

Features of the Overcomer (Continued)

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the significance of Jerusalem and the overcomer, highlighting the importance of spiritual life and resurrection in achieving spiritual maturity and separation from the world.

Scripture: Genesis 22:2, Revelation 21:10

Topics: "Resurrection", "Spiritual Overcoming"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the spiritual significance of Jerusalem as a representation of the spiritual state of God's people, illustrating that the glory of Jerusalem is veiled during times of spiritual weakness. He highlights that true overcomers, like Joab, are those whose hearts are wholly devoted to the King, leading to spiritual supremacy and the realization of God's heavenly purpose. The sermon discusses the importance of resurrection as a key to understanding God's purpose, noting that it serves as a dividing force between those who live spiritually and those who do not. Sparks warns that while all believers will experience resurrection, not all will attain the highest spiritual position, which is reserved for the overcomers. Ultimately, he calls for a complete separation from worldly ties to fully embrace the heavenly vision and purpose of God.

Transcript

We follow on where we broke off the last meditation, and complete what was not completed then.

From Genesis 22 (Mt. Moriah) Jerusalem does not come into view again until the book of Judges is reached. Immediately after the death of Joshua, Judah and Simeon attempted to take the City, which at that time was called Jebus. Josephus tells us that only the lower part of the City was captured. The Benjamites followed Judah in the attempt, but had no better success, and the City remained in the hands of the Jebusites during the whole period of the Judges, throughout the reign of Saul, and through the reign of David at Hebron.

Jerusalem in the Days of the Judges.

If you look at that period, you will recognise that it was one of spiritual weakness, and therefore of failure. We are familiar with the conditions that obtained through the period of the Judges. We have only to read the book to recognise that it covers several hundreds of years, and we are sadly impressed with the low spiritual state of the Lord's people, and the great weakness which characterised them during that time. We reach the close of the period, and Samuel comes on the scene, to find a very sorry state of things indeed.

Saul is brought in through Samuel, and still the condition is one of spiritual weakness, and therefore the City is not in possession, and is not occupying its place in the purpose of God.

The point is this, that for Jerusalem to express the mind of God, the very highest and fullest spiritual life is demanded of the Lord's people. The obverse fact is equally true, that whenever the spiritual life of the Lord's people is lower than it should be, the glory of Jerusalem is veiled, the City is not in the ascendant, and the Name of the Lord is not being honoured in it.

We gather from this extensive survey that, so far as time is concerned, Jerusalem represents the spiritual state of the Lord's people. That truth runs throughout the Old Testament by way of illustration, and is carried over in its spiritual meaning to the Church. That is why we speak of Jerusalem and the features of the overcomer. Eventually the heavenly Jerusalem, the Church, will come into view in heavenly glory, on the ground of spiritual maturity, spiritual fulness. It will be an expression of the very highest life to which the Lord's people can ever come, and that expression will be the power of the overcomer.

We know, in reading backward from the end, that Jerusalem does finally represent a very high standard of spiritual life, and that the overcomer company, as presented to us in the book of the Revelation, is a company which has reached the very highest point of spiritual attainment.

It is important for us to recognise that while the Jerusalem of the Old Testament, the earthly Jerusalem, is historical in a literal way, Jerusalem which is above has its history upon a purely spiritual basis. Its rise and fall, if we may speak of it in that way, is a matter of the rise and fall of spiritual life, and the Lord while now in heaven, having in His Own mind a perfect City, is seeking to bring His people, His Church, to that state of spiritual perfection which, when accomplished, will display His glory and bring with it the realisation of that vision which was seen of the Apostle: "And he carried me away in the Spirit to a mountain great and high, and showed the holy city of Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: her light was like unto a stone most precious..." (Rev. 21:10-11). That is a spiritual state that the Lord is seeking to realise in His Church. It will eventually be realised in those who truly constitute that Church, that City.

We see, then, that through the long period of which we spoke Jerusalem does not come into its place, and is not seen as expressing Divine thoughts, because of the spiritual weakness and failure of the Lord's people.

David and the Capture of Jerusalem.

