

The Blue of Heaven

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the significance of the blue cord on the people's garments, which signifies harmony with Heaven and the atoning work of Jesus Christ.

Scripture: Exodus 28:31, Numbers 15:38, Hebrews 4:14

Topics: "Unity in Christ", "Heavenly Identity"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of the color blue in the Old Testament, representing heavenly realities and the connection between God's people and their High Priest, Jesus Christ. He illustrates how the blue cord on the garments of the Israelites signifies their harmony with Heaven and their distinct identity as God's people. Sparks explains that through Christ's atoning work, believers can experience peace with God and a transformed life that reflects their heavenly calling. He encourages listeners to recognize their unity in Christ and the importance of living in accordance with their new identity as citizens of Heaven. Ultimately, he invites those uncertain of their standing with God to accept the provision made through Christ for reconciliation and eternal life.

Transcript

I would ask you to turn to God's picture book, the Old Testament, in two places: "And thou shalt make the robe of the ephod all of blue" (Exodus 28:31).

"Speak unto the children of Israel, and bid them that they make them fringes in the borders of their garments throughout their generations, and that they put upon the fringe of each border a cord of blue" (Numbers 15:38).

Now let us turn over to that part of the Word of which those passages are the illustrations.

"Having then a great high priest, who hath passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we have not a high priest that cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but one that hath been in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:14,15).

"...else must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once at the end of the ages hath he been manifested to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself" (Hebrews 9:26).

I referred to the Old Testament as 'God's picture book', for indeed it is full of pictures, illustrations, representations of all kinds, of Divine, spiritual, heavenly realities. The illustrations pass, but that which

they illustrate remains. God took hold of the picturesque Oriental mind, that kind of mentality which just must have pictures and illustrations and figures of speech, and turned it to very great account in setting forth the eternal realities which are the interpretation of them. So we have in the Old Testament a great number of things - names, people, places, colours, and so on - all used to illustrate some Divine, eternal truth; and, in the midst of that galaxy of symbolism, we find this one, in its two aspects. "And thou shalt make... the ephod all of blue" (the ephod was the high priest's main garment); and then: 'Speak to the children of Israel, that throughout their generations they make them fringes upon their garments, and a cord of blue.'

So that here you have a reflection, in every individual comprising the people of God, of what was true of the high priest's main garment. You look at his robe, the robe of the ephod, as it is called, and you see that it is of blue throughout, and you look at every man, woman and child of the people of God, and you find they all have as it were a bit of the priest's robe somewhere on their garment. It all corresponds.

Blue a Symbol of Heaven

Now, blue has quite a large place in the Old Testament. Blue is a symbol of that which belongs to Heaven. There are two or three places where that is made quite clear. For instance, in Exodus 24, we read that Moses and Aaron and seventy of the elders of Israel went up into the mountain where God was, "and they saw the God of Israel; and there was under his feet as it were a paved work of sapphire stone" (vs. 10). Sapphire, of course, is blue. And then we come to the prophecies of Ezekiel. In the very first chapter, the same thing is said again. The prophet had a vision of the throne in Heaven, "as the appearance of a sapphire stone" (vs. 26). We find the sapphire mentioned again right at the end of the New Testament, in the twenty-first chapter of the Revelation. Blue, then, sets forth what is of Heaven, what is heavenly. So that this high priest, with his robe all of blue, is meant, in the thought of God, to point to that One of whom we read later - Jesus Christ, who is our "great high priest, who has passed through the heavens" (Heb. 4:14) - our heavenly High Priest, who is in Heaven.

And He has entered there on the ground, and only on the ground, that He has made a complete and full atonement. The high priest in the Old Testament could never go into the Most Holy Place except on the Day of Atonement with the precious blood of atonement, and that is a figure. The Lord Jesus made a full atonement by His Cross for all sin and sins, and has passed into the very presence of God: not into a symbolic presence, as in the Old Testament, but into the real presence, the actual presence, of God; and there, as this letter to the Hebrews says, "he ever liveth to make intercession" (Heb. 7:25). He is fulfilling His high-priestly work there on our behalf. Aaron, then, the high priest of old, was a type or figure of Christ, our High Priest who is now in Heaven. The emphasis is upon the heavenly nature and heavenly work of the Lord Jesus now.

Let us consider this robe all of blue.

