

Abraham and the Law of Life

by T. Austin-Sparks

T. Austin-Sparks' sermon emphasizes Abraham's journey of faith as a model for living a life wholly unto God, free from natural influences and ambitions.

Scripture: Romans 8:2, Galatians 2:19

Topics: "Faith", "Friendship with God"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of faith in the life of Abraham, illustrating how true life in Christ is intrinsically linked to faith. He explains that coming to resurrection ground, as exemplified by Noah, leads to a life of faith, where all natural influences must be set aside to fully embrace God's purpose. The sermon highlights Abraham's journey of faith, including the challenges of ambition and the divine use of delay and contradiction, ultimately revealing that true friendship with God is found in letting go of earthly ambitions and trusting Him completely. Sparks encourages believers to seek God Himself as their ultimate goal, rather than the blessings He can provide, to experience the fullness of life.

Transcript

Reading: Romans 8:2; Galatians 2:19-20.

The next aspect of the sevenfold law of life is represented by Abraham. We are introduced to Abraham at the end of the eleventh chapter of Genesis.

In speaking of that aspect of the law of life represented by Noah, we were considering the necessity for being on resurrection ground, which implies that the whole ground of nature has been repudiated and for us lies on the other side of a flood, a baptism of death. We now regard ourselves, therefore, as being on resurrection ground, and, being there, we join hands with Abraham and let him lead us on and tell us what the next thing is in the outworking of life.

Life in Christ a Life of Faith

Here, in a word, we shall find the law of life is bound up with faith. When we reach resurrection ground as through Noah, we are inevitably on faith ground. It is well that we should recognize that at once. It is very nice to contemplate resurrection life: everybody will give some response to that idea; we shall not have any controversy or difficulty in accepting that. But let it be understood that resurrection ground carries with it inevitably and inseparably a life of faith. You can know nothing of life only along the line of faith, and it is

along the pathway of faith that life increases. These two go together; the one issues from the other.

Our last emphasis in our meditation on Noah was upon the little word "out". Noah's testimony, in building the ark, was to his being out of that realm of things. He was securing an exodus, a means, a way of getting out. By his building of the ark, he was declaring, in effect, I am not in this, I am out of this! So you are not surprised that the first word about Abraham is that the Lord said, "Get thee out". It is all of a piece.

But coming out on to resurrection ground means coming out on to faith ground. Noah typifies resurrection and Abraham faith. "Get thee out"! The life itself is a faith life. I do not mean by that the manner of life, but the very life itself is a faith life, and the faith which is the faith of the Son of God is life. Of course, that is not a profound utterance. You have but to reverse it to see how simple and elementary that is. Whatever is not of faith is always of the nature of death. Doubt is death, unbelief is death, lack of trust is death, and all things that are in that category. Questions, controversies, anything that is short of simple faith brings us to a standstill, brings under arrest. It is death. So then, the law of life in Abraham is seen operating along the line of faith, which faith worked deeper and deeper, producing life in ever increasing measure. These two things go together. The deeper the faith the stronger the life. Similarly the greater measure of life implies the deeper faith.

Here again we note that we are reversing Adam's evil. In all these cases, Abel and Noah and Abraham and all the others, God is working backward. He is reversing Adam's evil. When you come to Abraham, you see in him God's triumph over that basic sin of unbelief. These are figures pointing on to the true. In Christ Jesus all were gathered up, not in a figurative or representative way, but in a living, actual way, and Satan's triumph in Adam's deception and fall was completely reversed, completely undone; for Christ was manifested to destroy the works of the Devil. But even here it means, you see, the works of the Devil are being destroyed in something more than a merely figurative way. God is reversing the course of things and undoing Adam's mischief, correcting things.

Now, we must look at Abraham and sum up this life in two or three comprehensive words. I am not going to attempt to cover Abraham's whole life, not even in outline, but we can take out some of the main factors in this life of faith.

