

Possessing the Inheritance

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the necessity of understanding, assurance, and conflict in fully possessing the spiritual inheritance in Christ.

Scripture: Colossians 2:1

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Inheritance in Christ"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that the New Testament parallels the book of Joshua, illustrating how God transitions from one nation to a new people through the Cross, aiming to bring them into their full inheritance in Christ. He highlights the importance of understanding God's will and the necessity of assurance and confidence in our spiritual journey, which is often met with conflict and opposition from the enemy. Sparks encourages believers to establish a vital union with Christ, walk in the Spirit, and recognize the power of His resurrection as foundational to understanding and possessing their inheritance. He warns against rushing into spiritual commitments without proper preparation and understanding, urging a thoughtful approach to discipleship. Ultimately, he reassures that God's commands come with His enabling power, encouraging believers to press on toward their spiritual inheritance.

Transcript

We have pointed out that the whole of the New Testament is the spiritual and present-time counterpart of the book of Joshua. Beginning with the setting aside of one nation, and its loss of the inheritance through unbelief, we are shown the bringing into being, by resurrection out from that nation, of a new people, a new nation, by way of the Jordan - that is, the Cross - and the absolute government of the Holy Spirit, as represented by the "man with his sword drawn in his hand" - the "Captain of the host of the Lord". The object of it all? The bringing of the people of God into their full inheritance in Christ. The New Testament is concerned with that in a spiritual way. Those are but aspects of this one great truth: that God, from eternity, has had in mind an elect people, to bring into the fulness of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Now we can find this first chapter of the book of Joshua condensed into two or three verses in the New Testament. Those verses are in the letter to the Colossians, chapter 2, verses 1 to 3:

"I would have you know..." Let us give due emphasis to every part of this statement. "I would have you know". It is easy to see that this is a dominant feature in the first chapter of the book of Joshua - the leaving of people in no doubt in no uncertain position. "I would have you know how greatly I strive for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh; that their hearts may be

comforted, they being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, that they may know the mystery of God, even Christ, in whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden."

Assurance and Understanding

Those three verses tell us what the beginning of the book of Joshua is all about. The emphasis of the Apostle is upon 'standing fully assured' (Col. 4:12): having absolute assurance, certainty, and confidence, as to that to which we are called - both as to that which the Lord really wants, and as to all that the Lord really wants - standing fully assured about that. If, after reading that first chapter of Joshua, you stand back and consider, you have to say: 'There is no doubt about what the Lord means there!' You are left entirely without any question. You are fully assured as to the Lord's mind on the matter, from His side.

"Unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding". Understanding is a great factor in assurance. If you have not understanding, you have not got assurance. "Understand what the will of the Lord is" (Eph. 5:17). It is a tremendous thing for assurance and confidence, really to understand what the will of the Lord is. That is the first, the primary thing, that we need to understand.

I trust that you are set wholly and strongly upon that understanding - that it is no mere passive interest with you. For, you see, when you begin this book of Joshua, you find yourself in the atmosphere of a tremendous energy: there is nothing passive in this whole book. And the whole book is represented in this first chapter. Things are positive, definite, strong; there is nothing weak here; it is all emphatic and imperative. That is a necessary state of heart and mind for coming into the full inheritance. Make no mistake about it - we do not drift into all God's will. We come there by a very definite concern to know what the will of the Lord is.

I am not speaking of day-to-day affairs, either privately or in business; I am not speaking about knowing the will of God in this and that in the make-up of life: I am speaking about that whole will of God lying behind our being called by His grace into fellowship with His Son (1 Cor. 1:9). When that is settled, everything else will fall into line, will be given by God its meaning and value, and all things will work together for good when we are in line with His purpose (Rom. 8:28). 'I would have you know, understand, what the will of the Lord is.'

Conflict

And then, as we have already seen, in relation to that full and entire will of God, there is a great warfare. The atmosphere becomes charged with conflict, as the book of Joshua shows. It is the book of warfare all along. We therefore need to be fully assured, and have clear understanding, as to why it is that the enemy contests this thing so bitterly. There is no doubt that he does; it is perfectly clear, as we have said, that, immediately you go beyond a certain point in the Christian life, and seek to move on with God in the greater fulnesses of His purpose, then you come into a new realm of spiritual opposition and antagonism, arising from every quarter, and coming along every line and by every means. Why is that so? It is most important that we should be filled with understanding on that matter.

