

The Christian Life: A Warfare

by T. Austin-Sparks

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that the Christian life is a continuous spiritual warfare that requires active engagement and reliance on God's truth.

Duration: 27:58

Scripture: Luke 4:2

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the nature of the spiritual warfare faced by Jesus during his temptation in the wilderness. The assault was primarily on Jesus' relationship with the Father, questioning his identity as the Son of God. The preacher emphasizes the importance of not accepting anything less than God's full thought concerning the church, as the enemy tries to divert believers from the significance of the body of Christ. The battle in the spiritual realm encompasses three realms: our relationship with God, our relationship with the world, and our relationship with the church.

Transcript

Fourth chapter of the Gospel by Luke, Gospel by Luke, chapter four, And Jesus, full of the Holy Spirit, returned from the Jordan, and was led by the Spirit into the wilderness during forty days, being tempted of the devil. And he did eat nothing in those days. And when they were completed, he hungered.

And the devil said unto him, If thou art the Son of God, command this stone that it become a loaf. And Jesus answered unto him, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone. And he led him up and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time.

The devil said unto him, Thee will I give all this authority and the glory of them, for it hath been delivered unto me. And to whomsoever I will, I give it. If thou therefore wilt worship me, it shall all be thine.

And Jesus answered and said unto him, It is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve. And he led him to Jerusalem, and set him on the pinnacle of the temple. And he said unto him, If thou art the Son of God, cast thyself down from him, for it is written, He shall give his angels charge concerning thee to guard thee.

And on their hands they shall bear thee up, lest haply thou dash thy foot against the stone. And Jesus answering said unto him, It is said, Thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God. When the devil had completed

every temptation, he departed from him for a season.

In the letter to Timothy, the first letter, chapter one, and verse eighteen, This charge I commit unto thee, my child Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that by them thou mayst war a good warfare. Chapter six, verse twelve, Fight the good fight of the faith. And in the second letter, chapter two, verses three and four, Suffer hardship with me as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.

No soldier on service entangleth himself in the affairs of this life, that he may please him who enrolled him as a soldier. It is not necessary to inform you that the Christian life is a warfare, but it is a matter concerning which we need to have a realization. Great deal of difference between knowing a thing by way of information and realizing what that thing really means.

It is a matter, therefore, for our remembrance and our realization that the Christian life is a warfare. Moreover, the New Testament makes it perfectly clear that this warfare is an age-long thing. It goes right on to the end of the age.

It is shown right through the New Testament to be such. And the New Testament points on to the very end of this age and shows that it is characterized by spiritual warfare all the way through. Now, the enemy with whom we have to contend has a very elaborate and comprehensive and detailed tactical plan for getting his advantage.

And one of the major tactics of the enemy is to eliminate from Christians the very element of warfare itself. That is, to make Christians non-warring people. Really, to take the element of warfare out of them.

Or in some way to bring them to a state where that is completely eliminated. There are far more spiritual casualties by not fighting than there are by fighting. There are many who get bruised and wounded and knocked down temporarily in the fight.

And they may be casualties for the time being, but they get up and fight again. But the very land is strewn with casualties who are casualties because they didn't fight. And I say there are many more of them.

To change the metaphor, I was impressed again yesterday, as I have very often been when flying, with this fact that when a plane is climbing, and when it is at its altitude and has all its power in action, it is most steady. It goes on steadily and meets the adverse forces in a triumphant way. But immediately, the plane is thrown into the descending position and the acceleration is retarded.

And the power is reduced. The thing becomes the plating of the wind. You rock about, shaking all over the place, because this driving force has been lessened.

And it is very like that. We become the platings of the devil. We get knocked all over the place.

Yes, we become casualties when we cease to be part of it. Or, hence, something of the fighting, warring spirit is reduced in us. That is the perilous moment in the Christian life.

And I repeat that the warring spirit in a Christian is a great protection. To be without it is a great peril. If we let go, fighting, Satan will do the same.

But he will get us in other ways. Because that is the temptation. If we would not be so positive, we could have an easier time, in a way, from the enemy.

He'll let down if we do, in that particular form. But he'll work in quieter and more subtle ways and catch us. He's not giving us up.

If you want to have an easier time and get a no less perilous time, stop fighting the devil. You'll find that he'll follow suit. But it is, as I say, the peril of becoming a casualty of not fighting.

