

Ascension and Glory

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the significance of Christ's ascension and our heavenly union with Him as foundational to understanding our spiritual life and purpose.

Scripture: Ephesians 2:6, Colossians 3:1, Hebrews 11:16

Topics: "Ascension", "Heavenly Citizenship"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of Christ's ascension as a foundational truth for our spiritual life and purpose. He explains that while the death and resurrection of Jesus are often highlighted, His ascension is crucial for understanding our identity as citizens of heaven and our calling in Christ. Sparks illustrates that true spiritual life and service must originate from a heavenly perspective, as earthly pursuits ultimately fail to satisfy the spiritual hunger of believers. He encourages the church to recognize its heavenly citizenship and to live in a way that reflects this reality, culminating in the ultimate translation to glory at Christ's return.

Transcript

While much emphasis is laid upon the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, it is not generally realized that His ascension is no less important as a truth basic to our life in Him and for His universal purpose. In the fuller unveilings of spiritual life in Christ which came progressively through the anointing of the Holy Spirit much is said, on the one hand, about our having been made to sit in the heavenlies in Christ, and, on the other hand, we are reminded that we are strangers and pilgrims here. This revelation interprets the whole Bible along a certain line, and the key-declaration to this sweep of the Word is that the seat and base of all life and work, the place of the pattern, purpose, and entire resource of our calling in Christ, is in the heavens.

There are two words which represent or signify two halves of one great truth - ascension and translation; these are complementary to each other. The one makes possible the other, and the other demands the one. Ascension is an act, conclusive and definite. Translation is a process culminating in a climax. When the Lord Jesus ascended up on high and was "received up" it was representative and relative, just as was His death and resurrection. As the representative of the many sons whom He would bring to glory, He immediately and definitely transferred from earth to heaven the source of spiritual life, the spring of spiritual being; and in fact everything that pertains unto salvation, sanctification, service, glory, is now in the heavens, and cannot be found in the earth.

From the point of being "born from above," everything implied and involved in both nature and purpose is out from above. An exquisite cameo of this is found in the eighty-seventh Psalm. The terms are typical or illustrative. Here the partiality of God is seen for the spiritual as against the carnal habitations. Then the things of glory are related to this spiritual city. Then the boasted nativities of men are reviewed: they boast in having been born in Egypt, Babylon, Philistia, Tyre, or Cush. But transcending all boasts is His whose citizenship is of Zion and upon whom Zion's franchise has been conferred.

The Lamb's book of life looms into view, and the names are mentioned, and the all-inclusive realization of these heavenly citizens is that all their fountains are there. Theirs is a heavenly calling, life, vision, citizenship, walk, hope, country, kingdom, etc. One of the most marked things in the pre-ascension experiences of God's people is the failure of anything of this earth - though given of God - to satisfy the vision and expectation of His truly spiritually-minded people. Abraham had promise of a country and a city; he moved out with God, but it is quite clear that as his faith expanded, the fullest possibilities of realization on the earth failed to fulfil his hope and the promise. He came into the land but he was not at all satisfied that the promise was fulfilled; in fact, though there was blessing and increase he grew less satisfied. The truth is that his spiritual life was expanding and with it his faith demanded something more than that which was of the earth. That to which he looked forward at first, as adequate to meet the expectation through promise, he came by closer fellowship with God to regard as altogether insufficient. This led him to a series of refusals and rejections of things of earthly glory. The Promised Land ultimately ceased to be for him a thing of earth, and so writers under the illumination of the same Spirit as was leading Abraham tell us that he looked for "a better country... a heavenly," and "a city... whose builder (architect) and maker is God." (Heb. 11:16,10). Placing over against this such passages as Matt. 3:9, John 8:56, Gal. 3:7, 4:26, Heb. 12:22, we are surely compelled to recognize that Abraham's vision became more and more "other-worldly" as his faith became clearer. Simultaneously with this throwing back of the horizon, and as a means to that end, everything of earth was taken down into death, to pass through and out on to resurrection ground by resurrection life. It was then a thing no longer of this earth but of the heavens. This applied to possessions, relationships, prospects, vision, promise, faith, service, capacity.

An important principle is here revealed as basic to all the accomplishments of God and to all effective life and service in fellowship with God. WE MUST COME INTO EVERY DIVINE THING AS OUT FROM ABOVE, AND NOT FROM THE EARTH LEVEL.

Such phrases as "taking up Christian work," "getting into Christian service," contain a very dangerous and false concept. Unless such would-be workers have had their own works (even for God) brought to death, and themselves also, any move into things which are related to God will result in one of three things - to be smashed by them, or to come sooner or later to deadlock as in a cul-de-sac, or to go on with a show and appearance of success, but really effecting nothing in any heavenly sense, the thing effected being of this world, though religious and well meant.

