

The Triumph of Righteousness

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of righteousness, meekness, and dependence in overcoming the kingdom of Satan and establishing the kingdom of God.

Scripture: Psalm 45:1-7, Isaiah 61:1, Matthew 11:29, Matthew 28:20, Acts 3:14, Philippians 2:5, Colossians 1:13, Hebrews 1:8-9, Hebrews 13:5, Revelation 12:11

Topics: "Righteousness", "Spiritual Authority"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the triumph of righteousness over sin, illustrating the cosmic conflict between the kingdoms of God and Satan. He explains that the kingdom of God is characterized by righteousness, meekness, and yieldedness, contrasting it with the pride and possessiveness of Satan's kingdom. The sermon highlights that true power and authority come from a nature aligned with God, and that the embodiment of righteousness is found in Christ, who exemplifies meekness and obedience. Ultimately, the victory of righteousness leads to life and the establishment of God's kingdom within believers, calling them to reflect Christ's nature in their lives.

Transcript

"My heart overfloweth with a goodly matter; I speak the things which I have made touching the king: my tongue is the pen of a ready writer. Thou art fairer than the children of men; grace is poured into thy lips; therefore God hath blessed thee for ever. Gird thy sword upon thy thigh, O mighty one, thy glory and thy majesty. And in thy majesty ride on prosperously, because of truth and meekness and righteousness: and thy right hand shall teach thee terrible things. Thine arrows are sharp; the peoples fall under thee; they are in the heart of the king's enemies. Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever: a sceptre of equity is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated wickedness: therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows" (Psa. 45:1-7).

"...but of the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is forever and ever; and the sceptre of uprightness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows" (Heb. 1:8-9).

Into those two fragments of Scripture a great amount is gathered. In our previous meditation, we saw something, if it were but a little, of the meaning of the Cross of our Lord Jesus, and what judgment means. Now we move to the other aspect of the Cross, and come to the ground of righteousness. Sin unto judgment has so far held our attention; now, righteousness.

The Conflict Between Two Kingdoms

But may I just say here once more, for the sake of the setting of everything, that what we are seeking to see in these meditations is that the cosmic conflict between the two great kingdoms, the kingdom of Satan and the kingdom of God, of darkness and light, of death and life, is heading up in a very intense and comprehensive way at this time unto the end, and that the Lord's people everywhere are involved; and in a very real sense the conflict rests upon them for its issue. The Church is the eternally chosen instrument and vessel in and through which the absolute supremacy of the Lord Jesus is to be manifested and administered. Unto that a deep spiritual preparation has to be made on very practical grounds and along very practical lines, for these kingdoms are not just systems set up in an objective, external way. They are not political; they are not economic; they are not earthly in any sense. They are spiritual; and the very essence of their nature and strength and existence is a spiritual state, and that state is found within the very constitution of those who belong to the two kingdoms respectively. We have sought to see that the kingdom of Satan is really within man by nature. It is there in man's own nature that Satan now has his strength. On the other hand, the kingdom of the heavens is an inward thing. It is within you, and it is therefore a matter of inward constitution. Therefore one thing which arises for us is as to whether this kingdom, the kingdom of the heavens within the life of the people of God, is really going to manifest and express its supremacy, its ascendancy; and that is what we are called unto, and that is really the challenge of these meditations.

A Kingdom Ruled in Righteousness

Now we shall pursue that in an inward way again - as to what it means; but this time, on the side of righteousness. You notice that we read, "Of the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God." Do not draw mechanical lines between the kingdom of the Son of God's love and the kingdom of God. It is the same thing in meaning and value and effect. "Delivered us out of the power (authority) of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love" (Col. 1:13). What kingdom is that? "Thy throne, O God," He saith of the Son, "is forever and ever" - an everlasting kingdom: the same phrase as is used in the Old Testament of the kingdom of the Most High God (Dan. 4:23). "The sceptre of uprightness is the sceptre of thy kingdom. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity; therefore God, thy God, hath anointed thee...."

