

The True Basis of Life for the Companions

by T. Austin-Sparks

Living a heavenly life means trusting in God's power and supernatural resources to overcome impossible situations and fulfill His purpose.

Scripture: Judges 7:7, John 10:18, Acts 7:20, Hebrews 3:1, Hebrews 4:14, Hebrews 6:4, Hebrews 8:1, Hebrews 9:23, Hebrews 11:16, Hebrews 12:23

Topics: "Faith in God", "Heavenly Calling"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of the words 'heavenly' and 'faith' in the Christian life, particularly as presented in the Letter to the Hebrews. He illustrates how God consistently places His people on a supernatural basis, demonstrating that true faith involves trusting in God's ability to accomplish the impossible, as seen through biblical figures like Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph. Sparks encourages young Christians to understand that living a heavenly life is not limited to the afterlife but is a present reality grounded in faith. He concludes that faith is the belief that heaven can do what no earthly power can achieve, urging believers to rely on divine resources in seemingly hopeless situations.

Transcript

At this time I want to try and help young Christians in relation to two words which are the great words of the Christian life: 'heavenly' and 'faith'. You will have noticed, if you know the Letter to the Hebrews at all, that these are two of the most prominent words in it.

This word 'heavenly', in its different forms, occurs quite a number of times in this Letter:

"Wherefore, holy brethren, companions of a heavenly calling" (Hebrews 3:1).

"Having then a great high priest, who hath passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God" (Hebrews 4:14).

"For as touching those who were once enlightened and tasted of the heavenly gift" (Hebrews 6:4).

"Now in the things which we are saying the chief point is this: We have such a high priest, who sat down on the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (Hebrews 8:1).

"Who serve that which is a copy and shadow of the heavenly things" (Hebrews 8:5).

"It was necessary therefore that the copies of the things in the heavens should be cleansed with these: but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these" (Hebrews 9:23).

"But now they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly" (Hebrews 11:16).

"To the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect" (Hebrews 12:23).

"Whose voice then shook the earth: but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more will I make to tremble not the earth only, but also the heaven" (Hebrews 12:26).

So, you see, the Letter has a lot to say about heavenly things, and here, in chapter three, it says that we are called in relation to these heavenly things. Our calling is a heavenly calling, unto a heavenly life: not after this life, but now.

I am not going to cite all the occurrences of the word 'faith'! It has a very large place in this Letter, and, as you know, one whole chapter is given up to faith - chapter eleven.

Here are these two words: 'heavenly' and 'faith', and they are very difficult words for young Christians to understand. If we say to young Christians: 'Now you are called to a life of faith', they may think of that in a very limited way: that they have to believe God, that God is able to save, that God is able to keep, that God is able to provide. That is all true, but we are going to see that it means much more than that. If we say to a young Christian: 'You are called now to live a heavenly life', I do not know what he or she would think! What a difficult idea that is! They would probably say: 'Well, how can we live a heavenly life when we have to live down here on this earth?'

Well, let us try to help such people, and everybody else. Let me say again that 'heavenly' and 'faith' are one thing.

We are going right back to the Old Testament for illustration, and I am going to use another big word. When God took up an instrument, in the form of a person or a people, He always put that instrument, that person, or that people, on a supernatural basis. He took every measure to see that the basis of their life was a supernatural one. He took them completely off a natural basis, and for them, if there was not the supernatural, there was nothing at all. They found it difficult, but it was in that way that they learned that they had come into relation with a supernatural God, a God who was altogether above the natural. So God created naturally impossible situations for these people and then, in solving the problem of the naturally impossible, He showed them what a great Lord He was.

