

Taking Possession of the Heavenly Land

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the necessity of becoming a heavenly people through the Lordship of the Holy Spirit to fully possess God's inheritance on earth.

Scripture: Joshua 5:13

Topics: "Heavenly Inheritance", "Lordship of the Holy Spirit"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the necessity of becoming a heavenly people to truly possess God's inheritance, as illustrated by Joshua's encounter with the Prince of the Lord's host. He explains that the journey to heavenly fullness requires surrender to the Lordship of the Holy Spirit, which leads to spiritual conflict and growth. The sermon highlights that true possession of the heavenly land is not merely theoretical but requires an actual, lived experience of faith and obedience. Sparks warns against the dangers of earthly attachments that hinder spiritual progress and stresses the importance of maintaining a heavenly position in faith. Ultimately, he calls for believers to recognize the Holy Spirit's commitment to God's eternal purpose rather than their own plans.

Transcript

"And it came to pass, when Joshua was by Jericho, that he lifted up his eyes and looked, and, behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand: and Joshua went unto him, and said unto him, Art thou for us, or for our adversaries? And he said, Nay; but as prince of the host of the Lord am I now come. And Joshua fell on his face to the earth, and did worship, and said unto him, What saith my lord unto his servant? And the prince of the Lord's host said unto Joshua, Put off thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is holy. And Joshua did so." (Joshua 5:13-15).

"...having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints" (Ephesians 1:18).

I would make it clear at the outset that it is not my purpose to deal with the correspondence between the book of Joshua and the letter to the Ephesians. We are occupied in these studies with one particular thought, around which all this gathers, in which it centres: that is, that God's end is to have heavenly fullness expressed in this earth through and by a people. The whole course of His dealings through the ages, from the time when He established the heavens over the earth, has been, and still is, from man's point of view, like a spiritual pilgrimage, a moving spiritually heavenward: and that means, not to some place, necessarily, but to some order of things according to God's mind - that order to which the Lord

Jesus referred when, speaking of the will of God, He said, "as in heaven" (Matt. 6:10); to have everything as it is in heaven. Toward this there is a heavenly way, a heavenly course, a heavenly journey, and we are seeking to see, amongst other things, the nature of that heavenly way. And then we have seen that, since so many do not know more than the very beginning of that way in conversion, the Lord raises up instrumentalities in whom He does His very deep work in relation to heaven to pioneer the way for others.

Now we pursue this a little further. With the two passages which we have just read, we arrive at a particular point in this matter of coming to heavenly fullness. The second half of the book of Joshua, of course, is occupied with the people coming into the inheritance, the inheritance being divided and apportioned and possessed. Strangely, in the letter to the Ephesians - which corresponds to this - it is put round the other way. It is spoken of as God's inheritance in His people, "the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints" (1:18); and I would like to drop a word on that before we pass on, because it is not different, it is not something else. It is the same thing viewed from the other side.

The Lord comes into His inheritance when, and only when, His people really become a heavenly people. For the Lord to have His inheritance, they must be where they are seen to be in the letter to the Ephesians. When they really take position and possession and truly become a heavenly people, then the Lord has got His inheritance. To see "the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints" means, from the other side, that we come to the place where He can see it in us. He cannot see His inheritance in the saints until He sees them in the place where He would have them, until He sees them really the people that answer to His mind as a heavenly people. I am saying this in order to clear up any possible mental difficulty over talking about the people possessing the inheritance, and this word about the Lord possessing His inheritance.

Now, our point is not just the truth of there being an inheritance in Christ, either for us or for the Lord; not just the truth, set forth in the Word, that, when we are in union with Christ through death, burial and resurrection, and on the other side, we come into the realm of Divine fullness. The point that we are underlining is the point of actually becoming a heavenly people, actually taking possession - not doctrinally, not theoretically, not Biblically, but actually. I am quite sure that you behold the truth, you contemplate it, you recognise that it is a wonderful presentation; I am quite sure that you, in your hearts, embrace the idea; but the trouble is that all this is known so well - it has been taught to so many, but they are not there. They have not actually come to that position where they are this - and what is the use or good of all our doctrine, teaching, interpretation, contemplation and all the rest, if we are not there? So we have to look at the way to, shall I say, get there, so that it shall become an actuality.

