

Joseph and the Law of Life

by T. Austin-Sparks

The law of life in Christ Jesus is the principle by which we live a life that is pleasing to God, characterized by spiritual discernment, faith, and service, and it brings us to the throne through suffering and humiliation.

Scripture: Romans 8:17-18, 2 Corinthians 4:17, Philippians 3:10, 2 Timothy 2:12, Hebrews 12:6, James 1:2, 1 Peter 4:13, 1 Peter 5:10, Revelation 3:21

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Suffering And Triumph"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks delves into the life of Joseph as a representation of the spiritual journey towards reigning with Christ. Joseph embodies principles such as living all unto the Father, spiritual discernment, the resurrection principle, and unwavering faith amidst trials. His life reflects the path of suffering, rejection, and humiliation leading to exaltation and service. The sermon emphasizes the importance of spiritual preparation through suffering and the ultimate destiny of reigning with Christ despite facing opposition and suffering, especially from carnal Christians.

Transcript

Reading: Romans 8:2,17. Philippians 3:10.

We now come to the last of the seven out-workings of the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. We have followed the stages of that operation as illustrated for us in men in the book of Genesis, from Adam to Jacob; and now we come to Joseph, the seventh and the last. Joseph gathers up into himself all the preceding six and carries them in himself to the final fullness of life.

Let us ask whether in Joseph's case there was the first thing, namely, everything as unto the Father. You see, it is just on that matter that Joseph is introduced to us. The beginning of the narrative about Joseph is that Israel loved Joseph more than all his sons. Why was this? Because, as you will see manifested very soon after, Joseph had a special concern for the father's interests. He took up that first thing - all as unto the Father.

Did Joseph further take up the matter of spiritual discernment and understanding in respect of what would please the Father? Was not that the cause of the trouble between him and his brethren? His brethren were doing things very contrary to the mind of the father, and Joseph saw and felt how dishonouring this was to the father. He discerned what was wrong with his brethren. There was trouble about it, and he himself sought not to walk thus, but to walk well-pleasing unto the father, in the spirit and not in the flesh.

Then you can clearly see how the resurrection principle was operative in Joseph's case. His life was largely based upon that principle. Did he go into death? Yes, but he knew resurrection. It is a great factor in Joseph's history, the resurrection principle.

As for faith, if ever a man had his faith tested, Joseph did. All through those years in Potiphar's house, in the prison, in the dungeon - oh, how great was the test of faith! The Psalmist says that his soul entered into iron, the word of the Lord tried him. Yes, faith was both called for and tried, and it is wonderful how he trusted God. We see no trace of bitterness, resentment, rebellion; faith is triumphant in Joseph.

Yes, he is a true son. The spirit of sonship is there, in his giving of himself in service for the House of God, as represented by his brethren. He was concerned for his brethren's well-being. He went to see how they fared. He took them bread. The great goal of his life was service to his brethren as is seen later in Egypt.

Well, it is quite clear that Joseph embodied all these former things: and then what? Then he carries them through; through suffering to reigning, through rejection to exaltation, through humiliation to the throne. Oh, beloved, if the life of the Lord Jesus in us has a free way, it will produce all those things. That life will take the way which is all unto the Lord spontaneously. It will take the way of growing spiritual discernment as to what is of the Lord and what is not, and you will never have to say, You must give up this, and not do that. The law of the Spirit of life will teach what is not the mind of the Lord. It will separate us from the world, and we shall find that we are separate. It will not be a case of our having to give up the world, but of the world giving us up: we are out of it, we are strangers in this world. The law of the Spirit of life produces that. Test yourself by this law. If you can be happy, comfortable and satisfied in this world and in your own natural life, then you have serious cause to question whether the life of the Lord Jesus is in you at all. You will find that, as that life works in you, you will more and more be a stranger here. You will find yourself more and more, in spirit, outside of things, and sometimes you will be subject to the most terrible shocks.

Yes, you realize how far you have moved from that world by going on with God. What a far-removed world it is! That is the working of life. It is going to be like that. It is going to make for difficulties, but that is how it is going to be. The law of the Spirit of life will ever more and more widen the gap between you and the world and this life here on this earth. It is bound to do that. It will inevitably put you outside. Then, of course, when you are in that position, what have you to count upon, what support is there for you but God? He has become your life, your resource. The world's pleasures have receded and He has become your pleasure. For everything you have to look to Him; and that is a life of faith. No longer is your satisfaction here. But life brings it all about, brings you to the place where you discover God as your exceeding great reward, as Abraham did; God, El Shaddai, the mighty pourer-forth of fullness.

