

The Waters of Jericho

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the significance of Jericho in the Bible, highlighting its representation of the power of Calvary's victory over the power of Satan working through the flesh, and the importance of faith in the power of the Cross.

Scripture: 2 Kings 2:19

Topics: "Victory in Christ", "Resurrection Life"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks explores the significance of Jericho in relation to the victory of Calvary, emphasizing that Jericho symbolizes the power of Satan working through the flesh and the necessity of faith in overcoming it. He illustrates how the conquest of Jericho represents the fullness of Christ's victory and the importance of recognizing our position in resurrection life, which allows us to rise above spiritual death and vanity. Sparks highlights that Elisha, as a type of Christ, embodies the power of resurrection and the authority given through anointing, enabling him to address the curse resting on the works energized by Satan. The sermon ultimately calls believers to live in the assurance of no condemnation and the hope of resurrection, as they are united with Christ in His victory over death.

Transcript

Reading: 2 Kings 2:19-22; Romans 8:20-25, 1-2, 6.

While Elisha tarried at Jericho the men of the city came to him concerning the state of the waters, and the effect of that state upon all the fruit of the land, in that it fell before its time, and never came to perfection.

It is necessary for us, in order to get the full significance and value of this incident, to pass our eye over the history of Jericho in relation to the Lord's people up to this time. We remember the first encounter with Jericho on the part of the people of God, when the possession of the land was before them, and with our knowledge of that history, and of its details, we are able without any delay to gather it all up, and to recognize exactly what it all represents.

1. The Inclusive Representation of Calvary's Victory Over the Power of Satan Working Through the Flesh

The word "inclusive" is intended to bring us back to the recognition of the fact that everything which followed in the land was represented in Jericho. Jericho was, so to speak, the sign and token of everything. It gathered into itself the complete conquest of the land. The giving of Jericho, and the manner

of the giving, to the people was God's token that He gave the whole land. We may call Jericho the firstfruits of the resurrection; and in the firstfruits the whole harvest is always gathered up representatively.

Seeing, then, that Jericho was the first issue of the crossing of Jordan, that is, the firstfruits of resurrection, you have everything that the Lord intends for His people, and which He has provided for them represented by Jericho. Thus Jericho is the inclusive representation of Calvary's victory, but of that victory as over the power of Satan operating through the flesh. For Jericho represents the strength of the flesh as energized by spiritual forces.

In studying Christ as the Inheritance of His people, the counterpart of the land of promise, we see that we only come into our heavenly position through conflict and conquest. The Ephesian position "in the heavenlies" is in relation to "principalities and powers, and world rulers of this darkness, and spiritual hosts of wickedness," and the fullness of Christ is only reached and maintained by warfare therewith. We know quite well that the instrument, the means of the forces of evil is the flesh as energized by them, and that Jordan most definitely represents, not merely victory over the enemy as the enemy, but victory over the enemy by the removal of his ground of advantage in the putting away of the body of the flesh. If it had been only a spiritual conflict, then it would have taken place altogether outside of the human realm, and man as such would not have been drawn into it. The incarnation, therefore, would have been without meaning. The spiritual forces of heaven could have met the spiritual forces of hell, and it would have been purely a spiritual conflict. But the fact that God was manifest in the flesh, to destroy the works of the devil, carries the battle into another realm, and shows that it is because the enemy has his power, and his advantage, through the flesh, that he must be destroyed in the flesh. The Lord Jesus took flesh, in order to destroy the works of the devil in flesh. So that Calvary's victory is over the power of Satan working through the flesh, and that is what Jericho represents.

Jericho

(a) Something Too Strong for Man

Here is something which is altogether beyond the power of man to deal with. When the spies went out in the first instance, the majority report was that the task was quite beyond their power. They saw cities great and walled up to heaven, and giants. Their report was that this was more than flesh and blood could contend with, an impossible proposition. And they were quite right, as far as they went. The trouble with them was that they did not leave room for the Lord.