THE LORDSHIP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

And the very first thing after that preparatory work of which we were speaking a few pages earlier: the Jordan, the leaving something in the bed of Jordan, our old man crucified and left there; after leaving him there and letting him be covered over and going away from him: after that and after Gilgal - that is, the negative side, the putting off - now comes the positive side, the putting on, the real, the actual taking possession or entering; the becoming the thing that has always been in view. For this has always been in view, or it has been ever since coming out of Egypt. It was mentioned in the song of Moses. Yes, it was pre-visionsed in that great prophetic song on the deliverance side of the Red Sea. It has always been there as a notion, but it has been remote, somewhere out there, more or less vivid, as the days have gone on: sometimes strong and clear and positive and gripping; at other times fading, weak and far off, an abstract.

But now the whole thing has come right up as a positive present issue, preparation having been made. We come to this passage which we have just read in Joshua 5:13-15. Joshua, standing over against Jericho, "lifted up his eyes and looked, and behold, there stood a man over against him with his sword drawn in his hand". The warrior spirit in Joshua evidently rose, and he went to challenge him: "Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?" - probably meaning that if he got Yes to the latter part of his interrogation it was going to be the worse for the man - for at this point he only saw a man. The answer revealed that He was more than a man. Joshua capitulated, dropped his attitude of challenge, bowed, worshipped, confessed himself the servant of this One, and asked for instructions.

Who is this One? As I said in a previous chapter, it is my own conviction that this One, in this particular part of the Bible, represents the Holy Spirit in the New Testament. That, I think, could be borne out by quite a lot of evidence, but, without arguing it from the Scriptures, let us see how it works out - if it is that - in effect.

There are a number of changes which have taken place at this point. Up to this point, the course, the way, the government of the people, had been by the pillar of cloud and fire. Everybody will accept that that is the Holy Spirit. That is objective, that is in evidence to the senses, that is characteristic of the wilderness. When you get over into the heavenlies, it is all the Spirit; but, although at this point He was seen, He was never seen again. He disappears from sensual perception, but He is there all through what happens, very much there, the unseen Prince of the host of the Lord. That is one change. There are many other changes. No longer the manna - now the old corn of the land; the bread of life, the heavenly food, in another sense; that which belongs to another realm: Christ in resurrection, not Christ in humiliation, the broken bread. This is Christ in resurrection, the food of a heavenly people. The one belonged to the wilderness; this belongs to the land. And so we might go on with the differences. You see, here, in this realm, everything is essentially heavenly, in a new sense; in other words, it is essentially spiritual; not sentient, not temporal, but essentially spiritual.

Now Paul says that the Holy Spirit is "an earnest of our inheritance" (Ephesians 1:14): so that the Holy Spirit coming here at this point is the guarantee that this purpose of God is going to be realised. He, although from this point unseen, is the absolute security of all the rest. We said in our last study that the presence of the Holy Spirit in anointing for Divine purpose positively guarantees the realisation of that purpose, not only making it possible, but being the ground of the actuality. How does it become an actuality, as more than a doctrine, a truth, a precept - a present actuality?

God has given us the Spirit as an earnest: the guarantee, the security. The positive side begins with this first - the Holy Spirit presented as Lord. You notice that the American Revised Version (as English A.V.M. and R.V.M.) here says "as prince", and perhaps it is more true to the original than 'captain'. "As Prince of the host of the Lord": He is presented in Lordship. The positive side of things begins there - with the absolute Lordship of the Holy Spirit amongst the people of God. He is presented and recognised, and something is done in relation to it. It is not an objective truth, but something that is done positively in relation to it. Joshua went down in absolute surrender and capitulation.

The Cross has led to that. The Cross always does lead to the Lordship of the Holy Spirit. So it is from the Jordan to His Lordship. The Cross demands that. If He is not in His place as Lord, and if there is no capitulation, you had better get back to the Cross - go back and have another look through the waters at those stones which are supposed to represent you. Something has gone wrong, you are not true to the fact of the Cross, if He is not Lord.

