

Noah and the Law of Life

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes Noah's testimony as a representation of the law of life, highlighting the necessity of a good conscience through resurrection and the rejection of natural life.

Scripture: Genesis 3:7, Genesis 6:5, Isaiah 43:18, John 14:6, Romans 6:3, Romans 8:2, 2 Corinthians 5:21, 1 Peter 3:20, Revelation 3:16

Topics: "Resurrection Life", "Spiritual Walk"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks preaches about the importance of being on resurrection ground, as exemplified by Noah's testimony. He emphasizes the need to have the answer of a good conscience toward God, which is only possible through the resurrection of Jesus Christ. The sermon delves into the significance of being out of the life of nature and walking with God on resurrection ground, where the law of the Spirit of life operates. It highlights the dangers of mixing the natural life with Divine things, stressing the importance of discernment and distinctiveness in our spiritual walk.

Transcript

As we move on in these meditations, there are two other passages of the Word of a basic character which I want to bring to you. One is in I Pet. 3:20-21.

"... once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

Without taking it away from its context, which is vital to our present consideration, I want just to underline the last part of that passage: "the answer of a good conscience toward God, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ".

Then we will turn back to most familiar words in Romans 6:3-8.

"Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection: Knowing this, that

our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. For he that is dead is freed from sin. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him."

The Basis of a Good Conscience

We now pass to the third of the characters used by God to explain the working of the law of life, namely, Noah. We have seen that not one of these can be taken as detached or unrelated or separate from any other or from the rest. They all overlap, grow into one another and grow out of one another. We find ourselves really in a chain, a chain of seven links; and the links in the chain of the course of death are clearly seen as you take up this book. "The eyes of them both were opened" (Gen. 3:7); that is the first link in the chain. The second link is this: "And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord" (Gen. 4:16). The third link quickly follows: "And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually... And God said unto Noah, The end of all flesh is come before me; for the earth is filled with violence through them; and, behold, I will destroy them with the earth" (Gen. 6:5,13). Now you see in that seventh verse of chapter 3 exactly what has happened. It is said that the eyes of them both were opened. It means that conscience came into being, and an evil conscience at that. Up to that time, conscience had not been the ruling faculty. Perhaps they had been altogether unconscious of having a conscience, but now conscience has come to life, and because it is an evil conscience they acted as they did and hid themselves. That has come in with Adam, and what we have to see is that the mischief that came in with Adam has to be remedied; there has to be deliverance from an evil conscience and the answer of a good conscience toward God.

The Adam race in itself is entirely unable to give that answer of a good conscience. No matter how conscience works in the natural man, it always betrays condemnation; for in the natural man conscience usually works either to accuse or excuse, and both alike represent condemnation. Conscience being evil, and man being unable to give the answer of a good conscience toward God, means that, so far as God is concerned, man is dead, dead to God. The answer of a good conscience toward God demands that we should be on living ground, a ground of life, altogether other ground than that of nature: so in I Pet. 3:21, it is the answer of a good conscience toward God, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Now, it is to this that Noah brings us. Here we have the question of life bound up with the answer of a good conscience toward God by resurrection; for life and a good conscience go together, or a good conscience toward God and life go together. In like manner, an evil conscience and death go together.

Just look back one step in our meditation to Abel. There in Abel the matter is related to the death side of the Cross. As we contemplated Abel and his sacrifice, we saw that Abel's discernment and conclusion was that, rather than being able to bring anything as the fruit of nature for God's satisfaction subsequent to Adam's disobedience, the only way of life is through death: the creature must die, the soul must be poured out unto death, not bring its works, its fruits, its good, as did Cain. So Abel represents the death side of the Cross, where the soul is poured out unto death.

Now, while we look out upon a state of universal death as we come to Noah and death is very much in view, nevertheless it is the positive side that governs in Noah's case. It is very important that we should recognize that. It is not the death side which is supreme in the case of Noah, despite a universal overwhelming. It is the life side that governs in Noah's case, the positive side.

Let us mark again what Peter says.

