

CHRIST IS THE WAY OF PREPARATION

John 14:6—Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one cometh unto the Father, but by me.

Colossians 1:12-18—Giving thanks unto the Father, who made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light; who delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love; in whom we have our redemption, the forgiveness of our sins: who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him were all things created, in the heavens and upon the earth, things visible and things invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers; all things have been created through him, and unto him; and he is before all things, and in him all things [hold together]. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence.

Just a word of prayer:

Beloved Lord, we bow here in Your presence. We are so thankful, dear Lord, that it is unto You that we gather. We thank You that You have made provision for us for this time, and into that provision of grace and power—that anointing—we stand by faith. We need that anointing for the speaking of Your word, for the translating of Your word, and for the hearing of Your word. Will You, in a marvelous way, give a double portion of that anointing for this time? We need You, Lord. We are moving into days of unparalleled disturbance, turmoil, darkness, and conflict. We need You. We have always needed You, but we need

You now more than ever. Be gracious, oh Lord, and visit us. Grant that the Holy Spirit may not be quenched or grieved, but be enabled to give us that spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of the Lord Jesus, the eyes of our hearts being enlightened, that we might know what is the hope of His calling. And we would be careful to give you all the praise and worship of our hearts for answering this prayer, which we ask in the name of our Messiah, the Lord Jesus. Amen.

I will be sharing together with you on this theme of preparing the way of the Lord—Christ as the way. It is in fact impossible to prepare the way of the Lord without Christ. He is the key, the power, the grace, the energy, and the wisdom that we need to be able to be part of those who will prepare the way for the coming of the Lord.

JESUS IS THE WAY

Jesus said very simply as we have read in the gospel of John: “I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father but by me.” In fact, the early church described the gospel as the way and those who are born of God as people of the way. This is quite interesting in light of what we are studying. I am always amazed at the utter simplicity of all divine truth. In our theological seminaries and Bible schools, the simplicity of the truth has been incredibly convoluted and complex. We have been made to feel that no one can understand these things except those who are theologians and, at the very least, Bible teachers and scholars. But in actual fact, the truth of God is absolute simplicity. God has not given us things, gifts, techniques, or methodologies. He has given us a Person—the Lord Jesus—and in Him we discover everything. It is only as we are born of His Spirit, only as we grow in grace and in the knowledge of Him, only as we mature to adulthood

spiritually, that we are able to be part of preparing the way of the Lord.

EVERYTHING WAS CREATED FOR CHRIST

The Father gives us everything in Christ. The universe we are in and the planet we are on were created *through* the Lord Jesus and *for* the Lord Jesus. We are told this very simply in the Colossian letter by inspiration of the Holy Spirit. In that simple phrase, we have the key to everything in this world that we know. We are also told that He is before all things, as if He is the pattern for the whole thing. Man (and woman) was created for Him. When He created us, we were created through Him and for Him.

ALL THINGS HOLD TOGETHER IN CHRIST

Then we have this extraordinary little word: “And in Him, all things consist or hold together.” In the Greek it simply means that the whole of this universe is held together in the Lord Jesus. It was not only created through Him and created for Him, but it is held together in Him. If He wanted to, He could let go of the whole thing, and it would burst into a million fragments. He is the basic energy of the universe and of the planet on which we live.

We will recall that when the Lord Jesus hung on the cross, in the darkest part of those hours when He cried out: “My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me,” the sun ceased to shine. Ignorant people say it was an eclipse. Of course, we know very well that no eclipse could last for three hours. Secondly, it was a Passover moon on which there could be no eclipse. It is incredible, therefore, what happened. It gives us a little evidence that everything holds together in the Lord Jesus. In that moment, when He became a sin offering, when all of our iniquities were laid on Him, when God shattered and crushed Him, it was as if

the basic energy of the universe and the whole creation failed.

