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The Significance of the Mother of Jesus

by T. Austin-Sparks

Transcript of a message given on 13 December 1970 at Halford House Christian Fellowship in Richmond, Surrey, England. Words which were not clear are enclosed in [square brackets].

For the meditation in Thy Word, that Thou would make that Word to us all that it is intended to be, for enlightenment, and instruction, and counsel, for correction, and if necessary, for rebuke, for exhortation, and for everything that the Word of God, the Word of the Living God, was intended to accomplish. May that be true here this morning, as we bow humbly before the Word. We yield ourselves to it, in the name of the Lord Jesus, amen.

We read some verses, a section of the first chapter in the gospel by Luke. The gospel by Luke, chapter 1, at verse 26:

"Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. And he came in unto her, and said, Hail, thou that art highly favored, the Lord is with thee. But she was greatly troubled at the saying, and cast in her mind what manner of salutation this might be. And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found grace with God. And behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call His name Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High: and the Lord God shall give unto Him the throne of His father David: and He shall reign over the house of Jacob for ever; and of His kingdom *there shall be no end*. And Mary said unto the angel, How shall this be, seeing I know not a man? And the angel answered and said unto her, The Holy Spirit shall come upon thee, and the

power of the Most High shall overshadow thee: wherefore also that which is to be born shall be called holy, the Son of God."

Verse 38: "And Mary said, Behold, the handmaid, the bondmaid, of the Lord; be it unto me according to thy word. And the angel departed from her."

This is one of the five pillars of Christianity, it is called the doctrine of the virgin birth. I am not going to speak about the virgin birth this morning, but I have to start here and weave my way through a very great deal connected with this to get to the real message that is in my heart, and I believe is the Lord's word for this little while. But having said that, that this is one of the five major foundations of Christianity, I leave you to put your finger on the other four because, although you have very long meetings, it would be the longest you've ever had if I went into these five!

Because it *is* of such fundamental and major importance, you know full well that it has been associated with a tremendous amount of controversy, it is one of the great theological controversial points of Christianity: the virgin birth. And more, *because* of its importance, it has become the occasion of a tremendous amount of *confusion*. I want you to keep hold of that word for a little while.

Confusion

There are few things, perhaps, which have been more *distorted* than this matter in historical Christianity, what is called Mariolatry - the worship of the virgin Mary - a *tremendous* distortion of the real truth in connection with this dear woman.

I don't know whether, or how many of you, looked at the proceedings of the funeral of General De Gaulle recently, both in Paris and in the village. The pageantry, the tremendous, the *overwhelming* amount of glamorousness, and all that sort of thing associated with this matter, the centre of which is really the virgin Mary.

If you have moved about in the world at all, especially in Roman Catholic countries, you know of this distortion, the place that has been given *to her*. She has been endowed with the attributes of *deity*, omnipresence, from far east to far west, far north to far south. She has the attribute of all knowledge. She knows things everywhere; she's appealed to everywhere. That's enough to say: endowed with the attribute of deity; worshipped! And put on the level with the very Son of God Himself, the Mediator.

Well, that's enough of the distortion of this thing. Why is it? Why this controversy? Why this distortion? The answer leads us very near to our message this morning. You know, anything that is of vital and primary importance in the realm of the things of God is *always* the object of satan's distortion. If you went through the five things that I've mentioned, and the other four, you would see. The distortion of the work of the cross of our Lord Jesus is a major matter. The distortion of the advent and baptism of the Holy Spirit; what confusion! Anything of very great importance to the Lord suffers in this way, so that it is not long before it is brought into the realm of *complete* confusion. And so it is here, over this matter of Mary, the earthly mother of the Lord Jesus. The confusion, the distortion, this master work of the enemy to give a *false* interpretation, and a *false* meaning, and a *false* value to a most important thing. There it is, remember that. Remember that.

Satan does not seek in the first place to *obliterate* these things, to wipe them out of existence, no, he doesn't try to do that in the first place. He goes round to do it, so to speak, as from behind and he does it by way of discrediting the thing because it is put out into a false realm. And he associates with it so much that *is* false, as in this case, that is not the meaning of it at all. That is *not* the meaning of it. You see, if we were having a week together, we could show on all these points, that the interpretations of these major things through the minds of men have brought them to a place of such confusion, that men are prepared to wipe the slate of the whole thing, give it all up, and say, "This is a terrible mess, let's get out of it." Have you ever had that temptation over things of the Lord? Just *cannot* understand, cannot grasp, cannot get right over this; so confused!

