

Faith Unto Enlargement Through Adversity - Part 2

by T. Austin-Sparks

Faith is the key to achieving spiritual enlargement, establishment, and life, and it is through faith that we can experience spiritual growth and expansion.

Duration: 55:45

Scripture: Genesis 15:1-17, Luke 14:16-24, Acts 2:1-4, Hebrews 11:1, Revelation 21:5

Topics: "Adversity"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker describes a visit to a trailer park filled with worldly people, but also discovers that there are 16 Christians living there. The speaker then discusses five key themes found in the Bible: enlargement, establishment, free life, fullness, and faith. These themes are seen throughout the Old and New Testaments, particularly in the Gospels, Acts, and Revelation. The sermon emphasizes the importance of faith and the challenge of choosing between life and death. The speaker also highlights God's desire for enlargement and multiplication, as seen in the creation of the earth, the animal kingdom, and the promise to Abraham.

Transcript

We turn to several passages of Scripture. In the book of Genesis, chapter 15, verse by verse, After these things the word of the Lord came unto Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram, I am thy shield, and thy exceeding great reward. Verse five, And he brought him forth abroad, and said, Look now toward heaven, and number the stars, if thou be able to number them.

And he said unto him, So shall thy seed be. And he believed. Chapter 17, When Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am God Almighty.

Walk before me, and be thou perfect, and I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly. And Abram fell on his face, and God talked with him, saying, As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be the father of a multitude of nations. And I will make thee exceeding fruitful, and I will make nations of thee, and kingdoms shall come out of thee.

And I will establish my covenant between me and thee, and thy seed after thee, throughout their generations, for an everlasting covenant to be a God unto thee, and to thy seed after thee. And I will give

unto thee, and to thy seed after thee, the land of thy sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God. The letter to the Romans, chapter 4, and verse 17, That also which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, as it is written, The father of many nations have I made thee.

Before him whom he believed, even God, who giveth life to the dead, and calleth the things that are not as though they were, who in hope believed against hope, to the end that he might become a father of many nations, according to that which had been spoken, so shall thy seed be. Without being weakened in faith, he considered his own body now as good as dead, he being about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb. Yet, looking unto the promise of God, he wavered not through unbelief, but waxed strong through faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

Therefore also it was reckoned unto him for righteousness. Now it was not written for his sake alone that it was reckoned unto him, but for our sake also, unto whom it shall be reckoned, who believe on him that raised Jesus our Lord from the dead. Who was delivered up for our trespasses, and was raised for our justification.

And the letter to the Hebrews, chapter 11, by faith, Abraham, when he was called, obeyed to go out unto a place which he was to receive for an inheritance, and he went out, not knowing whither he went. Let me just simply and briefly state what is in mind at this time, that is, what is the Lord's message for us just now. If you look at those passages which we have just read, you will see five things.

One, enlargement. Two, establishment. Three, life or faith.

And then this extra and inclusive factor, all this brought into fullness at the end of the dispensation. The word of God gives us to understand that at the end, God will have a state of divine fullness, corresponding to the word enlargement. At the end, God will have things established, fixed.

At the end, God will have things wholly characterized by life. But all these will be through tried and proved faith. Some of you already recognize how that end is brought into view in the symbolism of the city, Holy City, New Jerusalem, seen as coming down from God out of heaven in the last chapters of the Bible.

Divine fullness, everything brought to a state of finality, established, all characterized by life, tree of life, river, water of life, symbols. But leading up to that, all the way along, is this matter of tried and proved faith. As we know the Christian world, as it is in our time, we realize how these are the great things which are supremely necessary.

These great necessities are Christian in our time. Spiritual and divine enlargement, things are so small, spiritual. Spiritual establishment, things are so weak, and uncertain, and variable, and inconsistent, without assurance, without certainty amongst Christians.

Divine life, how great is the need for more life, divine life, heavenly life, a greater fullness of life amongst the Lord's people. And while we recognize these things to be the crying needs, I think we are all ready to admit that the only way to these things is that the Lord's people shall be really tested, really tried. We don't like the idea, but there it is.

Everything needs to be put to the test, to be proved in order to be established. And so, we are already very conscious of a new movement of God amongst his people to test their faith, to really try their faith, to bring

faith to maturity. Now this would seem to have been God's pathway for his people all down the ages.

Try, try, tested, proved, and established faith to bring to enlargement, establishment, and life more abundant. Those are laws of the ways of God, principles of his dealings with his people. This leads us then to, in the first place, a comprehensive view of this matter.

