

The Heavenly Calling - Part 13

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the transition from the old Israel to the new Israel through the story of Lazarus, emphasizing the power of resurrection life in believers.

Duration: 53:46

Topics: "Heavenly Calling"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the transition from the old Israel to the new Israel, from the Old Testament to the New Testament. The Gospel of John is highlighted as a book that particularly focuses on this transition. The speaker mentions that there are 16 points in this transition, and they have already covered 13 of them. The 14th point is found in the 11th chapter of John's Gospel, which talks about the resurrection of Lazarus and the power of Christ's resurrection. The speaker emphasizes that just as Lazarus was hopeless and helpless, we too can find strength and hope in Christ, even in the midst of our weaknesses and difficulties. The speaker also mentions the challenges faced by the apostle Paul and how he relied on Christ's strength to endure and overcome them.

Transcript

We are taking note of the movement from the old Israel to the new Israel. From the old earthly historic Israel to the new heavenly spiritual Israel. This gospel by John is one of the books in the New Testament which especially have to do with that matter.

That is this gospel in a particular way sets forth this transition from the old to the new. From what was in the Old Testament times to what is now in New Testament times. And we have indicated that in this gospel there are sixteen points in that transition.

And we have already dealt with thirteen of these. So that tonight we come to number fourteen. And that is in the eleventh chapter of the gospel.

It would take too much of our time to read the whole chapter. And especially because I have some other scriptures that I want to bring in. Most of you will be familiar with this account of the death and raising of Lazarus.

If you are not familiar with it just look down the chapter and as quickly as possible acquaint yourself with what is said here. I shall be dealing with it in a general way. But I want to bring in at this point alongside of

that chapter some passages from the Old Testament.

I turn you first to the prophecies of Ezekiel chapter thirty-seven at verse twelve. I think many of you people on the continent are not as familiar with your Old Testament as you are with the New. So I will give you plenty of time to find it.

You open your Bible very near the middle you will be near Ezekiel. I hope you don't think I am insulting your intelligence. Ezekiel chapter thirty-seven at verse twelve.

Therefore prophesy and say unto them thus saith the Lord God. Behold I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves. O my people.

And I will bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the Lord when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves. O my people.

Now over to the prophecies of Isaiah chapter eleven at verse eleven. And it shall come to pass in that day that the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people which shall remain from Assyria from Egypt and so on. Now over to the New Testament the letter to the Romans.

Chapter nine verse twenty-seven. And Isaiah crieth concerning Israel. If the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea.

It is the remnant that shall be saved. The Lord will execute his word upon the earth. Finishing it and cutting it short.

And as Isaiah hath said before. Except the Lord of Sabaoth hath left us a seed. We have become as Sodom and have been made like unto Gomorrah.

You will remember those scriptures as I refer to them as we go along. We come then to John chapter eleven. Now a certain man was sick.

Lazarus of Bethany of the village of Mary and her sister Martha. We have been seeing that in this whole gospel there is a Jewish background to everything. And that the Lord is building his new Israel with the old Israel in the background.

That is you can see the new spiritual Israel in the light of God's dealings with the old earthly Israel. But at this point the old Israel was being put aside. And against that rejection of the old Israel God is bringing in his new Israel after the spirit.

The saints, the believers of this present dispensation are God's new heavenly Israel. Now to see the Israel that is being rejected just note some verses here. And once more you will see how unfortunate it is that the chapters are divided.

Of course they had to be divided as a convenience for public reading. But in your private reading you ought never to take any notice of these chapter divisions. So you look back to what is marked chapter ten.

At verse thirty-nine this is speaking about Jesus. And they sought again to take him. And he went forth out of their hands.

Look back at verse thirty-one. The Jews took up stones again to stone him. Verse thirty-three.

The Jews answered him for a good work we stone thee not. But for blasphemy because thou that thou being a man makest thyself God. Now over again to chapter eleven.

At verse eleven. At verse seven. Then after this he said to the disciples.

Let us go into Judea again. The disciples say unto him. Where am I? The Jews were but now seeking to stone thee.

And goest thou thither again. Now you see the Jewish background. Repeatedly they attempted to stone Jesus.

