

Faith Unto Enlargement Through Adversity - Part 7

by T. Austin-Sparks

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the church's role as a vessel of resurrection, light, and spiritual wealth amidst adversity.

Duration: 46:29

Scripture: Isaiah 60:1, Matthew 6:33, Romans 6:13, 2 Corinthians 8:9, Ephesians 3:8, Philippians 4:19, Colossians 2:2-3

Topics: "Adversity"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of keeping the light of God's word available for all. He talks about the surprises and revelations that come when we have a hungry and ready heart to receive the truth. The preacher encourages believers not to be put off by physical, religious, or denominational barriers, but to be open to the abundance of God's word. He also highlights the role of the church in being vessels of light, transmitting knowledge and spiritual riches to the world. The sermon references Paul's prayer for the saints to have their hearts enlightened and emphasizes the impact of the church in spreading the light of God's word.

Transcript

As we renew our occupation with the message of Isaiah chapter 60, there are just two preliminary words I want to say at this point. First of all, if there are any who were not with us this morning, let me say, lest they should be a little mystified, that we sought to make it very clear that in a great deal of the Old Testament scriptures there is a double meaning. There is that which is historical and therefore largely related to Israel and their future, and there is that which lies behind the message to Israel and is the larger message for the people of God in a spiritual way for now and for the future.

We are not going to argue that out again, but we are this afternoon occupied with the second of those interpretations. We are not spiritualizing everything historical out of existence, but we are seeing that the historical has most certainly a spiritual meaning, which is not historical, but which is eternal. Then the other thing that I want to say is just a following up of the last word this morning.

We are going again to use the word church, and we are going to point out that the things being said concern and relate to the church. Now here in this quite small company there are those who come from many places, some from very far off, you will be probably going back there, others from points nearer or

farther between those distant places, and you in your places are scattered, and many of you are just individuals or two or three, and you might just have somewhere undefined in the back of your mind you are speaking. Well, that is for the church.

He is talking about the church. All that is concerning the church, but then I am just one, lonely one, somewhere, or we are only just two or three in some remote place. We can't be regarded as the church, and therefore to some degree all this can hardly apply to us.

Now I am quite sure it is necessary to say a corrective word about that, and the best way of doing it is to remind you that when Paul wrote his final letters, mainly to and about the church, he did not write them to any one collection of Christians in any one place, nor did he write them just to several large companies of Christians. They were for all Christians, whether in companies or scattered and alone, and they have remained that ever since. And Paul thought comprehensively and inclusively of all believers, and just called them the church, that's all.

They may have been just here and there or in many places just one or two or a little group, or they may have been the larger assemblies, but they were all the church where he was concerned, and what he had to say applied to them all. For this reason, as we shall emphasize presently, he never at that time thought of them finally as on this earth. He had got completely away from earth conditions, so far as geography and time were concerned, from the merely physical, and he was seeing the church as one thing from the standpoint of God and heaven.

And so this whole matter of scatteredness and individual place and position didn't come into the thing at all, only in this way that every fragment, wherever it was, was a part of a whole as in heaven, so that everything applied to every fragment. And the practical value of that, dear friends, is this, that as I said this morning, we are all, wherever we are and however alone we may be, involved in all that the church is involved in, and that you may be in a remote place alone, and that you are bound up with all that relates to the church, that is happening to the church, that the church is knowing, that the church is suffering, that the church is called to, you're bound up with it, you're in it, you're not apart from it wherever you may be. Necessary for you to grasp this and take that back with you, and say, I am here as though alone or with another in this remote place as much a part of the whole, and the church is that group of honor over any other group.

That's what it means. And in the spirit and in the heavenly, you are always in the whole congregation of the church. You may not see them, you may not have perhaps the extra benefits of those personal fellowships and association with all the others on the earth, but you are in the whole church wherever you are, a part of the congregation.

You see, we are come to the general assembly and church of the firstborn ones, and that was not, that we was not just a few somewhere in one place or a big crowd in one place. That is all the children of God. We are all come to the general assembly, church of the firstborn ones.

So what we say this afternoon is not to be regarded as something said to an imaginary body called the church meeting somewhere. It is said to us all wherever we are. Now having said that, let us come back to the message which we get through Isaiah chapter 60.

Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. We have said quite a bit about the ground and the nature of this light. And now we go on to ask and in brief seek to answer the

question, What is this light? What is the light which is come? And the glory which is risen.

And I have no hesitation in saying inclusively that it is that which has peculiarly and particularly come through the instrumentality of the apostle Paul. I know of course that much light has come through others. But the full light concerning and for the church, the spiritual Israel has come through Paul.

And it is gathered into or stored up in his full and concentrated ministry through his last letters. The final letters of Paul, that is his church letters, are undoubtedly the light which God has given concerning and for the church. That is the light which has risen.