At length we come to the time when David goes up to Jerusalem and issues a challenge to his mighty men, who accept the challenge and attempt the taking of the stronghold of the Jebusites, and wherein Joab succeeds. Joab is an interesting character. He does not always shine in the best way, but the noteworthy thing about Joab, the thing that determines what Joab is, is his relationship with David the king. If Joab were in pursuit of personal interests, or if his interests were diverted from David to other considerations, he did not show up very well. But you find that whenever Joab was selflessly attached to David, and had David's interest and glory wholly at heart, he is always seen to advantage. Now here in the taking of the stronghold Joab excels, because of his unreserved devotion to David, and because of that he becomes yet another type of the overcomer who takes the stronghold.

There a new feature is introduced as to the City, and the overcomers in relation to the City, namely, that the overcomers will be those whose hearts are unreservedly devoted to the King, their Lord, and who,

because of their abandonment to Him, will come to the place of supremacy. If we have personal interests, or if our interests are in any way diverted from the Lord, we shall not be overcomers, and we shall not stand very well in the main issue. In this connection we recall the passage in Revelation 3:7-12. David is mentioned there, and the temple is mentioned, and you have the City, and association with what is represented by those three is seen to be the portion of the overcomer.

Surveying once more, we note that Abraham, Melchizedek, and David, represent the power of that which is wholly of God in a spiritual way. Two things have come clearly before us. (1) The heavenly Kingship. (2) The heavenly Priesthood. We see that these are realised in Christ. Then they are shared by a heavenly people, and they are related throughout to the heavenly Jerusalem.

Now the Lord made a covenant with David that he should never want for a man to sit upon his throne, as is recorded for us in the first book of Kings, chapter 8. Then you find that David and Israel have been without a king, without a temple, and without a priest for long centuries. There are only two ways, as far as I can see, of explaining the apparent contradiction. The one is the way of "British Israel," the other is the way of seeing that all is transferred to the Lord Jesus; that the covenant with David has been fulfilled in David's greater Son, and that He is on the throne, the government upon His shoulders, and the key of David in His possession. (Footnote: From such passages as Acts 2:30, this is surely the only true interpretation.)

In the first place, then, all is taken up in Christ in a heavenly position, but in a secondary sense it is transferred to and taken up in the heavenly Jerusalem, which is now regarded as being in existence. Paul says: "But the Jerusalem that is above (not which is going to be) is free, which is our mother" (Gal. 4:26). Just as the Church in Paul's letters is always seen as already complete and perfect, though we know it is not so literally, so Jerusalem is looked upon as now above in existence, and all that is said about it carries that feature. Thus the heavenly Jerusalem, of which we are now a part, seeing that we are seated together with Christ in the heavenlies, takes up and embodies this heavenly kingship and kingdom, and this heavenly priesthood. We are brought into that, and that is transferred to us. If Scripture is necessary to bear that out, we have very precise statements on the matter. To the Jews the Lord Jesus said, as recorded in Matt. 21:43: "The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof." Alongside of that you place Luke 12:32: "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." Then the words of Peter in his first Letter, chapter 2, verse 9: "But ye are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation." So that the Church as the heavenly Jerusalem takes up the kingdom, the kingdom is transferred to the Church, and the Church takes up the priesthood. "Our citizenship is in heaven." That is present tense. That at once links up with the heavenly Jerusalem as now existent. The kingdom at this time is, of course, so far as we are concerned, a spiritual one. The kingship and the kingdom at present are in spiritual expression. Later it will be literally expressed; that is, the Church will literally take the place of governing this world in the coming age.

The priesthood is also spiritual at present. We are now priests. We shall be priests then. We see how the book of the Revelation presents a very full thought of what already obtains, as well as of what awaits consummation. In two places, both at the beginning of the book and a little further, in chapter 1, verse 6, and in chapter 5, verse 10, we have the statement that He has made us a kingdom and priests unto our God.

The vital point, upon which everything that we have said, or can say, hangs, is that all is bound up with and inseparable from resurrection. Resurrection is a far greater, deeper, more significant thing than any of

us have yet recognised. Resurrection is the key to everything, and you will notice that everything which relates to God's heavenly purpose is bound up with resurrection. Indeed resurrection, if in Christ, implies and involves that the thing is heavenly.

The City, as we have seen, comes into view in the first instance with Abraham, and we know that the central thing of the life of Abraham is the great power and fact of resurrection; that when Abraham had come to the altar, and had definitely quitted all that was of the earth, even though of Godly origin, then it was that Abraham moved out into what was something more than an earthly vision and purpose of God, into what was the heavenly and the universal purpose of God. It was resurrection that became the basis of what was and is heavenly in the covenant with Abraham.

