

The Approaching Great Shaking

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the need for a profound spiritual awakening in the face of an impending shaking that will reveal the true nature of faith in Christ.

Scripture: Hebrews 12:26

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "The Coming Judgment"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the prophetic warnings in the letter to the Hebrews regarding a future great shaking that will test the foundations of faith and reveal the true nature of spiritual life in Christ. He argues that this shaking is necessary to remove what is unshakable and to establish a kingdom that cannot be moved, highlighting the need for a deeper understanding of Christ as the standard of judgment. Sparks warns against the dangers of conforming Christianity to worldly standards and the illusion of success, urging believers to seek genuine spiritual depth rather than mere outward appearances. He calls for a return to waiting upon God and discerning His methods, as the shaking will reveal the true essence of faith and the presence of Christ in our lives. Ultimately, the sermon serves as a call to spiritual vigilance and growth in the face of impending trials.

Transcript

As the writer of this letter (to the "Hebrews") approaches its conclusion; after repeatedly giving great and terrible warnings as to the peril of failure to apprehend the full purpose and meaning of God in Christ, he gathers all up into a prophetic forecast which is itself the inclusive warning.

"He hath promised, saying, Yet once more will I make to tremble not the earth only, but also the heaven. And this, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that have been made, that those things which are not shaken may remain" (12:26-27).

It is necessary for us to be sure that this has still a future application, and was not fulfilled in the destruction of Jerusalem and the dispersion of the Jews which was imminent when the letter was written. Undoubtedly it had a partial fulfilment in that terrible event, but, as is so often the case in prophecy, was there not a double aspect, as there unquestionably was in two outstanding instances in the New Testament? One is the case of our Lord quoting Isaiah 61 at Nazareth, and stopping at "the year of the Lord's favour," not going on to "the day of vengeance of our God" (Luke 4:18-19). The other is the quotation from Joel on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:16-21). This prophecy was obviously not wholly fulfilled on that occasion, but only partially so.

If we look at the passage in Haggai (2:6,9) quoted in Hebrews, we shall see ample reason for doubting its already fulfilment.

"Yet once, it is a little while, and I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land; and I will shake all nations; and the precious things of all nations shall come; and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts.... The latter glory of this house shall be greater than the former."

Not one part of that prophecy has yet been fulfilled literally. If the apostle employed that prophecy in relation to the destruction of the Temple rather than to its filling with glory and peace, there remains much to be desired both as to Biblical usage, interpretation, and fulfilment. A spiritual interpretation of the Day of Pentecost would get nearer to the features - i.e., heaven and earth shaken: the sea and dry land (the multitudes of mankind): the nations; and the nations yielding treasures; the house filled with glory, etc. But even so we are left with the future aspect of the passage in Hebrews 12.

The sense of verse 28 is that we are in process of receiving a kingdom which cannot be shaken, but this corresponds to verse 5 of chapter 2: -

"Not unto angels did He subject the inhabited earth to come, whereof we are speaking."

The whole of this paragraph should be carried over to "the kingdom which cannot be shaken" together with "partners of a heavenly calling" (3:1). It will then be seen that the "once more," literally "only once," in its universal sense must yet lie ahead, and doubtless in relation to the Lord's coming again.

The last verse of chapter 12 seems to clinch this argument - "for our God is a consuming fire," and surely it belongs to the events of which Peter wrote:

"The day of the Lord... in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing that these things are thus all to be dissolved..." (II Pet. 3:10-11).

Some of these phrases are very intelligible to us, and we are quite sure that Peter knew nothing about atomic bombs - "elements dissolved with fervent heat"; but the Holy Spirit did, and does! (It is well to read the whole of this chapter from Peter.) Peter's words in his first letter (4:17) are also very relevant to Hebrews 12:26, where he says that

"The time (is come) for judgment to begin at the house of God."

Having, then, as we think, good ground for believing that the great shaking still lies ahead, we are able to say something with regard to its object, its need, and its call.

The Object Of The Shaking

In the light of this entire letter, and indeed, in the light of the entire New Testament revelation, the one object by which everything is ultimately tested and judged is Christ, as being the constitution of everything in a spiritual way. God's one inclusive purpose is to have everything constituted according to Christ. This must be organic, the very nature and essence of Christ. It cannot be by imitation, duplication, or organization. It can only be by conception, not observation. This kingdom "cometh not with observation." Therefore it must be spiritual. It must come from within by 'inbirth'. Thus, the measure of Christ as the spiritual life and nature of everything or anything working from within is the basis and standard of all Divine

judgments. It will not be sound doctrine, extra truth, devoutness, zeal, many works, etc., but just Christ Himself, known, lived, and expressed, in the power and grace of the Eternal Spirit. In a word, it will be a matter of our true spiritual life as spiritual people in living and growing identification with Christ by the Holy Spirit. God has reduced His whole judgment to this. "He will judge the world by (or in)... Jesus Christ," and this is not just official, but spiritual - Christ is not only the Judge, but the standard of judgment. This is why the Book of the Revelation, which is a book of judgments, first of the Church, and then of the nations, begins with a full-length presentation of Christ the Living One. Then it shows that judgment is not so much as to things, more or less good or bad, but what is Christ or what is inimical to Him constitutionally.

