

The Heavenly Calling - Part 2

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding the heavenly calling and the greatness of the Lord Jesus, urging listeners to commit themselves to Him and become companions of Christ.

Duration: 51:45

Scripture: Hebrews 3:1, Hebrews 3:14

Topics: "Heavenly Calling"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the two main themes running through the four gospels: the Jewish idea of the Messiah and the Kingdom of God, and the heavenly idea. The four gospels show the rejection of those who rejected Jesus by God, and the establishment of God's eternal plan through his son. The speaker emphasizes that the Jewish idea of an earthly system has been gone for two thousand years, while God's kingdom has been established. The sermon encourages young Christians to deepen their understanding of the Bible and commit themselves to Jesus.

Transcript

Now I turn you again to those portions of God's Word which are the basis of our consideration in this conference. In the letter to the Hebrews, chapter 3, verse 1, Therefore holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, holy brethren, verse 14, we are become partakers of Christ if we hold fast the beginning until the end. We spent quite a lot of our time this morning with one word.

It is that word which is here translated partakers. It is a word which is translated into a number of words in our languages. Here and in some other places in this letter it is partakers.

In another place in the New Testament it is partners. In another place it is fellows. But we spent our time ensuring that the best translation of the word is companions.

So we translate, therefore holy brethren, companions of a heavenly calling. We are become companions of Christ. And we said that the New Testament gathers itself around that word.

And that word can really be taken as the key to the whole of this letter to the Hebrews. Companions of Christ and of a heavenly calling. Now we are going on from where we left off this morning.

Very sorry for all those friends who were not with us. Because we cannot tell you all that we said in more than an hour this morning. We are coming to this letter to the Hebrews.

And that is its true title. In the oldest manuscripts it just has this title to the Hebrews. But of course it was to Hebrew Christians.

Now we want to understand the setting of this letter before we can understand its message. You probably know that in New Testament times there was a great conflict between the Jews and the Christians. A very great battle raged between these two.

The apostle Paul who himself was a great Hebrew had a very large heart for his own people. You remember what he said if you look at his letter to the Romans in chapter 9 and verse 3. I could wish that I myself were anathema from Christ for my brethren's sake, my kinsmen according to the flesh. He was prepared to let everything go if only his people Israel would accept the Lord Jesus.

So great was his desire and his hope for them. But he fought a losing battle for Israel. And if you will look at the last chapter of the book of Acts you will see Paul's surrender of that hope.

Acts chapter 28 verse 28. Be it known therefore unto you that this salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles. They will also hear.

So he said seeing that Israel will not hear we give them up. I give up my great hope for them. And I turn to those who will hear.

So we turn to the Gentiles. And then you come to this letter to the Hebrews. And at the end of this letter you have the result of Israel's refusal.

Hebrews chapter 12 at verse 25. The writer makes this appeal to these Hebrew Christians. See that ye refuse not him that speaketh.

For if they escaped not when they refused him that warned them on earth. How much more shall not we escape who turn away from him that warneth from heaven. And this word yet once more signifies the removing of those things that are shaken as of things that have been made.

That those things which are not shaken may remain. Wherefore receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken. These words contain the final judgment upon the Hebrews who rejected Christ.

That shaking referred to the destruction which was coming upon Israel in the year 70 A.D. When that happened Israel would be left without their country. Without a city. Without a temple.

Without a government. Everything was shaken until it completely fell. The result of refusing to hear him that speaketh from heaven.

It is in that setting that we have this letter to the Hebrews. On the one side it is an appeal, a final appeal to the Hebrew Christians. An appeal not to go back from Jesus Christ.

On the other side the letter is a great warning as to what will happen if they do. So you have to put this letter right into that setting. It is a letter set in a great crisis of spiritual life.

And of course it contains an abiding message for all time. Let us look for a minute at the three features which made up that great conflict. And which led to that final division.

The first feature was Christ himself. Christ as the Messiah. Jesus as the Christ.