A People in Harmony With Heaven

First of all, this correspondence that we have noted between the robe of the high priest, and the cord on the people's garments, sets forth the glorious fact that they were in harmony with Heaven, that there was a harmoniousness between them and Heaven; and that is something. It is a wonderful thing to have no discord with Heaven, and for Heaven to have no discord with you. That is not our natural state; we know it right well. That is not the state of men who have not entered into the wonderful, redeeming, atoning work of the Lord Jesus Christ by His Cross. They know, as we all knew at one time, that they have no harmony

with Heaven. Indeed, the one quest, the one longing and craving, the one thing disturbing their peace all the time, is this - How can we get into harmony with Heaven? How can we be so adjusted to God, to Heaven, and to all that belongs there, that the discord and strain in life ceases? Oh, to be freed from this state of strain and unrest and conflict, this disappointment and dissatisfaction and discontent! There is something wrong somewhere; things are out of joint. But here, you see, is set forth a wonderful harmony with Heaven. If the high priest represents Jesus Christ in Heaven, this touch of blue on the garments signifies that all the people are participating in that. That is the very first fruit and value of the great high-priestly work of the Lord Jesus in offering Himself for our sins.

Now we know that, when we come by simple, precise faith, to accept the atoning, redemptive work of the Lord Jesus by His Cross, the discord in our hearts ceases. The strain has gone out; something has happened that has adjusted us to Heaven. Beautiful harmony has come about between us and God. This is put in many different ways in the Bible. One of them is this: "We have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. 5:1). Or again: "having made peace through the blood of his cross" (Col. 1:20). It is a wonderful inheritance, an inheritance to which multitudes can testify. There came a crisis in our lives - something happened - and it was just as though bones that had been out of joint were suddenly put right - they clicked together, and the ache has gone. Oh, how wonderful! Have you ever suffered the ache of a dislocated joint, that has bothered you night and day, disturbed your rest, robbed you of sleep, a constant nagging pain - and then you have got it put right? How you breathe again - life is worth living now!

That is exactly what happens to the sinner who by faith accepts Jesus as Saviour. Things click into joint; harmony takes the place of discord. Why? Simply because all the cause of, and reason for, the discord has been dealt with. What is the cause? What is the reason? In the words of a prophet: "your iniquities have separated between you and your God" (Isa. 59:2). Sin is at the bottom of it. I am not talking about sins; I am talking about sin. Sin is a thing which is native to every child of Adam. It is our nature - it is what we are. You know that. Try to stop doing certain things, and you find you have got to stop living in order to stop doing them. Somehow or other you have got to get rid of yourself in order to get rid of that. Sin is in our very nature. The Lord Jesus in His Cross took on Himself our sin and our sinfulness and dealt with it - dealt with the cause of all the discord and the trouble; and because the cause is dealt with, the effect follows quite naturally.

A little girl once heard read that passage from the book of the Revelation: "God... shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and death shall be no more; neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, any more" (Rev. 21:3,4) and she said, 'God must have a very big handkerchief! Well, that is a childish way of putting it. But you see, when God wipes away tears, He does not use a handkerchief. He gets behind the tears to why you cry, to the cause of the tears, and deals with the thing right at its source. All our trouble is dealt with at its source by the Lord Jesus. "Him who knew no sin he made to be sin on our behalf" (2 Cor. 5:21). "He bare our sins in his body upon the tree" (1 Pet. 2:24).

And so, having dealt with the source and root of the trouble, He brings us into union with Himself as the Redeemer, the great Atoner, the great Saviour, and we participate in His heavenly blue. Speaking now illustratively, if He is there wearing this robe all of blue, and we are here with a bit of that blue on us, it means not only that we are related to Him, but that our place in Heaven is secured. If you ask an unsaved person if they are going to Heaven, the answer, more often than not, is, 'Well, I hope so.' Now, it may happen that there is one reading these lines to whom that question might be addressed: 'Are you going to Heaven? are you expecting to go to Heaven?' You might in some uncertainty reply: 'Well, I want to', or 'I hope so.' I want to tell you that there is a way provided by God, whereby you need have no question about

it: that there can come right into your life the witness of Heaven, you can now share what is true of the Lord Jesus in Heaven and you can have your place secured in Heaven here and now, all on the ground of the work which Christ has done for you. We will come back to that again in another way in a minute.