Well, you have only to read that letter to the Colossians throughout, and its twin-letter to the Ephesians, and you will soon discover why the conflict. It is no less a conflict than that into which the Lord Jesus, under the anointing and government of the same Holy Spirit, was immediately launched in the wilderness. It came out full and clear at last. The enemy had been trying to get at Him in different ways, but at last the

whole thing is dragged out - "the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them" (Matt. 4:8). Ah, it is out now; now we know what it is all about! That is no small issue. "The god of this age" (2 Cor. 4:4), "the prince of this world" (John 12:31, etc.), "the prince of the power of the air" (Eph. 2:2), the 'world ruler of this darkness' (Eph. 6:12) - all these titles of the adversary indicate that he has a mighty kingdom and a mighty range of influence that he must preserve at all costs. But he knows that Christ and His Church are destined to oust him from his kingdom, to take it from him, and to supplant him in it for the ages of the ages.

To have 'understanding' on that is to bring some assurance, some confidence, some strength. We need to realise that no less an issue than that lies behind the conflict, which so often focuses down on fragmentary things - what seem to be mere incidents; but their object is the putting of us out, instead of our putting him out. And so we need "full assurance of understanding". There is nothing so weakening and destructive as the lack of understanding. We must ask the Lord to open our understanding.

(1) A Vital Union

Now, this understanding rests upon several things. First of all, it rests upon a vital union with the Lord Himself; Here is this constant reiteration and reemphasis: "I am with you" - "I am with you" - indicating the union between the Lord and His people. That is the simple but fundamental beginning of this whole matter of the will of God. Until a real, a living union is established between you and the Lord Himself, you do not understand what the will of the Lord is for your life and in your calling by His grace. Again, this union and this oneness with the Lord Himself is basic to an understanding of the whole conflict in which we are found. It is only when that union is established that the conflict begins.

Now note this. While Jesus was the Divine Son of God before birth, and at birth, and during the thirty years of His life, there was something of a special character that happened after His baptism at the age of thirty. That something was that God the Holy Ghost came in a particular way and united Himself with the Son of Man. And then the trouble began; then the conflict started; then the enemy came out! It was to get in between those two - the Father and the Son - in some way that the enemy was making his assaults. I cannot stay with the theology and the doctrine of that; but there is no doubt about it that, all along, the enemy's object was to get between Christ and His Father - to drive a wedge in there, to separate them. That would be his great triumph. If he can do that, he has captured all - the whole battle is his. This union was essential to all the purpose of God; this union was essential, as it was basic, to the whole triumph in the conflict.

Do remember this, that what the enemy is after is to get you away from the Lord - to make a breach, create a gap, and then to widen it as fully as he can, until you find that you are here, but the Lord is there: the Lord is not with you here - He is somewhere else. The enemy is always trying to do that, in a thousand ways; because he knows that while you and the Lord are together and continuing together, his hopes fade and vanish. This assurance and understanding rests upon our union with Christ, made and preserved.

(2) Having the Spirit

That, of course, as I have indicated, means our having the Spirit. A Christianity without the Holy Spirit is something which very much gratifies and serves the enemy. An unspiritual Christianity - a Christianity which is not really the Christianity of the Holy Ghost - the enemy loves that, and he will sponsor that; he will seek to build that up. And he has a great deal of success. Many who bear the name of 'Christian' might well be challenged, as Paul challenged those at Ephesus at the beginning: 'When you believed, did you

receive the Holy Spirit?' (Acts 19:2). Having the Holy Spirit is the basis of understanding what the will of God is, of understanding the whole purpose of our salvation, and of understanding all the wiles of the devil and the fury of the oppressor.

(3) Walking in the Spirit

But that is not enough. This "full assurance of understanding", because it is a progressive thing and not attained all at once, can only become ours as we walk in the Spirit. Although the day of the Spirit had not yet come, it is what the Lord Jesus meant when He said so much about 'abiding': "Abide in me, and I in you..." "If ye abide in me..." (John 15:1-10). That is explained later, in the epistles, as being the life of 'walking in the Spirit' and 'by the Spirit' (Rom. 8; Gal. 5:16-25; etc.). Our growing understanding, and therefore our growing assurance, depends upon our abiding in, and walking in and by, the Spirit. This is all implicit in the book of Joshua.