The flesh is always that, and you have a parallel in the Letter to the Romans; for when you read chapter 7, before you reach chapter 8, you know that you are up against Satanically-energized flesh, and every attempt of man to deal with that leads to the cry: "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" The whole of chapter 7 is a prolonged groan in the utter inability to deal with the flesh - "But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind"; "The good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do." That is flesh, not in the passive sense, but energized by an active law of sin and death, governed, of course, by the intelligent forces of evil. There is always that extra factor, and that extra factor is clearly recognized, inasmuch as the flesh has an uncanny way of trapping us just at the moment when we do not want it to, when it is least of all convenient for us to be caught by it. The whole thing is timed and planned with an intelligence that is uncanny, subtle, and watchful and is all related to other issues which are Divine, to frustrate them. It is not flesh that is just working automatically. It is a flesh that is energized by an intelligence. Jericho, then, speaks of Calvary's

all-inclusive victory over the power of Satan operating through the flesh; something more than man can deal with.

(b) Fullness as Represented by "Seven"

The Lord commanded that the people should go round Jericho once a day for six days, and that on the seventh day they should go round seven times. "Seven" is always the number of completeness, comprehensiveness, spiritual perfection, so that in the very going round seven times is the Lord's illustrative way of saying that this thing represents the fullness and the conclusiveness of conquest.

(c) Achan

Further, the Achan factor is significant. There were two things connected with Achan's sin, or which were the forms of expression which that sin took. There was the wedge of gold, and the Babylonish garment.

The wedge of gold incidentally is of interest, inasmuch as it has been discovered that wedges of gold, not coins, formed the currency of that part of the world at that time. Business was transacted, and payments were made in this way, and, in a word, credit hung upon these wedges of gold. It was one of those wedges of gold representing the commercial values of this world which Achan took.

The Babylonish garment, on the other hand, is a foreign element, which has proved to have been a link with a religious system, the Babylonish religious system; for that Babylonish garment was nothing other than something connected with the system of worship in Babylon. It might have been a garment of a priestess.

The gold was claimed by Jehovah. When the city was taken it was commanded that the gold should be devoted to the Lord for His purposes; that is, the Lord laid claim to the gold, and all the gold was the Lord's property, the Lord's by right. Achan, therefore, appropriated what belonged to the Lord, and sought to turn it to his own account. That is what the flesh always does. The flesh always takes to itself the glory that belongs to the Lord. The flesh is always taking God's rights from Him. The flesh is always putting itself in the place of the Lord.

As to the Babylonish garment: that was a part of the whole system of things which was to be utterly destroyed from the Lord, and it represented a spiritual order which was in antagonism to God, a worship which was energized by the god of this world, his religious system, in usurping God's place as God; and that whole system, with every accompaniment, every feature, was to be utterly destroyed. But Achan preserved something which was a representation of a spiritual antagonism to God as the only God, so that Achan's sin was a very deep sin.

You see how inclusive Jericho was, in that its every feature foreshadowed, or represented, what the conquest of the land was to be. The judgment of Achan's sin showed that God had first rights, and the flesh must not appropriate what belongs to God, must not take God's place. It showed that the land represents a false spiritual system which had to be blotted out, and not one fragment of it left to survive. When Achan took the Babylonish garment he was violating a law which had to govern the conquest of the land, and he became the enemy's instrument of breaking into the Divine order, so that Jericho gathered up everything through the whole land. We are told in the Book of the Acts that the Lord cast out seven nations greater than Israel. The "seven" of Jericho is symbolic of the seven nations which are to be destroyed, and they are virtually destroyed in Jericho.

Thus you have the flesh as energized by Satan, and Calvary's inclusive victory over the whole. That is what Jericho speaks of to begin with.

2. The Omnipotence of Faith in the Power of the Cross

It was all the work of faith. The going round once a day was a work of faith, so that day by day this march took place, and nothing seemed to be accomplished, no day seemed to close any nearer the ultimate issue than it commenced. At the end of six days, so far as any kind of human judgment could tell, nothing had been accomplished at all; they were no nearer conquest than they were when they started six days before. And then on the seventh day round they went, once, twice, thrice, four times, five times, six times, and no sign of anything happening. Faith is being drawn out to finality, to fullness of the seventh degree, the spiritual perfection of faith. And then, when faith has reached that point of completeness, it has to be expressed, has to be given a voice and a shout in the presence of a very great deal that would argue that it is all nonsense, all in vain, all foolishness. It would seem that there had been built up a tremendous amount of evidence that this whole thing is futile. And then in the presence of all that evidence, faith is called upon to shout victory. Faith is drawn out, extended, faith in the infinite value of the work of the Cross over all the power of the enemy. When faith reaches that point God comes in and vindicates Calvary. It is the omnipotence of faith in the power of the Cross that is represented by Jericho.