The Throne and True Destiny

I must come to Joseph very closely. All this working of life along these various stages, bringing spontaneously these various things to be the realities of the child of God, is all moving toward one destiny, one end. This law of life, given free course in us, is going to bring us to the throne. It is going to issue in the throne, in reigning with Him. But how? Through suffering, through humiliation, through rejection. That is the way of this life to the throne. This is what Joseph sets forth.

The Unique Relation of the Chosen Vessel to God

But notice that Joseph had a very special place in the father's affections. It is as well to establish that before you begin to take up the trials of Joseph. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth," and Satan always

contends against that. When we are in difficulties, in sufferings, in humiliations, in rejections, there is always a voice at our ear to tell us that the Lord does not love us. So it is as well to notice that Joseph had a very special place in the affections of the father. Why? Well, for the reasons that we have already seen. First of all, he was the result of that double labour. The father had laboured twice over for him. It had been a very costly thing to bring Joseph in; and the Church, which is Christ's Body, is the fruit of the deepest anguish of the Father's heart. God was in the agony of securing the Church. It is the Church of God. What a wonderful statement! So often it is termed the Church or Body of Christ, but here the designation is "the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28). That is why the Church is dear to Him in a special way. But not only because the Church is the result of His double service or agony or labour is this so, but also because it is the fruit of His Spirit, that which comes out of the travail of His Spirit, that which answers most deeply to His innermost being. It is a wonderful thing. That is how God views the Church. He does not view us as we are in ourselves, but He views us as we are in Christ and will be in eternity. A marvellous thing!

One most astonishing illustration or foreshadowing of that is in the case of the compelled utterance of Balaam over Israel, where Balaam was not allowed to speak his own words, but compelled to speak God's words; when under compulsion which he could not resist, as he looked from the mountain across the valley where Jacob was spread abroad, he said, "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob". Look at Jacob, look at the life in the wilderness, look at the rebellion, the murmuring, the turning back in heart to Egypt, the unfaithfulness, and, in face of all that, this astonishing statement right from the very heart of God forced through the reluctant lips of an unfaithful prophet: "He hath not beheld iniquity in Jacob." What grace!

So the Lord looks upon His Church as the fruit of grace, as the fruit of His travail, and the Church somehow answers to His heart in a way that is difficult for us to express. "Christ loved the church." He loved, and loves the Church, because, in some mysterious way, in the Church He gets what His heart desires. May we be inspired more deeply with the desire that He should have it in us. There, you see, is the placing of Joseph with the father.

The Outworking of True Vision

Then what follows? Suffering, rejection, humiliation! But this is not a contradiction of what we have just said, not a denial of the father's love. That the Lord Jesus went the way of the Cross was no argument against the love of God for Him. Not at all! Why did Joseph suffer? How did Joseph suffer? Well he was hated of his brethren to begin with. He suffered their hatred. Why? Well, there are two sides to that. On the one hand, he suffered because they were carnal; on the other hand, because he stood against that which he perceived to be the way of grief and dishonour to his father. This is a difficult thing to say without incurring misunderstanding: nevertheless it is a true position. That which really goes on according to the law of the Spirit of life, and in which that law is operating, will have spiritual discernment in respect of carnality in even the Lord's children, the Father's family, and, because it has such discernment, will inevitably come to a place where it cannot accept that, but has to repudiate it, has to stand against carnality in the people of God; and immediately you do that, you are ostracized, you are regarded as thinking yourself superior. You are cut off and put out; you are rejected; you are made the object of sneer and reproach; you come into suffering. Carnality hates to be exposed. Well, that is why Joseph suffered, and that is the way of suffering. It is standing for God's best, which ever means standing against that which is less than God's best.

