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A Positive, Purposeful God

by T. Austin-Sparks

Transcribed from a message given in November 1958.

The first words in the Bible, the book of Genesis, chapter 1.

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. And the earth was waste and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters. And God said, Let there be light: and there was light".

Place alongside of that, for purposes which you will see presently, a few words from the prophecies of Jeremiah. Jeremiah's prophecies chapter 4:

"I beheld the earth, and, lo, it was waste and void; and the heavens, and they had no light. I beheld the mountains, and, lo, they trembled, and all the hills moved to and fro. And I beheld, and, lo, there was no man, all the birds of the heavens were fled. I beheld, and, lo, the fruitful field was a wilderness, and all the cities thereof were broken down at the presence of the Lord, and before His fierce anger. For thus saith the Lord, The whole land shall be a desolation; yet will I not make a full end".

'*In the beginning, God...*' and everyone will say, "That's right; that is the place that He ought to occupy". And so, with these words so familiar to us, the whole Bible is introduced. And from this note, this keynote, the whole Bible runs and becomes a harmony - God. Here, God, the subject of the whole Bible, is introduced: "In the beginning, God...". And when God is in His place, which is first

and primary, there is always a new beginning. This is a point of departure, and a point which marks a new prospect. It is always like that when the Lord has His place.

Now for these few minutes, I want to dwell upon the kind of God that is introduced with these words. These early verses of the Bible contain in principle the great truths as to what God is like; the *kind* of God that He is. We open this book, and are at once confronted with a state that is wholly negative - wholly negative. Everything about that condition is negative: there was *not* this, and there was *not* that; that is the mark. And God, introduced over against a negative condition, is immediately shown to be a God who is positive; a God who is not negative, and a God who cannot bear anything that is negative. He just cannot endure a negative condition. He's like that. He is the great 'Yea' God, the Almighty "Yes", and whenever God comes to His place, the change will be from a negative to a positive; things will at once begin to assume some positive character, some meaningfulness.

With God, all that is negative will just begin to go out and we shall find that whatever His activities may be - and His activities are many indeed, and sometimes they *seem* to be working in a negative way - the fact and the truth is that, whatever He is doing, He is doing it with a positive object and a positive mind; His end is not going to be a negative. "I will not make a full end", we read in Jeremiah, "However it may appear things are being brought to an end, I will not make a full end". It is all unto a positive purpose. The very first thing about this God, who is the subject of this whole mighty Book, is that He is a positive God, who is set against any negative condition. Take that as a great truth in your relationship to the Lord, in your apprehension of the Lord. These are the foundations of everything.

The next thing is: "*And God created...*" Put that in another way: 'God got to work'. God is a God of purpose, and not passive, inactive. He is a God actuated by positive purpose. We know from the rest of the story how true that is. But here again, how much there is in the Bible that just comes back to this truth: God is not an inactive God, a stand-off God, somewhere amidst the shadows, just a spectator. He is right on the scene; He is right *in* things. Working *in* all things, *working* in all things as Paul says, '*working* in all things'. He is not a purposeless God, and He *cannot endure* a state of things that has no purpose. Look upon this: 'without form, and empty'. Well, God is not going to tolerate that; He is introduced to us as One who will *not* bear any state that is without a purpose, and will do all in His power to turn things to positive purpose. He is the God of purpose; He is not a passive God.

Then: "*Without form*". Without form, and He comes in as set against anything that is formless, or disorderly, or without order. He is a God of order. It is a beautiful story of an order being evolved, introduced, where there was no order. Disorder is always weakness, isn't it? Disorder is *always* loss. A disorderly person is wasting a lot of energy and a lot of time, and throwing away a very great deal of vital value. Disorderliness in our person, disorderliness in our home, or in any sphere; disorderliness in the Church - it means weakness, it means loss. God is a God of order. So, when it says it was "without form", God is introduced as One who is not going to put up with that, He's not going allow *that* to continue. His activity is to bring about an order that is not order for its own sake, not because He is fastidious or pernickety, that kind of a God, but because, as we all know, economy is always bound up with being systematic, being orderly. And that is the kind of God He is, who does not want there to be all that loss that is associated with a lack of heavenly order.

