

The Creation and Consecration of the Ark

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing that every child of God is a new creation, has a heavenly home, and is consecrated to God through the life of Jesus Christ.

Scripture: Exodus 30:25-30, Psalm 84:5, John 1:4, John 3:7, John 6:38, John 7:46, John 10:10, Romans 12:1, 2 Corinthians 5:17, 1 John 4:17

Topics: "Spiritual Journey", "The Ark of the Covenant"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of the Ark of the Covenant as a representation of the greatness and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, illustrating how the ark's journey reflects the spiritual journey of God's people. He explains that just as the ark moved inwardly and deeper into the life of God's people, so too must Jesus move from being an objective reality to a subjective experience in the lives of believers. Sparks highlights that true Christian life begins with the new creation in Christ, which is entirely a work of God, and that believers must recognize their heavenly citizenship and the eternal life they receive through Him. He concludes by stressing the importance of consecration, where the blood and oil symbolize atonement and the Holy Spirit's life, affirming that believers are wholly for God.

Transcript

We are occupied at this time with the greatness and glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, and we are seeing how that greatness and glory is represented to us in the Old Testament by means of the ark of the covenant. We have begun to look at the journeys of the ark through the wilderness and into the land, and we have pointed out that it was not only a literal journey, but a spiritual journey, moving ever more deeply into the life of God's people. The ark only went forward as it went inward. The Lord called upon the ark to stand still many times while the people worshipped, and in that way it was becoming a more inward reality as they went on with it. That is, what was true of the ark was being made true in their own history.

In that way it represents the history of every child of God. By means of deepening experiences the Lord Jesus is moving more and more from the outside to the inside, and is thus seeking to make His people correspond to Himself. That is the great general truth about our relationship with the Lord Jesus. In the first place He is presented to us objectively, and from that time onward the Spirit of God is seeking to make Him not only objective, but subjective also. So what John said is true: "As he is, even so are we in this world" (1 John 4:17).

With that fact before us we went on to see the way in which the ark came into being, and, while I feel that what I have to say now is for everyone, I feel that it is especially for those who are near the beginning of their spiritual journey, those who have only recently come to the Lord, or who have gone only a little way on the journey. What I am going to say has to do with the real nature of a Christian.

The beginning of a true Christian life is the beginning of Jesus Christ in that life, and that is something that has never been made by man. When the Word of God says: "In Christ there is a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:17 - RV margin), it means exactly that.

Now, you see, that is how the ark came into being. We have already emphasized that God did not leave the making of the ark to man's ideas. It came into being by a direct revelation from God Himself, and then it came into being by direct activity of the Holy Spirit. In the first place, it had nothing with what man did, or could do, but only with what God did. This ark was something which was altogether of God, and if the ark really does represent the Lord Jesus, that is the first great truth about Him. Man did not make the Lord Jesus Christ. He is not a human conception or idea. He is neither of man's mind nor of man's hand. He is a revelation and a creation of God, something altogether new. When the people who heard Him speak said: "Never man spake like this man" (John 7:46 - AV), they would just as truly have been able to say: 'Never was there a man like this Man.'

Now that truth has to move from the objective to the subjective with us. The beginning of a true Christian life is something altogether new. We have to say: 'I never saw it like that before.'

We must look at the Lord Jesus more closely. We are saying that He was something new out of heaven, and the Apostles who wrote about Him took very great pains to emphasize this truth. The Apostle John, for instance, continually spoke about the heavenly character and person of the Lord Jesus, and they all took great care to make it perfectly clear that everything truly related to the Lord Jesus was of a heavenly nature.

We begin with the home of the Lord Jesus. If you were asked where His home was, perhaps you would say: 'Well, Nazareth, or Bethlehem', or perhaps: 'He had no home. He Himself said: "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head." He was born in a stable, and was buried in someone else's tomb. He was altogether without a home.' Are you quite sure that that is true? If you think again, you will know that it is not, for He Himself said: "I am come down from heaven" (John 6:38), and that His Father was in heaven. His native land was heaven. He was a stranger in this world, but He had a home. Heaven was His home.

I wonder if you have all realized that that is the great truth about every true child of God. It is a pity that in our most common translation the Lord Jesus said to Nicodemus: "Ye must be born again" (John 3:7 - AV). That is only part of the truth. What He really said was: 'You must be born from above.' The first truth about every child of God ought to be the same as it was of the Lord Jesus Christ, for we ought to be able to say: 'I don't belong here. I am a stranger in this world. It is not my home.' This is not because we have been told that we are going to heaven as our heavenly home, but because there is something in us of which we are conscious that does not belong to this world. Do you really have that consciousness? Sometimes when we go to Canada we meet very many people who have emigrated from Scotland, and they give us such a warm welcome. They say: 'Oh, are you from the old country? Our hearts are there! We think about it, we dream about it, and when we get together we are always talking about it. It is good to meet someone from the old country.' They are in another country, but they do not belong to it. The country to which they

truly belong is inside, and that is exactly how Jesus was when He was here. He was always telling people about His wonderful Father who was in heaven, and about the wonderful heavenly home from which He had come, and He was longing to return there. You read the Gospel by John again and see if that is true!