Before we get down to the practical applications, the Bible has many angles. You take it and look at it from one standpoint, and you think that that is all that the Bible is about. You seem to be able to gather up the whole of the Bible into that one thing.

It might be sin, judgment, death. It's an angle. It might be righteousness and life.

It's another angle. And so, it has many such angles, and every one of them seems to be comprehensive. You just give the Bible another turn, and the same thing seems to be true again.

All the Bible is gathered up into that particular theme or matter. And so, you go on. The Bible is like that.

You can see the whole of it by just turning it a little from one angle to another. Now, you will see how true that is in this very clear instance that we have before us. This whole matter of enlargement by life through faith.

It would be very easy to gather all the Bible into that, and to say that is what the whole Bible is about. Well, of course it isn't. But it is one very comprehensive angle.

Think again. Enlargement by life through faith. Those of you who know your Bibles at all will at once see how that runs right through.

Supposing we change the metaphor and say that there is a whole bunch of keys to the Bible. Quite a large bunch of keys. And every one of them seems to be a master key to open the whole of the Bible.

But on this large bunch of keys, there seem to be three that are joined together on their own ring, so to speak. And those three keys are these three things. Faith.

Life. Enlargement. Faith opens the first door.

That door leads to the next, which is life. And through life to the next, which is enlargement. Those three things always go together through the Word of God.

Because this is clearly seen by the opposite. Unbelief is always shown in the Scripture to result in limitation. You just do not get any further.

You stop shock and stop death where there's unbelief. So there's no enlargement, but only limitation where there's unbelief. And therefore there is no life beyond.

No greater, no fuller life. Because you cannot separate these things. You see, it's always just like that.

These three things hang together. Faith. Life.

Enlargement. All the great crises in the history of God's people, as we have it in the Scriptures, had these three features. If you like to begin right at the beginning, in Genesis, the first chapter, with Adam.

It's perfectly plain there that the whole question of establishment, of enlargement, and of life, hung upon faith. And when he refused or ceased to believe God, that was a dead stop. A full stop.

No more. And that was death. At that point, death entered in, and limitation, so far as God was concerned, and so far as fellowship with God, and all that God means in the life, so far as all that was concerned, that hung upon his faith or his refusal to believe.

If only he had believed God, the way would have been wide open to continuous and unceasing enlargement, establishment, and life. You go on, in that book of Genesis, through these chapters, from which we have picked out some verses this afternoon, 15, 17, you come to Abraham. See, the Lord comes in with Abraham on this line of enlargement, of establishment, and of life.

Those are the three great things that sum up Abraham's life with God. Everything hung upon faith. All this that God said about this multiplying, this tremendous increase, this enlargement, and establishing him in the covenant.

Forever. Forever. The finality of this.

And this wonderful principle of life, which is so apparent in the case of Abraham, when death would argue that there was no prospect at all in himself, and in Sarah, and in every situation. Yet, life is in view, in spite of it all, but all those things just hung upon faith. He believed God.

If he hadn't, there would have been none of it. You pass into Exodus, the great crisis in the national life of Israel, in the Exodus itself, the deliverance from Egypt. Chapter 12 of Exodus just rests upon this.

Now then, the whole question of your enlargement, your release unto enlargement. The whole question of your being established, and brought to finality, to fullness. And it's a whole question of your life.

The central word, perhaps, in Exodus 12 is life, isn't it? Slaying on the one side of Egypt's firstborn, and the deliverance of Israel into life through death. Three things go together, and that was the crisis, but it all hung upon this matter of faith. Faith in action.

Whether they would take the lamb. Whether they would sprinkle the blood. Whether they would gird their loins.

Take their staff in their hand. You see, all an attitude and spirit of believing God. Everything hung upon that.

Pass into the book of Joshua, or through numbers into Joshua. And again, it's the land that is in view, the land of promise, with all that it meant to them historically, and all that it means typically and spiritually. Jordan lies between numbers and Joshua.

And what a matter of enlargement that was. From the wilderness, with all its limitations, its pent-upness, its emptiness, into that largeness, that fullness, into that liberty. That, to be established in the land.

The wilderness never, never had any idea in God's thought and purpose of permanence at all. There was only a phase of things to be got through as quickly as the spiritual condition of his people would allow. His thought was into the land and established forever.

The promise to Abraham was that the land was covenanted forever. Finality. And life.

Jordan overflowing all its banks, running there between. Speaking of death to be overcome. In its fullness. At its depth. And into the land is life triumphant over death. But again, everything hanging upon their faith. Upon faith. Would they? Would they? Move in faith. Now one generation could not do that.