Let us look at some illustrations. We will begin with Abraham - and he has a large place in this Letter to the Hebrews. Abraham was chosen by God for a very great purpose. We shall see more about that later, but let us be content with the simple statement of fact for the present. Abraham was called to be the father of a race which God was going to raise up and through which His Son, Jesus Christ, would come. God said to him: "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" (Genesis 22:18). Notice: 'In thy seed' - and then God went away and left him and did nothing more about it for a long time. God came back and repeated His promise, but by then Abraham was ninety years old and his wife was nearly as old - and yet God was saying: 'In thy seed'. An utterly impossible situation naturally! 'Impossible!' said Sarah, 'Altogether out of the question! We must do something about this.' And you know what they did. They tried to do God's work on natural lines. Sarah sent for her handmaid, Hagar, and they tried to fulfil God's

promise in that natural way. But those of us who know our Bibles know quite well that that was not God's way, and He was having none of it. God kept to His own ground - supernatural ground. If this thing was ever to be, only God all-mighty could do it. No man nor woman could do it, and neither could both of them together. Only God could do it - and He did it! He put them on to supernatural ground. It was a big test of faith! It was not earthly ground, but heavenly ground. It was not natural ground, but the ground of faith. And that is how God did it.

That is our first illustration, and that runs right through the Bible.

We pass from Abraham and Isaac to Jacob. Jacob came into the birthright. He was intended by God to have it - that is, he was intended to be the next link in God's chain, the next step of God in the onward march of His eternal purpose, but Jacob took the thing into his own hands. In effect he said: 'I am going to do this.' So he deceived his parent and robbed his brother... but his whole little plan broke down. He had to leave home and go many miles away to his uncle, and for twenty years there was no sign of God going on with His purpose. When you come on to Jacob, at the end of that time you find a very disillusioned man and a man who is very much afraid of what is going to happen to him. He is making plans for his own safety when he meets with his brother - and then God meets him. You know the story of that night when God met Jacob, Jacob, had tried to realize God's intention on natural grounds, and God entirely destroyed those grounds. In that night Jacob came clearly to understand that if God was going to fulfil any purpose in his life, only He could do it. When God changed his name from Jacob to Israel He changed the man from the earthly to the heavenly, from the natural man to the man of faith, and then God went on with him. God could never go on with Jacob while he was resting upon his own natural ground. When God got him off that ground on to heavenly ground, then they could go on together.

We pass from Jacob, to Joseph. The story of Joseph is one of the most fascinating stories of the Old Testament! A lot of unkind things have been said about Joseph when he was a young man. Of course, it is usually the old people who do that! Joseph had some dreams, and, well, young men are allowed to have dreams! You perhaps remember the dreams: he dreamt that sun, moon and stars were bowing down to him, and other things were doing the same. Perhaps he did make a mistake when he told his dreams to his brothers. They were shrewd enough to see the point, and they interpreted the dreams as against themselves. They said: 'Are we going to bow down to you? You are our young brother. We will never bow down to you!'

Now, you can say what you like about Joseph's indiscretion, but those dreams became literally true. The day came when his brothers were cringing before him, trembling for their very lives. 'Oh, sir,' they said, 'have mercy upon us!' Those dreams became true. There was something of God in that, and I think that Joseph always had those dreams in his heart.

Joseph was going to come, in the will of God, to a high place, and to serve God in a great piece of work. It was no less than preserving alive the whole of God's chosen nation.

However, these brothers - well, they had a conference, and the point of their discussion was how they could get rid of this young brother of theirs. One of the brothers said: 'Let us kill him, and we will soak his coat in his own blood, send it back to our father and say that a wild beast has destroyed him.' Another brother said: 'No, don't let's kill him. Let us put him into a pit.' So they put him into a deep pit. It was just another way of killing him - to let him die there. They left him and went off. Then they saw some camels coming and a caravan passing across where they were. So they decided to take Joseph out of the pit and

sell him. Accordingly they sold him to these traders, who were going down to Egypt, and he was taken and sold in Egypt as a slave. Oh, wonderful sovereignty of God! Joseph had just got to get down to Egypt! God had ordained that he should go, for it was there that he was to do his great work of saving his nation. But Joseph never thought of that way of getting to Egypt!

