

The Heavenly Calling - Part 9

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding the heavenly calling of the spiritual Israel, which is to minister light and life to the world.

Duration: 51:41

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Acts 2:41, Romans 8:1-2, 1 Corinthians 10:16-17, Ephesians 1:4, Ephesians 2:19-20

Topics: "Heavenly Calling"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of understanding the special character of the current dispensation. God is forming a heavenly and spiritual Israel in this time, contrasting with the old earthly and temporal Israel. The first Israel refused to move on with God and was ultimately destroyed. The speaker also highlights the unity of the church in Christ, where believers are united as one loaf and one cup. The church is described as a spiritual entity, just as Christ is present in the world spiritually. The speaker calls for a revolution in understanding the true nature of the church and not simply attaching the term 'church' to anything.

Transcript

The friends who have been with us all the time will be patient with me if I say a few words for those who have only joined us this morning. Just by way of helping them to come into line with what the Lord is saying. We are occupied at this time with what God is particularly doing in this dispensation.

And it is very important that all Christians should know what the special character of the time in which they live is. So we have seen that God in this dispensation is forming a heavenly and spiritual Israel. We put special emphasis upon those two words heavenly and spiritual.

That is the particular nature of God's work in this dispensation. We are saying that God has left the old Israel which was an earthly and temporal Israel and has moved on to form this heavenly Israel. The first Israel refused to move on with God into this heavenly Israel.

It got its roots so deeply into this earth and into this world that it would not have them pulled out. So God rooted out that vine. God pulled up that tree by the roots and has thrown it into the fire of these last two thousand years.

He has taken a remnant from it represented by the twelve apostles, by the apostle Paul, in the first place by the one hundred and twenty at the beginning. And then the three thousand saved Jews on the day of Pentecost. A spiritual remnant of Israel and then expanded this spiritual Israel to embrace the Gentiles.

And he has been going on with that work ever since. There are two things that I want to say before I go further with our particular point. I want to correct a possible misunderstanding.

The heavenly and spiritual Israel which is the church of Jesus Christ is not an afterthought of God. It was not brought in because Israel failed. Please be very clear about that.

There are those who teach that that is so. The Lord offered it to Israel. Israel refused it and then he had to do something and so he got the idea of a church.

It was quite an afterthought, a kind of emergency movement of God and he brought in the church. That is entirely false to the whole of the Bible and that is one thing that we are seeking to show in these days. No, we have said that everything in the Old Testament including Israel had Christ and the church in view.

It was all leading on to Christ and the church. And Christ and the church take up all the divine thoughts of the past and embody them. The church is the eternal thing.

The church is in the heart of God before time was. The church was chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world. The church is no afterthought of God.

It is a beforethought of God. God's Son is not an emergency. He may have come in at a time of emergency.

The church was eternally intended to be the body of Christ. Now I want you to keep that in mind in all that we are saying. It is a very important matter.

The other thing that I want to say is that this new Israel, the church, is essentially a spiritual thing as truly as Christ here now is a spiritual matter. And Christ is here in this world by the Spirit as truly as Christ is here no longer in physical presence and on a temporal basis but can only be known spiritually. We can only have fellowship with him spiritually as truly as that is the case with the Lord Jesus so it is as to the church.

In the minds of many Christians there has got to be a revolution about that word church is taken up and just put on to almost anything. Forgive me, excuse me, I mean no offense but we are dealing with very vital matters. We hear of, speak of this church and that church.

The Lutheran church, the Methodist church, the Baptist church, the Anglican church and how many more. And we speak of all these as the church. From heaven's standpoint that's a lot of nonsense.

From heaven's standpoint that is not the church. These things may represent one or other aspect of truth but not one of them has the whole of the truth and then you have put them all together they haven't got all of the truth. All the truth is in Jesus alone.

The church is a spiritual thing. You cannot look upon anything material or any people in the flesh and say that's the church. You are only in the church insofar as there is something of Christ in you.

It is Christ in us that makes the church. See the church is a unity in Christ. The Lord Jesus never looks upon so many loaves of bread all over the world when there's a gathering to his table.

