

Seeing Jesus *by T. Austin-Sparks*

"We would see Jesus."

"The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified" (John 12:21,23).

Among the several things, I mean the several primary things, which this gospel of John does for us, is that it declares and demonstrates that everything of divine intention and purpose for man is inseparably bound up with seeing Jesus. If you are having any difficulty with the Word just now, that is that you are not having a good time in the Word and it seems to be closed and you really do not know how to go about it, I suggest to you that it would be very helpful to take what I have just said and explore the gospel by John with it; that everything of divine purpose and intention for man is declared and demonstrated in this gospel to be inseparably bound up with seeing Jesus. It shows that such seeing and such knowing requires spiritual kinship with Him.

Then, of course, it goes on to show that such spiritual kinship has its own conditions, so far as man is concerned.

But it is upon this one thing that I feel the emphasis is to be laid just now — seeing Jesus. For there is a tremendous significance in the answer of Jesus to this enquiry, *"Sir, we would see Jesus"*. Jesus knew that seeing Him was an infinitely greater thing than just their beholding Him with their natural eyes, and, with the realization of how much greater a thing it is to really see Jesus, His answer, which, on the face of it, seems to be a little enigmatical, is an answer full of divine meaning. *"The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified."* For only so can Jesus be seen, and that is John's gospel throughout. But, before we speak of that in any greater detail, let us note that there are several aspects of this whole movement — for it is a movement — that is going on in this Gospel, the movement towards the Son of Man being glorified.

The first aspect of it is that there is a nucleus secured unto this seeing and knowing Jesus — the disciples, chosen, not volunteering, but apprehended, by the Lord. The object of their being chosen was in the first place, that they might be with Him and ultimately that they might see Him, as others did not see Him, for, as we have said, everything of divine purpose is bound up with seeing Jesus, and so there must be those who are really secured unto that. The Lord must have, and will sovereignly act to have, those who really do see Him, but we must remember that the object of such sovereign choice does not set grace aside, but it is vocational, it is for a purpose, for ministry, for service. It is to serve the Lord in a vocation, the vocation of those who have seen Him, and that is a special vocation. But that is the first movement.

The second is a general company, or the general crowd, who can be given to see; they are not seeing, they do not by nature have the power to see Jesus, but they are unspoilt in the fuller sense, they are just in nature's state and they can be given sight, they can be made to see, they can have their eyes opened. The man born blind is in this company. He is just a simple fellow, artless, an ordinary man born blind, and he can be given eyes and he can be given sight; and he represents a multitude in that category of people who, born blind, are in a further and fuller sense unspoilt, can be given sight, can be made to see, as standing over against the third element in this Gospel, the Jewish official party.

The third element, the Jewish official party, were twice blind and doomed because of their blindness. It is a great thing to see that the man born blind was not necessarily doomed because he was born blind. But these others were doomed because of their blindness, but their double blindness was their own responsibility. It was linked up with their will, and how often the Lord puts it at the door of the will — *"ye will not come."* It

was the blindness of prejudice added to the blindness of nature. That is the third element.

Then there is the fourth. From chapter 12 onwards you have the church in view, a company of those in kinship with the Lord Jesus, at any rate as represented in that relationship, an inner company; for the Lord, as you know, from this part of the gospel withdraws from what is public and is almost entirely bound up with the church. It is there that His final interests are centred, with a view to securing all His purpose along the line of revelation, which is only another way of speaking of "*seeing Jesus*". His pains, from this point onward, were all in the direction of revealing to those who represented the church — He is speaking in an inward way.

Now, having recognized that fourfold element or movement, we come to this. Why did Jesus say, "*The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified*", when these Greeks said, "*We would see Jesus*"? The answer is this, because everything as to the meaning of His coming depended, and still depends, upon His being seen. He had been moving to and fro for years in the closest contact with men, with the nucleus, in very intimate touch in many of the inner things of word and deed, with the multitude often thronging Him, with the Jewish official class close at hand, and yet how few had ever seen Him! It was only here and there by some special flash of divine light that anyone really glimpsed Him, even of the innermost circle. No, through the years of closest contact, they had not seen Jesus; therefore all that He had come for was in suspense, all the meaning of His coming and all the purpose of God in Him was in abeyance until He was really seen. Once He was seen, the purpose was released, the real work was done, but Jesus is never really seen while He is here in the flesh. Jesus really can only be seen as glorified, that is, when you see Jesus glorified, then you see Jesus, and who Jesus is.