Do we realize how great the Lord Jesus is? Do we realize that the One who died to save us, who came into this world, born of a woman, is the One through whom the whole universe and this planet was created, and for whom it was created, and in Him it holds together? At least it should bring us into a new place of worship and praise that the Lord should ever think of little microbes like you and me and died to save us. Can you believe that the Lord could love a human being so much—human debris, human rubbish, human trash—that He was prepared to come into this world and die in order to win us? What treasure did He see in us? What was it that caused Him, somehow or other, to forget everything else in the winning of our salvation? The Father has given us a Person for our salvation and then brought us into fellowship with Him.

JESUS IS THE FIRST AND THE LAST

Jesus is called the first and the last. In my estimation that does not mean He is only the first and the last, but He is first and last and everything in between. He is also called the beginning and the end. He is the beginning of the creation of God, and He is the firstborn from the dead. But He is also the Amen. So we can see that He is the beginning and the end. He is the beginning of God's purpose and the end, or the fulfillment, of God's purpose. He is the Amen. "For how many soever be the promises of God, in him is the yea" (II Corinthians 1:20a). It is through Him they are performed and thus become our experience.

JESUS IS THE ALPHABET OF GOD

He is the Alpha and the Omega. This does not mean that He is the first and last letter of the alphabet and everything

in between is something else. It means that He is the alphabet of God. God's entire language is in terms of Jesus. He speaks to us through Jesus, declaring and expressing His mind and heart and will in and through Him. How amazing it is that God should give us the Lord Jesus as His alphabet.

Every word that is spoken—whether English, German, Norwegian, Swedish, Dutch or any language—is formed from an alphabet. Of course, they are all pronounced in different ways, but the fact is, there is an alphabet. I think of the Chinese especially and thank God for their language because that is what gave me a photographic memory. I had to learn characters every day and then would lose about a third of them and have to start again to regain the third I lost and then add to them. I discovered that my lazy mind had suddenly become photographic. I was able to remember the word of God, for which I thank God and even knew which page in my Bible it was on.

Let us consider the Greek and Hebrew letters. There is A to Z, but Jesus is ABCDEFGH and all the way to Zed. It is the same with Hebrew—*aleph* and *tav*. He is every single one of those letters. Every word that God uses is made up of Jesus. It is the expression of His mind and His heart. Do you realize that in this book we call the word of God—all sixty-six books—that Jesus is the living word of God? He is the thought process of God, if I can put it reverently—unveiled, expressed, uttered, articulated—and in that dreadful American English, verbalized. That is the Lord Jesus. He speaks to us, and through Him, God speaks and unveils Himself. Through the Lord Jesus, we understand what happened to our forefathers and how they fell. We see what happened to this world, but we also see how the purpose of God has been pursued all the way through the years of Israel's history to the coming of the Messiah, and

even beyond that. It is amazing! The Lord Jesus is the Alpha and the Omega of God, the whole alphabet of God.

CHRIST IS OUR SALVATION

Christ is our salvation; we are born of God. If the Lord Jesus is in you, you are saved. If the Lord Jesus is not in you, you are not saved. Salvation is not a method; it is not a technique; it is not a series of steps. Salvation is a Person. That is why the angel said to Joseph and Mary: “Call His name *Yeshua*, *Jesus*, which means “salvation.” When He steps into a human life, that one is saved and delivered. The whole process of conforming that one to the image of the Lord Jesus begins. The whole possibility of glory is in the worst sinner in the world when Jesus steps into their circumstances and into their life. Never put anyone beyond the grace of God. The Lord can take the biggest swindler, gangster, or crook, and if Christ steps in, it is salvation. There is nothing like this gospel because God saves to the uttermost those that put their trust in Him.

I am often subjected to strange fears, and I am sure that many of you experience fears of one kind or another. When I have that kind of fear, into my heart will come a Scripture: “God is my salvation; I will trust and not be afraid. For the Lord, even the Lord, is my strength and my song and He has become my salvation” (see Exodus 15:2a). First there is the statement of faith—He is my salvation. Then there is the process—He becomes my salvation in reality. “Therefore with joy shall ye draw from the wells of salvation” (see Isaiah 12:3).

I had a completely unsaved background; but after I got saved I became so excited about the Lord Jesus. I do not know the five or seven stages of getting saved, but I do know that when Jesus is outside knocking on the door and we open the door, He comes in. The Savior enters our

heart, and in that moment we are saved by the grace of God. It is salvation.

