

Our Heavenly Vocation

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of living by Divine life and relying on God's power to fulfill our vocation, rather than our own strength.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 8:3, Psalm 2:8, Psalm 91:11, Zechariah 4:6, Matthew 10:39, 1 Corinthians 6:2, 2 Timothy 2:12

Topics: "Divine Life", "Christian Vocation"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks delves into the biography of Jesus Christ written by the Holy Spirit, focusing on the interconnectedness of His baptism, anointing, and temptation. Drawing parallels from the Garden of Eden and Israel's history, he highlights the central question of living by Divine life or self-sufficiency. Through the three temptations faced by Jesus, the sermon emphasizes the importance of living by Divine life, the methods of fulfilling our vocation without compromising with the world, and the ultimate purpose of our vocation to reign with Christ in the Kingdom of God.

Transcript

Reading: Matthew 3:13-4:11

As you know, we are in these mornings occupied with the Holy Spirit's biography of Jesus Christ which He is writing in the spiritual history of believers. Last time we commenced a new chapter in this biography, the chapter which contains the baptism, the anointing and the temptation of the Lord Jesus, which, as we saw, are three parts of one thing. Each depends upon the other, and they should never be separated, but, because of lack of time, we had to break off after the second part. So now we shall take part three, the temptation of the Lord Jesus in the wilderness.

It is very important that we should recognize what is the setting of the temptation, for it is not something in itself, nor just an incident in the life of the Lord Jesus. It has a very long history, going right back to the Garden of Eden and the first Adam.

May I just say here, to help you in your Bible reading, that it is always important to see any part of the Scripture in relation to the whole, and to see how it fits in to the whole revelation. This is a very special example, for this temptation in the wilderness, as I have just said, takes us back into the Garden of Eden and brings us alongside of the first Adam. As you know, that man was put on probation. The question he was going to answer was: Would he live by Divine life, or would he live in himself and not in God? Would it be a matter of God being everything, or, as Satan suggested, man being self-sufficient. That was the issue

of the two trees. The one tree, the tree of life, was a symbol of the Divine life by which God wanted man to live, and the other tree, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, was the symbol of man being sufficient in himself. So it was a question of whether man would be absolutely dependent upon Divine life, or whether he would depend upon himself. Well, we know that Adam failed, and the immediate result was that he was driven from a garden into a wilderness, and the Lord said that the ground would bring forth thorns and thistles - in fact, everything that spoke of a curse upon the earth. So the first Adam, because of this wrong choice of life, found himself in a wilderness, and the wilderness represents man making a false choice. Adam broke down in his probation.

Now we pass over some centuries and come to Israel, and this same issue was presented to them. It is the key to their history. When they were brought out of Egypt into a wilderness for forty years (and I hope you are reading Matthew 4 in this: Jesus was in the wilderness for forty days and forty nights, so the same principle is there) the question was: Would they live by Divine life, or, in rebellion, seek to be self-sufficient? Well, we know that in that probation Israel also failed.

So God presents the same question to a man and to a nation: 'Will you live by My life, or will you be sufficient in yourself?' The wilderness is certainly a good place to test that! God is very practical. If He puts us in a wilderness the question does indeed become very practical: Can we meet the situation here, or will it only be possible by God being our sufficiency? That was the question with the first Adam and the first nation, at least, it was the first nation so far as the Bible is concerned.

Now we come to the third thing. First Adam, then Israel, and then the last Adam, and we find Him in the very place where both the first Adam and the first nation failed. He is in a wilderness, and He also is on probation for forty days and forty nights. You know that the number forty in the Bible always means probation, a time of testing. Now the issue with the last Adam is exactly the same as it was with the first: Will He live in absolute dependence upon God His Father, or will He take up this life-vocation in His own strength? That test was a very practical one, for it becomes very practical if you have not had anything to eat for forty days and forty nights! It is a matter of how you will get something to eat, for it looks as though you will die. So at that point it was a question of life or death, but the question, of course, was deeper than just the matter of bread, which is what we come to here: "Man shall not live by bread alone." It was a question of whether He would face this life work just on a natural basis or on a Divine basis, of whether He would try to find the resources in Himself alone, or in His Father.

