

The Eternal Prospect of the Christian

by T. Austin-Sparks

The Christian life is not just a present experience, but a preparation for eternity, where there are differences in the Christian life and service, and the measure of utterness is determined by spiritual measure.

Duration: 49:28

Topics: "Eternal Prospect"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the purpose and significance of the trials and challenges that believers face under the hand of God. They emphasize that these experiences are not just for the present, but are preparing believers for something greater in the future. The speaker also highlights the importance of living in light of eternity and how our actions and character in this life will impact our place and vocation in the afterlife. Additionally, they address the difficulty and slow progress of God's work and the need for a deeper understanding of the Christian life, emphasizing that it is not a superficial or trivial thing.

Transcript

Really try to get to understand what the Christian life really is. In the first place, to show that it is not a petty, small, trivial thing to be a Christian. Hence our first evening was occupied with the immense significance of the Christian life.

Then that it is not a superficial thing of passing, changing, feelings, sensations, emotions, impressions. But that it rests upon some deep and radical changes in our very constitution. Thus our second evening was occupied with what happens when we become Christians.

That is, what happens to us and in us. Then that it is not something which is exhausted in its initial experience, however wonderful and great that may be. It is not all limited to its beginning, but it is inexhaustible.

It is boundless. So our third evening was occupied with the divine purpose and principles governing the Christian life. And finally, it is not by any means a matter of dislike alone.

Be it short or be it long, but it relates more to what follows to the life to come. Hence, this evening, we are to be concerned with the eternal prospect of the Christian life. Its relation to the eternal future.

We saw at the beginning that the Christian life is dated back to eternity past. It is not something which just springs up in this particular Christian era, as it is called. But that it was designed by God in his eternal

counsel.

The New Testament has quite a lot to say about that. And of that, eternal purpose and design is pressing in to this special dispensation in a very definite and particular way. The past eternity is pressing in and pressing up in this age in a particular way.

Now we are to see that the future eternity is also pressing into this dispensation. The future eternity is governing the present. It is shaping the present and explains the present.

God is not only working onward. Really, the onward aspect of divine activities is our side of things. God is walking backward.

His side of things is always backward to his full thought in eternity past. He is bringing us on, but he is really bringing us back. Now to come to this matter of the eternal prospect of the Christian.

We have to realize, and there is so much of it, it is not difficult to realize, that there is a very large prospective element in the New Testament. That is, the New Testament is always looking on. In the New Testament, everything is dominated by the ages to come.

The conception was an eternal one, not just a time one. And that conception is far, far too big to be realized in fullness in any time. It is much bigger than all time.

It certainly, therefore, cannot be realized in any lifetime of any person. It outbounds time. This is from eternity to eternity, and it requires timelessness for its full realization.

This, of course, explains a great deal. It explains the very nature of the Christian life and of Christian service. A very big factor in the ways of God with his people, with Christians, is that of experience.

God puts a great deal of value upon experience. It is just when we are beginning to profit by experience, and others are beginning to profit by our experience, the end comes, and we are called away. And all the long and full and deep experience has really had no adequate expression.

And there is something about that that would be a problem. If God puts so much value upon experience, and then when we've got it, we can't use it, like a contradiction. It requires an extension somewhere, somehow, to make good all that deep experience which God has taken so much pains to produce.

It explains God's ways with us in the path of deep and deepening experience. Then, as to the work of God, well, the work is difficult. It's hard.

The progress is all too slow. And though you may do much until your life, when you have had all the days that can be allotted, and have spent yourself to the last drop, what have you done? What have you done? After all, what does it amount to? At most, we have to say, little. Comparatively little.

So much more to be done. And every successive generation of Christian workers has the same story to tell. On we go, on we go, and we never overtake.

We never reach anything like fullness in this life. Something more is required to make perfect, both our imperfect lives and our imperfect work. And then another factor, which is not a small one, that God seems, I put it this way, seems to be so much more concerned with the worker than even with the work.

This, of course, creates the perplexities of Christian life and service. If God were only concerned with our Christian work, well, he ought never to allow us to be laid aside from it. Especially either repeatedly or for long periods.

