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Christ Our Life (1940)

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"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 centred 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 realise 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. It is not in us now to live such a life, therefore we cannot of ourselves receive the 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, fulness. 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 realise 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 fulness 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 fulness 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.