(4) The Power of His Resurrection

And then, one other thing. It rests upon the knowing of 'the power of His resurrection' (Phil. 3:10). What a large place the power of resurrection has in this whole book of Joshua. This people was a 'resurrection' people. They stood, in the first place, over against the generation that died in the wilderness. They lived while that died; they, went through Jordan, the figure of death, and came out of death triumphant on the other side. And there is more than that in this book. But they came into the constant experience of the power of His resurrection.

We learn much, you know, along that line; we come to a great deal of understanding and a great deal of assurance in that way. In this battle with death, and in our being allowed, from time to time, to go into, if not in our being taken into, experiences where the circumstances seem more powerful than the life of God in us - where we are really having an experience of death, where the sentence of death seems to have been passed, and we, like Paul, despair even of life (2 Cor. 1:8-10) - it is there that we learn, as Paul did, something about the power of His resurrection. We are thus brought to a greater measure of the full assurance of understanding; and by this understanding we are made strong.

Yes, there is something to learn in those death experiences. We need, when we are in them, to be more 'on the spot' (if I may put it like that), and to say: 'There is something in this experience of death that I must wring out of it - something that is going to be, as it were, 'stock in trade' or 'ammunition' against the enemy. I am going to learn something. I am coming out of this, by the power of His resurrection, and it is going to count in the matter of the inheritance.' The enemy would overwhelm us in those deep hours - carry the whole thing too far, and swamp us. Blessed be God, the Spirit is with us, and He brings us into a thousand resurrections.

This is the fourfold basis of the "full assurance of understanding", and the Apostle calls that the "riches". We are wringing them out of the Land; we are digging them out of these mines, out of these hills, of the Heavenly country. "In whom are all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge hidden". That is a great phrase, is it not? Remember the word to the people: "A land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass" (Deut. 8:9b). There were hidden resources, but they have got to be dug out, and it is real spade-work to get hold of the values of a deep and dark place in spiritual experience.

Taking Stock

Now, that sounds all very good and right and inspiring. But you will notice in Joshua chapter 3, something took place which is very often overlooked.

"And Joshua rose up early in the morning, and they removed from Shittim, and came to Jordan, he and all the children of Israel; and they lodged there before they passed over. And it came to pass after three days, that the officers went through the midst of the camp; and they commanded the people..." (Josh. 3:1-3).

They lodged before the Jordan three days, before going over it. This is not something to be rushed into; this is not something to be done just as the result of impulse. We may feel that it is a great idea - 'the fulness of Christ', 'the inheritance', these 'treasures of wisdom and knowledge' - wonderful! wonderful! most entrancing! But stay, stay; you are in for a big and a long fight. You are not going to come into this inheritance without real cost and real conflict. Stay! Many a Christian life would have been saved from wreckage if there had been, at the beginning, a little deeper and fuller consideration of what it all meant.

What is it that we are called to? Are we called to a 'religious picnic'? a life of 'spiritual joviality'? What are we called to? The Lord Jesus left no one in the dark about the cost of discipleship. But - but - how different is the appeal today! You would think that it was all going to be just one unbroken joy-ride - that it was going to conform to the idea of the man who was very fond of skiing, who said: 'My idea of Heaven is one eternal swish downward and no walking back!' You would think that that is the Christian life, from a lot of the things that you hear. The result is, many do not go very far; they either stop too soon, or they just lose out altogether.

So here at the Jordan, before taking the plunge (if I may put it that way), before committing themselves, before going into the river, there were three days' pause, while they weighed it up. 'Do you mean this?' We must be faithful with one another. While we so strongly emphasize the will of God in all this: while we make the appeal to go on, to go on; while we speak of the riches and the glory of the inheritance, the treasures of wisdom and knowledge - we must be faithful, and so we say: Take time to face the whole thing. Lay a sound foundation, so that you will be able to say, when the difficulties come afterward, and the enemy comes in like a flood: 'Yes, but I weighed it up; I weighed it up; I faced what it would involve; I calculated. I am not where I am on a flimsy impulse. Mine is a soundly considered position; I know why I am where I am.' It is very important, for the whole campaign, to pause for 'three days' before you make your advance. Now, of course, that need not be taken literally; but it does represent a state of the heart, a facing of things with God, a reckoning up in His presence.

Spiritual Resources

There was another aspect of this, as you notice. During the three days they 'prepared the victuals': "Prepare ye victuals", said the officers of Joshua to the people (1:10,11). It is only another aspect of the same thing. You have got to have something to move on; you have got to have some support for this. You really need to have resources for this movement. Presently, when the manna ceases, and the old corn of the Land is fed upon, the situation may change. But here is a crisis; here is a turning point. And, to carry you through this crisis, you must have some real spiritual foundation, some substance.