Righteousness the Expression of The Righteous One

Now, if the kingdom of Satan is based upon sin, and if sin is what we have said it is - rebellion, perversity, with all its outworking: pride: self in all its forms; unto enmity against God, separation from God, and utter impotence and helplessness to redeem itself - if that is the basis of the kingdom of Satan, then the kingdom of God is based on righteousness; that is, upon that which is exactly the opposite of sin. If Satan is the embodiment of sin, then Christ must be the embodiment of righteousness, when rightly understood. The point is that it is something personal, not abstract or something in itself. Do not talk about sin as some abstract thing. Sin is the expression of a person. Satan is sin, and all that emanates from him is sin. In like manner, Christ is righteousness, and the righteousness which is of God is Christ, Who is made unto us from God righteousness (1 Cor. 1:30). He is "the Righteous One" (Acts 3:14). It is personal. We need to say that and emphasize it, so that we shall not get any kind of mentality that we are dealing with things. We are dealing ultimately with persons, and therefore with kingdoms. On both sides it resolves itself into 'Who?' not 'What?' Who is going to have the kingdom?

Now if 'kingdom' suggests dominion, authority, power - as, of course, it does - then dominion, authority, power, rest upon and spring from a nature. They are not official, exercised and asserted by an appointment. They spring from the nature of the person or persons concerned; that is, you and I will know no more of Divine power than we know of Divine nature, of Divine likeness. Our spiritual power, dominion, authority over the power of the enemy, depend upon nothing other than our nearness to God and our likeness to Him. Any system of teaching about authority which takes up a certain kind of phraseology and begins to throw about phrases at the enemy without a deep knowledge of the basis of authority is a most dangerous and pernicious thing, and will involve all concerned in inevitable trouble from which it will not be easy to extricate them. This is not just a statement of ideas, this is fact. Some of us have seen the devil make awful havoc of people who stood up talking about Satan being a defeated foe, and throwing at him phrases from the Bible. The end of that has been scattering and shattering. But that does not mean that there is no such thing as authority over the enemy. What I am trying to emphasize is that it is necessary to know the basis of authority, and that basis is what is here meant by righteousness.

Features of the Righteous One

(a) Meekness

So then, in coming to the nature of the Kingdom which is founded upon righteousness, we see how opposite it is in all its features to the kingdom of Satan. In the latter, as we have seen, pride is the starting point, the first feature of revolt, rebellion, and the long history of perversity. "Thy heart was lifted up because of thy beauty" (Eze. 28:17). Therefore the kingdom of God, the kingdom of the Son of God's love, must have at its very foundation the opposite of pride, which is meekness; and I would call your attention to the large place that the matter of meekness has in the Word of God, in both the Old Testament and the New. Let me give you but a little handful of references, which will make many others spring up in your mind immediately.

"The meek will he guide in justice; and the meek will he teach his way" (Psa. 25:9).

"The meek shall inherit the land" (Psa. 37:11).

"The Lord upholdeth the meek" (Psa. 147:6).

"He will beautify the meek with salvation" (Psa. 149:4).

"(He shall) decide with equity for the meek of the earth" (Isa. 11:4).

"The Lord... hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek" (Isa. 61:1).

All that leads us to the One Who was the full embodiment of that feature. "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matt. 11:29). To Jerusalem the prophetic utterance was made, "Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and riding upon an ass" (Matt. 21:5). And Peter speaks of this as of great preciousness when he says, "Whose adorning... let it be... a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (1 Pet.3:4). Paul said, I Paul myself entreat you by the meekness... of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:1). To the church to which, through him, had just been given that immense and incomprehensible revelation of the foreordination, the predestination, the election of the Church in Christ before the foundation of the world, and of the object for which those Divine counsels chose it - to the church to which had just been given that matchless unfolding of the Church's eternal calling and heavenly vocation and resources, he comes right down, so to speak, from that high pinnacle and says, "Walk

worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called, with all... meekness" (Eph. 4:1-2): 'Do not let all this result in spiritual pride.' What is the way of the realisation of it all? By self-assertiveness? no - "all lowliness and meekness."

These fragments, surely, are sufficient to bring us right up against this fact, that power over the whole power of Satan is found centred in the first place in meekness. It says that all that mighty power of sin, all that mighty kingdom which Satan has set up, into which he has drawn all the sons of men by nature - his kingdom is to be undone by meekness; that meekness is a greater power than that.

