

Dying To Live – Part 3  
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He must increase, but I must decrease.

Some of you have been getting these Austin-Sparks daily emails called “Open Windows” and I wanted to start today by reading one. I believe this one just was sent yesterday.

He must increase, but I must decrease. (John 3:30)

What is spiritual growth? What is spiritual maturity? What is it to go on in the Lord? I fear we have got mixed ideas about this. Many think that spiritual maturity is a more comprehensive knowledge of Christian doctrine, a larger grasp of scriptural truth, a wider expanse of the knowledge of the things of God; and many such features are recorded as marks of growth, development, spiritual maturity. Beloved, it is nothing of the kind.

The hallmark of true spiritual development and maturity is this: that we have grown so much less and the Lord Jesus has grown so much more. The mature soul is one who is small in his or her own eyes, but in whose eyes the Lord Jesus is great. That is growth. We may know a very great deal, have a wonderful grasp of doctrine, of teaching, of truth, even of the Scriptures, and yet be spiritually very small, very immature, very childish. (There is all the difference between being childish and child-like.) Real spiritual growth is just this: I decrease, He increases. It is the Lord Jesus becoming more. You can test spiritual growth by that.

So I guess today I would like to challenge us all with something that I feel like the Lord has been working to challenge me on. And that is: Will you let Me continue to be the reduction of your life? Like Sparks said, the hallmark of true spiritual development and maturity is that we have grown so much less and the Lord Jesus has grown so much

more. Are we on board with that? Do we see that yet as progress? Is the reaction to our decreasing that of rejoicing because in our disappearing He has been exalted? Well, if we were truly confronted with the Lords increase, I assure you rejoice would soon follow.

I just want to suggest to you that it is only by the Lords mercy that He allows us to grow to be less, and that we have an opportunity to decrease in His appearing.

And by appearing I just me when the Father reveals the Christ who is in you, to you. Christ is in you, but to know Him you must see Him. To see Him you must turn your heart to Him. That's what I'm talking about. That's the appearing that will always cause in us a decrease. The Lord is never revealed in you with out the expectation of growth, of increase. In fact, the Father will not reveal His son in you without us allowing Him the liberty to increase. He never appears for "fun". He's not signing autographs, He is looking to expand the boundaries of His life in your soul.

So, back to my point. It is a gift of God that we are offered a place to walk out the journey of our decrease. That place is in Christ. He has allowed us to be broken in Christ, and not apart from Christ.

Matthew 21:44

And whoever falls on this stone will be broken; but on whomever it falls, it will grind him to powder."

I think it is necessary that we at the very least recognize something very awful about the Lord Jesus. And I say it like that because it was awful what He had to subject Himself to on our behalf.

2 Corinthians 5:21

For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

He is the only One that has ever and will ever die a death in the manner that He did. And please don't misunderstand me, I'm not

talking about His physical death, I'm not saying that He is the only one that ever died on a tree or a cross. I'm talking about the spiritual death that He suffered, not just for us, but also because of us. He died our death; He took our judgment and in Himself suffered the consequences. He suffered something that is so far beyond what we will ever be required to know; but in one terrible moment He bore in Himself what true death really is, a conscience awareness of abandonment by God. In that moment He entered in to the full awareness of what separation from God really means. And you and I hear today have never ever experienced that because that is what He suffered in our place. He bore it once in its fullness and faced the "grinding to powder" if I may say it like that, so that we could fall on Him and be broken together with Him and in Him. When One died, all died, and in God's great mercy we will never be faced with the devastating reality that Christ tasted for us.

So with our hearts turned to the Lord I hope that we can recognize something of the infinite grace of God. We have talked at times about and what the grace of God is, but first and foremost its not just words, it's a reality that needs to be experienced, but as we have said in the past when we cram that massive reality into weak words, grace is receiving a death we could never die and a life we could never live. And friends, the death that Christ died is something we could never understand in its fullness. I think if the Father were to reveal our true condition outside of Christ, we would probably commit suicide.

But by Gods grace and mercy, He is not doing that. Remember the verse we looked at last week? Ephesians 1:6 "to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved." Or again, I prefer the literal, which reads "by which He has favored us in the One being loved". But either way, by His grace, we are being favored in the One being loved.

In Matthew 8:12 (and in several other places) when the Lord speaks of a darkness where there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth, He knows what He is talking about. There is a realization of hopelessness, full and complete, but He says we need not worry about that, you can face this in my Son. You can fall on the rock and be

broken together with Him. You could never face the eternal hopelessness of your condition outside of my Son without your soul literally exploding. You could also never be made acceptable to Me apart from My having placed you in My Son. You require everything that My Son is, and that's okay because I will give Him to you. First as your death, and then as your life. Isn't that just amazing. If I were JW Luman I would say "Glory to the Lamb of the living God!"

