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Titles of the Risen Lord

by T. Austin-Sparks

Transcribed from a message given in a conference on "The Arm of the Lord" in April 1957.

We are today occupied with the resurrection side of the Cross. And this afternoon I'm going to ask you to consider with me some of the titles of the risen Lord, the resurrection titles of the Lord Jesus. In the book of the Revelation, chapter 1, at verse 4: "John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you, and peace, from Him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before His Throne; and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the Firstborn of the dead, and the Ruler of the kings of the earth". There you have three titles of the Lord in resurrection. That they relate to Him in resurrection is quite clear from the context where He Himself says to John: "I am the Living One; I became dead, I am alive for evermore".

Three titles: the faithful Witness. The Firstborn of the dead. The Ruler of the kings of the earth.

Now it is important to note two things as we advance to this. Firstly, this is the book of the revelation, or the *unveiling* of Jesus Christ; so the first sentence declares. Secondly, it is the revelation of Him as exercising authority and judgment: firstly, in the Church; secondly, in the nations; and thirdly, in the kingdom of satan. Those three things comprehend the whole of this book.

This authority, which He is here revealed as exercising, is itself based upon three things: first, what He has proved Himself to be in Person, in incarnation; secondly, what He has become in triumph over death; and thirdly, what He is in exaltation and Divine vindication.

At a glance, you will see that those three things are but an exposition of the three titles: what He has proved Himself to be in Person, in incarnation: *the faithful Witness*, taking Him right up to the Cross and into all the experience of the Cross; what He has become in triumph over death: *the Firstborn of the dead*. And what He is in exaltation by Divine vindication: *the Ruler of the kings of the earth*.

All His authority and judgment is based upon those three things, or upon what He has proved Himself to be in Person.

We take these, as far as time will allow, one by one.

"The Faithful Witness"

The testimony in incarnation: that is, in His Person while here on the earth.

Now, a witness is the embodiment of the truth - if he is a true witness, if he has the right to be called a witness; he himself should be the very embodiment of the truth. Jesus was *that*. Jesus as the faithful Witness was a, we may say *the*, faithful representation of God's mind concerning man, what God intended man to be, what the whole race of men had failed to be, Jesus became *that*: a faithful representation of God's mind in the creation of man. That is how we must look at Him while here on the earth - not just following His steps, noting His words and His actions, being interested or even fascinated with His teaching and with His mighty works - but looking deeper, deeper into His heart, into His mind, His whole mentality, His whole Spirit. Looking deeper to see what kind of a Man this is. What comes out from the very nature of this Man? All the reactions that He makes to all the play of conditions and trials and sufferings and disappointments, all that He meets in this world, and all that He meets in men, all that He meets in His life circumstances, and how He behaves, and what Spirit He shows. What comes out from the inward Man? What *kind* of a Man this is?

I think we can sum up the life of the Lord Jesus here in three ways:

Perfect Love

Perfect love: perfect love to God His Father. That is not only seen in the things that He says about it, and as to it, but it is seen in His relationship to the Father all the way through - a perfect love. And, mark you, if He had been other than He was, He might have had some questions about the Father - why His lot should have been what it was, why this and why that - from infancy to the Cross, why He was called upon to do this, to endure this, why He was so *tried* with the very men whom He said the Father had given Him. He said: "Those whom *Thou* hast given Me." You know, you might have looked at those men, if you had been other than Christ, and said: "Look what You've given Me! Look what You've given Me, what I've got to put up with! These are what You've given Me." You see what I mean. But at no point, at no time, under no circumstance: suffering, adversity, trial, provocation, disappointment, do you find a cloud coming over His love for the Father.

And what shall we say about His love for them? It needs to be a perfect love, doesn't it? But here's the declaration: "*having loved His own* which were in the world, He loved them to the end" - "*to the end*": that's the love that never faileth, that never gives up, that never disappears. It might have broken down many times. Here is perfect love.