"The longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

That is the positive side, you see; the life side. All this brings something into view, namely, resurrection, life; and resurrection, life, is only possible when there has been a repudiation of the natural or soul-life of the old Adam. That is one side of Noah's testimony. God always finally acts on the positive line. While He says terrible things - "The end of all flesh is come before me... I will destroy them with the earth" - God never intended that should be the end. God is acting on the positive line. He will re-act to secure something that does answer to His original thought. He is not abandoning His thought and saying, I can never do as I intended; man has rendered it impossible for me to accomplish what I had set my heart upon: I am defeated, I am in a hopeless state, I will wipe it all out and try again. It is never thus with God. And to whatever He has to resort to clear the ground, He is but clearing ground for something else; He is acting and re-acting with the positive always in view. Otherwise God is defeated again and again and again. He is as a hopeless, helpless God making futile attempts through history, and the greatest failure that this universe has ever seen was the death of Jesus Christ! But we know that the death of the Lord Jesus was the greatest triumph of God that this universe has ever seen. It has cleared the ground for a new creation. God is always acting on the positive line. But you can never come to the positive, you can never come to the life, until there has been the repudiation of that which God has repudiated, and God has repudiated the natural life, the soul-life of man as the governing thing. Why is that? Well, as we have seen before, it is because, since Adam's transgression and fall, the natural or soul-life of man is a false life. This is made very manifest in Cain.

The Natural Soul-life a False Life

We must re-emphasize here something that was said in our previous meditation. You have in Cain a very religious man; a man who, along his line, is a very devout man, recognizing and acknowledging God as the object of worship. As he looked over the result of his labours in those fruits of the field and of the trees, he probably picked out the best, he selected the most perfect, he made up a sacrifice that answered to his highest judgment as to what was worthy of God. We will do him credit for that, and I think it is most likely that is exactly what he did do. He brought the best he could lay hand upon, and sought to worship God by that means, and sought life along that line. But, you see, his soul was darkened, and that action of the soul, that energy, that motion, that life of the soul, that natural life, was a false life. It misled him, it deceived him, it caused him to proceed in a way which brought him up against a blank wall where God was concerned, with no opening, no way through. It was the leading of a false, deceived life, and that is so with this natural life of ours. It is a false life, it is a deceived life, and it deceives us even in worship. We may become almost ecstatic in worship, we may become tremendously emotional in worship; there may be something that looks like veritable agony in worship, and I have seen it. I have entered cathedrals and churches in Southern Europe and the Mediterranean at the feast of Corpus Christi and at other times, and I have seen people spread on the ground in what looked like an agony, when the host was elevated, groaning and almost perspiring. Half an hour afterwards out in the street, they were using knives to one another in a quarrel. You see, it is a false life, a deceived life. That, of course, is an extreme expression of it, but you can see the same thing in more modified forms. Sincerity is not necessarily reality: we have to discriminate. We may mean well: so did Cain; but he murdered. This life of ours is a deceived life and it will deceive us even in worshipping, and get us nowhere.

Even in what we call service to God, it may be our own zest, our own zeal, our own enthusiasm, our own energy, putting ourselves into it, and not that energy and vitality of the Spirit of God by which alone God is served. Now, I am not saying that, when the Holy Spirit gets hold of us, we do not put ourselves into things, but I modify that word "ourselves". It is true that, if the Holy Ghost gets hold of us, He will use us up. The Lord requires that, whatsoever our hands find to do, we should do it with our might. The Lord demands that we shall serve Him with all our strength, all our mind, all our heart. Yes, but the Holy Spirit must be in charge to direct, to instigate, to govern, or all is in vain, and we are deceived in trying to serve the Lord and it comes to nothing. The question is, Where is the spring of this - in ourselves, or in Him? Is it of God or simply our own judgment as to what is for God? Now, this is where understanding needs enlightenment, and where things have to be put into their right place. This natural life does not get through to God, and therefore can never lead to spiritual maturity. Strange, is it not, that some of those who are most energetically engaged and thoroughly using their energies in work for God still remain so spiritually small in their knowledge of God? This soul of ours never will get us through to spiritual maturity, to a real and true knowledge of God: and that is the test of everything - growth in the knowledge of the Lord. It is not a question at the last of how much I have done, how sincere or earnest I have been: the thing which matters in the long run is, In what measure do I know the Lord, how much have I grown in the knowledge of the Lord, how has my spiritual intelligence increased? That is the thing that matters; and that is a matter of life, Divine life.

The flood was the verdict upon the course of Cain. The second link in the chain is, as we have said, "And Cain went out from the presence of the Lord, and dwelt in the land of Nod." Then what happened? He instituted a civilization. You mark what is there recorded. You find cities, trades, arts, industries, all coming out from Cain, all the various aspects of human life. Cain built a civilization, produced a world after his own kind; a natural life, soul-life, soul-world; that which was not out from God but out from himself, and the flood was God's verdict upon the course of Cain, that world of natural glory, of man's fruitfulness apart from God. So the law of life is seen operating, not along that line - that is the way of death - but along another line, through the flood and out on the other side upon resurrection ground.