The Need For The Shaking

We have been at pains in our earlier chapters to show that Christianity has become, very largely, another Judaism, an outward system and a historic tradition. But it has become more than this. In its principles, methods, and means, it has largely become conformed to this world or age. Were we wanting to deal with the negative or defective aspect of things, it would not be difficult to write whole chapters on the weaknesses of present-time organized Christianity; but we would rather use our time and space on the positive line. Let us, however, appeal to our brethren in responsibility to think again and seriously before the Lord as to the true nature and origin of much that goes to make up the means of propaganda and publicity of work for God. Let us take account of such things as the prominence given to human honours, glories, titles, reputations, distinctions. That men have gained these or been given them in various spheres of life - politics, philanthropy, industry, adventure, war, sport, entertainment, science, art, or education - may be quite all right in itself, but that these things should be so largely used as the ground of appeal may just imply that Christ is not sufficient as standing on His own merits, but must be surrounded by these natural embellishments (?). Must Christ be recommended or His servants accepted because of some human association of the word "great" in some earthly connection?

Again, let us be very careful, for the same purpose, of the encroachment of the entertainment feature of sacred service. "Lovers of pleasure" is an end-time characteristic, and the age is running headlong thither. Is it necessary to go with the age in order to attract? Is the Gospel dependent upon this "makeup" for its effectiveness and appeal?

Once more: let us watch that we are not carried away by the illusion of bigness. Many a once powerful instrument of God - personal or collective - has lost its spiritual value and impact when it has become big or popular. There is a Satanic snare in bigness, and we may by this illusion lose our very faculty for seeing just where God is doing His deepest work, and how. Often, God's truest work is hidden. It is becoming difficult, if not impossible, for many servants of God to believe or understand that anything of real account can be done unless it is well known and in the public eye.

When David put the Ark upon a new cart and things went just so far and then came to an ignominious and tragic impasse, it was not due to a lack of sincerity, devotion, zeal, energy, or wholeheartedness, but because he had all unwittingly drawn up from his subconsciousness an idea and method which had originated with the Philistine diviners. Those diviners had once put the Ark upon a new cart to send it back into Israel. David had fled in an hour of weakness to dwell in the land of the Philistines, and had been infected with the methods and means of that world. When God made the breach upon Uzzah that he died before the Lord it would have been too hard and severe, in the light of the zeal for the Lord, if there had not been some extra factor. That factor was the hand of another spiritual system back of "this present evil world" of which the diviners were the representatives and servants, and whom God had already plagued

and cursed. (Read the story in I Samuel 5, 6, 27, II Samuel 6). There was no reason why Uzzah should be spared and the Philistines destroyed if the same factor obtained in both cases. No amount of zeal can save us in the end if the principles are false. But note how subtle it all was. There was not the remotest idea that things were basically wrong. The idea of bringing up the Ark (the Testimony) to its right and full place was right and according to God's mind. The earnestness and utterness left nothing to be desired. The motive and its passion were wholly commendable. But somewhere, somehow, Antichrist (in principle) was hidden in the constitution of things: the energy of the flesh, the soul-life actuated or taken charge of by that which was not the Spirit of God. If the soul, which is the natural side of man's being, is predominant, on any or all of its sides - intellectual, emotional, or volitional - then the door is wide open to deception; and deception, being what it is, does not mean that there is no zeal for God, but rather that it is zeal but not according to knowledge. It is only as the child of God lives in and is governed by the Holy Spirit through his renewed spirit - not firstly his soul - that he will be made aware of "the things that differ," even in his service for God. David eventually was shown what the Holy Spirit had indicated in the Scriptures as to God's principles of service, and he found by tragic experience that spiritual principles are more important than zeal and energy, although these latter were no less when the true basis was established. Satan is very subtle and will espouse our zeal for God if by so doing he can eventually bring shame and dishonour into God's testimony.

God sees through it, and would warn us of it. The trouble so largely is that, as in David's case, the drive and abandon associated with a great idea for God just ride rough-shod over quiet waiting upon God and enquiry of Him as to His mind concerning the means and methods to be employed. The point at which disaster will befall very much that is engaged in for God in all sincerity is that which leaves no time for quiet detachment, for unhurried waiting upon God. There may be prayer, but it is prayer with a drive of work behind it, instead of the other way round. The question is, Did you get that method, that means, that programme in the secret place with God, direct from Him? Have you put everything back until all heat and hurry have been subjected to the judgment of the Holy Spirit? Or are you just getting on with it because it is for the Lord?

Do you think that judgment is upon men and things as such? Was there not enough genuine devotion to the Lord in David, Uzzah, and all the others to prevail against that terrible breaking in of God? Would the Lord not be slow to anger if that were all? Oh, why then this severity of God? Why must judgment begin at the house of God? It cannot be because of a greater or lesser degree of Christian goodness or zeal. There must be something more in it than that! Yes, there is, and we have touched upon it. The "eyes of flame" (Revelation 1:14), "the consuming fire," have beheld an insinuation - in principle or element - of the great evil one, who will deceive even to the point of simulating Christ or "an angel of light," in order that - sooner or later - the real Christ impact shall be neutralized.

This is all so relevant to our consideration in these chapters, and is undoubtedly behind the terrible nature of the warnings in this letter. We could never over-emphasize or exaggerate the terrible consequences to Christians and Christian work of failure to take sufficient account of the significance in verse 12 of chapter 4 linked with verse 9 (last part) of chapter 12.

But when all has been said both there and here, will you stop, can you stop, to get a sure place in the Spirit, or are you so involved, committed, driven, that the "still small voice" of the Spirit has no chance of being heard? It is in this whole realm of things that the great shaking will have its first effect. I was recently told in America on very good authority that fifty per cent of the missionaries who go to the mission field never return there after their first furlough, they cannot stand up to it. If that proportion were only half the

truth it would be a startling - though small - sample of what the great shaking will mean in the matter of discovering how much there really is of Christ back of all early enthusiasm and well-meaning intentions. Not less zeal, devotion, and energy, but more depth, spiritual measure, and Divine understanding lies behind the appeal of this letter - "Let us go on to full growth."

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