Now, come back to this Gospel. The expressions of His powers were glimpses of Who He was. So you come to Cana of Galilee, to the marriage, the turning of the water into wine, and the summing up of John, mark you — the writer of the whole gospel with his one object in view — the summing up of that incident by John is this, "*This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee, and manifested forth his glory; and his disciples believed on Him.*" It was just a flash of something beyond, something divine, something of heaven, something not of man. It did not hold them for long. However far that belief went, it did not carry them very far, but for the moment it was a transient flash — they saw Jesus glorified, a touch of who Jesus is beyond things here.

You follow that right through the gospel and whenever there is an expression of His power, there is a manifestation of His glory, there is a glimpsing of Jesus glorified. It is pointing on to that time when He shall come, not into something extra or into something that He never had before, but into His own, into what is His by right, into that which He had from eternity, into that to which He refers in chapter 17, "*Glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was.*" It is Jesus coming to His primal glory, that which is His from eternity to eternity, and you see that and you come into divine purpose. All the divine purpose depends upon seeing Jesus.

So Jesus saw that His whole mission was bound up with His being seen, and when they came and said, "*We would see Jesus*", His response was, "*The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified.*" It is God's will that He should be seen, all the divine purpose necessitates His being seen, therefore any real seeking to see Him means that there must be a moving through beyond what is just here on this earth, to what is His in His eternal glory and Person. The whole purpose of God in Christ would be defeated if He were not seen, and Jesus is never really seen only as glorified.

Jesus glorified as He is now in the full sense, is the end from which God works. That is, that end has become God's starting-point for the realization of all His purpose, so that we can never come into the purpose of God at its very inception, with its very first point and meaning, only by seeing Jesus. And we can never move on into all the fulness of that divine purpose only as, by the Holy Spirit, we are seeing Him in ever-growing fulness. The great purpose of God — and how great it is! — bound up with the church, was introduced, so far as revelation and instrumentality were concerned, by a seeing of Jesus glorified. That is why Paul saw Jesus glorified, because the great purpose of God concerning the church which was to be revealed through that apostle was bound up with the instrument seeing Jesus glorified.

To bring that to a practical application to us means this: that you and I and the whole church depend entirely upon the revelation of the glorified Jesus for every bit of progress and victory in our course towards the consummation of God's purpose. If Paul had never seen Jesus glorified, he would never have gone through to the end. I always believe, I always have believed, that *the* thing which sustained Paul right through all his sufferings, his loneliness, his trials, was the fact that he had seen Jesus glorified. I believe that that lay right at the root of his endurance, and his being able to go through, even in those last years when all others forsook him, and he saw his life work crumbling to pieces (that is, on the outside); that he went through was because he had seen Jesus glorified. And I always believe that Paul's revelation of the church as the body of Christ was bound up with the personal revelation of Jesus glorified. The two were one, the one came out of the other.

Take a situation at any time which is fraught with exceeding difficulty and trial. We might today contemplate quite easily a world situation of extreme difficulty. What is happening in some parts of the world might easily become universal. All the outward activities and operations of the church in assembly life, in ministry of the Lord, might be brought to a standstill; it might be rendered quite impossible for the Lord's people to gather together, to have all the helpfulness of Christian fellowship and ministry, and all those things to which we are accustomed and almost take as commonplace. Then a situation might so easily arise of intense trial along lines of temporal circumstances, suffering and want, and then the thing could be easily pressed right home to our spiritual life where nothing whatever in all the universe could be seen by us as evidence that God was on the throne, that Jesus was Lord, that right was victorious. Quite easily we might come into a situation like that of extreme pressure being brought to bear upon faith, so that all that is left to us is that there is a declaration that God is, and we have had in our lives some experience which has made us believe that God is, but now, so far as experience is concerned, that is in eclipse, so far as evidence is concerned, that is all submerged. The only thing now is the clinging to the fact that God is, that is our one last spar to which to hold — God is, and God is faithful. Now, a situation might arise like that. How shall we on the one hand go through, and on the other hand, how shall we fulfil the purpose of God in our lives? How will the church get through? It will be only on this principle and on this basis, that there is in the heart by the Holy Spirit the revelation of Jesus glorified. That carried Stephen through to the end, that carried Paul through to the end, that carried John through to the end. You see these men and others in the New Testament who were put to it to the last degree of faith's testing in every realm and got through because they saw Jesus glorified. They saw inwardly. There is no explaining how we see inwardly. We only know that we do see. We have seen something and that to us is more real than anything else. There is all the difference between our being told that Jesus is risen, ascended, exalted, glorified, and our trying to hold on to that as some information, and that thing becoming the innermost reality of our being, that Jesus lives, Jesus is glorified, He is on the throne, and for all purposes of God, endurance and victory and service, the basic necessity is to have seen Jesus and to be seeing Jesus in a growing and ever-growing way.