And he certainly ought not to allow us to die prematurely, as we would say. If the work is everything, then he ought to keep us at full strength all our days and extend our days to a full period. But he does not.

So many of his choices, people, are not able to serve in the way in which Christian service is thought of, be in action, and even those who are fully in action are conscious that the real need, the real need in the work of God is for their own deeper knowledge of God himself and that God is concerned with them very largely, even more than he is with their work. What does this say? Is all that discipline, chastening, trial, testing, all that we go through under the hand of God, is all that just for now? Surely he is preparing people for something more. People.

He is concerned with men and with women, with people, quite as much, if not more, than with what they do for him. This, of course, will never be taken as an excuse for not working to our full degree. But it is all a case for something more.

There is nothing perfect, complete, while death remains. You remember the argument about the priesthood of the Old Testament? The apostle develops in the letters of the Hebrews. The priests of the old dispensation could bring nothing to finality because they died and had to hand on to another.

And he never brought anything to finality, died and had to pass it on to another. And so it went on. The argument is nothing was made perfect because of death.

But he, Jesus, our high priest, does and has made things perfect because he ever lived it. The principle, of course, is just this principle. That while death remains, nothing is completed or comes to finality.

It requires an endless life, the power of an endless life, to reach fullness. That is clearly shown in the Scripture. See, the picture of immortality, which the Bible gives us, is a very wonderful one.

One, of course, which we cannot understand in our present order of things. The picture of immortality, which the Bible gives us, is that of new productions without the dying of the old. Our order at present is that everything new comes out of the dead.

That priest leaves it. Three, everything has to die to produce something new. That's the order of this dispensation.

The heart of this dispensation is the great truth of Jesus Christ, the corn of wheat, falling into the ground and dying. There should be a production on a larger scale. That's the order of this dispensation.

But that is not the order of the coming eternity. The picture of immortality there, as given in the Word, is trees, yes, and new branches, new leaves, new fruit, and the old never dies. The old never dies.

It's fruit brought to perfection without any death at all. I think that's rather wonderful, don't you? And then when you come to the Word again regarding this perspective, factor and element, not a lot there is in the nature of an urge and an imperative to utterness. All the time the apostles are urging us, bringing upon us the weight of this great imperative to go on, go on, go on.

By exhortation, by warning, they're constantly saying to us, go on and ever on. This urge and this imperative in relation to being utter, utter for God, having no margin of life that is not burnt up for God. And the point of that argument, that urge and that imperative is the coming eternity.

All that is in the life of the afterward. Why be utter for God? Well, the answer is to be found afterward. We must, they say, we must be utter for God because of what is going to follow.

Because this is not the end. Because there is that which coming afterward will show the justification for having been utter for God. Now that leads us to the next thing in this connection.

The comparative element in eternity. There is, I think we agree, there is a prospective element in the Christian life which occupies a great deal of the New Testament, all of which has to do with the Christian life. Cut out that prospective element from the New Testament and see how much you've got left.

Whether it be gospels or epistles. You won't have very much left. You take that out.

It's there and it's mightily there. But in addition to it, there is what I am calling the comparative element in relation to the coming eternity. And again, there is in the New Testament such an element.

What I mean by the comparative element is this. That things are not all going to be on one mass production level hereafter. There are going to be differences where the children of God are concerned.

And very great differences. It was to this, of course, that the apostle was pointing when writing to the Corinthians. Speaking about foundations and superstructure.

He said the foundation is laid. Now let every man take heed how he builds thereon. If any man builds thereon, wood, hay, stubble, gold, silver, precious stones, every man's work shall be tried by far.

And if he implies it's wood, hay and stubble, it's all going up in smoke. Then he brings in this tremendously forceful word. Every man's work shall be tried by far.

The man may be saved, yet so is by far. He may be saved, yet so is by far. That is, the man may just creep through as a kind of an emergency thing.

Just managing to get in, as we say, by the skin of his teeth. Everything's gone. Everything's gone.