And that is the glory which has come. Those two words are characteristic of those final letters. Light and glory.

Not only are the words themselves there but the truth is there. What light! You find no such light anywhere else in the Bible. Indeed you are amazed at what this man came to see.

Light shining right back into eternity Paul. Light shining right on into eternity to be. Light shining right down onto this dispensation.

How great is the light! And as for the glory, again it is a characteristic word but it is a characteristic feature, isn't it? Unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus. What glory has arisen through that ministry? Let me safeguard this by saying that it is not all the light that has come, nor all the glory, but in its fullness, its meridian, it has come through this channel. Well, let us look at it.

First of all, it is light and glory concerning the church's calling to be the resurrection vessel of the Lord. That is an early statement of the Ephesian letters. Remember, here Paul is dealing with the church.

In other places he deals with the individual and refers to the individual's union with Christ in death and resurrection. That is the peculiar message to Corinthians, for instance, because there it has to do so much with personal conduct and personal character. But when you come here to these last great letters, especially Ephesians and Colossians, the idea of Paul is all the time connected.

And when he refers to our being quickened together and raised together, he means that's the church. It is a quickened and raised church. And as such, it is the vessel of the resurrection, the vessel of the resurrection of Christ, the vessel of the resurrection power.

Now, of course, there can be no church without individuals. Therefore, these things have their personal application. So then the apostle says that this light which has come, which has risen upon us, this glory which has appeared concerning the church is to make us know that we might know the exceeding greatness of his power according to that working of the strength of his might which he wrought in Christ when he raised him from the dead.

That is for the church, inclusive of all individuals, but the church itself is a resurrection vessel to be the embodiment of the exceeding greatness of his power. No one of us individually, nor any number of us, just as detached and unrelated individuals, can know the exceeding greatness of his power more than we can know any other aspect of his fullness. But it is easier to realize how the church, the great company of the elect right through all the ages, its pilgrimage and its warfare, with all that it has had to encounter and does have to encounter, with all that is set against it, how necessary the exceeding greatness of his power is to get that church up and out and clear and emancipated and heavenly established people.

But here it is, here is the light which has come, the glory which has arisen, that the church, my dear friends, you and I, wherever we may be as a part of that whole, are by this illumination told that we are of the vessel of the resurrection, that is, of the exceeding greatness of his power. I don't know how much that comforts you. I don't think that it's comforting you very much because you all look very miserable.

But if you had been with me during recent six weeks and seen the terrible, heartbreaking state of Christians in spiritual limitation and weakness and all that is set to keep themselves and how little there is that can make it otherwise, you would get very near to where I've got the point of despair over this matter. May I say here that this conference is coming out of my experience, the whole of it. This is not just the subject brought up for the conference.

Every bit of this conference is very near to my own experience borne of the past months. And this, I say again, that if you really did know the state of the Church in this world, the state of Christians and the desperate situation, the need, the limitation and the lack of that which would bring them into greater fullness, you might despair. You might even raise the major question, does God really mean to have His Church in fullness? Are we not really attempting something impossible? Have we not committed ourselves to something that cannot be? Is it not going to break us, shatter us? Is it right, after all, that this is what God wants? The answer is, the life has been given.

The life has been given. It has come, this life, that this is what God wants. And, blessed be God, because He wants it, the power is there for it.

And it is the power of resurrection. Perhaps we are wanting too much all at once. Perhaps we are impatient.

But God is going to have it. The vision has been given of a Church filled with glory at the end. The life has come.

That is how it's going to be, spiritual fullness at last. God is not going to be defeated. And the Church is the very vessel or sphere of the power of resurrection. You and I will know that in so far as we apprehend this truth by faith that we are a part of that and we are on that ground.

We stand there. We shall come into the good of this power of resurrection. And it will operate in us wherever we are.

It's the life that has been given, the calling of the Church to be the vessel of resurrection, life and power. Therefore, arise, shine. Thy light has come.

Glory of the Lord has risen upon thee. Now that, as you recognize, was the first thing we said this morning about this light. That here in Isaiah 60 we have the other side of the captivity.

The other side, so to speak, of the grave of Israel. Their grave of exile having been opened and they having been called out on resurrection ground. The word is, thy light has come.

So, you see, it's bound up with resurrection, this light. And so Paul's letter to the Ephesians begins with that. You hath he quickened and hath raised us together with him.

And unto us is the exceeding greatness of his power as in the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. Then, the second thing about this Isaiah message which finds its spiritual fulfillment in this ministry of Paul is the

Church called to be the vessel of light. The light for all.

Unto the nations. This morning we saw what that light meant, how it worked out, how effective it was or is shown to be in this chapter. What tremendous impact it registered unto the ends of the earth and how the nations began to flow toward that light or are pictured as flowing toward that light.

