

The Climax of the Way of the Lamb

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the spiritual interpretation of the book of Revelation, focusing on the kingdom of God, the redeemed, and the marriage of the Lamb, highlighting the importance of love and devotion to God.

Scripture: Psalm 2:6, John 14:2, 2 Corinthians 12:2, Ephesians 5:25, Ephesians 5:32, Revelation 12:11, Revelation 14:1, Revelation 19:7-8

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Eternal Purpose"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks delves into the spiritual interpretation of the book of Revelation, emphasizing the importance of understanding God's eternal purpose and the spiritual significance behind the symbols and events described in the book. He highlights the ultimate goal of believers being in closest spiritual proximity to God, experiencing divine glory and satisfaction by fully surrendering to His will and following the Lamb wherever He leads. The sermon focuses on the spiritual journey of overcoming obstacles, deepening our love for the Lord, and ultimately becoming part of the bride of the Lamb through transformation and conformity to His image.

Transcript

Reading: Revelation 19:1-10.

As we pursue our consideration of this matter of the followers of the Lamb, we come to the part which relates to the climax of that path, the climax of the way of the Lamb -- the climax of the Cross. But here it becomes necessary and helpful to widen our outlook, taking in the whole compass of things. It is a well known and often stated fact that the book of Genesis, being the book of beginnings, contains the first intimation of everything which we find subsequently in the Word of God. We can trace back what we find in all the rest of the Scriptures to some germ in the book of Genesis: that is, the Scriptures as a whole are the opening up and the opening out, the development, of all the beginnings found in that book. The book of the Revelation, being the book of consummations, takes all that up and gathers it into itself in a spiritual way. What we have in the book of Genesis in an earthly and temporal and material way, in a typical, symbolic, prophetic way, we have in the book of the Revelation in spiritual consummation. It is therefore of very great importance to know how to interpret the book of the Revelation, and, although I am quite familiar with the attitude of opposition toward what is called spiritualizing the Scriptures, I nevertheless make bold to affirm that the book of the Revelation has got to be interpreted, if not altogether, almost altogether, spiritually, and you will be entirely in a fog unless you do so. Indeed, you will be occupied with

an interminable, impossible task. This is the book of consummations of all things in a spiritual way.

What do we find in the Old Testament beginning with the book of Genesis? We find two kingdoms coming into evidence: the kingdom of God, and a kingdom against God. As we see the development of the kingdom of God, we are able to discern that that kingdom is developing with a very definite plan, and we find that before we are at the end of the first five books it has taken very definite shape. A cameo, a microcosm, of the kingdom of God has been presented -- yes, in imperfection, because it is only typical, that is, it is only a type, a figure; but its lines are capable of clear apprehension.

A country is marked out. That country has its distinct frontiers and is in its turn divided up, with inter-frontiers. The whole of that country is apportioned as an inheritance to tribes, and right at the centre -- although not literally geographically so -- but as the very heart and centre of the whole scheme is a city, and there is a place where God is met. Some of these parts of the kingdom, by sovereign divine appointment, are in closer proximity to the heart of things than others. Some are nearer to, some are farther from, that centre, but that centre -- the place where God is -- governs all. And then around that inner, special kingdom there are many other kingdoms and nations, and they are learning much from what is going on inside there, deriving a very great deal -- according to their attitude, of course, whether good or evil. That is, this kingdom of God is affecting all kingdoms. Being an earthly kingdom, and being set in the conditions of a disrupted world and humanity, and this other, spiritual kingdom being also in evidence, there are both good and evil represented: that is, there are available to the nations that walk in the light thereof both good and evil. That is perfectly clear at the beginning.

But that is only a section. You pass to the next part of the Bible, into what is called the historical section, where kingship is introduced, kingship through priesthood, and you find things are beginning to take another form, come into another realm. You are passing on to a higher level of things. You are moving away from the earth, you are coming nearer heaven, and when you close that combination of kingly and prophetic movements, or when you see the close in the book of the prophet Ezekiel, you begin to see a heavenly country. The end of the prophecies of Ezekiel is a whole country reshaped as an inheritance, and now in a new way it is the temple which governs everything, and it is the ideal temple such as has never been before or since the days of Ezekiel, a heavenly one, a spiritual one; a heavenly temple in a heavenly city in a heavenly country: for things have moved away from the earth, the earthly has been forsaken; now it is heaven. You ought to read those last chapters of Ezekiel again and note these two things -- the shaping of the kingdom and the placing of the temple and the city, and then the relationship to the nations around. We just mention that -- it is far too big and detailed a matter to occupy us now.