Went back and perished in the wilderness. But another generation did it. And into the land they went.

And all these things, these three things, rested upon faith. You pass into the book of Samuel and onward. And you move out of that terrible 400 years covered by the book of Judges.

The most terrible book in the Bible, I think. The most shameful, shameless story of Israel. Oh, what a story.

It's death. It's limitation. It's uncertainty.

On out of the book of Judges. Into Samuel. Transition.

Toward a new space. Of enlargement. This space will end with David and Solomon.

The enlargement of the kingdom beyond anything that had ever been before. Establishment. And life.

Again, it's all on the basis of faith. Faith in Sam caused the movement to go forward. Faith in Samuel's mother brought in Samuel.

We dare not stay with all the details. Right on. Last, of course.

Faith was lost. Unbelief prevailed. And, again, it's return to limitation.

A return to bondage. A return to spiritual death. A respond to uncertainty.

All hangs upon faith. Shall we go on? Well, you can look at the whole period just before the captivity. And after the captivity with the remnant.

And you find these things are holding together all the time. Three things. You pass into the New Testament.

You find that these are the things which cover the gospel. The core gospel. The whole issue is now that of enlargement.

Of being established. And of fullness of life. That's the issue in the gospels.

All in Christ. And now the question is. Relief.

It's a question of faith. The same is true in the Acts. And in the Revelation.

These are the things governing those first chapters of the book of the Revelation. Where the churches are dealt with. It's just a matter now of spiritual limitation or spiritual enlargement.

Of being established or having the lampstand moved out of its place. Nothing established. Nothing final.

It's now a matter of life. Through the living one who became dead and is alive forevermore. The whole challenge is on this matter of life.

And whether it's to be life or death. And it's focused on the one question. Faith.

And so you end with the last chapters of the Revelation. And there you have these things brought to fullness. In the great city.

As a symbolic representation of the church. What have you? Oh how great it is. How great it is.

How full. How enlarged. How solid it is.

Established. And how living it is. And it is the embodiment of tried, tested and proved faith.

Now here is the whole Bible you see gathered into this. And it's a tremendous lesson to us. The Bible simply says this to us.

Our Christian lives are based upon the Bible. Upon the whole Bible. What does that mean? Well it means this.

That our spiritual lives are concerned with spiritual fullness. As we shall see as we go on. Are concerned with our being established to eternity.

And not carried away with time. And our Christian lives are concerned with this whole matter of divine life. Brought into complete triumph over the last enemy.

Death. But the thing therefore which governs the Christian life in these three aspects. Which comprehend it.

Is this whole matter of faith. This matter of faith. Tried faith.

Proved faith. Established faith. Perfected faith.

Quite a lot that explains doesn't it. That is the basis. Well now we must look for a few minutes at these words that we have used.

The terms we are employing. We'll take perhaps for this afternoon just this matter of enlargement. Enlargement.

We can use the alternative word fullness. We shall do quite a lot. But here I have a special thought in my mind in preparing this word enlargement.

Because I think it's a very living Christian addition. This whole matter of enlargement. Whether the Lord is going to enlarge us.

Whether we are going to be enlarged. Because enlargement is a governing thought of God. All the way through the Bible as we have seen.

God's thought is enlargement. God is always thinking in terms of enlargement. Of increase.

Of final fullness. God never finds any pleasure at all in emptiness. And in smallness.

God dislikes emptiness. And God always reacts against emptiness. We open our Bible.

And what is practically, although not literally, the first thing that we read. After we have read in the beginning God. And then a few words more.

We read, and the earth was without form and void. Or if you like, waste and empty. And empty.

And the Spirit of God. The earth was empty. And the Spirit of God, what? Reacted against that state of emptiness.

It was as though God said, this is not my mind at all. This is altogether contrary to my thought. I am against this.

And I am going to do something about it. God would have everything in divine fullness. That is in abundance.

That is his thought. For the earth. For the people.

And so the Spirit of God brooding over this void, this emptiness, begins to work. And every stage and phase of the divine activity is fulfilled. It fills the earth with the vast range of the vegetable kingdom.

Seeds in abundance. And life within the seeds capable of endless production and reproduction. He fills the earth with the animal kingdom.

He fills the sea and has let the living creatures swarm in the sea. Swarm in the sea. And then creating man he says, be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth.

I am against this emptiness. This void. And on he moves on that principle, governed by that thought.

Reaching Abraham as we have seen, I will greatly multiply thy seed as the stars and as the sand of the seashore. Well, comprehend that if you can. That is divine thought.

