

'Looking Unto Jesus'

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of looking unto Jesus and keeping God's end in view, adjusting our lives to His ultimate purpose.

Scripture: Proverbs 4:25

Topics: "Divine Purpose", "Focus on Jesus"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the importance of focusing our gaze on Jesus as the ultimate goal and prize of our faith. He warns against various distractions that can lead us off course, such as looking back, around, or inward, which can hinder our spiritual progress. The sermon highlights that our journey is not just about personal salvation but about aligning our lives with God's greater purpose. By keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus, we can navigate through life's challenges with confidence, knowing that He has already paved the way for us. Ultimately, Sparks encourages believers to adjust their lives in accordance with God's eternal purpose, ensuring that every decision reflects this focus.

Transcript

"Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Make level the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established. Turn not to the right hand nor to the left" (Proverbs 4:25-27).

"Therefore let us also, seeing we are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:1,2).

There is a goal; there is a prize. We have been called with high purpose - a purpose so great that the Spirit of God has considered it worthwhile to fill the Bible with the truth of it and with the continuous urge in relation to it. For the Bible from beginning to end has to do with a course in relation to a goal, an end, a prize: it is just brimful of Divine speaking concerning Divine purpose, a very great purpose. We find this, of course, in a very strong way in this letter to the Hebrews, with its insistent call - "Let us go on". Moreover it gives us the great ground of confidence that the end can be reached, the goal attained, the prize received, the purpose accomplished, in that Christ has got there, Jesus has already gone this way and is there, and He has gone the whole way, the same way as you and as all those who are called according to His purpose are called to go. He has taken our level, accepted all that we have to know or may know on the course, and has gone through to the end. The fact is stated that He is there, and His being there is a tremendous triumph, for it is the assurance that we can be there also.

"Looking unto Jesus". More correctly that would be stated "looking off unto Jesus". We are coming to that again in a moment, but there is a ground of confidence. We can have assurance about this matter of attaining. One illustration of this is given in this letter to the Hebrews. It is as though the writer saw a ship out on the sea, being grievously battered and thrown about by the storm, in the grip of the wind and the current, and then, if it were possible, one brave representative taking the anchor on a long chain and dropping it within the quiet, peaceful harbour, leaving it there for the ship to pull on, in the sure knowledge that it will come in because it has a vital link with something already there. That is the picture the Apostle presents of this matter. We have this confidence, this hope, "as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and stedfast and entering into that which is within the veil" (Heb. 6:19).

There is confidence to be had, but there is also - and this is kept continually in view throughout both Old and New Testaments - there is also the possibility of failing, of falling short, of missing the mark. Illustrations are given of this. The possibility is always there - not of losing our salvation, that is not the point - but of failing to attain to the full purpose of God in our salvation.

THE PERILS OF WRONG WAYS OF LOOKING

This possibility of failure and missing the mark, of coming short, is related to our looking. It seems to me that it is all summed up in that way - looking. This matter of looking, therefore, is very important. It depends entirely upon where our eyes are and where they are kept. In the Word of God there are many directions in which people are warned against looking, because of the hazards to the whole progress and course of things toward the goal; the hazards of a wrong look, of a false direction, of the eyes getting off the mark.

The Backward Look

There is the one who puts his hand to the plough and looks back, and is therefore not fit for the kingdom (Luke 9:62). That is the backward look. It is the look which Israel took in the wilderness. "They turned again and tempted God, and provoked the Holy One of Israel" (Psa. 78:41). They looked back and spoiled their furrow, they spoiled their whole course. They failed to enter in simply because they looked in the wrong direction, that is, they looked back.

You know that that was one of the troubles in New Testament times. The letter to the Galatians was written because of that peril. They were beginning to look back. There was a voice from behind; the voice of the Judaizers was calling them from behind: 'Come back' - not to the world, not to ungodliness, not to forsake Christ; but to come back to a religious life which was less than that fullness of Christ to which they had been called; to a religious life which was not a spiritual life. They were in danger of looking back. They had indeed already half looked back and had come to a standstill. They had been going on, but now they had stopped going on, and the question was - would they continue to go on or would they go back? That letter was written to induce a going on. This letter to the Hebrews was written for the same purpose. The peril of a backward look is always there, in some way or another.

Looking Around

And then we are told of some people who looked around when they were commanded not to look around. "Look not around thee" (Isaiah 41:10, margin). I think that is what Peter did. When he was beginning to walk on the water he took his eyes off the Lord and looked around and he went down (Matthew 14:28-31). His eyes changed their direction and he began to look around. "WHEN HE SAW the wind" (verse 30). That is what Israel did when the spies went out and came back with their wrong report. They looked

around - walled cities, giants, all kinds of difficulties. They looked around, they got their eyes off the Lord. Only two of them kept their eyes in the right direction and they went through eventually to the end. "Look not around". That is, do not allow circumstances so to lay hold of your vision and to fasten upon your outlook that they control your movement. "Let thine eyes look right on" - not around.

The Too-Near Look

Then there were some people to whom Paul spoke: he told them that their look was much too near. He said, 'You only see what is immediately before your eyes, your vision is merely of things near you, these are the things that influence you'. Too short a range of vision leads to your life becoming smaller than the Lord would have it; you become far too easily satisfied and contented in the realm of the things of the Lord; you have a small, narrow horizon - you are not looking right on. Things near - that may apply in different ways. The things that are near are always the things that are most likely to upset us, to limit us, to disconcert us. We do become so occupied with the thing that is nearest. When we are right up against a situation and something is right up against us, we are in such danger of thinking that is all, that is everything, that we forget we have negotiated many such an obstacle before which we thought was going to be the end of everything for us. We learn our lesson so slowly. Here is another thing right at hand, right before our eyes; another mountain, another hedge, another real difficulty; and again we think - 'This is going to spoil everything, this is going to be the end of everything'. All we see is the thing near at hand.

