

Moses

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the call to pioneer the heavenly way and to be satisfied with no second-best, using the life of Moses as an example.

Scripture: Exodus 6:1, Exodus 14:16, Romans 7:18, Ephesians 3:20, Hebrews 11:24, Hebrews 11:29

Topics: "Spiritual Maturity", "Heavenly Calling"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks preaches about God's desire for a people of His best, emphasizing the need for His people to pursue His very best to satisfy His heart fully. He uses examples from the Scriptures, such as the generation in the wilderness and those in Babylon, to illustrate the consequences of settling for second-best. The sermon highlights the call for believers to not only attain God's best but also to pioneer the heavenly way for others who may not be aware of it. The life of Moses is examined as a great pioneer of the heavenly way, showcasing the training, crises, and ordeals he faced to lead God's people towards a heavenly perspective.

Transcript

Reading: Hebrews 11:24-27, 13, 16.

God has one great desire - to have what may be termed a 'a people of His best'. Until He has such a people, He will never be wholly satisfied. There may be those who will accept His 'second-best' - for He surely often allows a second-best - but only a people set on His very best will truly satisfy His own heart. But since the attainment unto His best is a matter fraught with conflict and cost and discipline, and much that is utterly contrary to the whole course of nature, it is not everybody - indeed, it is but a comparative few - who will go on with Him to His best. This is seen in all the Scriptures, and there are some out-standing illustrations of it. They are found in every dispensation.

For example, whilst we are not to say that the generation which perished in the wilderness, which had been brought out in virtue of precious blood and by initial faith - for "by faith they passed through the Red Sea" (Hebrews 11:29) - whilst we are not to say that that generation represents ultimate and final loss of salvation, it is nevertheless clear that they lost God's full thought for them, and it was a great and grievous loss, always held up in the Scriptures as an example of tragedy, failure and disappointment. We are not to say that the greater number of those who went into exile in Babylon, in Chaldea, and never returned, were lost eternally to God's salvation. But we do know that the minority came back, and in coming back fulfilled the true intention of God, and are represented as those of whom particularly He is not ashamed. For the

others, in the wilderness and in Babylon, there is sense in which God is ashamed; for these, not so. And thus it is in every dispensation. The call continues, and it is being sounded here to the people of God to be satisfied with no second-best.

But, as we have said, this is not only a call to us to attain. This is a call to a people to pioneer this way for others - for so many of the Lord's people do not know the heavenly way. Strangely enough, though born from above, they do not know the heavenly way. We will not bring in all the proofs of this, but it is true, and perhaps many of us have been like that for a period of our Christian life. It was very largely an earthly thing. Our activities were very earthbound, in a Christian way. Then there came a time of crisis, when we entered into the meaning of an open heaven and were lifted on to an entirely new level of spiritual life and began to learn heavenly things in a new way. These are facts, and all those who are called of God into this heavenly way are not only moving in it with regard to their own spiritual measure, but are called to pioneer the way for those who do not know, even of the Lord's people. That does not mean to preach to them about a heavenly way, to have a special interpretation of Scripture, some doctrine or phraseology. It means that they are called to be in the good of it, to be there, and by what they themselves know and experience to be able to help others up from the lower levels of spiritual life.

So we are going to look again at this matter of pioneering the heavenly way, centring our thoughts upon another great pioneer - Moses. There are, of course, many other features of his life besides pioneering, but I think that this really goes to the very centre of the significance of Moses - this fact that he was the pioneer of a heavenly way.

If we look at the life of Moses from an earthly standpoint, we see very much that speaks of disappointment and of failure and of tragedy: for, although, for eighty years - eighty long, trying, testing years of discipline and suffering - he walked the heavenly way or learned the heavenly way, neither he nor the people that he brought out of Egypt entered into the land. That sounds like disappointment, and indeed tragedy. I can never read that record of Moses pleading with God to let him go in, and God's full, final, conclusive refusal, without being deeply stirred. It is a touching thing.

You see, of these people who were constituted a nation by the hand of Moses, who instrumentally owed their existence as a nation to him, not only did that first generation not go into the land and inherit, but their whole history ever since has been one of tragedy. There have been bright spots and periods in that history; there have been times of glory; but, taking their history as a whole up to this day, remembering how much they talk about Moses, what they attribute to Moses, how they are always appealing to Moses, it has been a most disappointing history. I repeat: from certain standpoints, the life of Moses bears much that speaks of failure and disappointment and tragedy. But the very fact of his own life and the nature of its termination, the very fact of the generation that perished in the wilderness, the very fact of the nation all through the ages failing and disappointing, is the one most conclusive argument for another aspect, namely, the Divine truth of the heavenly. They are asserting in a most emphatic way that, if this is all, down here, then it is a poor thing: that there must be some other way than this, there must be some other sequel to this, this is not all. No, there is another standpoint from which to view it - there is the heavenly standpoint, where heaven interprets and governs everything.

