

The Reiterated Appeal

by T. Austin-Sparks

The letter to the Hebrews emphasizes the importance of consecration to Christ and the development of a life of holy fear, spiritual urgency, and boldness.

Scripture: Hebrews 2:3, Hebrews 3:1, Hebrews 4:1, Hebrews 4:11, Hebrews 4:14, Hebrews 10:22-23, Hebrews 12:1, Hebrews 12:28, Hebrews 13:15

Topics: "Consecration", "Great Salvation"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the profound significance of 'so great salvation' in his sermon, urging believers to recognize that salvation is not merely about being saved from sin but about fulfilling God's greater purpose for humanity. He outlines a series of appeals and warnings from the book of Hebrews, encouraging believers to actively engage in their faith through consecration, diligence, and mutual support. Sparks highlights the importance of maintaining a firm grip on faith, drawing near to God with boldness, and running the race of faith with perseverance. He warns against complacency and encourages a proactive approach to spiritual growth, reflecting on the responsibilities that come with salvation. Ultimately, he calls for a deeper understanding of the greatness of Christ and the implications of our calling as believers.

Transcript

Very early in this letter to the Hebrews the writer, having made a many-sided and very great comparison and contrast between the greatest persons and things of the old dispensation and Jesus the Son of God, launches an inclusive appeal and warning in superlative terms. "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" Throughout the letter he applies that in various connections, but he does so as always governed by that last clause

"So Great Salvation"

So that is what it is all about! Salvation. Great salvation. So great salvation! As there cannot be two salvations, this one and some other, but this one is really what God intends by salvation, it is as well that we look again at what has been said in these pages as to the greatness of Christ, the greatness of our calling, the greatness of our intended destiny, and the greatness of our responsibility. One thing ought to emerge from this consideration, that is, that salvation is a much greater thing on the side of its unto than on the side of its from. That is, there is much more in God's purpose for man than to save him from sin, judgment, death, and hell. However great redemption is, it is only to get man back to the place where the

original full intention of God can be proceeded with. It is a very costly 'fall' that has happened to man, but his recovery has far more in it than the recovery itself. The Gospel of Salvation as it is usually preached is so largely occupied with man himself and the immediate advantages and benefits of being saved. To promise, and get him to, heaven is about the limit. The "so great salvation" has immense issues bound up with it and includes all the superlatives and "mysteries" of Paul's unparalleled unveilings of "the eternal purpose." Salvation's greatest aspect is what it is unto, however great may be what it is from. If more of this greatness had broken upon the preachers, and were the mighty motive of their preaching, as it was in Paul's case, and others, the impact upon men would need little of the upholstery mentioned in our last chapter.

It is in the light of this more positive aspect that our writer so repeatedly appeals, urges, and warns, and it is now our intention to close our meditations by surveying these calls quite briefly.

While the writer was too moved by his theme to stop for systematizing his matter, it may help if we do something in that way. We can therefore, quite without straining, put these reiterations into three connections - A, B, and C.

It is assumed by this letter that those to whom it was written were believers in the Lord Jesus and that they had given themselves over to Him. They are called "holy brethren" (3:1) which implies consecration to Christ. On this assumption the writer bases his appeals and warnings.

A. The Basis Of Consecration

This basis is seen in the first series of appeals governed by the words "Let us."

1. (4:1) "Let us fear."

If the consecration to the Lord is a genuine one upon an adequate apprehension of His superiority to all others, it will have in it this element of holy fear. The context shows that it is the great prospect which has come into view with Christ that creates such a fear lest it should be missed. Holy fear should always be a feature of a Christian's life; not fear of judgment; not dread of the Lord; but fear lest there might be a missing of all that is implicit in the call of grace. The presence of such an exhortation is itself enough to prove that just to have accepted Christ is not enough to guarantee the attainment (to use Paul's word) of all that which is included in our having been "apprehended by Christ Jesus."

2. (4:11) "Let us give diligence"; literally "hasten".

This bears upon the time factor, especially the spiritual time factor. "So long as it is called Today" or "Today, if ye shall hear" is the ground of appeal here. The lack of urgency and diligence will have two effects. God's actual time opportunity - which is never shown to be other than now - may be missed; and, or, our capacity or ability to make good all that can be apprehended may slip past, and we be found like ships stranded on a mud bank.

3. (4:14) "Let us hold fast" literally "grasp".

It is so easy to lose grip and firmness of hold, and become loose or slack. You have made a confession; reaffirm, and do not let its full meaning and value slip out of your hand, or be taken from you. Close your hand tightly upon it against all that would steal it from you.

4. (4:16) "Let us... with boldness."

False fear, timidity, uncertainty, or any member of that large family of Doubt, will keep us away if possible. The Throne of Grace is there. The Blood has opened the way. The High Priest in all sympathy holds out God's hand to take yours. Why be hesitant, doubtful, wavering? Staying away means only to be more and more involved in despondency and Satan's accusations. Make the bold plunge of faith in God's mercy and love; give Him credit for meaning what He says, and "draw near".

B. The Development of Consecration

1. (6:1) "Let us go on..."

The real value of this exhortation is found in the implication of the Greek word used. It is the same word as in Acts 2:2 ("rushing") and II Peter 1:21 ("moved"). It really means to be borne along by another. This would indicate that God is moving on, the Spirit of God is going forward. He is not tarrying or delaying, but with great energy is pursuing His goal. Let us fall in with Him. Let us be caught in His goings. Let us yield to His energies. Let us not be left behind by the Lord. "Full-growth" is His goal; let us not remain infants or immature.

2. (10:22) "Let us draw nigh."