However, he got there, and became the slave of a great man. We will not fill in all the details, but by the treachery of that man's wife, Joseph was put into a dungeon and was left there for years. Where were his dreams now? The whole situation was quite impossible - but God had made it so. This whole purpose could never be realized on natural grounds. It could only be realized on supernatural ground - and if ever a man was put on supernatural ground, that man was Joseph! But this transition from the earthly to the heavenly, from the natural to the life of faith, was a difficult passage. It was very hard on the flesh - and it always is! But the supernatural Lord did it. No one could ever say that Joseph did it, or put it down to a man. Only God could do it. It was on supernatural ground, on heavenly ground, not earthly. It was the way of faith and not of sight.

I suppose I ought to put in a very large section here on Israel. That nation, saved through Joseph was after many years found in slavery itself in Egypt. God had said to Abraham that they would be in Egypt as slaves for four hundred years, but that they would come out of that slavery. He would bring them out by a mighty hand. However, they were here in Egypt and things were going from bad to worse, and from worse to awful. The whole situation was as hopeless as it could be, and to make it as impossible as could be, Pharaoh decided to kill all the little boys that were born at that time. I need not tell you the rest of the story! "At that season", it says, "Moses was born" (Acts 7:20). Moses was born at that impossible time, and will you tell me that it was not a supernatural thing that he was preserved alive when all the boys were being massacred? It was on supernatural ground, not natural, on heavenly ground, not earthly. We only need just to pass our eye over the account of the deliverance of the people of Israel from Egypt - what we call the 'Exodus' - and, my, what a difficult situation it was! Pharaoh had employed all his resources to prevent those people from going out. There was nothing he had not used to make the exodus impossible, but God stepped in when the situation was at its darkest and brought them out with a strong hand, as He had said He would all those years before. The exodus was on supernatural ground.

The story of the forty years in the wilderness is the same. If you do not believe it was supernatural, go and try living in a wilderness for forty years! Go especially to that wilderness! I have passed over it a number of times in an aeroplane and I have said: 'How on earth could a nation live in this for forty years?' The answer was: they did not 'on earth' at all. They did it from heaven. God fed them and protected them from heaven. In every way it was a heavenly life. It was not natural: it was God. He had put that nation on to a supernatural basis.

We come to the end of that time and go on to Joshua. We know what he had to face! There were all those strong and very wicked nations in the land of Canaan, and Joshua had got to lead the people in, take possession of the land and drive out all those nations. Do you think that could have been done naturally? No, God took over and the people of Israel went in. They crossed the Jordan when it was overflowing all its banks, and they went over with dry feet. The rest of the story is known to you.

We pass on many years and come to the book of Judges. We will just take one illustration from that book. Israel was now being beset by other very strong nations and the time came when the Midianites, as many "as the sand which is upon the sea shore for multitude" (Judges 7:12), gathered around Israel. The situation was anything but easy! The Lord called Gideon and told him that he was to go out against this

combination of armies and that he would deliver Israel from them. Gideon said: 'This wants a big army', so he sent out to all Israel and got a very big army together - at least, it was what was called a big army then. He had twenty-two thousand men. But the Lord said to Gideon: 'You have too big an army. It is quite true that all these other enemies are many, many times more than your army, but your army is too big.' So Gideon put a test to them, and a great multitude went home and left him with a much smaller army. And the Lord said: 'They are still too many.' Surely He is moving Gideon on to heavenly ground! When God had finished with Gideon he had just three hundred men, and He said: "By the three hundred men... will I save you" (Judges 7:7) - and He did it.

Notice how He put Gideon on to heavenly, supernatural ground. It was a very testing thing for Gideon! Do you tell me that that was not faith? Faith and the heavenly go together.

Are you beginning to see the meaning of what is heavenly and what is faith? Faith is, that heaven can do what no man or men can do. Nothing is impossible to heaven in any circumstances or situation.

