

Bringing Forth the Fruits of the Kingdom

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the vital relationship between the Church and the Kingdom of God, emphasizing the need for spiritual revelation and distinctiveness in Christian life.

Scripture: Matthew 16:13

Topics: "Spiritual Transformation", "The Church and the Kingdom"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the relationship between the Church and the Kingdom of God, illustrating that the Church is meant to embody the fruits of the Kingdom. He highlights the transition from mere knowledge of the truth to the revelation of the Spirit, as exemplified in Peter's confession of Christ. Sparks warns against the dangers of losing distinctiveness and power within the Church due to worldly influences, urging believers to seek a deeper, transformative experience with God. He concludes by encouraging Christians to embrace crises as opportunities for spiritual growth and to empty themselves for greater fruitfulness in their lives.

Transcript

"Now when Jesus came into the parts of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, saying, Who do men say that the Son of man is? And they said, Some say John the Baptist; some, Elijah: and others, Jeremiah, or one of the prophets. He saith unto them, But who say ye that I am? And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou Simon Bar-Jonah: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. And I also say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it" (Matthew 16:13-18).

"Therefore I say unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matthew 21:43).

THE CHURCH IS MENTIONED

We have been saying very much about the Kingdom of God, and have remarked more than once that the Gospel by Matthew is peculiarly the Gospel of the Kingdom. Now here, right in the middle of this Gospel which is all about the Kingdom, suddenly and without any explanation or introduction the Church is mentioned, and it is mentioned as though everybody understood what it meant. Jesus does not say: 'Now I am going to speak about something else. I have been speaking about the Kingdom, but now I am going

to speak about the Church, and then I shall have some more things to say about the Kingdom.' There is nothing like that. It is taken for granted that these people understood what He meant by the Church, and, indeed, it was no new idea to them. It may surprise some of you when I say that the Jews knew about the Church. In that long and very interesting discourse of Stephen's which ended in his being stoned to death, Stephen said that God was "in the church in the wilderness" (Acts 7:38).

The point is: is it the same thing here or is there a difference? Of course there is something new here, because Jesus says: "I will build MY Church", so that whatever the other church was, the one that He was going to build was something other. Indeed, He had come to constitute a NEW Israel.

I have often been asked the question: 'What is the difference between the Kingdom and the Church?' I am not going to enter upon that subject now, that is, I am not going to discuss the technical points in the matter. If there is a difference - and I believe there is - it will come out in what we are going to say.

WHY CONFERENCES?

What is the purpose of our having conferences? We will answer that by asking some other questions.

Firstly, why is the New Testament so very much occupied with ministry to Christians? Of course, you recognize that that is a fact. By far the greater part of the New Testament is concerned with Christians.

Another question of the same kind: Why were Peter and John and Paul so intensely concerned about Christians? Indeed, they were deeply and strongly concerned about Christians. Paul at one time says that we should be 'anxious for nothing', but another time, included in all his difficulties and troubles, is 'anxiety for all the churches'. These men had a real anxiety and concern for Christians. Paul said about the Christians in Galatia: "Of whom I am again in travail" (Galatians 4:19). If you can answer this question you can answer my first one: Why is it that for many years we have had conferences?

The answer is found in the two passages of Scripture which we read. In both of those Scriptures we have a transition. In the first it is a very beautiful transition; in the second it is a very tragic one. Let us take the second first.

"Therefore I say unto you" - and this is to the Jews of His time - "The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof."

That is a tragic transition - the taking of the Kingdom of God away from a nation and giving it to another. We will come to the first transition in a minute, but let us say without any further delay that the Church is the concentration of the truths of the Kingdom of God. You may not quite understand what I mean by that, but the Church contains the concentration of all the truths of the Kingdom.

Now we will look at this second transition. The old Israel had all the oracles of God. We can say that they had all the truth, for they had all that came through Moses, all that came through the Prophets, and they had the full content of the Old Testament, which was the content of the Kingdom of God in the old dispensation. They had all the teaching and all the truth, all the law, the Psalms and the Prophets, but they did not bring forth the fruits thereof, and there is a very big difference between having the truth and bringing forth the fruit of the truth. There is a very great difference between having the knowledge of the Kingdom and having the fruit of the Kingdom. You know that the New Testament is always aware of a great peril in the history of God's people, for three times the dying of the first Israelite nation in the wilderness is used as a warning to Christians. That nation had had all the signs in Egypt, and all the

testimony of the Passover Lamb and the precious blood, and all the experience of being brought out of Egypt and through the Red Sea by the very power of God. They had had all the supernatural provision of God in the wilderness, but that generation perished in the wilderness. It did not make the great transition, and I say that that is used three times in the New Testament as a warning to Christians. Then the last book of the New Testament sees the Christian Church in a state of decline, and the Lord Jesus appearing to the Apostle John with strong warnings about this decline.