The argument surely is that is not what God intended. Over against that we have a phrase like this. For so an abundant entrance shall be ministered unto you into the everlasting kingdom.

On the one hand, the possibility of just getting in with your life and nothing more. On the other hand, an abundant entrance into the everlasting kingdom. You see there are differences.

There are comparisons afterwards. What about those messages to the seven churches in Asia we have at the beginning of the book of the Revelation? Now I do not agree that the people in those churches are only professors and not true Christians. If you grant that, then you have got to face this, that between Christian and Christian there's a difference and there are certain very distinct promises given to certain Christians there.

To him that overcometh. To him that overcometh. To him that overcometh will I grant.

See, well surely logic implies if you don't, then you won't. If you don't overcome, then you won't get what the Lord offers. There are differences.

And I don't believe that this is a matter of loss of salvation. This is something more than just being saved, getting in. What is the nature of the difference or the differences? Some people will say, well of course it's reward.

All right, let's leave it at that. It's reward, if you like. But what reward do you want? What is the reward that you're looking for? Do you want wealth? That's the kind of reward you want.

Riches? Well, a lot of people would say it's going to be without them. I don't think that can be looked upon as God's thing that will bring us what we need and really what we want. Do you want honours? Do you want titles? Do you want an armchair for all eternity? What is it you want by way of reward? Let's put the question in another way.

What does the New Testament show to be the nature of the reward if we're going to hold to that word reward? And the answer is this. Quite clearly, if you like to look again, the reward is vocational. It is always vocational.

And his servant shall serve him. Then you'll see his face. Service without all that is associated with service now.

Service to him without limit, without restraint, without opposition, without suffering. Service. To be able to serve him.

Well, how does that appeal to you? I can think of nothing that would be a greater joy than just to be able, without all the strictness and limitations, difficulties of the work now, to be able to serve the Lord in fullness. Now, that's where the New Testament puts its finger. It's vocational.

And this, it goes on to show, is a matter of related positions. That is, positions in relation to the Lord. Different positions for service.

Take one illustration, an instance. One of those messages to the churches, to him that overcometh. Would I grant to sit with me in my throne? To sit with me in my throne.

There you have two ideas. One is a very close relationship with the Lord. A very intimate nearness to him.

And the other, royal service. Call it what you will, it's the service of the throne. Again, what your conception of sitting with him in a throne.

Let us put our mentality right about all these things, thrones and what not. Don't get pictures of sitting on golden or ivory thrones and that sort of thing. It simply means union with the Lord in the administration of his eternal kingdom.

That's the service. But that is said to be a special gift to certain people. If you like, it's their reward.

But the point is, it's vocational. And it's a matter of relationship to the Lord. The final picture that we have in the New Testament, while being so full of symbolism, is an embodiment of these spiritual principles.

It's a picture of the city. Now again, get your mind clear and don't think of a literal city. It's only an illustration, a figure, a symbol.

This city undoubtedly is the church. Need I argue that? The Jerusalem which is above is the mother of us all. Ye are come to the heavenly Jerusalem.

We are come. We're not coming later on afterward. We ye are come to the heavenly Jerusalem.

To the church of the firstborn ones. Identical. Jerusalem, the church.

So that that city which is said to be the new Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven is the church. Now it is put into a particular and peculiar position like a city. And the idea of a city is that it is the administrative center.

And then we are told that the nations walk in the light thereof. You see, there's something at the center for government and there's much more that is not at the center. Here is proximity to the Lord.

Relationship with the Lord for eternal vocation in an administrative way in His kingdom. That surely is enough to bear out what I am trying to say. That there is a comparative element in the eternity to come.

And that, that is the point of the urge and the imperative. That is the force of the constraint let us go on unto full growth. Not looking back but pressing on with the warnings.

Not that you lose your salvation but, but, but there are positions and there is a vocation to which you are called in eternity. You may miss that. You may miss that.

I think Paul saw that in what he called the on high calling. He saw something of this reigning life in the ages to come. Now, with God nothing is just official.

God never appoints officers in His kingdom. Doesn't matter. They are not politicians.

