

'Have You Understood All These Things?'

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the critical importance of spiritual understanding for entering the Kingdom of God, using biblical examples and teachings.

Scripture: Genesis 12:2, Psalm 119:18, Matthew 3:2, Matthew 11:28, Matthew 13:1-3, Matthew 13:51-52, Matthew 26:31-35, John 2:23-25, John 3:4-6, Revelation 12:10

Topics: "The Kingdom of God", "Spiritual Understanding"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the critical importance of spiritual understanding in his sermon 'Have You Understood All These Things?'. He reflects on Jesus' parables, which were delivered during a significant crisis in Israel's history, highlighting that the Kingdom of God was being established while the old order was being set aside. Sparks warns against merely intellectual acceptance of these teachings, as exemplified by Nicodemus, who despite his knowledge, lacked true spiritual insight. He stresses that true entry into the Kingdom requires a spiritual rebirth and surrender to the Holy Spirit, especially in times of crisis. The sermon concludes with a call to ensure that one's understanding of the Kingdom is rooted in spiritual revelation rather than mere intellectual assent.

Transcript

We will read again the Gospel by Matthew, chapter thirteen, verses one through three:

"The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side. And great multitudes were gathered together unto Him, so that He went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. And He spake many things unto them in parables, saying, 'Behold, a sower went forth to sow.'"

And verses fifty-one and fifty-two:

"Jesus saith unto them, 'Have ye understood all these things?' They say unto Him, 'Yea, Lord.' Then said He unto them, 'Therefore every scribe which is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, which bringeth forth out of his treasure things new and old.'"

When we read these parables of the Kingdom as given by the Lord Jesus and the many other things which He taught, we are in danger of looking upon them as something in themselves. For instance, we take these parables of Jesus and teach them to the children in the Sunday school, just as stories told by Jesus, and perhaps that is how we read them ourselves. They are very interesting stories.

In Matthew thirteen there are seven of them. Seven very interesting stories, and in other places in the Gospels, there are many more. We are all familiar with the three stories in the fifteenth chapter of Luke. The story of the ninety and nine sheep and the one that went astray. That is a very interesting story. We have heard many sermons on that. Then the story of the woman who had a necklace with ten pieces of silver on it. It was given to her by her husband, when they were married. And one day one of the pieces of silver fell off the necklace. She lit the lamp and swept the house to find it - very interesting story. Then the story of what is called the prodigal son, everybody knows that story. And so with all these teachings of Jesus, we read them as something in themselves, and we forget the most important thing of all.

The teaching of Jesus was given in a day of very great crisis, perhaps the greatest crisis in the history of this world. That is until the day when Jesus comes again. That will be the greatest crisis of all, but Jesus was giving His teaching in a day of very great crisis. The crisis was this: there had been a people in this world who had been the center of everything for thousands of years. That people had been the center of God's interest in this world. All the other nations of the world were watching that people. There was a sense in which that nation was the center of all the nations. What happened to that nation affected all the nations. God had chosen that nation. God had revealed Himself to that nation. God had given to that nation all the wonderful truth that is in the Old Testament. God had raised up the greatest leaders in history to lead that nation. He had given them the greatest prophets that men have ever had. He had given to them the greatest king that ever nations had had. What a lot God had done for the nation of Israel. From the day when He put His hand upon Abraham in Ur of the Chaldees, and had said to Abraham, "I will make of thee a great nation.... And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Gen. 12:2, 22:18). What a wonderful history it was from that day right up to the day when Jesus Christ came into this world.

And now with the coming of Jesus Christ, all that is brought to an end; that nation is being set aside by God. God is rejecting Israel. It will not be long now before Israel ceases to be a nation. Their city will be destroyed. Their great temple will be overthrown. Their priests will be killed and scattered. And from that day until now, they would have no city, no king, no temple, no priest, no altar, no sacrifice. That all has happened, and Jesus knew that that was going to happen. And all these parables were prophecies in relation to that, and He was giving them in connection with that great crisis. He was saying, 'Now the end of your whole history is coming. All that which has made up your life is going to be brought to an end, and an entirely new order of things is going to be brought in and put in its place.'

