. But the suggestion came that he could have the seat and spring of things in himself and *"be as God"*. To this idea he fell; and while he gained (?) that immediate object of *"knowing good and evil"*, his gain has been his curse ever since, and untold loss has come with it. The *"Last Adam"* (God's Son), to rectify the matter for a new race of *"believers"*, accepted a life of voluntary and absolute dependence upon God, confessing that *"of Himself"* (lit: *"out from"*) He could do nothing. He proved that such is a position and life of *Divine* strength, peace, joy, and ascendancy. He thus *"destroyed the works of the Devil"*, and by His life of obedient dependence and trust received all things as His inheritance of *"all things"*. But *"Christ in us is the hope of glory"* (Col. 1:27), and a life of absolute dependence upon Him means victory, ability, fullness. But it will ever be Himself, and we shall be kept strictly to this, ever knowing our own weakness and futility.

It is because God has established this as the unalterable law of life that He will cause everything else manifestly to fail, so far as eternal satisfaction and fulness are concerned.

As we move toward the end there will be a cutting off increasingly of *things*, and a resolving of all into a matter of *HIMSELF*.

We do not realize how much, how deeply, how subtly good things can take the place of Himself until they are removed. Let our work, our interest, our meetings, our ministry, our power to do, our opportunity to do, yes, our everything on the outside be taken away, so

that we are alone and helpless; then will come the supreme test as to what the Lord Himself is to us. Is not this the trend of everything today? More and more we are having outward things brought into limitation - things, men, movements, places, activities! Antichrist is on the horizon and will represent a fullness and ability, a wealth and a power by self-energy (the source of which is Satanic), and secretly or openly many will make a comparison between the fullness which he offers and represents, and the *apparent* smallness and weakness of what is of Christ. Many hearts will be drawn away, many will faint. The supreme test for all will be here - if it is not already the case. Antichrist may first overawe by his display of power and terror, and then carry away by what he offers. In the suffering and trial which this will mean, the whole issue will hang upon what the Lord is to us. God *must* press this issue, because in His new world order which will be imminent at such a time, the one all-inclusive feature will be that "*Christ is all in all*", and this not as a doctrine or as something merely objective, but a reality wrought into the very being of His people.

We have to test the nature of our stimuli. Is it work, enterprises, activities, movements, churches, societies, teachings, people, missions, etc., or is Christ Himself our life and satisfaction? Our chief lesson is *to live Christ*. Do we need sustenance and satisfaction? He says, "*I am the bread of life*". To every need His answer is *I am that*; not, *I give that*.

So Paul links the two things together - the appearing of Christ with the utterness of Christ as our life: "*When Christ - who is our life - shall be manifested...*" Let us "*hear what the Spirit saith*"; let us see what the sovereign acts of God are saying; let us look to our foundations. Is it just the Lord Himself before and beneath and above all things?

Are we satisfied with Him, apart from what He does or is able to do for us?

It is out of His being our all-in-all that every value in life and service will issue, and if He is, then the values will be spontaneous, the fruit will just be there without effort or machinery.

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