And what about the world? What about the world? I mean the world of sinful, weak, evil, persecuting, mankind - the world. I'm not speaking about the world system, which He positively hated and repudiated, but the world of man - that world that God so loved, well, He gave Himself for that world. And in its worst representatives - its *worst* representatives, who were exercising their power for His utter destruction, to *slaughter* Him - no, not too strong a word: "He was led as a sheep to the *slaughter*" - to *slaughter* the Son of God. He says: "Father, forgive them" - perfect love. Here's a Man that God intended men to be. And here's the Man, to the likeness of whom God will work to have all men in His Kingdom. Perfect love - "*the faithful Witness.*"

Perfect Faith

Perfect faith. It is quite clear that His Life from its very beginning, right on through to the end, was placed deliberately by God upon a basis of faith. In all material and temporal matters, His was a life of faith. But far, far more deeply and testingly than in the temporal, in the spiritual realm His was a life of faith. You've only got to sit down and think for a little while about how far your faith would carry you under the conditions of His life. You will discover, I am quite sure, that you won't go very far with Him. Your faith won't stand up to very much of what came upon Him. If we understood all that was going on in this necessity for faith: One who had, through past eternity, never had to live by faith at all - never had to live by faith. He had all that heaven can give: its riches, its honour, its glory, its servants to wait upon Him to fulfil His behest to the word - He never had to live by faith. It was all sight! It was all possession! And, now, emptied of all that!

You know, it's one thing if you've never had anything else. It's not so difficult, if you've never had anything else, to go without. But if you've had it all and suddenly find yourself in a position where you just cannot, cannot do what you did before, you haven't got it to do with, you may not in any case do it - you're morally bound not to do it. You have accepted a life and a course and a ministry which *forbids* you to draw upon those other resources and *compels* you to live wholly out from Another, out from God in all things. It's a big change over, and this is faith - this is faith! His faith was a perfect faith. And that is how God meant man to be. It is just at that point that the first man broke down. He did not *implicitly* trust God.

Perfect love, and perfect faith, and perfect obedience.

Perfect Obedience

We need not dwell upon it. We know how at all times and in all things, having committed Himself to the will of His Father, He fought right through on that: "Not My will" - "Thy will, Thy will, Thy will" to the end and through all - and what an "all" it was. And Paul is right when he said: "He became obedient even unto death, yea, the death of the Cross".

Perfect in these three things, and that is how He was the faithful Witness to God's thought concerning man. He was a perfect representation of God's mind. In that way, He was a "*faithful Witness.*"

Then He was a "*faithful Witness*" to the truth.

It's a word that was very often on His mouth - on His lips: the truth, truth, truth. "The faithful and *true* Witness" He is called in another place in this book of the Revelation - the faithful Witness to the Truth.

There was *faithfulness* about His witness, His witness as to the truth of man. He covered up nothing. He made no pretence that man is better than he is. He was faithful in His witness as to what man is. We might be afraid to do that, or we might think it not politic. We certainly would know that it would be unpopular to speak the truth about man, but Jesus was faithful in this - in the uncovering and the exposure of the truth about *man*.

He was faithful to the truth about *God*. He was faithful in His witness to the truth about *sin* - sin. And He was faithful in His witness to the truth about satan. He does not hedge this matter, He does not hesitate to uncover the devil; He exposes him, drags him right out into the light, tells you exactly what he is: "he's a liar from the beginning - he's a murderer."

A faithful Witness to the truth. Why? Because He *was* the Truth. His *nature* was the Truth, and there we must stay to use more of our time. It is a tremendously important thing, in relation to the power of resurrection, to authority, to government, to what is here revealed as to Christ in resurrection. It is a basic, a fundamental thing that there shall be the *Truth* - the *true* Witness.

You see, His authority, His judgment, His government, His everything - His right - His *right* to call the churches into question, His *right* to judge the nations, His *right* to deal with the kingdom of satan - is based upon this thing, this one thing: that He *is* the Truth! He is *true*, He is *true*. There can be no comeback from Church, or world, or satan which would find some point in Him that was a flaw, that was not true, that would upset His whole authority, His right to judge. It is all resting upon the fact that He is *true*.