But to look right on means surely to say this - 'Yes, this is a difficulty, but there is another side to it, it is not going to be the end'. It is one of the things that is included in 'laying aside every weight and the sin which doth so easily beset'. What is "the sin which doth so easily beset"? It is this, that the big difficulty of today blots out tomorrow, seems to get right in the way of any future at all. That is the easily besetting sin. Do not have too near a view, do not have too small an horizon. "Let thine eyes look right on". There is something very much more than the difficulty of the day, the very present thing, the near thing. The Lord will teach us as we go on that we can reckon on very much more than the things which are up against us now. We shall go on and leave them behind. Do not let us take them as the limit. Whatever they are, they are not the end.

The Selfish Look

Again the Apostle said, speaking to some believers, "...not looking each of you to his own things, but each of you also to the things of others" (Phil. 2:4). What did he mean by that? Here, surely, is the selfish look. I think perhaps he meant this, amongst other things: 'Do not be always affected in your lives by how things touch you, whether you stand to gain or lose by this or that; do not all the time be looking at everything in the light of how it affects you'. "Not looking each of you to his own things". That is the wrong kind of looking, the wrong direction. It will limit us, and make us small and self-centred.

The Inward Look

And how much the Apostle had to write about another kind of looking, the inward look. A very great deal of his writing was with the object of getting people to stop looking inside. I think there is nothing more calculated to arrest progress than looking inside. What are we looking for inside, at any rate? Well, of course, we are looking to find something that will satisfy the Lord and give us encouragement, make us feel good, and we never find it. There is nothing more discouraging than this looking inside. It is the wrong kind of looking.

THE SALVATION OF LOOKING UNTO JESUS

It is clear, then, that much is dependent upon our looking, and the Apostle was right when, after writing this long letter so fully bringing into view the great object - partnership with Christ - and urging to go on, he summed it all up in this fragment: "Looking off unto Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith". Looking away from the things behind, looking away from those around, looking off from the self-matters altogether, looking beyond the things that are so near, obsessing us now; looking off from ourselves unto Jesus. This is a theme touched upon in our recent book, *Pioneers of the Heavenly Way*. "He looked for the city" (Heb. 11:10); 'They looked for a country' (Heb. 11:14). How much was bound up with the look! How they had to battle with this matter of where the eyes wanted to rest, a too early satisfaction of the eyes, a wrong satisfaction of the eyes, a substitute for what God was after. But the Lord was constantly drawing their eyes away from lesser things, causing them to look and look, and that look led them on. As we said in the book (page 36), they thought from time to time that now they had found it - but they found that it was not so. The eyes of their heart were not satisfied and they had to move on a bit further. The look kept them on the move. It was a look which was heavenly and not earthly.

Now the passage from Proverbs that we have placed at the head of this article says this - "Let thine eyes look right on, and let thine eyelids look straight before thee. Make level the path of thy feet, and let all thy ways be established (ordered aright)". There is a great deal packed into that, but it just means this: Get God's purpose clearly and fully in view - nothing less, nothing other - and adjust the whole of your life to it; adjust your life to the ultimate.

KEEP GOD'S END IN VIEW

One of our words recently to a friend in baptism was the word 'eternal'. I pondered it during the day before passing it on. It took hold of me in this very connection. "Our light affliction, which is for the moment, worketh for us more and more exceedingly an eternal weight of glory; while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal" (2 Cor. 4:17,18). The eternal is kept in view, and life is adjusted in every way to God's end. How busy the enemy is to circumvent the onward movement and the final attainment, by getting us entangled and compromised in this earth, somehow to slip in something that will be a check, an arrest, a hold-up. Oh, the spiritual tragedies all around by some foolish relationship, some entanglement, some consideration of convenience, some pandering to the satisfaction of the flesh, something somehow slipped in by the enemy; and there it is - you just cannot go right on to God's end. Something is holding you back, some relationship is keeping you tied up, something has come in.

Now this word is - adjust everything to the end, have all your affairs in life brought into line with God's end. When you are considering a relationship, have God's end in view. When you are considering the next step in your life, have God's end in view. When you are deciding where you are going to live and do your work, have God's end in view. When you are deciding what your business is going to be, have God's end in view. Everything brought into line - that is the meaning of this "Make level the path of thy feet" or "Weigh carefully the path of thy feet". We have to say to ourselves, 'Now then, this is an opportunity, a prospect, that seems to hold a lot of good; but first of all, what is this going to mean for the Lord, how does this relate to the full end of God?' Nothing less than that must weigh with us. "Let thine eyes look right on" - not just at this thing, not even at what it seems to promise, but right on. How does it relate to the end? In all things, look beyond; see what is the relation to the full end of God; and adjust accordingly. Get the vision, and adjust life as far as possible in relation to it. "Weigh carefully the paths of thy feet and order them aright.

Turn not to the right hand nor to the left". "Let thine eyes look right on".

Some of you may find yourselves in spheres and conditions where perhaps you will have many a temptation to accept something less, where it seems impossible to have all that you would like to have, where it seems that God's full purpose cannot be realized: therefore you will settle down to something less and other. You may meet all kinds of things to divert you from the course of the on-high calling. The word to you is: "Let thine eyes look right on". Remember your Lord, offered the kingdoms of this world and the glory thereof: He refused them and looked right on. Yes, He was offered an easy way out, a way out of the Cross; but no, He let His eyes look right on, He set His face as a flint. His eyes looked right on, and here it is recorded, as we read in the next part of the verse from Hebrews: "Looking off unto Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising shame, and hath sat down at the right hand of the throne of God". He set His eyes on God's end. May we have grace to do the same.

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