

Faith Unto Enlargement Through Adversity - Part 4

by T. Austin-Sparks

Faith is the key to enlargement, establishment, and life, and it is the basis of our becoming more settled and experiencing the eternal life of God.

Duration: 57:04

Scripture: Genesis 2:9, Mark 2:22, John 10:10, Romans 4:16, Romans 6:4, 1 John 5:11, Revelation 22:2

Topics: "Adversity"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the issue of inequality and excess in society. He highlights how the surplus of resources is often withheld from the poor in order to maintain a market. The preacher also criticizes the culture of gratification and materialism, using Hollywood as an example. He then turns to the letter to the Romans, specifically chapter 4, and emphasizes the importance of faith and the power of God to give life to the dead. The preacher concludes by emphasizing the need for true spiritual life and establishment, rather than relying on external factors or knowledge alone.

Transcript

I'm going to read those verses from the Letter to the Romans, Chapter 4, which were placed at the beginning of our time of meditation. Chapter 4, the Letter to the Romans. At verse 16, the end of verse 16, that also which is of the faith of Abraham, who is the father of us all, as it is written, a father of many nations, have I made thee.

Before him whom he believed, even God, who giveth life to the dead. Underline that clause, retain it. God, who giveth life to the dead, and calleth the things that are not as though they were.

Get the tense of that, of course. It does not say who were. Later on, in the great resurrection, they will give life to the dead.

It's present, active, who giveth life to the dead. 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.

And without being weakened in faith, he took account of his body, now as good as dead, he being about a hundred years old. The deadness of Sarah's womb, yet looking unto the promise of God, he wavered not through unbelief. Unbelief always makes us waver.

All our wavering comes from our lack of faith. But that strong through faith, giving glory to God, and being fully assured that what he had promised, he was able also to perform. Wherefore, 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, under 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. The one which stands over this time together is the word faith, and we are being led to see the relationship of faith to three things. Firstly, faith in relation to enlargement.

We have taken note that God's thought revealed for his people is enlargement unto his own fullness. All the fullness of God is the word which indicates God's thought in standing his people. But every fresh movement toward enlargement, or every fresh stage in enlargement, comes about by a fresh challenge to faith.

Faith being tested in a new way as not hitherto, and by faith's triumph there is further enlargement, and there is no enlargement, no increase of God in any other way. So, the scriptures show from beginning to end. Then secondly, faith in relation to establishment.

We have again seen the thought of God to have things established in a state of stability, endurance, steadfastness, trustworthiness, something substantial, something deeply rooted and grounded and immovable. God works on that line to have things like that, to eliminate all those elements which are present in us which are weak, unreliable, unable to carry a weight and take responsibility, to bring us to place where we are established in Christ. But every bit of this work of confirming, establishing, rooting and grounding is connected with some further testing of faith, proving of faith.

Every fresh thought sends our roots down to take deeper and from a hole. It's along the line of faith, faith proving that we become established. Where there is no testing, trying, adversity, we are weak, unreliable.

And so we see that again, right through the scripture, God moving toward having things settled and fixed. And after his own nature, eternal, abiding, enduring forever, I say the whole bible shows that this is brought about by faith. And in the third place, faith in relation to life.

And that is to be our occupation for a little while this afternoon with perhaps a closing word on faith itself. We shall see. Faith in relation to life.

And I need hardly take you through the scriptures. See how those two things go together. Much will come to mind as we proceed.

But I just remind you of such a familiar thing as this. That this matter of life does bound the whole scripture. The bible opens with the tree of life and it closes with the tree of life.

And that is the great issue from the beginning to the end. From one angle, as we were saying yesterday, the bible is all about this matter of life as over against death. And so as in the other two things, enlargement and establishment, we find that God has left us in no doubt whatever as to his mind on this matter.

He has made it perfectly clear that his thought is life. And life in full. So much so that if the Lord Jesus in his coming into this world with one hand reaches right back to the beginning and with the other hand

reaches right on to the ages of the ages yet to be, he is in that position on one self-declared ground and purpose.

I am come that they might have life and that they might have it abundantly. Life and life abundantly. Now those other two things of which we have spoken, enlargement and establishment, are inseparably bound up with this very matter of life.

That is that all God's enlargements are by life. That of course is so clear, obvious, taking the parable of creation, of nature, going right back to the beginning again. God killing the boys, the waste emptiness which was the state of this world as we find it at the beginning of the bible.

God killing was in terms of life. In every realm his fullness, his increasing fullness was along the line of life. I say that as a parable of God's way.