Well, let us look at Moses. Firstly, Moses himself and his training. Secondly, Israel under his leadership.

(1) MOSES' TRAINING

(a) SOVEREIGN APPREHENDING

We begin with himself and his training. We are not beginning with his birth. We begin where we read of him in the letter to the Hebrews - Moses in Egypt; and here we are once more met by something that has come up repeatedly in these meditations - that inborn sense of destiny. You cannot get away from it. When you are dealing with God's full purpose and when you are dealing with the work, the service, the ministry, the pioneering in relation thereto, that is always the point at which you have to begin; and it is always there - this deep-down sense of a Divine, sovereign apprehending for something.

Here is this man in Egypt. He is surrounded by all that Egypt has, and students of history know that the glory and the glamour of Egypt were no small thing in Moses' day. He was surrounded by it all. The writer here speaks of "the pleasures of Egypt". Its pleasures, its amenities, its scholarship, its education: all its privileges, right up to the very house of the king - everything was at the command and disposal of Moses. He was "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians" (Acts 7:22), and he had all the "pleasures" of Egypt to his hand. That was no small thing. Do you say that was nothing to throw away? It was a mighty 'all' of this world - but this sense of destiny made it as nothing. Although enjoying it all, as far as he could enjoy it, there was a shadow over his enjoyment all the time; there was a something inside that withheld him from becoming finally content with it. There was within him a sense of restless discontent and dissatisfaction, which really was a working in him of God's unwillingness to be satisfied with anything short of His full purpose. Moses may not have been able to explain or define this strange urge, but it made him know that the 'all' of Egypt was by no means God's all, and that Egypt could never answer to this call and pull from above and beyond.

Now, that is not exaggeration, and those are not just words. That is Scripture, and that is very testing. For such as are called into the way of God's full thought, His highest and His best, it will be like that. It does not matter what there may be of popularity, worldly position, success, means and resources - everything to hand: if we are truly called according to His purpose, we shall be restless in it all, dissatisfied, and feel, 'After all, is it worth it? There is something more than this.' Test your hearts by that. That is no fiction; that is fact.

It may be that that fact lies behind your very reading of these words today. You could have much in this world if you liked to lay yourself out for it. You could have a way in the world and its pleasures, and other things, if you really went for it. Yes, and perhaps you could get acceptance and position even in the religious world, but to you it has become second-rate. There is something in you - you may not be defining it, perhaps you could not write down what it is - but you know there is something, and unless you discover that something, arrive at that something, life will be a disappointment, for there is a mockery in everything else. If that is true in your case, it is a very hopeful thing, it is a marvellous thing: heaven has come down to lay hold of you in relation to all its meaning. Of course, if you have not got this sense, you will be pleased with all sorts of things less than that, and you will be out for them. But, mark you, if you can be like that, it is a very terrible indictment, for it means that somehow, where you are concerned, that mighty heavenly apprehending has failed.

(b) A CRISIS

So the thing began with Moses inwardly, and that inward thing led to a definite crisis, the crisis of the earthly and the heavenly. The Lord has wonderful ways of producing this crisis. You know it is not always produced and precipitated by some ecstasy - if that is what you are after - the glory of a great light and vision, the enrapturing of your soul, some tremendously wonderful heavenly experience. It does not always happen like that. It did not happen like that with Moses, nor with others. How did it happen? He

went out one day and saw an Egyptian persecuting a Hebrew, and this sense of destiny took possession of him and overmastered him, and so, being evidently of powerful physique, he laid on to the Egyptian and slew him there and then. That was the crisis that precipitated this whole thing. Sometimes we only wake up to the heavenly or are brought face to face with the heavenly by some ghastly misdemeanour or failure; for, almost immediately after this, things were made untenable for Moses in that realm in Egypt, and he had to quit.

