

Resurrection

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the significance of the resurrection of Christ and its implications for our lives, highlighting the need for a positive stand upon the ground of the Cross and drawing upon the power of His resurrection.

Scripture: Isaiah 54:1

Topics: "Resurrection", "Transformation"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks explores Isaiah 54 as a profound illustration of resurrection, outlining eight transformative characteristics that signify the New Day brought by Christ's resurrection. He emphasizes the shift from barrenness to fruitfulness, straitness to enlargement, shame to honor, and forsakenness to fellowship, all culminating in the believer's experience of new life through Christ. Sparks highlights the immediate effects of Christ's resurrection on His followers, showcasing how their despair turned into joy and purpose, and asserts that these changes are available to every believer today. He encourages a positive stand on the Cross and a drawing upon the power of the resurrection to experience this transformation in personal and corporate life.

Transcript

When we come to chapter 54 of the prophecies of Isaiah, we have what we may call a sample chapter of resurrection--a sample of the conditions which the Lord would have as characterizing His 'New Day'. We find in this chapter eight features, or characteristics, of the New Day; eight, as you know, being the number of resurrection. Let us cast our eye down the chapter, and note them briefly in order.

(1) In verse 1, we see the movement from barrenness to fruitfulness. "Sing, O barren, thou that didst not bear; break forth into singing, and cry aloud, thou that didst not travail with child: for more are the children of the desolate than the children of the married wife, saith the Lord."

(2) Verses 2 and 3: from straitness to enlargement. "Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains of thine habitations; spare not: lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes. For thou shalt spread abroad on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall possess the nations, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited." How true that was of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus!

(3) Verses 4 and 5: from shame to honour. "Fear not; for thou shalt not be ashamed: neither be thou confounded; for thou shalt not be put to shame: for thou shalt forget the shame of thy youth..." ; and so on.

(4) Verses 6 and 7: from forsakenness to fellowship. "For the Lord hath called thee as a wife forsaken and grieved in spirit, even a wife of youth, when she is cast off, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee."

(5) Verses 8 to 10: from wrath to mercy. "In overflowing wrath I hid My face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer." You see the look back to the Cross, in which all those things were true; but now it is resurrection, and they have passed. It is a mighty and wonderful change.

(6) Verses 11 and 12: from affliction and desolation, to comfort and glory. "O thou afflicted, tossed with tempest, and not comforted, behold, I will set thy stones in fair colors, and lay thy foundations with sapphires. And I will make thy pinnacles of rubies, and thy gates of carbuncles, and all thy border of pleasant stones."

(7) Verses 14 and 15: from oppression to security. "In righteousness shalt thou be established: thou shalt be far from oppression, for thou shalt not fear; and from terror, for it shall not come near thee. Behold, they may gather together, but not by Me: whosoever shall gather together against thee shall fall because of thee."

(8) Verses 16 and 17: from reproach to vindication. "Behold, I have created the smith that bloweth the fire of coals, and bringeth forth a weapon for his work; and I have created the waster to destroy. No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness which is of Me, saith the Lord."

Is this not a wonderful sample of resurrection life, power and glory? As in other connections, so in this, we carry it all over from Old Testament history into New Testament, into this very dispensation in which we live--the Day of Resurrection. How true all this was-- and is--of the Lord Jesus, in the first place. There had been the negative side--all the straitness of which He spoke: "How am I straitened till it be accomplished!" (Luke 12:50); the stripping, the barrenness and desolation of the Cross; the shame and ignominy; the forsakenness, even of His own Father and God--the very wrath of God rested upon Him; He suffered affliction, oppression and reproach. All those things were true, as we saw in chapter 53. But now the whole scene has changed. What fruitfulness has taken the place of barrenness! Yes, the 'corn of wheat, falling into the ground and dying', has indeed borne very much fruit--fruit out of many nations. What a great joy it is to us to know, and in so many cases to know personally, something of the fruitfulness of His sufferings, in the 'seeing of His seed'. Out of barrenness into fruitfulness; out of His straitness, against which He groaned, into the great enlargement which has come to Him--and what enlargement!--out of shame into honour: multitudes and multitudes ever since, and multitudes today, all over the world, are just heaping honour upon Him. And so we could go on.