(b) Yieldedness and Obedience

We use another word here in this connection - yieldedness. The actual word does not occur often in the Scriptures, but what it means fills the Scriptures. We saw that in Lucifer's rebellion, and then in the great betrayal of Adam into his hands, the thing which influenced and governed the enemy and Adam was possessiveness, drawing to self - 'I will, I will, I will' and all Satan's force was bent upon having and holding and not letting go; so his kingdom stands upon that. Does that need any argument? Look abroad today - the grab, the acquisitiveness, the stretching out of the hand to have, to take, to hold, to dominate by possession. Over against that is the kingdom of God, which is the kingdom of the Son of God's love, and the characteristic of Christ and of His kingdom is yieldedness.

It is again a significant and impressive thing that in the letter to the Philippians this matter of yieldedness arises, though unfortunately the actual word itself is not used in our translation. We know what that letter contains. Euodia and Syntyche were evidently standing for their own rights. Somehow or other, they had got across one another. One of them perhaps had been the offender, and the other was standing to have her own rights established. 'You must apologize to me, you must ask my forgiveness, you must restore what you have taken from me.'

Then, as his means and method of meeting a situation like that (which you might think is, after all, only a little private quarrel between two people; why make so much of it?) Paul brings in the greatest argument that it is possible to find. By implication he goes right back, before this world was, to that scene we have depicted earlier, where the covering cherub, walking up and down midst the stones of fire, the most glorious created being, next to the very throne of God, said, "I..." and all the mischief started.

And in Euodia and Syntyche, two people on this earth, away there in Philippi, the very same thing is being expressed. Here is division because of pride and personal interest and personal possessiveness. It is exactly the same thing, and it divides. So the Apostle appeals. He says, 'Because in principle it is the same thing and therefore in outworking it will have the same effect of rending the Church, see how it has been dealt with and adjust yourselves. There was One Whose right it was to be equal with God; He did not grasp at that equality, He emptied Himself, became obedient unto death, yea, the death of the Cross.'

In our previous meditation we saw something of what that means - obedient for the sake of rescuing this disintegrated universe from the thralldom of Satan. Because of that principle of possessiveness at work, the Father asked the Son, 'Will you be made sin? Will you allow all the consequences of that evil to be laid upon you to the extent that the great divide takes place between you and myself, and you go out into the land of forgetfulness, far, far from me, where you will cry and not be heard?' - and much more than that.

And, He became obedient. He said, 'Yes, I will!'; and He died of a broken heart because of all that. Paul says to Euodia and Syntyche, two people on this earth - 'That is the range of this situation between you,

that is the significance of it; this thing has got to come to its right relationship and focus.' "I exhort Euodia, and I exhort Syntyche, to be of the same mind in the Lord." "Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5). 'Yield! The devil is in this; he has a foothold here and is aiming through you two to disrupt the very Church of God, to do here what he did in heaven long ago, and what he has done on earth all through the centuries.

It is the kingdom of Satan that is here. The only way to undo it is by yieldedness.' So (keeping in mind that setting) a little later in the letter the Apostle says, "Let your forbearance (yieldedness) be known unto all men." The translation in the Authorized Version - 'moderation' - is unfortunate and weak. "Let your yieldedness be known unto all men." The Lord Jesus was the great Master of the art of letting go. There is a sense in which His whole life on this earth was a life of letting go.

Men and Satan offered Him a kingdom; He let it go. All the time He knew how to let go; in that way He came to possess. "Thou hast... hated iniquity." goes to the heart of the whole thing. "Therefore God... hath anointed thee." 'You have the Kingdom because You let go.'

He was "as a lamb that is led to the slaughter" (Isa. 53:7). There can be no more perfect picture of yieldedness. "As a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth." You remember that when He was before His accusers, before those who were to slay Him, they did everything they could to get Him to open His mouth in self-defence, but "he gave... no answer, not even to one word" (Matt. 27:14). That was yieldedness. But oh, that we knew something more of the power of yieldedness, the spiritual power of that kind of thing! We ought to dwell upon it long, we ought to search our hearts. We are not naturally made that way. We are very ready to give a back answer, to justify ourselves, to vindicate ourselves, to stand for our rights, to take offence, to be very upset if in any way our interests are challenged or cut across. Yes, in the bus, in the train, when things do not go easily and people do not treat us as we think they ought to treat us, we are up in a moment. It is so easy to be caught; the spirit of meekness is not always there. We have a lot to learn.

