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God's Answer to a State of Declension

by T. Austin-Sparks

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We have observed that, when the Divine thought as represented by the temple and Jerusalem was forsaken and lost and the glory had departed, Ezekiel was given and caused to write the vision of a new heavenly house, a house in every detail measured and defined from above. In the same way, when the Church of New Testament times had lost its purity and truth and power, and its heavenly character and order, and the primal glory of those early New Testament days was departing, then John was caused by the Spirit to bring into view the new, wonderful, heavenly, spiritual presentation, the Person of the Lord Jesus - that new heavenly presentation of Christ which we have in John's Gospel, his letters, and the Revelation - and we must remember that the Gospel written by John is, in point of time, practically the last writing of the New Testament. Perhaps the real significance of this has not fallen upon us with due power and impressiveness. We take up the Gospels as we have them in the New Testament arrangement of books, and immediately we are put by them back into the days of our Lord's life on the earth, and from the point of time that is where we are when reading the Gospels. For us all the rest of the New Testament has yet to be when we are in the Gospels, both as to the writings and the history that followed; all is in prospect. That, of course, is almost inevitable - perhaps almost unavoidable, but we must try to extricate ourselves from that position.

Why was the Gospel by John written? Was it written just as a record of the life of the Lord Jesus here on earth to go alongside of two or three other records, that there might be a history of the earthly life of the Lord Jesus preserved? Is that it? That is practically the sole result for a great many. The Gospels are read with a view to studying the life of Jesus while He was on the earth. That may be very good, but I do want to emphasize very strongly that this is not the Holy Spirit's primary intention in inspiring the writing of those Gospels. And this is particularly seen in the case of John's Gospel, written so long after everything else, right at the end of everything; for when John wrote his

final writings the other apostles were in glory. John's Gospel was written when the New Testament Church, as we have said, had lost its original form and power and spiritual life, its heavenly character and Divine order - written in the midst of such conditions as are outlined in the messages to the churches in Asia at the beginning of the Apocalypse; and that can be so clearly inferred from his letters.

What was the object in view? Well, just this: as John writes things are not as they were, not as God meant them to be, they no longer represent God's thought in and for His people. The order, the heavenly order, has broken down and is breaking down yet more. The heavenly nature has been forfeited and an earthly thing is taking shape in Christianity; the true life is being lost and the glory is departing. To that situation God reacts with a new presentation of His Son in a heavenly and spiritual way (for the features or characteristics of John are heavenliness and spirituality). Is that not true? Oh yes, here is a new bringing into view of His Son. But what a bringing into view! Not just and only as Jesus of Nazareth, but as the Son of Man, Son of God, God revealed and manifested in man, out from eternity with all the fullness of Divine essence, that His people might see.

So we must get to the Holy Spirit's standpoint in the Gospel by John, and in his other writings, and just see this: that God's way of recovery, when His full and original thought has been lost and that heavenly revelation has departed and the heavenly glory has been withdrawn, is to bring His Son anew into view; not to bring you back to the technique of the Church or the Gospel or the doctrine, but to bring His Son into view - to bring Christ again in the tremendousness of His heavenly and spiritual meaning before the heart eyes of His people.

That is the answer that is found in John to these conditions that we meet with in the New Testament, which so plainly show that the Church was losing its heavenly position, and all sorts of things were coming in, and the whole thing was becoming earthly. What will God do? In what way will He save His purpose, which seems to be so dangerously near being lost? He will bring His Son into view again. Remember, God's answer to every movement is always in His Son. Whether that movement be in the world as it heads up to Antichrist (God's answer to Antichrist will be Christ in the full blaze of His Divine glory), or whether it be in the Church in declension and apostasy, God's answer will be in His Son.

That is the meaning of the opening words of the book of the Revelation. The Church has lost her place, the glory has departed, but God breaks in with a presentation of His Son.

"I am He that liveth; I became dead, and behold, I am alive unto the ages of the ages, and I have the keys of death and of Hades."

Christ is presented, and then everything is measured and judged in the light of that heavenly Man with the measuring reed in His hand. Everything for God and for us is bound up with a heart revelation of the Lord Jesus. Oh, beloved, it will not be, as I have said, in trying to recover the New Testament technique. It will not be in a restoration of New Testament order. It will not even be in the re-affirmation of New Testament truth and doctrine. These are things, and they can be used to form a framework, but they can never guarantee the life, the power, the glory. There are plenty here on this earth who have the New Testament doctrine and technique and order, but it is a cold, dead framework. The life, the glory, is not there; the rapture is not there. Now God's way of the glory is in His Son; God's way of the life is in His Son; God's way of the power is in His Son; God's way of the heavenly nature is in His Son.