How effective it is. Now, it is perfectly clear, if not from this ministry of Paul, that that is the vocation of the Church to be the vessel and the vehicle of this light. The light which all need.

Paul's great prayer for the saints here is for light. The eyes of their heart being enlightened. They might know.

Then you know the gradual unfolding of that light what a wonderful fullness it is. How many beams there are to that light in his prayer. What is to be known by the spirit of revelation opening the eyes of the heart.

The Church is definitely called to be and that means you and me. The vessel of light. That if people are wanting to see and wanting to know well the Lord transmits knowledge through us.

They will find it amongst the Lord's people. Now, that is not generally true but this is the calling of the Church. That wherever people are really seeking to know the truth to know the Lord to come into the light the Lord has a vessel where that light can be found.

It's a challenge as well as a statement of faith. It is something that we must quite definitely lay hold of, I think. You see it is God's intention therefore it must be possible.

Therefore the Lord provides for what he wants. And it is not necessary for any one of you dear children of God if you are standing by faith in the good of the heavenly calling and vocation it is not necessary for any one of you not to be a vehicle of light to others. Indeed it is a failure in your calling if you are not such.

Others are not seeing the light through you. I am not now thinking specifically in terms of your moving about with your Bible trying to give people light but being the light. The Church is to be the light which is given.

We are to be all light in the Lord. And the enemy's great work is to try and bring in darkness and shadows. The darkness and the shadows coming by anything that he can build to eclipse the light that the Church is called to be.

He has greatly succeeded in a very large degree in doing that and he's always at it. It's strange, isn't it? But as soon as there comes anything of difference disagreement division lack of love there's a shadow. There's a shadow.

There's darkness. So the enemy is very busy to destroy the Church's testament in this way as a testimony of light. Although, dear friends it's a very blessed thing for us to really contemplate to consider and to apprehend that given the conditions required there can be light which radiates as in this chapter to the ends of the earth and people flow to it.

He said this morning the flowing the flowing is because there's something to which to flow. Something that answers a need. Oh, the Lord put us in that position where need is being met all the time right out to the uttermost bound.

And then the next thing in this chapter as we pointed out is the wealth to which reference is made. You have probably or possibly looked through the chapter again in this connection and have recognized what a lot is said here about wealth. Wealth.

So much wealth that the whole world seems to be enriched by it. Everywhere. And this is no fanciful imagination.

No, dear friends, this is something that the Lord really has provided for because he has called to it to have a people here on this earth wherever they are who are the channels of the enrichment of others in all directions. There shall go out through them spiritual riches. Now you see how true that is in Paul's ministry, don't you? What riches have been disclosed to us through him.

A man who himself was overwhelmed with the wealth into which he had been brought. He would cry all the depth of the riches. He would speak of the unsearchable riches of Christ.

And he has given us a life concerning a great deal of that wealth, hasn't he? Look again into his ministry from that standpoint with that thought in mind what wealth there is here. Ought we to be poor? Ought we to be in a state of spiritual penury? Ought we to be living so that it's difficult to make ends meet? Ought that to be our state or the state of the church as sadly enough it is largely the case. Ought it to be in the light of all this wealth? This unsearchable, inexhaustible wealth that has come to life through this man alone Look at it again.

Surely you are familiar enough with these vessels of light in his letters. Realize that you have been taken out of your depth. The phrase in this chapter in Isaiah the 60th chapter the abundance of the sea shall be turned unto thee.

The abundance of the sea shall be turned unto thee. It's a phrase which intimates as perhaps nothing else might intimate how vast are the resources that God has uncovered. If you read this week about the return of the fishers on the east coast of our own country so great, so immense was the haul that a whole fleet of fishing boats had to wait for hours because there were no berths for them.

So many had come in already they just could not cope with this and the fear was a great haul our fish would have had to be pulled back into the sea well that's only a little spot on this earth after all mere microcosm of the whole you can't cope with the content of the sea or the abundance of the sea but well but well and is that exaggerating? Is that exaggerating? Well I've been trying to cope with it for upward of forty years and I'm conscious yet that I'm well nigh drowned in this sea I mean every time you come here in the spirit you realize that this is still beyond you. I can't cope with the wonderful light as to the counsels of God before this world was. Can you cope with that? Can you cope with all that is said here about what is going to be in the ages of the ages? It's beyond us all together but out of that fullness out of that fullness you and I are called to be enriched for the sake of others.

Church is called into this wealth how wealthy should we should be? Ask the Lord if you don't understand this to open your eyes to your inheritance in Christ. The church is called to be the vessel of resurrection the vessel of the light which has come the vessel of the wealth that has been disclosed. And here again both in Isaiah 60 and in these letters of Paul it is a matter of government government.