Moses undoubtedly had a heavenly revelation in Egypt. By illumination of spirit he saw that the poor, oppressed, crushed, distracted mob of Semites were the elect of God (Heb. 11:25). He further saw that the Cross as the reproach of Christ was the method of redemption (verse 26). Then he saw that sin, in his case, would be to retain the pleasurable advantages of this world in denial of that Cross and its objective. In the light of this he made his decision; he refused, he chose, he forsook, and feared not. But even when he had arrived at the position in his spirit, he had to learn the main lesson of his life, namely, that heavenly visions require heavenly instruments for their realization. He essayed to put his revelation into effect from the standpoint of some natural or earthly vantage ground. This jeopardized everything, brought confusion,

delay, shame, and fear. He had to go out and be brought through discipline to his famous "I cannot," and then come into the situation as from above. The real effect was to have been taken out and up, and then to come down on to it as from above; for afterward Moses was a man linked with the throne of God. It has ever been thus. For patterns, commissions, and powers, a place of ascendancy has been the Divine method. In "the patterns of things in the heavens" a mountain will do, but for the actual things a spiritual union with the ascended Lord is essential.

This can be traced in the case of Moses, David, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Paul, and others.

"Then the Spirit lifted me up and brought me... (Ezek. 11:1, etc.) is a clause which implies the Divine order. This is not the elevation of the soul by imaginations, ecstasies, idealism, or mental visions. Such, as well as false or true presentations of great prospects, may be presented by the Devil. The Master refused the elevations and visions given by the enemy because the true prospect was only by the way of the Cross.

Paul called himself "a wise master-builder," but this in his actual language only meant one who had been allowed to look at the architect's plan and was working according to it. For this look he had been "caught up," but to be "in the Spirit" is always to be caught up. The Lord Jesus said much about being in heaven while on earth. "The Son of man who is in heaven" (John 3:13) "What he (the Son) seeth the Father doing... these the Son also doeth in like manner" (John 5:19) His spirit had a heavenly union by the Holy Spirit, and so He wrought. It is one thing to take even the Bible as a manual or textbook - a system of truth, teaching, practice, and order; it is quite another thing to see the eternal, spiritual principles behind the precepts, practices, and system. The one is to live and work according to the transmission of truth through the medium of human intelligence: that is, an infinite truth has been shaped in finite terms to make it intelligible to men. The other is to apprehend by a quickened and renewed spirit the infinite significance of the revelation. The transmission represents the human range, the spiritual revelation infinitely transcends this, and requires a heavenly mind - the mind of the Spirit as against the mind of the flesh.

Only such as have been made one with the ascended Christ have His mind and can effectively serve Him. In so many ways the fact, nature, and need of ascension-union with Christ are emphasized in the whole Bible and especially in the New Testament. He ascended with the keys of authority in His possession. As man and for man He had wrested the dominion from the prince of this world. As a mighty conqueror He was "received up." This victorious return was foreshadowed in the spirit of the Psalmist when he sang:

"Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lifted up, ye everlasting doors: and the King of glory will come in.... The Lord mighty in battle..." (Ps. 24:7,8).

If it is true that Christ has taken our humanity, redeemed, purged, sanctified, into the very throne of God, and is reproducing this corporate union of Himself with us and of ourselves with Himself in the Church which is His Body, then ascension union means that we now have a place in the place of His sovereignty: we are to have dominion in Him over principalities and powers. The safer way to state this is that His sovereignty functions - or is meant to function - through His Body and all its members.

There are other doors mentioned in this connection besides the "everlasting doors." There are the "gates of Hades," which mean the counsels and schemes and judgments of hell. These are represented as being against the Church. It is therefore said that, because of the heavenly union with and in Him Who has passed triumphantly through the everlasting doors, these other "gates" shall not prevail, because His sovereignty is in the Church and the Church is in His sovereignty. Not to a Jewish group as such, or to the nucleus of an earthly kingdom related to any one age, but to the nucleus of His Church He addressed

those words about the building of that Church and its ascendancy over the counsels of hell (Matt. 16:18). To them as such He also said, "Behold I have given you authority... over all the power of the enemy" (Luke 10:19); this, in the light of His Cross which was the abiding background of all His utterances and actions. There can be no resting of the Holy Spirit in and upon believers except as incorporation in Christ crucified, buried, risen, and ascended has taken place. For Elisha to receive the "double portion" of his master's spirit he must pass through Jordan with him and be with him in the place of ascension.

It is ever thus. The Holy Spirit mediates the sovereignty of the Head to and through the Body, and for this "holding fast the Head" heavenly union is essential. The Church is a heavenly body, not an earthly society, institution, organization. The ecclesiastical systems of this world which call themselves "the Church" and "the churches" are too often a grotesque caricature. There are no sects, denominations, "branches of the Church," with God. Only one Church exists in the mind and interest of God, and that "the church of the first-born," and all this other welter is because there has been an attempt made again and again to set up something for God on this earth as of the earth. God is not in this, but is leaving it to compass its own end in confusion, or proceed apace in its delusion. He is quietly, without sound of axe or hammer, putting His elect stones into a spiritual temple, a heavenly house. Only such as have the vantage ground of the heavenly places will see this, discountenance the false, and find full blessedness in doing what the Father is doing.

