

The Cup and the Fire - Part 2

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the profound connection between the cup of suffering and the scattering of fire, illustrating how the church's trials lead to spiritual growth and victory over evil.

Duration: 34:34

Scripture: Luke 12:49-54

Topics: "Christian Life"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the significance of the cup and the book in relation to the Church's relationship with the Lord. The speaker emphasizes that this chapter in the Bible is filled with profound truths and historical events that can deeply impact readers. The sermon highlights the struggle between the powers of Israel and the spiritual forces that eventually triumphed. The speaker also emphasizes the spreading of fire and the shaping of Satan's kingdom, as well as the opposition faced by the Church.

Transcript

The word out of which our consideration is taken at this time are those in the 12th chapter of the Gospel of my Luke, verses 49 and 50. I came to cast fire upon the earth, and what will I? O that it were already kindled, that I have a baptism to be baptized with. And how am I sweetened till it be accomplished? The cup and the scattered fire.

We spent our time this afternoon upon the cup and the consequent scattering of the fire, mainly with a view to taking fresh accounts of the relationship between those two things. That there is no scattering of the fire, and all that that means in progress of the gospel, growth of the church, only in so far as the meaning of the cup is established. As the basis, the foundation of everything, right in the very heart of the life of the people of God.

Having sought to read, indicate, and emphasize that great law, this evening I am taking you to this 12th chapter of the Book of the End. For this you have heard, read, this chapter is a microcosm of the history of the cup and the fire. That of course is true of the whole of this book.

It is the cup undoubtedly, the church in offering relationship with the Lord. But it is the book of the scattered fire. This chapter, as I have said, is a miniature of that whole great truth.

Indeed, a miniature of the struggle of the angels, between the powers of evil and the invisible spiritual forces which eventually triumph. A tremendous amount of history and truth, packed into this chapter, which never fails to move and stir us when we read it. I wonder whether there is a chapter in the Bible so pregnant with phrases and clauses piled one upon another, every one of which would, without exaggeration, occupy our whole time.

Take some of these clauses, only a few of them in, now about that time. What a key that is. And what a lock that key opens.

You stay with it. We shall in a few minutes use it a little. If you have heard the King, far more in depth than perhaps you recognise, to vex.

Chatham asked the church, the vexation of the church, or the attempted vexation of the church, to James. He pointed out this afternoon, it was this James, and John, who came to the Lord, requesting places on the right hand and on the left in glory, to whom the Lord immediately uttered the challenge, are you able to drink of the cup that I drink of, and to be baptised with the baptism, with thine baptism. They said we are able, you shall.

And he killed James when he saw that it pleased the Jews. It pleased the Jews. There's a lot in there.

He proceeded further, and so we might go on. I say the whole chapter is full of phrases and clauses like that, which are just packed with meaning. Let us look at it, and at perhaps one or two of them, but really at the message of this chapter.

We begin then, now, about that time. About that time. Hot time.

Hot time. Full of significance. You can put your finger on that, and note that time.

The answer is a very large one. It has two main features. There's Herod's answer, or the answer that is in Herod, and there's the answer which lies behind Herod, much more deeply.

The answer of Satan. Let's look at it. The answer in Herod.

It says here, Herod the king. I suppose you know that there were six Herod's in the Bible. Four of them were Idumean in origin.

That is, they were descendants of Esau. They gathered under the symbolic name of Eden. Descendants of Esau, not of Israel.

All that's very significant. And at last you come to this man, who is the first and the last of them to hold properly, hold this title king. None of them up to him has officially held that title.

And this one was the last one to properly hold it. The title of king was taken away after him. You see this whole thing has headed up a long history.

You want to read the prophecies of Obadiah to really get the substance of this historic antagonism between the flesh and the spirit. Between heaven and hell. Between Esau and Israel.

The long history here headed right up to this man who now takes the title of king. I think there is a certain irony in the fact that the Jews should come to be ruled by a descendant of Esau and not of Israel. And that

that ruler should be appointed by pagan Rome.

To think about this, you're in the presence of a tremendous drama here. Perfectly fascinating. But oh, how deeply instructive.

I hope we'll be able to get out the essence of it as we go on this evening. About that time Herod the king put forth his hand to afflict the Sultan of the Church. And then he saw that it pleased the Jews.

Now why should Herod do this Jew-pleasing thing at that time? It looks just like a human thought. Might be. Seem to be a very simple thing.