This is not the same as No. 4 above. That was a matter of adjustment of ourselves to being received. This is unto communion following the adjustment. In the one we need not, and must not, stand without, asking whether, peradventure, we dare approach. In the other, we should not come with reserves that will keep us from entering positively into the communion that is there for us.

3. (10:23) "Let us hold fast."

Again, this is not the same as No. 3 above. That was taking hold, taking a firm grip. This is maintaining our hold. It is a matter of tenacity as to "our hope," "that it waver not." This goes right to the root cause of this whole letter. It is a costly and difficult way. It is "outside the camp, bearing His reproach." We made a confession. Perhaps we weakened. Having tightened our grip, let us not weaken again, but be pertinacious.

4. (10:24) "Let us consider one another." Rather "study" one another, with a view to

(a) Emulating the good in one another.

(b) Inciting one another to good; to love and good works.

In short, let us take account of one another with a view to positively helping one another toward the goal - not to noting one another's faults and defects and so retarding their progress and our own.

C. The Characteristics Of Consecration

Having made his appeal for renewed consecration, and having shown what consecration is, by the same phrase - "Let us" - the writer proceeds to a series of exhortations which indicate the kind of person a really consecrated person will be; what is necessary as characterizing such an one.

1. (12:1) "Let us lay aside."

If we really mean business in relation to this "heavenly calling" (3:1) we must and shall look at everything from the standpoint of whether it is positive or negative as relating thereto. Does this thing help? If not it must go. For it to hinder, or retard, or make heavy going is its condemnation. The course must be as clear as we can make it, and anything or anyone not in the real business, but just obstructing or loitering, must be pushed aside. This will apply to 'the luggage of life'; it will apply to distractions and diversions; it will also apply to discouragements and disheartenments. There is no place for temperamentalism and moodiness in this race, and the easily-besetting sin of doubt and mistrust will bring the pilgrim quickly to the Slough of Despond.

2. (12: 1) "Let us run."

Not talk about consecration; not be interested in it; not be merely a member of the 'Consecration Committee'; not be an expert in the technique of athletics, knowing about running and runners, courses, rules, outfit, and prizes; but "Let us run," let us do it. How many know all the teaching and doctrine of consecration who are slow starters, or poor runners, always needing to be urged, encouraged, get refreshments, or have a rest! Let us get on with it, and "with patience." Keep on with it.

3. (12:28) "Let us have (or take) grace whereby we may serve..."

Here the Greek word for serve suggests that it is return for something received. Grace is a great blessing and benefit. The grace which has called us with such a "heavenly calling," into such a 'partnership' (3:1) surely creates a responsibility born of indebtedness. Let us take this grace with grateful hearts and prove our sense of indebtedness by service.

4. (13:13) "Let us go forth unto Him without the camp."

In appreciation of the supreme greatness of Christ and of the grace bestowed upon us, let us show that we are not ashamed of Him, but rather are prepared to suffer with Him and share His reproach. If we are really consecrated to Christ we shall be glad to stand by Him while and where He and His fullest interests are excluded, even from the Christian-Judaistic system which is more for itself than for Him.

5. (13:15) "Let us offer up a sacrifice of praise continually."

This is the topstone, the crown, of consecration. Reproach and rejection, yes, and all else involved; but is He worth it? Will the end justify it? Sonship, dominion, partnership with Christ crowned with glory and honour, God's House for ever; these are the things held up to view in this letter. If we have really seen Him, and what partnership with Him means, so that we are abandoned to Him, we shall be in that priestly course of singers which - in David's constituting - never ceased. This letter is so largely on the line of the House and the Priesthood and the Sacrifice, so that it is not surprising that it should end on the "twenty four courses of the singers" by implication - a course for the whole circuit of the sun, day and night. "A sacrifice of praise continually," or "a sacrifice of perpetual praise."

Thus fourteen times in this letter the appeal is made against any and every failure to be always characterized by an active outreach after God's fullest thought for His people. The spirit of Caleb is so apropos to it all; he "wholly followed the Lord," and at an advanced age requested hill country and a mountain to prove that he was still of that mind, and that the Lord honours such with supplies of spiritual vitality. He had seen that God had made known what was His mind for His people and that was what mattered. He - Caleb - would not accept anything less. He would not talk about that being 'the ideal, but

quite impracticable,' or 'the state of things being what it is - in ruins - we must accept it, and make the best of a bad job.' Any such talk would be to Caleb treachery or betrayal: disloyalty to the Lord: an admission that God had intended something, but it had proved unworkable and must be scrapped for something less. The mind of Caleb was that; the majority might take the other attitude, but until God gave another and modified revelation of His purpose, though he were the only one to "go on" he was going on. This attitude, spirit, and activity God fully honoured, and not only did Caleb inherit, but Judah came into their inheritance because of his faithfulness. And Judah stands for something in the Divine thought!

While "Hebrews" and "Ephesians" still remain a part of the Bible, that is what God means for His people, even if but a comparatively few "go on". It can only mean serious and grievous loss to take any other attitude. Hence with the repeated "Let us" the writer links a repeated warning note "Lest". The nine occurrences of this warning note are worth considering. They cover every form of possible cause of failure - from the lack of alertness necessary to grasp the mooring as the vessel is carried by the current either out to sea or onto the rocks, to a definite hardening of heart against the appeal "Today, if ye shall hear His voice". This last is an appeal to Christians, not here to the unsaved as it is almost exclusively used by preachers.

All this, then, brings us back to our starting point - the implications of this letter - and should cause us to examine modern Christianity and our own position to see if it is a set system, a tradition, an inheritance; or whether it is really - and now - bringing to the Land and the goal, the fullness of Christ.

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