There is a Psalm that I find very precious, and it is Psalm 91: “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in whom I trust” (vv. 1-2). Listen to how the Psalm ends: “He shall call upon Me, and I will answer him; I will be with him in trouble: I will deliver him, and honor him. With long life will I satisfy him, and show him my Jesus.” Your version says: “my salvation.” In Hebrew, it is “Yeshua.” “I will show him my Yeshua, Jesus.”

How can we prepare for the Lord’s coming unless we are saved and experiencing our salvation day to day? There is such a power and so much within our salvation. I do not think any of us have yet explored to the full what is given to us in our Lord Jesus.

CHRIST IS OUR LIFE

The second thing I want to bring to your attention is that Christ is not only our salvation, He is our life. Jesus said: “I am the way and the truth and the life.” Jesus said: “I am the bread of life by which we live and grow.” Jesus said: “I am the resurrection and the life.” Everywhere you look in the word of God, you discover that Jesus is the life of God.

May I put it another way: Jesus is the tree of life. You will also recall that He said: “I am the light of the world: he that followeth Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). The life of Jesus in us becomes our experience. It becomes the way to know Him, understand Him, be educated by Him, and trained by Him.

I feel sorry for Christians who had a conversion experience years and years ago—and nothing ever since. We are not meant to hark back to something that happened ten, twenty, thirty, fifty, sixty, or in my case seventy years

ago, as if it was the only thing that ever happened. Jesus is our life. God has given us eternal life in the Lord Jesus.

Eternal life is not something that happens after death. Everyone seems to think that we live here and go through the routine of life day after day, week after week, month after month, year after year, and when we are about seventy—sometime before or sometime later—we drop dead and float away into eternity. There we will sit on a damp cloud with a harp and sing praises to God forever and forever. One wonders: did the Lord go to all this trouble to have an eternal choir? Is that the purpose of God? Is God so (if I may put it reverently) egocentric that all He is interested in is thousands and thousands of people around Him just worshipping, worshipping, and worshipping. And after a thousand years of worship a bell goes off, and we will have something to drink and eat; then the bell rings again and we will all gather again for another thousand years of worship. And that is eternity? No wonder the world laughs at us. They say in mockery: “Your Jesus came into this world to die so that you might join a choir forever and forever?” No, it is not as if God has retired, sitting somewhere in the heavens vegetating.

God is full of power, wisdom, and grace. If I may put it reverently, He is full of ingenuity. God has not finished creating. Do you think this world in all of its original beauty—the beautiful scenery around us, the animals, the birds, and fishes that He created—has exhausted Him so that now He sits in retirement as an old gentleman? Do you really think that is the gospel? Never!

There is an eternal purpose of God in the Lord Jesus; it is centered in Him. He is the beginning and the fulfillment of it. And the way to enter in is being saved through His life. How can you be born again without life unless you are stillborn? If you are born of God, the life of the Lord Jesus

is yours; it is in you. And by the experience of that life, you grow.

Romans 5:10 puts it very simply: “For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life.”

Have we been reconciled to God? How have we been reconciled to God? It is through the suffering of the Lord Jesus on the cross. We have been saved by the blood of the Lamb. God has gone to such lengths to reconcile us to Himself; but many of us are not even interested in being reconciled to Him.

A PERSONAL TESTIMONY OF BEING RECONCILED TO GOD

I was saved through reading the life story of C.T. Studd. I had thought that God was a myth, but after reading the story of C. T. Studd I realized that maybe He was not a myth. What God had done in that man was amazing. So I stood up. Then I thought: “I think they kneel,” so I knelt. Then I felt uncomfortable and I stood up again with my hands raised, and said: “Oh God, if there is a God, will you please do in me what you did in C.T. Studd?” I was reconciled.

Later on I went to see a Charlie Chaplin film. But in the evening I had a feeling that I should go to church. I had never been to church except to Sunday School, and that was only because I was roped in to going to look after my sister and her friends. So my sister and I went to the first church meeting we had ever been in. We were reconciled by the death of His Son, but the most wonderful thing is, we are saved by His life. That is an ongoing daily process of learning to hear the Lord.