I suppose that on any Lord's day there may be millions of loaves of bread being broken and as for cups I don't know how many. Heaven never sees more than one loaf and heaven never sees more than one cup. The loaf is Christ.

The cup is Christ and by our partaking we are united in Christ. It's one loaf. I'm not quite sure whether the translators were correct but I think there may be something in it.

When they translated the words of the Lord the old version said that the Lord said this is my body which is broken for you and I think there may be very real truth in using that word. Indeed the Lord's body was broken but the later translators have left out that word broken and have said this is my body which is for you. Now perhaps that later translation dismisses a false idea because the word broken has been so often taken to mean another piece and there's another.

Christ is not divided. Paul said if Christ is not divided there may be a thousand pieces of the earthly loaf. Heavenly loaf is one and that is how heaven sees the church.

The church is a broken thing on the earth. It's broken into many pieces down here but in heaven it is seen as one and the sooner you and I see if this man or this woman is in Christ it does not matter whether that man or that woman is in our denomination or not. Whether they are in our sect or not.

If they are in Christ they are part with me and with you of Christ. Now understand that the church is a spiritual thing not an earthly temporal thing and that is a very important thing for us to recognize. Now I've taken a lot of time before we go on with our particular point.

We are doing this along one side ways with the along the other side we are seeing that he takes the spiritual laws of the old Israel and perpetuates them in the new Israel. What he did in a temporal way with the first Israel he is now doing exactly the same thing but in a spiritual way in the new. Last word yesterday morning was that God's glory in Abraham reached its climax in sonship.

Sonship in death and resurrection and God's glory came to its climax in sonship. Sonship is the climax of God's glory. We are back in our letter to the Hebrews now.

What is the climax of that letter and of all God's movement as contained in that letter? It is found in one fragment bringing many sons to glory. That is the climax of the glory of God. As it was in a temporal way in Abraham so it is in a spiritual way in the new Israel.

But the idea of sonship did not begin with Abraham and Isaac. It only came out in Abraham and Isaac. It was right back before them in eternity.

This idea of sonship is God's cherished secret from before times eternal. That secret has been lost in Abraham's seed after the flood. But it is taken up in Abraham's seed after the spirit.

Now probably you know that the letters to the Romans and Galatians are concerned with that particular theme. In the letter to the Romans chapter 9, 10 and 11 all one section really. The apostle is just saying this.

They are not all Israel. Only those that are of Israel. Out from Israel is the new Israel.

All the natural children of Abraham are not Israel now. It is the spiritual children of Abraham now. And when you go into the letters of the Galatians that is explained very carefully.

And the apostle reduces it to this one thing. He refers to the promise made to Abraham. In thy seed shall all nations of the earth be blessed.

Now this is the thing that got Paul into a lot of trouble. He said when God said that he did not say in thy seed. He said in thy seed as of one.

And he said and that seed is Christ. Not the many natural children of Abraham but the spiritual children and that is Christ. Christ and the companions of Christ.

Isaiah cried he shall see his seed. He shall see at the travail of his soul. And this heavenly Jerusalem is the spiritual seed of Abraham.

The letters of the Galatians says the rest of God. Even all the other children of Abraham are now set aside. God only recognizes his spiritual children.

And this is taken up in this phrase that has governed our whole time together. Wherefore holy brethren companions of a heavenly cause. We are companions of Christ if we hold fast the beginning firm unto the end.

There is something there that I am tempted to stay with. But I think I'll have to hold it over for another connection. I want to get on with this matter.

This spiritual and heavenly Israel is called companions of a heavenly calling. For a few minutes I want to dwell upon that heavenly calling. What was God's intention in this world concerning the first Israel? Well as we said last night it was that they should mediate light and life to the nation.

That was their divine calling. That the nation should receive light through their light. That they should be the channel of divine light and life to the nations of this world.

That was their calling. Now we could take quite a lot of the Old Testament to show that. I'm going to take perhaps only one illustration.

You notice that all the sons of Israel were focused in one son. Because when I speak of Israel now I mean Jacob. All the sons of Jacob were focused in one son.