The Gift of Life is Both from God and Wholly for God

In the first place, it was a matter of going out with God alone. That is what I see to be God's meaning in what we speak of as "the call of Abraham". "The Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house" (Gen. 12:1). Thy country, thy kindred, thy father's house! In the sovereignty of God, Abraham was taken up to be the vessel of life; that is, in type, in figure. That life, the life of which we are speaking, is God's alone, and it must be lived wholly unto God. It cannot be taken hold of and used in any other relationship. It refuses so to be used. The life of God refuses to be brought into relationship with any other thing than God. Immediately it is so brought over, or immediately there is any attempt to bring it into another relationship, it stops, and the vessel in which it dwells comes to a standstill. That is exactly what happened with Abraham. God said, "Get thee out of thy country": but He also said, "from thy kindred and from thy father's house". It was inclusive, comprehensive, full and final. Abraham took the first step of faith and not the second and third. He took kindred and father's house with him and did not get very far. He came to a standstill, and there he remained until the rest of the Divine requirement had been brought about, or at least a large part of it. Then Abraham moved on: but even so he did not move completely into the Divine thought, as we shall see presently. I think you see the point.

This divine life which is in the child of God by new birth is God's life and God's life alone, and it cannot be related to anything else. It will not work with anything else. It only works in relation to God; God's thought, God's mind, God's will, and if that life is going to carry us right through to God's full end, then it has to be wholly unto God, and there all other relationships have to be set back. It must not be brought into other relationships. You see, this life is not just an abstract thing. It is in Christ Jesus and it is in the hands of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, we cannot separate these; we cannot separate the life from the Person, from the Divine Person. Christ is the life, and the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of life. So when we are dealing with the life, we are dealing with the Holy Spirit and we are dealing with Christ Jesus, and that means that this life, which is the very essence of God, has its own characteristics, its own forms, its own meanings, its own standards, its own objects. It has its own mentality, its own reasons, its own ways. It is something which has a way of its own, and a meaning of its own, and a mind of its own, and there is not another like it. It takes its course. All other ways, all other mentalities are other indeed, altogether other, and there is no correspondence between them. When God says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways"; that there is the difference as of the space between heaven and earth between your ways and thoughts and Mine, it is only another way of saying, My life is something altogether different from yours in its mentality, its judgment, its reasonings, its characteristics, its nature; different in everything, altogether other.

Well, what is the effect of that? It means that it cannot coexist or have fellowship with anything that is of nature. It cannot have any companionship with this other life of ours, with this nature of ours. The natural life cannot be a friend of the Divine life and the Divine life cannot be a friend of the natural life. They are in two different worlds. The natural life, the soul-life of man has Satanic elements related to it, and the Divine life has Divine elements related to it, and these are two different kingdoms altogether. Now, this is a fixed principle, that this Divine life demands its own direction and its own relationships. This Divine life demands what is of God wholly, and I see in "thy country, thy kindred, thy father's house" those things which suggest natural relationships and influences, and God cannot allow that in the presence of His life in us. Paul said, "When it pleased God to reveal his Son in me... immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood" (Gal. 1:16). That would have been human influence, natural influence, in relation to the things of God, and that is the principle here. So far as nature is concerned, this life with God has to be completely independent.

Now, of course, I have to be careful in saying that, because we say so much about the evil of independence. You see, I am talking in another realm altogether and I want to make that clear. First of all, anything that is in the nature of independence spiritually is wrong; I mean as amongst the Lord's people. It is a violation of the corporate law of God, which is also a law of life. Again, I am not speaking of the influence of what is spiritual. We need spiritual influences, relationships, and help from one another, and there must be no independence in that matter, no independence in the matter of what is of God in others. There are those who say, 'I must walk with God, I must know God for myself: I can take nothing from anyone else, I can submit my convictions to no one; I go on alone with the Lord in my solitary assurance and conviction.' That may be a very wrong thing. While we must know the Lord for ourselves, very often the Lord will make Himself known to us through others who are also walking with Him. A wrong kind of independence in these things works to the contrary and we may be utterly in deception because we will not walk spiritually with others and our aloneness not be an aloneness with God. It is a conviction that it is so, but it is an entire deception. That is one thing; but what I am talking about now is the influence of nature, not the influence of spiritual people and spiritual things which are of God. We need those influences and help and fellowship to go right through to God's end. But when it is a matter of natural