Official politically in His kingdom. Neither are they officially ecclesiastical. With God, I repeat there is nothing just official.

You know, God doesn't appoint officers in His church. God's principle of appointment is always, always according to spiritual measure. God indicates those who are even now in the church where it is a spiritual thing where it is according to His mind He indicates those who are to have oversight as being men of spiritual measure not selected, chosen and voted in by popular vote or unpopular vote but according to spiritual measure that's the principle of the New Testament and in the kingdom it's like that.

No one is going to have any position just because they are appointed officially to it. Not at all. Every position will be according to our spiritual measure.

Hence again, repeatedly, let us go on to full growth. And you know that connected with that phrase full growth the authorized version, perfection an unfortunate translation full growth, it is always the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. It's the measure of Christ.

It's just how much of Christ there is. How big we are according to the standard of Christ. That is God's basis of appointment.

It will always be with God it is now and in the ages to come it will always be that vocation is settled upon how much of Christ there is in those concerns. God's whole thought as we saw at the beginning of these meditations is that Christ shall fill all things. Now that explains our discipline for our discipline now is our training for them and the nature of our discipline now is just to increase the measure of Christ.

We have seen decreasing the measure of I of ourselves in every way. Setting aside one man that occupies the place of Christ and putting Christ in his place the one all-inclusive object of the Holy Spirit in this dispensation is to make Christ everything. Setting aside one man that occupies the place of Christ and putting Christ in his place the one all-inclusive object of the Holy Spirit in this dispensation is to make Christ everything and to get as much room for Christ as he possibly can and where we are concerned as much as we will let him have.

Now that throws us back of course upon are we really going to be utter? The measure of our utterness will be the measure of our usefulness in the ages to come. Going to be governed by spiritual measure and by no other principle. Some people find difficulty purely mental ones in reconciling reward and grace.

It's just possible that some legalists are coming back on me in their minds while I'm talking and saying oh it's all of grace and you're making it of work. After all it's all of grace. Well of course you've got to you've got to somehow explain the place of rewards haven't you? And how you can reconcile rewards and grace.

But it's not so difficult as all that. It's all of grace that we have a chance to be utter at all. It's all the grace of God that I can be a Christian and that I can go on with the Lord.

That I can serve the Lord a little bit. It's all of grace. And if suffering is going to lead to glory and the measure of the glory is going to be according to the suffering then it will require all the grace of God for that.

Never get outside of grace and if ever there should come a reward if you like to visualize such a thing literally now a reward being offered I tell you dear friends when we get to that point with full understanding and knowledge of all the forbearance and long suffering and patience of the Lord we pull on our faces and say Lord I can't take any reward it's all of your grace. It will be all of grace. But then remember that grace is spoken of in more than one way in the New Testament.

There is grace which gives us access and acceptance. This grace wherein we stand all the favour of God without merit that we are saved at all that we belong to the Lord yes that's grace. But then grace is also spoken of as strength.

Strength beyond salvation. What the Lord meant when he said to Paul in the presence of his affliction and suffering my grace is sufficient for thee. My strength is made perfect in weakness.

Grace is acceptance without merit but grace is strength to labour, serve and suffer. It's all grace. However you look at it.

So now we have to focus down upon this that there is a large plate in the New Testament for our meaning business with God. It's not all willy nilly. You believe, you accept Christ that's the beginning, that's the end of it.

You get everything now. Well there's this large plate for what I call meaning business with God. Here it is.

All these entreaties exaltations this he changes which bear down upon this don't lead anything to chance. Don't lead anything to chance. Don't say oh well this doesn't matter very much this won't hurt there's not much wrong in this I've got salvation and the grace of God will cover all these things imperfections and I can do this and that and it won't make much difference God is a God of love but the New Testament says don't take any risk.

If it doesn't mean about your salvation ultimately it does mean about something. Something. The whole force of the word is look here you be utter and God doesn't make provision for anything else.

You go all the way with the Lord. For it's that to which you're called. The Lord has never said anything about well you only need go so far and I'll excuse you the rest.