Isn't that true as to the doctrine of the Holy Spirit? Is it not *so* confused and chaotic in our time, that people are inclined to wash their hands of the whole thing and say, "Let's get back to something simple and true, and get away from the whole thing." And so they will not speak about the Holy Spirit. Out He goes! Do you see what I mean? It's like that, isn't it? This is the master work of the enemy.

And so that brings me to this matter of the *truth*, the *truth* about the birth of the Lord Jesus and the vessel through whom He came. What *is* the truth about it? And when you get to the truth, and you can put your finger upon the truth, my, how the clouds break! How everything opens up and you *see!* My word, that's something not to lose, that's something immense.

But you see, here in *this* thing, everything is being so linked with it, that it has become a complete contradiction to the truth in what I have referred to: all this pageantry, all this externality of earthly glory, all this pomp and ceremony, all this vestment, and all associated with it; the glorification of men and of things in this association.

When you come *back* to Bethlehem, *back* to Bethlehem, the whole of that is stripped off; what is Mary after all? What is Mary after all? Oh yes, she is blessed, but blessed because of the truth about her. But she is the object of special grace, "Thou art *graced*", said the angel, "thou art *graced*". You know what grace means. You're learning more and more the meaning of grace. I've heard it here this morning. Oh grace, what should we do without grace? When we are learning about ourselves, and those of us who have gone on longest, have the poorer, poorest idea of ourselves, having a view of ourselves that we never had at the beginning of the Christian life. We are down in the dust in self-abasement, and therefore worshipping because of *grace!* All of grace! All of grace! "Thou art *graced*." If she was something in herself, she wouldn't need to be *graced*. Look at the situation. Why, in the counsels of the Almighty who is here, on the scene, involved in this, the council for eternity are here: all the wisdom, the knowledge, the power of God is here, but in what form, in what vestment? A stable. A manger. A couple of despised people. Everything speaking of earthly poverty, earthly dishonour. Nothing of this world. No show. No glamour.

Alright, look at the One who is born here. "The Son of Man hath nowhere to lay His head" - His own words. Watch Him, follow Him through His life, where's the glamour? The earthly glamour? Where's the show? Where is it? None of it at all. You see? The *contradiction* associated with this thing, the truth. Well, we've come to the real point:

What Does Mary Signify?

What *is* the message of this woman? And it is in that thirty eighth verse; underline it, underscore it: "Behold the *bond maid* of the Lord...". The *bond maid of the Lord!* All there. Also translated the "bond servant"; the *servant* of the Lord. But what *is* it? The larger question: what is *true service* to God? Indeed, what is the *only* service to be rendered to God? By whatever means it may be, whatever way, what is the thing at the heart of service to the Lord?

Now, I've said once you get your finger on the truth, what an opening up! You get your finger on the truth here about Mary as the bond maid of the Lord, you go right back, right back over the ages, right back to the beginning. We pick up history, all the way through the Bible and history, and we're able to see one thing. One thing right at the heart, like a golden thread running through all that is there, just one thing. Focussing upon this woman here in Bethlehem and going on through your New Testament, and right on, and right on through these ages, lighting upon a place called Halford House. [That's it,] and embracing it and all true gatherings of the Lord's people, all true Christianity, governed by one thing, only one. But a *mighty* thing, so comprehensive of all time, of all realms, all ways of God. God's ways are just one way intrinsically. What *is this* that is here? What *is* the service of God? What *did* Mary do? What *was* the effect of her life? In what way *was* she the bond maid of the Lord?

The answer is so simple in words: *bringing in the Lord Jesus into His place in the creation*. Does that sound too simple? Go back then, you with your Bible, open it at the beginning and follow this all the way through the prophecies. The *whole* of your Bible is centred in this one thing: *God having His right place in the universe and then the creation*.

God Having His Place

Isn't that it? Read your Bible again in the light of that, over against a *tremendous* and many-sided activity of another sinister power to keep God out: keep Him out, thrust Him out, see that He does not come in. But wherever a servant of God may come, an apostle or anyone else, to bring Christ in, it means that then the battle begins and if possible that servant will be thrown out of that place or killed in that place.

Everything is centred in this: the Lord having the place that is *His* by right in His creation. That's the service of God, and there's no other, no other!

What are we here for? Oh yes, salvation of souls. But what is that? Is that something in itself, the beginning and the end of all things? No! It's to bring Christ in, a little more in that life, by that life; that one is to be a temple, a sanctuary, a place of His dwelling, and where that one is, *He* is to be! That will be conflict, that will be warfare, that will set up an atmosphere, won't it? We've found that out not by what you say, not because you're trying to argue, but because you're *there*. Just there. Something gets into the atmosphere because you've come into that place. Is that true?