But we are in the unfolding of this much deeper thing. You know, Satan is very deep, but God is deeper still. That's what we've got here.

Well, if you look back to the chapter before this, you will find that there was a great famine. Verse 27. Now in those days.

Now note, in those days. Now about that time. In those days there came down prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch.

There stood up one of them named Agabus. And signified by the spirit that there should be a great famine over all the world. Came to pass in the days of Gloria.

Now about that time. Simple answer is this. The Jews were a very difficult people to rule.

That is perfectly clear of course. We know that. They were a very difficult people to rule.

But, and to the normal usual common difficulty, a famine. And you know there is nothing, nothing that leads to revolution more quickly than tax, than hunger. You notice later in the story, these people got paid from his province.

The question of food, you see, and it's become very acute. And there's a seizing and a surging and a rising. And Herod must do something to get these people diverted from their struggles.

Preoccupied. There must be some diversion. There must be something done for them.

He can't provide the food and avoid the famine. It has come. It's a fact.

And if he is going to hold his position and hold these people, and keep them in check, he must do something to please them. There's your answer. Sounds like human story, a bit of trickery, politics, whatever you like to call it.

But that's one part of the answer. Now about that time, you see. Why must he please the Jews? Well, that's the answer.

How will he please the Jews? Well, he knows their hatred for the Christians. That's a long story too. The Jews' hatred for the Christians.

And that's why he takes forth his hand to afflict or bed certain of the church. The Christians were being used to access out this ramshackle false kingdom of Herod. Keep his throne intact.

He's using them for his own ends. Well, that's only part of the answer. Simple one.

But that's Herod's part of the answer. But let us get behind Herod. Because Herod is not acting alone.

There's something more, something deeper. The answer is really found in that realm. The satanic behind the man.

The deeper and the more real answer to the question. Well, let's look at chapter 11 again. Verse 19.

They therefore that were scattered abroad upon the tribulation that arose about Stephen, traveled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, speaking the word to none save only the Jews, they that were scattered abroad upon the tribulation that arose about Stephen. That's a tremendously inclusive word. There's something happening.

Oh, what a lot has been happening. You see, that takes you back to chapter 7. Chapter 7 is the martyrdom of Stephen. That's the cup, that's the cup Stephen is still.

It looks like a tremendous triumph of the day. Stephen was a mighty man. Tremendous hopes for the church bound up with the life of that young man.

Some have said after reading his discourse, studying it, that he was the equal of Saul at least. And there he is. Looks as though Satan has really triumphed.

From that very point, scattering of the believers far and wide, and everywhere they went, they're divided. Saul of Tarsus is converted. What a tremendous thing that is.

Peter is led to the house of Cornelius. Way up there in the north, and we know what happens there, door is open to the Gentiles. Tremendous things all coming out of the cup, cup of the Lord.

The baptism, the passion into which the church has been baptized. All this is happening. If you read the account, there was a more added to the church.

About 5,000, about 3,000. See, it's growing. That's the answer.

The king of Satan turned to his death. Something must be done about it. Fire is spreading.

Satan's kingdom is being shaken. Someone tersely put it. The men that have turned the world upside down have come here.

That's what's happening. Now, about that time. That's the explanation, about that time.

Out of this baptism of the passion of the Lord, into which the church has been brought. The fire is spreading. The enemy is moved, and deeply moved.

He puts forth his hand, and with a hand behind that hand, to vex Satan of the church, and he kills Jesus with a sword. And when he saw that it pleased the Lord, he proceeded further. I'd like to say with all those fragments, you know, because there's a message in every one of them.

He's carried on by his own momentum. Have a little success, and see what it will do for you. However, let's return to this.

Turn away from that for the moment, to the other side, the the aspect of this, that we may call a drama indeed, of the sovereign kingship of the Lord. Look, it's all summed up in three things. Herod put forth his hand to afflict.

An angel of the Lord snowed him, and the word of God flew and multiplied. That's tremendous, isn't it? Begin the story with Herod putting forth his hand. You end the story with Herod eaten of worms, and giving up the guilt.

You begin the story with the church afflicted and martyred. You end the story with the word of God flowing and multiplying. That's the story of another king.

It's the story of two kings pitting themselves against each other. I said at the beginning, it's the microcosm of this long history of the conflict between the forces of evil, and those invincible forces of the Spirit, which always in the long run. But here a pressing question arises.

