

'In the Likeness of His Death'

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the representative death of Christ in our salvation and the need for a new man and a new life to fulfill the Christ-purpose.

Scripture: Romans 6:4, Galatians 2:20, Colossians 2:11

Topics: "Identification with Christ", "The Cross and New Life"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the dual aspects of Christ's death: the substitutionary aspect, which provides vicarious redemption, and the representative aspect, which calls believers to identify with Christ's death in their own lives. He illustrates this through the lives of Abraham and Moses, highlighting the necessity of separating from the old nature to embrace the new life in Christ. Sparks points out that true spiritual service requires the crucifixion of the natural man, as the old self cannot inherit the spiritual promises. He stresses that understanding our identification with Christ's death is crucial for living a fruitful Christian life. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a deep recognition of the need for the old man to be put to death to fully experience the new life in the Spirit.

Transcript

It has often been pointed out that the death of Christ had, and has, a twofold aspect. Firstly, there is the substitutionary, which is unique, isolated, and conclusive. Nothing can be added to that, nor can it be shared in its vicarious and redeeming efficacy. We receive the benefit of it as a gift by faith and are justified.

But there is a second aspect, namely, the representative. In this, we ourselves in the nature of Adam, in his fallen state, are included. Our sin is dealt with in the substitutionary aspect, ourselves are dealt with in the representative. While both of these are vitally and fundamentally related to our salvation, the latter will find the Divine emphasis when we come to living the Christ-life and fulfilling the Christ-purpose.

The Old Testament is full of this latter emphasis in type and teaching. Abraham must needs be separated from "country" (the world), "kindred" (natural relationships), and "father's house" (the "old man"). As one writer has pointed out, his whole life was a constant application of the death-principle to the many phases of the natural man. He made an initial move when he came out of the land of the Chaldeans, but his progress was arrested at Haran until his father was dead. The "old man" cannot be taken beyond the Jordan (the Cross). The old life cannot come into the borders of the "heavenly places." The writer quoted points out the meaning of the many relationships and incidents in Abraham's life in their carnal nature, and

of the trouble, arrest, and tragedy which they brought; and further, how they had to be cut off and abandoned. Some of these were:

1. Egypt - the realm of the senses; the attempt to find spiritual strength and enablement through the tangible, apparent, and present.

2. Lot - "the upright-natural mind." "The spiritual and natural mind seem at first so united that it is difficult to distinguish between them. The difference between the spiritual and the upright-natural mind is seen in the whole course and conduct of Abraham and Lot." It was only after Lot was separated from him that the Lord said to Abraham "Lift up now thine eyes."

3. The Canaanites - false religion; spiritual, but satanic; outward rites with accompanying signs and wonders, but demoniacal.

4. Hagar and Ishmael - expediency; trying to obtain spiritual ends in a natural way; trying to be fruitful, and that through self-effort, fleshly means, on natural grounds.

The principle can be followed in other details of his life, but we are content to point it out and leave it.

Abraham, in order to come within the terms and fruitfulness of an eternal covenant, must be a man of the Spirit, a spiritual man, and this on a basis of faith.

In like manner Moses had to be disciplined and prepared. One of the most remarkable and - to many - most perplexing statements in Scripture is that in Exod. 4:24: "The Lord met him, and sought to kill him"; and this, after the vision and the commission.

We know that it was in relation to the covenant-sign of circumcision, but we must remember that circumcision was the symbol of the cutting off of the whole body of the flesh, and this is related to our identification with Christ in death (Col. 2:11,12). Forty years earlier, Moses, with a conception of Divine service, had attempted it with carnal means and in his own natural life. This had brought the inevitable failure and arrest. For a further forty years the principle of death had to be applied, until the only honest expression in relation to spiritual service was "I cannot." The Lord had deliberately taken pains to bring him to nothing. The basic truth, however, must take some literal form of recognized testimony, there must be a definite expression of a spiritual fact - if you like, an ordinance; but the ordinance is nothing in itself, only as a confession of the acceptance of the spiritual reality. Circumcision was this in Israel, the encircling of blood, separating between the natural man and the spiritual, the old and the new; hence the incident mentioned. The progress of Moses was suddenly arrested, and with a shock he was brought up against the need to make in an act a definite and concrete declaration of the law of encompassment of the end of the flesh. We may take it that if we essay to carry the uncircumcised flesh, or the natural man, into the realm of spiritual life or service we shall be smitten down - that natural man will be met with the challenge of the judgment of Calvary.

Thus we see how the truth of incorporation into the representative death of Christ lies at the root of Old Testament experience, and this can be traced right through the Scriptures. The history of Israel is one long commentary upon it. The Red Sea is the substitutionary death, the wilderness the revelation of the need for the Jordan as the representative death, or identification in the death.