But what was inside the crisis, what was the meaning of it, why did God allow it? Moses might have said, 'Why did the Lord allow me to do that? Why did the Lord, who had foreknown me and had in His own foreknowledge called me to His great service, let me make a mess of things like that? Why did He let me become involved by my own act in a thing like murder, to have the stain of murder on my hands? - I who am called to be the emancipator of God's people! Why has the Lord allowed it?' And the answer would have been: 'That is not the way in which heaven does things, Moses. That is the way the world does things; it is the way the flesh does things. It is not heaven's way of doing things. You, Moses, can never bring out a heavenly people into a heavenly place by earthly methods and means. Learn that once and for all. It may seem a terrible way of dealing with the situation, but there it is, clear and plain. This people, that you are chosen in the foreknowledge of God and by the sovereign act of God and by this sense of destiny in yourself to lead out: this people, chosen to be a heavenly people - how can you get them on to a heavenly level of life if that is your level of life?' We will come back to that again in a minute. Heaven breaks in and says with terrible emphasis, 'No, Moses. Carnal weapons for carnal ends, but not carnal weapons for spiritual ends; earthly ways for earthly ends, but not earthly ways for heavenly ends. Heaven is governing here and must register itself like this.' What a lesson for a life! What a foundation!

Now you may never have been a murderer, but I have no doubt that some at least who read these lines have learned very deep lessons of this kind: that you just cannot go on with God on that level, you cannot get through with God along that line, you cannot serve God in His heavenly purpose in such ways, in the strength of the flesh. It is so true to principle. Heaven will have none of them; it demands its own life, its own nature. That was the crisis of the heavenly and the earthly in the training of Moses.

(c) FORTY YEARS IN THE WILDERNESS

And the next phase - to the wilderness, to the "back-desert" for the next forty years. Oh, surely this has no place in the economy of God! Yes, wildernesses always represent and signify one thing wherever you find them. They signify self-emptying. Think about that. You cannot be a very important person in a wilderness. You cannot be a very self-sufficient person in a wilderness. You cannot be a self-confident person in a wilderness. A wilderness empties all that out. You are not only in the wilderness: the wilderness gets into you, barren, desolate, unprofitable, useless. And do you not think that that got into Moses in forty years? What is happening?

It is the negative side of training. It is the cancellation of Egypt and of the world. Egypt stood for self-sufficiency, Egypt was always the synonym for independence - and Egypt had to be emptied out of Moses; he had to be emptied of the spirit and principle of the world. It had got inside, and now it was being put out, and just the contrary to Egypt was coming in. This negative side, as we have called it, is an integral part of the school of the heavenly way. It brings us inwardly and spiritually to the place where we see clearly that there is no profit whatever in us; where of ourselves we can produce and accomplish nothing. That is the wilderness. Do not misunderstand or fail to recognise that. It is true to life, true to experience, and true to heavenly principle. Room has to be made in us for heaven - for there is no room

for heaven in us by nature.

(d) THE ORDEAL OF EMANCIPATION

Then the next thing after that - Moses is brought back to Egypt for the ordeal of emancipation. Now it is the Lord, not Moses. It is going to be all the Lord now, or nothing at all. But it is going to be the Lord. "Now shalt thou see what I will do" (Exodus 6:1). There was a day when Moses said, 'Now you shalt see what I will do', and the Egyptian felt the weight of that, and the next day the Hebrew. But that has gone, and the Lord says, "Now shalt thou see what I will do". 'I will do, now you have stopped.' The position is altered; everything now becomes possible. There has been a transition from the negative to the positive. The great ordeal of the emancipation of this people begins.

The first stage relates to the rod and the hand. Exodus 4 - "What is that in thy hand?" "A rod." 'Very well; by that rod things are going to be done.' "Put now thine hand into thy bosom." 'Take it Out' - white and leprous. "Put thine hand into thy bosom again." 'Take it out' - clean and whole.

THE ROD

What is the rod? You know that the rod that Moses used was later Aaron's rod, the rod that budded when the test of priesthood was made (Numbers 17). Twelve rods were put up overnight, representing the tribes. In the morning there were eleven dead rods and one living - the insignia of a living priesthood. And do not forget: priesthood has to do with the spiritual. They are going to have to deal with all the gods of the Egyptians. They are unclean, they are corrupt, they are evil, they are of the devil's company. It needs the mighty power of a holy priesthood to deal with that unclean situation. It is the rod of the word of the Cross. The word of the Cross is a mighty rod.

What is the issue here - the issue that is bound up with this whole ordeal? This is it. The Lord had said, "the Egyptians shall know that I am Jehovah" (Ex. 7:5). That is the issue. Very well then; begin to apply that in practical ways by the word of the Cross, the word of living priesthood.