They wanted to do with him what later they did with his servant Stephen. Just to stone him there and leave him broken in body and dead. Just as they did to Stephen.

Again and again and again they took up the stones to stone him. And they sought to stone him himself. That is the Jewish background of chapter eleven.

And it very clearly shows us why Israel of old had to be set aside. And why God must have another new Israel. That kind of an Israel can never serve the purpose of God.

So that Israel is rejected. Now you notice that if you remove the chapter mark eleven. And read through from chapter ten.

And read right on. You find that this account of the death and raising of Lazarus is set right in that background. We must never just take some story as an incident in itself.

We must always recognize that it relates to something else. And this dying and raising of Lazarus is set right in that Jewish background. This was not just a coincidence.

Not just a chance sort of thing that happened. Jesus made it perfectly clear that this was in the plan of God. You read the story and it is quite clear from what Jesus said that this is all planned.

This is arranged by God. It is arranged by God that Lazarus shall die. And Jesus is not going to interfere with that.

It has got to happen. Because it stands related to some very big thing that God is doing. Well let us look at Lazarus.

Our friend Lazarus is sick. And Lazarus has a sickness for which there is no cure. I don't know how many doctors there were in Bethany or even in Jerusalem just a few miles away.

But I am quite sure that if there were any doctors about during those four days the sisters would have sent for the doctors. But whether they sent for the doctors or not. The doctors could have done nothing.

Lazarus has just got to die in the plan of God. He has a sickness for which there is no cure. And even Jesus who has more than once raised the dead will not interfere with this matter.

He just positively refuses to prevent Lazarus dying. Here it tells us that when Jesus heard about it he stayed where he was for four days. Of course it was that that made the great problem for the sisters.

And it gave something to the enemies. They said could not this man who gave sight to the blind have prevented this man from dying? Well let the sisters misunderstand. And let the enemies misjudge.

Jesus is not going to be moved by anything. He lets Lazarus die. Is this a hopeless situation? Well what does Jesus say about it? When he received the message from the sisters of Lazarus he said this sickness is not unto death but for the glory of God.

That the son of God may be glorified thereby. This sickness is not unto death and yet he let him die. He evidently meant this sickness is not unto death forever.

Not final death. Later he said our friend Lazarus is dead. And yet he said it's not unto death.

So he meant this death is not going to be the last word. Now let us note this as we go along. The spiritual knowledge of Jesus.

Although he was a long way away. Away from Bethany. He knew exactly the moment when Lazarus died.

No one sent a second message to him to say Lazarus is dead. He said to his disciples our friend Lazarus sleepeth. They said well if he sleeps he'll do well.

Then said Jesus plainly unto them Lazarus is dead. Jesus knew in his spirit what had happened. He knew in his spirit that Lazarus had died.

In his spirit he always knew when there was death and when there was life anywhere. And I'm tempted to stop there and put in something else. You know dear friends that if the Lord Jesus is in us by his spirit we always know when things are alive or dead.

We may go among some people and say my word there's no life here. It's all dead. Or we may go amongst other people like those of Asia and say my there's life here.

We know it in our spirit. No one has to tell us that those people are dead or they're alive. And that is a mark of the Lord Jesus.

Now that is just something by itself. Let us go on. Jesus knew the moment that Lazarus died.

Now we have the Jewish background. Now the immediate connection of this incident. That is the connection of the old Israel.

Now that is why I read those scriptures from Ezekiel and Isaiah. When Israel was in captivity in Babylon and Assyria the Lord said they were dead and buried. And he said when I shall open their graves.

To the Lord they were in their graves. And then Isaiah said a remnant shall return. And that remnant was the people that came out of the grave of Assyria and Babylon.

Now did you notice in Romans how Paul takes that up and brings it over into the New Testament. He quotes Isaiah's word about a remnant. And in Romans he is saying that out of the old buried Israel there is going to come a remnant that is resurrected by the Lord.

And that remnant of Israel is going to be incorporated into the new heavenly Israel. That is why this story of Lazarus is put right in the Jewish setting. You notice that Jesus deliberately moves into the Jewish area.

It was there that they had repeatedly tried to stone him. He said to his disciples let us go back into Judea. They said Lord they have only just recently tried to stone you there.