We now proceed to say a little about that half of this truth implied in the word "translation." At the outset we said that "translation is a process culminating in a climax." The climax is, of course, the appearing of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. The whole course of Christian experience when wrought out by God is one of progressive transition or translation from earthlies to heavenlies. Faith is the principle of translation, and its very nature demands a basis which is spiritual and not of the senses, which is heavenly and not of the earth. The Lord's dealings with His people have ever resulted in their losing all earthly ground of confidence and assurance and being made utterly dependent upon Himself.

Faith always brings us into precarious and difficult situations. Faith always demands a letting go of things seen and temporal. Faith threatens, and carries out its threat, to bewilder and confound our natural judgments, wisdom, acumen, hope, confidence, and security. Faith never fails to cut the ties of our natural safety, and dry up the springs of our human resource. All this must be in order to open up an entire system of heavenly fullness. God makes revelation indispensable and His own heavenly realities absolutely essential to existence. Thus He meets us in some challenge and demand, a crisis is precipitated, a step in the obedience of faith is required, and when it is taken it is a step upward which gives us some spiritual vantage-ground where we see what we did not know before. Thus by a succession of upward steps in faith we are having the faith of God's elect wrought in us in preparation for that climax in translation. It is corporate faith in the whole Body of Christ - proving it to be what it really is, a heavenly Body - that will bring about the advent of Christ. "The Second Coming of Christ," is not some merely historical event in a Divine timetable of prophecy. It is the climax of faith in the Body of Christ, which faith has severed that Body absolutely from the world and merely earthly things, even though they be religious things and systems. The obedience of faith increases capacity for apprehending the spiritual, eternal, and unseen principles of God's eternal purpose, and thus makes possible the effecting of that purpose. Surely this is the principle running through Hebrews 11 as a summary of the nature and course of faith. But it is "one faith," even "the faith of the Son of God." This faith is a mighty energy, spiritually militant, and the means by which the battles of the Lord have ever been fought. Thus it is that the final great conflict with the Satanic hierarchy will be brought to a victorious issue by the faith of the Christ triumphant in His Church

(Rev. 12:11). Thus shall the sovereignty of the HEAVENS be established over the "gates" (counsels) of hell by the Church, and the earth will feel the impact of that triumphant faith.

This kind of translation faith is rare and few there are who will pay its price. Well might the Lord ask if He shall find it on the earth at His coming. Let it be emphasized once more that the transferring of all things to the heavenlies, so that we are feeling more and more the strangeness of strangers and the homelessness of pilgrims here, and at-homeness in spiritual and heavenly things, is the natural course of a true life in God. When the climax comes and we are finally translated, it will be no great change for our inner man; there will be no awkwardness or feeling of being strange and out of place. It will be but the last phase of the spiritual journey where the glory breaks upon us, and like Enoch, "we are not, for God has taken us."

It only remains to be said that this is the path of, and to, the glory.

The glory is always heavenly glory. Ultimately it will be manifested in a perfected humanity. At present it is secretly within the spirit of the believer, and with each fresh step up in faith, that which cannot be defined to others becomes more wonderful to him. It would be a poor description of the Divine glory to say that it is incorruption and incorruptibleness, perfection of understanding, perfection of harmoniousness, perfection of capacity, perfection of graciousness. But almost imperceptibly the movement of faith and the action of grace are leading on to this. The incorruptible seed which makes possible the incorruptible body is already in the sons of God by faith. There is an opening of the eyes of their understanding, and heavenly things for them are much more real than the things seen. There is a "peace which passeth understanding" realized in deep crises, which is the fruit of a harmony in the will with God's will. (The word "peace" would always be better translated "harmony.") So also spiritual capacity is that which transcends the limitations of time and space, and which bounds the universe in effects and issues. And it scarcely need be said that the graciousness of Divine love, compassion, tenderness, considerateness, humility, etc., are the glory of God.

These things, however, do not touch all that His glory means. Perfection of character, capacity and service, bring perfection of satisfaction. This is but the basis of His glory. Here we have to stop short. This glory can only be known in spirit and not portrayed in words. We remind ourselves that it is written that we have been called "unto his eternal glory" (1 Pet. 5:10), and that our salvation is "with eternal glory" (2 Tim. 2:10) and that the light affliction "worketh... an exceeding weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4:17).

Thus, as we have been crucified together with Him, buried with Him, raised with Him, so we are ascended and glorified together with Him.

May we have grace that every movement of God by which He would make our ascension-union manifest and experimentally real may find an "Amen" in our hearts, cost what it may in the uprooting of our lives from earth.

He would have us see the heavens open always and the representative and inclusive "Son of man" in the glory AS US, even while we are on the earth; everything in ministry here moving from and to the heavens.

With these heavenly truths thus before us let us find the meaning and force of familiar exhortations, such as:

"Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon the earth... but lay up... treasures in heaven" (Matt. 6:19,20).

"If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is.... Set your minds on the things that are above, not on the things that are on the earth" (Col. 3:1,2).

If we are to appear with Christ in glory we must have a life already hid with Christ in God, and ourselves be dead to things on the earth.

"For ye died, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Col. 3:3).

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/t-austin-sparks/ascension-and-glory/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net