We go to Christ's temptation. These three temptations, of which we've just read. We note that the line was crossed at Jordan.

The battle was set and begun. And he committed himself to the cross. As symbolized in the Jordan.

And when the anointing spirit came upon him, that was the beginning of the battle. Now, note the nature of the warfare, as indicated by those temptations. First of all, the attack, the assault was upon his relationship with the Father.

If thou be the Son. His relationship to the Father. The whole question of sonship.

That's an objective of satanic assault. Notice how the end of the account is given. Then the devil leaves him.

Our version says, for a season. But the margin says, until a season. Coming back on that again.

And he did come back on that, right at the end. The hour of greatest weakness, he came right back on that. Again, the whole question of his relationship with the Father.

I have no time this morning to speak about what that relationship really means. Of son to the Father. But I can just indicate this.

That sonship, by its very meaning, the very meaning of the word, means that the whole honour of the Father is involved. True sonship means the taking up of the honour of the Father. The most terrible thing about failure in sonship, whether it be Christ or in the ordinary relations of life, is that it dishonours the Father.

It brings reproach upon the Father. It is shame heaped upon the Father. The Father suffers shame by the failure of a son.

And so it was with Christ the whole matter of the Father's honour, and the Father's satisfaction was involved. And so the enemy focused his assault in the first place upon that, the relationship with the Father. Remember that is always the nature of a warfare, of this warfare.

You know it well, our relationship with God is a focal point of constant attack and assault by the enemy. And it will be to the end, because so much is at stake. And bound up with that relationship, the enemy is always trying to drive a wedge between us and the Father.

Then, in the next place, relationship to the world. Relationship to the world. Offering him the kingdoms of the world, glory and the authority on his terms, Satan's terms.

And so it became a question of whether Christ would let go this world as it is, and all that it had to offer. All that it had to offer. Of position, of rewards, of influence, and everything that this world could offer him.

Whether he would let that go in its present form, to have it only on God's terms, and to win it in God's way. You can see that that is a very real issue in spiritual warfare, especially for young Christians. You come up against that at once, immediately almost, you become a Christian, you're up against this, rather, the world, or the law.

Whether you're going to have the world, or whether you're going to have the law. It very often becomes a very clearly divided question when you become a Christian. And you're right up against that.

And there are many practical ways that present is present. And it becomes a warfare right on to the end. It's never to the end of our lives a pleasant thing, a pleasant thing to our nature, to be shunned by the world, discounted by the world, and to have the world holding back its favour and its price.

Because, because we are Christians. It's got to be settled. It comes into the battle.

You see how hurriedly I'm passing over these things, only hinting at them. And then in the third place, the battle was focused upon the relationship with the Church. Look into the pinnacle of the temple.

The temple. Why does he take him to the palace? Well, that's the world, from another realm. To some other place.

No, it's to the temple. Lord Jesus had come with the object of securing his Church. And here's the issue.

It's a religious one now. It's a religious one. Not the world now, it's a religious one.

It's not God now, immediately. This is something else. And here you have, represented by the temple, the popular religion.

The established religion. The traditional religion. The formal religion.

Yes, and the dead religion. The devil doesn't take it. And now, the suggestion is made, that he can capture the religious world.

If only he will do this thing. He can capture the religious world, and a place in the religious world. He can capture a reputation.

He can capture influence in that world. He can make a name for himself in that world. He can get applause in that world.

Acceptance of the following in the religious world. But Jesus always, in his life, drew a distinct line between traditional, cold, dead, formal religion, and the living church. He submitted himself to the church.

He said, I will build my church. Christ loved the church, and gave himself for it. Now, the devil knows he has a keen, keen sense of things.

He has an intuitive knowledge of things. He knows what that church is destined to mean in his undoing. And so, if he could just turn Christ away from that specific object of the church, onto something religious, that's an alternative.

He has scored tremendously. The relationship to the church, no, Christ has not been put off that. And don't forget, dear friends, the enemy is always trying to get up, to accept something that is less than God's full thought concerning the church.

To be religious. To become, yes, formal, professional Christian. To drop down onto that level, and to be robbed, deprived of the tremendous significance of the body of Christ, and its destiny in the counsel of God.

Again, I hint at this. I want to come to another threefold application of this. But these are three realms of the battle.