But here, in spiritual interpretation, it is taken for granted that the Cross really is an established fact. While there are the faults and the weaknesses of the human life - they come out in Joshua - while there are faults and weaknesses and flaws still there in our humanity, nevertheless, so far as our hearts and our wills and our minds are concerned, the Cross has broken us and made a way for the Holy Spirit. That is what the Cross means: the way of the Lordship of the Spirit is open, and through the Lordship of the Spirit the way to heavenly fullness is open.

What a profound difference there is between man-made 'conquests' (?) - shall I say, man-made revivals - and the work of the Holy Spirit! What a difference! This book of Joshua is the book of mighty differences. The difference here is such that it just leads man right out of it. He cannot reckon with this thing, he has no place in it, it is simply beyond his powers of calculation. The Lord has precipitated His people into a realm where it is altogether different from man's way of doing things. When the Holy Spirit is Lord you have not got to organize something to get it going. You have not got to plan and devise and scheme, in order to get something going, to make a work of God, to make a revival. It just goes. It is the going of heaven. And it requires you in that position - it requires this absolute government of the Holy Spirit. In every man-made activity there is always the 'earth touch' - means or methods or people, or all that paraphernalia, to guarantee its success - and the thing goes with a lot of noise and a lot of creaking, and it has to have a tremendous amount of human support, and at any moment it may fade out, if you do not prop it up with something more; it will collapse if you do not.

Never is it like that in a work of the Spirit. But that earth touch - that is the point. The earth touch always means death, always means arrest. The absolute Lordship of the Holy Spirit demands that the earth touch be finished with - and that is what is meant by Joshua being commanded to take the shoes from off his feet. "What saith my lord unto his servant?" 'Go and conquer the land, go and take possession, go and lead the people in'? Not at all. 'Take your shoes off.' You get your shoes off, Joshua, and all the rest will follow. You destroy the earth touch, and see what will happen. You will only have to walk round Jericho. That is not how men would do it. Think of the tremendous campaign that would have been organized to capture Jericho if left to men! No, get your shoes off and see what happens.

If you question that interpretation, you have only to see what happened where he put his shoes on, or where Israel put their shoes on, a little later. What happened at Ai? What happened with the Gibeonites? They had got their shoes on, they touched earth: the result - arrest, compromise, limitation. Get your shoes off and keep them off. The principle of the heavenly is the principle of the Holy Ghost's moving on, is the principle of spiritual fullness. 'Put off thy shoe from off thy foot; for the place whereon thou standest is heavenly ground.' You have no standing here; the earth has no place here, the world has no place here, men have no place here. This is sacred and sanctified to heaven. From this point heaven takes over. Yes, even from the great instrument raised up to serve the Lord, heaven has taken over. Sovereignty in choice of an instrument never means that sovereignty gives place to human strength. It never condones wrong in the instrument. That works out even with Joshua and Israel, for Joshua, as we said earlier, is representative of all the saints and all the servants of the Lord.

THE HOLY SPIRIT COMMITTED TO GOD'S PURPOSE

But notice this answer that came to his enquiry - "Art thou for us, or for our adversaries?" Which? For us? For them? For this? For that? 'Nay; I am not for this or for that, I am not for you or for them: I am for the Lord's purpose'. That is the real content of the answer. 'I am not for people, whoever they are: I am for the Lord's purpose. I am not for this work or that work that you are trying to do for the Lord. I am for the Lord's

purpose, I am committed to the purpose of God - the eternal purpose.' "Nay; but..." Oh, if only we could get the force of that in everything! We are wanting the Holy Spirit to sponsor our movements, our work, our ministry. We are asking the Holy Spirit if He is 'for us'. He will never say He is. There is a sense in which the Lord is for His people. "If God be for us..." But there is another sense in which the Lord says, 'I am not for you but for My purpose in you and through you; not for you, as you, in behalf of Israel, or Joshua the sovereignly chosen and anointed; I am not for you, I am committed to the purpose of God'.

My point is that we must identify the ground and object of the Holy Spirit's committal. We must know what the Holy Spirit is committed to. There is so much planning and arranging for the Lord, and so much failure on the part of the Lord to come and take it up and fulfil it. How much there is today in the world that is being arranged, planned and programmized for the Lord. It does not seem to go. The Lord does not seem to be committing Himself to it. That is just the point. We must identify the object of the Holy Spirit. The object of the Holy Spirit is not to do something and make something on the earth, not to set up something upon, and linked with, this earth, which has 'shoes' on it. To establish something here is not His object at all. The Holy Spirit is committed to something that is absolutely heavenly, and His whole object is to detach everything, in a spiritual and inward way, from this world. That must be shown more fully, perhaps, presently; but note that it is most important to know what it is that God will commit Himself to. He will not commit Himself to anything that is attached to this earth. He will only commit Himself to that which is attached to heaven.

