

Walking in the Power of God

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of living by faith in the Son of God, meeting every demand and carrying every liability, as exemplified in Christ's life of moral and spiritual ascendancy.

Scripture: John 5:19

Topics: "Divine Strength", "Walking in Faith"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of walking in the power of God as illustrated in John 5, where Jesus heals an impotent man who had been paralyzed for thirty-eight years. This healing symbolizes the deliverance from the bondage of the law and the impotence of humanity without Christ. Sparks draws parallels between the man's condition and Israel's history, highlighting that true hope and strength come from a relationship with Jesus, who embodies grace and truth. The sermon encourages believers to rely on Christ's energy and strength rather than their own, illustrating that true freedom and power are found in living out of Christ. Ultimately, the message is one of overcoming weakness through faith in Jesus, leading to a life of victory and rest in God's provision.

Transcript

READ: John 5.

KEY VERSES: 19, 20, 21 and 30.

In chapter 5 we are back again with Christ in Jerusalem. We must not miss the importance and significance of the visits to Judea and Jerusalem as recorded in "John." These visits have a relationship with the position, condition and destiny of the Jewish nation in an official sense. Take, therefore, full account of every visit and every event, and, the connection of each. The details of these will come out as we move on, but we call attention in a general way to two aspects; one, the close association with Israel's past history, and the other, the place of the Mosaic order.

Look at some of these:

Chapter 1. "The Lamb of God." What a lot of history in Israel there is behind that phrase.

Chapter 2. The marriage. Just look at two passages.

Jeremiah 31:35-33: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people."

Hebrews 8:7-10: "For if the first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people."

Here, as you see, the point was a marriage covenant, and this is transferred from the covenant made through Moses to the covenant made in the Blood of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 3. The serpent lifted up. (Numbers 21.)

Chapter 4. The springing well. Here it is interesting and significant to notice, that in Numbers 21 the springing well came into view almost immediately after the lifting up of the brazen serpent, and this is the order in John 3 and 4.

Chapter 5. The impotent man. (We are going to deal with this in the present chapter.)

Chapter 6. The Manna.

Chapters 7, 8 and 9. The Feast of Tabernacles.

Chapter 10. The Feast of Dedication.

Chapter 11. Contains the spiritual meaning of Jordan - death, burial and resurrection as something right at the heart of Israel's history.

Chapter 12. Israel's blindness (verses 37-41). See in this connection the passages in Isaiah, chapters 6 and 53, quoted.

Chapter 15. The Vine. Isaiah 5 represents Israel as the vine, or the vineyard, and the vine was a common figure amongst the prophets of Israel. This is transferred in John 15 by the Lord Jesus from Israel to Himself.

Chapter 17. The High Priest, with the altar and the whole burnt-offering in view.

This is only a selection, and more features can be traced, but there is one thing to be remembered that is, that everything to do with Israel in "John" is in a bad light, and represents the setting aside of Judaism to bring in the Church. This is done by Christ Himself taking all the elements of Israel's true life, and embodying them as the spiritual features of the Church's constitution, life and vocation. Everything which subsequently comes out in the doctrine of the New Testament will be found in germ in the Gospels, and especially in "John."

Now we can come to our particular chapter, John 5. Here, as on a number of occasions in "John," it is a Feast of the Jews which brings Him to Jerusalem, or is the occasion of His being there. What Feast this one is is quite uncertain. Other Feasts are mentioned, some by name such as the Passover and some are marked by such definite features as to leave us in no doubt as to what they are. In this instance the article is not present. It does not say THE Feast of the Jews, although some translations have included the article. If it were present we should know that it refers to the Passover. We are left very largely to conjecture, but, as far as it is possible to trace the date of this incident, it would seem that it is the Feast of Purim. This Feast was originated in the days of the captivity, and we have the account of it in the book of Esther. It related to the marvelous overruling by God of the counsels of the evil Haman, and the deliverance of the Jews from the awful death, under sentence of which they were living until the Lord turned their death to life.

If this is the Feast of chapter 5, then verses 24-27 take on a wonderful significance: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; and hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of man." Carry these words back into the book of Esther and see how wonderfully they fit in. Condemnation and death exchanged for life, and the Lord Jesus taking the place of Mordecai, to Whom at length the authority to execute judgment is given, even to Him Who has been set aside, humiliated and rejected by men.

But there is another historical feature in the background of this chapter. The immediate foreground is occupied by the impotent man at the pool, and we are told that he had been there in that state for thirty-eight years. Now that was exactly the period of Israel's wanderings in the wilderness, from the giving of the law at Sinai to the death of Moses. Note these two things: (1) the law given, (2) a subsequent life in impotence, weakness and failure as under the law. What a lot of light is thrown upon this for us by the subsequent writings of the New Testament. The apostle Paul says a good deal about it in his letter to the Romans. He points out that, while man was weak, the weakness of man was not made manifest and brought to light until the law was given; and then, when the law came, the great fact, the universal fact that man is utterly impotent in the presence of the requirements of a holy God is made all too apparent. Not that the law is evil in itself. Nay, but good, and if only it could be lived up to, it would be a great blessing to man. God never imposes upon man anything that is not for his good, but then, because of sin and man's fallen state, there is an inherent weakness, which renders him totally incapable of standing up to God's demands; and so, what should be for his good and benefit, becomes the very instrument of his conscious weakness and helplessness.