Why go back? But he would not accept their argument. He went deliberately into the Jewish area. Although it was so hostile to him.

Why did he do it? The story of Lazarus is the answer. This death and raising of Lazarus was set over against that Jewish situation. Right in the midst of the rejected dead and buried old Israel he is going to raise a new one.

You might have thought that when the Lord wanted to start his new work he would have gone to some other country. He would have said well I can do nothing in Jerusalem. I can do nothing in Palestine.

Let me go to India. Let me go to China. Let me go to Switzerland.

And start afresh all over again. But he deliberately went back into Judea. And he said in the place of death I am going to have resurrection.

The day of Pentecost is wonderful for that fact alone. If ever there was an impossible situation it was Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost. The old Israel has been rejected by God.

From God's standpoint it is dead. It is buried. And right there God brings by new birth his new Jerusalem.

That's the immediate setting and meaning of this incident. Like we said Paul carries this whole thing right over into the New Testament. He says God has sent the old Israel away.

God is going to bring out of that very place of death his new Israel. A remnant is going to be saved through union with Jesus Christ in death and resurrection. And what is the new Israel? Here again get rid of your chapter divisions.

From a certain standpoint they can be a perfect nuisance. The chapters in the letter to the Romans remove the numbers. What are marked chapters 9, 10 and 11? Mark up copy to 9. Deal with on the one side the death of the old Israel.

The rejected nation. And then it's there that the apostle says that out of that a remnant will be brought. But you see chapter 11 goes straight into chapter 12.

And what is chapter 12 about? It is about the body of Christ. It says there is one body. There is one body.

What is the body of Christ? It is not Jew and Gentile brought together. It is both having lost their own distinctiveness and become one in Christ. In another place Paul says that in Christ there is neither Jew nor Greek.

Neither born nor free. We are all one man in Christ. So that when the old Israel is removed a remnant is taken out of it and buried with Christ and raised together with Christ.

It does not come back as a Jewish remnant. It comes back as a part of the body of Christ. That's the new Israel.

Well now I have said that is the immediate connection. What will help us most is to see the wider connection. Going back to Lazarus.

The New Testament teaches us this. That the cross of Jesus Christ does not cure the old man. It crucifies him.

Now that's the trouble with most of us. Let us be perfectly honest about it. We are wanting the Lord to cure our old man.

To make the old man a good old man. To remove from him all his faults. All that is wrong with him.

All his simple nature. The cross of the Lord Jesus does not do that with the old man. The cross of the Lord Jesus says in the sight of that old man is dead and buried.

Our old man, says Paul, was crucified with Christ. Jesus never came to any old man to heal him and make him better. And we are waiting all the days of our life for the Lord to make us better.

And right to the end of our life the old man will still be the old man. But with this difference that God looks upon him as buried. As in the grave.

Crucified with Christ. That's Lazarus. Jesus would not cure Lazarus of his sickness.

God would not cure Israel of its evil nature. God said it must die. That's only half of the story.

But let us be quite clear about this. There will always be an incurable background in our life which is not healed. It's there all the time, it's not healed.

It is not cured of its spiritual maladies. Any day that you like, if you like to go back onto the ground of the old man you can commit the same old sins. That is what the New Testament teaches on one side.

But the glory will be in that which stands over against the background. The glory will be in what is in the foreground. We may have a sick body.

The Lord does not always heal sick bodies. Just sometimes he does. But he does not always.

Even with the very best saints that he has had. And some of the best saints that God has ever had have had sick bodies. We may have a sick human nature.

And we all know that is true. We're all the time up against the troubles in one another. Oh if only I could forget what that brother or that sister is in himself or herself.

I would have a happy time. But you know he is such an awkward man. He loves the Lord.

He wants the Lord's best. But if you come up against him naturally you don't find him a very easy man to get on with. And the Lord does not seem to deal with that.

He does not seem to heal that human nature. I do not expect dear friends however long I live that the day will come when everybody will think I'm perfect. Perhaps in my last days before going to the Lord people will find some difficulties with me.

Paul right at the end of his life said neither am I already perfect. I'm not saying that we ought not to lose some of those strong wrong ways in our life. Grace can work miracles in our human nature.