Dear friends, you will at once pass in mind from Him to ourselves, to the church, and see weakness, failure to register, the lack of authority, the absence of authority; and all this terrible state of weakness, and that the world can point at the church, point a finger. And that the church has not the influence and power with the world; and that satan can stand and hold the ground and almost laugh at the church is very largely due to the fact that the truth is not here. It's not true. It is just not true. Many of the things that you say may be true in themselves; but they're not true in *you*. Many of the things that you profess, while in themselves they may be correct, they are not true of *you*! There's a gap between what you profess, and say, and claim, and yourself. It's just not *real* in your own case. Therefore your whole position is given away. You see what I'm getting at.

This is a very important matter for witness, for influence, for effectiveness, for standing before God and standing before man, before the world, and standing before satan. What a *large* place God has given to this matter of truth! He is Himself the God of Truth. He is shown in His Word to be very jealous over the truth. He is said to desire truth in the inward parts. He holds all lies, we are told, an abomination. He has consigned all liars to the lake of fire, so the Word says. He excludes from the city, the New Jerusalem, *everything* that maketh a lie. It has no place within. Jesus Himself is called "the Truth". He called Himself "the Truth". And here He is "the Faithful and true Witness."

While, on the other side, satan at the other extreme, in the other realm altogether, is called "the liar", and "the father of lies". The whole structure of creation collapsed when the lie, the falsehood entered in. It was at that time that all that beautiful structure just went to pieces. It was all because

of a lie, a lie came in. And if there is a lie in anything, that's what's going to happen to it. Sooner or later it is going to mean the collapse, the disintegration of any structure, if there's a lie in it.

The result of that lie entering at the beginning was that man himself became a lie. Man became a falsehood. It was not just that there was untruth in him: he himself *became* a falsehood. He is a *deceived* creature. There's a lie in his very nature. He is not the *true* thing that God made him and intended him to be. He is a *misrepresentation* about God's thought about man. There is a lie not only in his nature and constitution, but there is a lie in his life and in his work. He hopes and he believes, he works and he strives and it is all in vain. It is all in vain.

As the wise man said, he had explored every realm of knowledge and learning, he had sought out every secret law. He had made it his business to go into every realm to discover its secrets and to make himself acquainted and familiar with *all* things - with all things. And he said, "When I've done it," and you know, he did get quite a lot; the Queen of the South came to see his wisdom and the wisdom of Solomon is proverbial, if it is not fabulous, he'd gone a long way in this, and when he had done it all, made it his life business, he said: "All is vanity. All is vanity. All is vanity". There's a *lie* in it all. There's a *falsehood* in the whole thing. Disappointment awaits the best that man can do. Disappointment is his destiny - that's the end.

Man thinks that he's free, but he is a prisoner. He thinks that he knows, but he's a fool. That's not too strong a word. In the light of things today you have to say: "Oh, what fools men are. The wisest and the cleverest and the strongest of them; what fools they are. They've missed the Way." He thinks he knows. He's a fool. He thinks he can do, and he does a great many things, but where does it end? In the hydrogen bomb. Terror, fear in all the earth, apprehension, holding of the breath, men at their wits' end. What to do? What to do? That's what he can do. The end of his wonderful, wonderful work, all that he can do, only leads to more problems - still more problems. He builds on sand, not on rock. His whole world is run by lies, yes, make-believe, pretence, falsehood.

One of the rarest commodities in this world is downright honesty - in politics, in industry, in commerce, in business, in society - downright honesty. Man can only succeed in this world if he misrepresents, or deceives, or pretends (I speak quite generally), if he mixes things a bit, he exaggerates a bit. What about all our advertisements? What a marvellous, marvellous world this would be if a modicum of what is said in our advertisements were really true! My, we should have reached utopia. We should all have immortal bodies. Well, well, the golden age would come if only half a dozen advertisements were true. It's true - that's a fact, you know. You just read them and, of course, you read them and you're captured and go off and buy this, that: food or medicine or something. And then you try it out, and afterwards, well, it hasn't done the thing that it was advertised to do. But man can only run his world like that. He can only get on, he can only make money, he can only get any success by these appearances and exaggerations.