So the parables, as they are called the parables of the Kingdom, related to the passing of one kingdom and the bringing in of another to take its place. With the passing of that one kingdom and the destruction of all that had to do with it, John the Baptist came on the scene, a voice crying in the wilderness, a great multitude going out to hear what he had to say, and what did he say? "Repent ye: for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand" (Matt. 3:2). That was the message of the forerunner of Christ. When Jesus came from the Jordan, having been baptized, and began to preach, He said the same thing. He said, "The Kingdom of Heaven is at hand." And that was the message of the apostles. As Jesus was about to go from this world back to the Father, He spoke to His disciples after His resurrection, and it says that He was speaking to them about the things of the Kingdom. On the day of Pentecost, the great message was the message of the Kingdom. And when the apostles went away over all the world they were preaching the Kingdom. When the Apostle Paul was at the end of his life in prison in Rome, a number of people came to see him in his prison room, and it says he spoke to them concerning the Kingdom.

At the end of that great letter to the Hebrews, everything is gathered up into this. All that the writer has been saying in that wonderful letter is gathered up into this statement, "Wherefore, receiving a Kingdom that cannot be shaken." The literal tense of the word is this: "Wherefore, being in process of receiving a Kingdom, which cannot be shaken." And the great triumphant cry at the end of the Bible in the Book of the Revelation is this: when all the story is told the cry goes out, "Now is come the Kingdom of our God, and of His Christ" (Rev. 12:10). See what a large and important place this matter of the Kingdom has in the Word of God. What a great thing it is to be in the Kingdom of God. What a terrible thing it is to miss the Kingdom of God.

Israel, as a nation, missed the Kingdom of God. Jesus said a most terrible thing about them, that the children of the Kingdom would go into outer darkness. There would be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. I ask you, is not that true for the last two thousand years where Israel is concerned? Israel has been in the outside darkness for two thousand years. Israel's history for that time has been one of weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. We know the terrible stories of Israel's history right up to recent time. Oh! how Israel is hated. Their city is divided in two, and on one side of their own city is a people who hate them and want to destroy them. All this, because they lost the Kingdom of God. It is a terrible thing to miss the Kingdom of God. But on the other hand, it is therefore a wonderful thing to be in the Kingdom of God. Now we come back to where we started last night. May I remind you of what we said then: If the Kingdom of God is a very great and important thing, if it is a terrible thing to miss it, and if it is a glorious thing to be in it, we must have the secret of getting into the Kingdom of God. You notice how these two things are always put together by the Lord Jesus. Here is the Kingdom of God, and the way into the Kingdom of God is by SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING. Because they had not spiritual understanding, Israel lost the Kingdom. They could have had spiritual understanding. It was not because it was not possible for them to have it, they could have had it just as well as anybody else, but they were unbelieving and disobedient. And because of their disobedience of unbelief, their spiritual eyes were closed, and they could not see. They lost the Kingdom, because they did not see.

Now keep that in your head for a few minutes. Jesus spoke these parables, all seven of them, and then He challenged His disciples, "Have you understood all these things?" Everything to do with the Kingdom hangs upon this matter of SPIRITUAL UNDERSTANDING.

Now let us move over to a very familiar part of God's Word. The Gospel by John, chapter three. You know it is a very convenient thing to have the New Testament divided up into chapters. However, sometimes it is a very unfortunate thing, and here we have an instance of that unfortunate division. Chapter three really ought to begin at verse twenty-three of chapter two. I am glad to see that you have got your Bible, that helps me so much. Now, verse twenty-three of chapter two, "Now when He was in Jerusalem at the passover, during the feast, many believed on His name, because they beheld the signs which He did." Before we go on, let us ask this question: Do you think that that is true faith? They believed because they saw His signs. Is that good enough? All right, we will leave it there.

Let us go on. "But Jesus did not trust Himself unto them, for that He knew all men, and because He needed not that any one should bear witness concerning man; for He Himself knew what was in man." Now note: 'now there was a man... He knew what was in man, and He did not trust Himself to man.' "Now there was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews: the same came unto Him by night, and said unto Him, Rabbi, we know that Thou art a teacher come from God; for no man can do these signs that Thou doest, except He be from God." But Jesus did not trust Himself to him, for He knew what was in man. But what did He say? Jesus answered and said unto him, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee,

'Except a man be born anew, he cannot see the Kingdom of God.'