HEARING THE VOICE OF THE LORD

Some people have told me that they have never heard the Lord. What is wrong with you? Oh you say, “I am just a

very ordinary person.” Rubbish! Why has the Lord saved you? If you are so ordinary and so worthless, why has the Lord gone to all of the trouble to save you and bring you to Himself?

Jesus put it very simply: “My sheep hear My voice and they follow Me.” Could there be anything simpler than that? I think within our spirit there is an ear that can hear God’s voice. When we are born of God, we can hear. How did we first learn our father’s voice? How did we first distinguish our mother’s voice from all other female voices? We heard, we heard again, we heard again, and we began to discern that voice. We distinguished that voice from all the others. One of our problems is that we do not expect our Lord to speak to us. We should expect the Lord to speak to us. How can we grow in an experience of the Lord Jesus if we never hear His voice? How can we obey Him? “Well,” you say, “I have the Bible.” Yes, that is true; but I am not sure that just having the Bible means that you are hearing the voice of the Lord. It is when the Holy Spirit takes the word of God and illumines it to us. When we are given the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of our heart being enlightened, then we know the hope of His calling—not know about it. We can read the Bible and know about it, but when it dawns on us, we know the hope of His calling. We know the glorious riches of His inheritance in the saints, and we know the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe.

John said in 1 John 5:11-12, “And the witness is this, that God gave unto us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He that hath the Son hath the life; He that hath not the Son of God hath not the life.” You can have all of the theologies, doctrines, and Biblical knowledge, but if you do not have the Son, you do not have the life. He is the life of God, and once you begin to experience His life, you are born of God.

EXPERIENTIAL KNOWLEDGE OF THE LORD

What happens when a child is born? His eyes open, and he begins to hear. He begins to grow, and before long he is crawling, and cutting teeth. Then he begins to climb on things, and before long he is your parents' worst nightmare. Can you stop him? You might say, "Kill him." However, that is not the answer. The answer is much more simple and wonderful.

We are growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus—not academic knowledge but experiential knowledge. We begin to experience Him, and as we do so, He becomes the bread of life. What do we do to live? Of course, we eat and drink. Thus, the Lord Jesus is both the food and drink that we need to grow. How does it happen? The Lord allows to come into our lives—gently at first, but before long—difficult circumstances and situations in which we are baffled, confused, and even depressed. Then we discover the word of the Lord being made real to us by the Holy Spirit. Thus, we have our own experience because the Lord has done something in us. It may be very small at the very beginning, but it is real and living.

I was a young kid the first time the river Thames overflowed. Every time it overflowed, it came up onto the avenue where I lived. It would flow around the house and into the garden so we could not walk outside anywhere. I was alone in the house one day when this river started coming around the house. Apparently, the toll keeper was drunk so the river overflowed where we lived. The tidal basin of the river Thames came across the toll path and then would go down again. I did not know what to do, but I remembered Aunty Ella and her sewing machine and how she trusted God, Who sent an angel. I went to the garden, paddled through the water, got on my knees and said, "Lord, send this water back." I could have been only

thirteen or fourteen at the most, and to my amazement, the water gurgled back to the next neighbor. I then found out that they had discovered the toll keeper drunk and they lifted the toll gates, and the waters receded. For me, it was an amazing answer to prayer since I had no Christian background or experience of the Lord. I then had my own experience with the Lord. My first experience was with Auntie Ella when I saw her sewing machine touched by an angel. Now I had my own experience, and I grew.

We have to hear Him so that we can grow. Do you not think it is an odd thing if our Lord has gone to such lengths to save us by coming into this world, being born of a woman, living for thirty-some years being contradicted by sinners, gainsaid by sinners, and then dying on the cross for us? Do you really think He will never speak to you? Wake up! Would it not have been better if He had never thought of you in the first place, or come into this world, or be born of the Spirit and then dying on the cross? It is quite clear that He wants us. How can we prepare the way of the Lord's coming if we do not hear Him or experience Him?