Well, "*Without form, and void*". The Hebrew word would be better translated to the English word 'empty' - 'without form and empty' or 'desolate', 'barren'. Void. And God is not a God like that. If there is one thing that the Bible says about the Lord, all the way through, it is that He is a God who

believes in fulness; His thoughts are *full* thoughts; His ends are *full* ends. He believes in fullness. The great end at which we have already been looking this morning, is that when "the earth shall be *filled* with" - shall be full of - "the knowledge of the Lord". He is working toward that. Now, the Lord cannot bear to have a condition that is not full; He just cannot. He does not like people to be empty; He does not like us to be just partially full: He wants us to know His fulness - 'of His fulness to receive, grace upon grace'. Now, God cannot bear vacuums, a vacuum is always a dangerous thing. Always a dangerous thing, He acts against that.

Next, "*God said, Let there be light*". God cannot bear a state of darkness. He is the God of light, the God of illumination; and His desire is that there shall be light everywhere, *fulness* of light. Now, that is the kind of God that is introduced with this word, "In the beginning God...".

There are those who believe that this state here described was the result of judgment upon a former creation. Well, whether that is so or not, the rest of the Bible does show, again and again, that God had to act in relation to a state of things that had missed the purpose of its existence, to bring it to this condition: break it down, destroy it, throw it into disruption and desolation. He did that again and again when a thing for which, which He raised up for a purpose had lost that purpose, He just did it. But whenever He did it, He moved again. He moved again. The Bible is just full of the second movements of God in lives, in a people, in places. You look up the double movements of God that the Bible contains and there you are. How thankful Jonah was that the Lord did not leave him in the depths of the sea in his misery! The word is: "And the word of the Lord came again, a second time unto Jonah..." Thank God for that second time! How glad Peter would be that the Lord came a second time into his life, after the chaos, after the blinding darkness of his failure. The Lord came again to Peter. And so the Bible is full of that. "I will not make a full end". In other words, 'I will come back again, whatever I have to do.'

Sometimes the Lord does seem to be on that line of pulling down. I read this morning that short, perhaps shortest chapter in Jeremiah 45, of the word to Baruch; the tremendous statement of the Lord through Jeremiah to Baruch. He says: "That which I have planted I will pull up, I will root out... Seekest thou great things for thyself? seek them not". But we know that while the Lord pulled up, rooted up that people from the land because they failed to fulfil their Divine purpose, He planted them again. Through the prophet, He says: 'I will plant again; I will plant again'. And He did. Sometimes it does seem that there is the pulling up business going on, the pulling down business, the destroying, and the scattering and the bringing about of a state of chaos and desolation. If it seems like that, may not that be only another aspect of the Lord's positive line of action? If the Bible says anything at all, it says that, that even His judgments, in time, are intended to be to His glory, and not to desolation.

Well, we could take many illustrations or instances in the Bible of the working of what I have said as to what kind of God He is. There was the chaos and desolation, the barrenness and unfruitfulness and darkness of Israel in Egypt; a condition very similar in the nation, in the people, to what we have here at the beginning of Genesis. And it might well be said of Israel in Egypt during those four hundred years: 'Without form and void... and darkness'. But the Lord moved, came to that formlessness, emptiness, purposelessness; and in the wilderness, what a beautiful order He established. From a rabble He created a nation; from a purposeless people, He brought them into a wonderful prospect, from this chaos in which they were living, He produced that marvelous system of worship in the Tabernacle. How *ordered* it all is, to the last detail! He is the God of order. Or Israel in Babylon again, a similar condition - "without form and void... and darkness". The Lord moves

against that. What about the disciples after the Cross? We could say: "without form and void... and darkness over the face of the deep" - awful chaos and desolation. But see the Creator at work after His resurrection, recovering! And we know the end of that story.

Now, what I want to say alongside of this, dear friends, is the great thing, of course. All this is true as to what kind of God this is that is introduced with the Bible. The great thing is what Paul says about it, that 'all things were created *for... unto... and by* Jesus Christ.' What does that mean? It means that all this, of which we have spoken so imperfectly, of course, all this becomes spiritually true in the Lord Jesus. As it is true in creation, in nature at the beginning, in the new creation in Christ Jesus it becomes *spiritually true* for every member of that new creation, every one truly born anew.