The Lord Jesus answers that in John's Gospel when in chapter five He says: "The Son can do nothing OUT FROM HIMSELF", for that is the force of the Greek word. It is not in Him to do it, and that is the position that He has accepted voluntarily - absolute dependence upon His Father. 'The works that I do, I do not OUT FROM MYSELF. The words that I speak I do not speak OUT FROM MYSELF: It is the Father who doeth the works, and it is the Father who speaks the words.' Jesus had accepted that position, but there was a tremendous battle connected with it.

That is the issue which confronts every one of us, and it ought to be the issue governing the life of every believer. We were saying that we were all called to the same vocation, and that the service of God is gathered up into one thing, which is bringing the Lord Jesus into a situation. That is the service of God comprehensively. Can you do that of yourself? Can we bring the Lord into a situation in our own strength, in our own wisdom, out from our own resources? Well, you know the answer to that! The very justification of your being a Christian is that through you the Lord is brought into this world, that where you are the Lord comes in. He comes in through you against all the forces of this world and of Satan, and it is because you

are there that He comes in. Now, if that were put to you individually, what would you say? 'No, IMPOSSIBLE! That can never be where I am concerned!'

I think there is a lot of history behind that. The Lord takes away our own strength and our own wisdom, and makes us dependent upon Him. That is the principle of heavenly vocation.

Now we come to the three temptations, and we must remember what is the issue that is involved. The issue is vocation, that for which we are here, and, as I have said, we are here to make a place for the Lord.

These three temptations are immediately connected with that vocation. We must see how each temptation is related to this vocation, because the object explains the methods of Satan. Do you understand that? Satan knows what our presence means to his kingdom. He knows quite well why we are here, just as he knew why the Lord Jesus was here, and so he must defeat that end in some way. He works very subtly and increases his temptation as he goes on, but he knows what he is after at the end.

The whole question is that of the basis of life. The basis of the Christian survival, and the great basic factor, is Divine life, and Satan has always wanted to defeat that. In the Garden of Eden and with Israel his one object was to defeat Divine life.

LIFE FOR OUR VOCATION

In the first temptation Jesus is in physical weakness through lack of food, and this is a question of His very life. Satan comes to Him in His weakness and says: 'If what was said at the Jordan be true, and You are the Son of God, command these stones that they may be made bread.' What did Jesus answer? "It is written that man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."

The first thing about this life-bread is that it is a different kind of life from natural life. That is what is hidden in this first temptation. There is a great deal of difference between natural life and Divine life. I think we should notice that the Lord Jesus, in quoting that Scripture from Deuteronomy 8, quoted it correctly. Presently Satan is going to quote the Scriptures, but he is going to do so incorrectly, and that is one of his ways. He takes up Divine things and gives them a twist. In quoting that Scripture the Lord said: "Man shall not live by bread alone." He did not say: 'You do not need any natural bread.' There are certain kinds of Christians today, and have always been through the ages, who think that they are very spiritual because they starve themselves. They fast as much as they can, usually looking very miserable. They are always very finicky about their food - and they think that is being very spiritual! But the Lord does not say that that is what we are to do. He says that there is the natural bread, but that is not the only thing, for there is a bread which is much more important, and that is the TRUE bread. That is quite different. How men are trying to fulfil the work of God on natural grounds! Their resources are natural resources which are produced by themselves and the Lord says: 'No!' There is all the difference between the earthly and heavenly worlds, between natural life and Divine life. But that life is not only different; it is something extra. It is not bread only, but something more than that, something extra to the natural. You may have your breakfast in the morning - and there is nothing wrong in having a breakfast, or any other meal - but if you think that you are going to do the work of God on a good breakfast, you make a mistake. Do you see what I mean? This is something extra to the natural, something much more than anything that natural food can give us. It is the great Divine extra.

