

God's Speaking in Relation to Man

by T. Austin-Sparks

"God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son" (Heb. 1:1-2).

"Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things that were heard, lest haply we drift away from them" (Heb. 2:1).

God's speaking is Son-wise. It was not only what the Son said, but God's speech was the person of His Son, what the Son was and is as an embodiment, representation and expression of God's thoughts and mind. God has made Himself known to man by way of the living person, and that particularly as to man — that is, what God's thoughts are concerning man. It might be of some great value if God had just spoken about Himself, about His character and nature and being. That would be very good, perhaps wonderful, but we might be left with that as something in itself. Well, it is a good thing to know that God is in existence and what kind of God He is, but God's making of Himself known is not just by way of information as to His existence and His character. The Bible as a whole makes it quite clear that God's self-revelation is vitally related to man, and man is vitally related to that, or, in other words, the sum of God's thoughts is a relationship between man and Himself, and Himself and man. And it is in His Son, Jesus Christ that that relationship is brought about between God and man and man and God, and it is just there that the first utterance or expression of God is found. Why should God become man? Why the incarnation? Why should He take flesh, be made flesh and tabernacle among us? Why should God speak by incarnation? That is His first speech, His final speech and His full speech.

Well, you see, everything in the Bible just focuses upon this that in Christ a union has been brought about between God and man. The Old Testament types, figures and symbols always bear down upon that. The central thing, for instance, in that great symbolic system of the tabernacle, which was in the centre of the life of Israel was the ark of the testimony, the ark of the covenant. Everything focused upon that. You know that it was made of acacia wood (always the type of humanity), overlaid with gold (always the type of divinity). Therefore in that central thing, placed right in the most holy place where God met with man, spoke to him, and man met with God between the cherubim, on that mercy seat (which was the lid of the ark), you have this great declaration, God's thought right at the centre of everything. The central thing in His whole system is His union between Himself and man in Christ. Christ is God's speech in that sense. *"God ... has ... spoken unto us in His Son."* Formerly He spoke in various, numerous ways and forms of expression, as we have seen — by people, by their offices as prophets, priests and kings, by their work in sacrifices, altars, and so on, and by many symbols and types and figures God spoke in a multitude of ways in fragmentary forms at different times.

The first period is the period of priesthood, sacrifice, mediation. That lasted for a period. It changed to another period, of kingship and monarchy, and God spoke again in a different way through kings from what he had spoken through priests, and then that gave place to the period of the prophets when God spoke, not through kings or priests, but through prophets. He spoke in divers manners at different times in the past, but now He has gathered it all up, every form of old is now collected up, so to speak, and concentrated in one person who embodies all the speech of God. There is no more; it is final. *"At the end of these days"* — these days in which God has spoken in these many ways and forms are at the end. There is nothing further. Christ is the end of God's speaking. If you do not listen to Him, there is nothing more to come.

God has spoken at the end in sonship, His Son, and because of the transcendent fullness of His speech in Christ *"therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things that were heard"*. They are the things to which we are to *"give the more earnest heed"* because, as we said earlier, from the whole tone of this letter — so serious, so solemn, so imperative — there is something bound up with this spiritual hearing of God's speech in His Son which is of momentous consequence to the people of God. The things which were heard, or the things that God has said in His Son — let me say again, not only *through* His Son, but also *in* His Son. What does Christ say to us as God's message? What is He as the message of God to us?

It is a very comprehensive message, far, far too big for a brief season like this, but we can take some of its parts, and we will begin at the beginning.

If the apostle Paul did not write this letter to the Hebrews, I am quite sure he had a lot of influence in it. You can trace his finger in it. We are not going to argue about the authorship, but I am quite certain that he had a lot to do with it. That being true, or not true — it does not matter very much — the apostle Paul, under the same Holy Spirit as dictated this letter, has given us so much as to the significance of Christ, and has helped us tremendously as we seek to enter into this letter.

You notice the movement of this letter right at the beginning. The first chapter is a marvellous presentation of the greatness of the Lord Jesus as God's Son. There are things here which are altogether beyond us. We need to read and read again, quietly and thoughtfully, and allow every clause to affect us.

"God ... at the end of these days hath spoken unto us in his Son."
Now listen!

"Whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the ages; who being the effulgence of His glory, and the very image of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of His power ..."

Can you grasp any one of those statements? These are tremendous things to say and — note! — they are said about One who is called *"His Son"*. We go on a little later:

"Having become by so much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they. For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, This day have I begotten thee?"

Of course, the answer to the question is: to none. Not to Michael, nor any of the archangels, and they were mighty, mighty beings. You remember what one angel could do to a whole army of the Assyrians. One angel went out at God's command and the whole army was slain that night. Look again at all the tremendous things that angels did in the Bible, but not to one of them did God say, *"Thou art my son"*.