The Importance of a True and Settled Position

Now, if we at any time leave the ground of resurrection, which pre-supposes the repudiation of our natural life, then life is at once arrested and death takes advantage. We have to settle it once for all that we have done with nature and nature's ground as the ground of our hope, our confidence, our reliance, our expectation. Yet how long drawn out is that awful conflict with our own natures to get that issue! Have we any expectation whatsoever in nature? Of course, as one familiar with the doctrine, you will say, No, certainly not! we see that it is unfruitful, unprofitable, and we can have no expectation there. Then why be miserable because you cannot find any good in yourself? It means that you are expecting something from yourself. Take that ground and you take the ground of death. If you take the ground of resurrection, it implies that you have once for all given up all expectation of any good coming out of yourself. Oh, to get that settled, and settled with reference to the Devil; because, you see, this not only constitutes for us an outstanding point of conflict, but it is also Satan's ground. Every link in this chain, every aspect of the working of this law of life, is a reversing of the work of Satan. If he brought out the soul into a false place of domination, then the soul has to be poured out that his ground may be taken away.

You have heard of the farmer who was always having trouble with his spiritual life because Satan was always coming to him and telling him that he was not forgiven and not a true believer in Christ, that he was not truly saved. Almost every day he went down under that accusation until life became intolerable. One

day, unable to go on any longer because of this accusation and the misery of getting down under it, he sat down and faced the thing out. He put some questions to himself with the Word of God before him. He said, Have I accepted that? Do I believe that? Of course I do with all my heart. Then God says that I am forgiven. God says "there is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." So he went out into the field where Satan had met him so often and took a stake, and drove it deep into the earth, and said, That settles it once for all! Then he went on with his ploughing. He got to the other side and Satan came back and tried to tempt him again. Look here, Mr. Satan, he said, you come along with me. You see that stake? You know why I drove that stake in there: I drove it in to settle this business once for all. God has said it and I believe and accept it. That is an end of it!

Do not parley with Satan. Point to an established fact and stay there. Keep to your fact. If you move off resurrection ground and what it implies, it is death. Stay there, with its implication that you have repudiated the life of nature as having any possible hope, and you have seen Christ as the hope, the sure hope, the only hope. Maintain that position, and the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus makes free from the law of sin and death. That is how the law of life operates, on resurrection ground. There is no good conscience on any other ground, as that farmer well discovered when he moved over on to Satan's side and accepted what he had to say.

Noah forever stands to testify against the vanity, the emptiness, the unfruitfulness of a natural life, and his is a practical testimony. He testified to the vanity of natural life by building an ark in order to get out of it. That, for Noah, was the way of life - out of the life of nature. The law of life in Christ Jesus supposes that, in spirit, we are out of nature: otherwise that law is not a law for us; it has no meaning for us, it does not operate where we are concerned. It supposes that we are out of the life of nature and in Christ Jesus.

Noah a Witness against a Lost Discrimination

Now, to examine Noah a little more closely. One of the pronounced features in Noah's day was the loss of distinctiveness between things clean and things unclean. There is that mysterious statement in Genesis 6:2: "The sons of God saw the daughters of men... and took them wives of all which they chose." The last clause is very suggestive - "as THEY chose". Refraining deliberately from going into explanations of the first part of the statement, let us take what lies on the surface. Here are those who are on God's line. We will just leave it at that. There are those who are on God's line and those who are not on God's line, the sons of God and the daughters of men, and there is an inter-mixture, a loss of distinction, a loss of discrimination between what is of God and what is not of God, and a bringing of those two things together and making them one. That is the meaning of marriage. But what was it that led to that? "As they chose." You see, here you have the soul in action, desiring and choosing, without a perception of what is of God and what is not of God. You see the principle. Will you just isolate that little bit, and hold it and think about it? The soul in action; desiring, that is the soul on its emotional side; choosing, that is the soul on its volitional side; desiring and choosing without discrimination as to what is of God and what is not of God. That is exactly the manner of the natural life, exactly what is exemplified in Cain. The life of nature mixes things up and has no power to perceive or discern what is of God and what is not of God: it brings the two together. That today is the tragedy of Christianity, the tragedy of what is called "the Church", the tragedy of the work of the Lord. There things have become all mixed up. That which is of God has been brought under the hand of man, and man is putting himself into the things of God. All this is the mixture of soul with the things of God.

