

In the Book of the Acts

by T. Austin-Sparks

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the foundational role of the Book of Acts in understanding the Lordship of Jesus and the empowerment of believers through the Holy Spirit.

Scripture: Matthew 28:19-20, Mark 16:15, Luke 24:49, John 17:14, Acts 1:8, Acts 2:4, Acts 8:4, Acts 10:36, Romans 12:2, 1 John 5:19

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Lordship Of Christ"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the transformative power of the Holy Spirit as depicted in the Book of Acts, urging believers to fully embrace the Lordship of Jesus Christ in their lives. He highlights that the book serves as a crucial foundation for understanding the New Testament, illustrating how the early Church's actions were driven by the authority of Christ and the active work of the Holy Spirit. Sparks encourages a deeper understanding of Pentecost, asserting that it signifies not just the coming of the Holy Spirit but a profound change in believers' lives, making them witnesses of Christ's authority and love. He calls for a commitment to live out the teachings of Jesus, reflecting a new humanity that is not conformed to the world. Ultimately, he challenges listeners to allow the Holy Spirit to work in them, leading to spiritual growth and a genuine expression of faith.

Transcript

Lord, we have just asked Thee to do some very big things in us. We have asked Thee to completely change our minds about things. We have asked Thee to give us an altogether new idea of liberty and strength. We have prayed that Thou wouldest completely reverse our disposition. We wonder what will happen to us if Thou dost answer that prayer. All we can say to Thee is that we agree with it and we ask Thee to do these things. Make us Thy captives, Lord, in order to be conquerors, help us to deliver our souls. Lord, do Thy work in us, take hold of Thy Word this morning and use Thy Word to work in us. Lord, we do pray that what we hear this morning may be the Word of the Lord. Thy Word is like a sword that pierces, Thy Word is like a hammer that breaks in pieces, Thy Word is like a fire that melts, Thy Word is like a lamp unto our feet. Thy Word is like ointment poured forth. If Thou dost break us by Thy Word, so heal us by it. We put ourselves into Thy hands do with us as is good unto Thee. In the Name of the Lord Jesus. Amen.

The importance of this book is best recognised if we were to estimate the importance of it being in the New Testament at all. I wonder if you have ever thought of what the New Testament would be without this

book! Perhaps at some time you would like to read the New Testament and leave this book out. There would be a whole lot of questions that you could never answer, and you would be in complete confusion. This book, therefore, is of very great importance to the whole New Testament.

Historically, it is Luke's second volume, and it gives us the beginning and the spread of Christianity. It tells us how all the rest of the New Testament came to be written. That is the historical aspect but spiritually there is another aspect, and that aspect is backward and forward.

In the first words of this book Luke tells us of what happened in the past - that he informed his friend of what Jesus began to do and to teach. That is the backward look. Then Luke proceeds to look forward. In effect, he says: 'Now I am going to tell you what Jesus continued to do.' But there is this particular thing that we must note: all that is in this book is the securing of the ground for the rest of the New Testament. All that is in the rest of the New Testament is built upon the ground of this book. After Acts the New Testament is occupied with the doctrine, or the teaching, and the book of the Acts is the story of how the ground was secured for the teaching.

As to the backward look, this book of the Acts takes up Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, and makes those four Gospels actual. Now I want to remind you of one of the first things that we said at the beginning of these messages. You remember that we said that the best way of understanding the New Testament is to read a book and then having read it, to stand back and ask yourselves the question: 'What is the main impression that has come to me by reading that book? This is of particular importance with regard to the book of the Acts, for when we stand back, after reading it, we see the Holy Spirit making the Gospels real and actual in history. Pentecost truly governs this book, but it will be well for us if we stand back again from that word 'Pentecost', and if we ask ourselves this question:

WHAT WAS PENTECOST?

Can your minds work quickly enough to give an answer? If I asked you now just to put down on a piece of paper what Pentecost was, I wonder what you would say! I know what a lot of you would say: 'It was the advent of the Holy Spirit.' You would be quite right. Some of you would say: 'It was the baptism of the Holy Spirit', for that is the meaning of the word 'Pentecost' for a great many people, but when you press the question closer, what was, and what is, the baptism of the Holy Spirit? You know what a lot of people would say. It is not necessary for me to discuss that! However, what I am getting at is this: there is an altogether inadequate conception of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Pentecost has come to mean a very much smaller thing than it really is, and that is what I want to show in the first place. Not one of us will doubt the necessity of the Holy Spirit. Call it 'Pentecost', 'the gift of the Holy Spirit', 'the baptism of the Holy Spirit', or what you like, but, really, what was it?