Increase and fullness in the people of God, in the Christian life, is always in terms of life. When God adds it is always additional life. The result of all God's work is that the issue is there's more life than ever there was before.

And so progressively, by crises and stages, God is moving with his people where he can, where they will let him, where they will not waver through unbelief. He is moving in that direction toward his ultimate fullness on the basis of constantly increasing life. The same is true in relation to establishment, confirming, making things stable, solid, deep.

This work of establishing is always again in relation to life, confirming in life, making strong in life. The real element about this life is its eternity. An increase of life is always an indication of something deeper having been done in the heart.

Now, the emergence from some state of uncertainty through the victory of faith in a crisis, in a difficult, a dark experience, the emergence just means, well, it's more life. That's all. It's like that every time.

More life. We are experiencing, and enjoying, and knowing more life. Life is the basis of our becoming more settled.

You see, there are lots of people who think there are other things which lead to consolidation, and establishment, and certainty, and assurance, but when you come to look at it, it isn't that way at all. You don't get established by a lot more teaching, a lot more information, even about divine things. You don't even become spiritually established by knowing your bible better.

That is not to say that you shouldn't do that, and that is not necessary, but the real establishment is that of life known in ourselves. The answer, this is the testimony that God has given unto us eternal life. The testimony is not a form of teaching, an interpretation of truth, a system of doctrine, a way of doing things.

Testimony is none of those things. This is the testimony that God has given unto us eternal life. And to be established means to be constantly knowing the increase of this life.

Well, now, that being the connection, as we said earlier, between these three things, because they go together invariably, we will take a look at some of the evidences of God, and inclusively, of course, the evidence of God is life. The evidence of God is life. The proof, the testimony to God, and the testimony to what is of God, is life.

Again, I need not turn aside to say that the evidence of God is not this and that and many things, but the evidence of God is life. Let us go back to that original criterion in the symbolism of the beginning tree of life. It is perfectly clear, is it not, that that tree of life, what it represented and symbolized, held the whole issue of whether God was going to continue with man or not, whether man was going to continue with God or not, whether their relationship was going to remain intact.

The evidence of God was centered there. Now, that tree evidently represented another and different life from what man already possessed. That's perfectly clear.

God had brought in the living things. The waters swarmed, as we have seen, with living creatures. The air swarmed with the living power.

The earth was full of living creatures and living vegetation, and then man created into his nostrils. Already there had been breathed the breath of life, and he was an animate being. Already he had what we all have by nature, this life that we call.

But it was after the imparting of that kind of life, and then becoming a living soul, that God pointed to the tree of life, and made that the issue of life and death. It was not the life that was in man that was the issue of life and death, because man did not forfeit that life which was in him when he disobeyed. Tree evidently represented, symbolized another life altogether than that which God had already breathed into him, a different life.

Death, therefore, came to mean two things. In the first place, it did come to mean a change in man as he was. Although he would continue as an animate being over a tenure of years, a change took place in him.

You must say, to analyze that change, that he became different by disobedience, even in his own natural being. But on the other hand, he forfeited his right to this other and extra and really true life as represented by the tree. He never inherited that.

He never possessed that. He forfeited his right to it. He throws just a little light upon the words about the Lord Jesus by God that to as many as believed him.

See, the whole question of faith coming in in relation to the right. To as many as believed him, to them gave he the right. The right to be children of God.

It's only saying, in other words, the right to this other life of God, which is through being begotten of God. The right to that life was forfeited by Adam through disobedience or unfaith. The right to that life is restored through faith in the Lord Jesus.

That's very simple and very elementary. Now, Satan said, as God said, Thou shalt surely die. Thou shalt not surely die.

Thou shalt not surely die. What a categorical statement. I know, apart from his known rupture in fellowship with God through his disobedience because of unbelief, man, Adam, probably was not conscious of what had happened.

Thou shalt not surely die. Very well. Believing the devil instead of God, he acted.

He acted in disobedience. True, the crown came over the face of God and the shadow instead of a light, a clearness of fellowship, the man went on living. He didn't there and then fall dead, perish.

He went on living and went on living quite a long time. Went on growing, developing, enlarging. You see, the tremendous enlargement after its time from that man the growth, his children, family, the tribe, the race, development and enlargement in every way.

And this looks very much as though the devil was right. Thou shalt not surely die. God was wrong.

The devil was right. But what has happened? There has entered into man a deep and terrible delusion and illusion of a false life. A life in which there is a lie right at the very core.