Everything of Christ is given through His finished work and in His resurrection life. Think of that! There is nothing that God withholds. When He gave His Son, He said: "I have given you everything in Him—all you need to overcome, to endure, and to come right through every experience and be conformed to the image of My Son."

THE CHURCH IS CHRIST

Thus far, we have spoken of everything being in Christ. Salvation is Christ; the life is Christ; eternal life is Christ. Yet, there is another matter we need to touch on as being Christ, and that is the church. Now you may say: "No; you are going too far now. We are the church, not Christ. He is the Head and Savior." No, Christ is the church. An old

brother was once asked: “What is the church?” And he said: “Mrs. Jesus. The church is Mrs. Jesus.”

The church is not a building where you leave your umbrella, your purse, or your Bible. The church is not a place with a steeple or a tower with a bell in it. It is not a place, such as in Britain and in Europe, where all the dead are buried around it and often within it.

THE HEAD AND BODY ARE ONE

What is the church? “Christ is the head of the body which is His church, the firstborn from the dead that in all things He may have the preeminence” (see Colossians 1:18). He is the church.

May I give you an illustration. Here is my head, and from my head down is my body. Are you going to tell me that the church is severed from its Head? That is what it has become again and again through church history. But the real church is the extension of our Lord Jesus; it is His body. We are members of Christ and members one of another which does not mean membership on a church roll. It is a Greek word meaning “limbs.” We are limbs of Christ and limbs one of another. Where did this all begin? It began with the Head. How did it begin? When the Head ascended on high and reached the throne of God, He sat down in the throne of God. There He received the promise of the Spirit and poured forth this Holy One. In a single moment of time, something which had never happened before in the history of the universe took place: a Head in heaven became joined to one hundred and twenty limbs on earth in Jerusalem. That is Pentecost.

This Head and body were destined to turn the Jewish world upside down and inside out. And in the end, the Gentile world was turned upside down and inside out. How did they do it? Was it by great organization? No! Was it by great planning? No! Was it by great funding? No! They did

it by being joined to the Head. When they could hear the Head and obey the Head, the world was turned upside down. Within hours, one hundred and twenty members of the body of our Lord Jesus became three thousand one hundred and twenty members. Within a few weeks, the number had reached five thousand. Within a few more weeks, the number had reached eight thousand. Even a great number of priests and Levites believed on the Lord Jesus. *That kind of church is invincible, and the gates of hell cannot prevail against it.* Whilst it remains within the principles of its beginning, whilst it is joined to the Head, whilst it hears the directions of the Head, whilst it obeys His directions, it is invincible. When man is put in place of the Lord Jesus—whether it be pope, archbishop, cardinal, bishop, pastor or leader—the church is paralyzed and begins to die. Then the Lord Jesus, blessed be His name, launches a new initiative by the Holy Spirit.

Look at the history of the church. Wherever you turn, you find those who were used by God to initiate a new move by the Spirit. They are called by names that they never called themselves—Donatists, Monastics, Bogomils, Waldenses, Priscillianists, Quakers, Methodists (who were first called Enthusiasts which is much better), Brethren, Pentecostal, and the last great move—the Charismatic. Wherever you turn, the Lord has launched something by His Spirit and turned the so-called church upside down.

I realize that you have difficulties with me saying that the church is Jesus. I was reading a little booklet by T. Austin-Sparks one of the times I was not very well. I was taking walks by the river Thames, and while I was walking, I would read this little booklet. It was wonderful until I read: “So you see, the church is Christ.” I thought, “He cannot have said that.” I read it again. But he did say it. I read it again, and I thought: “Now I know what is wrong with him.” Everyone was speaking against Theodore

Austin-Sparks and telling us to be careful of him because he was a heretic and all this kind of thing. I had searched and searched to find what was wrong in his teaching, and I had found it. Now I knew what was wrong with Honor Oak.

