

'Some Better Thing'

by T. Austin-Sparks

Faith is the basis of spiritual completeness and leads to sonship, which is spiritual stature, measure, greatness, and fullness born out of discipline.

Scripture: Romans 4:3, Hebrews 11:40 - 12:1

Topics: "Faith", "Spiritual Sonship"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the theme of completeness in faith as presented in Hebrews 11, illustrating how the faith of biblical figures like David leads to spiritual sonship and fullness. He highlights that true sonship is characterized by disinterested devotion to God's purposes, as seen in David's desire to build a temple for God, which he ultimately relinquished for the sake of God's plan. The sermon also discusses the importance of laying aside burdens and distractions that hinder spiritual progress, urging believers to focus on Jesus, the author and perfecter of faith. Sparks encourages the congregation to recognize that faith connects all generations in pursuit of spiritual completeness, and that Jesus' example shows that triumph is possible through faith. The message concludes with a call to trust in God's provision for spiritual rest and freedom from burdens.

Transcript

In our last chapter we came to the matter of "completeness" as the governing object of the faith of all those mentioned in Hebrews 11. "Apart from us they should not be made perfect (complete)." Now we take that up in relation to the clause which precedes it. "God having provided (foreseen) some better thing concerning us." We pointed out that this being "made perfect" or complete had to do with justification or righteousness by faith. "All... had witness borne to them through their faith", ("Abraham believed God, and it was reckoned unto him for righteousness", "Wherefore... it was reckoned unto him for righteousness"; Romans 4:3,22, etc.) thus making them "just men" (Hebrews 12:23) first potentially through faith, and then actually when the object of faith, the Christ, had come and made the work of righteousness perfect. We now have to carry that faith further as to its results.

In an earlier chapter we have dealt with 'sonship' as the supreme Divine revelation, brought out so much in this letter to the Hebrews. We have to return to that for a little while in our present connection. It is tremendously impressive how much referred to in chapter 11 directly relates to Christ in type and figure, and then how large a place sonship has there.

No one will dispute the typical factor of Abel, as to the virtue of the blood of Christ (12:24); of Isaac, as he that was raised from the dead; of Joseph, as he who was exalted to "the right hand of the Majesty on high" - three stages in the course of Christ. But sonship lies either patent or latent in so much. We shall not take this up in detail, but instances are clear in the case of Abraham and Isaac; of Jacob and Joseph; of the birth of Moses, etc. The point, however, is that sonship and spiritual fullness are the same thing, and that is what this letter is all about. Faith is shown to be the basis of spiritual completeness and therefore it leads to sonship.

To indicate something of the nature of this sonship we take one person out of chapter 11 - David. No doubt David's faith is there connected with "obtaining promises" (verse 33). See II Samuel 7:11-12; I Chron. 22:9, etc. These promises had to do with a son, one Divinely marked out from among many sons (I Chron. 28:5). This son was going to be the fullest example in type of God's thoughts as to sonship that the Bible contains. But there was a point of transition in David's life. After many years of chastening - child-training - numerous and varied experiences of suffering and trial and proving the Lord's faithfulness, the point was reached where the one passion of his life came immediately into view. For this he had prayed, longed, and planned. For this he had been in quest, and it had so possessed him as to make him determine not to go up into his bed, nor give sleep to his eyes until his quest was successful. We might truly say that for David to live was that house for God. And now, at long last, he divulges to Nathan the prophet what was in his heart. Nathan, knowing that God was with David, gave him instant encouragement to do all that was in his heart, only to have to go back a little later at the Lord's command and withdraw that encouragement and tell David that he was not to be allowed to fulfil his desire nor carry out his life ambition for the Lord. What a blow! What a shattering disappointment! What an opportunity for being offended with the Lord! And what an occasion for faith to freeze, and for despair to overwhelm him! Not he, but his son, should build the house. If this whole matter had been a personal interest, if it had been for his own gratification, well might he have been embittered and spent his closing days in brooding over and nursing his disappointment. But no! He is too big a man for that. So long as the Lord gets the house it matters not who builds it, nor whether David is allowed to have any hand in it. Moreover, he will give his own treasure to help it forward. What a magnificent triumph over the smallness of man!

David Passes To Sonship

So David passes from the child-training through faith's ultimate test into sonship; and no one, after all, ever thinks of David without that grand issue of his life - the Temple and its service; and no one ever thinks of Solomon without remembering that he was the son of David. And more, how often is Christ referred to as "son of David."

