

'This One Thing I Do'

by T. Austin-Sparks

The secret to going through to the end in our Christian life is a genuine surrender to Jesus Christ and a focus on Him above all else.

Scripture: Acts 22:6-11, Acts 26:19, 2 Corinthians 1:8-10, 2 Corinthians 11:23-28, Galatians 1:15-16, Philippians 3:13-14

Topics: "Perseverance in Faith", "Personal Encounter with Christ"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of a personal encounter with Jesus Christ as the foundation of a lasting Christian life, using the Apostle Paul's journey as a model. He highlights how Paul's transformation began with the question, 'What wilt Thou have me to do, Lord?' and culminated in his unwavering commitment to 'this one thing I do' despite immense suffering. Sparks stresses that true surrender to Christ is essential for enduring faith, as it allows believers to press on toward their heavenly calling. He encourages Christians to maintain a singular focus on Jesus, regardless of life's challenges, to ensure they finish their race triumphantly. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a deep, personal relationship with Christ as the key to perseverance in faith.

Transcript

We are going to read some Scriptures in the Word of God:

"And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, 'Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?' And I answered, 'Who art Thou, Lord?' And He said unto me, 'I Am Jesus of Nazareth, Whom thou persecutest.' And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid, but they heard not the voice of Him that spake to me. And I said, 'What shall I do, Lord?' And the Lord said unto me, 'Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do.' And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus" (Acts 22:6-11).

"Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision" (Acts 26:19).

"For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life: but we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead; Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver: in Whom we trust that He will yet deliver us" (II

Cor. 1:8-10).

"Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches" (II Cor. 11:23-28).

"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 3:13,14).

"Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?"; "This one thing I do." IN THOSE TWO SHORT WORDS, THE APOSTLE PAUL SETS THE BEGINNING AND THE END OF HIS LIFE. The beginning of his Christian life was when he said, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" When he wrote the Letter to the Philippians, he was at the end of his earthly journey. He was in prison in Rome waiting to be executed. Right at the end of his life, he was still saying, "This one thing I do." He began with, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" He ended by saying, "This one thing I do." There were thirty years between the beginning and the ending of his Christian journey. And what a tremendous thirty years they were. All his traveling and all his labors, all his teaching and his preaching, and then, as we have read, all his sufferings. How very full his thirty years of Christian life were. And there was plenty in those thirty years to bring him to an end. Many of those sufferings might have brought him to an end. He might have despaired long ago, he might have said, 'I cannot bear any more, everything is too much for me, I must give it all up.' But he went right through to the end. And among his last words are these, "This one thing I do. I press on toward the mark of the prize of the on-high calling of God."

Now, what we are concerned with this morning is just this, we must know the secret of being able to go right on to the end triumphantly. We may not have all the kinds of sufferings that the Apostle Paul had. But there will be enough difficulties in our Christian experience, and sometimes they will seem to be too big. And we shall wonder whether we can go on any longer, and perhaps we shall be tempted just to give up. What we want to know then is the secret of victory at the end. You know there are many Christians who do not go right through to the end. Perhaps you know some, and I know many, who have given up. They made what looked like a good beginning, they were full of promise. And then they left the Lord. They went away from the Savior. And there are very many in this world like that. They have begun but they have not gone through. Many, many Christians have gone away from the Lord. And many have gone away because they found the way too difficult.

So it is very important that we know how we are going to be able to continue unto the end. And the case of the Apostle Paul has something to teach us on this matter. Everything depends so much upon our BEGINNING. The end so often relates to the beginning. In the case of Paul, it was his beginning that kept him going right to the end. The Apostle Paul put his beginning into a very short sentence. He called it "the heavenly vision." When he was on trial before king Agrippa, he said, "I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision!" And we have read what the heavenly vision was. The heavenly vision for him was the Lord Jesus. Paul had not decided to come into Christianity, to turn from one religion to another. Paul had

not decided to accept certain teaching about Jesus Christ. It was not because some people had persuaded him to become a Christian. It was none of those things. And it was none of the many other things that call some people to become Christians.

Paul saw Jesus Christ. For him the beginning was not a religion or a teaching, it was a Person. Later on, he put it in this way. "It pleased God to reveal His Son in me" (Gal. 1:15,16). He had a very personal encounter with Jesus Christ; it was very personal. Paul, at that time, or Saul of Tarsus as he was, was one of a crowd. We do not know how many were going with him to Damascus. But it is quite evident that there were a number of others with him. He says that they saw the light, but they did not hear the voice. He was the only one who met the Lord Jesus; it was very personal. Jesus knew his name. He said, "Saul, Saul." Jesus knew exactly where he was. Jesus knew where to find him. And Jesus knew exactly what he was doing. You see, Jesus knew all about this man. And He came down to him on very personal grounds. This beginning of his Christian life was something very personal between himself and the Lord. Let us look again at this beginning.