Having come to the blessings of the substitutionary work of Christ, and the enjoyment of justification by faith, we shall - if our spiritual life is a pure and progressive one - begin to learn how very wide is the gap

between the old creation and the new, between the natural man and the spiritual. This will come to us only progressively and line upon line, but with God it is already a settled conclusion. With Him there is no overlapping of the two, they are poles asunder. The bringing of these two together is to Him in the nature of spiritual fornication and the fruits of life and service are unlawful.

It is His purpose to make this increasingly clear to us, and while to us there may seem to be much mixture and intertwining, He will show us with ever increasing clearness that He has driven the dimensions of the eternal Cross between the two. We have given much Scripture in previous chapters which shows the fundamental differences between these two, the natural and the spiritual.

To be a Christian is not just to change the direction of our interests - to turn all our faculties, abilities, energies, resources, emotions, acumen, enthusiasms, etc., over from self or the world to the account of Christianity, religion, the gospel or the kingdom of God.

In the realm of the life and things of God there are two words uttered over the natural man by God, "Nothing" and "Cannot." To fail to recognize the significance of these two words is to come into the hopeless, heart-breaking, barren realm of Rom. 7. Fruitless struggle will result if there be any genuine spiritual aspiration; and whether there be such or not (the notion in the latter event being merely that of the natural man directed toward Christian enterprise) the service will be ineffective in all true spiritual attainment. No flesh shall glory in His presence, and the religious flesh is no more acceptable than the irreligious. How many there are who are seeking either to attain unto a standard of spiritual satisfaction, or to do God's service, with their own resources of intellect, will, emotion - reason, energy, passion. Hence all the unapostolic organization, machinery, advertisement.

No! For acceptance and service there must be a new man, and this new man has a new life, a new mind, a new spirit, a new way, a new capacity, a new consciousness, in fact "all things are become new." The one concerned comes more and more to realize how differently God does things from the way men do them; yes, and what different things God does. The aims of God, the methods of God, the means used by God, the times of God, are an education and often a discipline to this man in Christ.

Until the "old man" is well crucified, God's ways and means and times and aims are a sore trial to him and he will either revolt and break away in himself or he will go down into the depths; but he will come anyway to see that in the intention of God, he - the natural man - must go to the Cross, where God put him conclusively in the representative man Jesus, the Christ. The touch of the natural man upon the things of the Spirit is death and desolation; hence the Lord is always taking precautions against this natural life in His own children and passing them through that which brings them very low and puts them, on their natural side, out of action.

He drove a stake through Paul's flesh as a precaution against the uprising of his soulish life into exaltation; in order, further, that there might be no arrest, but rather an increase of spiritual usefulness. We have a very limited knowledge of our own natural springs - the motives, the nature of our desires, even for spiritual blessing; the personal interests in the kingdom of God; the craving to possess, to be satisfied, to have influence, recognition, freedom; and a multitude of other constitutional elements.

The Lord knows how all our sources of life and expression are poisoned and tainted. He would not have us introspective and self-analyzing, but He would tell us His own verdict upon the "natural man," and ask us to accept the Divine requirements that he should be crucified. When, by faith in His judgment and word, we thus accept the Cross, He proceeds to work out the death in us, and we have a growing realization of

the need for such. Then we refuse to move other than in the Spirit on the ground of God's fact in Christ - "I have been crucified with Christ... it is no longer I" (Gal. 2:20).

As the holy anointing oil was not to come upon man's flesh in the typical anointing in the Old Testament, so the Holy Spirit, typified there, will never be allowed to come upon uncrucified flesh in this age of the Spirit. Calvary precedes Pentecost in history and in experience. A true revelation of the worthlessness of the natural man in God's sight has always been a necessary prelude to anointing for service. The "I cannot" of Moses, the "Woe is me" of Isaiah, the "I am but a child" of Jeremiah, the "I am a sinful man" of Peter, the "In me... dwelleth no good thing" of Paul, are typical of all who have been the called of God, and these expressions are the result of the application of the true meaning of the Cross.

And yet they were religious enthusiasts, and devoted to God in the realm of their soulish nature. It is ever the love of God which leads by the way of Calvary, though bitter may be the cup when the soul (not the spirit) is poured out unto death, for only so can there be that life of emancipation from the limitations of the natural into the universal dimensions of the spiritual.

Let us look into the Word again and keep this thought before us, and as we see that His death is our death let us say "Amen: Lord, work it out"; and then we shall be ready to "know him, and the power of his resurrection... becoming conformed unto his death."

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