But if you are looking for the day in this life when you are going to be absolutely free from your bad human nature you are doomed to disappointment. That's a very poor gospel to preach. But there is another side to it.

You and I can live in the power of his resurrection with a very sick body. And with a very poor human nature. Yes the power of his resurrection can cover so much.

The foreground can just be the power of his resurrection. We have to say about some people well you know they are so weak physically. They know so much about sickness and yet look at what the Lord enables them to do.

It's a miracle how much work they get through. They ought to have been dead a hundred times. But they go on.

Not in their own strength. There is another strength that is over their weakness. Paul said when I am weak then am I strong.

The power of Christ's resurrection was overcoming his weakness. The weakness was there. He said I glory in infirmities that the power of Christ may encamp upon me.

He was speaking of his physical infirmities. And he was speaking of the power of Christ's resurrection. Now what is true in the physical realm is true in the spiritual.

If we live in ourselves we will give up. Oh what a lot of infirmities there are in our natures. We are always carrying about a lot of spiritual sicknesses.

You understand what I mean? These natural infirmities of ours what a trouble they are. And if ever we say well I cannot. And then because we cannot we say I give it up.

We have forfeited the greatest blessing of the Christian life. Think of all that the apostle Paul had to do and to suffer. The terrible terrible life that he had to live from one standpoint.

He had a weak and infirm body. He had enemies wherever he went. He suffered three shipwrecks.

He only tells that they were only told of one. But he says there were three. He was in the sea a day and a night.

He was in nakedness and in hunger. He had to travel on foot mile after mile, month after month. So we can gather up all the difficulties in that life.

If ever a man ought to have said I cannot go on. That man was Paul. But what did he say? I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

No not I can do all things. Paul would have said I can do nothing. But I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

There was a day when he naturally despaired of life. He said so. He said we had the sentence that it was death.

On the natural side we despaired of life. That we should not trust in ourselves but in God who raises the dead. Now Lazarus was absolutely hopeless and helpless.

Now Lazarus was absolutely hopeless and helpless. And that is how we see it from nature. Jesus may not always heal us in body or in nature.

But if he does not heal us he can give us divine life. And divine life is the great thing. Perhaps some of you have heard of God's great servant Dr. A.B. Simpson.

Now Dr. Simpson was a great believer in divine healing. And he wrote a book on divine healing. But although he was such a great believer in divine healing he said this.

So that no one will misunderstand my position. I do not say that everybody has got to be healed. But I do say that everybody can know divine life.

Which is something more than natural life. Well back to Lazarus. The Lord did not heal him.

But the Lord gave him resurrection life. And this is the hope of everyone. The Lord may want to heal you in your body.

Or he may not do it. Whether he does it or whether he does not do it. He does not want us to live on our own life.

He wants us to live by resurrection life. That is what Jesus meant when he said this is not unto death but to the glory of God. And if you look through your New Testament.

You will see that God is always glorified in resurrection. That is where the glory of God is. You may see a very weak Christian physically.

And you may glorify God in that weak Christian because of the wonderful power of divine life. You may see a person who has many faults. Lots of things about them that you don't like.

And yet there is something more than that. There is the Lord's life in them. And while you may not glory in what they are naturally.

You can glorify God for what they are spiritually. Well that is the real heart of this incident of Lazarus. Life out of death is God's secret.

It is the thing that most of all glorifies God. Is that all a lovely story? All wonderful truth? Put it into operation tomorrow morning. When you get up in the morning.

Say to the Lord, now Lord I know good in myself but I am going to live this day by the power of your resurrection. There may be impossible situations in yourself or outside of yourself. You just say to the Lord, now Lord you get glory today by enabling me to live by resurrection life.

It is something that we are to take by faith every day. It is something that we are to take by faith every day. Timothy was obviously one.

Hold fast the eternal life. If the Lord meant everybody to be physically healed, why didn't Paul heal Timothy? Paul knew that there was something better than being physically healed. The power of eternal life in a weak physical body is better.

Lay hold on eternal life. That is resurrection life. Something that we have got to do.

May the Lord enable us to do it in all times of conscious weakness. Of course we can't do better than sin.

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