

Los Angeles Conference #1

by T. Austin-Sparks

The Holy Spirit demands absolute sovereignty and submission from us, and we must be willing to adjust our positions and interpretations to see Christ in all His greatness.

Duration: 57:11

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, John 3:8, Acts 2:2, Acts 11:17, Acts 15:10, Revelation 2:7

Topics: "Conference"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by expressing gratitude for the warm welcome he has received. He then directs the audience to a well-known passage in the Bible, John 3:8, which talks about the wind blowing where it chooses. The speaker connects this idea to the transformation of Peter in the book of Acts, highlighting how Peter's encounter with the Holy Spirit led to a change in his perspective. The sermon emphasizes the importance of having a living relationship with Christ rather than focusing on external traditions or structures. The speaker concludes by emphasizing that the Holy Spirit searches and tests everything, particularly the foundations and structures of our faith.

Transcript

I thank you, dear friends, for the warmth of your welcome back again. In what our brother Harrison said about the link resulting in his being here, I wasn't quite sure as to whether I was to be blamed or to be praised. I'm afraid I must leave that uncertainty with you.

But he seemed to feel that it wasn't such a bad thing. I trust that it's working out that way. I believe it is.

Now, without any further loss of time, in that way, let us get to the word. And I ask you, first of all, to look at a fragment in one of the best-known chapters in the Bible, in the Gospel by John, chapter 3. And the fragment which I'm lifting out of this so well-known story is at verse 8. The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the voice thereof, but knowest not whence it cometh, nor whither it goeth. So is every one that is born of the Spirit.

I want to bracket alongside of that three other fragments from the book of the Acts, chapter 2, verse 2. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound as of a rushing of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. Chapter 11, verse 17. If then God gave unto them the like gift as he did also unto us when we believed on the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I that I should withstand God? Chapter 15, verse 10.

Now therefore, why tempt ye God, that ye should put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear? Back to our original fragment, John 3, verse 8. The wind bloweth where it listeth. Here the Lord is drawing a similarity between the wind and the Holy Spirit. He says, the wind bloweth where it listeth.

So is every one that is born of the Spirit. This similarity between wind and the Spirit is not peculiar to this passage, as you know. There are other places where the two are brought together.

For instance, in Ezekiel, in the valley of dry bones. Come, O thou wind, and breathe upon these bones. And the Spirit entered into them.

Two things, the wind and the Spirit. And everybody knows that on the day of Pentecost, it was the day of the Holy Spirit. Coming as the sound of a mighty rushing wind.

Now the point that the Lord makes here is that of the absolute sovereignty vested in the Holy Spirit. His perfectly free and independent action. He says, there are some things that you don't know.

Whence it cometh, whither it goeth. We know not. Some things you don't know.

But as to the fact and the effect, there is no gamesaying left. There is no question about that. The wind, and we're not talking about a soft, gentle breeze now.

The wind is indisputable. Ability or no ability to understand and explain makes no difference. It's the fact that matters.

Fundamentally, it's the fact that matters. Not whether you can explain the fact. Define this thing.

The greatest of all facts, dear friends, the greatest of all facts in relation to God and man is the Holy Spirit. Everything. Even Christ.

Even the work which he has done. All the meaning and value of his cross. And of his person.

Of his incarnation. Of his atonement. Of his heavenly glory.

And everything else depends entirely upon the Holy Spirit to become of any value to us. He said that. It is expedient for you that I go away.

If I go not away, the Spirit will not come. Clearly implying, far more important that the Spirit should come than I should stay in the flesh. Everything depends upon the Holy Spirit.

No vital relationship with God apart from the Holy Spirit. No living Christian experience apart from the Holy Spirit. No knowledge or understanding of divine things apart from the Holy Spirit.

No fruitfulness in life or service apart from the Holy Spirit. No transformation into the likeness of Christ apart from the Holy Spirit. Now I of course could stay for a week or more speaking on the Holy Spirit.