Oh, let me say again how important the beginning is. You know if you are putting up a building, and you want that building to last a long time, and to stand up against all the storms of wind and rain, and to carry all the heavy weight that is going to be put upon it, you must have a good foundation. Everything for the building depends upon the foundation. And so it is with the Christian life. Everything for our endurance is going to be a matter of our foundation. So we look at this foundation again. We have seen that it was something very personal between the man and the Lord. It must be like that with every one of us. We must be able to say, 'The Lord has met me personally, and I have met the Lord personally. This is not something that other people told me. This is not something that I read in a book. This is not something that was taught me in the Sunday school. This is not something that I heard the preachers preach about. This is something very personal between me and the Lord. If there was not another Christian in the world, I know where I stand. If I am the only Christian in the world, I am a Christian because I have met the Lord Himself. I know the Lord for myself.'

Let me tell you that this is a very important thing. Although I have not had all the experiences that the Apostle Paul had, I have been in the work of the Lord many more years than Paul was in it. You know sometimes as we look at Christianity, our hearts sink. We see all the divisions, we see all the inconsistent Christians. We see so much in Christians and Christianity that is not the Lord. And we could easily give it all up and say, 'Well, we have made a mistake, we are on the wrong road!' What is it that keeps us going when there are all the false teachings and the false teachers? You notice that Paul included in his list of sufferings, false brethren. When there are many false brethren, oh, how easy it would be for us to wash our hands of the whole thing. Perhaps you may feel like that sometimes; you may look at other Christians, and you may be disappointed. And you may say, 'Well, I am sick of Christianity, this is not what I expected to find.' What is it that will keep us going? Only one thing, we know the Lord for ourselves personally. To us the Lord is very real. Our foundation is very strong. Our foundation is not a teaching, a religion, or a society. Our foundation is a Person. Do remember that as the very first thing and seek to have that as your foundation.

Then there was another thing about the beginning of Saul or Paul. You notice how he spoke to the Lord? Jesus said, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou Me?" Now I do not think that Saul knew what he was saying when he said the next sentence. We sometimes say things and we do not know what we are saying. The next thing that Saul of Tarsus said, he did not know what he was saying at that moment; he said, "Who art Thou, Lord?" And when Jesus said, "I Am Jesus of Nazareth" (Acts 9:4,5) I wonder if Saul, just for a

moment, said: 'Oh, I did not mean to call You Lord. I am persecuting Jesus of Nazareth. I had no intention of ever calling Him Lord.' But Saul did not do that. When he realized that he had called this terrible Jesus of Nazareth, Lord, he did not take it back. He did not say, 'I have made a mistake. Oh, I apologize for saying that.' He doubled it. And said, "What wilt Thou have me to do, Lord?" To call Jesus of Nazareth 'Lord' twice was a tremendous thing for this man.

If you had met Saul when he started out on that journey to Damascus, with authority from the chief priest to imprison all that followed Jesus of Nazareth; and as it says, "Saul, breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the people of this way" (Lit. "The Way"). If you had met him when he started on that journey and said to him, 'Saul, before you finish this journey, you will be calling Jesus of Nazareth, Lord.' What do you think Saul would have done? Well, he would have put you in prison right away. The last thing in all the world that ever this man intended to do was to call Jesus of Nazareth, "Lord." It did represent a tremendous surrender.

In that word, "Lord," there was the surrender of everything. That was his beginning. A complete and absolute surrender to Jesus as Lord. It was a tremendous thing for him. Notice, "What wilt Thou have me to do." Here was a young man who had always decided for himself what he would do. Here was a young man who had a very strong natural will. No one could stand against that will. If his parents had pleaded with him, he would not have listened to them. No matter who would have urged him to change his mind, he would have said, 'I will not, I am going to do this. It does not matter what anybody says, I will do this.' That is the kind of will that Saul of Tarsus had. And now, here he is saying, "What wilt Thou have me to do." That strong self-will was completely surrendered to the Lordship of Jesus Christ. That was a very deep thing. You see, that is the kind of beginning that is going to see a man right through to the end. That was his beginning. He put everything over into the hands of Jesus Christ as his Lord. In effect he said, 'It is no longer my will, but Your will. It is no longer my way, but Your way. It is no longer my plans for my life, but Your plan for me, Lord.' That was a foundation which would carry a very heavy load. You think of all those things that we have read that came into the thirty years. Just go home and read them again.