elements coming in - and they may be many; sentiment, the natural affection of others seeking to influence us, and so on - when natural elements come in to divert us from what we know to be the will of God; elements, that is, not born of a knowledge of God, not born of a close walk with God, so as to be the counsel of God to us through others, then the life of faith demands that all these shall be fully and finally set aside, and that we live, so far as our spiritual life is concerned, unto God, wholly unto God. That was the first test with Abraham and the first application of the law of life in his case. Would he go out with God alone, despite all natural influences? Would he respond to God's movement in his own heart without allowing natural considerations to influence him?

For a long time that was only partial in Abraham's case and therefore the purpose of God was lying under arrest and he was only partially moving in the Divine purpose. In the first place, he took his father with him and that brought him to a standstill, and not until his father died was there a further release as to God's purpose. His life was retarded so long as natural kinship remained to influence him. But all this has to be applied inwardly as well as outwardly. I am not just speaking of our relations, our families. True, it may be there that natural influences are brought to bear on us, but it is much more than that. There is within us a kinship, a relatedness to this earth, to nature. There is that in us which is always taking counsel with the flesh; fleshly judgments, fleshly reasonings, the working and influence of the natural mind, and we have to put it back and cut it off. All that is of the life of nature must stand back when we come on to resurrection ground to know life, because that life is essentially a faith life.

The Proving of the Heart

Now, the second thing in Abraham was the question of ambition as to the things of God here on earth. This will find us out. At length Abraham moved on. Natural influences, so far as relationships were concerned, were lessened, and he moved on and came into the land; the promised land, the fulfilment of great expectations, the thing for which he let everything else go, the thing for which he had launched out in faith. He came into the land, the object of his expectation and his new ambition, and what did he find? A land full of that which was very contrary to God's mind, and a mighty famine in the land, and no one to offer him even a plot. He had not so much as a foothold in it. I suggest to you that such an experience is a fairly good test of our ambitions. What do we expect when we go on with God, when we come right out for God? What have we in view? Well, the answer to that question will decide whether, in relation to God, we have ambitions for something on the earth. Do you get the point? You see, it is so possible to swing over your natural ambitions to spiritual aims. It is the same thing still at work and the only difference is the direction or sphere. You can be as ambitious in the work of God as you can be in the world, and it is the same natural ambition. It is the ambitiousness of nature. You desire - what do you desire? To see something, to have something, to be in something? Ambition for success: yes, once it was in the world, now the same ambition transferred to other things. If that were true in Abraham's case, what a test! It was a test of ambition. He got nothing, no not so much as a foothold in the land. He had to move to and fro, dwelling in tents. There was no immediate, seen response to his faith so far as that land was concerned. Under that test, he broke down; he went down into Egypt. What did his going down into Egypt imply? Some expectations! He had expected something different at the hands of God. He had to be taught that this life is a life of faith, and the more deeply inwrought that life is, the less shall we see to gratify nature, even in the things of God.

You see, it is very often to the children, the kindergarten, the elementary stages of faith, where there is not the capacity to take very much strain, that God has to give quick results and manifest signs. The marks of maturity are usually the withdrawing of outward manifestations and signs, the demand to walk with God

alone for God's own sake. It is a mark of graduation in the school of God that He can withdraw outward things. It shows that we have passed the test, as to whether we are ambitious in this life.