In relation, our relationship to God, our relationship to this world, and our relationship to the church. The battle rages on those three points. We've got to fight it through.

But then look, as to Christ personally, in himself, first his body. Attack upon his body, and what seems to be its clamant need. And there is a direction, dear friends, in which the great issue arises in the very bodily realm, whether the dictates of our bodily life, and I say our physical life, are going to be paramount, or whether the will of God is going to be paramount.

Sometimes that issue arises. That is why the apostle says, I beseech you to present your bodies as living sacrifice. Your bodies are living sacrifice.

Because so often the body is the thing which rises up and dictates our course. What we need for our very physical life it seems. What is demanded? What is good for us bodily, physically? Sometimes it's a matter of point of rest.

Oh yes, these bodies need rest, and God knows that. And Christ took account of that with his disciples. And he knew the need of physical rest.

But there are points, I say, and times when this whole question has got to become a spiritual one and not just a bodily one. Where our physical weakness, it may be some indisposition, can become the dictating thing and we lie down under it, accept it, put out of the battle. Whereas, even then at times, not always, but at times, we are called upon to say yes, I don't feel very fit, I don't feel very well, the body seems to say I ought to do this, that and the other.

But there's some spiritual issue at question and therefore I lay hold on life. I lay hold on life. And it's so often is it not true that when we stand on our feet and gird ourselves for that very physical battle, the life comes in and we do what we would not have done if we'd given way to the body.

You see the point? It was a question then at that time of whether the body was going to dictate or the spirit or the Lord, the Father. The realm of the body and then in the realm of the soul. As I pointed out, this offering of the kingdoms of the world was an appeal to his soul.

Ambition. Ambition. Oh, the tragedies of ambition in this world.

Parents for their children. Their ambition for their children has so often devastated the spiritual life of our children. And our ambition in this world to get something, get to the top of the ladder, to be something, to make a name and every other form of our own natural life, our selfhood.

And this was an appeal to selfhood, you see. Selfhood in this world. Reputation.

Name. Position. Influence.

Fame. Success. Prosperity.

Getting on. All that was involved in this. Well, there's nothing wrong nothing wrong with doing a good job of work in this world and of getting on, but if it is at the cost of doing the Father's will, and if it is at the suggestion of the devil and the drawing out of our own soul or self life, there's an infinite peril bound up with that.

And we've got to fight this thing out. Get really to this and fight out this issue. Now, what is it that is dictating? Is it my own selfhood? My own soul? Or really, is that all subject to what God wants for my life? And that is very often a very keen battle, isn't it? And then as to his spirit.

His spirit. Body. His soul.

His spirit. The whole question of worship governs this. This whole temptation, doesn't it? Worship in spirit.

The spirit is that part of us where God does worship. God seeketh true worshipers who worship him in spirit. Not the body.

Not the soul. But the spirit. Paul said whom I have in my spirit.

The enemy will do anything to get us off the ground of that essential and ultimate relationship with God in our spirit. Anything to draw us away from that. You and I have to learn more and more, keenly and clearly, what it means to walk in the spirit.

And to have our life with God by our spirit. Not by our feelings. Our emotions.

Our own desires. Our own reasonings. And not by the governing influences of this world at all.

But in the innermost part of our being with God. Now you see how from that very moment that was a primary issue in the life of the Lord Jesus himself all the way through from this committal at Jordan and from this battle, this fundamental and inclusive battle in the wilderness his life was based upon this. Would he be influenced by other considerations or would he walk with the Father in an eternal way in his heart? See how that arose again and again.

The enemy was trying to cut in there to get his life upon some other basis than upon the basis of his inner fellowship with the Father. Much could be said, could it not? You realize it about the battle that rages there to get us off of that ground. And all this raises one big question.

What is going to prevail? The enemy comes along physical lines. He comes along emotional lines. He comes in all these different ways but there's one issue in it all.

It's a battle. Who is going to prevail and what is going to prevail? The Lord Jesus came back every time to the devil. It's what the Father had made known as to his will.

After all it is written. He was only saying another word. God has said this.

God has said this. God has said this. I know what God has said.

That's the final word in this battle. That's the argument. Not the argument even of my physical needs and conditions.

Not the argument of my well-being in this world at all. But the argument of my inward life with God. That's the battle.

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