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Death and Resurrection

by T. Austin-Sparks

Transcribed from a message given by T. Austin-Sparks in January 1965. The spoken form has been retained verbatim. Words which were not clearly discernible have been enclosed in [square] brackets.

Now, Lord, we have been reminded of that great occasion when Thy Word was given, and those that had understanding gave the sense and the people knew what it was that the Lord was saying. We do pray that it may be like that here, we're a little company, the Word of the Lord is amongst us but there is a need that we should come into understanding and therefore there is the need of an Interpreter. Thou hast given the Holy Spirit to interpret the things of God and our prayer is that He will do that while here tonight, fulfilling the word and promise of the Lord Jesus: He shall guide you into all the Truth. Oh Spirit of the Lord and Spirit of the Word, guide us *into* the Truth tonight, may we not only hear words but be led *into* the Word to have our life in the Word. Lord, be very gracious to us as Thou knowest and understandest our need. For Thy Name's sake we ask it. Amen.

I hope that no one here this evening will feel any offendedness when I say that my sense of leading at this time is to take you back to the foundation of our life in Christ. I expect most of you have had the experience of having many times gone over the same road, traveled in the same area, until it has become so familiar to you that you hardly notice it at all. And then one day you take with you over that old road, someone who has never been that way. And the whole thing takes on new life and new interest; you are impressed with the things that they see that you never saw, it wakes up, it is almost as though you had never been that way. You are seeing it through other, and new eyes. It is often like that. Now I think there is a very helpful way of coming to the word of God: trying to approach it as though we knew nothing about it, as though we'd never seen it before, forgetting all that we do know for the time being and taking it up and pursuing it with that mind that is looking at it in an altogether new way with new eyes as though it were for the first time.

Now, if we were strangers, complete strangers to Christianity and the Bible and were anxious to know what it really is so that we sat down with the New Testament and read it carefully, diligently, seekingly, honestly... what would it be that would impress us most? What would it be that would confront us supremely? I wonder if you have ever approached the Word in that way? Now, what is it really that is THE message of this book? What is it that comes out most distinctly and definitely as we read it?

Now if you were such a person as I have imagined, coming for the first time in a spirit of inquiry to the New Testament and then reading, don't you think that the thing that would confront you more than anything else would be this book is all about one Jesus. And the thing about Him is that He was crucified and then rose from the dead. That seems to be the uppermost and foremost thing in this whole book.

There are four narratives of His life. In quite a number of respects they differ, but they all finish here, on this. There is one thing that every writer seems to have as the end to all which he is moving and that he puts over everything else: the death of this One and His resurrection.

And then there follows a book of the history of early Christianity and when we look at it, it is all about the same thing: this Jesus Who was crucified but Who was raised from the dead. And then we go on into nine letters or epistles written by the first apostles of this one Jesus, and we find that they are all based upon this one thing: Jesus Who died is risen, is alive. One phrase occurs repeatedly - as a matter of fact in its different forms, twenty five times - "this Jesus did God raise up from the dead". Well, noting that, being impressed with that, we should draw our conclusion, as strangers to this whole story, our conclusion would be that this Christianity is built upon one thing and that one supreme thing is the resurrection of Jesus. That, of course, could only be if He had died. So the supreme thing about it is the resurrection of Jesus. This is what the New Testament is full of, what dominates it all, and stands out above everything else.

But we should not be able to stop there, having got that far, we should be impressed with another, a further feature. It is that although a comparatively few of the people mentioned and concerned in this book claim to have seen Jesus after His resurrection, they are ALL enjoying the reality of it! By far the greater majority are living on the basis of that truth. It's something tremendously real to them, not because they have been told about it or that it had been preached to them, that it is the thing that they had been taught, because you know, you don't really, livingly come into things by teaching. You know that! You can be taught and taught and taught thoroughly, soundly and for a long time and yet not be in the real enjoyment and experience of it all. Teaching may be vital, it may be important, but these people that we meet in this New Testament are not just what they are, living as they are, because they have heard about Jesus being raised from the dead, but because Jesus raised from the dead is in His resurrection life *there* and then present with them! It is not something of a few years ago, or many years ago. It is not something in history or in Christian doctrine and teaching, it is something right here NOW! Jesus might just at this very moment in this very hour have risen from the dead and appeared to them. It is like that with them, it is *a present reality in experience*.

That is what the stranger would be impressed with. It is like that! This book is alive! It's alive, and everything in it is alive because Jesus is alive in the present experience of all those who have believed. And then, if you were still inquiring, you would ask the question: Now, those things are quite evident in this book, those things are quite evident, there is no mistaking them but HOW did it come about? HOW is this thing? What is the explanation of a historic fact becoming an immediate, up to date experience with such an effect on people's lives? Because, you know, this matter of resurrection from the dead is a really startling thing! Oh, we've got so familiar with the truth of the

resurrection of Jesus. It can be something we know so well without any great wonder in it. I venture to say if any one of your family really died and was buried and you have seen them dead and buried and a week or more afterward they came into your room and there was no mistaking about it that this appearance was YOUR one, really; no mere apparition, well, that one! You would... well, I don't know what would happen to you! You would be perhaps startled, you would certainly say, "Well, this is the most wonderful thing that ever I've known! Nothing like this has ever happened before, indeed I had never believed, never thought that such a thing *could* happen!" You would be living in the wonder of it, the surprise of it, the amazement of it, it would become a tremendous POWER in your life to have an effect on you. What you would be saying is this: well if that can happen, anything can happen!