There's a *lie*, you see, somewhere in the whole creation. And the lie has gone into religion. The charge that our Lord laid against the scribes and the Pharisees was in a horrible word - a horrible word: "*Hypocrites!*" - play-actors, pretenders, those who are making believe. "*Hypocrites!*" - false, false. Yes, the outside of the platter: washed, but underneath... the sepulchre painted white, but inside: *rotting* bones. The Lord saw through! It's a horrible story, isn't it, this story of man's deceived and lying nature?

Over against that, you see, Jesus says: "*I am the Truth*"; I came to bear witness of the Truth". His last, among His last words at the Cross, was His statement to Pilate that He had come to bear witness of the Truth and Pilate was so unfamiliar with *that* commodity that he said "Well, *what is truth?*" I - I'm not familiar with that. I - I don't know anything about that. What is it? What is that thing you call truth?" This world doesn't know what that is.

Truth, the *True* Witness

You see, it's a great spiritual, fundamental law. That is why I said that it is so important to note these things at the beginning, that this is an unveiling of Jesus in authority and in government and in just judgment, because it rests upon this. No-one has a right to exercise authority or judgment at all. No-one has a right to be in a place of government unless this can be said of them: "They are *true*. They are true - absolutely true, through and through. There's no lie in them. There's no falsehood in them. There is no question about them. There are no two things in them that contradict each other."

Dear friends, that is why the Lord Jesus came to the church's beginning. He started there, you see. "Judgment *begins* at the house of God," and He began this whole exercise of His Authority with the churches, with seven churches symbolic, of course, of the whole Church, and He stands before and He is really saying, "Look here, you are weak, you have failed, your testimony has broken down. The world is not feeling the impact of your presence. The powers of evil are making inroads into your life as churches, and it is because," (this is the implication) "it is because there's something *false* there - something false there."

You notice how again and again, in His messages to the churches, He raises this question of falsehood and truth- whether things are true. Oh, it is important for it to be like this about us - that we are *real*, that we are *real*, that we are *genuine*, that what we say is true, what we pretend or profess is *true* of us. It must be like that for spiritual power in this world.

If only the Church could recover itself from the weakness resultant from a *false* position - something that is not really true, "As the truth is in Jesus." If our representation of God's Mind were more *exactly* according to that mind, what power there would be - what power there would be. But as I said, as the creation at the beginning collapsed and went to pieces because a lie entered in, it's an abiding - an abiding fact that wherever there is anything that is questionable, doubtful, not true, not real, there will be, sooner or later, spiritual collapse. We have to be *built upon the foundation of the Truth* - the Truth.

Now, this so much explains, does it not, the very title of the Holy Spirit that Jesus gave Him: "When He, the *Spirit of Truth*, is come". "*The Spirit of Truth*" - the Holy Spirit is *THAT!* He is exact! He is particular! He sees through everything. And if you and I walk in the Spirit, we shall be very true, we shall be very real. There will be nothing that is doubtful and false about us. We shall be checked up on everything, upon maybe an exaggeration - maybe an exaggeration, it may be a pretence, a make-believe, anything that is not true, that is false, the Holy Spirit will check us up on that. Not because He delights to bring us into judgment, but simply because it is *so very important* for the building of that which is going to stand, abide, and go through, and go right through to the end, and come out triumphant at the end, it is so important that right from the foundation the thing should be *true*.

The Lord will take us down, take us down, take us down, all to pieces, and bring us right down to the bottom in order to begin with what is true *if* there's a superstructure that is unsafe because it is mixed or because it is not true. And we ought to be thankful to the Lord that He does that.

