

The Final Message of God

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the need for a return to the spiritual fullness of Christ, rejecting the earthly and natural aspects of Christianity.

Scripture: Hebrews 1:1

Topics: "Spiritual Depth", "Final Revelation"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks delivers a profound message on the finality of God's revelation through Jesus Christ, emphasizing the critical transition from Judaism to a complete understanding of Christianity. He warns that many Christians today risk reducing their faith to mere tradition and ritual, losing the spiritual depth intended by God. Sparks highlights the urgency of recognizing the crisis within traditional Christianity and the necessity of embracing the fullness of Christ's message. He calls for a serious reflection on the implications of this revelation, urging believers to move beyond superficial practices to a deeper spiritual life. The sermon serves as a wake-up call for Christians to reassess their faith and relationship with God in light of the final message delivered through His Son.

Transcript

Preamble

The "Preface" to any book is intended to serve the purpose of letting its readers know what the writer has to say as to his purpose in writing, and anything that does not really form a part of the subject matter. While it ought to be regarded as important, many people do not read the Preface, and by not doing so, may unintentionally do the writer an injustice. To guard against this risk, I ask at the outset for a careful perusal of what follows.

I am well aware that what will be said will represent for multitudes of Christians today no less an upheaval and revolution than that which was presented at the beginning by the transition from Judaism to a fully-fledged Christianity as presented by the Apostles when they were through that transition and interpreted the significance of Christ. If it should cause or result in as violent a reaction and hostility, it will be no surprise.

There are two causes for comfort in such a case: one is the deep sense of Divine urge and commission to write, "whether they will hear or whether they will forbear"; and the other, the knowledge that for a long time and in an ever deepening way there has been a growing realization on the part of many that all is not

well with Christendom, even with evangelical Christianity. With the exception of two classes of Christians, there is an increasing concern over the actual or comparative weakness and ineffectiveness of the spiritual life and witness of Christians and the churches. This concern shows itself in various ways. Sometimes by enquiries and discussions as to what is wrong, and sometimes in the holding of an increased number of conventions and meetings "for the deepening of the spiritual life."

The two classes excepted are, those who have so organized Christian activity as to have made it all a matter of a tremendous business to be maintained by drive and its own momentum: which unceasing activity is itself thought to be life and power: with the result that there is little time or interest to be given in the matter of spiritual depth, and Divine measure. The other class is comprised of those who are so settled in tradition and a fixed position in doctrine and practice as to make it wellnigh impossible for the Holy Spirit to lead into the way of a greater fullness of Christ. Both of these conditions marked Judaism in the first days, and they both provided a ground for the strong resentment and antagonism from which the Apostles and first believers had to suffer.

It is not too much to say that a time and state of crisis is upon traditional Christianity. This, and its nature, will be shown more fully in what follows; but in concluding the Preamble may I ask that, should you at any point be so vexed as to be inclined to put the whole thing aside, you will just pause and give place to a supposition. Supposing it should be right? In the year 1939 many responsible people, governments, and officials, came under severe condemnation because - it was said - they refused to believe facts. For years Germany had been most thoroughly establishing Fifth Column agents and forces in almost every country. But whenever anyone said so and warned the Governments of those countries that it was so, not only was the suggestion repudiated, but evil intent was disbelieved. Well, the persistently disbelieved reports proved true, but it meant suffering, sorrow, and horror unparalleled in history. Supposing that in 1939 someone had prophesied that in less than a year Germany would have defeated and overrun Holland, Belgium, and France, in addition to a number of other European countries, what would have happened to such a prophet? He would have been ridiculed, if not put into prison or an asylum as a defeatist or a lunatic. He, himself, most likely would have been regarded as an enemy agent, as in effect were Jeremiah and other prophets of old. But those "unbelievable" things became actualities. Thus, untold suffering and loss are the price of refusing to entertain a supposition.

But there was another factor of a very subtle nature. It was a studied part of the success of that German technique that the agents should spread abroad the impression that no such evil intent existed. To disarm suspicion and impress with good will was a vital part of the success of the scheme. This has its counterpart in the "heavenlies," and it will only be those who keep much in the secret place with the All-knowing Spirit of God who will be saved from the infinite perils which lie in the way of a superficial optimism which is such a secret weapon of Satan's campaign against the fullness of Christ.