God has enormous humor. The next morning my daily portion of reading was 1 Corinthians 12:12: "For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also is Christ." Then I thought to myself: "Wait; that is what T. Austin-Sparks said; it cannot be right." I looked it up in the Greek and found to my amazement that it was exactly correct. There are many members of the body; there is one body—so also *is* Christ. At that time I was a Baptist, but in that single moment, I died as a Baptist. I went down into the grave as a Baptist and came up a Christian. I suddenly realized that the church is not denominational, not a thousand divisions, not a thousand different ways of doing things with different routines. Suddenly, I realized the church is the Lord Jesus.

Many of you ought to be able to understand this by now. This church that the Lord has brought about is Head and body. It is not body apart from the Head or the Head apart from the body. It is Head and body.

How can we prepare for the coming of the Lord if we are in all kinds of dead things? How can we prepare for the coming of the Lord if we are in a church that is not *the* church? How can we prepare for the coming of the Lord if we do not know anything about His life in us, if we do not know Him as our salvation? Vision is an unbelievable thing. When God touches the eyes of your heart, in a single moment of time, you see what you would have thought would take years of academic study. Suddenly, in a moment, you see it.

I can take a simple illustration. Maybe you were brought up in a Christian home. Are you a Christian? You say, “Yes, I am.” But you are not really. You have all the trappings, but you are not saved. Then the Lord revealed Himself to you, and in that single moment, you were saved. What you had heard as a child became reality in you; it became experience.

When the God of glory appeared to our forefather Abraham, it knocked him out. According to Jewish tradition, his family had a very lucrative business in idol making in Ur of the Chaldeans. He actually made the idols that the people worshipped—household, kitchen, and bedroom idols; idols in the garden, at the gate into the house, on the corner of the street, and in temples. It was very lucrative.

THE GOD OF GLORY APPEARED TO ABRAHAM

One day, the God of glory appeared to Abraham. It was one of the great turning points of history. It was the beginning of the people of God. Until then it had been individuals. Now, suddenly, it was a people. Abraham was never the same. He saw something in the God of glory that he had never seen in an idol. He saw the eternal purpose—he saw the Savior—and he understood.

He went out from Ur of the Chaldeans in obedience to the command of the God of glory as a nomad, shepherd, goat-head, with camels and donkeys. He saw in the God of glory, the city of glory, and he was never the same again.

MOSES AND JACOB SAW THE GOD OF GLORY

When Moses saw the glory of the Lord, it changed his whole being. He spoke of a prophet coming like himself but much greater. It was Jesus. Jacob saw the God of glory when that heavenly Visitor wrestled with him and changed

his name from Jacob, the twister, to Israel, prince with God. Everywhere we look in the Bible, when people have really seen the Lord, it has changed their lives.

PAUL SAW THE GOD OF GLORY

One of the best examples in my estimation is a rabbi whose name was Saul of Tarsus in Asia Minor. He was filled with hatred for Messianic Jews. He was filled with derision over the talk about the Messiah Jesus. He went everywhere, hounding the Messianic believers into prison, torturing them, being a witness to their execution. Then, on his way to Damascus to hound out the Messianic believers in Damascus, God knocked him out. When he came to from being smitten to the ground, in a dozy state, he said, “Lord, who are You?” And Jesus said in Hebrew: “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.” I do not know if you have ever realized that in that single statement was the seed which was to take root in Paul the great apostle. He said: “I am not persecuting You; I am persecuting these disciples of Yours.” Then it dawned on him that when he touched those disciples, he was touching the members of the body of the Messiah. From this came all of Paul’s understanding of the church as the body of Christ.

How amazing this is! It changes our lives. People sometime say to me, “Oh, it is awful in Israel—the visas being cancelled for Christians and the difficulties for Christian work in the land.” I say to them, “It is no problem with God. When God’s time comes to save Israel, He will knock out the chief rabbis. With one clean blow, they will be knocked out, and reeling from it, they will say, “Who are You?” And He will say, “I am Jesus.” And some of them will become, if the Lord tarries, great apostles. Those natural branches have to be re-engrafted into their own olive tree; but it will happen.

Listen to me. How can you possibly prepare the way for the coming of the Lord if you are not saved, if you are not experiencing His life, if you are not experiencing His body, the church, the house of God? That is what you and I need above everything else. May the Lord take these poor words of mine and use them to reveal something to every one of us. Amen.