Here, of course, we meet with the whole necessity of soundly instructing young converts, or young Christians, or those who want to go on further with the Lord. They need to be instructed, provided with the Word of the Lord in this matter. What a sorry and sad situation may exist, of spiritual immaturity, weakness and defeat because just there, at the crisis, there was not an adequate basis of the Word. Let us, then, lay a foundation, truly and surely, and see that we have victuals, we have substance, we have resource,

something for our strengthening, to go upon.

Possessing the Inheritance

"Now Joshua was old and well stricken in years; and the Lord said unto him, Thou art old and well stricken in years, and there remaineth yet very much land to be possessed" (Josh. 13:1).

"And Joshua said unto the children of Israel, How long are ye slack to go in to possess the land, which the Lord, the God of your fathers, hath given you?" (18:3).

Perhaps you are thinking that the first of these quotations looks like a contradiction of what I was saying previously about the 'young man' Joshua. If you think like that, you must think a second time! There is a good deal of encouragement for the old men here, not discouragement! The main part of Joshua's work began at that point. Up to that point, it is true he had led them in battle; he had led them against the many enemies, and he had subdued the country, but he had not yet brought them into their full inheritance. From this point, you will notice, it is all settling in the inheritance. Joshua does a very great deal, after this, of consolidating everything. That is the point. We must not stop until all that God intended has been entered into. The tragedy, of course, of these people was that they stopped too soon. For that very reason we have the story related in the book of Judges - the most tragic book of the Bible.

The Letter to the Hebrews is one strong argument against stopping too soon. 'Having laid the foundation, let us not go over it again, but let us go on - let us go on' (Heb. 6:1,2). 'Let us fear lest, a promise being left to us of entering into His rest, any one of us should be deemed to have come short' (4:1). That is the great burden and object of that letter, is it not? - to go right on! There are two sides to that.

There is, of course, the imperative. In Joshua 1 you have the imperatives: "Arise, go over..." We must, because the Lord wills it and calls us to it. Then there is the perfect: "To you have I given it" - 'I have... it is yours.' And there is the expressed purpose: "Ye are to... go in to possess". It must be. But if that 'must' should sound hard, should seem to put an onus and a burden and a strain upon the Christian life, remember - when God says it must be, He means it can be. God's commandments are God's enablings. If He says: 'Thou shalt', He means: 'Thou canst'. And because it must be, and it can be, then it should be. Those are the two sides - the imperative, and God's provision for all that He wills. What He requires, He makes possible, He provides for, indeed He commits Himself to it.

God's Commands Are His Enablings

It is a wonderful thing how - difficult, hard, painful and costly as may be this way of the fullest purpose of God, and all the conflict which is bound up and associated with it - it is just marvellous how we do survive, and more than survive. If there is any realm in which the miracle of His sovereign grace and His sovereign power is manifested, it is in this realm of the fuller purposes of God. A life in such a realm is a life of the 'wonderful works of God'. Perhaps that is why He allows it to be such a contested and difficult way, that He might show His wonderful works. That is how we must read the Word of God, that is how we must read Abraham and Paul and others: as men whose lives throughout were subjected to the most terrible testings and tryings, sufferings and adversities, sorrows and disappointments, in one realm, and yet who, at last, triumphed so wonderfully; and we have the record of their marvellous triumph.

You cannot read that eleventh chapter of the letter to the Hebrews without marvelling every time. I say to myself: 'I could not do it' - and we all know that we could not do it. Listen! "These all died in faith, not

having received the promises" (v. 13). What are you going to do about that? They died without receiving the promises! One after another died without receiving the promises. And yet it says: 'They died in faith'. They did not die saying: 'God promised and He has not fulfilled; God is not faithful to His promise. I give it all up; I cannot believe God any longer.' "These all died in faith, not having received..." - "in faith, not having received..." I say, I could not do that. But God can - the grace of God can. And it is a long list that we have here.

And so, what God calls to, He enables for. It can be, because, from God's standpoint, it must be. I trust that you have seen something of the clearly defined lines of God's will and God's purpose for us, in having called us into fellowship with His Son. You can see what it involves us in, but you can see that God has committed Himself to that. When we are on this line, He will say: 'I am with thee whithersoever thou goest.'

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