"And again, I will be to Him a Father, and he shall be to Me a Son?" No, He did not say that to any of the angels.

"When He again brings in the firstborn into the world, He says, And let all the angels of God worship Him. And of the angels He says, Who makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire; but of the Son He says, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever; and the sceptre of uprightness is the sceptre of thy kingdom."

All this about the Son is tremendous, is it not? Why is it put there at the beginning of the letter? Why is that made the gateway into the letter, the basis upon which the whole letter is founded? Now read on (and dismiss these figures that men have introduced to divide the letter into chapters. That is only a mechanical convenience for public reading,

and it is often an unfortunate division in the narrative. Just read on as though there were no chapter divisions).

"We ought to give the more earnest heed to the things that were heard."
Now listen!

"For not unto angels did He subject the world to come, whereof we speak (or, are speaking). But one has somewhere testified, saying, (Listen!) What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? Or the son (not of God) of man that Thou makest mention of him? Thou madest Him a little lower than the angels; Thou crownedst Him with glory and honour, And didst set Him over the works of Thy hands; Thou didst put all things in subjection under His feet." Who is this? To whom did God do all that? *Man!*

That is God's idea for man. That is why He created man. It was His intention where *man* was concerned.

"For in that He subjected all things unto him, He left nothing that is not subject to him (to man)". But what do we see? We do not see that divine intention concerning man now true in operation where man in general is concerned, but what do we see?

"But we behold Him who has been made a little lower than the angels, even Jesus". Notice the name that is used; the name of His humanity - *"because of the suffering of death crowned with glory and honour, that by the grace of God He should taste death for every man."*

What does all that say to you? Well, clearly this is what it means. God had that great, that wonderful thought concerning man in the creation of man: *"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth"* (Gen. 1:26). God's great thought for man: *"to be crowned with glory and honour"*. *"What is man, that Thou art mindful of him? Or the son of man that you mark him out (for that is the literal meaning of the words) for this?"*

That was the purpose. But man failed. He disappointed God, he disobeyed God, he rebelled against God, he took sides with God's enemies. The result is that man is by no means what and where God intended him to be. What is to be done for that Adam race if God is going to reach His end? And He is going to reach it where man is concerned. He must start again with another Adam, and it is there that Paul helps us. He calls Jesus *"the last Adam"* (1 Cor. 15:45). I am always glad that he calls Him *"the last Adam"*. There won't be any need for another one, a third one or a fourth one. This One will effect it fully and finally. He is the last speech of God, the last divine expression as to His purpose. He is the last Adam, come to start all over again.

Now this letter, you notice, has from the beginning a lot to say about this One, this last Adam, this second Man. The writer, in speaking of believers, says: *"He is not ashamed to call them brethren, saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the congregation will I sing thy praise"* (Heb. 2:11). This last Adam has started a new family, and this family is going to come to glory and honour and the realisation of God's thought, but it is going to take its character from its first One.

Now that is what I am going to focus upon during this message. We go back to Genesis 1:28. The Lord has brought the man and the woman into being, and He says: *"Be fruitful, and multiply. and replenish the earth ... and have dominion."* What has God done He has spoken, and when God speaks it is always an act, not just a word. It is a decree or order. God said *"Let there be light; and there was light"*. God's words are acts. When He came in the flesh and spoke, something always happened. When God said, *"Be fruitful, and multiply"*, He gave the power of procreation, of multiplication, of

reproduction. *"Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth"*. In other words, *"Fill the earth with people like yourself. I give you power to do it."*

That is the point at which Satan rushed in: 'If I can capture those two I will fill the earth with my likeness, my seed. If I can capture that power of multiplication, reproduction, I will fill the earth, not with the kind that God wants, but with the kind that I want'. That was the point. Now I ask you, is that what has happened? You need not look outside this hall; look inside yourself. Have you got an old Adam? That which we call 'the old Adam' is our trouble, is it not? It has become a phrase, but that first Adam in broken relationship with God, whose very nature is not to trust or believe God, to suspect God, is in every one of us. We only have to be pressed hard into some real trouble, where it seems that God has left us, and immediately, not from outside, but from inside we begin to question God, to have reservations about the love of God. There is something that rises in our very constitution that is rebellion against God. There is something in this whole Adamic race which is rebellion against God in its very nature. There is question and doubt as to God. Satan has filled this world with a seed like that. It is an unbelieving world, a God-mistrusting world, and a world very largely full of rebellion against God. Satan captured the race for generation after generation, along that line of 'replenishing the earth'.