It was the earthliness of things during the time of the Judges, and during Saul's life, which kept the City in a place of eclipse, out of sight, and out of function. And when you come to the reign of David, you notice it is as the threshing floor of Ornan is secured for the temple that the City comes into its full place. It was then that God secured His habitation there in a typical way, and it is by the habitation of God that the City is what it is. It always has been, it always will be. It is the presence of God that makes anything Divine and heavenly. Now the securing of the threshing floor of Ornan was in the day when the angel put up his sword; when death raging throughout the land was arrested; when the sacrifice was slain on that threshing floor, and an end to a curse was brought about. Thereafter you have a new beginning on resurrection ground. Resurrection always occupies the central place in relation to heavenly purposes.

Resurrection is a Separating thing.

Resurrection is the key to everything. It is the key to every fresh movement of God in the securing of His fullest intention and thought, and it is always a separating or a dividing thing.

Take a chapter like John 5. In that chapter the Lord Jesus is found speaking about resurrection. "The hour cometh, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live" (verse 25). That, of course, must be taken spiritually. Who hear the voice? Not all. It is those who hear that live, but all do not live. That is to say, the power of resurrection in the Word of the Lord divides spiritually between those who live and those who remain dead. Resurrection is a dividing thing. It cleaves the company in two, as it were. Some hear the spoken Word and live. They are raised from spiritual death. Others do not hear. You know that later the Lord Jesus said: "My sheep hear my voice...." There we have the first form of resurrection. It is spiritual. It is a raising from spiritual death, or from among the spiritually dead, and in a spiritual way men become two companies, the living and the dead.

In the same chapter the Lord Jesus projects things further into the future. "The hour cometh (He does not say 'and now is'), in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice (not the spoken Word)." That links us with 1 Thess. 4:16. "The hour cometh, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice." That must be taken literally, not spiritually. What happens in that resurrection? "And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done ill, unto the resurrection of judgement" (verse 29). Again resurrection divides.

There are other resurrections in the Word, and you find that every one of them divides. There is the general resurrection of believers mentioned in 1 Thessalonians, and there is a specific resurrection of believers spoken of in Philippians 3, the out-resurrection from among the dead. Paul was quite sure of his position in 1 Thessalonians. He had no doubt whatever of his being in that resurrection, no question at all. But of the resurrection mentioned in Philippians 3 he is not so sure, not at all sure. Of that his own words

are: "If by any means I may attain unto the out-resurrection"; "Not that I have already obtained"; "I count not myself yet to have apprehended." Here is another dividing in resurrection.

We are bound to come to this conclusion, I feel, that at the same time that resurrection divides, it also puts in a position, and that the resurrection of Philippians 3 is not the resurrection of 1 Thessalonians 4. 1 Thessalonians 4 is a far more general thing than Philippians 3. Philippians 3 applies to a much higher position in the expression of the Divine thought than does 1 Thessalonians 4.

When you come to the Revelation, you find the statement that the rest of the dead lived not for a thousand years. Well, there has been a resurrection, the first resurrection, and it has wrought a division. "Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection..." (Rev. 20:6); but a good many have been left out of that. Resurrection has divided again, you see: it has taken some, and left others.

But again at the end of the thousand years there is yet another resurrection, and again a dividing. There is a resurrection, and in connection with this resurrection we read: "And if any was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:15). Why state that, if at that time, at that point in the course of things, all whose names were in the book of life had been raised a thousand years before? Do you mark the significance, that even after the thousand years there will be some raised whose names are in the book, who missed something for a thousand years? Thus after a thousand years there takes place a resurrection, which divides between those whose names are in the book, and those whose names are not found in the book. If that were not so, surely a divinely inspired Word would say that at the end of the thousand years the rest of the dead were raised and straightway cast into the lake of fire. Why say: "...if any was not found written in the book of life"? Resurrection has come, even at that late date, to divide.

What does all this mean? It means that there are resurrections (not one resurrection, not two resurrections), and every resurrection represents some stage, some position, some bound of advancement in the Divine purpose; and you can come quickly to this conclusion that the first, the out-resurrection, is of a company which reaches the highest position. Every subsequent resurrection represents something less than that. We can be Christians and lose the thousand years. If that is true, there may be other things that we can lose.