And that has surely worked itself out and is still working itself out. All the increase of days, yes, until many years it may be. All the development, enlargement of its kind in the matter of this world.

But right at the core of it all, bitterness and disappointment. At last, at most, emptiness. Disillusionment.

What has it all been for? What is it all about? And the people who have most, have most, are the most dissatisfied people. Always. Always.

That is true, isn't it? People who have most and have not absorbed are the most dissatisfied people in this world. The evidences of it are patent. As I was saying yesterday, I have just come back from a part of the world where the last whim and fancy is satiated to the full.

Everything that the soul of man could crave for and ask for seems to be available. Take in the realm of natural things. Down there where I've been in Southern California, see the acres and acres and miles and miles of the most beautiful food.

I pick stackfuls of the most beautiful grapefruit and oranges that ever you could see. Now my friend on whose fruit farm I was staying said, but you know, it's so prodigal that in order to keep any market at all for it, tons and tons of this most beautiful fruit are put into a ditch and acid poured over them so that no one will get hold of them to try and make business of them. Poor people who might need a little out of this surplus are deprived of it in order, you see, to keep some sort of market.

It's so prodigal. And it's like that not only in natural things, fruits and other things like that, but in pleasure. In pleasure.

Hold that very often in one family there, there are three or four cars. All the children have a car. One in every three of the three has a car.

And I go on. And you know what the word Hollywood means. The very last thing in gratification of human desire.

You can see it all there in this place. The feverishness, the restlessness, the uncertainty, the anxiety. The biggest hospital in the world is there in Los Angeles and four thousand cases are treated every day in a country like that.

Everything can be had for health. It's this train of life. To cope with life.

And as I stayed out in the very beautiful suburbs, everything very nice, I saw as I went along, house after house, up for sale or to let. And I asked my friend, what's the meaning of this? Oh, everybody within miles of this city is living as on the edge of a volcano over this atomic bomb business. And they're all moving out as far out as they can get because they think that any day the atomic bomb may be dropped upon Los

Angeles.

Life intention with everything conceivable to fill life with pain and tension and fear. Now, I haven't exaggerated, dear friends, because I couldn't. You've only got to go to think.

Now, here is an example of what I mean. Of course, you don't know anything about death in experience, but it's true. The more men have, the more dissatisfied they are.

The more you give to this life, the more it will take and can take. And the more it will demand, and the more dissatisfied it is, it wears it out in no time. The whole thing fails to last.

It doesn't last. And that is the life that the devil has given in place of this other life. You and I can have very little in this world.

Nothing at all comparable to a Californian set up very, very little and have the Lord Jesus and be satisfied in our heart. It's a very practical thing, this matter of the difference. But you see, the devil said, thou shalt not surely die.

And man took it up and walked away with it and thought that God was wrong, the devil was right and that he was alive. And this is what it led to. A pulse like hollow at the core, never, never answering to man's real need.

A mockery, a mockery in the end. The fruit looking beautiful, but falling from the tree before it's ripe. A hidden deception in this life.

But in that life which was represented by that tree, that other life, it's just all the other way. It has nothing to do with things at all. It has all to do with a person.

This life does not wear out. It wears well. It survives.

It is not like the other, only kept going by artificial respiration and the stimulants and how artificial they are. This is maintained from a living source and requires no stimulant, nothing artificial to maintain it. But mark you, that's very surgical, that's very surgical.

It's very, very important to be quite sure that this thing has taken place with every conduct. That there's no illusion about this, or delusion. But that they have really become definitely and surely the recipients of this other life, which will not require a constant succession of stimulants from without.

When all outward things cease, it goes on. That's the test. That's going to be the test.

It's a very important thing. Now this illusion, you see, this illusion can get into religion, and that's the place where the devil likes to have it more than anywhere, an illusion. The Lord had something to say to a church on that very matter, didn't he? To Sardis, thou hast a name, a reputation to live, and art dead.

A reputation to live, to be alive, for life, and art dead. The eyes of flame see through the reputation, the name, the false situation. It's a very important thing.

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for life, and art dead.

The eyes of flame see through the reputation, the name, the false situation. It would not be difficult, of course, to portray what that would be, how that would be, what a church like that would be. You need not stay with it.

Many things that have a semblance of life, that look like life, people call life, but they're not life. I have said they require these external stimulants to be applied to keep the thing going all the time. What the Lord calls life is quite another thing, quite another thing indeed.

Now some of the marks of this life, this divine life, in the first place, it is perennial freshness. It is called newness of life, that we should walk in newness of life. While that word new in our English language has two Greek words behind it, one means something that never was before, another means something that is altogether in freshness.