The thirty years of sufferings, of afflictions, and of trials prove two things. First, they prove how genuine Paul's surrender was to the Lord Jesus. Now this man did not say, 'Lord, I will live for You if You give me an easy time. I will be a good Christian if only You see that no troubles come into my life. I will be a Christian and follow You if only You would just fill my life with blessings.' He never said anything like that to the Lord. What he meant was, blessing or no blessing, You are my Lord, and I am Your bondservant. And for thirty years, that kind of surrender was tested by all these trials. He said, "Three times I was beaten with rods." "Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes except one" (II Corinthians 11:25,24). Why did he say except one? Because the fortieth stroke was always regarded as the fatal stroke. Thirty-nine strokes and the next one, you are dead. Three times that happened with him. Don't you think the devil said to him when that thirty-ninth stroke came on him, 'Now, do you still surrender to the Lord? Do you still call Him Lord? If you would like to stop calling Him Lord, you can stop having all these strokes. A whole situation can change for you for the better, if only you will stop this surrender to Jesus Christ.' I expect Satan often spoke to him like that. And as the strokes were coming on him, Satan would say, 'You are still going to call Him Lord?' But there was very much more than three times with thirty-nine strokes. There were the imprisonments. Once he was stoned and left for dead, then he was in the shipwrecks at sea, and all these other things. There was plenty in all that kind of thing to make him reconsider his surrender to the Lord Jesus. But those troubles were only proving that his surrender was genuine. This was not just some artificial thing. This was something more than the man himself.

That leads us to the second thing that the thirty years were proving. All these thirty years of difficulty and trial were just proving how great the Lord Jesus is. The Lord Jesus is greater than all the imprisonments. He is greater than all these many kinds of sufferings. The Lord could bring a man through all that, and often at the end, saying, 'I am still going on.' Paul used the phrase in one of his later letters. He spoke of, "according to the power that worketh in us!" It was the power of the Lord working in him.

Now here is a thing that we must all remember. The mighty power of the Lord may be working in us and we may not be conscious of it at the time. Appearances may argue that Satan is having it all his way. Things may seem to say that Jesus is not Lord, but circumstances are Lord. But what is it that decides whether the power has been working in us? It is not that we are conscious of that power at the time of trouble. It is that that power brings us through the trouble. That mighty power of the Lord Jesus working in Paul brought him through all those troubles to the place where at the end he said, "This one thing I do." So the troubles were necessary in order for Paul to discover what a great Lord had come into his life. If everything was easy, we could never discover how great the Lord is.

Now you come over to this letter to the Philippians. In chapter three, from which we have taken that little fragment, the Apostle Paul is telling of all the worldly advantages which were his before he met the Lord Jesus. He says, 'If any man thinketh that he can boast, I can go beyond any man. Any man thinks he has confidence in the flesh, I have much more than any man. Circumcised the eighth day, that made me a true child of Abraham, and that is a big thing. Of the stock of Israel, I come right up out of the root, I am not something that has put on the outside. I belong to the tribe of Benjamin. And Benjamin produced the first king of Israel. I belong to the tribe of Benjamin. I am a Hebrew of Hebrew parents, there is no mixed blood in me. As touching the law, a Pharisee. A proud, self-sufficient Pharisee. As touching zeal, persecuting the church. As touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.' What does a man want in all the world more than that? Here is a young man who has got to the top of his profession. He is a great success in this world. Now what does he say? 'The things which were gain to me, I have counted it loss for Christ. Yea, I count all things but refuse for the knowledge, the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. There is nothing that all this world desires for fame and success which can compare with the Lord Jesus.' How the Lord Jesus had captured this man's life. He said Jesus is Superior to all these things.

Well, we must hurry to the close now. There is a lot more that we could say, but we just close with one thing. When Paul wrote this letter to the Philippians, he wrote it from his prison. As we have said, he was waiting the sentence of death. He was no longer able to travel about the world preaching. He was no longer able to visit his beloved people in all parts of the world. A lot of his friends had left him. There was not much that he could do in a public way now. All that is at an end. So that it was not the churches and it was not the works; it was the Lord Jesus. Paul's life was not just his work. It was not just his traveling about all over the world preaching. When all those things were taken away, he says, 'I am still going on.' 'This one thing I do, I press on. Take away my work, I am going on with the Lord. Take away my friends, I am going on with the Lord. Take away my liberty, I am still going on with the Lord.' How great a Lord He must be.

Well, when the Lord Jesus is like that to us, we will go right through to the end. Paul started with saying, "What wilt Thou have me to do, Lord." He finished by saying, "This one thing I do." One thing, how important it is to have a single eye. Not one eye looking this way, and the other eye looking that way, not two hearts divided, but one eye, or both eyes on one object. I have but one interest in life, and that interest is the Lord Jesus. In my business, it is the Lord Jesus. In my college, it is the Lord Jesus. In my home, it is the Lord Jesus. Among my friends, it is the Lord Jesus. In all things in this life, I have but one interest, that

is, that my Lord Jesus may have all that He ought to have in my life. I say, if it is like that, while many others will fall out by the way, we shall go through to the end.

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