3. The Curse Resting Upon All the Satan-Energized Works of Achan

Joshua cursed Jericho, and Jericho became the representation of the curse resting upon all the Satan-energized works of man. It is very important to see that a curse rests upon all the Satan-energized works of man. That takes us right back to the Garden, and holds good through history. The features of that curse are two-fold:

(a) Death

Here you have an illustration of what spiritual death is. So far from being a ceasing to exist, it is something which goes on with tremendous activity. Spiritual death has many works, many activities, many energies put forth, and yet is lacking a vital something which justifies all those activities in the long run. The waters of Jericho lacked that essential element. Men labored, men spent themselves in the field; they cultivated, they tended, they watched over. They were successful up to a point. The result of their labors was seen up to a degree, and then everything stopped, and from that point there was no further progress, it failed.

(b) Vanity

That is the nature of spiritual death. It is what Paul calls: "Vanity." It is work, labor, energy, but never going through to the fullness, to the finality, which God intended it to reach. Death and vanity! Vanity is the work of spiritual death. That is inevitably the nature of all works of the flesh, even though they be ostensibly for God. There will seem to be success up to a point, but no going beyond that; from that point no development. Yes, it is even possible in the flesh to produce something, to reach a certain point, and to have a certain measure of success, but if it is the activity of the flesh it gets just so far, and then fades out. It is the mark of a good deal that has been done in the Lord's Name. A great many activities have been entered into, a great deal of energy has been put into the work of God, a great deal of organized effort, and it looked as though there was a great result, and numbers have been noted, totals made, and reports given. And then years after, you come to look for the fruit, and where is it? A great measure of it has come to naught. The work was for God; it was with the best of motives, but it was produced by man. It got so far,

but it never went through. It is always so, and it is as important for the Lord's people to recognize that as it is for men out of Christ to know it. There is no possibility whatever of getting through on the level of the old creation. "The creation," Paul says, "was subjected to vanity." You cannot get away from that.

That is Jericho as you have it in the beginning. All that is carried over to Elisha. That history of Jericho is brought over to Elisha's day. It becomes necessary, therefore, for us to remind ourselves of what Elisha represents, and how he deals with this situation.

Elisha represents the power of resurrection. It is therefore significant that he has so much to do with death, and that the very first public thing that comes his way is his dealing with death along this line. He comes in in relation to the ascended Lord on resurrection ground.

Elisha's Roots Are in Jordan

All his beginnings were there. He stands, as it were, basically in Calvary, and that gives the main significance to his life and his ministry. He proved the power of victory over death when he took the mantle of Elijah, and smote the waters of the Jordan, and said: "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" and the waters parted hither and thither, and he passed over. He proved the power of his risen Lord in the waters of Jordan, and it was in that power that he proceeded. His roots were in Jordan. In other words, the very foundation of his life was the power of the Cross.

If Paul is pre-eminently the New Testament example of that, it is equally clear that Paul had his roots in the Cross. If there is one Apostle who knows more than any other Apostle about the power of the Cross, it is Paul. He has seen this universal, mighty victory in every realm, and therefore he is the Apostle of resurrection life in a peculiar way.

Elisha's Power Is in Resurrection

Let us point out one meaning of that in particular. His power in resurrection was of this nature, that because of resurrection position he stood entirely outside of, and superior to the situation with which he had to deal. Resurrection always means that we are outside of the world. After His resurrection the Lord Jesus never again appeared to the world. He never manifested Himself personally to the world after His resurrection. The resurrection means that He had passed, in that sense, out from the world and stood apart, and His power over the world was His apartness from it. His ability to deal with the situation is because He is no longer involved in the situation. Resurrection life means that we are outside of the world spiritually, and in a superior position.

Elisha, therefore, could move in scenes of death without in any way being overcome by them, but being superior to them all the time, and handling them with absolute authority because he was in no way a part of them. His power lay in that.

We have to learn how to live by the power of Christ's resurrection, so that the death around us is not able so to impinge upon us as to bring us into its grip. Resurrection union with the Lord Jesus means that we are not involved in the death that is all around us. We can move in scenes of death and not be touched by death. This is a very important lesson to learn, how to be in life in the midst of death.