That is a terrible thing, but what I am getting at is here. A last Adam has come, and He is not of that order, but of a heavenly order, with a heavenly nature, tested and tried in every way even more fiercely than the first Adam, but without sin, and absolutely triumphant. He has won a complete victory — and what a victory it is! We have read that He *"tasted death for every man"*. Do you know what death really is? No, we don't, and thank God it is not necessary for any of us to know what death means!

When this Son of God was to come into the world He was announced by an angel. An angel made the annunciation to Mary, came in with the news of the incarnation and initiated this thing. When the Son of God was actually born the heavens were full of angels singing and glorifying God. When He was in the wilderness with the wild beasts, and under the stress of temptation from the devil, it says that: *"an angel ministered to Him"*. When He was in the Garden, going through that awful agony, *"an angel came and strengthened Him"*. When He was risen from the dead, angels were there at the tomb. But when He was on the cross there was no angel at all, no voice, no hand to help, no ministry from heaven, and God Himself turned His face aside. That is death — the utter separation from all that is of heaven and the consciousness of it.

I say that you and I need never taste that. The last Adam has tasted that in the behalf of every man, so that we need not taste it. He triumphed through that and came out victorious, and is seated at God's right hand — as *"The firstborn among many brethren"* (Rom. 8:29). A family is to be reproduced by Him. God has given to Him, the last Adam, this great power of reproducing a family after His own likeness — the Christ-family after the likeness of this last Adam. Paul says: *"As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly"* (1 Cor. 15:49). Not one of you doubts or questions that you bear the image of the earthy, which is the old Adam. We do, but this wonderful letter is telling us that man was not called or meant for that, and what God is going to do with us is to *"conform us to the image of his Son"* (Rom. 8:29). He begins that by new birth, by the reproduction of Christ.

Oh, dear friends, lay hold of that fragment! What a mighty thing that is! It is going to carry us all the way through. What is it that a Christian is meant for? What is a Christian? What does new birth mean? What does it mean to be joined to the Lord? It means the reproduction of Christ in a family, in a race which is going to replenish this earth, the inhabited earth to come of which we are speaking. That is the phrase here. It is going to be peopled with people like Christ. That is what we are called to. That is the tremendous thing that we might miss. That is the tremendous thing which we must cherish, the thing around which all these warnings and exhortations circle. *"We ought to give the more*

earnest heed to the things that were heard, lest ... lest ... lest we miss it (drift away from them)" (Heb. 2:1).

Leave out all your theological and doctrinal problems and face *facts*. Here is a book – the book of Hebrews with thirteen chapters (if you like to let the chapters stand) the whole weight of which comes down upon this: You Christians are called to a tremendous thing which you may miss. You cannot get away from it. Some people have tried to get round it by saying: 'This letter is not written to Christians at all. It was written to Jews.' That is just trying to get round it, for, as I have said, you cannot apply this letter in any part to non-Christians. Hebrews 6 tells us: "(You) *tasted ... the powers of the age to come*" (Heb. 6:5), and no non-Christian has ever done that. There are many other things. No, this is to Christians, and it is all saying: 'You are called to His eternal glory, you are called to conformity to His image, you are called to be a part of this people to populate His creation in the ages to come, an expression of God's thought concerning man.' It is a tremendous thing! It is called 'the inheritance' here, and an inheritance is something more than just being in the family. You can be a member of a family because you are born into it, but that does not necessarily make you an heir. Plenty of people belong to families, but they are not the heirs. This letter has to do with the inheritance of heirs.

Why is Christ presented in this majestic revelation at the beginning? In order that the Holy Spirit should go on and say: 'You are called to be fellow-heirs with that One, a part of His inheritance, and for the very purpose of God in Him — to show His glorious intention when He made man.' It is a tremendous thing, is it not, to hear words like this at the beginning of Hebrews 3: "*Wherefore, holy brethren, partners in a heavenly calling*". Now, all the people who are working for the firm are not partners in the firm. That word here, which is translated 'partakers' in some versions, 'partners' in the original, is this business term. It is the same word as is used about the disciples when they were fishing and were given a miraculous draught: "*They beckoned unto their partners in the other boat*" (Luke 5:7). Evidently these two or three families were in a business partnership, and that is the word used here: partners, fellow-sharers, on a basis of mutual relationship in the interests of this business. Here it is "*Partners of a heavenly calling*". What is this heavenly calling? Well, partnership with Christ. The writer is saying: "*We are made partners with Christ if we hold fast our confession unto the end.*"

I do not want to pile words up to make a mountain too heavy for you to cope with, but my concern, dear friends, is that we should see not only how great Christ is, but why the revelation of Jesus Christ in such majestic terms is given — to show us what we are called to as Christians. Partnership with *that* One in the ages to come, beginning now by new birth.