Thus we can see something of the nature of sonship; it is spiritual stature, measure, greatness. It is fullness born out of discipline. Carry this back into Hebrews 11 and 12. Spiritual stature is determined very largely by disinterested devotion to the Lord's interests, by how little we come into the picture, and by how much we are ready to serve the Lord's ends without any gratification to ourselves, without having our hand in it. "By faith... David... obtained promises."

What we have said above forms a fitting setting for what we have as the application of the message as found in verses 1-3 of chapter 12.

The Race, The Runners, The Witnesses, The Captain

Before we can proceed we must correct a possible doctrinal error. The Apostle truly employs a common spectacle as his illustration. The stadium, the course, the runners, the onlookers, and the captain. But he would not have us to think that he means that the "cloud of witnesses" are those "with Christ" who are all conscious of and interested in our lives here in this world. There is nothing in the Scriptures to support this idea, and we can only believe that it would not be "far better" if they knew all about our wavering faith and impersistent progress. Put yourself in their place! Rather would the Apostle have us think of them as having borne witness in their lives, and in some way linked with us in the way of faith, so that their ultimate interests and ours are one. But conscious observers of our course - No! They do say that, in all ages, not only in this age, faith has been the law and governing factor. Faith links all ages in one goal - fullness. Well then, this is a course to be run, and everything that makes for weakness in the running must be repudiated.

We have already pointed out that in the context of the whole letter the "weight" is the legal system. "They bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders" (Matt. 23:4). This refers to the endless definitions and interpretations of the Law made by the scribes or lawyers, which just keep men bound to burdens of legal impositions. No one can move freely in legalism, Jewish or Christian. The "sin which doth so easily beset" we have seen may represent the formalism which is lifeless, and to which religion is so persistently and easily susceptible.

But it may be of wider application. Weights may be anything which has the effect of bearing us down. Seeing that it is the spirit that is the object of fullness the weight would be whatever hangs heavily upon our spirit. There are many things of spiritual anxiety and strain for which God has provided a remedy, and this letter refers to some of them. All-inclusively union with Christ is to find "rest unto your souls." "My burden is light." "There is... no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made... free from the law of sin and of death." "We who have believed do enter into... rest." What burdens your spirit so that you cannot run? There is something somewhere in God's Word that will relieve you of that.

"The sin which doth so easily beset." I find that these last five words are what is required in English to express one Greek word. That word means "standing round about." Linked with the race course it may refer to people or things which are not really a part of the race, but just stand around and - because they are not in the business - get in the way of those who are. They are "sins" in the sense that they would weaken faith and slow down spiritual progress. What is there in our lives, having an influence upon our spiritual progress, which really does not belong to this business? We must each answer that question as to our own case. The Lord's word is "lay aside every weight" and thrust away the unrelated hindrances, like a runner brushing aside the obstructing people on or around the course. Do not be put off or put back. Faith is the test of all. What effect has this or that on faith? That will decide what is to be done with it.

The Captain

When the Apostle bids his readers to look unto Jesus, the author and finisher of (our) faith, he really says more and other than our translations convey.

Firstly, it is looking beyond or onward unto Jesus." In 11:26 Moses is said to have looked 'beyond' (same preposition) unto the recompense of reward.

Then it is "unto Jesus." This is the title of the incarnation and earthly life, and its use here indicates - as the next words show - that this faith course was taken up and completed in One Who was "in all points

tempted like as we, sin apart." A Man in utter dependence upon God, never employing His deity for His own support, has compassed the whole course of faith triumphantly; and inasmuch as He did it by the same Eternal Spirit as is given to us - no more, no less - it shows that it can be done, and there is no need for failure.

"The author and perfecter of faith." There is no "our" in the original text. Literally it is "the foremost leader of faith." This word is the same as in 2:10 - "to make the foremost leader of their salvation perfect through sufferings." "Perfect through sufferings." Now we are back to our word "perfect" (=complete), and He Who has been made complete along the same way of faith as we are called to traverse is our "perfecter," i.e., the One Who makes complete. In Him this faith way was initiated, and in Him it is completed.

Now then, the exhortation, so full of doctrine. If we look at the way, or the difficulties, or at ourselves, and become occupied with them, we shall not finish the course; and even if we do, it will be slow and jerky. The focal point of faith here is to link ourselves by it with the Triumphant Lord, with His perfected work, and reckon His triumph ours. It is not abstract and merely psychological, but there is a definite Divine Object - a Living Person - Whose work the Holy Spirit is ready to make good in us. When the Apostle comes to his benediction in 13:20 he will use the phrase "Make you perfect (complete) in every good thing." We leave that for the moment, with but this remark - faith fastened upon Jesus and His embodiment of a perfect work is the basis upon which "the God of peace" makes us perfect.

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