You see, we are repeating the life of Christ, and I can give you examples from His life. Just take one: His meeting with the woman of Samaria. The Lord Jesus, being wearied with His journeys, sat on the well and sent His disciples into the city to buy bread. Then the woman came from the city, and you know the conversation they had and how the whole of the life of the Lord Jesus was poured out to that woman like living water. As He spoke of heavenly things, as He gave to that woman the heavenly secrets, and as He spoke about the heavenly life, deeper than that well and more eternal than the water of that well, although it was Jacob's Well, all His weariness went and He was a renewed Man. The disciples came back to Him with their loaves and said: 'Master, eat.' Then they looked at Him. 'Has anyone given Him bread to eat? What has happened to Him? Why, He is a new man and He does not want our bread.' You see, He had been talking about life, and it is no use talking about life if you are not an example of it. He said: "I have meat to eat that you know not.... My meat is to do the will of him that sent me" (John 4:32,34). Think about that for a little and remember that you are dealing with these eternal principles. This is the EXTRA bread, which is more than the natural.

Some of us who minister a great deal find that when we face new ministry we often feel very weary, and naturally the question is: 'Can we do it? Can we get through that long conference?' But when we get to the end of the conference we have new life. It really IS like that. The fact is that when tomorrow night comes and this conference is over, I shall have just as much in hand as I have given all the week - and we shall want another week! Well, I am not an example, but I am trying to enunciate the principle: "Not by bread alone, but..." This is one of those very many occasions when those two words are put one against another - "Not... but..."

There is one other thing: This Divine life is a matter of faith. The Lord Jesus said: "By every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." Well, there is the word in writing in the Bible, but do you think it is enough for it to be the Word of God, written in the Bible? No, you have got to lay hold of it by faith, and we have to lay hold of this life by faith. You remember the woman who came to the Lord Jesus in the crowd and said: "If only I could touch the hem of his garment I would be made whole", and although the multitude was pressing on Him, there was no one else in that multitude who received that life. It was that woman's hand of faith, and the Lord Jesus said: "Thy faith hath made thee whole." LAYING HOLD of the word of life by faith is something that we must ever do. Paul says: "Lay HOLD on eternal life" (1 Timothy 6:12), for it is there. Really exercise faith about it.

These things may seem very simple to you, but they are very important and real.

The passage that the Lord Jesus used in answering Satan is from Deuteronomy 8:2 and 3, and you need to look at the setting of it. It is at the end of the forty years in the wilderness, and says: "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God hath led thee these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble thee, to prove thee, to know what was in thine heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or no. And he humbled thee, and suffered thee to hunger, and fed thee with manna, which thou knewest not, neither did thy fathers know, that he might make thee know that man doth not live by bread only, but by every thing that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord doth man live."

What have we here? The people are not going into the wilderness now, for they are going over Jordan into the land, but there is a history behind them. For forty years God has proved that there is a life other than the natural. Do you not think that that is a good thing? You might say to me: 'You are talking about this Divine life, but PROVE it.' Well, I can give you more than forty years - but no, I am not talking about myself. I am talking about the history of the Church, and that is two thousand years. Has the Church

continued through these many centuries by its own strength? Has the Church been in many a wilderness? Has there been much starvation? Yes, again and again the Church has been in a terrible wilderness, with death all around, and with nothing in this world to support it. It could have died again and again, but it has not died. It is alive today, and there is a great history of the Lord's Divine support. And what is true of the Church is true of the history of many a believer. Many of you could say: 'If it had been left to me I would have been dead today. My very survival is a testimony to something supernatural.' Is that true? Oh, yes, it is true, and it has to be true to the end.

So here we have a history behind what the Lord Jesus is saying, and He is able to put the strong proof of history into His words when He answers Satan.