When you come to the book of the Revelation, you are right in the spiritual side of that whole kingdom of God. What I want to point out in connection with the spiritual interpretation of the book of the Revelation is this. In the first place, you have to recognize that the kingdom of God is a very great dominion, but that it is divided up into many regions. You find yourself, in different places in the book of the Revelation, in different places where the throne is governing. There is the earth and there is the heaven, but you speak about earth and heaven as though it were a duality. It is not; it is a multiplicity. There are heavens and heaven of heavens. Paul said he was caught up into the third heaven (2 Cor. 12:2). So heaven has various regions, departments, sections -- upper, lower, perhaps middle.

And then you come to this remarkable thing, that the redeemed are also divided up into sections in different places. The Lord Jesus said, "In my Father's house are many abiding-places" (John 14:2). (Get rid of that word "mansions". There are not streets of mansions -- at any rate, that is not what He referred

to.) "In my Father's house are MANY abiding-places". There is the first heaven, second heaven, third heaven, heaven of heavens, and people are located accordingly, in relation to the throne. There is this company right in the throne. There is that company around the throne. There is another company and another. The nations, redeemed nations, on the outer circle deriving values, now not good and evil, but deriving their good from what is there in the centre. The kingdom of the heavens is plural, not singular.

A Company in Closest Spiritual Proximity to God

Now you are wondering why all that. For this reason: that we are occupied now with God's fullest intention for His people, as represented in the hundred and forty-four thousand of chapter 14. God's fullest intention is to have His people as near as near can be to Himself, in the closest spiritual proximity to Himself. This matter of position, of disposition, of distinction and of inheritance is a spiritual matter. Dismiss your geographical ideas and mentality. We need not worry ourselves to try to decide where heaven is. We could spend the rest of our days trying to find where heaven is and we should not get an answer. Some have tried to tell us which of the planets is heaven, but no one has come to tell us if they are right. But you see this is a matter of spiritual proximity. It is just possible, just gloriously possible, that, wherever we are, with a very gracious visitation of the Lord, we should find ourselves in heaven without leaving our present location, and we would say -- "This is just wonderful; nothing could be more glorious and blessed and perfect than this". Perhaps you have never experienced this. It is possible! Being rid of all that other encompassment and embodiment and impingement that is of the kingdom of death -- we need not bother about geographical locations -- we may just have a foretaste of divine glory, even in this scene and in these circumstances.

It is a matter ultimately not of going somewhere but of being something. It is not that we are not going to heaven, but mainly and primarily it is not a matter of some PLACE, literally, actually. It is being in a certain state that makes heaven; and the heaven of heavens, the highest place, the most utter place, is that where God has His fullest satisfaction in a life. There is nothing that can surpass the knowledge that God is as satisfied as He can be, being God, in any life; that He has got what His heart has been set upon; and I suggest to you that that can be tested all along the way here, in measure. If you and I ever have a difficulty over God the Lord having His place or His way in relation to something very costly, something very dear to us, something that we hold very precious, that we very much would have and it is so difficult to contemplate being without it, and then we get to the Lord after much battle and conflict and suffering and travail and we get through on that thing, there comes in such a peace and joy and rest, such a sense of the Lord, that it is a touch of glory. God has got His place, and when He gets that it is glory in the heart where He has it. Only in small ways do we prove that now. But let that be complete, final, utter, with no more conflicts, obstacles, struggles, questions, at all; the thing is all over, God has reached His full, final, consummate end: then you will sing as these people here were singing -- the hundred and forty-four thousand, who were singing with such a voice that it sounded to the apostle like the sound of many waters. It is the glory of the Lord having His utter place in a people. That is the spiritual interpretation.

So forget henceforth the number one hundred and forty-four thousand in the matter of so many people singing round the throne. I am not saying that it will not be like that, but it is what it means that is the important thing, and it is just going to be the measure in which the Lord gets His satisfaction which will be the measure of our approximation to the heart of things eternally. That means it is the measure in which the Cross has accomplished its purpose, or, to use the other figure, the measure in which we have "followed the LAMB whithersoever He goeth". That, in other words, means the measure in which the Lamb has overcome in our natures, in our hearts. THAT is the measure of our approximation to the centre of

things eternally, and the measure of eternal glory, because it is the measure of the satisfaction of God.