Now we will see whether Nicodemus was seeing or not. "Nicodemus saith unto Him, 'How can a man be born when he is old? Can he enter the second time into his mother's womb, and be born?'" And Jesus did not answer his question or explain anything to him. He did not commit Himself to him. Jesus answered, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, 'Except a man be born of water and the spirit, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit'" (John 3:4-6). All right, now Nicodemus, who is he? What is he? He is a representative of all Israel. In the person of Nicodemus, that night all Israel was represented. And to all Israel, in the person of Nicodemus, Jesus said, "You cannot, you cannot. You cannot see and you cannot enter. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. In order to see, and in order to enter the Kingdom, you must be born from above. Naturally, you are a man of the flesh. Only spiritual people can enter a spiritual kingdom. Only spiritual people can see that kingdom." And it is true for Nicodemus.

When Jesus had said these things, Nicodemus said, "Oh, how can these things be? I do not understand this. I do not see what you are talking about. How can these things be?" Jesus said, "Art thou the teacher of Israel and understandest not these things?" There was nothing of all the history and all the teaching of Israel for thousands of years that Nicodemus did not know. He knew all the Old Testament. He knew all that Moses had taught and written. He knew all that was in the Psalms. He knew all that prophets had written. He knew it all. You could not have taught Nicodemus anything about Israel's history, and Israel's doctrine, and yet this man had no ability or capacity for seeing the Kingdom of Heaven.

I am going to stop there for a minute. That is a very solemn thing. It lies behind why I am here in Manila in these days. I have not come with the idea that I can give you any new teaching, I expect whatever I might say, somebody here would be able to say, 'Well, we have heard that before.' Somebody would say, 'Well, that is not new.' That is not the point, dear friends. There is all the difference in the world between knowing it all here, and seeing it with your spiritual eyes. Now I say this is the most solemn thing. One of the most tragic and sad things that has come into my life has been this: I have known people to come and accept all the teaching that we could give, and to profess to believe it, and then to go out and preach it, teaching it in various parts of the world. And if you had seen them and heard them, you would have believed that they knew it all, and then afterward they have so acted as to deny it all. Just to repudiate it all by their conduct and their behavior and by their way of life. I have known that to happen in more than one case, and it leaves you asking very big questions. They seem to have taken it all. They seem to have believed it all. They talk to other people about it everywhere. And then they have taken a course in life which denies the whole thing. And their whole position and teaching afterward is a contradiction of all that they profess to believe.

What is the trouble? You can only conclude that after all, they did not see it. They saw it in their intellect. They accepted it with their mind. They taught it with their natural ability. But they never really saw it. You know, if you have once really heard the voice of the Son of God, you are never the same again. Many believed on His name, because they saw the signs. But they were like Nicodemus. They thought they understood. They would have said that they understood, but Jesus did not commit Himself unto them. He knew what was in man.

Let us look at this man Nicodemus very closely. He is a very intellectual man. He has a fine brain, he is a highly educated man, he is a devoutly religious man, he is a teacher of other people, and he is a lot more than that. Everybody thinks that Nicodemus is a wonderful man. But Nicodemus did not see the Kingdom

of God. It is not a matter of intellectual power at all. That may be very useful in other matters. It is not a matter of education. It is not a matter of being very religious. Nicodemus was all that and much more. What is he?

Now we come to this thing that Jesus said to Nicodemus, "The wind bloweth where it listeth, thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." What does that mean? What did that mean to Nicodemus? What does it mean to us? Have you been in a great storm of wind, on the land or on the sea? Have you been in a hurricane? A really bad one? When the wind really blows, what can you do about it? Can you withstand it? Can you resist it? Can you say to it? 'Oh, I am not going to be moved by you?' Can you say to the wind, 'Oh, who are you? You are nothing?' What can you do about it? You cannot do anything. You are utterly helpless. You are just weak before the power of the wind. You are as nothing before that mighty storm. What is the only thing that you can do? Surrender, let go, you say, 'It is no good, I cannot do anything with this. I must just let the wind have its way.'

So is everyone that is born of the Spirit. The wind bloweth where it likes. You cannot say, 'Today wind you blow this way, and tomorrow wind you blow the other way.' The wind takes things into its own hands and blows where it likes. And you can talk to the wind as much as you like, but it will take no notice of you. So is everyone that is born of the Spirit. What has Nicodemus got to learn? What have you and I got to learn? That the Spirit of God is the Sovereign Spirit of God. And the only thing to do is to let go to the Holy Spirit. You will never see the Kingdom, or enter into the Kingdom, until you have surrendered to the Sovereignty of the Holy Spirit.

