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Fatherhood

by T. Austin-Sparks

Transcribed from a message given in August 1961.

Now, dear friends, I want first of all, before coming to the message, to raise with you this question of the real fruitfulness of a time together like this. We want every one of these meetings to be a success. I'm sure you want the meetings to be a success, but what do we - each one - think of as a "success", to a meeting? What would you say would be the real success of our having come together this afternoon? Perhaps you haven't thought of it like that. Well, now, this is the time in which to adjust our minds to this matter and to ask ourselves individually, "What am I expecting? What am I looking for? What am I wanting? Why have I come here?"

If you feel it is very necessary to focus down on questions like these and to really concentrate on some issue and to definitely say to ourselves, "Now such-and-such for me would make the meeting a success" that's only a manner of approaching things.

You'll understand what I mean when I say that the only real justification of us coming to *any* meeting at all of the Lord's people, is that the Lord should speak to us as though we were the only person in the world. That is, that we should go away truly able say, "The Lord has spoken to *me*." And I think we could hope for nothing better, desire nothing greater and more than that. If that should be the case, then it would be a success, wouldn't it? But when we have said that, we've got to get still closer to the matter.

We must forget the meeting. We must forget the other people who are here or who are not here. We must forget the place. We must forget the speaker. We must *try* to get through the way in which he speaks and through the handling of the Word of God on his part, to get right through, and all the time have our hearts and our minds poised in this way: "*Is the Lord saying anything to me?* What is the Lord saying to *me* at this time? *Is* the Lord saying something to me or is He trying to say something

to me?" Now, that is an absolute essential for the (and I've used this word) *success* of any meeting, the spiritual success: that we, every one, must seek to be alone with the Lord and all the time watching, listening *intently* for anything that the Lord may be seeking to say to us personally. Will you try to make that adjustment and get that kind of attitude? And if so, if the Lord really has something to say, He'll find that a good opportunity for saying it.

Now, brother Fields spoke about a theme for the conference. I believe the Lord has given me something which may run through the meetings later, after this afternoon. I had thought that perhaps we would have made a start with it this afternoon, but on the way here and since being here, I have had a very real sense that that is not so for the moment. There's something else to come before that, that the Lord would have me say. And not knowing anything about that, of course, you will not be surprised that the Holy Spirit, if you are pleasantly surprised to know that I'm turning you to John 17. I think it would be good for us to read that prayer again, carefully. There's only one thing in it that is in my heart to speak about, but we need the whole prayer in order to get to that one thing. So we'll read.

And you will notice that the first words of the chapter as arranged, require the last words of the chapter before: "These things have I spoken unto you, that in Me ye may have peace. In the world ye have tribulation but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world. These things spake Jesus.

"And lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, Father, the hour is come. Glorify Thy Son that the Son may glorify Thee. Even as Thou gavest Him authority over all flesh and whatsoever Thou hast given Him to them He should give eternal life. And this is life eternal: that they should know Thee, the only true God and Him whom Thou didst send, Jesus Christ. I glorified Thee on the earth, having accomplished the work which Thou gavest Me to do. And now, oh Father, glorify Thou Me with Thine own self, with the glory which I had with Thee before the world was. I manifested Thy Name unto the men whom Thou gavest to Me out of the world. Thine they were and Thou gavest them to Me and they have kept Thy Word. Now they know that all things whatsoever Thou hast given Me are from Thee. For the words which Thou gavest Me I have given unto them, and they received them and knew of a truth that I came forth from Thee. And they believed that Thou did send Me.

"I pray for them. I pray not for the world but for those whom Thou hast given Me. For they are Thine. And all things that are Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine, and I am glorified in them. And I am no more in the world. These are in the world and I come to Thee. Holy Father, keep them in Thy Name which Thou hast given Me, that they may be one even as We are. While I was with them I kept them in Thy Name which Thou hast given Me, and I guarded them and not one of them perished, but the son of perdition that the scripture might be fulfilled. But now I come to Thee. These things I speak in the world that they may have My joy fulfilled in themselves. I have given them Thy word. The world hath hated them because they are not of the world even as I am not of the world. I pray not that Thou shouldst take them from the world, but that Thou shouldst keep them from the evil one. They are not of the world even as I am not of the world. Sanctify them in the truth. Thy Word is truth. As Thou didst send me into the world even so send I them into the world. And for their sakes I sanctify Myself that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth.

"Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on Me through their word; that they may *all* be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in us: that the world may believe that Thou did send Me. And the glory which Thou hast given Me I have given unto them; that they may be one, even as We are one; I in them and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected into one, that the world may know that Thou didst send Me, and lovedst them, even as Thou lovedst Me. Father, that which Thou hast given Me, I will that where I am they also may be with

us, that they may behold My glory, that they also may be with Me, that they may behold My glory which Thou hast given Me: for Thou lovedst Me before the foundation of the world. Oh righteous Father, the world knew Thee not, but I knew Thee; and these knew that Thou didst send Me; and I made known unto them Thy name, and will make it known; that the love wherewith Thou lovedst Me may be in them, and I in them."

Now I want you just to pass your eye over that prayer. Verse 1 He said, "*Father*". Verse 5, "*Oh Father*". Verse 11: "I come to Thee, *Holy Father*, keep them", 21: "As Thou, *Father*, art in Me and I in Thee", 24: "*Father*, that which Thou hast given Me..." 25: "Oh, righteous *Father*". Back to verse 6: "I manifested *Thy Name* unto the men whom Thou gavest Me..." verse 26: "I made known unto them *Thy Name*".

"I manifested Thy Name, I made known Thy Name", and quite evidently from this chapter, and from a great mass of this whole gospel, the name which He manifested and made known was the name: *Father*.

It may not impress us as it would have done those of His own time, for with the Lord Jesus there came in a revelation of God which was nothing less than revolutionary. Revolutionary!

You go back to the Old Testament and you look at the manifestation of God in the names and titles which are given to Him. There are many. They are wonderful, they're very great, very glorious, but usually very remote. They put God in a place of holy and awe-full isolation. There He is, the One who is unapproachable in Himself and whose presence always created fear; something like terror. And if there was anything approximating to the coming near of God, even in those strange forms of manifestation called the theophanies, when in the first place those visited thought it was a man and then afterward said, "It was the Lord", even there those people cried out in fear, in terror. And the Lord had said even to a Moses - a Moses - such an honoured, choice, faithful, devoted servant: "No man shall see My face and live." And live!

When there wrestled with Jacob a man and subsequently that man departed, Jacob cried, "*Woe is me. I have seen the Lord face to face and my life is spared.*" To him it was the most wonderful thing. Of course he had not met the *unveiled* deity, the *veiled* God had come in man form, but even so, Jacob recognised it was the Lord, and the wonderful thing was that his life remained whole in him. *That* was the Old Testament conception of God!

When the Lord Jesus came into this world, He brought an altogether revolutionary revelation of God when the one word on His lips, more than any other word was, "Father, My Father, the Father, Our Father". *Father!*

This part of John's gospel, which those who have organised it have marked off as the seventeenth chapter, is, as you may see, the culmination, the summation of all that has gone before: the life of the Lord Jesus, the manifestation of the Son of God with all His works and His words. Here the end has come. You notice how it goes on immediately when He had said this, "They went over the brook Kidron where there was a garden...". The final scenes of His earthly life were enacted and the cross followed. This is the gathering up of *everything*. It is *Jesus* gathering it all up. He is gathering up the very purpose for which He came into this world. He's gathering up the meaning of all His teaching and all His works. He's gathering up *all the meaning of His having been here* in this world, and he is putting it into one word, one marvelous word or name: *Father*. He's saying about His life, His work, His walk, His everything up to this last hour, "What I came for, I have done. I came to manifest Thy Name."

"To Manifest Thy Name"

Note the way in which He puts it: "I did not come to *tell* them that God is a father. That may be, you may look at it like that: to give them a doctrine, a truth, a teaching about the *Fatherhood* of God as a theme, as a subject". He didn't say that. He said, "*I manifested*. I manifested!" If you like, for our purpose you could use the word, "*I demonstrated*. I demonstrated." There's all the difference, you know, even between a lecturer and a demonstrator, between a preacher and a demonstrator. To *manifest* is something very practical. It's more than words, more than teaching, it is *showing in a living way* the thing that you are desiring to have grasped and understood.