THE HOLY SPIRIT WITH A DRAWN SWORD

Well, now, that being established, the next thing follows - again an extraordinary thing. This One, as Prince of the host of the Lord, is standing with His sword drawn in His hand. Oh, this is battle, is it? This is warfare, is it? And so immediately the Holy Spirit takes charge and there is complete capitulation to Him. The battle is on. Make no mistake about it. Whatever you think about being baptized with the Holy Spirit, and all that that may imply - whatever else it is going to mean, it means immediate and unceasing conflict. It may mean other things, but it means that - a warfare from which there is no discharge, an army from which there is no retiring. Here you will never be pensioned off. You are in it to the end.

Was it not like that with the Lord Jesus? It begins there - Jordan, the open heaven, the Holy Spirit, the wilderness, the devil. Immediately - "Then was Jesus led up" (Mark says 'driven', or 'impelled') "of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil" (Matthew 4:1). No sooner had the heavens been cleft for the advent of the Spirit, on that day called Pentecost, than the war was on. The Church was precipitated into it, and has never been out of it since. If it has, it has been to its own spiritual loss. Somehow this Lordship of the Holy Spirit immediately issues in that. The sword is in hand, and it will never be sheathed until the day's task is done.

Yes, but that is language. The Holy Spirit is not very interested in carnal and physical warfare. The warfare, the conflict, will be after His own kind. It will be spiritual, it will be after the spirit - because spiritual forces are in possession; and therefore it is spiritual warfare that is going to dispossess. That is one reason why it is so actually and truly a battle. The point hardly needs labouring. We know it. We know that there is not one step, one foot, of spiritual attainment that is not contested; not one movement or even gesture in the direction of spiritual increase but that there is conflict. It is true. It is spiritual warfare, and the nature of it is altogether beyond our power to comprehend. We think it will come one way - it comes another. It never comes where we expect and in the forms which we think we would recognise. The fact is that we rarely recognise the devil in his assaults. They seem to be so covered in either accident or

mishap, or something going wrong - but you have only got to judge of the effect in relation to spiritual life, and you know there is something more of design and intelligence in it than mere circumstances of life. It is spiritual warfare. The Holy Spirit has precipitated this.

Do understand that; it explains so much. How constantly the enemy works by the 'blind spot'! I think that probably by far the greater proportion of his success today is by blind spots amongst the Lord's people. Prejudice is called 'caution', suspicion is 'being watchful' - good names for bad things. The enemy is a past master at that. Your prejudice may be your blind spot which the devil has created. He has found the possibility of creating that, and it is standing right in the way of your own spiritual and heavenly fullness. The Lord's people are caught in that snare today, the world over. Enlargement and increase spiritually, in a heavenly way, is being withstood and frustrated by the prejudices and suspicions of God's people. "An enemy hath done this."

Why is it that in the letter to the Ephesians, with all the heavenly fullness presented and in view, and the spiritual conflict in relation to it shown, the Apostle prays that the 'eyes of their hearts may be enlightened' to see? Why is that necessary? Because of this blinding work and these blind spots; because all can be lost by a prejudice, a bit of closed mind, a bit of suspicion, a bit of false fear, instead of trusting the Holy Spirit and knowing the anointing within which will 'teach you concerning all things' (1 John 2:27) and show you what is right and what is wrong. You feel you must fortify yourself 'in case', and you may be fortifying yourself against the Holy Ghost. That is what so many are doing. That is the realm of the conflict. Spiritually it is like that. It is very sinister and subtle.