Of course the Jews believed in a Christ. For Christ is only the Greek word for the Hebrew Messiah. And the Hebrews believed in a Messiah.

But the trouble was they would not have Jesus as the Messiah. And so as was prophesied, Jesus became the stone upon which they fell and were broken to pieces. It was a matter of the place that they gave to Jesus.

Now you could see how this letter puts Jesus in such a high place. We are going to see that again presently. But Jesus as God's anointed son, the Christ, was the rock upon which they were broken.

But Jesus, the anointed son of God, was the rock upon which they were broken. That was the first great factor in this tremendous conflict and in the final defeat. Which it gives to Jesus Christ.

If anybody ever comes to you and wants you to accept some system of teaching. They will have wonderful arguments. They will use a lot of the Bible.

What are you going to do about it? You may not be able to meet their arguments. You may not even be able to answer scripture for scripture. But there is one thing that will always go to the heart of the matter.

What place do you give to the Lord Jesus? Do you give him the place of God's eternal son? And everything stands or falls on that. You can try that. And you will find that most of the false teachers will begin to wriggle on that.

Oh, we believe in Jesus as a great man. As the greatest teacher that ever lived. And so on.

But if you want us to believe that Jesus is God. We just cannot go that far. It is the place that is given to the Lord Jesus that is the test of everyone and everything.

That is the first factor in this great conflict in the letter to the Hebrews. And you will see why the writer uses the whole of the first part to magnify the Lord Jesus. The second feature is what the writer here calls the heavenly calling.

And you have got to put all the emphasis upon that word heavenly. You see, the Hebrews wanted an earthly calling. And all who are like them, even if they are called Christians, just want an earthly calling.

A Christianity that belongs to this earth and this world. Something down here. Well, we are going to enlarge upon that later on.

But there is a tremendous significance in this little phrase, the heavenly calling. Oh, that is something very much more difficult. That is, that is far away.

That is up in the clouds. That is not down to earth. That is not practical.

This heavenly thing. But everything was in that, and we shall see that as we go on. And then there was this third feature.

These Hebrews were prepared to be Christians. But it must be a Christianity after their own minds. It must be a Christianity that allows all the Old Testament system to continue.

It must allow Moses to continue. It must allow all the law of Moses to continue. It must allow the temple to continue.

It must allow all the Old Testament priests to continue. It must allow all the sacrifices to continue. We are prepared to be Christians if you will let us bring over our Old Testament into Christianity.

But if you say all that is finished, and a heavenly system has taken its place, then we cannot have that. A Jewish system brought into Christianity. That is a Christianity of ritual and form.

Now do you see the force of this word companions of a heavenly calling? Companions of Christ. These companions of Christ are those who are constituted anew on a heavenly and spiritual basis. They are the ones who are responding to a heavenly calling.

Now we have come to the point of the transition from the natural and earthly Israel to the new spiritual heavenly Israel. This transition ought to have been a transition from the natural and earthly Israel to the spiritual and heavenly Israel. In a divine sequence.

The one ought to have quietly given way to the other. The old ought to have made full place for the new. The old Israel ought to have died, been buried and raised again in Christ.

And become the heavenly Israel. The companions of Jesus Christ. But they refused to have it like that.

And because they refused to have it like that, they were set aside. God is just moving on with his purpose concerning his son. And although many were called, few were chosen.

There were a few of Israel who were chosen as the companions. While the many who were called refused. So they were set aside.

God moved in this transition toward his new heavenly Israel. No, they positively refused to move onto a heavenly ground. They refused to move onto the ground of the heavenly man.

Hence, as a result, they went the way of Adam. Now here is a very interesting and instructive thing. Adam was made by God.

Adam was chosen by God. Adam was called by God into relation to his purpose concerning his son. But when Adam was made, he was not perfect.

He was innocent. But he was not perfect. Know the difference between being innocent and being perfect? Well, a little baby child is innocent.