But that is not the message for this morning in general. The particular aspect of this matter for this present moment is that of the absolute sovereignty of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit's absolute demand to have his own way.

To have his own way. Which demand will be refused or resisted at the expense of your spiritual life. This is a life or death matter.

The Spirit being sovereign with all that that means. Now that is clearly borne out by this very simile of the wind. The wind blowing.

When the wind really blows. And we hardly need to pause to say that there is nothing indefinite about the Holy Spirit. Nothing uncertain about the Holy Spirit.

If there is one thing that marks the Holy Spirit from the first reference to him in Genesis 1-2. Spirit of God brooded upon the face of the deep. To the last reference at the end of the book of the Revelation the Spirit said come.

If there is one thing about the Holy Spirit from beginning to end it is he is always positive. Always positive. Always very definite.

And if you know anything about the wind really blowing. You know that the wind takes charge. It takes charge.

Have you ever really been in a hurricane? Have you ever really been at sea? In a raging storm? Have you ever been in the presence of a strongly blowing wind? You know how futile it is to try to resist. The wind takes charge. So is everyone that is born of God according to the divine thought.

Taken charge of. Taken over. Taken out of their own hands.

Out of their own power. Out of their own reason. Taken over.

Everything into his hands. Now that is the New Testament teaching about the Holy Spirit. That is the very basis of a true Christian life.

And because that is not recognized, acknowledged and accepted by so many who bear the name of Christian. For that very reason there is so much that is indefinite. Uncertain.

Unsure. Wavering. Vacillating.

Double-minded. Undependable about so many Christians. Do you notice how meticulously careful the apostles were about this matter? Look at the book of the Acts.

Well, Philip went down to Samaria and preached Christ to them. Spirit started moving. There is no doubt about it.

And many came to the Lord. Many came to the Lord. The apostles which were at Jerusalem heard of this.

What did they do? Did they say, well this is good news. This is fine. We rejoice in this.

Nope. Probably didn't say that. But they went down.

And when they were come down, they looked into this thing. And what happened? They did not just accept it as it was. Then, then laid they their hands upon them that they might receive the Holy Spirit.

And do you notice that procedure was followed? Carefully, meticulously, all the way through. With Paul, he came to Ephesus and found certain disciples. Sensing a certain lack or weakness, he felt about in his mind, now what's this? They are disciples.

They are Christians. They know their Old Testament. Apollos, that man writing in the Scriptures, has given them a good Old Testament foundation.

That was the only Bible, of course, that existed. But there is something here. Got the name, the profession, the Scripture.

But there is something here lacking. Oh, did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? Yes. Now, when you believe, can you believe without receiving the Holy Spirit? I leave you to answer that question.

Here is a case in point. There was a flaw in their foundation. We will not deal with that, but here it is.

How careful they were. They said, we have not so much as heard that the Holy Spirit is. He got his finger on the spot, hadn't he? He had right discernment.

Well then, he got busy on the situation, and they received the Holy Spirit. He laid his hands upon them, and they received. Here is the complement of faith.

The complement of, say, faith. The completion. The Holy Spirit.

My point is, how careful were the apostles about this matter? Not just taking things at their face value, but making very sure, very sure. For anything short of this would be disastrous. Sooner or later, a disaster.

Making sure about this, that these people had really received the Holy Spirit. Why? For this one reason only, that when the Holy Spirit really is present within, the sovereignty of that life from center to circumference is taken over by the Spirit of God. And that individual is no longer in possession of themselves.

No longer in their own sovereignty. No longer on the ground of their own rights. The Spirit has taken over everything.

Everything. The wind takes over. And if there is one thing about the wind, when it really gets going, it demands submission.

Absolute submission. So is everyone that is born of God. A life under the aegis of the Holy Spirit is a committed life.