Now again, it is not a matter of introspective self-examination and analysis. It is a matter of knowing what is the meaning of having the Spirit of Jesus resident within us in order to make us Christlike; and the thing to be kept in view is not only our need of being Christlike but the reason for that need, namely, that there is a great kingdom to be overthrown. Yieldedness is the way to it.

And, yieldedness includes and issues in obedience - the opposite of rebellion. In view of what we have been saying, I do not think we need dwell in more detail upon this; but it is well that we ponder the specific statement that concludes and crowns the declaration concerning the yieldedness of the Lord Jesus - "becoming obedient even unto death... Wherefore also God highly exalted him" (Phil. 2:8,9).

(c) Dependence

Then dependence; the opposite of independence, with all its many forms of outworking, of which we were speaking earlier - either throwing God over altogether, seeking to realise our destiny without calling upon Him, or through the various less blatant expressions of independence on to the place where even the sanctified man begins to show signs of spiritual pride because the Lord blesses him. It is so easy to assume that, because He has blessed, a step taken can be repeated without the need for going back to the Lord and saying, 'Lord, even though the last hour was a mighty hour, nothing can be for the next hour unless it comes from Thee.' That subtle movement, the taking of a second step because the first one has been blessed, springs from spiritual pride - presumption.

Look at the Lord Jesus. If there is one thing that stands right out as you follow Him in those years here on the earth, it is this matter of His dependence upon the Father. "The Son can do nothing of himself" (John 5:19). Very often you can almost feel Him waiting, poised, suspended between doing and not doing, going and not going, with constraints and influences being brought to bear upon Him to cause Him to act. You recall His mother's words, "They have no wine" (John 2:3), with their suggestion of an opportunity for Him to save from embarrassment in a very unhappy situation, to do something quite kind. But He is for the moment poised. "Mine hour is not yet come." He cannot, He will not do it simply at her suggestion. His brethren urged Him to go up to Jerusalem at the time of the feast of tabernacles, but His answer was "Go ye up unto the feast; I go not up unto this feast" (John 7:1-10). Then, when they were gone up, He Himself went up. All through His life it was like that. Not because other people did it, not because it was the recognized thing to do, not because of any consideration, sentimental or otherwise, did He act in any matter. It was - 'Father, do You want this?' He would not act apart from the Father. He was absolutely dependent on the Father. Was not Satan's kingdom overthrown in that way?

Were not many of these things all of a piece with that threefold temptation in the wilderness? - "Command that these stones become bread"; "Cast thyself down"; "...if thou wilt fall down and worship me" (Matt. 4:3,5,9). What is behind it? - 'Act on your own initiative, do something out from yourself, take the matter into your own hands!' But He refused, knowing that He had been committed to the Father and that He was the Father's bond-slave. "Behold, my servant" (Isa. 42:1). This was dependence indeed.

Now our whole being revolts naturally against the idea of dependence. Our pride will not let us be dependent; we are independent by nature. Yes, that is the poison of Satan in us. If that comes into the spiritual realm, it is in principle the kingdom of Satan coming into the kingdom of God.

But dependence is the way of power. Why? - because it is the way along which the Lord comes. It is the meek, the dependent, to whom the Lord looks. "To this man will I look..." (Isa. 66:2). Power results from having the Lord with us. We may presume and assume and go on with some activity, but what is the good if the Lord is not with us?

(d) Selflessness Born of Love

All this is summed up in selflessness, which is not simply negative - self-abnegation, the cessation of desire, such as is seen in Buddhism. Selflessness is the fruit of love, and love is a very positive thing. Why did the Lord Jesus take that position and hold to it and fight out that battle right to the end, even to great drops of blood, against all the pressure brought upon Him from the spiritual world? Why did He say, "Not my will, but thine, be done"? Why? Because of His love for His Father. Love was the positive factor, and selflessness is positive when it comes into this realm. It is love, the love of Christ constraining. When love comes in, self goes out. So we are not going to take the negative side in this matter; we are going to ask the Lord to fill us with His love, and self will go out. Those two things can never hold the throne together. Selflessness - that is how love shows itself; that is the fruit of love.