There's something here just catch the picture King shall come to the brightness of thy shining you shall in a word you shall have power authority government here are the kings here are the rulers here are all these

people who are supposed to be in the place of authority and government and they're all bowing at your feet they're all bowing at your feet they're all going down before you surely that is superior authority is there anything about that in Paul's letters? Well there is isn't there?

Let us and his own right hand part above all rules and authority every name is named yes even over principalities and powers and world rulers of this darkness and spiritual host of wicked men the church is called to that position we have a lot to learn yet about that place and power of government ruling of ascendancy spiritually but here we are saying what the light has shown and brought to us is that that is the church's place according to God's mind that is our place the place of spiritual government ascendancy power in Christ oh that we did actually know more about it in practice but here it is may we be moved tremendously realize this is not something to which we are to climb by struggling we have been brought there by Christ he hath seated us together with him in the heavens he hath

raised us set us far above all that is our place by right and I think one thing that you and I need to learn though we've got to be very careful about this, a lot of people have got themselves into trouble in this very matter and have developed a phraseology and what not nevertheless we are not to be put off by that sort of thing one thing we have to learn is how in prayer together in our prayer times whether we be two or three or larger companies, how to really stand in our place of authority of government we are all the time beseeching and imploring and entreating and reaching out and striving and struggling to get somewhere and we very rarely take the position that is ours in Christ to govern situations and spiritual forces here we are called to that, to rulership in a spiritual way

and it doesn't call for love and stride and language and phrases and voices, it's a spiritual position but it's a definite and positive exercise that is to be made by us together as the church authority over other authorities that are at work in this universe and then one other thing as we close for the present you notice the universality of things in this 60th chapter of Isaiah how far reaching it all is, how comprehensive thy son shall come from far thy daughters from the ends of the earth, the nations the nations of the earth it's very comprehensive and extensive it's universal isn't it this ministry the value of this life so far reaching and when you turn to Paul's ministry well, there we are this is not something just a little few in some corner or a number of corners this is

something for all something for all, oh God deliver us from exclusiveness God deliver us from tying up what he has given to us, to ourselves and to just little companies here and there God make us know that he has planted us right in the midst of the universe, right in the midst of the nations and that he has given us enough for all his people we do constantly need to watch this matter lest we should preserve things unto certain people who like this sort of thing no no, this life has been given for all we must watch carefully against everything and everything that stops us from seeing that all are in the way of heaven and that it is available for all for the church's life is universal that is for everyone and everywhere and there is enough of it enough of it, dear friends we are not going

to lose anything certainly we are not going to run out of resources if we enlarge ourselves to all the Lord's people the real way of our own enlargement is the enlargement of our hearts to the Lord's people.

Be careful then and watchful against all that which is ever the propensity of people who get light to reserve it for certain narrow circles hold it into those limited realms. Oh do always remember that it is not only for people who have seen it and responded to it, to be precise we're always many of the Lord's people are in danger of interpreting things in this way but you see we've seen the light we've got the light and we've

come out by the light that we've received and these other people well they're where they are they're in this and they're in that well they're not in the light and the effect of that is pernicious.

It is destructive to the very thing for which the church exists no the light is for all as the love is for all it is for all and keep the open heart, keep the open heart and the open mind it's amazing how many really hungry and longing people there are just shut up where there is no light you've got to be always watchful that the light is available for them all I think it's a warning note that is very necessary. Oh let us be enlarged because the Lord does not make his sun to shine upon the good only and the light you see, the light does good to very bad people very evil people are getting good from the sun the Lord doesn't say only the good people are going to have my sun have the light, have the sun no, no, it's available for all and we must keep it there if the light has come, the glory has arisen and it's like the sun it's like the sun for everyone and we get surprises don't we oh we get surprises I, with shame say that I've had some startling surprises some people some dear woman with make believers thick as pink and everything that would set you back make you keep away and yet contact beginning speed and a heart that is hungry and ready that's not exaggeration that's not fiction, that's true surprises how hungry heart and ready heart hidden behind things that would repair, we must keep the light available for all and never be put off I've spoken of physical things but even other you see ecclesiastical things religious things denominational things, anything you like don't be put off don't be put off don't allow your life to be held from anybody because of these complexes what perhaps you think does not the Lord's full cause, nevertheless keep open to all you will be in the way of surprises and you will find that there will be wonderful responses to the light if only you make it available from very unexpected quarters oh, the light the light is for all it's a universal light this light that is, it is to be available for everyone it's a large thing a large thing so the sun shall no more be thy light, nor the moon the Lord shall be thy light that's something very much bigger than natural bodies of light isn't it, how great is the Lord how great is the Lord, if our sun is great through the illumination and the warming of the whole earth sometimes capable of doing it at any rate how much more so the Lord the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee don't keep it to yourself don't tie it up in any compartment arise shine for thy light is glory of the Lord

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