Beyond all comprehension, God thinks in terms of enlargement. Always like that, oh how much you can gather up if you like to go to the Bible on this very matter. Remember the Lord Jesus came to express the thoughts of God in very practical ways.

Amongst many other things that he said, he spoke of a great feast. Which was made and the guests were bidden. And they did not come.

They made excuses. And then the man who made the feast said to his servants, go out into the highways and hedges and compel them to come in that my house may be full. See, Christ bringing God's thoughts into this world.

That my house may be full. And I suppose in the New Testament, the day of Pentecost is the greatest example and expression of this divine thought. When the spirit came, mighty rushing wind, in form or in manner, fill the whole house where they were.

Fill, and then it's applied. To each believer, be filled with the spirit. See, it's very clear, isn't it, that this is a governing thought with God.

Enlargement. And the Lord Jesus not only pointed that out as what the Lord, what God would have. He has said, on the other hand, it is exceedingly dangerous to be empty.

Spoke of a certain house which was a man, possessed of a demon. An unclean spirit. And he visualized the casting out of the unclean spirit.

And the house being swept and garnished, but left empty. And because no other occupant takes possession, the unclean spirit comes back to his old home and sees it empty. The Lord says, he goes and taketh seven others like himself and fills the empty house.

It's a dangerous thing to be empty, to be void. If God doesn't fill, the devil will. Beware, my friends, of negative conditions.

Of not being positive. Of not being devine. Beware of vacuums in your heart, in your mind, in your life.

David one day was on the housetop in a state of a vacuum. A time when kings go out to war. And he was a king and a warring king.

He went on to the housetop. Instead of being occupied in a positive way, he was in a passive state. And we know the disaster that overtook him from which he never recovered all his life.

It's a dangerous thing to be empty. The devil will see to the filling up of any space that he can occupy. The Lord wants to fill.

But it is not just size that the Lord is after. It is fullness. It is not just bigness.

It is fullness. The ultimate word in this matter in the Bible is Ephesians 3.19. That ye may be filled unto all the fullness of God. Sent to believers together in their corporate, their related life.

To the church. It is the fullness of Him that filleth all in all. That ye may be filled unto all the fullness of God.

Think of it. The fullness of God. The fullness of God.

That is God coming in. In such a way that there is no room for anything else. There is an illustration of this in the Old Testament in the temple.

When the cloud and the glory filled the sanctuary, the priests had to go out. The Lord fills and there is no room for anything or anyone else. That's the fullness of God.

It seems to me that that word void or empty at the beginning of the book of Genesis is the result of a judgment. That of course has been surmised. Some people think guessed.

But you can look at it from another standpoint and I think it is confirmatory. When the Lord sent His people Israel into Babylonian captivity for the 70 years, the land was waste. The land was waste.

The land fell into a state that very largely corresponded to this state at the beginning. Void, waste and empty. Now in the case of Israel going into Babylonian captivity, it was a judgment.

A judgment upon their unbelief and their idolatry. So that the waste, the void was a judgment. And it would seem that's how it was at the beginning.

Desolation as the result of a judgment upon a former creation. But what is the point? The issue must have been this issue. For it has always been this issue.

It must just have been this matter that God was not allowed to fill all things. God's place was either shared with other things or God was driven out. The end of this present world as shown to us in the New Testament is going to be like this.

There will be a point at which God will be finally rejected by this world and have no place. We are moving astray. The result? The burning up of this world.

Judgment, destruction and evidently for a period, shorter or longer, we don't know. A state again of desolation before there's a new heaven and a new earth and all things created anew. Judgment.

And judgment is always upon this one thing, whether God is all and in all or not. Therefore, enlargement, the fullness which is God's full, rests upon this matter of God having full place. And my dear friends, that is the basis of all testing of faith.

God presses that point closer and closer as we go on. Whether we will believe God sufficiently to let him have his place in this impossible situation. Well, what do we mean by the fullness of God? It is not God coming in in person and filling everything.

But it is surely God in nature filling all things. God is light, the scripture says. God is light.

Then where God is, there is no darkness. There's no room for darkness. And when God comes in in fullness, there's no darkness at all.

It is all light in the Lord. All light in the Lord. And the Lord is moving on this line, dear friends, with you and with me, to get us completely out of our darkness into his light.

That is, to bring us into the light as he is in the light. He's moving. And oh, how faith is a factor in this matter.

A coming to know the Lord. Coming into the light of the Lord. Coming into understanding.

Whatever word you may use for light, it is seeing. It is knowing. It is understanding.

And you and I never come to one fragment of extra real light. Real light. I'm not talking about information, I'm talking about spiritual light, only along the line of tests of faith.