So can you begin to see with me that it's only in God's great mercy that He has granted us the gift of "He must increase, but I must decrease"? This is not a punishment; this is a great gift. We can't understand the greatness of that gift because we still have a natural life that is working very hard to convince us of its sufficiency apart from Christ. But believe me, natural life is a broken and corrupt awareness. It's a cracked lens and offers nothing but distortion. The natural mind cannot know the things of God.

I'm pretty sure that Paul had a clear view of the Lord and in his letters with get a sense of the Lords perspective. In 1 Timothy 6:7-9 Paul says: "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out." Jesus says in Luke 12: "Therefore I say to you, be not anxious as to your life." So my position is just that we all begin with a misunderstanding of purpose and so we can't help but give ourselves to things which do not satisfy or benefit.

Do you remember the first chapter of Haggai? When the Lord says: "Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways! You have sown much, and bring in little; You eat, but do not have enough; You drink, but you are not filled with drink; You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; And he who earns wages, Earns wages to put into a bag with holes." Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways!"

I believe that He is trying to call our attention to the fact that maybe we're investing in the wrong place. Let's look at Isaiah 55.

Isaiah 55:1-3 "Everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. Why do you spend money for

what is not bread, and your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance. Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live.”

We can stop trying to build a personal kingdom on earth. Our only purpose in this world is to be a testimony, a living testimony. And if you are wondering what the testimony looks like, it would be the living witness of “He must increase, but I must decrease” working in your soul. The accumulation of things, whatever they may be, is not the purpose of our existence. Later on in that same chapter Paul says “But you, O man of God, flee these things and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, gentleness (basically saying pursue Christ). Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, to which you were also called and have confessed the good confession.”

So I digress, but my point remains the same. The Journey of faith, the journey of “He must increase, but I must decrease” is completely dependant on where your treasure is. Christ said, “For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also”. If Christ is your treasure, if faith is your reward, then there your heart will be also.

We read in Hebrews 11 that: Having become great, Moses by faith refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, having chosen rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than for a time to have enjoyment of sin; having counted the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking to the reward. By faith he left Egypt, not fearing the anger of the king; for he kept on as seeing the Invisible One.

I know I've read that a few times before but it's important because in Moses we see an example of where faith will lead you. Now Moses could have been called the son of Pharaoh's daughter but by faith he refused. Moses could have had the treasures of Egypt, but he counted the reproach of Christ greater than the treasure of Egypt. By faith, he kept on as seeing the Invisible One... and the testimony of Moses is “He must increase, but I must decrease”.

It's everywhere friends. This is the testimony of Moses, Paul, of Abraham, of Noah, all of them. Why? Because it's the testimony of faith.

And so we have this great opportunity ahead of us. A great journey that will forever have us facing our decrease in the appearing of His increase. Believe me, there will come a day when this natural body dies and I would suppose that we must all face (still, thank God, in Christ) but face none the less, all of the places in which we have refused to know Him. All of the places where are treasure was yet still found somewhere, anywhere, other than in Christ.

And on the heels of that, I don't want misunderstanding in my life, I don't want potential liability, or to be caught up in the sin that so easily entangle us. But in saying that, you and I must realize that we are the gateway for all of those problems. We are the host that gives entrance to these dangers into daily walk. I am the thing that causes me to stumble.

And so the solution yet remains the same: "He must increase, but I must decrease". Just like Paul I want to say: "For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out." And I just don't want to quote that, I want to KNOW THAT! I want you and me, all of us, along with the world around us, to diminish to point where we can say, as a confession of reality, that we have grown so much less and the Lord Jesus has grown so much more.

And just as much and I want that for me, I want that for all of you. I want that because that is what the Lord expects for His body, for His church, of which we are all members. In Isaiah 46:16 the Lord says. "I will bring the blind by a way they did not know; I will lead them in paths they have not known. I will make darkness light before them, And crooked places straight. These things I will do for them, and not forsake them."

This is the way of spiritual increase. It is the Lord Jesus becoming more and more and more. We don't need to put a lot of focus and energy on our decrease, because in the Lord Jesus becoming more and

more in us, I can assure you that we will become less and less. But that does not exempt us from seeking out the true grace and mercy of God's granting us a decrease in the appearing of His exalted Son.

Let me just end by reading once more the reality that T. Austin Sparks confessed.

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Amen.