

The Israel of God - Part 2

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the foundational role of faith in the Christian life and its connection to being part of the true Israel of God.

Duration: 31:35

Scripture: Genesis 15:5, Genesis 22:2, Isaiah 53:10-11, John 12:24, Romans 9:6-7, Galatians 3:7, Hebrews 11:13

Topics: "Israel"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of faith in Christianity. He states that faith is the foundation, continuation, and confirmation of the Christian life. It is the key to salvation, spiritual progress, service, prayer, and the perfecting of believers. The speaker highlights Abraham as an example of someone with great faith, who believed in God's promises despite difficult circumstances. He mentions how God tested Abraham's faith by delaying the fulfillment of his promises, but ultimately rewarded him with the birth of his son.

Transcript

In the further opening up of that which the Lord has brought for our consideration in this conference, we bring forward some of the passages of scripture which have been guiding our thoughts. Again, the words from Isaiah's prophecies, chapter 53, verses 10 and 11. When thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see his seed.

He shall see of the travail of his soul shall be satisfied. His seed, the travail of his soul. And then this other passage in the letter to the Romans, chapter 9, verses 6 and 7. For they are not all Israel that are of Israel, neither because they are Abraham's seed are they all children.

That is, it is not the children of the flesh that are children of God, but the children of the promise are reckoned for a seed. Letter to the Galatians, chapter 3 and verse 7. Know therefore that they that are of faith the same are sons of Abraham, his seed, the travail of his soul. We, I trust I can say, are being led at this time to a fresh apprehension of that upon which the heart of the Lord is set, a divine and spiritual seed born out of his travail.

In these few minutes this morning, I want to dwell upon another fragment of this whole matter which is in these last words that we have read. Know therefore that they that are of faith the same are sons of Abraham. There is one supreme characteristic of this divine seed and that is faith.

Whether we like it or not, Christianity rests upon one word and that word is faith. The beginning of the Christian life rests upon that. The continuation of the Christian life rests upon that.

The confirmation of the Christian life, the completion, rests upon that one thing, faith. It relates to salvation, initially. It relates to and governs the whole course of progress, spiritually.

It relates to service. It relates to prayer. It relates to the perfecting of the believer.

It relates to final victory. There is no phase, no aspect, no stage of the Christian life with which this issue is not bound up. It is from beginning to end, at all times, in all things, just a matter of faith.

It is a matter of faith. It is just there that we find the weakest point in human nature. No doubt about it.

No doubt about it. Sooner or later we discover that that's our weakest point. There was a time when I used to look at certain people who seemed to have natural faith, with whom it seemed to be not a difficult thing at all to believe in God.

It seemed quite natural to them to believe in God. Seemed to have no difficulty about it. You know, was I born with an unbelieving heart, an infidel mind? They seemed to have none of those difficulties.

But I have lived a few years, and I have watched those same people, and I have seen them come to the place. There was a time when the most difficult thing in all the world for them was to believe God. Sooner or later, we discover that this is our weakest point.

But on the other hand, this is the strongest point in the divine nature. This matter of faith then is basic to our union with God. If this is the strongest point in the divine nature, and it's the weakest point in our nature, those two things cannot exist and obtain in a true union.

They are contradictions. They are quite against one another. And the issue is, it's either God or ourselves.

And union with God always rests upon this matter of faith. The same is true of communion. The continuation of union and living in the good of it, the expression of it, communion.

It's all a matter of faith. It's a matter of God's pleasure in us. And that's an important matter.

Without faith, it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto him. It's a matter of God's pleasure in us. You know, dear friends, that goes very deeply.

It is possible, thank God, for him in grace, in mercy, to bless us and to use us as instruments. But at the same time, not to take very much pleasure in us, just to be used of the Lord. And yet know, and yet know, the Lord is not taking pleasure in using you.

Doing it in grace and mercy, you may not be able to understand that, but it's true. Somewhere, even in the servant, there's a reservation about the Lord, which holds up the Lord's good pleasure in his servant. It's something more than having blessings from the Lord.

It's something more than even being used by the Lord. The Lord having delight in us. And mark you the point, the point at which the delight factor comes in, is just this matter of faith.

It does not say, without faith, it is impossible to get any blessings from the Lord. It is impossible to do any work for the Lord. But it does say, without faith, it is impossible to be well-pleasing.