The gospel put it in a very simple way, you know, it's the [product of profoundest] simplicity of all philosophy. He sent His disciples into the towns and villages, "whither He Himself would come". They went there to *bring Him*. That's all! That's apostolic service. But how immense this is!

You see how long we could take over this, going through our Old Testament, "Let them make Me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them". That's your first part of the Bible, isn't it? "That I may dwell among them," *because* being *offended*, offended, He had to withdraw because of man's rebellion,

man's complicity with the enemy who in his own mind had said, "No, we won't have God in this creation, we'll get Him out of this". That's the secret of his first activity: exclude God! "Has God said?" They will malign God, will tell lies about God, *anything* to get God out.

Go on through your Bible, the controversy circles round this one thing: *a place for God*. When it got to such a point that God had *no* place except in eight souls in the days of Noah, God drowned the creation. Then Noah built his altar as he said to himself, "The earth is the Lord's", taking the earth first for the Lord. It's the Lord's. That's the meaning of the altar, isn't it? The cross all the way through, but have you seen this? It's very necessary, very necessary.

But oh, what a *pathetic* thing it is, this, this contradiction and confusion in so, so many ways. You're going to be very patient with me, very kind to me with what I'm going to say, aren't you? I'm really trying here to get to the heart of one of our problems.

What we want (I take it you do) more than anything is that the Lord shall be with me, the Lord shall be in our midst, the Lord should have His place. Is that right? But you know, we're up against the most *intricate activities* of the most cunning in the enemy, to defeat that. How did he do it in the very first place? In the garden, what did he do? He pushed a woman in front of a man and upset the divine order and at that point deception came in. When divine order is upset, there's always deception and Satan knows it, by upsetting divine order. Perhaps I ought to have put it the other way: pushing the man behind the woman, same thing in another way, isn't it? Divine order, see?

When that which is the very principle of divine self-surrender, sacrifice, devotion, help, meet for the interests of God, when that takes over, takes possession, *asserts* itself soulishly, you may be sure deception is coming and the Lord is going to be limited. It's only one aspect of a very big thing. All the way through the Bible, these are the methods of the enemy: upset the divine order. Deception follows. You get a *false* position and the Lord's place is limited. He cannot be there.

Now, we could touch on many other things, as you know. I just touch that to show you that we're up against an immense power, the one object of which is to either keep the Lord out (that's why there's a battle over every soul that's going to be truly indwelt by Christ, a battle over that soul, over that life) or a battle over *more* of the Lord. We have not attained, we haven't got all, indeed, if you live to be as old as I am and to have been occupied with the Lord's things as much, you will realise that at the end you don't know very much. We really don't know very much. There's immensely more to be known, and there is a knowledge which brings the *Lord* in. There's so much more ground to be taken; you're in Joshua now, on the same principle, you see.

Well, I must leave it with you. Perhaps I've created some confusion, have I? Well, it's just an effort to show you dear friends that the true service of the Lord is not necessarily many kinds of Christian activity, but the *result* of them! Does this bring the Lord in? *Does this bring the Lord in?* Does this give a place and a way for the Lord? If not, we've failed in our vocation, our calling; we've failed in our service.

And so we come back to Mary who was marvellously, profoundly, and simply this: "Behold the bond maid, the servant of the Lord... be it unto me." What is it? "He shall come in, truly He shall come in, He shall have His place!"

You have to challenge your hearts continually, you have to challenge your heart as I have mine, "Does my presence in this world, *has* my presence in this world, does it mean a way open for the Lord? The coming in of the Lord?" That the Lord is there because you are there and I am there. Individually and collectively, is it the Lord, just the Lord that we meet, and people meet? A place for the Lord. It's the Bible! The whole Bible. The service of the Lord is securing a place for the Lord.

We shall finish with this reminder. The Hebrew word and the Greek word for this presence of the Lord is very instructive. The Hebrew: "that I may *dwell* among them, that I may dwell among them", the Hebrew is, "that I may *move* amongst them, move amongst them. Move amongst them!" The Greek in the New Testament now, the presence of the Lord is: "that I may be *in* them, *in them!*" It's nice to have the Lord moving about amongst you, but it's far better to have Him inside. Well, that's the New Testament difference from the Old, you see. The Old is external, the New is: He's within, a place for the Lord within.

Have I gone too long? I'm sorry. [Honour] the word, make it live and [be] fruitful. May we have one, and only one concern: to serve Thee in *this* respect, that Thy rightful place is secured and enlarged because we are here. In the name of the Lord Jesus, amen.