Now the Lord Jesus is in a wilderness, but what is He going to have to meet in the next three and a half years? I do not think that Satan is going to stop at anything to kill the testimony of Divine life in Jesus. Again and again he makes an attack upon His life in every possible way in order to quench the testimony of Jesus, but He goes through. He lives, and He lives today, for that Divine life has triumphed over everything.

That biography has to be written in your heart and in mine. We are in a wilderness - or do you think that your Christian life is the Garden of Eden, with everything so lovely and with everything in the world that you can want? Is that how it is with you? Well, of course, it is very nice here at Hilterfingen, but you know quite well that you have to go back. You may feel like Peter: "Let us build three tabernacles and stay in Hilterfingen for the rest of our lives!", but it may rain next week, and, even if it does not, you know you have to go back to your difficult situation. That may be very much like a spiritual wilderness, but you have this great truth: there is a Divine life, which is a different life, an extra life, and you can live by that life wherever you are.

I suppose there are few more difficult situations than those in which our dear brother Watchman Nee has been for eighteen years. As far as we know, he is alive, and I believe that his spiritual testimony is still alive - and that is a miracle. We may not have his experience, but we may know the wilderness, and God CAN prepare a table in the wilderness.

The point, then, of the first temptation was this: Would the Lord Jesus use His own powers to save His own life, or would He depend upon God? Later on He will say: "He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Matthew 10:39), and that is the principle. Satan has failed on that ground, so he is going to change his position, for he is not giving up yet.

THE METHODS OF FULFILLING OUR VOCATION

Now we come on to the methods of fulfilling our vocation. Satan took the Lord Jesus into Jerusalem, set Him on the pinnacle of the temple and said: "Cast thyself down." Now Satan quotes Scripture, trying to take Christ's own ground and defeat Him there: 'You believe in the Scripture, do You? You are thinking of the Word of God. All right! Now it is written: "He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: and on their hands they shall bear thee up, lest haply thou dash thy foot against a stone."' I say that Satan misquotes the Scripture, for is that what Psalm 91 really says? If you read that Psalm you will find that Satan left out the most important clause: "He shall give his angels charge over thee, TO KEEP THEE IN ALL THY WAYS" (verse 11). There are some ways in which the Lord will not keep people, but Satan leaves that out.

Yes, Satan is quoting Psalm 91, and what are "the ways" in that Psalm? I think it is very impressive and almost humorous. That Psalm begins by saying: "He that dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High", and THAT is the man referred to throughout the Psalm. Jesus had chosen to make His dwelling in the secret place of the Most High, and every Christian knows what that is. You have a hidden life with God, and you abide in that. Have you a hidden life with God, a life that this world does not see, a sanctuary with God, a secret place with the Most High? Will you come out from that? You see the subtlety of Satan! 'Come out from Your secret place and adopt some worldly methods of fulfilling your vocation! Cast Yourself down and everybody will say: "This is something very wonderful!", and You will have all the people in Jerusalem rushing to You. They will say that You have come down from heaven, and You will be the most popular man in Palestine!' - and it will have been done by a trick. It would mean that the Lord Jesus was party to something in the natural man which likes to have evidences and proofs, for, you see, everyone in Jerusalem sought for a sign. They said to Him: 'Show us a sign and we will believe. Give us some evidence. Give us some proof that we can see and we will be Your followers.' This is the temptation: Use some methods in the work of the Lord which will make you popular, something that will appeal to the sensational in man, some tricks. Do you see what I am talking about? Is this not what the Church is trying to do? It is trying to recover its lost power by a lot of tricks, by playing to this thing in man that wants the sensational. Surely we can see that this is what is happening! The methods that are employed in the work of God to attract the crowds, to get big meetings, are to satisfy this desire for proofs and evidences. Perhaps never in the history of the world has there been so much of this. I do not want to be critical, nor to judge too much, but I have a very great question about the guitar, and a lot of other things that are employed to try to make the work of God successful.

