

The Key of Faith (Concluded)

by T. Austin-Sparks

Faith is the key to spiritual enlargement, and the testing of faith is God's way of enlargement.

Scripture: Genesis 15:5, Genesis 17:1

Topics: "Faith", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks concludes his sermon 'The Key of Faith' by emphasizing that God's plan for enlargement in our lives often comes through tests of faith, as exemplified by Abraham. He highlights that the enemy seeks to limit God's work, but true spiritual growth requires overcoming internal unbelief and external challenges. The testing of faith is not just a one-time event but a continuous process that leads to greater spiritual maturity and establishment in God's purpose. Sparks encourages believers to recognize that these tests are integral to realizing God's promises and to remain steadfast in faith despite trials. Ultimately, he asserts that God desires both enlargement and establishment in the lives of His people.

Transcript

Reading: Genesis 15:5, 17:1-8; Romans 4:17-24; Hebrews 11:8-10; Revelation 21:9-18, 22:1-2.

We were speaking about God's governing thought of enlargement, bringing to remembrance His words to Abraham concerning the immense increase which He purposed for His servant; and then we saw how every bit of that increase came along the line of a testing of faith.

This is not just teaching. These things are very pertinent and appropriate to our need at the present time. The whole work of the enemy is by every means and agency to limit what is of God, to reduce it, to make it as small as possible and keep it so. God's thoughts, of course, are entirely to the contrary; but God's thoughts do not just operate and come to realization automatically. He is dealing with living people, not with a mechanical world. It is in a people that His thoughts are to have their fulfilment, individually and collectively. For the realization of His thoughts, therefore, all the work of the enemy has to be overcome.

The Battle Of Unbelief

Now the work of the enemy is not only from the outside - it is from the inside. The enemy has got a very strong and deep foothold in man by nature, in you and in me, and it is no small thing to enlarge us unto the enlargement of God. There is very much in us that ever seeks to frustrate and limit God. That foothold of the enemy in us by nature is something that ever stands in the way of God's thoughts, as a positive force

to resist God. The essential nature of the foothold is unbelief, and there is not one of us, no matter how advanced may be the point of our spiritual progress, who has no battle remaining with the unbelief of his own heart.

"The sin which doth so easily beset us" (Heb. 12:1), which impedes, retards, and arrests us in the spiritual race, is unbelief. You know that this letter to the Hebrews is all concerned with going on - going on to fulness; and here, in this metaphor of the race - 'running with patience the race that is set before us' - we find the exhortation to lay aside this impeding thing that so easily besets us. It is unbelief. In the original text, the passage follows immediately, without any chapter division, upon the eleventh chapter of the letter, which is the chapter of faith. Thus, in that quite general way, it is very appropriate to our present need to speak about this matter of 'faith unto enlargement', for as it was with Abraham, so it is with us all.

But of course it has particular and specific applications. In the work of the Lord, in a ministry, in a testimony, in an instrumentality for Divine purpose, there are times when the direction and course of everything seems to be to close it down, to thwart, frustrate, and bring it to an end; and because of that, a very great test of faith arises. Those concerned are thrown into the vortex of a great conflict as to whether God, after all, wants this, means this, is after this--or whether, in view of the accumulation of frustrating, crippling, limiting efforts and activities, some mistake has not been made, and the whole thing needs to be reviewed and revised. At such times, the enemy does press very hard with questions. It is a time of severe testing of faith. And what is true collectively becomes so true in individual lives from time to time.

Abraham's Tests Of Faith

Now, the point and the argument of all that we see in the Bible is this: that the very testing of faith is God's way of enlargement. Fresh enlargements will come by fresh testings. That is the order of things. It ever has been so. You see, here is Abraham. With an oath and a covenant, God has announced to him His thoughts about this great enlargement. "I will make thy seed as the dust of the earth" (Gen. 13:16). "I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heavens, and as the sand which is upon the sea-shore" (22:17). God has not left Abraham in any doubt as to His thoughts about enlargement.

But look at the testings into which Abraham was immediately brought. He had, speaking naturally, every ground and reason for saying, 'I have made a mistake in thinking that God meant that. I have misunderstood what the Lord meant; I have been caught in some illusion.' It would have been very easy for Abraham, under the pressure and the trial, to have so reacted. But the point is this, that the Lord has done, where Abraham is concerned, far more than Abraham ever thought. For you see, all that great multitude presented to us in the last book of the Bible - 'a great multitude, which no man could number' (Rev. 7:9), 'ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands' (Rev. 5:1) - Paul says they are the seed of Abraham (Gal. 3:29): not Jews, but believers, the children of faith (3:7). Every one who has reposed faith in God is the seed of Abraham - a countless seed. It has come to pass. But see how Abraham's faith was progressively tested on this matter of enlargement. It was not one battle fought once and for all, and settled; but over a long life, till he was a hundred years old, in different forms, at different stages and with accentuated poignancy, again and again the test of enlargement was raised.

But every test passed meant some further enlargement. We have said that that is a way and a law of the Lord. It is something to hide in our hearts. The Psalmist said: "Thy word have I hid in my heart, that I might not sin against Thee" (Psa. 119:11). The sin of all sins, where God is concerned, is unbelief, and here is a word that we must hide in our hearts against the day of trial - the day when we feel our faith is being so

tested and tried and pressed by the situations in which we find ourselves, that it must mean limitation--it must work out to curtailment, if not to an utter end. The Bible all the way through argues the other way: that such tests of faith are ever alongside of God's expressed and revealed mind, that these tests are the way for the realization of His purpose, and that the thought of God is, in the first place, enlargement.

Establishment

But if spiritual enlargement is a need, and if the work of God, the testimony of Jesus, needs releasing and enlarging, is this not equally true in the matter of establishment - the establishing of the Lord's people? If God is after enlargement, He is certainly revealed to be equally desirous of, and working toward, that which is solid, that which is substantial, that which is characterized by stability, endurance, steadfastness, trustworthiness, faithfulness, responsibility, depth. These words touch the situation very, very closely.

We may recall that the New Testament was written almost entirely for the establishment of believers. Typical phrases are: "I long to see you... to the end ye may be established" (Rom. 1:11); and: "Now He That establisheth us with you in Christ... is God" (2 Cor. 1:21).

God works for that which will endure. A characteristic of God is the "for ever" feature. "Whatsoever God doeth, it shall be for ever" (Eccles. 3:14). The chief factor in establishment is faith. Firstly it is the establishment of faith - the objective ground. This is the message and meaning of the Letter to the Romans. There can be no subjective work unto this objective position is secured. Indeed, it would be very dangerous to proceed with the subjective otherwise. All further and fuller work in us necessitates a strong and settled faith in what has been done for us, and in what our standing is by grace.

Then comes the establishment in faith. This means the removal of all false ground - any ground of confidence or trust which is other than God Himself. In this category of false ground come our feelings, theories, traditions, and all external supports. All these will prove false and incapable of bearing the strain of true faith's testing. In order to keep to reality and true life God shatters all false positions, shakes all false ground, and strips off all vain confidence.

This applies to our lives and our work. It is very impressive to note that, when Paul was a prisoner and when many old friends forsook him, when churches which were his life-work turned from him, he then wrote such tremendously assured and confident letters as those called "To the Ephesians", "To the Colossians", and "To the Philippians". This does not look as though he believed that the real work was breaking down. "Unto the ages of the ages" is characteristic of these messages.

Paul knew what he meant when, in writing to the Thessalonians, he used the phrase: "Your work of faith" (1 Thess. 1:3). His was that, and it paid large dividends, although both the faith and the work underwent severe testings.

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