Well, Abraham in the first test, the first application of that truth, failed, but he blessedly learned his lesson. We must always give the Lord's servants full credit for every bit of spiritual gain. In the very next thing - and it is remarkable that the two incidents follow one upon the other - you see a marvellous and glorious triumph in that same realm. In Chapter 12 you have recorded Abraham's going down to Egypt, and that being for him the way of death, and not the way of life. Ambition proved to be the way of death. This is immediately followed in the succeeding chapter by the quarrel between the herdsmen of Abraham and the herdsmen of Lot for pastures and waters. Abraham came to Lot about the matter and said, in effect, Do not let us quarrel; for what is there to quarrel about? (Are we wanting something for ourselves? - that is the purport of his words). Now Lot, look all round, lift up your eyes, survey the land: see the very best of the land and take your choice of it. Just leave me what you like, leave me the rest: you take your choice. If you decide to go in this direction or that, then I will readily take the other. Lot lifted up his eyes and saw all the Plain of Jordan, well watered and fruitful, and chose it: and they separated themselves the one from the other. On Abraham's part it is a triumph over ambition. Immediately God comes in and says, "Lift up now thine eyes... all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever. And I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth..." There lies the way of life, after all. The way of earthly acquisition, ambition, gratification, of having something here, became the way of death for Lot. Abraham let go, so far as this world was concerned, let go for God, and God came in.

So Lot was separated from Abraham. What has happened? Is this the end of that kinship that has all this time been a cause of limitation? It looks like it. In the day that it happens, in the day when this natural influence is cut off, God comes in with a new range of life. It is a true principle. It is a mark of going on when we can come to the place where it is true before God that we have let go all the prosperity and success even of Christian work and Christian ministry as men would count it. To be able to let go the great opportunities and the great advantages that may be had amongst Christian people, and the prizes that can be grasped, and to say, It is all right, the Lord knows; it is for Him to give or withhold: I am not going to make a line for those prizes: I am not going to allow those things to influence my walk with God: ambition is not going to dictate my course, is a sure sign of growth. It may not seem here on earth to mean very big things; wide open doors and all that, but somehow you may take it that there is life there, spiritual influence there, something that is counting there. In the end it will have counted. But this does sometimes first of all necessitate that conflict with ambition where all those suggestions and influences have to be laid low, and we come to the place where we see the way of life is to go on with God though it costs us everything. The law of the Spirit of life works in that way.

The Divine Use of Delay and Apparent Contradiction

Now, in the third place, we see in Abraham's case life working along what is apparently the way of death in two senses, namely, the Divine way of delay and of contradiction. God promised Abraham a son, and, having made the promise, went away and left the matter there for years; the delayed fulfilment of promises serving to drive faith in God deeper down and to prepare the way for something so transcendently more of God in Abraham's life. The longer the delay, the more the realization of a hope must be of God, and the less and less possible is it of man. That is the thought. God does work in that way, whether we like it or not. Whether we cherish the thought or not, it is true. When God is really working according to the law of life, we have to be brought into this realm of faith where even the promises of God seem to be suspended and have no immediate fulfilment. God is going to be true. God will be no man's debtor. There will never

be any balance against God in the end. We may settle that. God will come up to all that can be rightly and truly expected of Him, and there will be at last, even if it be at long last, an overwhelming justification of God and attestation of His faithfulness. We are all permitted to take an attitude such as this: Lord, when I stand before You at long last, You have to be clear of any ground I could lay to Your account of having failed my trust. It is essential to God that He should be in that position. His very nature and character requires that, in that day, those who have trusted in Him shall be able to say, Lord, You have not failed in one thing, but You have done even more than I had a right to expect, even a right in Christ to expect. God will come up to that mark, but, in order to deepen the life, to strengthen the life, to produce Godlikeness, to destroy the power of death and the work of Satan, and to reverse the mischief of Adam, God has to extend us in the matter of faith even over His promises. He does it. It is a mark of growth, of maturity. Such then is the Divine ministry of delay.