But you can see also how true this became of that little band of disciples. You can say that, at the time of the Cross, these negative and dark things were in a certain sense true of them. Yes, everything was gone; the trees were stripped bare; it was barrenness indeed. In their hearts they were saying: 'What has it all been for? It has all gone; we have lost everything.' But see the change from the Day of Pentecost onwards. From barrenness to fruitfulness--again you go through this list of characteristics--from straitness, as a little band, a little handful of men, hedged up in a few miles of Jerusalem, of Judæa, of Palestine, a little country--unto what? "Their sound", said Paul, "went out into all the earth, ...unto the ends of the

world" (Rom. 10:18). What enlargement! it was the lengthening of cords, the strengthening of stakes in resurrection. Their aloneness --the terrible loneliness that had come over them when He, as they thought, was dead--has given place to a marvellous fellowship, that is being established in relationship with an ever-growing company of fellow believers. All these things came about: this wonderful change over was true for the disciples.

But does it stop there? No! The same thing became true in every new believer; and it has been true from then on until now. These are the things which are the characteristics of the true believer's life--a believer's life! If you are living on the other side of the Cross, or even if you are living in the day of His death, just living with Christ dead, these things are not true. But if we are living, as true believers should, on the ground of His resurrection, then all these things are true. It is a very blessed thing for us to be able to say, without any hesitation or reserve, that He has changed our life from barrenness to fruitfulness; from straitness to enlargement; from shame to honour; from forsakenness and aloneness to fellowship; and so on. This is the heritage of every true believer.

Immediate Effects of Christ's Resurrection

In the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, there is struck and sounded forth this wonderful note--a new life, a new hope, a new assurance! We see it clearly in the New Testament. It is worth noting the marvellous effect that His appearances had upon the people concerned. As far as we can see, there were about ten appearances of the Lord after His resurrection. Five of them took place on one day, between sunrise and perhaps a little after sunset; the other five were scattered over a period, in different places. But it is most impressive, most instructive, to see the tremendous change that came over the people, and over the whole situation, between the time before He appeared, and the time He disappeared. Let us run through some of those appearances.

The first, undoubtedly, was with Mary Magdalene, who came early to the tomb, with spices, to anoint His body (Mark 16:9; John 20:1-18). What a poor, sad, desolate, empty sort of person she was that morning! What a plaintive note there is as she beholds Him without recognizing Him, and takes Him for the gardener: 'Sir, if you have borne Him away, tell me where you have laid Him'. Jesus only speaks her name--"Mary"--and the whole situation is transformed, transfigured! She hurries from the tomb--hurries away to tell the disciples. It would seem, too, that there were other women near by, and that, as they were going, she and they, to tell the disciples, Jesus met them on the way--another transforming scene and experience (Matt. 28:8-10; Mark 16:10-11).

And then, we are told, He appeared to Simon Peter (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5). It does not need very much imagination to picture what kind of Simon he was when Jesus appeared to him. He was not a very happy sort of man! If ever there was a man who felt he was bereft--bereft of everything, stripped, stark, alone, forsaken, and in utter despair--it must have been Simon Peter. And then Jesus appeared to him--gave him a private interview! Ah! that changed the whole situation, completely transformed the whole outlook for Simon.

Then there were the two disciples on their way to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-35; Mark 16:12-13). What sad, doleful, desolate men they were! As they walked those three miles, it must have seemed the longest three miles that two men had ever walked! But then Jesus appeared.... Their eyes were opened, they saw... He went... and those three miles back were the shortest three miles that ever men had run! I don't know what their time was for the course!--but I am quite sure they were not conscious of those three miles. Distance

and time lost all their meaning as they raced back, fleet of foot, to Jerusalem, to tell the others. And as they came in, before they could get out anything of what had happened to them, they were met with this from the other disciples: "The Lord is risen indeed, and hath appeared unto Simon"! They were changed men, and it was a changed scene in Jerusalem into which they came.

And He appeared to the apostles themselves, and to James, and to "above five hundred brethren at once" (1 Cor. 15:6-7). His appearance--that is, His coming in resurrection--brought about a marvellous change on every occasion, in every situation. It represented a very real fulfilment of Isaiah 54--Isaiah 54 is resurrection!

Can this Be a Present day Experience?

Now, the big question that arises for us is: Have we any ground for believing that this can be our own up to date experience? And I want to say that the New Testament presents us with very solid ground for just that. We find very much, in the experiences of men and women after the Lord had gone to glory, that had this effect. I need only turn you to the Book of the Acts, and remind you of that Ethiopian on his way home, disappointed and desolate, sorrowful and perplexed. Surely we may say that, through His servant Philip and through the word of Isaiah 53, the Risen Lord met that man. The whole scene was changed. The last thing we hear of him is: "he went on his way rejoicing" (Acts 8:39). Here is a transfigured life, a transfigured situation, because one has come into touch with the Risen Lord. That incident is typical of the marvellous transformation that took place when the Spirit of the Lord touched people, came into their lives, came into their midst. They met sometimes in much perplexity and oppression, in much affliction and suffering with the threats of the rulers, and they went away changed people, full of joy, full of confidence.