Let us go further with this gospel, this good news, of the heavenly blue. What does this mean for Christians, when once they are the Lord's, this blue cord on the garment of the Lord's people?

A People Distinct from all Others

First of all, it marks them off as different and distinct from all other people. I expect that if the other nations round about Israel knew about this, and if ever an Israelite went out amongst them, they would say, 'Oh, we know where you come from! That bit of blue gives you away, that marks you off from everybody, that distinguishes you from everyone else.' A true Christian is something different and something distinct from all others, and the feature which makes him so is that there is in him another life, which is a heavenly life. Jesus said, 'I am come down from heaven for the life of the world' (John 6:33). "I am the living bread which came down out of heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever" (John 6:51). Here is another life, a heavenly life, in Jesus Christ, which those who receive Him receive in Him.

This is a test of our Christianity, but it is also a testimony to its reality. We know, when we have come on to this ground of Christ's atoning, redemptive work, that we have received into our very being another life, a different life. And this new life always gravitates back to its source in Heaven, that is, it is always pulling us up out of this world, it is always drawing us upward. It is a life of elevation, of uplift, a life which gravitates towards Heaven, like water in a pipe from a reservoir, always seeking its own level. Paul put it in this way. "If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is" (Col. 3:1). The great characteristic of a true Christian is that he is living in touch with Heaven, in the light of Heaven, in communion with Heaven, and always feeling the mighty magnetism of Christ in Heaven.

Our natural life always gravitates downwards. It does not matter what you do: leave it for a minute, and down it goes. Take restraints away, and down it goes. Remove the props, and down it goes. Its whole gravitation is downward. It does not matter how far you advance in developments - intellectual, social, and so on. Take people out of their wretched hovels, and put them into nice new dwellings: after a time you will see deterioration setting in, and soon it will be another slum district. You cannot stop it. That is the way of things. It is true of everything in this life and in this world.

But here is something that comes in and counteracts, takes another course. It is a wonderful thing. When a man or woman accepts Christ and becomes possessed of this heavenly life, they begin spontaneously, without any instruction, to change their behaviour. From uncouth, they become polite. From being careless in their manner and dress and so on, they become conscious of something. They change, and it goes on like that. I am afraid it must be said that some Christians have forgotten. Something has happened to check the life of Christ, the heavenly life, and they have become careless, slovenly, indifferent, unwatchful as to behaviour, as to courtesy, and so on. But when this life is not hindered by wilfulness, it is a transforming life, and that is the great distinguishing mark of a Christian.

People Belonging to Another World

Christians have got another world. It goes by the name of Heaven. I do not know where Heaven is, but I know what Heaven is. It does not matter so very much where it is, so long as we know what it is, and I am content to know that Heaven is a state. Christians are marked off as belonging to another world. This

world knows quite well that, as soon as a man or a woman becomes a Christian, it has lost a citizen. They are lost to the world. Yes, we have got another world. It a very much better one, a much more wonderful one, an entirely new world.

People With Another Goal

And we have another goal. This is true to the illustration of the Old Testament. Israel in the wilderness was not limited to the resources of the wilderness. A wilderness is no place in which to try to live by the produce of the land, and yet they went forty years in the wilderness without starving. They had heavenly resources when there were none in their surroundings. They drew everything from another world. It is an illustration again. The survival of Christians under pressure, under trial, under suffering - the triumph of Christians through all sorts of adversities - is a testimony to the fact that they have another world from which they are drawing their resources. Thank God, this 'wilderness' is not the end for the Christian. We have another goal; we are people with an objective, people for whom there is something ahead. Death is not our goal; the grave is not our goal. All that this world may offer of prizes is not our goal. The goal of the Christian is something very much better and more glorious.

The Unity of the People of God

Let us note one other thing about these people. It is quite obvious that the blue cord on their garments, corresponding with the high priest's, indicates the unity of the people of God, not only with Christ as the High Priest in Heaven, but with one another. There was something about every one of them, as those who belonged to the Lord, which was the same, something about them that united them. They were not all the colours of the rainbow, as Christendom is now. No, there was one conspicuous mark about them which made them all alike, all one. There was a unity of the people of God amongst themselves.