Then, further, we have the Divine ministry of contradiction. The son was given at last: but what then - "Take now thy son... and offer him..." A contradiction; God giving and taking, promising fulfilment and then seeming to wipe it all out with a stroke. Well, what does it mean? What lies behind this? I think, beloved, that the heart of things here is that God is always wooing to Himself, that the heart may be for Him and not for things. Even if the promises in their fulfilment are delayed, God is seeking to draw the heart to the place where it is Himself, rather than what He does for us, that is its quest. If there is that ministry of contradiction, its purpose is to woo us from things to Himself.

God, All in All

Well now, you have summed up the whole aspect of this law of life. What is the law of the Spirit of life? How and where does it operate? On this ground, that, from start to finish, it is the Lord Himself being everything. That is the heart of the matter: the Lord Himself everything. "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house." Get thee out - out from ambitions as to things here on earth even in relation to God. Get thee out of things, as things which God can do and God can give. Out to where? To God Himself. And do you recognize the issue - oh, wonderful thing! - "Abraham my friend." My friend! What a lot lies behind that! All letting go for God, being wholly for God, letting God have His way, trusting God where even God seems to be denying and contradicting Himself, issues in our coming right into the heart of God. My friend! Is that life? Is that the way of life? For that to be said of any of us at last, in the way in which it was said of Abraham, surely would be life? Surely it is something to be coveted more than anything else? If ever we reach that place, we shall say, This is life indeed! This is worth everything! Yes, life is on the basis of friendship with God.

What is friendship with God? Well, it is, what we have said: not friendship with the world; not friendship with our own natural life, its influences and considerations; not friendship even with ambitions, projects and achievements in the things of God; not friendship with what God can do for us, but God Himself. That is all. That being so, it means that, if the Lord delays or contradicts, we nevertheless trust. You see, friendship is the blotting out of all enmity. It came in from Satan through Adam, and was blotted out in Abraham. What does that mean? Blotted out by faith. Faith will destroy enmity, root and crop. It is progressive, of course. Abraham had to live a whole lifetime in this way, but he came out as God's friend.

And we are in the way of this life, which is the way of this faith, and I do trust that we are steadily and surely moving beyond the place where there is enmity. Is there any enmity in our hearts to God? Are we disappointed with God? Are we sore about God? Is there some tinge of bitterness, is there some reserve? Is there aught of that kind? We know quite well that is working death in us if it is there. That is not life. The

only way is to let that life work in accordance with its own law of faith. Why are we disappointed? Why are we feeling sore? Are we quite sure it is because the Lord has not proved Himself to be what we expected? Are we quite sure it is that? Are we quite sure that it is not because things have not gone as we wanted them to go, that ambition is disappointed? Are we quite sure? If only things had worked out as we desired them to work out, how pleased with God we should be! How readily we should say, God is faithful, God is true; we love the Lord! But now things are not working out, things are not easy: things are hard, things are going against us. It is because of the things we are feeling bad. I believe, beloved, if we come to the place where our objective is the Lord, where He is our goal; where it is true that "My goal is God Himself, not joy nor peace, nor even blessing, but Himself my God," we are in the way of life. But it is the creeping in of these other considerations and influences from our natural life that spoil it all. You see that this issue is a very clear one.

For us, the way of life demands that we shall get before the Lord again, and say, 'Lord, though all my earthly prospects fade, though all my ambitions are disappointed, it is You I want. You are my ambition, my goal. If I have You, these other things will count for much less.' I believe that, as we can get there - and not many of us have got a long way on that road - but as we can get there, we find the secret of life, of joy, of release. I am not so sure that we shall not find that God is able to give back the prizes here, the Isaacs. He withdraws them that we may turn from them to Himself, and when He has us for Himself, He may give something here. He may give blessing here on this earth; but let us remember that His desire is to have us for Himself for His own sake, and, as we fall into line, life is found there. It is the way of life. The law of life demands that everything should be for the Lord, without any other influence or consideration - the Lord Himself.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/t-austin-sparks/abraham-and-the-law-of-life/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net