Would you say it's perfect? No, it's not perfect. It has got to grow up. And it will only grow up and become perfect as it goes through all sorts of difficulties and troubles.

We call them growing pains. But that is the way of becoming perfect from an innocent child to a full grown man. Adam was innocent like a little child.

Very beautiful. No sin in him. But he was not perfect.

He had got to come to spiritual perfection. He had still got to be made like God's son. That is what he was created for.

Now God put him on test. God allowed him to be tested. Oh, what a wonderful thing would have happened if Adam had gone through his testing triumphantly.

From the innocence of a little child he would have become a spiritually full grown man like the Lord Jesus. And we, the children of Adam, would have been very different people. But he failed in his test.

He did not go the way that God had called him to go. What did God do? Put him aside. And put a curse upon him.

And said, that kind of being can never satisfy me. He has refused to go the way of my son. That is exactly what happened to Israel after the flesh.

God made Israel. God chose Israel. God called Israel.

And all with his son in view. And Israel refused. Refused to go God's way.

Israel was tested as to Jesus Christ. The four gospels are just full of Israel being tested concerning Jesus Christ. The four gospels show us clearly how God chose Israel.

And they all end with it. He put Israel aside. And put a curse upon Israel.

And for these many centuries that curse has rested upon Israel. It rests upon that longer. It comes out again and again in our meditation.

Now in this letter you see, you have that possibility presented. To the Hebrew Christians, God is saying by this letter, do not refuse him that speaketh from heaven. But here is the other side to the story.

Israel positively refused God's heavenly calling. Just at that point God's eternal plan is revealed. That is a heavenly people with a spiritual nature occupying a place in God's creation.

That is what God eternally intended. He intended that before he called Israel. And he called Israel to be a people like that.

A heavenly people with a spiritual nature. I don't know how much breaks upon you as I say that. For me I see so much that I despair of ever being able to tell you about it.

I do not know what to say and what not to say. Because I've only got ten days in which to say it. But the point is that just here when Israel refuses, God presents his eternal plan.

That is this heavenly people of a spiritual nature. Now the whole of the New Testament is the body of truth which relates to this eternal will of God. Let's just look at that very hurriedly.

We will take the four Gospels. No we are not going to study the four Gospels. We are just going to look at them.

If you take up these four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. If you get some general idea of what they contain. And then you stand back from them.

You are able to see two lines of movement right through the four Gospels. Two movements running alongside of each other. On the one side there is the Jewish idea of the Messiah.

The Jewish Messiah. The Jewish idea of the Kingdom of God. And the whole Jewish system is there running along here.

Alongside of it and over against it there is something that is different. Alongside of it and over against it there is something that is different. There is God's idea and Heaven's idea of the Messiah.

That is very different from the Jewish. And it is always in conflict with the Jewish idea. There is God's idea and Heaven's idea of the Kingdom of God.

And it is very different from the Jewish idea. There is the Jewish idea of the King. What kind of a King they want and what kind of a King they are going to have.

That is running along one side through the four Gospels. Alongside of it and over against it is God's idea and Heaven's idea of a King. Behold thy King cometh unto thee meek and riding upon an ass.

That is not the Jewish idea of a King. How can a meek man riding on an ass overthrow the mighty Roman Empire? That is not our idea of a King. And we will not have this man to reign over us.

You see the two lines running through the four Gospels. The Hebrew idea and the Heavenly idea. And that is the very meaning of the four Gospels.

When you get to the end of the four Gospels you have the Jewish idea rejected fully and finally by God. And on the other side God's idea introduced and established forever. Two thousand years have proved that that one idea of an earthly system is God.

There has been nothing of it for two thousand years. On the other side there is God's idea of His Kingdom. That was introduced when Israel was rejected.

And God has been going on with that for two thousand years. And we are here tonight because that is true. We have God's King.

We are in God's Kingdom. We are under God's government. Well that is what the Gospels, the four Gospels say to us.