The Fact of Unity

Now, first of all, that is factual. We have got to realize this and stand upon it deliberately and persistently, that everyone who is truly a child of God is our brother, our sister, belongs to our family; we have the one life shared amongst us. That is the fact of the unity of Christians, of children of God. Our unity rests in the first place upon nothing but the oneness of life which we share in Christ. The approximation to that in expression may vary, but that depends upon how far God's people live upon the fact of another life. Its expression will never come about by our trying to bring together all the sects, denominations, churches, departments, and so on, and setting up a unity. It will not happen. It will always prove in the long run to be like the tower of Babel. Something will happen, and it will all go wrong again.

But if only we would live upon the great fact that we have received, through faith in Jesus Christ, His own life, that is the basis upon which we are to proceed. I meet you, not upon any mechanical ground, but upon the ground that you belong to the same Lord, you share the same life. Let us forget the other things as far as we can. Let us not allow the other things that divide to affect us more than we can possibly help. Let us cling to this, that, if you and I are truly children of God, born from Heaven, we have one life. It is a fact upon which we need persistently to live, and for which we must fight.

A Unity of Interest

And then it means that we have a unity of interest. The real people of God have only one interest, and they are a unity because of this particular interest. What is the interest of Christians? Paul put it in this way: "To

me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). 'My sole interest in life is the furtherance of the interests of Jesus Christ, the glory of Jesus Christ.' That Apostle sought unceasingly to further the interests of Jesus Christ and to make Him glorious wherever he went. We have one interest, and we put it in that one word - Christ. That is the unifying factor. If we have other things - private things, personal things, things in this world - upon which our hearts are mainly set; if we have sectarian interests: very well, we shall not be one. We are one by this all-captivating passion - Jesus Christ.

And that springs up immediately this great thing happens in us. Is it not true, that as soon as we receive the Lord Jesus in virtue of His saving work for us, immediately we want to tell people about Him, we want to talk about Jesus Christ? You cannot keep us quiet on this matter. We must be talking about Christ. He has become the one all-absorbing interest for us, in our very being. It comes out in business, it comes out in our social circle, it comes out everywhere: we are miserable if we cannot talk about Jesus Christ, if there is no place for Him. That is our unity, a unity of interest.

Now I go back where we began. Do you belong to the people of God? Have you received this Divine life? Do you know harmony with Heaven, or do you go on hoping, maybe praying, maybe longing, but... you are not sure? Heaven is something that makes you long, but you do not know. I want to say to anyone who has not peace with God, who has not perfect assurance that it is well between themselves and Him, that God has nothing more to do to provide you with the ground for it. God has done everything - everything that God Almighty could do - to bring you into that blessed experience of peace with Himself, harmony with Heaven; to give you another life than the one that you have, as a power drawing you upward, drawing you onward, giving you a great motive, a great interest, altogether beyond this poor world. Here it is all available.

What then? It rests with you. You have not got to work for it, or work it out; you have not got to try and fit yourself for it, by trying to be better than you are. You are only prolonging the misery if you say, 'Oh, it is not for me, I am not good enough for that.' What about Israel - what kind of people were they, as to themselves? Well, the Bible story of Israel is not a very pleasant one, as to the people, but I believe it was written for the very purpose of showing up what kind of people they were. If ever there was a difficult people on this earth, it was Israel! Yet that did not prevent them from coming into what God had provided for them. It is not what we are - good, bad or indifferent. God will no more accept the good person than the bad person. God is not waiting for you to change anything in your manner of life. Everything has been done in Christ, and all He says now is: 'Look, I have made a full provision - I ask nothing from you but that you believe it and accept it. Recognize your need, bow before Me, and say: "I am one in need: You have the provision. By faith I receive all Your provision in Christ."'

Does that sound far too easy and too simple? If it does, remember that, while we get it so simply, like that, it cost God and His Son infinitely to provide it. The greatest suffering and sacrifice that this universe has ever witnessed was the cost of your salvation and mine. If we say, 'Only believe and receive by faith', that does not mean that it is cheap. It is very, very costly to God. But He waits for you. You think you are waiting for something - perhaps for Him, or for a change in yourself. You will wait. God has done it all. Christ is now in Heaven, the seal of the fact that the work on earth for men is done. In the words of the great Apostle: "We beseech you on behalf of Christ, be ye reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20).

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