So the New Testament contains this warning, this fear, for Christians, and it is because there is something so much more for them and that they might miss it. That is the answer to the question: Why conferences?

CRISES IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

Let me say to the most experienced and mature Christians here, even to those who are the leaders, the teachers and the preachers to God's people: be careful that you never come to the place where it is not possible for God to do a bigger thing in your life than He has ever done before. You may have a lot of experience and a lot of history. You may have been a Christian for many years and have done a lot of Christian work and preaching, but we never reach a point where it is not possible for God to do something that He has never done before.

Now we have been giving a great deal of teaching. Do you think that that is all that we came here to do? Is that what you came here to get? Did you come here only to get your notebooks full of notes of teaching? Well, that is not my idea about the conference. We are here for a crisis. The idea of these conferences is that there should be crises in lives, and the teaching is only intended to bring us to such crises.

I do not present myself as an example, but so far as I am concerned, conferences sprang out of a crisis. I did not say over thirty years ago 'Now it will be nice to have some conferences in which we will give the Christians a lot of teaching.' God had brought about a tremendous crisis in my life. I had been a minister of churches for years. I had organized a tremendous amount of Christian work. Oh, yes, I was a very busy minister! And I was a Bible teacher. I was a member of a Bible Teachers' Association; - and then God brought about a crisis, such a tremendous crisis in my ministerial life that all the past was as nothing. From that crisis everything was changed. There was a new ministry because of a new life. I have always called that my 'opened heaven'.

Now I am not saying that I am your example, but I am getting to grips with this principle. I doubt whether there is anyone here who is more fully occupied than I was before that crisis, but I repeat, when God did that new thing in my life the past was as nothing.

Now our concern and our purpose in having conferences is that CHRISTIANS can say: 'God has done a new thing.' We know of a brother in Scandinavia whom the Lord had used quite a lot. He came to a conference and God met him in such a way that he says today: 'At that time, and in that conference God gave me a new Bible and an altogether new vision.' For years since that time God has been using him as He never used him before.

What I am saying is that there is a transition which has to be made. I will begin at the beginning, where the transition really begins, and it is in this matter of gathering the fruits of the Kingdom into the Church, that is, the Church becoming the embodiment of the FRUITS of the Kingdom.

DISTINCTIVENESS OF TESTIMONY

The first thing about the Kingdom of God, whether it is in the Old Testament or in the New Testament, is this: The Kingdom of God is always selective and distinctive. The rule of God came down into the nations and took hold of one nation, selecting it from among the nations.

The first law of the Kingdom of God is separation. You have only to look at the history of Israel to see that. God said to Israel: 'You are a separate nation and are different from all the other peoples in the world.' That Israel lost its distinctiveness, for they intermarried with other peoples. You read the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. What a terrible business it was to separate the Lord's people from the ones they had married! They lost their distinctiveness of life and vocation, and the distinctiveness of their testimony in the world. They lost the fruits of the Kingdom of God. They had all the tradition, all the teaching and all the oracles, but they lost all the fruits thereof.

So the first fruit of the Kingdom of God which has to be recovered is an absolute distinctiveness of life and testimony. Christianity is in a terrible position today. There are those who are saying that the day of Christianity is over and it is no longer a force to be reckoned with. Of course, that is an extreme view, but there is a great deal of truth in it. The impact of New Testament Christianity has been largely lost, and it can no longer be said: 'The men that turned the world upside down have come here.' The best circles of Christianity are troubled about their lack of power. What is the reason for this? The Church has got mixed up with the world. It is in captivity to the world. It is having to use all the world's means, ways and resources to carry on. It has not got enough of the real joy of the Lord to prevent it from going to the world for its pleasures.