And so this matter of the *Father* God, the *Father* God, was manifested in a Person. The Person *Himself* was the manifestation. When you look at Him, when you listen to Him, when you watch Him doing what He is doing everywhere, there's one deduction that you can draw, and should draw, and must draw: "*That is what God is like*." That is just what God is like! Whether it be with the little children and His hands of blessing upon them, drawing them to Himself, or take any of the many things that He did in healings, in comfortings, in restorings, and any of the wonderful things that He said in parables, what is called a prodigal son or a lost sheep, or whatever it may be. What is the conclusion? "That's a pretty story, that's very interesting, that conveys some wonderful truth and teaching..." oh, no! What He meant was: *that is what God is like!* And it's all an expression of God as *Father*. He Himself is the manifestation of the Father.

Now open that out and go right back to the beginning of history as the Bible gives it to us, and this conception, *this* conception is *inherent* in the very beginning. What *was* the conception with which the Bible opened when God had completed His creative activities and got His man and got the man's wife? That was the end, the crown. What was it all unto? A family. A family! The family conception was right there in the very beginning. And in God's mind, it was to be a family of His *own* children. It might have been the children of men and women, but to God, it was a family for Himself. *He* wanted a family of *children* after His own image and likeness - *like Himself*, like Himself! His heart was set upon this, it's there, right at the beginning: "*be fruitful and multiply*". And behind it is God, and it is God in the spirit and intent of *fatherhood*, to have a family. There it is. You can think more about it.

Do you notice that in the second phase of the Bible, what we call "the patriarchs", it's a family which is the dominant characteristic and feature of the patriarchs? It's a Bible word *patriarch*, as you know. But do you know what it means? *Patriarch*? The head of a family; that's all. The head of a family. Perhaps you haven't thought of that when you've thought of Noah and Moses and Abraham and all these people and called them by this high-sounding name "the patriarchs". No, just the heads of families, that's all, that's all it means. But you see, right through that long and very rich phase of the development of history in the Bible, there lies there, deeply embedded, this idea of the family. And in the patriarchal families, it was not only the father who was the head of the household, the eldest son, the eldest son was the priest of the family in union with the father. It was fathers and sons, which was the Divine idea. Fathers and sons. If you'd like to make it singular, you can, because you're looking right ahead to John 17, Father and Son lying there right at the heart of the patriarchal family.

But when you still move further in the Bible history, you come to what we call that section of the Old Testament which has to do with the kings, the monarchy. And have you been impressed with this, that when that phase reaches its highest point, its peak, in David and Solomon, the very conception and idea of monarchy, of government, of dominion, of reign, of kingdom lies with father and son? Father and son: David and Solomon. That was the peak of the monarchy. And if you look, both into the Old Testament account and into the New Testament references to it, you'll find that those words

spoken by the Lord to David about his son Solomon, "He shall be to me a son and I will be to him a father," those words are taken up in the book of the Acts and applied to the Lord Jesus. So that God was looking *through* David and *through* Solomon, not just *at* them, but through them to His own *eternal* thought of the family. And here it's the family renewed, governing, fatherhood and sonship in ultimate and supreme dominion; a lot in the New Testament there is in that, isn't there?

You come to the next and final section of the Old Testament, the prophets. And what is this *cry* of the prophets? For in this section, it's a cry, it's a sob, it's a groan, it's an anguish, it's a travail! For the more part, that is the spirit of the prophets. They are *burdened*. And you know, that word is used about them, isn't it? "The *burden* of the Word of the Lord... the *burden* of the Word of the Lord." They're men with a burden, men with a cry, men with a heartache, men who are expressing a travail.

Listen again to Isaiah 53, but what's it all about? God has lost His family. The *family* has been broken up and broken down. The *family* of Israel is scattered and disintegrated. It's away from God and away from God's house. God is deprived of *that* thing for which He, first of all created, and then inculcated into the whole of His dealings with men. He's lost His family.

God is there in the prophets seen to be in a state of disappointment, in a state of sorrow. Listen to Hosea, for instance. There's a cry of deep anguish in that prophet's heart, and it all focuses upon this family conception.