Elisha's Authority Is in Anointing

He had received the Spirit. We know that there is something unique about Elisha. He was the only prophet who was ever anointed. Kings were anointed; priests were anointed; prophets were not anointed. But Elisha is unique, alone. The Lord told Elijah to anoint Elisha to take his place. That carries its own meaning, because Elisha is a successor. That means that Elijah and Elisha are one man in two parts.

Carry that to the New Testament, and the antitype is Christ as the Head, and the Church, His Body, under one anointing. The Church is simply the vessel of Christ on the earth for the carrying on of His work in the power of the anointing. The value, the power, of the anointing of Elisha was made good on the ascension of Elijah to heaven.

Elisha has his authority by reason of that anointing. Anointing always implies that God is committing Himself, so that the authority of God rests where the anointing is.

Look at the little incident of the ridiculing of Elisha when there came out (unfortunate translation in our Version) little children and mocked him, saying: "Go up, thou bald head." The original has no idea of little children at all. It is the word that is used for young men, and it is also used for hooligans. Evidently this was a considerable band, for forty of them were mauled by the bears. It was a large company of young men who were out to mock the Lord's servant in view of the ascension of Elijah, and were, in effect, saying: "Just as Elijah went up, you go up!" mocking the rapture. There are plenty of people who are mocking the thought of the rapture today. But the point for the moment is this, that Elisha there and then exercised the authority which was resting upon him, in a judicial way, and cursed them, and there came out bears and tore them, so that a large number suffered under judgment. It was the Divine authority that was with him that came out there so distinctly. His authority was from above on the ground of resurrection and through the anointing.

Elisha's Vessel Is a New Cruse

None of those things can be true of the old creation: roots in Jordan; power in resurrection; authority in anointing. The exercise of all that, the going forth of all that spiritual life demands a new cruse. The new cruse is the new creation in Christ Jesus, which stands in this position, in this relationship to the Lord, with its foundations in the Cross, its life in resurrection, its authority by the Holy Spirit.

Elisha's Means Is Salt

Salt is a symbol of that which is incorruptible, and which stands in its incorruptibility against corruption, against death, challenging and dominating. That is nothing other than the resurrection life of the Lord Jesus standing as a mighty challenge to death, to corruption.

All that is summed up in Elisha, and all that, as gathered up into this man, is brought to the waters of Jericho. Is it not very evident that this man is a type of the power of Christ's resurrection, of life triumphant over death?

There is the type so fully, so richly set forth. But what is the spiritual value and spiritual application for ourselves? We turn to Romans 8, and see it there quite clearly. In those later verses, verses 20 to 25, we have the spiritual background of the life of the whole creation. The Apostle there says that the creation itself was subjected to vanity. That is a Divine act. There was a time when, because of certain things, the creation was deliberately made subject to vanity; that is, God put upon it a ban which was of this nature, that the creation should never realize its full end except on one ground. So that the whole creation is in the

grip of that which means the impossibility of its reaching the end intended for it save only on one ground. The Apostle says that in parts of our being we are still involved in that. Our bodies are still involved in that. "We groan within ourselves, waiting for our adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body." But he says that the creation - and ourselves as involved in the creation - was subjected to vanity IN HOPE. It is not entirely hopeless, not WITHOUT hope. But where is the hope? If the Lord Jesus has in His own representative Person gathered up the whole creation - for all things were created by Him, and FOR Him - and this creation, because of its rebellion, has departed from the purposes for which it was brought into being; if the Father gave Him that creation, and now it has failed, will the Father rob Him forever of the gift? No! He will subject it to vanity in hope. Now the Lord Jesus takes the creation representatively in His Own Person, and as man enters vicariously INTO ITS STATE and goes as far as to have the very curse resting upon it, made to rest upon Him. The very thorns upon His brow are symbols of the thorns and the briars which sprang up immediately when God cursed the earth; and that curse is made typically to rest upon His Head. Then He dies as under the curse. The universal death is concentrated upon Him, and He dies as under a curse. When He is dead, where is the hope? Looking at Him naturally there is no hope; but God raised Him from the dead. That is where all the hope is. Paul says: "...in God which raiseth the dead." Christ raised from the dead is the hope, and the Firstfruits of resurrection. The hope is in Christ risen. The hope is resurrection in Christ.

Read again Paul's great chapter, the fifteenth chapter of his first letter to the Corinthians, and you have the classic on the subject of what resurrection means. If the dead rise not, we are of all men most miserable: our preaching is vain: your faith is vain: ye are yet in your sins, without God, and without hope. "But now hath Christ been raised from the dead, the Firstfruits of them that are asleep," and there is the hope.