But there is another aspect to this spiritual conflict. Why does the Holy Spirit bring this about? Why does the Holy Spirit precipitate it? You would think that it would come from the enemy quite naturally, but why does the Holy Spirit start it up, or make Himself the occasion of it, every time? We have seen it in the case of the Lord Jesus. Deliberately - for it is a definite and positive and precise statement: "Then was Jesus led up of the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted of the devil" - the Holy Spirit takes the matter in hand to precipitate it, to bring it about. He did it with the Church - deliberately, knowing what He was doing. The effect of it is as though the Holy Spirit said, 'Now I am going to lead them into battle forthwith, straightway'. Why?

Well, for one thing, because this is a spiritual matter, a spiritual inheritance, because there are spiritual forces in possession and they have to be ousted; but also because we only grow spiritually by conflict. The Lord is interested in us. It is perhaps rather difficult for us, if a speaker stands on a platform and says, 'You are having a bad time because the Lord is interested in you; the devil is being allowed a lot of leash to assail you because the Lord has His highest interests in your well-being' - it is perhaps difficult for us to accept such a statement. The next time the enemy comes and begins to do his terrible work, you will be the last to say, 'Oh, the Lord loves me today!' We do not do that. But is it not a fact, is it not true to experience, true to history, and therefore true to principle, that we never make any progress spiritually, never increase at all, never grow at all, never go on at all, except by conflict? It is true. The only way we grow is by having something to overcome, where our spiritual life has somehow to get on top of something. It is a law in nature and in grace. There is no progress without contest. Would to God that we should be able to look at it like that every time! We believe it may be true as a fact - but, oh, save us from being involved in that truth!

That will not do. The Lord is concerned with these people coming actually into possession; not theoretically, not doctrinally, not on the ground of a Bible reading, but actually into possession; and when

you really come under the mastery of the Holy Spirit, then you are in the way of the actuality, and the Lord believes in it being actual and very practical.

Jericho is representative: the great example of how it will always be in principle. You have first of all to have a heavenly position, as we have said; not an earthly position, not man's way of doing things. This is the outworking of that principle which we saw first of all with Abraham, where man tried to act and made an awful mess, because he touched earth; and again with Moses, where he took things into his own hands, and assailed the Egyptian and the Hebrew, and made an awful mess. Here is the outworking of the discipline, and Joshua takes up all that spiritual history, and at Jericho we find there are no carnal weapons - no human reason here, nothing left to man here. If this is not heavenly, it is nothing. Things do not happen like this on the earth. We can walk round, not only seven days, but all our lives, and nothing will happen unless we are in a heavenly position, unless heaven is coming in. Jericho is man set aside, altogether excluded. It is heavenly.

Well, that is the basis. And then immediately afterward you find this - that, if the enemy cannot succeed by open resistance, he will try more subtle tactics. He cannot succeed by open resistance if you and I are in our heavenly position and keep it - and keep it, for that is what Jericho means. They not only took it on the first day but they held it and kept it and ratified it, and seven times on the last day they confirmed it, holding their heavenly position; they did not give up. We do not always get through with the first or second day. There has to be a holding to that position in faith, and the enemy is completely worsted when that position is really held like that. When he is worsted along that line, he must somehow turn it to defeat, if he possibly can, and so he will work subtly.

Is that not the word about the Gibeonites? They worked subtly to make an 'earth touch' somewhere. It was the same with Achan and Ai, the Babylonish garment and the wedge of gold - an earth touch. The Gibeonites and the covenant made with them constituted another earth touch. We must not think that it is always going to be just open, clear, straightforward spiritual warfare. There is that aspect where we must see where the earth touch is being manoeuvred by the enemy - where there is the introduction of something that will make a contact with that which is cursed, and with which God cannot go on.

How is that done? You know, of course, that Gilgal was the place from which they moved out - Gilgal, the place of the rolling away, the place of the flesh set aside. But they did not go back to Gilgal after Jericho. They went straight on to Ai: whereas it was the custom always to go back to Gilgal after any advance or conquest - back to Gilgal and out again from Gilgal. This time they did not go back to Gilgal. They went on.

Let us keep near the Cross, and never assume that because the Lord has blessed and prospered and given success we can go on. Never for a moment must we get away from the Cross. The Cross is not something that lies back there, to be left. It is something to be with us all the time. It is our safety.

This is the heavenly way, the whole nature of the heavenly way, the way to God's end. The Lord keep us in it.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/t-austin-sparks/taking-possession-of-the-heavenly-land/>

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