The Spiritual Interpretation of the Revelation

May I touch parenthetically upon this matter of interpreting spiritually. You must go through the book and ask yourself questions. I find myself, as a somewhat questioning kind of person, up against difficulties all the time. I see the Lamb making war and overcoming, and I see saints with Him making war and overcoming. I have asked many questions: what does that mean? I wonder what your mentality is about it. Is it a Doré Bible mentality, with pictures of all these things? You see one picture: Christ literally, personally, coming, with a sword literally in His hand, and a whole host of saints behind, with swords, going literally to slay and make devastation and spill blood all over this earth. Is that your mentality when you read about the wars of the Lamb? Did He do that in the first days of the church? Did He overcome? Did He overcome the Roman Empire which set itself to destroy Him and His testimony in the earth? Did He come out from heaven literally with a drawn sword and angels and shedding of blood upon the earth? How did He do it?

Well, how has He ever done that sort of thing? He has been making war all through these centuries. It has been a sorry lookout for peoples who have lifted their heads against the Lamb. It is a sorry lookout for those nations today who are deliberately lifting their heads against the Lamb. Do not have any doubt about what the issue is going to be, as to what is going to be the end of the great red dragon. (That phrase, that term, has some meaning now -- great RED dragon.) Do not have any doubt. "I have set my king upon my holy hill of Zion"; "He that sitteth in the heavens shall laugh: the Lord shall have them in derision" (Ps. 2:6,4). That is the position; it has been like that. If we could read the spiritual history of nations and kingdoms from Nebuchadnezzar's day onwards, we should see the wars of the Lamb, something working mightily unto devastation, but unseen; a spiritual force at work. And these wars of the Revelation are spiritual wars. There may be an acceleration of the process, may be sudden things happening in the collapse of these opposing forces, but it will be, so far as you can see, a common explanation. You may say that this and that worked to bring it about. But you have to get to the ultimate. When you get to the ultimate, you see it is in the wars of the Lamb. You see what I mean. It is very important to get your spiritual vision of this book.

Overcoming in Relation to God's Eternal Purpose

So we are brought here to this matter of the differences and distinctions on spiritual grounds. It is not a thing of a general character, a wider nature, that I want to say. What we have in the book of the Revelation is not something new to the New Testament, it is not really a new order of things at all. I have before pointed out that when you come to the beginning of this book and you have the messages to the seven churches in Asia, you have the risen Lord speaking to the churches that were raised up through the instrumentality of the apostle Paul. Paul was used in Asia for the bringing into being of those churches, either personally or indirectly, and it was through Paul that the full revelation of God's eternal purpose was given to the churches in Asia. Look at Ephesus, and remember that the letter to the Ephesians was not specifically for the Ephesians, but was a circular letter for Laodicea as well as Ephesus. This full revelation of God's eternal purpose in its fullness was given to those churches, and then the risen Lord comes back to those churches to bring them to judgment -- for what? He is standing in the midst of the seven golden lampstands, those churches, for what purpose?

It is to deal with them on the basis of the full revelation of His eternal purpose. There are plenty of things that are less than the Lord's purpose, and while He commends everything that is good -- He has to condemn much that is wrong, but He commends what is good -- in effect He says, "But that is not all I revealed to you, this is not all I have shown you; I have given you to see My eternal counsels in fullness -- read the letters that are in your hand. Now to judgment! Not that you are wholly and utterly bad and corrupt, not that there are lacking all signs of goodness, not that there is not something that is quite commendable about you -- but what about this full revelation that has been given to you? That is the point and that is going to determine the issue". "He that overcometh..."; not just he that overcometh certain sins, faults, failures, weaknesses, but he that overcomes everything that gets in the way of full purpose. The hundred and forty-four thousand are the overcomers. And what are the overcomers? They are those who have come into the value and meaning of the whole revelation of God's eternal purpose, and they are nearest to His heart. It is a spiritual matter.

The Marriage of the Lamb

Does that impress you? If we do not see it in that light, I do not think we have the key to the whole book. This book, you see, stands apart. God is dealing with everything in the light of His full revelation of eternal counsels. Then, when we have seen that, we are ready, prepared, to come to this matter which is the centre-most thing of the whole book -- the grand consummation, the marriage of the Lamb. It is like a mighty climax when you come to this -- "And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunders, saying, Hallelujah: for the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigneth. Let us rejoice and be exceeding glad, and let us give the glory unto him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready." The marriage of the Lamb is the climax, there is nothing beyond that. God's end is reached in the marriage of the Lamb. God's heavenly thought about marriage is identity, such a oneness of heart and spirit and constitution that the two are one. "This mystery is great: but I speak in regard of Christ and of the church" (Eph. 5:32). It is oneness, utter oneness, with Him as the Lamb. She has come to such identity with Himself. She is like Him, she answers to Him in every way. When that end is reached there will be the supreme "Hallelujah" in heaven, for the Lord will find the satisfaction toward which He has been working all along -- "His wife hath made herself ready".