We know it to be true, every true child of God, who comes into this relationship with the Lord Jesus, immediately assumes a new sense of positiveness in life. We know that before that, it is all so negative, isn't it? All so negative. Even the positives of this world are negative, and everybody knows they are. Things in which the world glories or finds its pleasure - they know it's all negative, they must have, and have, and have, to try and overcome this negative element that is in everything. In Christ that negative gives way to a positive. We, most of us, if not all here this morning, know it is true that union with the Lord Jesus has given a positiveness to life and has given a purposefulness to life. That comes in at once. When anyone is saved, or born again, you see them assuming a sense of purpose in life; there is now a new meaning to things that has been introduced. "Called according to His purpose" - a sense of mighty Divine purpose comes in with Christ, it's found in Him.

Then the life begins to take on a new order, doesn't it? All that unco-ordinated state, where everything was in a state of disintegration and unrelated, begins to give place to a co-ordinating purpose; the life becomes united, and united by something quite positive. It is a new order that is brought into life in Christ, a heavenly order, a Divine order.

What is true of those things, is true of this matter of fulness: how empty after all, life is, until we find the Lord Jesus! It is empty, however full, it is empty, there's an emptiness; we know. I never understand the phrase: 'an aching void!' What is an aching void? A void is a void, and it is void of even an ache! But it is an expression. It's an expression, we know what it means - a void, an emptiness, an ache for something to *fill* life. That is answered, isn't it, in the Lord Jesus. We *begin* to know something of that when we *begin* the true Christian life; now, now we are on the way to something rich and full. And so it goes on and on; there is no end to this fulness. John said: 'Of His fulness have we all received' - *of* it, not it; we have not received His entire fulness, but *of* His fulness have we all received. And the end 'unto the fullness of the measure of the stature of Christ' (Eph. 4:13) - 'the fulness of *Him* that filleth all in all' (Eph. 1:23) - the fulness of God. That is what we are introduced into. God is that kind of God, but He is now made all that to us in Christ. There should be no vacuum in the Christian life, no emptiness.

And again, is it not true that in Christ there is the true illumination, the true light? He is the light. Paul, as we know well, linked this first chapter of Genesis, these very first phrases, with his own spiritual experience, and said: "God, who said, Let light be, shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ". The new creation is a new illumination; the light begins to shine.

Now that we have it - imperfectly, it is true; a little, and more, and more - the measure of light, the measure of understanding of Divine things, will entirely depend upon two things.

On the one side, how prepared we are to subject *our* wisdom to the wisdom of God. You know, our heads are usually the hindrance to spiritual illumination. We are wanting to get it all through our heads, through our reason, to understand it with our natural minds; we are struggling and struggling, and we don't get very far; and we have to say: I can't understand! Well, you never will that way. Just as the will has to be subjected to the will of God, so the *mind* has to be subjected to the mind of God. We come up against something which is God's revealed mind, and it does not accord with our minds, and our minds do not accord with it; we therefore put our minds in the way, and say: "But... but... but"! There light is arrested; there understanding is arrested. "Your thoughts are not My thoughts, My thoughts are not your thoughts, saith the Lord. As high as the heaven is above the earth, so are My thoughts above your thoughts". So you have got to surrender your own mental activities to the Lord, and perhaps be crucified in that *tremendous reasoning* capacity and faculty that you have, in humble acceptance of what God says. The light will break then.

But you see, that is one side. The other side is this. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of illumination, of revelation, and we must have the Spirit for spiritual understanding. "The Spirit of God *brooded* over the face of the waters". *He* it was who was the agent in transforming this scene, and bringing in this light, which made all the difference. The Spirit of God does this. It is a simple word for perhaps beginners in the Christian life. It is a wonderful, wonderful thing how, if we surrender on the one side, surrender mind as well as heart and will to the Lord, how the Lord can get on with His new creation so much more quickly than if we all the time are arguing, or reserving, or holding back, or contradicting. When the Holy Spirit really gets His place in us, how quick the change is; how wonderful the transformation!

But my point this morning is that all this that comes in by way of illustration (I am not saying it is only illustration and parable, history or not history - that does not really matter for the moment) - the thing is, all this is God's way of leading us on to His Son and saying what is true in the natural order of creation, under the hand of God, has its *superior* counterpart in the spiritual, heavenly, new creation in Christ. And this is what we find, or should find in Christ, this kind of thing: God working against what is negative, to bring about the positive; what is empty, to bring about the full; what is disorderly, to bring about the order; what is dark, to bring about the light. That *is* the nature of the Christian life; that is what is made true in Christ and the new creation.