TAKING UP THE GOSPEL BY MATTHEW

Firstly, the coming of the Holy Spirit was taking up the Gospel by Matthew. What have we seen to be the message of the Gospel by Matthew? We have seen it to be the absolute Lordship and Authority of Jesus Christ - and that is the beginning of Pentecost. That is the first meaning of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and we do not know the meaning of the Holy Spirit until we recognise that. Now read the book of the Acts in the light of Matthew! "They... went everywhere preaching..." (Acts 8:4), and what was the chief note in their preaching? Jesus Christ is LORD! (Acts 10:36.) The absolute Lordship and Authority of Jesus Christ runs from the beginning to the end of the book of the Acts.

This is the primary test of our having the Holy Spirit, which ought not to be something subsequent to our conversion. This is not the extra gift, nor the second blessing. You look into this book and see! From the very beginning these people who came to the Lord came into His Lordship. They accepted Jesus Christ as LORD, and they came under His authority, and that was the secret of the power of the early Church. I know it was that that cost them their very lives. If you stand on the ground of the absolute Lordship of Jesus Christ something is going to happen, but do you want nothing to happen? Yes, things happen in this book. All hell was stirred to its depths, all men were compelled to give a reaction of some kind, and all heaven was very interested. The supreme thing in heaven and earth and hell is the Lordship of Jesus Christ, and making Jesus Christ Lord is the first work of the Holy Spirit in a life. I do not just want to say these things; I do want them to be applied. I hope that no one will read this message without making Jesus Christ Lord in a new way, without making Him Lord in all the practical things of your life and in the way you behave in this world, in everything that people see about you, so that you are captivated men and women, young and old. So the book of the Acts takes up Matthew.

TAKING UP THE GOSPEL BY MARK

It also takes up Mark. What is the message of Mark? It is that a life under the authority of Jesus Christ is marked by a consuming concern that other people should know the Lord, a great passion that others should receive the Lord and that He should have a full place in them. You remember John Mark? I hope you will never forget him! That young man in a hurry! He had lost time. He returned from the work, and there was a period in his life which was lost to the Lord Jesus. Then he was recovered and his whole spirit from that time was: 'I must make good all the time that I have lost', and so John Mark is: "Straightway... straightway... straightway...".

John Mark, therefore, is the representative of a life under the authority of Jesus Christ, and he takes the spirit of Jesus Christ and says: 'I must work the works of Him that sent me while it is day, for the night cometh when no man can work.' Now you see in the book of the Acts how that spirit is found. "They... went everywhere preaching", and if you say to me: 'Well, of course, that applies to the apostles', may I remind you that it applied to all the believers that were in Jerusalem "scattered abroad" (Acts 8:4); when the hammer of persecution came down on the Church at Jerusalem and the believers were scattered everywhere. The Greek word for what they were doing is very interesting. I notice that our interpreters have got into difficulty with this word! Well, if you don't understand the word, you know the thing. You can see it on the street any day, and after every meeting of a conference. Two or more people get together, and what are they doing? Well, they are just... GOSSIPING! That is the word. These believers went everywhere just gossiping - gossiping the Gospel. They were talking, talking everywhere about Jesus Christ. That is actually what is said about them. That is in the book of the Acts - but that is the later spirit of John Mark in Acts. He is moving everywhere and is talking about Jesus Christ. Do you see that this book of the Acts does take up Matthew and Mark?

May I just stop here to say something especially to my younger friends? It is quite evident that after his restoration John Mark was a released young man. Before that, although he was a disciple, he was just tied up, and his relationship to the Lord Jesus was in severe limitation.

Now what I want to say is this: You will never get your spiritual release until you become one who testifies. This is a law of the spiritual life. I do not present myself to you as an example. You may not believe it, but I was a young man once! I came to the Lord when I was in my teens, but for quite a time my spiritual life was locked up. Yes, I loved the Lord, I had given my heart to Him, but my life was all tied up until the day

came when I stepped into the middle of an open-air meeting and gave my simple testimony to a large crowd of people. It was an awful business! I went home saying: 'I will never do that again!', but it turned out to be my release, and from that time my spiritual life was completely free. That is when I started my preaching life, and that has gone on to this day. The point is that you will never get full release in your spiritual life until you tell someone else about it.

I had a great friend, and he was a great soulwinner. I was not very much impressed with his preaching, but he was a wonderful personal worker, and I am sure that in eternity a great number of people will owe their salvation to that man. Now he learned this principle. One day he went out and was wondering where he was to go to meet some souls and tell them about the Lord Jesus. He was just passing the army barracks, and inside the gate he saw two soldiers. One of them was on guard; he had his gun over his shoulder and was marching up and down. On the other side there was another soldier, just standing and watching. He had the stripes on his arm, and was just watching to see that things were done properly. My friend walked in through the gate, and when the soldier came to stand still, quite contrary to regulations, my friend asked him if he knew the Lord Jesus. Well, the result was that this soldier accepted the Lord Jesus. My friend said to him: 'Now that you have accepted the Lord Jesus as your Saviour, shout over to that other man and tell him what you have done!' He had much experience, and he knew quite well that while we keep it to ourselves we are not free. If you are an apostle, go everywhere preaching the Lord Jesus. If you are just a simple believer, talk about the Lord Jesus everywhere and you will be a true John Mark. The book of the Acts takes up that principle of the Gospel by Mark.