It cannot be otherwise. You are not under the aegis of the Holy Spirit if you are not committed. A state of controversy will be going on between you and the Spirit of God until that point is reached where complete and utter submission is given to Him.

Look at the Lord Jesus. The Spirit came upon Him as He moved out into His life vocation. There is a point at which it is written of Him.

Jesus from that day set His face as a flute to go up to Jerusalem. Do you know what that meant? All that was involved in that we know. He knew.

But He set His face steadfast as a flute to go up to Jerusalem. He is committed. He is committed.

He is under the Spirit's government. You travel by air. You travel long distance by air.

There is always a point which the pilot knows to be the point from which there is no turning back. We have gone too far to turn back. It would be far more fatal to turn back if anything goes wrong than to go on.

From that point the only thing to do, whatever happens, is to go on. We are committed. Jesus went all the way from the day when the Spirit came upon Him.

His heart had gone all the way. There was no turning back. He was steadfast.

I repeat, a life under the Holy Spirit's government is a committed life from which there ought to be no turning back. Have you reached that point of commitment? Have you really reached that point of commitment? As we say, all the boats bound behind, all the bridges with the past destroyed, blown up, committed. The wind has taken over.

The Spirit is in the position of mastery, subduing, controlling a force which subdues every other force in us. Every other force in us. You see that working out.

So the first thing, and dear friends, I keep very strictly to the Scriptures in what I am saying. You know this is so. First thing about the Holy Spirit, as the wind from heaven, and as seen on the day of Pentecost, the great foundation of the dispensation, which is the dispensation of the Holy Spirit, is that he just takes everything into his hands and demands that place of absolute sovereignty.

You are going to argue with the wind. You know, it is futile to argue with a hurricane. It is futile to try out conclusions with a mighty rushing wind.

You will either be disastrously broken or gloriously broken. It is possible to be gloriously broken. Everything of Christ comes along that line, following the Spirit.

Next thing about the wind is that the wind chooses and takes its own course. You cannot tell the wind which way to go. You cannot dictate to the wind as to what its choice should be of this or that.

The wind just chooses its own course and takes its own course. So is everyone born of God, born of the Spirit. The Spirit demands the right to do this with us, dear friends, to choose his course with us and to take his course with us.

He demands the right to do it. Now, Peter is a very splendid example of this whole thing in a very real sense. Peter is the embodiment of all that I am saying.

It is not without significance that it is Peter who is the foremost figure on the day of Pentecost. Not without significance, I have said. What significance? Why, the very significance of Peter himself.

Remember the last words that the Lord said to Peter in the old regime before the Ascension? Simon, when thou wast young, thou girdedst thyself and waitest whithersoever thou wouldest. But when thou art old, another should gird thee, carry thee whither thou wouldest not. Whither thou wouldest, whither thou wouldest not.

Naturally. Here you have Peter present with his own natural temperament. This mercurial man.

What a descriptive word that is. You ever spilt some mercury on the ground and try to pick it up again? Get it together again? Why, you've got to go after it in all directions. And when you think you've got it, you haven't.

That's Peter, isn't it? Simon. Very descriptive. The old Simon.

His temperament. His natural make-up and constitution and disposition. Diving after all the tensions.

Frustrated in one way, he's off in another. Thou waitest whithersoever thou wouldst. And for Peter well shunned thou hadst.

Whither thou wouldst. You dictated your own course. You chose your own way.

You followed your own likes and dislikes and preferences. You were the sovereign of your own life and as you thought of your own destiny. Another shall gird thee.

Another shall gird thee. That belongs to your spiritual immaturity. All that.

Your spiritual maturity is going to be marked by this. Another shall gird thee. And carry thee whither thou, the old Simon, wouldst not go.

This spirit that will gird you will work quite contrary to your own make-up. Your temperament. Your disposition.

Make it impossible for you just to do as you like. Or as you are disposed to do. Another shall gird thee.

