

'Them That Have faith.' 'Now faith...'

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the profound nature of faith as the essential link between God's calling and the realization of His promises in the believer's life.

Scripture: Romans 4:3, Hebrews 2:10, Hebrews 5:9, Hebrews 5:14 - 6:1, Hebrews 7:19, Hebrews 11:1, Hebrews 11:40 - 12:2, Hebrews 12:23

Topics: "Faith", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that faith is the essential link between God's calling and the realization of His promises, as illustrated in Hebrews 11. He argues that true faith is tested by the believer's position in a spiritual age, where external validation is absent, and that the focus should be on spiritual growth rather than temporal achievements. The sermon highlights that the heroes of faith were not only defined by their actions but also by their ultimate goal of spiritual completeness in Christ. Sparks warns against the dangers of relying on external rituals and encourages believers to cultivate a deeper, inward faith that connects them to God. Ultimately, he concludes that faith is the assurance of things hoped for, leading to a complete inheritance in Christ.

Transcript

You will have read many books and heard many addresses on the classic Hebrews eleven: "The heroes of faith"; "The Roll-call of the Faithful"; and it is doubtful whether this chapter has ever been dealt with, in whole or in parts, without examples of and encouragement to faith being the point focused upon. And rightly so. But not often do we hear or read anything on it which makes the whole context of the letter the object. The chapter is usually taken in itself, with the first words of what follows often added.

What we desire to indicate here is that chapter 11 is really the Apostle's gathering up of his whole theme as he begins to round off his letter. He has presented Christ "crowned with glory and honour". God's Son in uniqueness of sonship; and then he has shown the Divine thought of securing and bringing to glory many sons, not sharing that uniqueness, but being made partakers of His incarnation and through "adoption," i.e., "child placing". He has shown that everything of God in this dispensation is of a spiritual and heavenly nature, and not temporal and earthly. He has urged that spiritual fullness in Christ is the goal of the believer's calling, and that it is terribly possible to fail of it, with grievous consequences.

Now, as to all this, and its values for God's people, he shows, by triumphant examples, that faith is the link between calling and destiny, between Divine thought and its realization.

The Supreme Feature Of The Life Of Faith

is that the people of God are tested by their position. There is no more testing position than that to which believers are called in this dispensation. God has not promised us anything on this earth in this dispensation which will be our vindication before men, the literal and material justification of our abandonment of all for Him. The nearer we get to the Divine thought the further away do we get from what can be "written up," pointed to, and advertized as the result of our work. Such things belong to the elementary stages of life, and God never prolongs them. His most abiding and solid work is underground where the sensation hunter cannot get at it, and where the publicity department will be hard put to it. If faith is really faith, and if the end times are to be more testing as to faith than any others (and the Scriptures say emphatically that it will be so) then there will be much less in the consummation of things to relieve faith by sight than at other times. But this principle holds good at all times when God is after something more than the superficial. The people mentioned in our chapter were all tested by their position. This is most clearly seen in Abraham and in Israel with Moses. God was there and then acting on the line of material responses to faith, but they were severely tested by the position in which they were placed by God's act.

This is a spiritual age, and it is that fact which constitutes the test which very few Christians are prepared to accept. If anything becomes big, or if it can be made so: if names of world fame and titles of worldly importance sponsor it, or if they can be persuaded to do so: how much is made of it all! How very gratified is that flesh when things appear to be going well! Yes, yes, we are still so much of this earth, and we have failed to see how very small the biggest thing here is when seen from even ten thousand feet up, to say nothing of God's throne and His spiritual measure.

What our writer is really saying is that real measure is that of faith, because the realm into which we are now called is one in which there is nothing apart from faith. The first stage is now of faith, and so is every subsequent increase. The whole dispensation is an immense advance upward in Divine thought, and sets the background for something much more inward than ever before. In the previous dispensations everything was outward and tangible - sacrifices, altars, meeting places, priests, vestments, feasts, rewards, etc.; but in this age all these things are gathered into the all-inclusive "In Christ," and are essentially spiritual aspects of the One Heavenly Man; to be known, enjoyed, and comprehended only by faith. The long generations of sentient gratification in religious things were in the very blood of these Hebrews, and they craved for the seen, the felt, the heard, the physical and emotional system of the past. Thus, all that is said from the beginning of the epistle is carried up to the most spiritual of all attributes - faith, which worketh by love.

The encumbering weights impeding the running in the race of chapter 12:1 are the legal aspects of external Law. The "sin which doth so easily beset" is doubt or unbelief, 'unfaith'; for "whatsoever is not of faith is sin".