Pause then, and ask, Supposing what is here written should be right? Would it result in spiritual and eternal loss or gain? Supposing it should eventually prove to be God's message?

The Letter To The Hebrews

(1) The Approach

In the Preamble we have used the word Crisis. The letter which is before us had its occasion in a crisis in two dimensions or phases. Immediately, it was related to those who had taken a real step with Christ and were in peril of resolving Christianity into a Judaism which acknowledged rather than rejected Him. But it

also related to the great event which was imminent, in which the whole Jewish system would be swept away, and all the prophecies as to Israel's rejection and scattering would be fulfilled. It is always important to remember that, when God deals with any of His people on a spiritual issue, there is always a literal issue bound up with it sooner or later. He would save us from the historic disaster which He knows to be coming by putting us into a spiritual position where the event will be no disaster to us. Thus the crisis is a turning point - as in a critical illness - with life or death as the issue. The letter repeatedly warns and entreats in the light of the tremendous consequences which are in the balances. We may say without fear of being contradicted that some of the most terrible things in the whole Bible are found in this letter. Thus does it become us to note the significance of the opening statements.

God in past times spoke in fragments and various ways, but now He has spoken in fullness and in one all-inclusive way, and that with finality. He will not speak again; He will neither add to nor vary what He has said in the final way. The fragmentary speech of God in past ages had very great consequences involved in man's attitude and reaction; but that was small compared with what is bound up with this final Speech. This kind of approach is preserved like a theme through the whole letter; it comes to the ear in various connections, sometimes beautiful, sometimes terrible. The upshot of it all is this: You have had in your midst and available to you the full Revelation of God's mind. For that you are now responsible. That Revelation was, and is, intended to bring you into a certain spiritual position and to govern the entire order of your life. The measure of your spiritual life in terms of Divine satisfaction will be determined by your living apprehension of and obedience to that Revelation. The degree of your ineffectiveness and unfruitfulness, individually and collectively, will declare the degree of your failure in your apprehension of that Revelation.

The letter is intended to be tremendously serious. While it contains most glorious things, it is the possibility of missing these (a possibility so nearly becoming an actuality in the case of its first readers) which makes the tone so solemn at times. Thus our approach must be with the shoes off our feet: the shoes of prejudice, self-sufficiency, pride, formalism, and such-like. Having adjusted our approach, we are able to contemplate something of the import or implications of the letter.

(2) The Implications

It is here that we have to begin to say some of the things not easy to say, and still less easy to accept.

This letter to the Hebrews sets forth the all-inclusive revolution or reconstitution which God made when He brought His Son, Jesus Christ, into the world - that is, the religious revolution. This revolution, which was rejected by Judaism, has been almost entirely overlooked or lost sight of by Christendom since Apostolic times. The entire present system of Christianity as generally accepted would be impossible if the meaning of this letter were received as a heavenly revelation in the power of the Holy Spirit. That is - if it came into the heart by the Spirit's power with the effect of a revelation in the same way as the Apostle Paul came to see who "Jesus of Nazareth" is, then a Christian-Judaism, or Judaistic-Christianity (which Christendom so largely is) would be impossible; as it became in his own case. The Letter to the Hebrews is only one other aspect of the battle fought out in the Letters to the Romans and Galatians. In the light of such a spiritual eye-opening a whole lot of things would go: but being a "heavenly vision," there would be no tears, no sense of loss, and no fond farewells. The gain and joy would rather put all such things into the category of a worn-out and no-longer-to-be-desired suit of clothes. In saying this we are only contemplating the full-tide of spiritual life known before any of these things came into being. These things only came in when the fullness of the Spirit had gone out, and being an artificial substitute they can never but be limiting things in

the realm of Divine purpose. And yet, behold how these things have become the very nature of traditional and organized Christianity! So much so that to touch them in any way which threatens their existence is to meet something more bitter and formidable than any persecution from the world. This is not said carelessly. Religion can be, and is very largely, a terrible force; and Christianity has become a religion. There are very few communities of Christians - even the most evangelical, and spiritual - who wholly escape the tendency or propensity to persecute or ostracize other bodies of Christians who might be regarded as rivals in their field of activity. All the talk about "sheep-stealing" has little or nothing to do with stealing from the fold or the Shepherd, but only relates to some private religious fold of organized Christianity.