I am sure we would say: "Lord, let there be no falsehood in my position, no untruth in what I profess. There should be nothing that is not absolutely *real* in what people think about me." It's very important. You see, the Lord Jesus stands as He does, and as He may, to judge, and to be, to *be* the Measure because He is the true Witness - the true Witness. That is, He is the embodiment of the Truth.

Now, that is a sombre word. It's a searching word. It is not perhaps a very inspiring and uplifting word. But, you see, after all, this is a title of the risen Lord - a title of the risen Lord. *Why* did God raise Him from the dead? *Why could* He be raised from the dead? God won't raise a lie! God will never even resuscitate a falsehood! He was raised because He was the *true* Witness. He had, in His Own Person, borne a true testimony to His Father, and to the thoughts of His Father. It's a matter of Life whether there's truth, you see. Life can never go alongside of anything that's not true. Life demands the Truth.

We leave that then and go to this second of the titles:

"The Firstborn of the Dead"

"The Firstborn of the dead": what He has become in triumph over death.

This phrase "firstborn" is used, as you probably know, quite a number of times in the New Testament. In Romans 8:29 we have it: "that He may be the Firstborn among many brethren." The idea is here again and again in the New Testament, in that great resurrection chapter of 1 Corinthians 15, it's there again: "Christ is Risen, the First - the Firstborn, from among the dead".

There's a very interesting reference to this, which impressed me very much because I admit that I had not noticed it, or it hadn't struck me very forcibly before, in Acts chapter 26. It is great significance attached to it in Acts 26 and verse 23. Here is Paul making his defence before Festus, and the others, and this is what he says: "How that the Christ must suffer, and how that He *first* by the resurrection of the dead should proclaim light both to the people and to the Gentiles". He "*first* by the resurrection of the dead": the *first* Witness, the *first* Preacher, the *first* One to proclaim - it begins with resurrection; He is the *first* of a long line of preachers. Well, I am not going to dwell upon that and make much of it, but I'm saying that this phrase, "*the Firstborn*," again and again occurs in the New Testament.

Well, what does it imply? Well, firstly, of course, quite obviously, it implies that there is to be a succession. And here we are back in Isaiah 53: "He shall see His seed" - "He shall see His seed." He is the Firstborn. We're back again in John 12:24, the corn of wheat and the abundant result of it falling into the ground and dying: "The Firstborn among *many brethren*", "the Firstborn from the *dead*". Then, it means that all these, of which He is the First, the many brethren, the seed, the progeny of His resurrection, will share the same deathless triumphant Life. We're a family who have a Life which has proved itself already in the *first* of the family more than a match for death - great hope, great assurance, great comfort, wonderful truth that if we are of this company of the family of the many brethren, He has passed on the same Life to us as He has, which has so marvellously and gloriously

proved that death is not equal to it: "O death - O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" That comes, as you know, in the resurrection chapter: "Now is Christ raised" . We brethren, the many brethren, sharing the same death-conquered Life. We have it - we have it, if we are of this company, but it means a people of a distinctive character, not only possessing a certain Life, but people of a distinctive character.

The Old Testament illustration of this, as you know, is the Levites. You remember the story of the Levites and their inception, when the people broke down and worshipped the golden calf at the foot of the mountain. Moses came down and saw what had happened. He took the tent of meeting right outside the camp and then, standing at the door, he cried: "Who is on the Lord's side? Let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi went to him".

And the Levites, as you so well know, were taken as representative and in the place of all the firstborn of Israel, and became the "church of the firstborn One". Why? Because they *separated* themselves from that iniquity. They separated themselves from that sin, from all idolatry, from all disobedience, from all *corruption*. They separated themselves and went *outside* the realm where that *evil* thing was at work. It's a great type and illustration, but the many brethren, of whom our Lord is the Firstborn, constitute this church of the Firstborn - so different in character.

And so the context, the context is vividly appropriate to what we have here about the firstborn. You see, "Unto Him That loveth us, and loosed us, or washed us, from our sin in His own blood". It's a different character that is here in the firstborn ones. They take their character from Him. And, then, being the First born-again, He is in every sense the Prototype of the family. Paul's given us the great secret out of the heart of God from eternity past when he has said, "to be conformed to the image of His Son" - "conformed to the image of His Son" - in Resurrection, He is the Prototype of all the sons-to-be!

