

Ressurrection: A Living Personal Reality

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of having a living personal experience with God, rather than relying on borrowed or second-hand experiences, and the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome natural limitations and bring us to true ground.

Duration: 26:15

Scripture: 2 Kings 2:9

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of staying close to life and keeping our ambitions and quests for enlargement and increase in line with the work of the Lord. The story of Elisha and the floating axe head is used as an example of a miraculous reversal of the natural order. The speaker highlights that by nature, we are prone to sinking and being pressed down, especially when faced with spiritual demands. However, with the Holy Spirit in us, there is a reversal of nature, causing us to rise and go on in the work of the Lord. The message is that everything we use in the work of the Lord must be firsthand and a true part of our own being and experience.

Transcript

In the second book of the Kings, the second book of the Kings, chapter six, and the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, behold now, the place where we dwell before thee is too street for us. Let us go, we pray thee, unto Jordan and take thence every man a beam, and let us make us a place there where we may dwell. And he answered, go ye.

And one said, be content, I pray thee, and go with thy servants. And he answered, I will go. So he went with them.

When they came to the Jordan, they cut down wood. But as one was felling a beam, the axe head fell into the water. And he cried and said, alas, my master, for it was borrowed.

The man of God said, where fell it? And he showed him the place. And he cut down a stick and cast it in thither, and the iron did swim. He said, take it up to thee.

So he put out his hand and took it. I confess that I used to wonder why that story was included in the number which we have of these acts of Elisha. Very interesting, and of course quite wonderful, but what is

its lesson? What has it to say? And in thinking about it, several things have become quite clear to me.

I would like to pass on just one or two of them this morning. Of course, this, with all these other things that are recorded about the acts of Elisha, this with them is included in the great beginning of his life. You recall that as his master Elisha was about to be taken up to heaven, he asked Elisha what he might give him.

Elisha said, a double portion of thy spirit. More literally, the portion of the firstborn. Elisha said, you have asked a hard thing.

Nevertheless, if you see me when I am taken up, it shall be. And as they passed through the Jordan, on to the other side, the chariots, the Lord appeared and caught up Elisha. Elisha cried, my father, my father, the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof.

The mantle fell from Elisha and Elisha took it up. The sons of the prophets who come into view at that point, and are mentioned so many times in this book, cried, the spirit of Elisha does rest upon Elisha. And they bowed themselves to the ground.

Now that is where it all begins. For these various, shall we call them stories, they are more than stories, works of power, worthy expression and outcome of that mighty anointing with the spirit. That portion of the firstborn.

So that what we have here in every one, and in this one, of which we are thinking this morning, is the real work of the anointing. That is the Holy Spirit operating in the power of resurrection. Every incident, as you notice, bears that stamp.

In some way or another, in some form or another, it is the mighty walking of resurrection power by the anointing, by the Holy Spirit. It would be easy, and we have done it before, will not take the time to repeat this morning, show how this is but a foreshadowing of the ascension or receiving up of the Lord Jesus, whereupon the Holy Spirit descended upon the church. The mantle of the firstborn, the portion of the firstborn fell upon the church.

We want to know what the portion of the firstborn is. It is just this, the power of his resurrection. Seeing that, let us come to this story, the sons of the prophets, again in view, and note what they represent.

They represent the generation succeeding, following on to carry forward the prophetic testament, the next generation, the sons of the prophets. The heart of this whole thing, where they appear again and again in relation to these mighty acts of the Spirit through Elisha, the heart of the whole thing is this, that these called sons of the prophets, who were in the schools of the prophets, being educated and trained to carry on the work of the prophets, to fulfill their ministry in the next generation, were not just academic students. They were being, by these various ways, brought into the closest touch with reality.

And you will at once see how true that was in the case of this man and his ex-head. But these sons of the prophets expressed quite a legitimate ambition or desire when they said the place where we dwell is too straight for us, and said let us have enlargement perfectly legitimate ambition or desire, a right thing, nothing wrong with that at all. To desire to escape limitation and straightness and to enlarge and to expand for the work of the Lord, that's quite a good thing and quite a right thing.

And so Elisha raised no objection, put no difficulty in the way, but encouraged. And when some of them said to him, look here, we're not just going on with this without you, we're not discarding the old

generation, you come with us, we need you. He said, I'll come.

There was a towardness in this whole matter, quite rightly so. But even so, with a perfectly legitimate desire and ambition, a right quest with which there is no objection at all, the thing has got to be kept very close to life. And that's what this story is about.

Amongst the various lessons that it teaches, there are just two that I will point out this morning. That in our going on, or our desire to go on, our quest for enlargement and increase and escape from anything that is small, narrow, straightened, limited. All that is employed in the work of the Lord must be first hand.

It cannot be done with borrowed tools. There are many ways in which the testimony can be second hand. Maybe children brought up in it in their home.

I wonder if I might refer to such an occasion in our own midst several years ago. When our brother Patterson was taken so suddenly to the Lord, his son John, who was with us at the conference time recently, passed into a very difficult phase. He came to see me.

He said, I'm having a very difficult time. I have discovered that I have been living on my father's testimony. I have just taken what he said, followed him, thinking that I was on the same ground as he.

I discovered that it was his and not mine, and I've got to find it all for myself right from the beginning. It was a difficult passage. He came through, of course.

He's on his own ground. It was a borrowed axe. We may get it from our meeting, teaching that we have received over years.

We've got it in our hand, we think, and then we imagine that we are going to use it in some way, and it's going to be a serviceable thing, and then something happens. We find it doesn't work. The head comes off.

It just comes off and lets us down. This is not ours, alas, it was a borrowed one. It wasn't ours, it was someone else's.