Apply it first to the whole realm of nature, of creation. "I, the Lord, have created" (Isaiah 64:8). The Lord of Calvary is the Lord of creation, and the first application of the word of the Cross is in that realm in Egypt. At the touch of the Lord of creation the world of living things is brought under judgment; the issue - "I am the Lord".

The second application is to the heavens - for the Lord made the heavens as well as the earth - and the elements, under the word, are touched. If you look on to Calvary, you will see all these features. When He, the great Pioneer of the heavenly way, went to the Cross, the whole creation was affected. Heaven and earth were involved. There was a great earthquake, and there was "darkness over all the land until the ninth hour". Creation and the very elements were coming under the impact of Him who is the Word in the Cross. That happened in Egypt, in type.

Then thirdly, there came the application to hell. What is hell's greatest weapon? Death, "the last enemy" (1 Cor. 15:26) Death is no friend, death is the last enemy, and that was the last judgment of Egypt. Hell's stronghold was broken into; the power of death was taken hold of for the emancipation of a people. That is what Christ did in the Cross. The word of the Cross is this: that hell has been broken into and death has been apprehended and made to serve the ends of God rather than frustrate them. In Egypt the word by the rod touched the firstborn with death, and hell was stung with its own sting to the very core of its being.

But that is not all. That self-same rod led the people out, worked redemption from Egypt and through the Red Sea. "Lift thou up thy rod, and stretch out thine hand over the sea" (Ex. 14:16). The word of the Cross is the word of life triumphant over death. Death is vanquished and life and incorruption are brought to light. By means of the rod of the word of the Cross, through this wonderful ordeal of emancipation, Moses is learning one thing - that heaven rules: heaven rules in this creation, heaven rules in heaven, heaven rules in hell; and in the kingdoms of men heaven rules for the emancipation of the elect. All this is the story of the intervention of heaven.

You wonder why this was graduated as it was. It did not happen all at once. The effect of the rod was only partial to begin with, but gained in strength and power as it went along.

There are two sides to this. On the one hand, there is the progressive nature of this education: it is gradual. We do not come all at once to see and to know the full power of heaven. We learn it a bit at a time. It is graduated. It goes so far at one time; it will go farther later on. Are we not learning that? We learn it in simple ways - how heaven is greater than earth, than man, than nature, than the enemy. We are learning, step by step, more and more of the meaning of that tremendous, infinite ascendancy of heaven.

But there is the other side. God, by this gradual means, is drawing out the opposing forces, gradually extending them. "I will harden Pharaoh's heart." "I will harden Pharaoh's heart." "I will harden Pharaoh's heart." "Pharaoh shall harden his heart." God could have wiped him out in one stroke, but He is going to extend him to his utmost limit. The power of this world is going to be drawn out to its full extent to meet the infinite power of heaven, and then heaven's superiority will be a very simple thing, after all.

We have so often said this, and it is true. Though we cannot grasp it or see it or calculate it, the truth is that "the power that worketh in us" is "the exceeding greatness of His power" (Eph. 3:20; 1:19). We do not know, we are not able to measure, the immensity of the forces that are against a soul being saved, the immensity of the forces that are set against God's full purpose for His people. We know a little and we shall know more and more as we go on; but when it says "the exceeding greatness of his power", that is not just language: that is an attempt - only an attempt - by means of language, by superlatives, by all that human language can do - to arrive at the reality. "The exceeding greatness of his power to us-ward who believe, according to that working of the strength of his might which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead" (Eph. 1:19, 20). And that is to us-ward.

There is something tremendous here. It is heaven's superiority over this whole situation to bring a people out and to bring a people through. We are in that school. Moses was in that school. He was put through that ordeal in order that he might progressively, but quite steadily and definitely, recognise that all that is here in Egypt, all that Pharaoh represents, is going to be drained to the last drop of its vitality and be laid in death at last - all of it. Moses was sometimes apprehensive. Sometimes he came back from the challenge disappointed. He felt, 'We have not got there yet, something more is needed yet'. 'All right', says the Lord, 'we will have something more'. The Lord was leading him on in his education; he was coming progressively to see more and more. Do you not think that, if God did everything all at once, in one act, we should miss something, we should take it all for granted, it would not mean so much to us, it would be just a miracle of the past? And yet throughout our lifetime God is extending the forces against us in order to prove that His forces are superior. It is a long schooling, but that is the way of the heavenly purpose.