We hurry to the third title:

"The Ruler of the Kings of the Earth"

What He is in exaltation and vindication: "Ruler of the kings of the earth." A fuller, stronger title still is given us in the seventeenth chapter of this revelation: "King of kings and Lord of lords".

Now, at present this is not official and temporal, in a sense not literal: it is *spiritual*. It is a long term thing. I say this because I know the problem that arises when you say: "Jesus is on the Throne. He is Ruler of the kings of the earth, King of kings, and Lord of lords" - then - then - then: "Why this? Why that? Why are these men doing what they are doing, these rulers of the earth taking the course that they are taking, these kings of the nations? *Why* if Jesus is on the Throne?" Let us remind ourselves that this is first of all *spiritual*, and it's a long term thing. On His Throne, as Ruler of the kings of the earth, He will, over a long term, prove the utter, *utter* fallacy and falsehood of all their standards.

We, dear friends, here in this hall this afternoon, even younger ones, have lived through a period in which we have seen the lifting up of certain heads of rulers of this world. I could mention their names; I'm not going to: this one, that one, within our lifetime, who have lifted up their heads to take the government of this world - to take the government of this world. Their whole idea has been world dominion. One was going to bring all the nations under his government to be the dictator, not of his own nation only, but of all the nations, and he set himself to do it. And another one was going

to be the final Cæsar: to gather everything under his control. And yet another, we've seen them rise. We've seen them go so far and seem to be - *seem* to be in the way of doing it. But what has happened? The ignominious end of these men!

The oldest of us go back to others who did the same thing. What an *awful* end these men have come to: shame and dishonour! Yes, there's Someone on the Throne Who says: "The world dominion belongs to Me - belongs to Me." The Father has made *Him* Ruler of the kings of the earth, and no-one can take that place. It may be a long term and painful outworking, but there it is.

And it's happened like that right through history, you see. It happened with Babylon. It happened with Rome. It has happened with other empires. And it is right up-to-date, this - right up-to-date. God has given the Empire to His Son. He may let men go so far, but He only will let them go so far as He did Pharaoh, in order to show His superior might and strength over *all* that man can do and can be. That's - that's history, and that is still history in the making. *He* is the Ruler of the kings of the earth, but I said it's spiritual, in this way: that His Government is on *spiritual* things - I mean character, such a thing as truth.

You know, in the end, truth *does* prevail. In the end it does prevail. It's the only thing that stands! Men may set up a whole regime and system of lies - lies. And, oh, it's a *terrible* thing today to see how great world powers are based upon lies. Indeed, they don't seem to know what the truth is. They are laying themselves out to get their way by lies. That is so. But wait and see. Truth will prevail and the lying thing will go to pieces. He is Ruler of the kings of the earth.

So it is now, the day is coming. And this book of the Revelation shows us the day that is coming, when it will not be the long term business and not be just the outworking of spiritual things, He will come. And very swiftly He will arraign the kings of this earth and all the forces of this world. He will have the kingdoms before Him and He will pronounce the judgment and the verdict for eternity upon them. That day is coming when it shall be seen by all. We read this morning: "every eye shall see Him - all shall mourn because of Him - *and they which pierced Him*". That's a startling statement! They're dead 2000 years. Their dust could not be found in the earth. Their eyes shall see Him, they who pierced Him. They shall *see* Him - *they*!

Oh, yes, you can't get away from this One - can't get away from Him. Time, or any other thing, does not get rid of Him. In the end, you have to face Him. He is Ruler of the kings of the earth, because God has exalted Him and God has vindicated Him. It's like that. These are great things all bound up with His resurrection: titles of the risen Lord. They are titles of great comfort to the Church, of great instruction to us believers. They are titles of great terror to the ungodly.

The Lord give us new joy in contemplating the greatness of our risen Lord!