The wind chooses its own course and takes it. So is everyone. Peter on the day of Pentecost came under the mighty girding.

And now the battle between old Simon and new Peter begins. Next thing. Do you know Acts chapter 10? Peter is on the housetop praying.

He's been fasting and praying and he becomes very hungry. Falls into a trance and sees a vision. You remember the story.

The sheep let down. Full of unclean drinking. And a voice arrives.

Peter, kill and eat. Old Simon rises up and says, Not so, Lord. Now we mix things up, don't we? And we get into that realm of nature.

Lord, that word won't do. That word won't do when it's our saying not so. You cannot say Lord and at the same time say not so.

And three times this happened. And the vision passed. Peter thought.

Now you know the rest of the story, don't you? There arrived the three men from Caesarea. Cornelius, the centurion, knocking at the door. Read the story.

I haven't time to just go over it again. Peter was girded. The Lord said, Go with them.

Go with them. The Spirit said, Go with them. The Spirit said, Go with them.

There's a headache for Simon. But he was girded and he went into the house of a Gentile. Into the company of Gentiles.

Unclean beasts according to Jewish ritual. According, mark you, and you've heard me say this before, to the Scriptures of the Old Testament. He got the Scriptures on his side, as he thought.

He is standing upon his interpretation of the Scriptures. They were supporting him. But the Spirit was doing something.

See the contradiction? To the very Scriptures. And to his whole position. I know the danger of what I'm saying.

But you've seen the point. The Holy Spirit knows what he's doing. And he demands absolute sovereignty in this matter.

For it is not even our interpretation of the Scriptures that is final. It's the Holy Spirit's interpretation of the Scriptures. And very often, as we go on with the Lord, we come to the place, yes, repeated in our life.

For it is not even our interpretation of the Scriptures that is final. It's the Holy Spirit's interpretation of the Scriptures. And very often, as we go on with the Lord, we come to the place, yes, repeated in our life.

We have to say, I've got to make an adjustment over that. I believed, very strongly, this and that about that, that I've got to adjust. The Lord hasn't made a demand that I change my position over that.

I remember some years ago, a retired army colonel, with a friend of mine who had written books, books and books on a certain prophetic subject. Published them, well known and read everywhere. And he said to me, He said to me, you know, I've got to recall the whole lot.

The real life that the Lord has shown me, poured upon this matter, makes it necessary for me to change my whole position, my whole life position, over this matter. It was honest. It was honest.

But there was no doubt about it. The Holy Spirit had taken over this matter of His mental play upon the Scripture and interpretation. And there's all the difference between a mental interpretation and a spiritual revelation.

Well, here is Peter in the house of Cornelius, in this wonderful story. What was Peter doing really? Or the old Simon doing in this matter? Listen. He was making Christ much smaller than He really is.

And if there's one thing that the Holy Spirit is against, He's against that. He's against that. Israel.

The elect. The spiritual aristocracy. The Gentiles.

The dogs. The unclean beasts. Israel.

Now, the Holy Spirit is saying to Peter very emphatically, Jesus Christ is a much bigger Christ than ever you have seen, Peter, yet. And you have to adjust to that. If there's one thing that the Holy Spirit is against, it is exclusivism.

Make no mistake about it. When exclusivism makes Christ smaller than He is, that's the tragedy of Israel. Chosen, yes.

Elect, yes. Given the oracles, yes. All that.

But what for? Why? For the sake of the nations. A testimony of God in the midst of the nations, that the nations might see and believe and turn to the Lord. That's the horizon of Israel.

Oh, Jonah, Jonah is really an example of this. Go to Nineveh. That great, that mighty system.

You know the story of Jonah. But Jonah represents the traditional position of Israel. Exclusive.

Shut up within themselves. We are the people and no other. We are the chosen.

We are the elect. We have received the light. We have got the truth.

But why not for ourselves? Not to make us something in ourselves. Not to draw around us a fence, shutting out all others. But for the sake of all others.