Of course that is not all. But that is the general conclusion of the four Gospels. Later on again we are going to see the details in the Gospels or at least one of the Gospels which shows how true that was.

That the four Gospels show the rejection by God of those who rejected His Son. And on the other side God bringing in that which was according to His Son and establishing it forever. So that the very gates of hell have not been able to prevail against it.

You move from the Gospels to the Book of the Acts. And when we move on from the Gospels to the Book of Acts. Then we find two features in that.

First of all the feature of the transition from the old to the new. With God the transition is complete. People were not ready to accept it.

The transition was slower than it ought to have been. Because James the head of the church in Jerusalem still wanted to have something of old Israel. And even Peter was very very reluctant to abandon Israel and go right out for the Gentiles.

And even dear old Barnabas was caught in that snare. Paul says with grief in his heart even Barnabas, even Barnabas. These who were of the old tradition were very slow to give up their tradition.

But you see that God is going up. James, Peter, whoever it may be if you are not coming on I am going on. If you are not going on I shall leave you behind and find others.

And because they were so slow he brought in Paul. And Paul got things going. The transition was complete with Paul.

And he was God's instrument of completing the transition. The letter to the Galatians is the instrument by which that transition was completed. Judaism received a fatal blow with that letter to the Galatians.

That is Judaism in the Christian church. You pass from the book of the Acts and you come into the letters what are called the epistles. And what have you here? Just the full body of teaching concerning the heavenly and spiritual nature of the people of God.

It is applied to a whole variety of connections. There is one state of things in Corinth. There is another state of things in Galatia.

Another state of things in Ephesus. And so on. But applied to all these different conditions is this one thing.

It is God's intention to have a heavenly and spiritual people. And all the letters were applied to different situations with that one object in view. Every letter in the New Testament has something to say about this heavenly nature of the people of God.

The New Testament has something to say about this heavenly nature of the community. But as I must close in about four minutes we just arrive at the letter to the Hebrews. And this letter takes a very very important place in this whole question.

Because this letter to the Hebrews is a summary of the whole New Testament. The whole meaning of the New Testament is gathered up in this letter to the Hebrews. Into this letter there flow many tributaries.

Making this letter the meeting place of all the revelations of God concerning his son Jesus Christ. And so we close where we began. And so we close where we began.

What is God's plan? Therefore, dear brothers, companions of the heavenly calling. We are companions of Christ. Who are the companions of Christ? Those who have fully left the whole earthly realm of things.

And are joined to the heavenly Lord. Those who have become God's spiritual Israel. Those who have answered to the heavenly calling.

Paul cried when he was on trial. Wherefore, O King of Greta, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. And if Paul was a great companion of Jesus Christ.

It was because he had completely finished with everything but Jesus Christ. He says, I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. He was a man who was wholly on the ground of Jesus Christ.

And wholly on the ground of God's heavenly purpose. These are the companions of Jesus Christ. Now later we shall go further with this.

And deal with many of the details which we have only mentioned in general. But I feel I must say this as I close this evening. There are many young Christians here.

And perhaps you don't know your Bible as well as some older Christians do. You do not know all the Bible background of what I have been saying. I hope this will make you want to know your Bible better.

But perhaps there is quite a lot that I have said that you don't understand. Now this is the one thing that I do want you to understand. You will come to understand all the other as you go on.

If you hold fast your beginning firm unto the end. If you really do commit yourself to the Lord Jesus you will come to understand. But that is not what I was going to say.

What I was going to say is this. What I want you to realize is that you have a very much greater Christ than ever you have imagined. The Christ to whom you have given yourselves is a very great Christ.

The call of the Lord which you have answered in accepting the Lord Jesus is a much bigger calling than you have any knowledge of. I just want you to go away with the impression my eye has come into something. And this is big enough to fill my whole life.

So don't worry about what you don't understand. But do realize how great a Lord is your Lord. And what a great thing is the heavenly calling.

We pray.

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