And then, quite a lot of other things depend upon and rest upon this foundation thing of faith. I only mention them and leave you to think it out. You know, after all, love rests upon faith.

Think about this. It depends upon faith, doesn't it? Joy rests upon faith. Think about this.

You know as well as I do how miserable you are if you've lost your faith, or if you've got any doubts and questions. Only when your faith is clear and bright that you're really happy. Do you know joy, joy hangs upon faith.

And does not peace hang upon it? You like to change the word for rest. That's the biblical way of putting it. Rest, peace within.

It just rests upon faith. There is no rest or peace unless there is faith. Rest and peace are proportionate to the faith.

Then again, meekness, meekness. What is the opposite of meekness? Well, it is trying to force things. Assert.

Going out from yourself. Trying to hold your own ground. Vindicate yourself.

Faith undercuts all that, doesn't it? It undercuts all that. You need not worry at all about anything. You can be perfectly restful about issues if you have faith, patience.

Well, so obvious, isn't it? Patience rests upon faith. Those two things are put together in the word of God. And so are all the other things.

Hope, and long-suffering, and kindness. All the divine virtues rest upon the foundation of faith. And if faith is not there, these other things are either wanting or they are weak.

It's a tremendous matter, this matter of faith. You look in the Bible, you will see all the tragedies and the calamities there were resultant from a lack of faith. The first great tragedy and calamity of God is called the fall, simply because of faith.

Faith was not there. Israel's tragedy in the wilderness, same reason. Israel's going into the exile and captivity, same reason.

And perhaps worst of all, Israel's present dismissal and setting aside. There are personal instances, such as Ishmael, a perpetual sore, open sore, in the history of God's interest in this world. Many more, but I mention it again, to pass on the tragedies and calamities, whether they have been, and are personal, national, collective, nor be traced to this one cause to break down somewhere in this matter of faith.

Now let me say a platitude. Faith is always faith. Faith is always faith.

It will always be objective. It will always focus upon the very character of God. That's the focal point of faith, the very character of God.

And remember, remember that any weakness or absence of faith, and I'm speaking of course about spiritual faith, is an impugning of the character of God. That's where we begin our Bible. As God said, as God said, an impugning of the character of God, a calling into question of the character of God, a throwing doubt upon the character of God, and that was the initial and inclusive breakdown.

And it's always been that, you see, because the focal point of faith is nothing less and other than the very character of God, whether we believe that God is what he says he is. That's the ultimate matter in relation to faith. But it's always faith.

We are always wanting faith to be something other than faith, trying to turn it into something else, either sight or experience or what we get, what God does for us. But God always keeps this thing in the realm where it is. After all, it's faith.

Faith never moves it out of that realm at all. Never moves it out of that realm. I look at the tremendous implications of this one fragment of Paul's statements on this matter in Galatians 3 7. They that be of faith are Abraham's seed.

He has said not all they that be of Abraham are children, are a seed. To thy seed, to thy seed. He said not to seeds as to many, to thy seed which is Christ.

This is the true seed of faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and by that. For a moment or two, let us look at these implications of Abraham's seed, whom the covenant was made, not after the flesh, that is laid down. It's a spiritual thing.

And turns out, as we see in the scriptures, turns out to be that which is born out of the travail of Christ. The fruit of his cross, the reproduction and multiplication of himself as the corn of wheat, having fallen into the ground, died. This is the seed.

All the covenant promises made to Abraham are fulfilled and realized in Christ and his seed. We inherit all that. Of course, you're familiar with that as fruit.

But all that comes to us through faith in Jesus Christ. Because we are the seed mentioned to Abraham. Look at Abraham, therefore.

God's great example of faith. Far too big a thing for these moments, but we can just glance at it again. See, God carried through the whole system and purpose from eternity to eternity in creation, in redemption, and in established fulfillment.

He carried that all through the soul of one man. Yes, Abraham rightly has a large place. It is as though God forced through the very soul of that man, the whole plan of his divine purpose and redemption.

All on the principle of faith. By a long succession of demands for faith, here written for our instruction. First, the promise of a land.

Get thee up, thy kindred, thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee. And then he promised him that land. He promised him that land, I will give him.

His promise and his covenant. Abraham did it. Left his country and subsequently his father's house and came into the land.