No it's all the fullness that God keeps in view and he's challenging all the time we mean business we will mean business with God. There will be no place at last for our boasting and our endurance our success our utterness even though we we pour ourselves out to the last drop at last we shall be the worshippers we shall be the worshippers we shall be the ones who are down before him most the most utter people are the ones who are most conscious of their indebtedness to the Lord. And now we must draw to a close.

The great crisis which determines everything it's always there in the scripture always kept in view the great crisis the coming of the Lord the coming of the Lord it's there it's then that everything will be determined though we may have passed on before he comes the word makes it perfectly clear that that makes no difference we'll be there when he comes we'll be there when he comes and those who are alive when he comes will not get ahead of us together we will be there and so we'll all be on the common footing and then it will be determined what the future is going to be just exactly what our place will be what our function will be this is the big factor in the prospective aspect of things always that in view the prospect always keeps the Lord coming in view when we are saved we receive

a new hope but when we are believers we find that that hope becomes something very definite and concrete and it becomes called in the New Testament THE hope THE hope and THE hope is related to the coming of the Lord so that all the appeals and all the warnings and all the entreaties are focused down to this the Lord is coming and at his coming everything will be decided everything will be settled then the future eternity will be decided upon where we are concerned and you know all those appeals in the light of his coming for watchfulness for being fully occupied till he comes being on full strength and serious warnings that if we are not something is going to happen something is going to go wrong I am not putting this into any system of doctrine crystallizing it into any form of teaching

but these are the facts pure simple facts at the coming of the Lord great decisions will take place and if we are not watching if we are not occupying if we are not on full strength something is going wrong the word makes that perfectly clear in various ways something is going wrong I put it like that I mean there is something going to be missed so we bring the eternity that is ahead right into the present and see that this is a tremendous motive it gives a tremendous motive to the Christian life oh the life hereafter going to heaven however we may speak about it is not something that is stuck out there in a kind of objective detached way we are looking forward to that day waiting for that day to come my dear friends that day has pressed right into the present that day is here now in all

its implications I have often put it like this little hope of our going to heaven if heaven has not already come to us our place then at any rate and our vocation then will depend very largely if not our salvation upon the measure that Christ has in us in this life oh that again explains a lot of things doesn't it how the Lord does

press into a short time very often a great deal that produces a measure of Christ in a wonderful way much suffering much suffering, much affliction much trial and you can see the growth in grace you discern the patience the forbearance the kindness the love of Christ coming out in this suffering child of God there's preparation for glory, there's preparation for service, explains a lot, we could go round it and look at it from so many different standpoints but

after all it amounts to this the New Testament keeps the future in view as the great governing thing for the present the New Testament says that it's going to make a difference in the eternity to come just how far we have gone on with the Lord and how much room the Lord has gained in our lives now it's going to be different it's going to be different and the New Testament says the Lord is coming this is no time matter at all you may die makes no difference you may live, makes no difference the Lord will come in his own time and then all will be decided see so many people are interested in a second coming of Christ purely from perhaps a prophetic standpoint events and happenings in the world and so on and so few Christians are alive, fully alive to this fact that the coming of the Lord

in the New Testament is always brought to bear down upon this, your spiritual state he that really has this hope not he that has this prophetic interpretation of the second coming but he that has this hope, purify himself, get ready get ready seek that his state is alright as well as his standing it matters it will matter a very great deal so we must open the door wide in our Christian lives so that far greater far greater life that is before us at most this is a brief one a small one but it's only the beginning and all its meanings are going to come out then in fullness but will you hear the appeal Christian life as we have said is a tremendous thing an immense thing we are called with an eternal calling unto an eternal vocation here we are just brought into relationship with the Lord

and then are dealt with by the Lord are allowed to serve the Lord but even in our service we are in school we are learning more than anything else don't you think that that really is how it ought to be not just doing a thousand and one things but learning a lot, school of experience it's all related to the calling on high and the great vocation afterwards the Lord move our hearts to be utter for him leave nothing to chance whatever, take no risk but like his servant go for the highest prize the fullest thing that the Lord ever intended shall we pray

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