Now you may think that I am out of date, but I do not believe that it is necessary to have worldly entertainments and all those things to carry on Christianity. I believe that it is possible to have the most living testimony and the most joyful life without any worldly entertainments. The loss of power is due to the loss of distinctiveness.

DIVINE LIGHT BY DIVINE REVELATION

I want now to come back again to this very vital matter, and I want you to listen to this, especially my brethren in ministry. Earlier we said that the Kingdom of God is the Kingdom of light. That was the first great thing in my crisis. I must speak out of my experience to explain what I mean. I have told you that I was preaching a great deal and was a Bible teacher. Well, how was I doing it? I was a member of several theological libraries and I used to go and spend hours in them, studying all the authorities on the Bible. Sometimes I studied so hard and so long that I had to get up and go for a walk because my head was going round and round. I was having to find the straw to make the bricks, and it was hard work, but it was deadly work. It was all the work of my head, my reason - 'flesh and blood' was revealing all that to me. And then the crisis came. What was the difference? It was no longer reason, but revelation. It was no longer just human brain work, but Holy Spirit inspiration. Yes, the Bible was a new book. Before, I could have given you a very good lecture on the Letter to the Ephesians, putting it all out on the blackboard, but when God made that transition I saw what I had never before seen in that book. My spirit was released and I had a new world. The transition was from reason to revelation, and it was a very wonderful transition.

THE FRUITS OF THE KINGDOM FOUND IN THE CHURCH

Now we come back to the first passage of Scripture that we read. Peter, in a moment of inspiration, said: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." What did Jesus say? 'Oh, Simon, you are a blessed man! Flesh and blood did not reveal that to you. You did not get that in the schools, nor by going to the

theological libraries. You did not get that by your own brain effort. Flesh and blood did not reveal that to you, but my Father in heaven.' You can go through the New Testament and you will find that phrase 'Flesh and blood' again and again, and wherever you find it you will see that it is under a veto. It says: "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God" (1 Corinthians 15:50), and the first and second chapters of the first Corinthian letter are an enlargement of that fact. "The natural man" (which is only another word for flesh and blood) "receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God... HE CANNOT KNOW THEM" (1 Corinthians 1:14). Flesh and blood cannot know the things of the Spirit of God, for they are only known by the spirit.

Here is a transition. Peter had been receiving all the teaching of Jesus and had seen His wonderful works. He knew all of that - but it never saved him from denying his Lord! It never prevented him from being a contradiction to all the teaching, but later on, when Peter got his 'opened heaven', he was free from Peter. The great transition has been made. Now the teaching is alive. Before it was truth, words, but now it is alive. He has entered into the FRUIT of the Kingdom, and the fruit of the Kingdom is light. The old Israel went out in darkness. Jesus said to them: "The sons of the kingdom shall be cast forth into the outer darkness" (Matthew 8:12), and that is where they have been for nearly two thousand years - in the outer darkness with "the weeping and gnashing of teeth". The Kingdom was taken from them and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof, and Peter says that it is the Church that is the holy nation, so that it is in the Church that the fruits of the Kingdom are to be found.

EMPTYING OF SELF UNTO MORE FRUIT

I must close, but just this last word. I said that this passage in Matthew 16 represents a great transition. It is the transition from all that is meant by flesh and blood, the transition from natural energy, natural wisdom, and all that is of ourselves, even in Christianity, to that which is in life and revelation. Do you want that? With all that you may have, do you not want more of that? After the transition in Peter's life he went on and on and on. We have it indicated that he had some more crises after that big one, but every new crisis brought him into more of the fruits of the Kingdom.

What are you going to do about it? Are you going to say: 'Lord! Lord! make it like that with me!?' Will you do that? Have you the COURAGE to do that? Do you recognize that immediately after that episode in Matthew 16 Jesus began to tell His disciples that He must go up to Jerusalem and be delivered into the hands of wicked men, and that they would kill Him? Peter said: 'None of that, Lord. Oh, no, Lord, this shall never come to You.' Peter was at that moment in danger of shutting the door to an opened heaven, for the opened heaven lies by the way of the Cross. You will only have more of the fruits of the Kingdom as you have less of the fruits of self. In the Cross of the Lord Jesus Peter was emptied of himself. He was a broken man, but that was the way to the heavenly fullness.

Will you say: 'Lord, make this all real!?'

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/t-austin-sparks/bringing-forth-the-fruits-of-the-kingdom/>

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