And that son was Joseph. If it had not been for Joseph that whole nation would have perished. And not only the sons and families of Jacob but all Egypt would have perished.

The world would have perished in a sense. God's strange sovereign dealings with Joseph brought him through death and resurrection to the throne. And when his brothers came to Egypt and he made himself known unto them.

In utter shame they went down before him. They began to apologize to try and excuse themselves. Poor miserable wretched fellows they were.

Down before Joseph their brother. What did he say? Don't be sorry. Fear not.

Don't be miserable about it. You meant it for evil. God meant it for good.

To send me before you to save many alive. Life and life came not only to all the families of Jacob but to Egypt. The world through Joseph.

Joseph was the inclusive representative of all his brethren. God made him like that. And he sets forth this truth that God intended all Israel of old to be a minister of life and life to the whole world.

To save much flesh alive. There is Israel calling. That is what Israel was intended for in the old dispensation.

Just down here by God's appointment right at the center of the nation in a position of ascendancy to mediate life and life to the nation. Abraham's seed was intended to be that. But that seed of Abraham failed God.

And instead of fulfilling that holy calling they contradicted it. We need not dwell upon their failure. It's a dark and terrible story.

And if you ask why Israel has been where they have been for the last nearly 2,000 years. For they have been just where the Lord Jesus said they would be. He said the children of the kingdom shall be cast into outer darkness.

There will be weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth. And that is the story of the earthly Israel through all these past centuries. That is as a nation.

Thank God for all those who have escaped from the outer darkness. Who are not weeping and wailing and gnashing their teeth now. But are rejoicing in Christ Jesus.

But that is where the nation went. And the last stroke of that was in the year A.D. 70. That's the dark side.

But God had not finished with an Israel. He still had in view a prince with God. But that is the meaning of the name Israel as you know.

And this heavenly spiritual Israel to which you and I belong are called into the vocation of Joseph. God has transferred that in a spiritual way to us. We are here in this heavenly calling.

This spiritual vocation to minister light and life to the world. That is to be our heavenly calling now. That is why the Lord said to his new Israel go ye into all the world.

Begin at Jerusalem, Samaria, or Judea, and unto the uttermost parts of the world. And wherever you are your heavenly calling is to bring light and light from above. And at the beginning the church almost settled down in Jerusalem.

That is the earthly Jerusalem. They were very slow to move away from the earthly Jerusalem. So the Lord took a big hammer and he brought that hammer down on the church of Jerusalem.

And they were all scattered abroad. Lord said I finished with this earthly city. The new Jerusalem is above.

And the new heavenly calling is all the nations. That is the heavenly calling of the spiritual Israel now. But that has got to come to fullness afterwards.

And that fullness is represented at the end of the Bible. The holy city new Jerusalem coming down from God out of heaven. No this is not a material and political world center.

This is the church. These are the companions of Christ represented in the symbolism of a city. And the last word about that city is this.

And the nations of the earth shall walk in the light thereof. And in the midst of the city there is the tree of life. And the leaves of the tree are for the health of the nation.

You notice I've changed the word. Our translation says the healing of the nation. It's not correct.

The nations then won't need healing thank God in eternity. But they will need their spiritual health ministered to. Most of us here this morning do not need saving.

And remember by the way that the word salvation in the original is the word health. It is a state of being in good health. That is the meaning of the word salvation being in good health.

Of course it means spiritually. The nations will then be the nations that have had the gospel and responded. Righteousness will cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.

But right at the center of the nations will be the church. And through the church light and life will go out to maintain the health of the nation. I was saying we do not need salvation now in the sense of being saved.

But why have you come here? You're all saved people. What are you doing here? Ought you not to be out all over the world getting others saved? Well that may be. But you're here because you want your health looking after.

You take your morning breakfast to keep your health good. And you have come here to the Lord's provision. The table which the Lord has spread for us.

To keep our health good. And to still make our health better. So the leaves of the tree are not for the healing but for the health of the nation.