Now let me conclude by coming back to this focal point. You see, just as truly as you and I know that that first Adam is powerfully, terribly and wretchedly in us by our new birth, by our union with Christ inwardly, by this that has happened through a last Adam coming and our faith in Him; the thing that has to be true of us is that, as we have known and know the strength, power and reality of the old Adam in us, so we have to know the reality of this last Adam in us. The reality of "*Christ in us the hope of glory*" has got to become more and more real in our case. Christ is the solution to all our problems, the answer to all questions. What is the answer to the great problem of Christian disunity? This disunity amongst the Lord's people is a big problem, a terrible problem, and there seems to be no end to it. It is the old Adam busy, and the old devil busy through the old Adam. I challenge you on this: that in every instance, every case of division among the Lord's people, you will be able to trace the old Adam somewhere as the cause. If you could see it you would find it is that. Somewhere this old man has got in, either in his own assertiveness, his ambitions or his determinations. That is where these divisions come from. What is the answer to Christian divisions? Not conferences, or discussions, but Christ, and only Christ. There will be no healing, only in so far as there will be an increase of Christ. But if there is an increase of Christ we have the key to the situation.

Paul said: "*Is Christ divided?*", meaning that it is an impossible thought. Christ cannot be divided. Therefore, if there is a large measure of Christ you will have unity. It is terrible to think, is it not, that the disunity means that there is such a small measure of Christ after all. What a terrible thought!

As it is true of a matter like that, so it is true of all other things. Christ is the answer. The more there is of Christ the more problems are solved. The more there is of Christ the more difficulties are got over. More of Christ, and you are getting nearer to that where "*the earth shall be full of the glory of the Lord*". Christ in you is the hope of that glory.

This is a rebuke to us, and yet it is a great call to us. You see, this letter is founded on this: Christ ... Christ ... more of Christ. What are you praying for mostly? What is your greatest concern? Perhaps you are praying that the Lord will use you to lead souls to Himself. I don't say pray less about that. Pray more about it, if you can. You may be praying for something else, but let me tell you this: the thing above all these other things to pray for is that we may be more like Christ, that there may be more of Christ in us. You see, God speaks to the world in a Person. It is not firstly in words, but in a Person. If only He could get this 'one new man' conformed to His Son, what a tremendous impact He would make upon this world! If we were more Christ-like, we would have to say less, and the testimony would be far more powerful.

Well, that is the sort of talk that we are used to, but there it is, dear friends. I can only say to you that this is what is being borne in upon me tremendously; that the Lord would call us, His people, to look again at His Son, see how great His Son is, get a new conception of the greatness of Christ, and then say to our own hearts: 'There is nothing that we could imagine of greater honour than to be joined to that Son, to be a fellow-member of Christ, a partner with *Him* in the heavenly calling.'

"*When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, The moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained*" (Psalm 8:3). Recently we went to the London Planetarium and were shown the constellations in this marvellous way. You just shrivel and become so small in your own eyes as you view it and contemplate the vastness of the heavenly bodies. David, the psalmist, stepped out one night under that heaven as he was looking after his sheep. He looked up: "*When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon and the stars, which thou hast ordained; What is man, that thou art mindful of him? And the son of man, that thou visitest him?*"

How do you interpret that? Do you interpret it as meaning this: 'This is so vast and man is so little, so insignificant in this universe. Here is the greatness of God, and man, well, God made man, but he is so insignificant.' Is that how you look at it? David's thought was just the opposite: the vastness of God's power and wisdom in the universe, and right in the centre of it He has put man as the most important part of His creation. What is man that he should be, in God's mind, more important than the worlds, and more important than everything? He is the key to everything.

"*Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; Thou hast put all things under his feet.*"

It is not a putting down of man in the smaller place in God's universe; it is putting him in the highest place. God's thought, you see, is realised in His Son, and all the suns, and all the moons and all the stars must worship Him when "*He again brings in the firstborn into the world*". What does that refer to? To the coming again of the Lord. There is no doubt about it — at the coming again of the Lord He will say: "*Let all the angels of God worship Him.*" That is how it will be.

The book of the Revelation shows you that actually happening, but see it is the Son of man in that position, and that is a term, a designation that brings Him in relation to

mankind. Oh, what a calling! It is too big, too wonderful for us, but, dear friends, don't you think that we need to get a bigger idea both of Christ and what it means to be a Christian? Well, read this letter to the Hebrews again in the light of that, and you will see how tremendously it bears down upon this: Don't miss your calling, don't be careless about this great calling, this on-high calling, this heavenly calling. "*Let us go on*" is the great note of this letter. "*Let us go on unto full growth.*"