TAKING UP THE GOSPEL BY LUKE

What about the Gospel by Luke? What did we say about that? We saw that the message of Luke is the message of a new humanity, a new kind of man, and this new kind of man is after Christ. It is not mankind according to Adam, but mankind according to Christ. Is it necessary for us to point that out in the book of the Acts? The work of the Holy Spirit is not only to make Jesus Christ Lord and to make us active witnesses to the Lord Jesus; it is also to make us LIKE the Lord Jesus. It is to reproduce the Lord Jesus in us, and this is the proof as to whether we have received the Holy Spirit. This is what Pentecost means: a change in our nature from Adam to Christ.

TAKING UP THE GOSPEL BY JOHN

And then we pass on to John. You remember what we said about John's message? Everything in this present dispensation is of a heavenly character and is spiritual in its nature. I will gather that up into one word. Near the end of John's Gospel he gives us that wonderful prayer of the Lord Jesus. Jesus is praying, is pouring out His heart to His Father, and the burden of His prayer is these men the Father had given Him. He is praying for them, and what does He say to the Father about them? "They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:14). That is New Testament Christianity, and the work of the Holy Spirit is to make that true of every one of us - "not of this world". Romans 12:2 says: "Be not conformed to this world", and do you know what the literal words are? "Do not take the fashion of this world." That is very searching!

Well, I must leave that word with you, especially to the younger people. Are you trying to be like the people of this world in your fashion? I will say no more, but I will ask you to ask your own heart about that. You will never overcome the world on its own ground. The Church has tried to do that, and the world has defeated it. Our victory in the book of the Acts is on the ground that we are not of this world. So the Acts takes up

John, and, as I said, makes ACTUAL Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

TEACHING FOR THE SPIRITUAL LIFE

When the ground has been secured and men and women have responded to that fourfold message, then the teaching follows. We have the forward look from Acts. All these people in all these places mentioned in the Acts will receive the teaching for their spiritual life.

Now note this again. The teaching demands the position. Unless you are in the position the teaching will do you no good. You may have it all in your notebook, or, if you have a good memory, you may have it all in your head, but it will do you no good whatever unless you are in the position. We can only understand the teaching, and grow up into Christ, if Jesus Christ is absolute Lord. There are multitudes of Christians who have just come to a standstill in their Christian life. You try to talk to them about the fuller things of Christ and they look at you as though you were talking in a language they had never heard before. They do not understand what you are talking about. Well, they have come to the Lord, but for them the Lord is not absolute Lord, and therefore they cannot understand the teaching. They are still babes in Christ. For spiritual understanding and spiritual growth complete committal to the Lord Jesus is necessary.

Again, we cannot understand the teaching or grow up into Christ unless we are very practical in our Christian life. That is John Mark - being very practical about the Christian life. Not just theory, nor doctrine, but practical life. That is essential to spiritual knowledge and spiritual growth.

Then we cannot understand the teaching or grow up into Christ unless we are dedicated to be like Christ. That is Luke - manhood after Christ. If your heart is wholly set upon being like the Lord Jesus He will give you an open heaven, that is, the Holy Spirit will come and teach you and work in you according to Christ.

Finally, we cannot understand the teaching, nor grow up into Christ unless we are not conformed to this world. There is really no such thing as a 'worldly Christian', that is, from the New Testament standpoint, but actually there are many Christians who are still of this world. Do you know, dear friends that this world lies under a curse? Do you believe that of the devil? He was cursed in the Garden of Eden. The symbol of Satan is the serpent, and the serpent has no wings - it cannot get off the earth. The symbolism is that this earth is a cursed thing, and the Scripture says that "the whole world lieth in the evil one" (1 John 5:19). If you touch this world you touch death, that is, spiritual death. The Word of God knows what it is talking about, and therefore, with very great meaning, it says: "Be not conformed to this world." If you do Satan will make a mess of your life. Brother Watchman Nee always spoke of this as 'the earth touch'. If he saw any Christian who was not going on with the Lord, who had no spiritual power in his life, he said: 'There must be an earth touch somewhere.'

Does this all sound very serious? Well, it is serious. It is not my desire to be hard, but I am trying to help you to see the way of a true Holy Spirit life, and so I come back to what I said about Pentecost. Do you see how much greater Pentecost is than what people think it to be? This is what Pentecost meant in the book of the Acts, and this is what it will always mean. So I say to you what the Apostle Paul said: "Think on these things."

Once more we pray, oh Lord, make this all very real to us. Oh, teach us what it meaneth, make this true and real in our lives. May the presence of the Holy Spirit in us mean these things. We can only ask Thee to do it. Thy Word has been given, ours is the responsibility to respond to it. So help us, Lord! In the Name of Thy Son, Jesus Christ, Amen.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/t-austin-sparks/in-the-book-of-the-acts/>

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