That's just how it was, you see? Just how it was. They not only knew in their minds by information that Jesus was raised from the dead. That One Who was raised was there and then as real to them as Christ risen, as though they had been with that handful who had seen Him with their own eyes of flesh, after His resurrection; just as real as that. But, I was saying, as an inquirer you would say, how do you explain this? What is the explanation? How is it that it comes about like this? And then you would have to go back to your New Testament and begin to read again to find out how. How? What is the explanation? And you would find as you made inquiry as to the how, that you would light upon a corresponding factor in the New Testament, you would come upon another person being mentioned, called the Holy Spirit. You would find that in that book containing the history of the first years of Christianity, in that book alone, one of all those that make up the New Testament, only one, this one called the Holy Spirit is referred to no fewer than seventy times! Now that's enough to impress anybody! Seventy times referred to? And then go into these letters written by only one of these men, of these apostles of the New Testament, only one of them, his name is Paul. And he refers to this one called the Holy Spirit no fewer than one hundred and twenty times! What is this here? We are in the presence of someone or something.

Well, this would lead us to our conclusion. Christianity is evidently this: Jesus, crucified and truly dead - may I say here in parenthesis, that the Lord God saw to it that He was really crucified. He was really dead. You see all the evidences that they killed him right enough, there's no mistake about it. They killed Him, He was dead. It's all there, all the four narratives make it perfectly clear and everything afterward refers to that, they make it perfectly clear that this was no mock thing, no sham thing, that Jesus really died, and He *was* dead and He *was* buried, there's no doubt about it. The resurrection was not just resuscitation after a coma or something like that. He was dead. Now this Jesus who was really dead, and you can't in all honesty put anything else in the place of that when you read this book, you've got to accept it that He was crucified and that He died and that He was really dead and buried. Everybody knew that at any rate. He was raised from the dead, Jesus was raised from the dead and that He in resurrection was made real and true in the hearts of men and women and in their every day experience by this One called the Holy Spirit.

Forgive me friends for talking to you as to little children. Sounds like the Sunday School doesn't it? But you know, this after all is the heart and essence of the Christian life, we know it as to its truths, but there is ever to the end need, *need*, and thank God possibility, of knowing this in a fuller and ever fuller way. This one apostle who spoke so much about it, and who knew so much about it, more than all of us put together, right at the end of his life when he is writing one of his last letters before his death still said "That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection". *Still* more to know when you know *all* that such a man knows, there's still more to know? This is the foundation of the Christian life. But our imaginary person [*break in recorded message*]

This teaching is at least as wonderful and we can truly say more wonderful than the teaching of all the other great religions, why not make then this so superior teaching of Jesus the foundation of Christianity? Why not make His character the foundation? He was such a good man, look at these life stories, what a good man He was, what a kind man, what a lot of good He did! Why not make His character the foundation of Christianity? Or why not make His heroic death the foundation? See Him laying down His life for His principles, for His truth, His teaching, for what He believed. For as He believed He was doing it for the good of other people, ready to die. Why not make that the foundation? You know quite well that people have tried to do that in each of these cases, make that the real essence of Christianity: the teaching, or the character or the heroic death of Jesus. Why not? Why make the resurrection the central and basic thing? Now we're getting nearer, you see, the answer to that question dear friends, includes ALL the other realities of Christianity.

Inclusively, inclusively, death is the end of everything, isn't it? Death is the end of everything. There are many things that men can do for men, just provided that the men are alive. If they are only alive, what a lot can be done for them! Even if they are only half alive or quarter alive still we can do something, we say while there is life there's hope. We can still do something while there is any bit of life remaining, we can do something. But when the life is gone, we can do nothing. All that you might try to do doesn't profit at all. Death is the end of all that you can do. Death is the end of everything. It's the end and you just have to close the book and say it is finished. After that, what? Nothing; unless God steps in! Nothing; unless there's an intervention of God! Now men are entirely put out of court with all that they could do, they had to say: we can do no more, that's the end, it is finished. Now it's God's matter. It's God's matter or it's nothing at all, there's no more. Only God can do anything now. You see, that is just the beginning of Christianity, it is that! If God hadn't stepped right in when Jesus was in the grave there would have been no Christianity, there would have been none of all this that the world has come into and is coming into because of Him, but God stepped in. It was God's *alone* power and prerogative to raise the dead. Now it is utterly and absolutely and *all* of God and *nothing* of man, nothing outside of God. If Christianity begins there and is based on that then the Christian life is something which speaks of a mighty intervention of God and says: "I am today in this experience on the basis of something that only God Almighty could do. What I have, what I have is that which God alone, the Almighty, Eternal God could do. I am the fruit of that. My life rests on that. My Christianity is of that kind. It derives from an intervention of God Almighty when no one else could do anything at all".

I wonder if the experience of every one of us is like that? You know the Lord takes pains to have it like that, that's why so many, so many when the crisis of their salvation has arrived and they try to get through on all kinds of ground of their own works and their own activities and energies and all the rest of it, they never get through until they come to this place: only God can save me!