It was the fellowships, the meetings, or the teachers, in various other ways. It can be something borrowed from the study and the library and the bookshelves, the commentaries and the translations, and all the authorities, the godly men who have written it, and we've got it, we think, and it doesn't work. The head comes off, alas, it was borrowed.

Now the Lord allows these incidents, if you like, these accidents. There are no accidents at all. These things to happen where the whole thing seems to let us down.

It doesn't seem as though it's working. He does that. A crisis arises such as arose with this man and his acts, in order that the thing should pass through death onto resurrection ground and become ours in the power of resurrection.

When the whole head has come off, and we are left just with a head with a shaft in our hand, which won't chew down any trees at all, won't accomplish anything, left like that standing, it's a painful hour, painful time. Feel that perhaps we've been on the wrong road. We've been in some kind of illusion.

Well, maybe. The Lord is very faithful. The Lord is very faithful.

And such experiences, which seem to be like disaster, and we cry alas, alas, those experiences are in the very faithfulness of God, to bring that thing onto new ground, where it's ours by a miracle of God. It's ours because the power of his resurrection has come in. And when that has come in, it's no longer a borrowed one.

It's yours. I'm quite sure you've seen more than is necessary for me to say. No, dear friends, the very faithfulness of God necessitates on the one side the loss of the ex-head sometimes, to leave us standing, crying alas.

All our power to do things has flown, it's gone, it's stranded. On the other side, there's always the positive purpose of God in such experiences, that we shall know this portion of the firstborn. You get the firstborn portion, you know.

You like to go back to the book of Deuteronomy, you'll see what that is and what, where that arose. The portion of the firstborn is something which secures the inheritance to the individual conserved. It is not something bought, paid for, earned, but a gift of grace, portion of the firstborn.

It is knowing the anointing in truth. We will all agree, every one of us here this morning will agree at least with the theory, with the statement, that we don't want borrowed experiences or teaching, second-hand addresses, studied-up things. We want people who know and can speak out of a deep experience.

They have been through the death of Jordan. They have been into death and have come onto resurrection ground. They know it by the bitterness on the one side of loss, failure, disappointment.

On the other side, the wonderful strength of this miracle of resurrection life. We want sons of the prophets who are in the good of the anointing, not just students of it. Well, that's the first lesson.

Simple it is, but it explains a lot, I think. The Lord's ways with us. Everything has got to be established on the ground of a living personal experience, and not be somebody else's, but our own.

The other thing which goes with it, of course, quite clearly is, that in this, that happened, this miracle of resurrection, it was a complete and perfect reversal of the natural order. It is the nature of a piece of iron to sink. That's its nature.

It will sink. For a piece of iron, a lump of iron, an axe head, to float, is contrary to nature. I only need hint at things.

You'll see much more than I need say. Dear friends, by nature we are all bits of iron. Let me put that another way.

By nature we are of the sinking kind. We know that. It wants very little to push us under, to put us down.

It's in us. And especially when there is some spiritual demand on hand. For here was the whole matter of enlargement, expansion, and increase in the work of the Lord.

And I wonder if you have noticed, that whenever something more of the Lord is in view, how quickly we get downed. We get pressed under. I have noticed that it happens.

It just happens. With something of the Lord just coming on, you'll find people under things. They've gone down.

They've been caught in some way, and they've sunk. We have to really gird ourselves for anything that the Lord is going to do. It just doesn't happen.

Well, we are made like that. Naturally we are of the sinking kind. Perhaps you may think that you are a very buoyant person.

I venture to suggest that the most buoyant person in this place this morning, with the most buoyant and optimistic natural make up, coming right up against the forces that are set against the things of God, will find that they need more than natural buoyancy. We are not going to swim, to float, to stay on top, without something more than our own strength of nature, our own constitution. And the wonder of the anointing, let's say it quickly and close, the wonder of the anointing, the wonder of the Holy Spirit, the wonder of the portion of the Firstborn is this.

That although we are so sinkable, we are such sinkable stuff, naturally it is decline. It is to drop down under pressure, under trial. The marvel is that you and I are afloat today.

It is a marvellous thing that we are afloat today. Many of you know that. Perhaps you think that you have sunk many times, but you are afloat today.

Your heart may be sinking today, you think, but you are not drowned yet, you are not at the bottom yet, you are not lost for good yet. We have all been there many times. We can say with a psalmist, though I fall, yet shall I rise.

Though I fall, yet shall I rise. There is some extra factor in the child of God and in the servant of God, called according to his purpose, that causes us to survive a thousand drownings. The power of his resurrection is a wonderful thing.

And this simple little story just says to us, if the Holy Spirit is in us, there is a reversal of the way of nature. Nature declines, nature goes down, nature sinks, but here the Spirit is always reversing that, and causing us to rise, to rise, to go on again and again. It is like that, there is something that is different from nature in us.

It is the divine nature, the power of his resurrection. So the world's simple message is, we must be on true ground. Everything must be true and real, not borrowed and second hand.

We can do nothing really effective with tools that are not a part of our own being, wrought into our own experience, out of which we can say, now this truly is mine. I have been through death with this. This has brought me into life.

This is mine, this is mine, not something that I've heard, not something I've got from someone else. I have this because I've gone through it with God on this matter. It must be like that, to carry the testimony on, the prophetic testimony, and then this great assurance, this wonderful assurance, we have the Holy Spirit.

If we are the Lord's, we have the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead, dwelling in us. And that is something not only more than nature, but contrary to nature. And although oft times we may feel we are going to the bottom, we may feel we've touched bottom, we're going to come up again if that Spirit is in us.

The Holy Spirit is not going to die in the grave. If the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead be in you, he that raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall quicken your mortal body by his Spirit dwelling in

you. Your body of death, the power of his resurrection.

And the iron, the iron did swim.

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