I am going to close with this point. You know the disciples were men who had a lot of self-confidence. When Jesus said to them, 'All of you will be offended because of Me.' And Peter, "this night, before the cock crow, thou shalt deny Me." Peter pulled himself up straight. He said, 'Though all should be offended with Thee, yet will I not be offended. I will go with Thee even to death.' Now note what the writer puts there, the writer puts this in, "Likewise also said all the disciples" (Matt. 26:31, 34, 35).

They were all people with a good deal of self-confidence. They believed that they could do wonderful things. And if they were put to the test, they would come through it all right. But look at the sad story, when Jesus was taken into the judgment hall, even before He got to the judgment hall in the garden, when Judas betrayed Him, and the soldiers took hold of Him, it says they all forsook Him, and fled. Now Jesus is crucified. What a poor lot of men they are.

We hear two of them speaking as they walk to Emmaus. And the stranger draws near, and hearing what they were saying, He said: "What manner of conversation is this that you have as you walk, and are sad?" And they stood still, and looked at Him, "Are you only a visitor in Jerusalem? Do you not know what has happened there in these days?" And He said, "What things?" And they said, "The things concerning Jesus the Nazarene, He was a prophet mighty in Word and in deed before God. We had hoped that it was He Who should redeem Israel, but our rulers condemned Him and crucified Him!" I think we could take it that those two represented all the others.

What had happened? All their expectations had gone. All their hopes were disappointed. All that they thought they believed had broken down. We say, 'the bottom had gone out of everything.' Dear friends, that had to happen. The Holy Spirit could never come until that had happened. Until these men had entirely lost all confidence in themselves. Until these men had come to see that what was in their heads

was not in their hearts. They had heard it with their ears, and seen it with their eyes, but they had no spiritual understanding. They had to come to that position before the Holy Spirit could come.

There always has to be the devastation of the natural man, before the spiritual man can be born. Before we can have the spiritual understanding that leads us into the Kingdom, we have got to have our own understanding brought to an end. Many of you here tonight are thinking that because you have got a good brain and a good education, and that you are very religious, that is a guarantee of your seeing the Kingdom. You are suffering from a great illusion. Only spiritual men and women can see and enter the Kingdom of God. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; but that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I say unto you, 'You must be born anew.'" What is true about the beginning of the Christian life, that is, entering into the Kingdom, is also true about everything in the Kingdom when we are there. We can know nothing of what is in this Kingdom, only as we are growing spiritually. Very often our intellectual life goes ahead of spiritual life, and when that happens, we have to come back a long way and start again. We sometimes think we know a great deal more than we really do know. Only a life in the power of the Holy Spirit learns the things of the Kingdom.

Now, I am going to stop. I told you I was not going to give you any new truth, everybody here could say, 'We know all that', but how do you know it? Do you know it because other people have said it? Do you know it because you read it in the Bible? Do you know it because you have studied it as you study other subjects? Or, can you say, 'Truly the Spirit of God has revealed in my heart what is in that Book?' And can you go further and say, 'The Spirit of God is continuously revealing in my heart the things of the Kingdom?' Now, I must say one more important thing, and it is this: We are in just as big a crisis as Israel was in the days of Jesus. It may be that the Lord knows what is coming on us very soon. We are so often in danger of saying, 'Oh, it may happen there, but it will never happen to us.' What has happened in China, of course, will not happen in the Philippines. I beg to suggest to you that it has happened once in the Philippines. It can happen again. It can happen anywhere in the world.

There is a great unrest in all the nations. Men's hearts are failing them for fear. Anything can happen almost any day. It could come this way much more quickly than you would believe. If all the outward forms of Christianity were removed, what have you got left? If you could not have your lovely meetings and enjoy your beautiful spiritual fellowship, what have you got left? If you could have no more teachers, what have you got left? That is the mark of the crisis. The crisis is, what have we got in our heart? What has really been revealed to us by the Holy Spirit? What has become so much a part of our life that you cannot take it away without taking our life away? The end of this dispensation is going to be marked by crisis like that. And that is the big question. How much have we got by the Holy Spirit? "Have you understood all these things?" Make sure that you have spiritual understanding.

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