Well, that is not all. You remember that later Israel went into captivity in Babylon, and they were there for seventy years. At the end of that time they were in a very poor state, but when it was put to them that the time had come for them to return to their country the great majority said: 'No, it is impossible. It is no use going back there. The whole situation is hopeless. The land is in desolation and the city is destroyed. We have not got the heart for it.' But a remnant returned, and you know the details of how God came in for them in a sovereign way. He provided for them all that they needed and helped them in marvellous ways, so that they rebuilt the city and their temple and made their land productive again. But it was a supernatural thing. The majority vote was 'Impossible!' The minority believed God.

Where shall we stop? Let us leave the Old Testament and come to Him to whom all this was pointing - Jesus. It was all leading on to Him. God had promised to send His Son. The prophets were just full of the coming of the Messiah, but the ideas about the Messiah on the part of Israel were very natural ones: 'Of course, he will be a great ruler, a man with tremendous power. Everyone will gather to him. He will set up this wonderful kingdom of Israel and the Romans will be thrown out of our country.' That was their natural idea of their Messiah - but when He came there was no room for Him at His birth, and the ruling authority of that time started the old game of killing all the little boys, with the special object of getting his hands upon this one boy. The very survival of Jesus was a heavenly miracle! His birth was a heavenly thing, a supernatural thing, and the same was true of His life. How many times do we read: 'They took counsel that they might kill Him', and 'They took up stones to stone Him'? His fulfilling of His ministry was a heavenly thing. It was supernatural.

And what about His death? They took counsel to kill Him and decided they were going to do it. Then they said: 'We won't do it at the Passover. That will be the wrong time'... and God said: 'I have this matter in hand. It will be My matter and not yours. It will be on exactly the day that I choose, and that will be the day of the Passover.' Jesus said about His dying: "No man taketh it (My life) away from me, but I lay it down of myself. I have power to lay it down and I have power to take it again. This commandment received I from my Father" (John 10:18). He was saying that when it happened it would not be in man's hands, it would be in God's hands. And in spite of their decisions and their counsels, it was on the day of the Passover! It had to be. Many, many generations were involved in that. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ were supernatural - not of man, but of God.

I could go on from that to the Church. The whole history of the Church, from its beginning on the Day of Pentecost, is a miracle. It was persecuted in its early years and there were many massacres of Christians. The Roman Empire decided that Christianity must be wiped out from the earth, and at that time, and many times since, the Church has passed through very, very serious crises. But the Church of God marches on! It is still here and it is still growing. It is supernatural.

Now, why all this? This is not something which is peculiar to Abraham, Moses, Joshua and Gideon. It is not something which is limited to these men of the Old Testament. This Letter to the Hebrews is written to Christians. It is written for us, and it says that we are "holy brethren, companions of a heavenly calling". We are the companions of Christ, but God has put us on the same basis as that on which He always did put His people.

The older Christians know quite well from experience what I am talking about. How often in our history have situations arisen - not that we have brought about - which were quite impossible! We say: 'God allowed them.' Perhaps we ought to say: 'God appointed them.' God has put our lives on this basis, Our salvation is a supernatural thing or it is nothing! Poor Nicodemus, the man who could not see further than nature, with all his intelligence, said: "How can a man be born when he is old?" (John 3:4). Our new birth is a miracle, our sustenance in the Christian life, that is, being able to keep going, is a miracle; and our survival and our triumph in many and many an impossible situation are supernatural. And at last our translation to glory will be supernatural. You may die naturally, but you will not naturally rise again. That will be God's doing. And if it is going to be true that we share His glory, we, who know ourselves, would gladly say: 'That will be a miracle! A creature such as I am sharing the glory of Jesus Christ for all eternity! My, that will be supernatural!'

This is the meaning of faith - just that you believe that heaven can do what no one else can do. Faith is a very practical thing. A whole situation is naturally hopeless. What are we going to do about it? Are we going to give it all up and say: 'It is impossible. This is the end of everything. We are finished'? Or are we going to say: 'Yes, it is like that naturally, but God... but heaven...' Heaven is greater than earth and God is greater than all.

That is the message of this Letter to the Hebrews. I hope you understand a little better what it means to live a heavenly life. It is living on the resources that heaven has for us when all other resources have gone.

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