This life, of course, is something that no one has ever possessed before outside of Christ, but its mark, its characteristic, is its freshness. It's freshness. It's freedom from the earth touch.

This earth isn't a curse. This earth is in death. It's under judgment.

All that belongs to it is under judgment. And if this earth touches anything, it touches it with death. But this life, this life of which we are speaking, is completely free from the earth touch, and free from the touch of man by nature.

It is freshness. And for its freshness, it demands that it shall be kept free from this earth, and kept free from man's touch. That's been the issue, hasn't it, all the way along.

You see, the life comes in, the life of God comes in, and it makes it wonderfully fresh, wonderfully beautiful, and then what? Well, man must take hold of it in some way, and put it into his mold, and run it according to his ideas, and organize it, and set up machinery for this life, and it's not long before the thing is no longer in freshness. It's touched, something that takes the bloom off of it, and in the course of time has become old. Oh, and I suppose I'm permitted to say this, as being no younger young, God has no interest in anything that is old.

Many of you, some of you perhaps are older than I am, but I still say it. No, God is only interested in that which is of himself, that life in us, and his interest is to keep it fresh. Into old age, and to gray hair, there's freshness.

If the life of God is the principle upon which we are living, there's still freshness, still freshness. Yes, but we must keep man's hands off, and we must keep the earth's touch away. We must not bring it down.

Oh, man's terrible habit of wanting to take hold of, and run the life of God, it has killed more works of God than anything else, brought an end to a wonderful movement of the spirit. Man has taken hold, brought it into his framework, and under his control, and under the direction of his committee. Very well, the Lord withdraws, and it is no longer in the freshness of his life.

Freshness, newness, is the mark of God's life. The church is his new creation. The church is his new cruise to refer to Elijah, and the falling fruit of the trees of Jericho, because of the lack of this vital element in the water.

Bring me a new cruise, he says, and put salt therein. The waters are healed, and Pentecost is the counterpart of that. The church as the new cruise, with the life in it, against all the death in this world.

Newness of life, and newness of vessels, the Lord Jesus put his finger upon this very principle and said, when he said, no man, he might have said, much less God, no man put his new mind into old minds, madness. You're going to lose everything if you do that. No man put a new piece of cloth into an old garment.

God doesn't do that. He must have everything new and fresh. We are citizens of the new Jerusalem.

So we could go on, you just look up the word new and newness, and you'll be surprised how it covers everything in the New Testament. Everything is new where this life is. A second feature of this life is its productiveness, or productivity.

That is God's method of increase, as we have said. It's the method of life. All the difference between putting on, adding to from the outside, accretion, and increase from the inside.

That's God's principle, the organic principle of increased multiplication by life from within. And it really does happen that way. Life produces life, and life produces organisms after its own kind.

The seed with the life in itself. To reproduce, to multiply, a hundredfold. And the characteristic of this life is its productivity.

Now that, of course, is a testimony. It's also a test. If there is life, if there is life, there will be increase.

There must be increase, because it's the law of that life to increase itself. This is also a test. It's a challenge.

If there is no increase, no increase, then there's something wrong in the matter of the life. You and I are not bearing fruit. If we are not really in the way of increase, then we better look to this matter of our life, because it is inevitable.

It is unavoidable, because it is so spontaneous. If there is to be productivity, then there must be life. And if there is life, there is reproduction.

Unless, of course, we force the life. We get across the life. Somehow or other, we block up the well, then our fruitfulness is lost.

Further, this life is characterized by its inexhaustibleness. There is no end, there is no exhausting it. It goes on, as we have said just now, it doesn't get old.

We may get old, but that life in us doesn't get old at all. It just goes right on. It is inexhaustible.

And then, for now, finally, it is incorruptible life. Because it is God's life, it is incorruptible. Life corresponds to salt in the Bible.

The symbolism of the new crews and the salt they are in, is just the vessel of God here, with the life of God in it. And the presence of that life is the counter to the presence of corruption, wherever it is. Now, this, of course, is quite clearly seen in the book of the Revelation, in those first chapters, the challenge message to the churches.

It was, or is, a time of spiritual decay. Look at those messages, and in the name, they are against spiritual decay. We go further and say, spiritual corruption.

From language, thou hast there that woman Jezebel. Thou hast there those that teach the doctrine of Pharaoh, taught Israel to sin. Here is corruption.