Now note: Paul says we have the Firstfruits. Though that is true, there are still realms in our being that are under this regime of vanity; our body is still subject to death. We have not the full redemption yet, but we have the Firstfruits of the Spirit. We have resurrection life by the Spirit already in us. That is the Firstfruits of the Spirit, the ground of hope. And because we have resurrection life already dwelling within, we have the guarantee that our bodies also will be raised.

What is the present good of that? "There is therefore now no condemnation..." no judgment, no curse, no lying under the Divine ban. "There is therefore now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death." In the resurrection of the Lord Jesus we are delivered from the curse - that is, from the death which works vanity - and we have been brought into the place where we can go right through to the Divine end, the full realization that vanity no longer rests upon us. We are no longer held up; no longer in the position that we live and come to a point and that is the end, and we can go no further. We can go right on now! The fruit of life can come to perfection because the power of death in the curse has been canceled in the power of His resurrection. The condemnation has been removed.

Apart from the great condemnation resting upon all men out of Christ, is it not true that when we allow ourselves to come under a spirit of condemnation from the enemy there is brought about an instant arrest, so that we can go no further, but stop short, and everything in our lives becomes blighted, and the fruit begins to fall? It is the effect of condemnation. The enemy is always trying to get children of God back on to a ground of condemnation in order to reverse the Testimony of His resurrection, and to spoil the fruit of union with Him on resurrection ground. The people who are not absolutely certain and settled as to their being on the ground of Romans 8:1, are people who do not make very much progress; they get just so far, and there they stop, and their fruit falls before it ripens. That is to say, they are not people who can affirm

with certainty and finality that "there is... no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus" or, to go further, that "the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death." We have to live in the joy and the assurance of that, the certainty and the glory of that. The power of the enemy to spoil everything is destroyed when we see, that standing with our roots in the Cross of the Lord Jesus, and in the power of His resurrection, united with Him above by the Holy Spirit of anointing, we are no longer under condemnation, and there is no longer any reason whatever why we should not go right through to the fullness of Christ. When we recognize that, the enemy has lost his power.

We have pointed out before how great a change takes place between the verses that mark the close of chapter 7 and the opening of chapter 8 of the Letter to the Romans, and the same change is to be noted in this second chapter of this second book of the Kings. Romans 7 may be called the chapter of the waters of Jericho - in death and vanity by reason of the curse; and it is a painful chapter. No goal is reached: nothing gets through; everything comes to arrest - "O wretched man..." Chapter 8 opens the door to going right through in life. Why? Simply because chapter 7 is put in at this point by the Apostle to show the glory of chapter 8 as the outcome of chapter 6. Chapter 6 is Jordan. "For if we have become united with Him by the likeness of His death, we shall be also by the likeness of His resurrection"; "...our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away, that so we should no longer be in bondage to sin; for he that hath died is justified from sin. But if we died with Christ... we shall also live with Him; knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death no more hath dominion over Him." "Even so reckon ye also yourselves to be dead unto sin." Did Paul write what is termed chapter 7 at this point, in order to contradict all that, and to say that it is all theoretically true, but his own condition a complete denial of it? No! He writes chapter 7, to show what chapter 6 has dealt with. Chapter 7 is in fact the condition that has been dealt with by chapter 6. And then he says: Now you see, that condition having been dealt with, this is our true position because of chapter 6. - "There is therefore now no condemnation..."; "The law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus made me free from the law of sin and of death." You cannot have chapters 7 and 8 together. For example, "But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind..." ; "For the good that I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I do" alongside of "There is... no condemnation." Paul is simply saying that chapter 6 is God's way of dealing with what is found in chapter 7, resulting in chapter 8. It is the power of His resurrection opening a clear way through, so that this hedged-up man in the arena, dragging around a dead body, has got his escape from that no-way-out life, that no-way-through life, into the open way that leads to the fullness of Christ, because he is on resurrection ground.

Christ is the Firstfruits of them that are asleep, and we have the Firstfruits. Therefore, we are linked with Christ as the Firstfruits in resurrection. And the firstfruits are always taken as a guarantee that the whole harvest will follow. The whole harvest that is going to follow is going to be a wonderful harvest, and has as a part of it the redemption of our bodies.

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