That is the significance of the overcomer in relation to Jerusalem. The overcomer, as seen in Revelation 3, comes to the throne, but that overcomer company of Philadelphia and Laodicea is the overcomer company of chapter 12, of the manchild. It is a special out-resurrection company; and surely it is with that in view that the Lord has brought into our consideration the urgency of our being a people who are not in any degree earth-bound, world-tied, but utterly out, so that we might form a part of that company which shall express the fullest thought of God, and know the out-resurrection from among the dead.

If you have any doubt as to whether there is more than one resurrection, read the New Testament along that one line only. Unfortunately the Authorised Version in this case does not bring the fact out clearly, but the Revised Version will help you a great deal more. You will find that two words are used in relation to resurrection in the New Testament. Those words are the resurrection of the dead, and the resurrection from the dead. The Revised Version makes that distinction. Resurrection of the dead is one thing. There is to be a resurrection of the dead that is going to include everybody, but there is a resurrection from the dead, that is, from among the dead, which does not include everybody. The Bethany sister beautifully stumbled upon that truth for our good: "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (John 11:24). She is speaking of the resurrection of the dead, when everybody should be raised. Jesus

drew her up and said: "I am the resurrection" (verse 25). Now note: John 12 which immediately follows (it is the continuation of the narrative) says: "Jesus therefore six days before the passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus raised from the dead." The word is "ek," out from among. "I am the resurrection" - "Whom Jesus raised from the dead." In relation to Christ there is something more than general resurrection from the dead, there is an out-resurrection. The fuller the relationship to Christ the more God secures by resurrection.

So that Jerusalem has as its highest feature the overcomer, on the ground of a resurrection which, as we see, is of those who have gone all the way in their relationship to the Lord, or, in keeping with our general thought, of those who have not in any way been earth-bound, world-related.

Resurrection is separation, but resurrection as separation is simply following out the principle of spiritual separation now. If you and I are truly separated unto God now, so that Colossians 3:1 is true of us: "If then ye were raised together with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated on the right hand of God," we are on the way to the following out of that spiritual separation in an out-resurrection from the dead. I am not of those who believe that all who have been saved, who are living semi or partially worldly lives, are going to know the out-resurrection. They are going to lose something, and it is going to be possible for people to have their names in the book of life and miss the thousand years, if the Word means anything at all. I ask you to look at the Word. Does it say that? "The rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years should be finished" (Rev. 20:5). Then there is a resurrection, the books are opened, and those whose names are not in the book of life are cast into the lake of fire.

Now we understand those tremendous warnings in the letter to the Hebrews, for instance, about failing of the inheritance, failing of God's purpose, and losing the birthright, the intention of God. There is that tremendous statement made about Esau, that he sold his birthright for a mess of pottage. And then what? He sought with tears, but found no place of repentance. Then the letter to the Hebrews says: "...it is impossible to renew them again unto repentance..." (Heb. 6:6). Does that mean that they are eternally lost? No! They have lost their birthright, they have lost their inheritance, not necessarily their eternal life. They may at the end of the thousand years still be in the book of life, but lose their inheritance.

Now you understand why it is that there is such stress laid on utterness for God: perhaps you understand a little better the nature of what we call the Testimony, and why it is necessary for us to come out in a spiritual way from everything, even religiously, as of this world, and stand apart for God. Why all that? Why not succour the more generally accepted thing? For this reason, that God has shown a more utter thing of His will, which makes a more utter demand, and represents a more utter cost. It brings into a realm of a more utter conflict and anguish. But what can we do, when we have seen the heavenly vision, but go on? "To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne..." There is kingship.

Resurrection is the key to everything in the purpose of God. It is the basis of everything. And resurrection is always a dividing thing. You can come to one resurrection and miss another. It depends on how far you have gone on with the Lord. This is not a question of salvation, this is subsequent to salvation. Paul had no doubt about his salvation, and no doubt about that which was bound up with salvation unto life. But there is another resurrection inside of that, and of that he was not so sure. For that he had to strain every nerve spiritually: "If by any means I may attain." That resurrection is not the resurrection which goes along with eternal life, that resurrection is the prize of the upward calling. It is for the overcomer.

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