So when everything has been said and done you have gone right through the long long story. At last you come to the end in the last chapters of history in the book of the Revelation. And the last picture is of a heavenly Israel ministering light and life to the nation.

Perhaps some of you bible students, you people who are very interested in doctrine, are just troubled now with a question in the light of what I've said. Does he mean that the church is one thing and there are a lot of people who are not of the church? In other words the city is one thing and the nations are another? Now I'm not going to please you by entering upon any argument about it. But I'm going to bring you back to this letter to the Hebrews for your answer.

And the answer in this letter is in one little word of two letters. If. Then.

We are become companions of Christ if. Whose house are we if? And the whole letter in one sense circles around that little word. It is not now a matter of salvation and getting into heaven.

It is now a matter of that instrument of heaven for all the rest. This is the height of the heavenly calling. I leave you to answer the question by studying this letter again.

It does seem to say that everybody will not be the city. Everybody was the city. Where's the country? No the city is the center.

It is the seat of administration. The seat of government. The seat of light.

The whole country derives its values through the city. And it does seem that that is the truth that is here. It is possible to get into heaven but not be of the city.

Well if you've got trouble with that you disagree with me. It doesn't worry me very much. I can only say to you back to the word.

I cannot my dear friends I cannot understand this letter on any other ground. Why is this letter shot through and through with this urgency to go on? I do not believe that if you don't go on that means you forfeit your eternal life. That you sacrifice your salvation.

But I do believe that if you don't go on you will forfeit your inheritance. And that is the teaching of this letter as I see it. Why the whole of the new testament after the gospels has this one object to get Christians to go on.

To go on to full growth. This is Abraham's spiritual seed and we are going to see at some point that Abraham looked for a city whose builder and maker is God. This is the city that Abraham was looking for.

So I'm going to close with that thought this morning. God put something into the very constitution of Abraham which had two effects. It made Abraham a very discontented man.

Abraham was possessed of a holy discontent. He went up and down the land. He saw the land.

God gave him crops and herbs in abundance. But all the time Abraham was saying this is not it. There is something more than this.

I can never be satisfied with this. And in a right sense Abraham was a most discontented man. On the other hand he had a vision of what ought to be.

The new testament calls it the heavenly country. He was looking for a city the builder and maker of which is God. And no city on this earth answered to what was in the heart of Abraham.

Do you think I'm exaggerating? Do you think I'm making that up? What did Jesus say to the oldest one? Your father Abraham saw my day and he rejoiced. He saw right down the ages. He had a vision.

Nothing in this world could satisfy that vision. His heart was ever hungry. And so he was a man who never settled down on this earth.

I expect people round about said continually hello Abraham you're packing up again. You're putting down your tent again. Where are you going this time? That was always happening with Abraham.

He could not settle down anywhere. There was in his heart this vision and this hunger. Something that God had done in him and nothing but the heavenly could satisfy him.

Now I've given you the letter to the Hebrews again. Let us go on says this letter continually. Let us go on.

Let us not settle down. Let us never be satisfied with anything less than God's fullness. That's the message of this letter.

And it is in the end represented as a race. We are running a race. The gold and the prize lie ahead.

Let us not stop in the race and turn aside. Let us run with patience the race that is set before us looking up unto Jesus. Your father Abraham saw my day and rejoiced.

It's due to be like that. Looking up unto Jesus. He now sings to Jesus.

Never settling down with anything less than God's fullness. Wherefore holy brethren companions of a heavenly calling. I'm quite sure that where the Holy Spirit really has his place in a heart.

That heart will be a going on heart. That heart will never settle down to anything less than God's fullness. There are two different kinds of dissatisfaction.

There are those poor miserable people who are never satisfied with anything. Always discontented. And that in a wrong way.

And I'm not appealing for such people like that. But the spiritual discontent. This that says no I haven't yet attained.

Neither am I already perfect. But there's one thing I do. Leaving the things which are behind.

I press toward the mark of the prize of the on high calling. That is the nature of a truly Holy Spirit governed life. It will always be pressing on to something more of the Lord.

These are the true heavenly feet of Abraham which is Christ. And we leave it there for the time being.

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