And the challenge to that state of corruption, in the first place, is indicated by the announcement, the announcement of the Lord himself, I am he that liveth. I became dead, but behold, I am alive unto the ages of the ages. And it is as though he was saying, now then, according to this incorruptible life, I am measuring you on the principle of this incorruptible, this deathless, this death-conquering life, I am challenging you in your corruption.

And the effect of the message is this. If you had the life vibrant and regnant and triumphant, there would be none of these conditions at all. These conditions of corruption are due to something having arrested the life.

And so, the issue for the overcoming, the setting aside of all corruption, is that of life. Life. False teaching.

The corrective for heterodoxy is not orthodoxy. Shall I change the words? The corrective for modernism is not fundamentalism. The corrective for error is life.

That's what the scriptures show. The corrective for error is life. So it is in the seven churches.

There's error, false teaching. And God, who wrote that, also wrote his letters, you know, very much about the same time. And his letters are dealing with falsehood, error, decay, decline, corruption, antichrist, and all the rest.

Bad stink coming amongst believers. And John's word in his gospel, in his letters, and in the revelation, is life. You know that? You must tell him every study of John's writings produces that.

They're all about life. He begins his gospel, in him was life. The life was the light of men.

And that's the keynote to the gospel. Right the way through. Resurrection.

His letters are on that note, aren't they? All the time. Life. This is the testimony that God has given unto us.

His eternal life. This life is in his son. He that hath the son hath the life.

Life. And so you begin the revelation with, I am he that liveth, or I am the living one. You pass on to the poor living one their testimony and influence.

And you close the revelation with the tree of life and the water of life, the river of the water of life. It's all about life. But that is all presented in a day of corruption.

The answer to corruption is divine life. It's not argument. It's life.

So this life is something which is only appreciated and understood by those who have it. Others who have not got it can see its effect or its proof, but they don't understand it at all. They may say, well those people have got something I don't know anything about.

I don't understand at all. I don't know what it is. They seem to be happy about it all, but I'm certainly a stranger to all that.

I don't know. Or it may not affect them at all. They may come in where there's abundant life and go away unaffected.

They don't just understand it or appreciate it. But you and I do. You see, those of us who have this life, do appreciate it, do understand it.

We cannot explain it to anyone else, any more than we can explain what natural life is. No one can explain what life is. But you cannot explain what this life is, but we do it.

If we are spiritually alive, really spiritually alive, alive unto God, alive in the spirit, and we go in amongst other children of God, we feel. We feel something. It may be we feel death, a lack of life, an absence of life.

Something here that's not alive. There's some check to life here. Or on the other hand, we may sense the presence of life.

Now that capacity, ability to appreciate and to understand is the guide of the Lord's people. It's our intelligence. It's a very intelligent faculty, isn't it? We feel something's wrong here.

And why do we feel something is wrong? Or why do we say something is wrong here? Because we don't feel the life. We don't sense the life. There's something that is not alive.

Isn't that it? Very well. We are then alive to the fact something's wrong. That's our intelligence, and that's our guide.

What is it? What is it? I believe that's exactly what Paul found within Ephesus when he found those certain disciples who were disciples, and they were having some of that rich teaching that Apollos could give, because he was a man mighty in the scriptures, and he was giving them a lot of bible teaching. But when Paul came down to them, a lot of bible teaching here, and you are professing disciples of the Lord, but what's the matter with you? There's something I miss here. Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you believed? The Holy Spirit is the spirit of life.

He registered the absence of the witness of life, even with all the bible teaching, and the prophet. It was his guide, and it led him to put his finger upon the situation, the cause of it, to clear it up. This life is a very instructive thing, a directive thing, and so it works in so many ways which I'm not going to try to point out, but you see the principle of all the Lord's progress, as we have said, the Lord's going, the Lord's enlarging, the Lord's establishing, is along this line of life.

Come back. It is the life of faith. It is all governed by faith.

We're thinking much of Abraham, a little more to say about him yet, but there it is. Every fresh movement toward enlargement and consolidation and increase of life was by way of a fresh testing of faith, a fresh testing of faith. Everything rests upon this matter of tried and true faith.

You and I passed then in a time when our faith is being slowly tried, really being put to it. Let us try or ask the Lord to help us, to adjust ourselves to this. This is not unto death, but unto life.

This is not meant or allowed by the Lord to bring an end in death. This is allowed or meant by the Lord to bring us into a larger life. If only we could have that faith, we would rob the dark times and the difficult times of their deathliness and make them the very ground upon which we come into newness of life through fresh victories of faith.

Faith is the way to life through trial, testing, suffering, adversity.

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