Well, that is enough. It's covered a lot of history, hasn't it? There's a lot more in it than that. You could see that that could carry us on for a week only, but that's enough to show what was in God's heart, what *His* heart has been set upon, what *He* had hidden, in a way, as His Thought in history, in His dealings with men, in His constitution of things. A hidden desire and purpose of the heart of God.

The Son of God Comes

The Son... now, I'm not going to tell you at this point and do all the work for you, you do a little work on this and you will be greatly helped as well as greatly impressed; just go through your New Testament and tabulate the number of times *Father* and *Son* occur. Father and Son; that is, as to God and the Lord Jesus. And when you've done that, go the third step and tabulate the number of times that the Lord's people are referred to as His children, His sons, or as in a family relationship to Himself, "*begotten* of God," "*born* of God," and so on. It's full, isn't it? It's rich, we've only to mention it for a great deal just to come back to us and break upon us. There it is.

Now, we said: "the Son of God came from the Father." As He said, "I came forth from the Father." And why? To take up all that history, for one thing. To take up all that history from creation, through the patriarchs, through the monarchies, through the prophets, gather into Himself the realisation of *this* thing for His Father; to satisfy His Father.

Now, dear friends, if you want to know what the Lord Jesus meant and what it means where we are concerned when He said, "I came - I am come to do Thy will." *Thy will. Thy will. Thy will.* That great *Will* of God to be spelled with a capital *W*. What was it? This, that we're talking about. The Will of God is the *family* of God, in which He is truly *Father* God, His Son is truly *the* Son, the eldest Son, the First-Born among many brethren. That's the Will of God!

You pray to know the will of God? You ask to know what the Lord's Will is? Well, of course, you may apply that to all sorts of things, but you must remember that the Will of God is very comprehensive

and specific. And the Will of God is just this that we are talking about. He came for this: He *came*... not only to *speak of* the Father but to *manifest* the Father. So that He could say, "He that hath seen Me has seen the Father. There is no further need for you to say 'show us the Father.' No further need for anybody to say, 'show us the Father'. He that has seen Me has seen the Father. I manifested Thy Name. I have *given* them Thy Name." And, as we have seen in this chapter alone, six times, "*Father, oh righteous Father, oh Father.*"

The Lord Jesus has come expressly to give in His own person the revelation of God as *Father*. He has come to redeem unto God His family. Those wonderful words in the early part of the letter to the Hebrews, "He is not ashamed to call them brethren saying, 'I and the children whom God has given Me'. Wherefore holy brethren, partners in a heavenly calling...". That is the fruit of His redeeming activity. Dear friends, it's a good thing to be redeemed, it's a good thing to have what redemption means in the sense of sins forgiven, deliverance from bondage, security unto eternal life; all those blessings. But do we sufficiently recognise this: that it is *a family* that He has come to redeem and that we are redeemed *as a family*? We may be redeemed individually, but God's Thought and Christ's Thought was this family! To redeem a *family*.

A Redeemed Family

And what is a family? Now, have any of you friends here got a family? You parents, how happy and pleased would you be if every one of your children was a unit in himself or herself, living an independent life without any concern, or consideration, or interest in any other member of the family, just so many isolated units in one place, which could not be called a home in that case, under one roof? Would you be happy about that? Or if they all went off and never had any concern very much for the other members. Just individuals. Well, they might be children of the same parents, might be, but the parents would feel the real, *the real* meaning of parenthood had been lost; was not there, if that was the situation. You can see through what I'm saying, how God must feel about anything and everything that is other than a *family* concept and a *family* spirit amongst His people.

We hear so much, and perhaps we have said, and do say so much about the church, and the churches, and the local assemblies and what not, and you can get very tired of that. It can be so technical, can't it? So technical. What is *God's thought* in companies of His people in any place? A representation of the family! The *family* where His Fatherhood is the dominant thing, where His Son has the place that He ought to have and where all - *all* - are a unit, of a piece. "Father, I pray, Father I *pray* that they be one. I pray that they may be one." How? "As Thou *Father, and I* are one." As the Father and the Son, in fatherhood and sonship are identical, are one, the Father revealing Himself in the Son and the Son manifesting the Father. That perfect oneness between those two, "*That they may be as We are*" - the prayer of the Lord Jesus right at the end as He went to the cross was for the family! And He was now going to the cross to redeem the family, that out of His death and resurrection many sons should be born.