Thus sin, in this letter, is resolved into a matter, not of morals, but of how much we reverse the nature of the dispensation by putting temporal elements and ideas in the place of spiritual. It may never have occurred to many that ritual, vestments, and ecclesiastical regalia and forms may be sin in this respect, that they undermine, supplant, or weaken the truly spiritual, and, rather than help faith, only act as crutches which keep people from having "their senses (spiritual faculties) exercised" (Heb. 5:14).

This leads on in the unbroken sequence of thought to what is - in our unfortunate, mechanical divisions of chapters - in chapter 12. Here the "fathers of our flesh," and the "Father of spirits" are compared. Childtraining ("chastening") unto "son receiving" (literally, "placing as sons") has to do with our spirits; not firstly with our bodies, or our souls. The spirit is the very new man himself with which God is linked by new birth. All God's paternal attentions are taken up with this "inner man of the heart". Spirit cannot really be fed with temporal things. The soul may be greatly stimulated by blessings in the temporal realm, but it is here that one of the most vital and far-reaching distinctions is made by the Word of God, and one most grievously overlooked by the vast majority of Christians; and especially is it the point of default by the majority of Christian leaders. It is thought that if there is much soul stimulation along the lines of emotion, feeling, and 'zeal' or enthusiasm: reason, argument, information to the mind: and action, work, drive, volition: this is essentially the mark of spiritual life. In the New Testament it is the other way round; there was a deep inward work of the Holy Spirit in those days, before the effects - the instruction or teaching, the zeal, and the works. To put the cart before the horse in this matter may be just Satan's great illusion by which he brings about the most deadly reactions, so that the afterward is more hopeless than before. It may be well at this point to give a reminder that Satan's point of the conquest of man was man's soul - reason, argument: desire, feeling: volition, choice, action. Through and by his soul man capitulated to a course of unbelief, which severed his spirit from fellowship with God. (God is Spirit, not soul. When God is referred to as having soul, it is only speaking after the manner of men, not actually the truth about God.) The undoing or destroying of the works of the devil in man and in a new race will be by rebirth of man's spirit in union with God by the Holy Spirit, and by that being "joined to the Lord, one spirit" to make for the full growth of a spiritual man (Heb. 5:14, 6:1; R.V.) thus bringing the soul into captivity with its moods, variations, and its inherent weakness toward doubt. The "dominion" of chapter 2 is now reserved unto spiritual people, and this is the heart of the whole Letter to the Hebrews with its particular connection, as it is the heart of the whole New Testament in its manifold application.

The "placing as sons," which is the issue of "child-training" is spiritual "full-growth". Here is the link between chapters 11 and 12. It was not only what those heroes of faith did through faith, but what they attained unto. There was a Divine "perfection" as the goal of fellowship with God. The word "perfect" (Greek, "complete") is used eight times in this letter.

"To make the Captain of their salvation perfect" (2:10).

"Having been made perfect, He became... the Author of eternal salvation" (5:9).

"The law made nothing perfect" (7:19), etc., and thus, having shown the object of God, and incidentally of this letter, the writer brings us to two consummate statements:

- a. "Apart from us they should not be made perfect" (11:40).
- b. "Ye are come... to the spirits of just men made perfect" (12:23).

We leave the second till later, only noting again where completeness lies.

So, with all their faith and its manifold and wonderful expression two things issued:

- a. They "received not the promise," but "died (still) in faith". They awaited completion or completeness; the full fruit of their faith had yet to ripen and be gathered.

b. "The spirits of (these) just men made perfect." "Apart from us they should not be made perfect" (made complete).

Note: This is not numerical completeness; that we were necessary to be added to them. That might be true, but it is not what is meant here. It is their own completeness.

Something then has happened between their dying and our time. Yes; their faith was, in its essence, prospective. It looked on. See statements as to this in the record of chapter 11, etc. What did it look on to? Well, with greater or lesser clearness and definiteness it linked with the Christ, their Vindicator, their Redeemer, their Prince. This link of faith - not abstract faith, but its Divine Object - made it justifying faith; "it was accounted unto (them) for righteousness." Hence they are "just," or justified men, and their faith carried them over centuries to the Justifier, to our day; and in the "perfect" - finished, full and final - work and speech of God in Christ (Heb. 1:2) they, with us who have faith, are made complete, and their spirits are in the rest of faith. This is all so much of a piece with the whole letter that we are considering, as will be seen.

So "Faith is the assurance (confidence, giving substance to) of things hoped for, a conviction of things not seen." Someone has translated it "the title deeds" of things hoped for. Then the inheritance is now - at length - in possession.

In our next chapter we shall have something more to say on this matter, drawing upon chapter 11, as we move to the second part of chapter 12.

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