Has the dispensation changed since the time of the Acts? That book has never had a conclusion; it is just broken off. The Holy Spirit never intended Luke to write the end of the story, because it had to go on and on and on to the end of the dispensation. What was true then is to be true in our experience now. Yes, we have plenty of ground and evidence for this. But then, you say, 'On what ground can this experience be mine?' If the Scripture gives that which justifies an expectation that it should be true in our case, if we really have it in the Word that it ought to be like that with us, then the question arises, 'How can this be true of me?' Let me therefore try to say, as concisely as possible, how it can be--how we really can know this.

The Need for (1) A Positive Stand Upon the Ground of the Cross

Firstly, we must take our stand most positively on that ground which God has provided for us through the Cross of the Lord Jesus. That is, we must appropriate all the values of Isaiah 53, as being provided for us. Isaiah 53 tells us all that has been done for us. "He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon Him". "He bare the sin of many". Our whole state and condition, under condemnation and judgment, was put on Him by God Himself. 'He, He made His soul an offering for sin.' That was on the Divine side. If you and I will still linger on the ground of question or doubt as to whether the Lord Jesus has done that, for us, as men and women, for our sins, past, present and future, there is no hope of this transforming experience of resurrection! If you are still nursing condemnation, still opening your heart or your mind to accusations, you are, in effect, denying the work of the Lord Jesus on the Cross, and God cannot show you His mighty arm.

"To whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?" Never to the man or woman who brings in any question as to the work of the Lord Jesus in His Cross! Never! You must get right off that ground in every way. If you are so fond of doubting and questioning, if you will so tenaciously hold on to condemnation, can you not swing

right over in the opposite direction, put all that capacity for doubting and unbelieving round the other way, and say about your condemnation: 'I don't believe it! Isaiah 53 says that He took all that for me: then I definitely do not believe, I will not believe--the Cross of the Lord Jesus forbids me to believe--that there is condemnation.' Yes, put your strong and mighty capacity for unbelieving the other way round--let it be converted! Put it over against all the work of the accusing spirits, the accusing conscience and the accusing heart. Meet the whole thing in reverse!

No, we shall never know this mighty, many-sided transformation and transfiguration of life, until we quite positively take our stand upon the values which we see secured for us in Isaiah 53. We shall once again, and in the simplicity of a beginner, have to sit down with that chapter, and, as has been so often said, put our own name in there: 'He was wounded for my transgressions; He was bruised for my iniquities; the chastisement of my peace was upon Him; with His stripes I am healed.' We shall never experience resurrection glory until we have our feet firmly planted on that ground. You see, it is we ourselves who constitute the ground of death: it is in us--it is not in Christ; we must therefore repudiate our own ground. We must say, when the Accuser would bring all our sins to remembrance: 'Yes, I know them well, and thousands more; but... there is One Who died in my place.' Faith must credit God and Christ with the full meaning of the Cross.

(2) A Positive Drawing upon the Power of His Resurrection

Next, we must take a positive attitude at all times to "the power of His resurrection" (Phil. 3:10)--the attitude of faith in 'God Who raises the dead' (2 Cor. 1:9). We must really reckon upon that 'extra', and that 'other', which is represented by the power of His resurrection. It is all true--that this is this and that is that, and things are as they are; it is all true. We are not putting on blinkers, trying to make believe that we are not as bad as we are, or things are not as bad as they are: we know that they are just as bad as they can be, inside and out. But... there is something more than that--an altogether transcendent factor: and that is, the power of His resurrection. We must take a very positive attitude at all times toward that.

(a) For Personal Life

This means, in practical terms, a definite drawing upon His risen life. But it does not mean that we are thereby entitled to break the laws of God. For instance, if you speak at three or four or five meetings a day, for something like eleven weeks, without one day's rest, you are breaking the laws of God, and God will not protect you. That is exactly what I have known to happen. How long it takes us to learn these lessons--sometimes a whole life time! We get drawn out by need and appeal and so on. I believe the Lord is very sympathetic, but, nevertheless, He does not set aside His laws. So I have to say, that, while avoiding breaking Divine laws, the laws of nature, the laws of our bodies (and you can never speak of the laws of nature without meaning God, for the laws of nature are an expression of God, and God is Himself the supreme Law of Nature: that is not Pantheism, but it does mean that the laws of nature bring you right into touch with God)--I say, while not violating God in His laws, in the body and so on, we must deliberately at all times draw upon His resurrection life. We must do it; we must keep a tight hold, so to speak, on the risen life of the Lord, and draw upon it; make a very practical thing of it.