Then, you see, there was this further thing with Joseph. His aspirations were too high. His heart was set upon a throne. He dreamed dreams about a reigning life. These principles are wrapped up in a very human story. The Lord is not one to give Himself to painting artificial pictures. Were we writing this for the sake of bringing out spiritual principles, we should write it very differently. The Lord, for His part, tells the story in very human terms, and He just lets us have all the details of the unfortunate way in which Joseph went to work with his brethren. But, nevertheless, hidden behind this very human story, in which all the defects of this one are seen even while he is standing for the highest thing; hidden behind the human story are principles. Behind those dreams and the telling thereof, there is a principle. The throne is in view as God's intention and purpose for those who will go all the way for Him. The throne is God's destiny for that life which has come out from Himself. It must, if it has its way, come back to its source: it must return to the One from whom it came. The only thing that can come back to God is His own life, that which is of Himself, nothing else. That life has been given to bring us through the sanctifying process of suffering to the throne. That is the destiny of that life, and it was that principle that got Joseph into trouble. Oh, this reigning life, this throne life, this overcoming life, what hostility it provokes - You evidently think you are going to be something special, something better and higher than everyone else! In such terms will men rail at you.

The Animosity of Satan to the Chosen Vessel

I think there is something deeper than that about it. If Joseph was a type of Christ, and there is no doubt that he was, he was destined, like Christ, to come to the throne. But there is someone else who has aspired to that throne, someone else who will make things impossible for the aspirant to that throne, someone else who will stand at nothing to make the life of those called to that throne a life of suffering and agony. I think, lurking in the shadows behind this whole scene, there was ever one who saw what this was illustrating, what this was prefiguring. I think Satan can always discern Christ anywhere, even in a shadow, in a figure; and this was, in a figure and a shadow, God intimating that there was One who was coming to the throne most surely. Satan is against that and he will use all carnal means to make that impossible and to frustrate that: and here were carnal brethren giving Satan just the ground that he required to turn upon this one whose eyes were toward the throne. His aspirations were too high for Satan. If the Church has aspirations like that, according to God's intended purpose, the Church will have a bad time at the hand of Satan, not only directly but through carnal Christians. The greatest obstacle and hindrance and cause of suffering to those who are going right on with God will be carnal Christians. You will suffer more at the hands of the professing Church than you will at the hands of the world, if you mean to go right on with God. This is a suffering way, the way to the throne.

The Spiritual Preparation Wrought by Suffering

But then, you see, God was in the sufferings of Joseph. We see the necessity of the suffering under the sovereign hand of God, as being that which was to prepare him for the throne. We reign if we suffer; but not because of the mere fact of suffering, but because of what the sufferings accomplish in us. The sufferings of Joseph were effecting great things in preparing him for the throne.

He had to learn how to serve, because service is the mark of the throne. When at length he came to the throne, it was to serve his brethren. Let us not think of our eternal destiny as being just a life of idle leisure. The glory of it will be service. "His servants shall serve him." He had to learn service and he learned it in a hard school. Potiphar's house was the school in which Joseph learned to be a servant. His was a very hard and difficult school - a servant down there in the house of an Egyptian; a child of a prince with God, the son of Israel's heart, learning subjection in service in Potiphar's house; emptied of everything in order

that he might learn how to reign and how to have fullness without pride. Emptied to be filled; humiliated to be exalted; serving in humiliation in order to serve in exaltation. The sufferings were effecting something. I cannot go over all the sufferings of Joseph, but there they are as the way to the throne.

Joseph represents, then, the true spiritual Church and its destiny, which is, to reign with Christ: and in the meantime its pathway to the reigning position is the pathway of rejection, of suffering, of denial, of humiliation, and that largely at the hands of the carnal elements amongst the people of God, the unspiritual.

Well now, what more can we say? We have reached the end when we have reached the throne. We see the way of life, we see the working out of life.

A True Foundation and its Issue

I think the last thing that I would say by way of repetition and re-emphasis is just this, that, in the first place, we have to make sure that we have received Christ as the life and as our life. "The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." To have received the gift and then, as we go on, to remind ourselves of the exhortation "Lay hold on eternal life"; for the whole thing is so grimly and terribly withstood that at times it would be easy to accept death. I mean that literally. There are times in the life of the Lord's people when Satan offers them death and makes them want to quit this scene, to accept an end of everything, to say, It is all finished! and to begin to ask the Lord to take them out of things altogether because they have come to a place of despair. Sometimes you get there. I do not know whether you understand what I am saying: Satan stands at nothing. He gets them under depression and wants them to accept death. Thus, again and again we have to lay hold on life by an act of faith, and as our attitude is one toward life, one which lays hold on life, one which responds to the law of life, one which goes on with that which is bound up with that life, that life will bring us through all its successive stages of development. That very life in us, which Christ is in us, will prove not only the hope of glory, but the realization of glory in the throne. There is that in you and me which is destined to bring us to the throne if we will let it.

May the Lord teach us how to comply with the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus.

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