All his life went up and down in it, dwelling in tents, and never got a foothold. Never got a foothold, really, according to the covenant and promise. We can read the story in a few minutes, but it took a few years and many years.

Many years. Well, what are you going to do about that? Plenty of scope through the years and all the demands of patience and whatnot. Difficulties, trials, the adversities of many years.

Plenty of scope for saying, I made a mistake. A fundamental mistake. I got an idea.

Evidently, I was wrong. Something happened and I got out on the wrong line altogether. Nothing that I was told is being supported.

Plenty of room for all that sort of thing. We can enlarge upon it and I don't think we could exaggerate what Abraham had to encounter in his own soul on that one question of the land. But that's not enough.

He was promised a seed. And thy seed to all families of the earth is blessed. Thy seed, thy seed.

Again and again, that word is on the mouth of God in covenant to Abraham. A seed. And not a child.

And not a child. Not one. And naturally, little or no prospect of anything like this.

His own situation utterly contradicted God's promise concerning this seed. Plenty of room there, isn't there, to have a controversy with the Lord and to get all sorts of tangles in your own soul. What a mess you could get into with a situation like this.

Well, it was not for a day or a week or a month or a year that Abraham had to cope with a problem like this. And then, and then, God came and repeated this, reiterated this, and focused down this matter upon child Isaac. Promised him.

This time an all-natural hope had receded. Promised him. And went away and left him with a promise for a few more years.

Just something said to him and nothing to support or bear it out in actuality. Went away and left him. And if the hope had receded far back to the horizon before the promise was actually crystallized, surely it's gone beyond the horizon now.

He looked at his own body, as good as dead, this fall and terror, hopeless. He's gone and said it would be, and is leaving him with that situation. And then the child is given.

Yes, the son is born. We know the great test of faith that came in for that period between the promise and the realization. Even, even Abraham broke down, they, we know about Ishmael, we believe that.

Nevertheless, child is born. Child is there. There's the infant.

And with what wonder they must have looked at that child. There's the little child growing up in their home. And how they must have cherished that child in the light of all that God has bound up with his life.

And he has grown to you, no doubt, an object of great love, care, devotion, watchfulness, and expectation, and then the blow fell. Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest. God seems to be rubbing salt in, doesn't he? Thine only son, whom thou lovest, and offer him.

Well, we need not press this further. Abraham went on, came to his very old age, and died, not having received the promise. These all died in faith.

There's the writer, not having received the promise. No, he hadn't got the land, he hadn't got the seed in any commensurate way. Died in faith.

But he died in faith. That's the point. Through it all, faith survived.

Now friends, we've got to break off there. They that be of faith are Abraham's seed. This seed, this seed, these children, this people, this true Israel of God, is on that basis, that principle, and after that kind.

Let us make no mistake about it. I started by saying whether we like it or not. And we don't like it.

At a rate, I don't. No, we don't like it. It's the hardest, the most difficult thing, but there it is.

Take it or leave it. It's a matter of believing God, and believing God not because of what he can do or will do, but because of what he is. And it goes a long way, very deep down that does.

Prides us on everything. Prides us on everything. God's postponements.

God's delays. God's seeming contradictions and paradoxes. Thousand and one things.

The end is after all. Well, what are you going to do about it? Is God, is God, and is God what he says he is, or not? Does your interpretation, your argument, your position, your mind about things, does it really set aside God? Does it? God knows what he's doing. Now, if I had time, I should carry that into the realm of spiritual life.

You know, in our spiritual lives, in our spiritual growth, in the perfecting of us, in the likeness of Christ, there are lots of things that we think the Lord ought to have removed long ago, and he hasn't removed them. Even matters of our character. If we could, we would make God make us absolutely sinless this very moment.

He does, and he does not. He's dealing with us on the matter of faith, even over our spiritual transformation. And how many other things would we have God do for his own glory, and he doesn't do them? For the facilitation of his own interest, work, whatnot, and he doesn't do them.

Well, either God is, or he is not. Either he is faithful, or he is not. He is either consistent, or he is not.

You see, after all, dear friends, we're brought back to this. We're just brought back to this. The question of faith.

The question is, they that be of faith are Abraham's seed? What is Abraham's seed? Christ and those born out of his travail. And what travail there is related to the fruit of faith. Oh, there is no real fruit.

That is not the fruit of travail. And travail is always a matter of faith.

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