We have - without mentioning them specially - spoken of things which would have to go if a true spiritual revelation were received, and doubtless the reader is wondering what those things are. Well, this letter which we are considering will make them plain, so let us come closer to it. On the very face of it there appears for all who have eyes the contrast between Judaism and Christ. Judaism was an earthly religious system: Tabernacle, Temple, Priests, Vestments, Rites, Sacrifices, Feasts, Ministries, Orders, etc. The New Testament, and this letter in particular, has some very clear things to say about this Jewish system.

(1) As To Its Intent And Purpose

It was instituted by God as a copy of things in the heavens. Not that heaven contained such things literally, but just as all visible and created things were intended to embody heavenly laws and principles, so this system was intended to represent the centremost spiritual things of God's universe. But the instrument or type was never intended to do more than serve a purpose for a time. It represented a dispensation, or method of God for a period only. Never was it intended to be an end in itself, nor was it meant to be carried on in any detail or respect beyond a certain point in time. God meant it ever and always to be a prophecy of "better things to come," and to be held so loosely as to constitute no difficulty when the "better things" arrived. The letter which is before us affirms that the era of the "better things" had arrived some time since. "God... hath at the end of these days spoken... in His Son."

But the new era and new order had brought out a new and mightier-than-ever conflict. A very serious and grim part of that conflict was with the religion of tradition, the religion which worshipped the same Lord, and embodied in a symbolic way all the truth of the new era. One great warrior apostle was the champion of the new spiritual order - himself one who had been deeply and powerfully embedded in the old system, but by a mighty revelation emancipated from it. He called that revelation "the heavenly vision," and that word "heavenly" defined for ever the nature of the change in the dispensations. Into this battle he was forced by the ubiquitous Judaisers. It was fought in his letters to the Romans and to the Galatians. Whether or not we believe that Paul wrote the Letter to the Hebrews, there is no doubt that he had a big part of influence in it, and in it again is the same battle carried on.

If the main feature of Judaism is sought, it will be found to be the resolving of heavenly and spiritual things into a purely earthly system. It is the making of the things of God purely sentient, a matter of the physical and soul senses: sight, sound, feeling, reason, emotion, etc., with the numerous and various complex elements of human constitution. One of the inclusive arguments of this letter is that a religious system based upon the natural senses has no power to bring those who adhere to it to spiritual fullness. Such the Jewish system was, and it failed utterly and tragically. God did not mean it to do more than lead to something other; and in this dispensation even that is set aside and the other has become the first and only thing in God's acceptance. The earthly, natural, and temporal has been supplanted by the heavenly,

spiritual and eternal, which lay behind the illustration. The failure was inevitable because it was never intended to be an end in itself, and because of man's condition. It only operated at all in the realm of man's soul, a very unstable and variable thing; whereas everything with God is a matter of man's spirit, in the first instance. This is the point of verse twelve of chapter four, which should be considered with the context preceding.

The whole thought of God, running right through this letter, is spiritual fullness; and any religion - even Christianity - mixing and confusing soul and spirit, the sentient and the spiritual (as did the Christian-Judaism and as does organized Christianity) is doomed to the destiny of Judaism. If we draw upon the soul resources of people to build up Christianity, instead of recognizing that "all things are out from God" - that all must first come from Him and have its first point of contact with man in his spirit, which, being renewed (made anew) becomes the vessel and vehicle of all divine things for ever after - no matter how immense may be our structure, it is going to crash when the great "shaking" comes. Christianity now is very largely a built up thing with many Jewish features in it; i.e., outward orders, forms, vestments, titles, buildings and rigidly fixed boundaries of apprehension of truth. Viewed from a heavenly standpoint, it is all so much nonsense, child's-play; albeit so seriously regarded by its children.

It is important to recognize that this letter was addressed to a people who - for a long period - had held the position nationally of a people whom God had taken out of the world unto Himself. It seeks to explain their nature and history in the light of Christ and true spiritual Christianity. It shows that even such a people may make their separation earthly and earthbound, and that for so doing they have been "overthrown," and will - even as Christians - be overthrown again if they repeat in Christianity what their fathers did in Judaism. There is something here much more than typology interpreted and the interpretation accepted as to salvation from sin and judgment; it is the essential and indispensable heavenly relatedness and life of the Lord's people as inwardly detached from the natural life even in a religious sense.

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