That was what was in this pinnacle of the temple. You will get the crowds if you do that kind of thing, but you may come out from the secret place of the Most High, that hidden place from the world which is the place of power.

I can only just drop these hints, but I know what I am talking about, and I do believe, dear friends, that all we need is the power of the Holy Spirit in the Gospel. I do not believe that it is necessary to have all this other stuff. I believe that where there is reality, people who really want reality will go there, and people who do not want reality, well, just let them stay away! Perhaps you do not agree with that, but I am talking on Divine principles, on the principles of the life of Jesus Christ, and I am saying that these principles of Christ have to be written in His Church.

THE PURPOSE OF OUR VOCATION

We come to the third temptation, and Satan is now moving his position. He is gradually being uncovered and it is now going to be manifest what it is he is really after. He himself knows what he has been after all the time, and he has been moving steadily towards it. He took the Lord Jesus up into a very high mountain. I do not know, of course, how that was done, though I do not think that it was done literally. I think that the Lord Jesus was seeing all this in a spiritual way. However, in that high mountain Satan showed the Lord Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and said: 'I will give You all this if You will fall down and worship me.' Ah, now it has come out! Satan knows what Jesus Christ has come into this world for, and that is to bring in the Kingdom of God. He knows that this One is destined to be the Divinely-appointed Lord of the universe. If Satan knew the Scriptures in Deuteronomy and Psalm 91, he also knew them in Psalm 2, which shows the final exaltation of God's Son. Satan knew that before the world was. His demons know this One, for on one occasion they said to Him: "What have I to do with thee, Jesus, thou Son of the Most High God?" (Luke 8:28). So the ultimate issue is world dominion, and that is the one thing

that Satan is against, for he is the god of this world and he is not going to have that position taken from him by anyone.

But see how clever he is! 'I will give it all to You without You having to go to the Cross. You can have it all without suffering if only You will do one thing - put me in the place of Your God and worship me. And if You do that I know quite well that You will not get the kingdoms of the world. MY kingdom is established, and what You came for will be defeated.' That is what lies behind it all but what is Satan really saying? 'Compromise with me as the prince of this world' - and if we compromise with this world we are going to lose our spiritual dominion now and afterwards. You see, it is the Church that is going to reign.

There are some things in the Bible that I do not understand. For one thing I do not understand what Paul meant when he said: "Know ye not that the saints shall judge the world? ... Know ye not that we shall judge angels?" (1 Corinthians 6:2-3). I do not really understand that, but I do know that it is in keeping with the whole revelation of the New Testament: "If we suffer with him we shall reign with him" (2 Timothy 2:12). He will give us the Throne with Himself.

That is what we are called to, and is the purpose of the vocation: to govern this world in the place of Satan. Is that not a tremendous thing? That is the destiny of the Church. So Satan sees that the way to defeat that destiny is to compromise with the world, but you cannot cast out Satan by Satan, nor can you cast out the world by the world. The Church has tried to do that, and it has lost its position and its power. It is in a poor state today, and the reason is that it has compromised with this world. It may have had a right motive - trying to win the world on its own grounds - but it takes more than a guitar to beat the devil! You will never overcome the world by worldly means and methods.

'Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God ONLY.' You must give Him the supreme place in this universe. 'And Him ONLY shalt thou serve,' not Satan, nor the world.

What is the service of God? Remember Mary's service - bringing the Lord into His right place, taking ground for the Lord and holding it for Him. But what a battle! The enemy and all his powers are set against it, but thank God for the anointing! It is said that the Spirit which had come upon Him DROVE Him into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil, but it does not say: 'to be defeated by the devil'. He was anointed to test out the strength of this great enemy and break it, and the anointing carried Him through in victory.

Dear friends, we have the anointing. Let us believe in it! There is NOTHING impossible with the anointing: "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6).

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