THE HAND

From the rod to the hand. "Put now thy hand into thy bosom." What hand? That hand that had murdered the Egyptian, that hand stained with blood, that hand of natural strength, that hand of self-sufficiency, that hand which represented the old Moses and his failure, failure under the energy and drive of his own will. 'Put that hand in. What is in your bosom, Moses? That is what is yours. Do you think that can wield the rod of God? Do you think that can bring in the heavenly authority? Oh no, that hand has to be cleansed before you can wield that rod. That bosom must be cleansed, that stain must be removed, all that self-energy and self-sufficiency has to be undercut. Moses, that leprous hand is what you are like in yourself.'

Are we not discovering that? What is my heart like? What are we like? Just like that. The more we know and see of ourselves, the more it is like leprosy. But, blessed be God, there is a cleansing. For Moses there was a Divine act of cleansing. In that instant, all the meaning of the Cross, the word of the Cross, took effect in Moses' life - of course in type, in figure. And now that there is a hand that cleansed, that is, a heart circumcised, the inner life separated from the fleshly strength and sufficiency, all that can take the word of the Cross, the word of authority. It must be like that. We have no power in the realm of the gods of the Egyptians, those spiritual forces that are actuating this world, no authority at all in that court, no hope of overpowering that strength, unless something has happened for the deliverance of ourselves from our own strength, our own sufficiency, our own hearts.

(2) ISRAEL UNDER THE LEADERSHIP OF MOSES

Then there is that phase, so large that I hardly dare touch on it at the moment - Israel under the leadership of Moses. It was one long drawn-out issue of the heavenly and the earthly. All those forty years of the nation in the wilderness were just that - the issue of the heavenly and the earthly being fought out. They had been brought out to be a heavenly people; to have all their resources, all their support and succour, from heaven; to be in this world and not of it. If ever that is true - to be in the world and not of it - it is true in a wilderness.

The Divine thought was the making of a large place for heaven. There was a large place for heaven in that wilderness. Everything from the Divine side was to be heavenly. The people were constituted on heavenly principles. Moses up in the mount was securing those heavenly principles for the constituting of the nation. It was all coming from heaven. Their whole relationship to God in the wilderness, as centred in the tabernacle, came out of heaven: it was the pattern shown in the mount. It was heavenly; nothing was left to man and his judgment at all. Their going from day to day was out from heavenly means of the pillar of cloud and fire. It was all heavenly. What warfare there was, was heavenly: Moses on the top of the hill, with hands uplifted, the battle going on in the valley. Heaven is directing this warfare: it is heavenly warfare. It was all learning the meaning of the heavenly way, in every aspect.

But they failed to learn those lessons. They would come down to earth, they would reject the heavenly. It was too hard, it was too difficult for the flesh, it was too uncertain. It was such dependence, it was such helplessness so far as self was concerned. They could not help themselves - and we do want to help ourselves in this business. It was all so heavenly. But it was most real. Those who know anything about it know that heavenly things are the most real, spiritual things are far more real than other things. But they would not have the heavenly way, they would have the earthly; and they repudiated it all and perished, on the earth, in the wilderness.

Joshua and Caleb took up all those lessons of the schooling of Moses and Israel, in themselves. They learned the lessons, they apprehended the heavenly truth, and they took the next generation over - a

heavenly generation.

Well, all that may be regarded as history, as what is in the Bible: but I am sure that many of you are reading your own history. Is it not so true in principle to what we are going through, to what God is doing with us - defeating us, bewildering us, bringing us to an end, to an emptiness and helplessness? - and yet, by some mighty power that we do not feel, of which we are not conscious, we are going on' we are being drawn out and drawn up. It is the story of so many survivals, when it would seem that all has gone: that we are lost, we have failed, broken down, disappointed the Lord; there can be no future.

But there is a future. We have continued. There is something from beyond that is all the time holding us on, and it may be that today our hearts are more set upon what is of God than ever they were. And why is that? Not because we have been more successful, not because we have been less full of failure and weakness. No; rather we have learnt the lesson of our own weakness. We know today, better than ever we knew it, that "in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing" (Rom. 7:18) - and yet today the Lord has a stronger purchase upon us than ever. What is this? This is a mystery. Oh, thank God it is true! Thank God for His sovereign grace! These are the evidences that He has called us with a great calling and that He will not be satisfied until He has brought us right through to His own full end. May we follow on, whatever the cost.

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