Faith, really tests. You want to know the Lord? You want to have more of the Lord? A dear woman who felt that she was far too quickly provoked, far too short-tempered, said to dear servant of God, Oh, do pray for me that I may have more patience. I do need more patience.

Do pray for me that I may have more patience. And the servant of God said, All right, let's get down and pray now. And so they knelt down.

He said, Oh Lord, do send more tribulation into this dear sister's life. And she stopped him. No, I didn't say I want tribulation, I want patience.

Ah, but he says the word says tribulation works as patience. Oh yes. We want more of the Lord, but we're not always ready to go the way of peace.

But he would take us to have more of himself. Is it that way? And what is tribulation if it is not testing of faith? Like that, is it? Putting us into situations where it does take some faith in God to live and to go on.

And yet it's possible.

It's so possible. It's only a week or two ago that I was in the West, United States, in California. And the brother said that we would go to see some dear children of God.

It was about some 60 miles drive. These dear people down there had begged us to come. By the way, those who didn't hear what I said about this the other day, a wonderful example of really meaning business with God.

And after a long and very heavy day's work, hard work, these several dear children of God bundled into a car. Without having had time to take a meal, took something with them in the car, and came a hundred miles every night for one meeting. And after the meeting, rather late, back home again.

Reaching home after midnight, the same for the next ten or more days. That's business with the Lord, isn't it? Now, they begged us to go and see them for some fellowship. And so we started out the morning, and these dear children of God were living in perhaps one of the most worldly, unpropitious, impossible situations spiritually.

You can think of. The weekend resort of all the Hollywood stars. And I can't describe that.

The utter abandon to the flesh. When we got there, we found our friends, our two friends, living in what they called trailers over there. We called them caravans.

In a trailer, a large trailer, right at the center of a great trailer park of all these worldly people. Luxurious trailer homes. But surrounded, as it seemed to me, by the utmost sensuality, fleshly indulgence.

We went in, had a most blessed afternoon with them on the things of the Lord. Most precious time. And when we'd spent the whole afternoon in the touch of heaven, brother said, perhaps you won't believe it, but there are 16 out-and-out Christians in this trailer park.

I'm going to catch them all. We went across and brought back two dear children of God, elderly, simply people. And without any going round matters at all and talking on generalities, right at the things of the Lord, we sat down.

Most blessed. And we could have gone on all night. They were so sorry we had to leave.

Just gone on and could have brought all the others in. But brother said, we all meet here in this trailer, 16 of us, and have very blessed times of fellowship. Now why am I saying this? The most unlikely place on earth.

Yes, the most impossible place for anything really of the Lord, of a spiritual character. But there. Right in that place.

I dare not put names to it. Here are our saints, walking in Piedmont, in living fellowship with the Lord. You say, you say, oh, the place I have to live in and work in, it's impossible for any spiritual life or spiritual growth.

Everything's against me. Remember that. The Lord can enlarge you anywhere if he calls you to be there.

But the argument, you see, the impossible. Well, think of Abraham. Think of Abraham and the enlargement.

But not because everything was propitious. Not because everything made it so easy and was so helpful. No.

There can be light in the darkest place if the Lord is there. The increase of the Lord. I had, having heard of that situation, expressed the wish that those dear friends could have been got out of it.

But when I left them, I changed my view entirely. I don't know that they would really be the better for getting out of this. This is the thing that is enlarging them spiritually.

It's throwing them on the Lord. It's making them know the Lord. There's nothing here but the Lord.

Everything else is against the Lord. It's only the Lord. But here they are.

It is the fullness of God. And that is in terms of light, even in darkness. Of love, for God is love.

Love in a realm of hatred. God is light in a realm of death. God is holy in a realm of unholiness.

That ye may be filled unto all the fullness of God. Now I must close. There's much more about this matter of enlargement.

Remember that that was the governing thing in the sovereign gifts of the Ascended Lord. When he ascended up on high, he led his captivity captive and gave gifts among men. And he gave some apostles and some prophets and some evangelists.

Some pastors and teachers caught caught for the perfecting of the sin. Till we all attain unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. Every divine gift in ministry has fullness as its object and its governing motive.

Let me close with this for a moment. That spiritual measure is always the test as to whether a thing is of God. It is not the measure of our doctrinal knowledge.

Not even the measure of our Bible knowledge as such. It is not the accuracy or correctness of our technique, inform and procedure. It is the degree of God.

We can have all those others and there really not be a degree of God. It is the degree of God that counts. The measure of God.

It's all a matter of when we meet and when others meet with us.

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