The Effects of Sin Negated by Righteousness

What is the result of all this meekness, yieldedness, obedience, dependence, selflessness? Well, just the opposite of what sin was on the other side. Sin was enmity against God; the result here is love, the love of God in Christ shed abroad in our hearts, destroying the enmity. Sin put at a distance; this nature of Christ brings nearness and likeness to God. Instead of impotence comes power with God and the power of God.

The Issue of Righteousness - Life

Now if you turn to the book of the Revelation - where all things in the Bible are brought to a consummate expression - you find there that the end of movements in the cosmos is the hurling from his height of "the dragon, the old serpent, which is the Devil and Satan"; hurled down at last, with all his, to his destruction; and then the coming down out of heaven of the New Jerusalem to take his place. But how has it come about? "The Lamb shall overcome..." (Rev. 17:14). John at one point said he saw in the vision a book sealed with seven seals and he heard a voice saying, "Who is worthy to open the book...?" and there was none found to open it. And he said, "I wept much, because no one was found worthy to open the book." But the angel said, "Weep not; behold, the Lion that is of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, hath overcome to open the book." And John turned to see this Lion, and being turned, he beheld "a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain" (Rev. 5:1-6). You are familiar with that. A Lion? - power, majesty, dominion? Yes, all that. Where? - "a Lamb... as though it had been slain"; a slain Lamb, the embodiment of all the features of the Lion of the tribe of Judah. "And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 12:11). Oh, there is spiritual meaning in all that! It ought to find us out, it ought to pierce our hearts! How shall the enemy be overthrown? How shall his kingdom be destroyed? By the nature of the Lamb being so developed in us, the people of God, that all that other kingdom of Satan is undone in principle. And the power of this kingdom, which is an everlasting kingdom, is the power of the nature of Him of Whom it is said, "Thy kingdom..." It is His nature. "Thou hast loved righteousness and hated iniquity; therefore..." And this is life triumphant over death; and when the Lamb has made war and has prevailed, and the Church has come into the good of that in fellowship with Him because of the blood of the Lamb, because of the word of their testimony, having loved not their own lives unto the death, then the way is opened for the final scene - the new Jerusalem; and from the midst of the city issues the river, the water of life. That is life!

What is life? It is letting go to God; it is meekness; it is all this that we have been speaking of; it is Christ, the Life. We are not dealing with things - although there may well be a very literal side to all this and it is not simply all principles and abstract ideas; yet behind all else there are spiritual features. We are not thinking of going to heaven until heaven has come to us. We are not thinking of going to the Lord till the Lord has come to us. We are not thinking of a kingdom which is going to be given to us until that kingdom has already been constituted in us. All that depends upon what the Lord does inside us now and our intelligent co-operation with Him in what He is after.

The Kingdom Established Within by the Tests of Faith

Why is He treating us as He does? Why does He lead us through the experiences that we go through? Do you ever have the slightest sense that the Lord has left you? In spite of what we have said about Christ bearing all for us, do we not from time to time feel the Lord far away? Why? Oh, we have puzzled over that! He has said, "Lo, I am with you all the days, even unto the consummation of the age" (Matt. 28:20); "I will in no wise fail thee, neither will I in any wise forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5). 'Then where art Thou, Lord, today? Thou dost seem to be a thousand miles away today, I have no sense of Thy presence.' Why? just this; God's fact is that He is not far away. What about your faith in God's fact? Are you living on facts or feelings? by faith or by sight? - for everything has to be established by faith. Faith must rise up and say, 'Lord, Thou dost seem to be a thousand miles away today, but Thou art not, Thou art here, according to Thy promise. I repudiate the devil's suggestion that Thou hast left me, and that I have grieved the Holy Spirit and Thou hast forsaken me; I repudiate it on the ground of all that Thou hast done to bridge that gap by the Cross.' When faith thus asserts its position things are restored, the trouble is cleared up.

And as it is with that matter, so it is with all others. We are in the school, where we are to learn that we are not just living on the Bible in an objective way, and that there is a sense in which the Bible merely as a book cannot help us or do us any good. Somehow or other, there has to be something done between us and that which God has said, in order to make it real, and that is done through testing and trial; and thus the spiritual reality - the Kingdom - is established within us, and we learn to reign over that other kingdom. The Lord help us.

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