When I was a small boy, I remember my mother telling me something that has remained with me to this day. She was describing to me the death of my grandfather, an old man of eighty four. She was sitting by his bed, holding his hand, as he was slowly, very slowly passing away. He had been a very strong man, physically, and this is what she told me. 'He had hold of my hand', she said, 'in a tremendous grip: I was

praying for him, but he was gradually sinking away: but I felt as though he was drawing the very life out of me; I felt my very vitality being sapped; he was pulling something out of me, to hold on to life: and at last I could stand it no longer--I just had to wrench my hand out of his; and when I did so, he went.'

Well, I do not know how much scientific truth there is in that; but to me it is an illustration. We have literally got to draw on the vitality of our Lord. It is an attitude, a grip of faith: we must 'lay hold on life', as Paul said to Timothy (1 Tim. 6:12). It must be something that we do.

I fear we are far too indefinite in this matter of our relationship to our Risen Lord. We believe in the resurrection; we believe in resurrection life; and we believe that it is for us: but we are not definite enough about it. We must first ask ourselves: 'Do I need resurrection life? Am I in need of the power of His resurrection?' Of course, if you have no sense of need, you will not be definite about it; but if, in any way, you really feel your need of the power of His resurrection, that the Arm of the Lord should be revealed to you in that way, then ask yourself the further question: 'Are there any Scriptures, any statements in the Word of God, which justify me in believing that that life is for me?' Then, if you believe the answer to that to be in the affirmative, say to yourself: 'Let me get to the Word, and find out what it says about this; let me gather up, search out, all that the Word of God says about this matter of resurrection life-- for me!'

Do it as an exercise, not just picking out random texts; get a strong foundation of Scripture under your feet. "If the Spirit of Him That raised up Jesus from the dead dwelleth in you, He That raised up Christ Jesus from the dead shall quicken also your mortal bodies through His Spirit That dwelleth in you" (Rom. 8:11). That is in the Bible! "Always bearing about in the body the dying of Jesus... that the life also of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh" (2 Cor. 4:10-11). That is Scripture! Gather up in this way all that you can find; take it to the Lord, and say: 'Lord, Your Word clearly says...' (and here you can quote Scripture to Him, if you like: it is a very healthy thing to remind the Lord of His Word). 'Now, Lord, You have said that the power of the resurrection is to be known in Your people, in believers, as a present experience: here is Your Word about it.' Bring it to the Lord; present it to Him, all that you can find, be very definite in this matter. We might see marvellous things, wonderful things, have a far greater testimony of resurrection life, if only we would be more definite about it. It is not just going to 'happen'; it is not going to be casual. Any dilly dallying about this thing will not find us coming into the good of it. We must be positive; we must be definite; we must make this a very real matter.

For it is not just personal, for our own private good; the whole testimony of our Risen Lord is bound up with this. There is, of course, thank God, the personal application, and this may be either spiritual--for we are surely all, individually, in constant need of new accessions of life spiritually--or it may be physical. Blessed be God, that we can take life for our bodies! We may know resurrection life carrying us through impossible situations, physically. Or it may be that we need a new accession of life, the 'baring of His arm', in our ministry: for all ministry, if it is to be true spiritual ministry, has to be fulfilled in the power of His resurrection.

(b) For Corporate Life

But then, widening out beyond personal, individual need, it may apply to a company of the Lord's people of which we are a part, or in which we may have some responsibility. Things are going down into death, straitness and dishonour; the situation is not glorifying to the Lord; and we are greatly burdened with the need--Oh, that the Arm of the Lord might be revealed! Oh, that the power of resurrection might be manifested! What are you going to do about it? Well, it requires the same exercise. This resurrection of the

Lord Jesus is for every aspect of the life of the believer and the Church.

But... it does not just happen. I say once again: we have got to take a very definite and positive attitude to this matter. If we will, and if we do, there are those who can testify, from a long history, that this really does work--that repeated miracles of sustenance and enablement and supply, of raising up and carrying on, will result again and again, from a definite laying hold of the fact that Christ is risen for us. He died for us--He is risen for us. He died in our place--He lives in our stead. He is the Living One!

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