There are not lacking some indications that there was a very real answer to His prayer at the beginning. You would never call those twelve disciples or apostles a family before Calvary, would you? Would you? Well, I would say "Lord, deliver us from families if that's a family!" Quarreling, envy, striving, jealous of one another, and what not, but look afterwards and Peter standing up with the eleven, and that wonderful second chapter of Acts. They were together. They were all together in one place. They had all things in common. No one said that aught that he possessed was his own. Well, we've reach something of the family when the Holy Spirit brings Christ into His place and God is Father over all. Paul had some conception of this, and you know that in his letter to the Ephesians he prayed to "the Father of whom *every* family in heaven and on earth is named."

Well, the Lord Jesus came, firstly to secure unto the Father the satisfaction of His eternal desire - the realisation of His own ambition of heart. He came to redeem unto God a family. And not to leave it there, not to leave it there, but to bring that family to *reign* in the eternal kingdom, to reign, to govern; to be the governmental family of the ages to come. This is the means by which He's going to govern this world in the coming ages, by this family elevated to His Throne, an elevated family. The far greater and more glorious counterpart of David and Solomon is the Father, the Son, and then, to use another phrase from Hebrews, "*the many sons whom He has brought to glory, bringing many sons to glory.*"

We cannot just say these things without reminding ourselves that the realisation of this, both on the part of the Lord Jesus, and on *our* part if the Father is to find His satisfaction, is a costly thing, it's by the way of travail. There's no family without a travail. It's in the very constitution of this creation. God has put it there that now family is by way of travail, by way of suffering. It's costly. In a word, someone has got to be prepared to lay down their life for the family. That's always involved in this. *He* did it.

And, dear friends, we're not going to have anything like this amongst the Lord's people unless we're prepared to suffer for it, to lay down our own lives for it, to set aside all our own *personal* interests for it, to really put up with a lot, that we might bring to the Father that upon which His heart is so much set. It's the way of travail, the way of sacrifice. It's the way of suffering. For this, His Body was broken, that we might *share* that Body, as one Body, one family. For this His Blood was shed - was shed - that we might, in drinking of His Blood, in other words of His poured out Life, share as a *family* that *one* Life.

So we come back and close where we began: His prayer.

His Prayer

What a cry it is! What an appeal it is! Shall we say: what an agony it is, "*Father, the hour has come... Oh righteous Father... Father, the world has not known but these have known... Father, as Thou and I are one that they may be one.*"

Have you been all the time poised, just to hear the Lord say something to me, if somewhere, somehow I have violated the family spirit, the family disposition, grieved the Spirit of God Who is the spirit of the family? Is there something He's saying to you and to me? How does this apply to us? Is it just a lovely Bible thing? God forbid. It's a *prayer* with Him. Let us make it a prayer, and a prayer that will have a very practical aspect, for sometimes we can go a long way toward answering our own prayers because in this matter it's not *all* to be left with the Lord; He has done *His* part.

Shall we pray? We do ask, we do pray, oh Lord, that this matchless Name, may be to us more precious from this time than it has been, that it may have a music in it, a beauty in it, but ever and always, a challenge in it and a meaning to us and for us of great preciousness. We do thank Thee that whereas Isaiah of old stood in awe and dread and fear of Thee, in Thy beloved Son we can draw near with full assurance of faith. We need not fear, but come with boldness to the Throne of Grace, because now Thou hast been manifested to us in Him as Father. Lord, lead us into the deeper fullnesses of all this that is contained in that Name. Set Thy seal upon our hour together this afternoon. May we have more than words and thoughts: a deep Holy Spirit registration in our hearts that shall correct us, shall guide us, shall influence us in all our relationships. We ask in Thy dear Son's Name, guard our hearts, our minds, our lips in this time in between, so that we may come

together again in Thy will without the necessity of starting again, able to go right on. We ask this for Jesus sake, amen.