God begins with the revelation of Jesus Christ in the heart and God works from that point for all His purposes, for every new phase of divine activity springs out of a new revelation of Jesus Christ. It is so difficult for us in these lives of ours which are so much governed by a mentality of soul sense to rightly adjust ourselves to the idea of seeing Jesus. There is a sense in which it is not *seeing* Jesus at all. What is the spiritual faculty of sight? Well, it is not an optical vision, it is not seeing at all in the natural sense. It is that something has become livingly real in our very being. We say in the natural world, — As sure as I see you standing or sitting there! Now, as sure as that the reality of God in Christ has to become a reality in us. It is something right in us by the Holy Spirit. How does that come about? It only comes about along the line of sheer necessity. No man or woman will ever see Jesus really in a saving way until they have got to the point where it becomes an absolute necessity, a matter of life or death. If they do not see Jesus, although they would not put it that way, if Jesus does not become their Saviour at that time, they know that they are doomed and lost. It becomes the most absolute necessity and then Jesus becomes a reality, and, becoming a reality, they can speak in terms of "*once I was blind, now I can see*".

From the simple first beginnings of salvation, at every point the law is the same. We never come into any enlargement of divine purpose without a fresh revelation or seeing of Jesus, and that upon the basis of sheer necessity, so that, as we go on with the Lord, we are continually plunged into new necessities for making new discoveries of the Lord. All that we did know seems now to be as nothing. We need a knowledge which we have never had, we need to see Him as we have never seen Him. He must become to us now what He has never been, or all goes for naught. That is how the Lord deals with us, and, bringing us there, He reveals Himself in a new way, in a way in which we have never known Him before. We discover Him in an altogether fresh way and meaning and fulness, and that discovery is the basis of a new usefulness to the Lord, a new fruitfulness of life, a new strength of endurance, so that eventually our going through the final trial is the result of a succession of experiences through which we have come to know the Lord, which have made it necessary for us to see Him anew, and we have been built up unto final overcoming along the line of a growing revelation of Jesus Christ, which revelation has applied to a whole set of needs and situations. He has gradually been, so to speak, "spreading" Himself over every department of our life, all the directions of human need, and He has been steadily filling up, becoming all in all. We just discover Him as by a new knowledge, call it "seeing", if you like — that is speaking in gospel terms — seeing Jesus. Speaking in Epistle terms, it would be revelation, inward revelation of the Lord Jesus.

Here He is at this moment concerned with the whole purpose for which He had come. Up to this point, moving in the world among men at close quarters, they had not seen Him, and He knew that, up till now, the purpose of His coming was not fulfilled, it was not even begun. So far it was all in suspense, and then, as He reached a certain point, while the Jews officially rejected Him with a finality of rejection, that door was closed. These Greeks came and said, "*Sir, we would see Jesus*", opening a new possibility in relation to the purpose of God beyond Israel, the Son of Man aspect of things now, not the Messiah aspect of things; the racial, the "one new man" vision; all that in the background. He saw that this quest carried with it a new possibility for the realization of divine purpose, and He said, "*The hour is come, that the Son of man should be glorified.*" When He is glorified and seen as glorified, the purpose is possible of full realization.

Now, you and I are thrown back into this position. Only seeing Jesus will bring us into God's purpose, only seeing Jesus as glorified will get us through to the end and make us triumphant to overcome, and that seeing of Jesus will come through experiences in which He becomes far more necessary than He has ever been before, because God, as we have often said, is never content with theory. He is never content with mere creed or doctrine. The thing has got to be a part of us, and you and I never learn anything properly except through experience. We can get a lot of book knowledge, but we do not know it. It is not

until we are tested out with that knowledge in practical circumstances, in no matter what sphere of life it may be, whether it be mechanics or medicine, or whatever it may be, you get your lecture knowledge, but what is the value of it until you have got a case or situation which is a test and a real test? Now then, you are up against it. What is the value of your knowledge? Here you have got a case in the medical world, a complicated case, and all your knowledge stands or falls upon whether you can apply it, make it practical. If it is in mechanics, you have got a breakdown, and there is no one else within miles to help you. You have mechanical knowledge in your head. Now, how are you going to get out of this predicament and get on the road again? Unless you can bring your knowledge into operation and get yourself going again, your knowledge is worthless.

So it is in every realm, and that is how the Lord deals with us on doctrine. Oh, yes, we know all about Jesus glorified, risen, ascended, but being brought right up against it, you are going to see Jesus as you never saw Him in a book, in a meeting or a conference. You see Him as a practical power and reality to get you out of your difficulty, and the Lord constantly puts us into those positions so that we discover Him, and, seeing Jesus, we go on from strength to strength.

So everything for divine purpose is bound up with seeing Jesus, and our prayer must ever be that the Lord will keep our inward seeing of Jesus abreast of all our outward information concerning Him.