This is exactly what we have in John 5. Here is a man on his bed for thirty-eight years. A bed is intended to be a good thing, a blessing, but in the case of this man the bed has become the symbol of his weakness and bondage, and had really become a tyrant rather than a friend. So, right in the heart of Jerusalem, we have this long stretch of Israel's helplessness illustrated in the life of a single man lying in the bondage of his own weakness for thirty-eight years. What is the hope for Israel? What was the hope for this man? Hope lay only in one direction. That direction is indicated right at the commencement of John's Gospel: "The law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ." Hope, then, lies in the direction of grace and truth, coming in the Person of the Lord Jesus. Thus we find Him coming on the scene when all other hope had faded and disappeared, and well-nigh, if not altogether, settled down in the heart of this

poor, helpless victim.

What a picture this is, not only of Israel but of all men without Christ. It is not a matter of sins, many or few. It is not a question of comparative moral strength, greater or lesser; but it is the issue of standing face to face with the perfection of God in the Christ. How can man at his best measure up to that, and give an answer wholly satisfactory to God? There is no man who can do it. Remembering that a breach in one point declares imperfection, and involves the individual, and the race, in the fact of sinfulness, we have to come to Paul's conclusion: "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God." "There is none righteous, no, not one." But we cannot escape. We must all give an account before the judgment seat. What is our hope? Our hope is in Christ alone, and the grace of God in Jesus Christ. In his wonderful letter to the Galatians the apostle Paul opens up for us God's matchless grace in delivering us, through the death of Christ, and our death with Him, from the bondage of the law.

Now this man did not finish his history there. There was a glorious issue when the Lord Jesus came into his life. Whereas at the outset his bed was his master, at the end he was the master of his bed. Whereas in the beginning he was completely dependent upon others, and all his strength was outside of himself, in the end there was that within him which made it possible for him to stand upon his own feet, and, not only walk, but, as the Greek tense of the words shows, "keep on walking," or "be walking all the time."

So we see, then, that what is in view in the first place is deliverance from the bondage of the law, and from the hopeless impotence and weakness of all men by nature, when they stand confronted by the standard which God demands, and from which He will not excuse one single individual. That deliverance is found to be mainly along the line of grace, brought into experience by reason of a vital relationship with the Lord Jesus. But, while walking in the power of God is the object in view, what we have to see before we close is the law of this divine truth and blessing. What is the law of this walk in life and power? Well, our key verses bring us to that. The man in the story had tried many, many times to find in himself the energy by which he could get upon his feet and walk. That energy he had never found. Now, when the Lord Jesus comes on the scene, that man discovers that in Him (Christ) there is energy, and that energy flows out as the words are spoken - a literal fulfillment of another thing said by the Lord Jesus in this Gospel: "...the words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." So that this man, unable to walk as out from himself, found himself able to rise up and walk by the energy which proceeded from Christ; and the simple law of this walk in the power of God is that of meeting everything as out from the Lord, and not from ourselves. This was the law of Christ's own life of moral and spiritual ascendancy. Taking the place of man representatively, He said: "The Son can do nothing out from himself, but what he seeth the Father do...." He spoke of the words, and the works, as proceeding out from the Father, and not out from Himself. In the text the little word "of" is the Greek preposition "out from." So that Christ lived His life as out from the Father, meeting every demand, carrying every liability. Thus His life was one of victory over all weakness and ineffectiveness.

But notice further, this all took place on the Sabbath day, and the Sabbath in this chapter signifies God's rest. God has come to the end of His works, and rests. As in every part of this Gospel, Christ is the chief character in view, and this Sabbath points to Him and says: God has reached the end of His works in His Son, is satisfied and at rest. Christ is the sum total of all the works of the Father. Out of that fullness of God in Christ we, who have labored under the bondage of the law, may now walk in the rest of being set free by faith in Jesus Christ.

Now the life of the believer is one of learning continuously and progressively how to live as out from the Lord. We shall always be conscious of our own weakness. In ourselves we shall never be anything but weak and impotent, but we do not stay there. We see that in Christ all strength, all ability, all wisdom, all grace resides, but that it is in Him for us, and as we, refusing to accept our own state as the criterion and the final argument, by faith take hold of the Lord Jesus, and move out to meet our obligations as out from Him, we shall find that we are able to do what we have never been able to do before, though we may have tried many times. We shall learn now what the apostle meant when he said that the Lord had told him that His strength was made perfect in weakness. Do we feel crippled? Do we despair of ever being able to walk and serve to any good purpose? Have we tried and failed again and again? Let us learn the lesson of John 5. Nothing out from ourselves but everything, hitherto impossible, out from Christ.

Let us ask the Lord to show us how to live by faith in the Son of God. That life is a life of overcoming what has before been our bondage, our very tyranny. It is not something, it is the Lord Himself, and, reverting to the Esther link which may be somewhere in the background of this chapter, we shall know the wonderful joy of what is recorded in that little book as the issue of the divine intervention, "a good day"!

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