Now, that was a pronounced feature of things in Noah's day, and if there is one thing which is abhorrent to God, it is mixture. God has shown Himself in His Word to be opposed to mixture. With God, there is light and there is darkness, there is death and there is life. When God reaches His end, the river of the water of life is crystal clear, and no murkiness is to be seen. The new Jerusalem, the Holy City, is as clear as jasper, transparent. All this is after God. "God is light and in Him there is no darkness at all." God is utter and God hates confusion. He is not the God of confusion, He cannot bear mixture. God is always saying in effect, One thing or the other! "Because thou art... neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth" (Rev. 3:16). God is nauseated by mixture, and that is what obtained there, natural life mixing up with Divine things. That brings the Deluge, judgment, that is the way of death. The law of the Spirit of life demands utterness or it cannot operate. Life moves along the line of what is absolutely distinct, unmistakable, clear, as of God. It cannot countenance mixture.

You see here, the deception of this life brought about the judgment of God. What is deception? Well, it works in many ways; but, so far as the soul is concerned, it can work in this way, that it is a determined adherence to one's own opinions on any subject, which means we are unwilling to subject those opinions to any court but the court of our own judgment. The thing begins with us and it ends with us. It is tied up with ourselves and we are not prepared to have any other judgment on the matter. You may take it that, if anybody is like that, they are most deceived.

Noah's Testimony Essentially Implies Resurrection

Now, we must close. There are two things to be noted about Noah. It says that he was a just man and that he walked with God. Well, as a just man, he took up what was true of Abel. Abel had witness borne concerning himself that he was righteous; and, walking with God, he took up what was true of Enoch: Enoch walked with God. Both of these things carry you at once on to resurrection ground and show what Noah stands for. If, as is said, he is a just man, whence is his righteousness? Why, only on the ground of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. We are justified by His life, that is, His resurrection life. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is God's own act of attestation that all sin and guilt has been dealt with and put away, and that is the ground on which we are justified. It is through His righteousness, a righteousness given us of God. That is life, walking with God. Who can walk with God? No one can walk with God who is not on resurrection ground, who is not righteous before God in that sense.

So we might go on increasing this emphasis in many ways, that what Noah stands for is the positive side, resurrection, and that the law of the Spirit of life operates on resurrection ground. That means that all other ground of natural life has been left and in Christ we have come out. You see, Noah was all those years occupied with that which spoke of being outside of things here; for Noah was building that ark all through those years. He was every day hammering home this fact: I am not in this, I am going out, I am repudiating this! The hour is coming when what is true of me spiritually will take place literally. That is also our position. We too are out spiritually, and we await the hour when what is true of us spiritually will become literally true; we shall go out. But Christ is out, and resurrection life means that we are out of what is here; out of nature, and out of this world, and out of ourselves. Noah with his ark ever bears that testimony - out, always out.

But, even so, it required a lot of patience to be spiritually out and yet to be environed by all that state of things, pestered by it, worried by it, pressed by the life of nature. "In your patience ye shall win your souls." That is the way of life.

Let me emphasize again that this means to be on resurrection ground. That is why we read Romans 6:3-8. It is "out" through death. Link Romans 6 with I Pet. 3:21 - Through water saved on to resurrection ground: planted in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection. Eight souls (eight, the resurrection number) were saved through water: "the like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us... the answer of a good conscience toward God, by the resurrection of Jesus Christ." It is quite possible for everyone of us to have a perfectly good conscience. A happy state to be in! Have you a good conscience? Are you under accusation, under condemnation? Are you fretting and worrying about the badness of your own heart? That means that you have not the answer of a good conscience to God. What is the matter? You are still looking for something from nature, from yourself. You had better give it up, as that is the only way out; repudiate it. Tell yourself and tell the Devil once for all that in you, that is, in your flesh, dwelleth no good thing, and you never expect to find anything. The Devil knows it, and yet he is trying to get you on an impossible quest for something he knows you will never find, and that is how he worries you. Then why not come on to the Lord's ground and out-manoeuvre him? Drive in your stake. Let us settle it that we can never expect to find any good in ourselves. All our good is in another, even our Lord Jesus. It is the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus. The Lord explain all that this means.

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