Do you see what I mean when I say that what was true of the Lord Jesus has to be true in us? That ark of the testimony came out from heaven and was always moving toward heaven. It would never come to its rest until it came right into the heavenly country. Are you quite sure that you have that country in your heart? You remember that the Psalmist, in Psalm 84, when speaking of the pilgrim people of God, said: "In whose heart are the high ways to Zion" (verse 5). The thing that was in their hearts was going to Zion. Their feet were not only taking the way to Zion, but the way to Zion was in their hearts.

Now I am spending too much time on this one thing, but it is very important that we should all recognize this fundamental thing about a true Christian life. It must not be that when we come to the end of the journey we just say: 'Now I am going home'. That is how a lot of people think of death, but we ought really to have been going home all our Christian life, and the last step will just be over and through the door. So heaven as our home must be in our hearts and in our consciousness from the beginning of the Christian life.

When you are asked where you were born, it is only half a truth to say: 'In France... In Switzerland... In Germany... or, In England.' No, we were born from above. But what does that mean? What happened to you when you were born? You were born because you had received life. When you were born naturally you received French life, or German life, or English life, but it was an earthly life. It had a beginning, and it has an end. Those who are born from above receive a life which had no beginning and has no end. That is what John tells us about the Lord Jesus. He begins his Gospel with these words: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God." Can you tell me when that beginning was? There is no date to it. It is outside of time. John says of Jesus Christ: "In him was life" (John 1:4), and Jesus Himself said: "I came that they might have life" (John 10:10).

There are two Greek words for 'life'. One is 'bios', from which we get 'biology', and that is just natural life, but there is another word, 'zoe', and that is a different kind of life. It is a life that no one has naturally. It is called eternal life, or the life of the ages - and that is the life which was in Jesus Christ, and which He gives to every new-born child of God.

Now, you do everything by reason of the life that is in you. You think because there is life in you, and when the life has gone, you will stop thinking. You feel because of the life that is in you. Am I being too simple? Be patient, for I have not finished yet.

I find that French people behave in a certain way because they have French life, and British people behave in a certain way because they have British life. And all the other divisions of the human race behave, think and feel and act because of their peculiar life. When you go to a foreign country you are always having to excuse yourself. You have to say: 'Excuse me, but this is how we do it in our country.' You see, your whole behaviour is governed by the kind of life that is in you. Jesus did not think as the people of this world think, He did not feel as they feel, and neither did He act as they act. That was the cause of all the trouble with Him. The world did not understand Him, and John said: "The world knoweth us not, because it knew him not." He had a life in Him which made Him different from the life of this world.

We all need to recognize this more, and young Christians especially must recognize this great truth: If you really are a child of God you do not belong to this world system, and even the world recognizes that there

is something different about you. We are given a life which is not the life of time or of this world. It is the life of eternity, and that is the life which we are supposed to have in Jesus Christ.

What is true of the Lord Jesus has to be made true of us in every respect.

Now I will close with just one other thing about the ark. When the ark had been made according to God's pattern, although it was an expression of God's mind it had to be consecrated to Him. You will find this consecration in Exodus 30, and there were two things in it - blood and oil. The high priest sprinkled the ark with blood and oil. Now you notice that, as in the New Testament, blood in the Old Testament is always related to sin. It speaks of the atonement for sin, for where the blood was, sin had been removed. Atonement had been made for sin, and the blood separated that upon which it rested from a life of sin. The blood says: 'Sin is atoned for and put away.' It speaks of the death side, for that which has shed its blood has died. Oil speaks of the life side, for, because sin has been put away, the Holy Spirit can come down upon it, and because there has been a death to sin, there can now be a life in the Spirit. In that way the ark was consecrated, which means that it was separated unto God. One of its names was 'The Ark of God'. It is wholly for God. It is no longer for the world or for self, but altogether for God.

That is Jesus Christ. By shedding His own precious blood He removed sin for us, and by giving the oil of the Holy Spirit He has brought us from death into life, so that now we wholly belong to God. We do not belong to ourselves, to this world, or to sin. The Holy Spirit has come to us and made us wholly God's.

I am so glad that the old Christians are listening so carefully! That means that they are also taking this to heart and are not saying: 'Oh, that is for young Christians.' My dear friends, the older we grow and the further we go with the Lord, the more true will this become in our history.

Forgive me for saying this: I am not wanting just to give you the truth that is in the Bible. My far greater concern is that the truth which is in the Bible shall be true in us. If you go away with all this just in your note-books, or in your heads, the whole conference has failed. All the ministry of every meeting has failed. All our prayer and travail over this time is for nothing. These realities about the Lord Jesus must be realities in our experience. Therefore I beseech you to have prayerful exercise about these messages.

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