When you think the beginning, he killed James with a sword. And when he saw that it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. The question that clamors for an answer is, why does God allow this kind of thing? Why did he not intervene before James was killed? Why did he not stop this thing before Peter was thrown into prison? Why did God allow it? And why does God allow that kind of thing? Well that's another key to another large history.

And God permissive will. God allowing his servants, his so useful servants, to be killed or cast into prison. Allowing the church to suffer like this.

Why does God allow it? The answer dear friends is deep within the cup. You get down deep enough into the cup and you'll find the answer. I put it another way, it's deep within the cross.

God, in the mystery of his will and his way, uses the church as he used Israel to draw out the evil forces to their own destruction. God moves in a mysterious way. Is it the church or is it the forces against them that are destroyed eventually? Well you see the answer in history.

Here in this chapter, in representation, that God has done that. Here you have Israel in Egypt. What a tremendous, extreme tending of Pharaoh.

Drawing him out, drawing him out. Drawing him to the limit of his own resources to give an answer through the magician. And then going on and going on.

Drawing him out until Pharaoh has exhausted all his resources and then God smashes him. Untotal of his whole resources. He is broken.

And God has used a suffering people to destroy it all out. And that's the story here. The church, I say in the mystery of God's way, suffers.

But its suffering comes from the enemy and God is drawing it out by the church. And drawing it out and extending him when his cup of iniquity is full. God will smash it beyond repair.

That's the issue of Pharaoh. But the church that has brought this out, it's the sufferings of James and Peter and the church in these days. They have accomplished that.

Have accomplished that. But is not that done right in the cross? Look at the cross. Is the cross the extending of all the powers of evil in earth and in hell? It is that.

You would say, is there anything more that they can do? When you see him there on the cross, dead. And know how it's brought about and all that went to bring it about. Tell the whole story of human and satanic malice and spite.

Is there anything more that they can do? No. What's the answer? The scattered fire. That's the answer.

You see, it's in the cup, it's in the cross. It's an integral part of this whole matter. The sufferings of Christ which abound unto us, unto the church, are working, working, working.

Victims undoing. And for us, a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. Wait, if you can, in patience and in faith.

Therein is the patience of the faithful. Remember that word? Therein is the patience of the faithful. If you can win, you'll see that your suffering or your suffering on the one side wrought havoc in the kingdom of Satan.

Brought him to an end. They drew him out. They were the marks of his coming out.

On the other side, his sufferings have worked for you, glory. In the meantime, spiritual increase, spiritual progress, scattered fire. God uses the work of Satan for Satan's undoing.

But it's the church and it's the saints who are the instrument. It's in their soul that this battle is fought out. Now unto the principalities and powers in the heavenlies, they've known the manifold wisdom of God by the church.

But see the something in the unseen. Progress of the word of God. It's a costly thing.

It involves not suffering, it does involve the cup. But that's his way. Here then, we have God using Satan's work for his own undoing.

And for the progress of the world, for Satan's overthrow, for the church's advance, and for the glory of God. All that is wrapped up in the anguish of fellowship with his son. You and I have had a good deal of difficulty in understanding why Paul should long to know the fellowship of his son.

One of the most difficult prayers for us to pray. But Paul knew this secret. He knew the secret.

That's the way of the progress of the gospel. That's the way for the destruction of sin that is against fellowship of his son. For that is the heart of the cross of the Lord Jesus himself.

And all this you see rests upon the cup. The cup. The cup ceases to be an object.

It ceases to be just a thing. It becomes something living. Something living.

Something potent. That cup is a mighty force. Dear friends, when you come to the Lord's table next time, you can do.

May God give you some larger conception of the tremendous thing. What is that thing in his universe? Touching every realm. The representation of something living.

Something living. This blood speaks. This blood tells.

This blood counts. Blood is vital. This blood is a terrific force in this universe.

You take the cup. Yes it's true. We accept the baptism of passion that let us recognize that in faith we take the tremendous victory.

That is set forth. It's costly. I can't help thinking a lot of things as I read and ponder how this might have turned out so differently.

You see, I come to this next scene. We must see where it was all wrought out. On the one side, hero.

Wicked. Wicked. All the cruelty of his long, long history.

Back to Esau. The dew. The dew.

Did we say anything about that? Indeed we did. The person. The change.

The strong God within and without. All quaternions. These are things which symbolize hell.

Great, great forces. Difficulties. All the things which are against.

They're not just words. They're tremendous things all of them. Viewed from the natural standpoint.

That's on one side. On the other.

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