For the sake of all others, that's all. And it's for our lost deposition, dear friends, for this whole dispensation on one issue. These two thousand years of Israel's tragic, so tragic history is the issue of making God's Son less than He really is.

Oh, what Christ is. What God meant Him to be to Israel and the world. You see, it's in this very chapter that the most familiar words in all the Bible are God so loved the world, whosoever.

Nicodemus, Nicodemus. You've got to be born from above. Out of this exclusivism.

Out of this narrow traditionalism. Out of this fixed and set position of yours. Born right out into the greatness of God's all-comprehending purpose in His Son.

How great Christ is. Oh, may we be saved from having a smaller Christ than God means us to have. There's no danger in that, dear friends.

The Holy Spirit can look after that. But my point is that the Holy Spirit in this tenth chapter of Acts is just saying this. I'm not having any of your circumscribing of Christ on any ground whatsoever.

You may quote me Leviticus chapter 11 if you like. But I'm not having it. What God hath cleansed, call not thou unclean.

The cross has dealt with all that ceremonial uncleanness. And open up the vast vistas of grace for all men. Third occasion of Peter.

See? First, his temperament. Then, his spiritual bigotry. Chapter 15.

Paul refers to what happened. In his letter to the Galatians, he refers to what happened. Peter is called to account for this by the elders of Jerusalem.

He's, as we say on the carpet, on the spot, having to answer for this, this unusual, unheard of behavior. Well, you know, we quote it. Peter sums it all up in this.

Who was I? Who was I to resist God? That's what it amounts to. Who was I to resist God? But something else happened. Peter's at Antioch.

Gentiles at Antioch have been saved. Gathered in. The Spirit has done something with the Gentiles.

And Peter's down there rejoicing. He's following up. He's following up.

Caesarea. House of Cornelius. Happily following up with the Gentiles in Antioch.

Eating and drinking. All right. But certain came down from Jerusalem.

James and certain others came down from Jerusalem. And when they were come down, Peter withdrew. Peter withdrew.

Peter withdrew. There's a withdrawing. This is a dangerous offense to the Holy Spirit.

Violating of what he's doing. And Paul recognized the significance of this. And he said, I withstood him to the faith.

For his dissimulation. I withstood him to the faith. Simon is having a bad time, isn't he, under this aegis of the Holy Spirit? Really is.

What's happened now? Yes, something has come up of the old Simon. Bondage to man. What will the brethren say? What will the leaders say? What will the chief men say? I must be careful because of what they will say and perhaps what they'll do.

And that kind of thing is set over against the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit. Two things in collision. You cannot have this.

I'm so glad that Peter must have got the better of this. He couldn't have written his two letters if he hadn't. And he couldn't have said later on about this man who withstood him to the faith.

Peter, you stand condemned. Before God you stand condemned. You're guilty of dissimulation.

Later Peter wrote. Our beloved brother Paul. In all his writings, in which there are some things difficult to understand.

You see. But he's got over his hurdle. The Holy Spirit who is choosing the way and taking it is finding Peter coming into line.

Coming into line. There were some of you who did not come into line. Demas had forsaken me.

Returned to Thessalonica. I don't know about Barnabas. Even Barnabas, says Paul.

Even Barnabas. Even Barnabas. Unthinkable.

Dear beloved Barnabas to whom I owe so much. And we all owe so much. The church at Antioch owes so much that even Barnabas was carried away.

Barnabas falls out of the New Testament. I hope I don't exaggerate judgment, condemnation. But there are those who just get out of the way of the wind.

When he's blowing toward this great full purpose of God. Decimate. Withdraw.

The Lord savor. I don't know where. The wind searches.

May I finish on this? Leave the other. The wind searches and tests everything. Especially foundations and structures of what kind they are.

I've spent a great deal of my life in Scotland. My childhood and later. There's a common sight in Scotland.

We had there many pine trees. Pine forests and pine trees growing along the roadside. And it's a land in which the wind blows.

And after any of our great wind storms. You can go along and see these pine trees uprooted. Themselves lying level with the earth and their roots up in the air.

Before, people admired them. Said very nice things about them. What fine trees they were.

What a magnificent sight. And the wind blew. And the wind blew.

Testing the depth of their roots. Testing their power of endurance. Testing stamina.

And down went so many of these before time erstwhile admirable praiseworthy trees. The wind. The Holy Spirit just does that, you know, friends.

That is what he is doing. The Holy Spirit is going to blow on us all. Christian experience is just this.

Under the sovereignty of the Holy Spirit. Our foundations are going to be tested. Make no mistake about it.

They're going to be tested. And our structure. Our building.

Our stamina. Our endurance. The wind's blowing today.

My word, it's blowing over this earth. Look at all the testing. See all the tragic crashing to the ground.

Do you know, dear friends, that Christianity as we now know it is going to be blown to bits. Absolutely to bits. And there's going to be nothing of it left.

Christianity as we know it. All these things must be dissolved, says Peter. This whole cosmic order and this whole Christian system as we know it is going.

You say that's a terrible statement. Well, plenty. I have lived through two world wars.

What have we seen? Alone there's a simple and very small example of what I'm seeing. We have seen many and many a place with a great Christian tradition. Something that has stood for something.

Simply crushed to the ground. Hardly any one stone left upon another. Everywhere.

Destruction. No preferences. No favoritisms.

And God? Where is God? Where is God? Oh, if anything ought to have been preserved, that ought to have been preserved. God ought to have protected that. No? The answer is no.

Why? Because God is not interested in things. God is only interested in one matter. The Holy Spirit is only concerned about one matter, dear friends.

One matter only. History bears this out. The Holy Spirit is only concerned with Christ.

With Christ. With what is Christ. What is of Christ.

With the measure of Christ. The Holy Spirit has only one in his vision and that's Christ. And he'll always think how much really of the eternal essence of Christ is here.

And so you can go to Asia Minor today and find no trace of the churches in Asia. You can go to Galatia. You can go to all these places of the New Testament.

Find nothing today as places. Now the first three chapters of the book of the Revelation. Just bear down upon that.

Note to the churches. To the seven churches in Asia. Seven times.

What the Spirit said. The wind is blowing. But what? Just to discover not whether this has got a tradition.

Not this and that and something else. Not whether they've got a building and a place of meeting or a technique of worship. A kind of New Testament order.

But whether they have that or not. How much of the risen, living, exalted Christ is here. And the Holy Spirit will go as far as to say repent or I will remove thy lampstand out of its place.

Because the light's gone. What's the good of a lampstand if there's no light? We are ornaments. The Holy Spirit is not interested in.

You see the point? The light is Christ. The measure of Christ. It is Christ.

It is Christ. What the Spirit said is not this and that I know thy works and thy labors and thy patience. All that's very good but I have this against thee.

What about Christ in you? In your assembly? In your gathering? In your corporate life? In your testimony in the world? What about Christ? The place can go. Olivet House will go. Or, forgive me, Westmoreland Chapel will go eventually.

It will go eventually. It's not here for eternity. And all the other places, however much they may have stood for the Lord, they're going up in the great final issue.

And dear friends, what matters is not the place and not many things that you make a great deal of think are very important but this measure of the Spirit of Jesus Christ against dissimulation, withdrawing, division, bringing us all down onto the common ground, the one foundation which is the unique and only foundation for other, other foundation can no man lay. What are you laying down as a foundation? Which is Jesus Christ. It's the Holy Spirit.

He's concerned about that and that only. And he demands, I come back to it again, he demands this sovereignty, this kind of submission, subjection, commitment of our temperament and our tradition and all things in us and outside of us committed to him, to have his way utterly and unreservedly and undividedly.

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