How? "It was given unto her that she should array herself in fine linen, bright and pure: for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints" (Rev. 19:8). This is something far ahead of imputed righteousness. Imputed righteousness is for every believer. It is only another phrase for justification by faith. But this is something as to character, as to transformation, as to something inwrought, the practical side of righteousness in the life: "the righteous acts of the saints". It is conformity to His image. THAT is the bride, the wife of the Lamb, and when the Lord gets that, He is satisfied; He is satisfied indeed, and all heaven is satisfied.

The Bride's Love for the Lamb

There are, as has been mentioned, approximations to that represented by different companies in different positions in relation to the centre and heart. This one is nearest, that one is not so near, and the other is still less near, and it is all a matter of the measure of Christ as the Lamb. That is, of course, just a statement of truth. But do note that this discrimination is not an arbitrary one. It is not just that God sovereignly appoints that it shall be so, and that if you are meant to be of the hundred and forty-four thousand group you will be because you are meant to be, and if you are not meant to be it is no use your

trying to be -- you never will be. It is not like that at all. When you come to the question of the Lamb and His bride it is all a love matter. It corresponds to chapter 12, the great red dragon, the woman and the man child, the man child caught up to heaven, and the great declaration -- "And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb, and because of the word of their testimony; and they loved not their life even unto death"; they loved not their own souls unto the death. FOR HIM they loved not their own souls unto the death. It is a love matter, and you know you cannot force love, you cannot compel love, you have to leave love alone, and if it is not love you can do nothing about it. But if it is, well, it is spontaneous and it will go all the way; it is a love matter. And so it is here. THE BRIDE -- it is just this whole question of love for the Lord and how far it will take us, how strong and deep that love for the Lord is, and whether we will just follow Him to the measure of love, unconstrained, uncompelled love, spontaneous devotion to our Lord; self-forgetting, self-denying, self-yielding; all of self being set aside FOR HIM.

Do you not feel that this is something that we must face in a new way? We are so continually weighing things up in the light of how they affect us. We are so governed by the effect that situations and circumstances have upon us and our interests. It is really the root of most of our trouble, if not of all of it. We are so earth-bound, so time-bound; this life does mean so very much to us, this world does mean so very much to us. Heaven and eternity are not as real as this world is. If only we could get the heavenly vision and the heavenly sense! If only it could really take hold of us that eternity is real, that everything is as real in eternity and in heaven as it is here, and far more so, just as spiritual things can be more real than temporal things even now. If only we could get the sense of that, would we not be more ready to let go -- to let go those things which take such a large place with us here, in this life; should we not be much more prepared to let them go? It is a matter, after all, of heart-relationship to the Lord, and that is what the Lord is trying to work to all the time, to get us there. Every conflict, every battle that we come into, is really circling round one issue, if we recognized it. Right at the heart of everything is this question of love for the Lord, whether we are going on with the Lord. It is like that.

We have said that this is not some new issue in the book of the Revelation. We are right back in the rest of the Bible, and we are particularly back in those letters of Paul. At the end it is a matter of having reached those counsels, those purposes of God from eternity which are revealed in the letters of Paul. Then, when these have been revealed in the first chapters of the letter to the Ephesians, when we have been taken back there and shown the greatness of God's purpose concerning this elect people, Paul goes on, not in a sense of an anti climax but as so much a part of the whole: "Walk worthily of the calling wherewith ye were called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love". Is not that the Lamb coming in there? Is not that walking in the way of the Lamb in relation to the eternal purpose? It is so clear. "With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love."

Now do you see the three movements? There is the revelation of the purpose in chapters 1, 2 and 3 of Ephesians. There is the walk according to the Lamb. Where do you arrive at the end of the letter? "Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it; that he might sanctify it, having cleansed it by the washing of water with the word, that he might present the church to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing." "The marriage of the Lamb is come." That is only saying in figurative language that God has reached that purpose in a company who have gone the way of the Lamb, walked the way of the Lamb, followed the Lamb, and now they are presented to the Lamb as His bride. "The marriage of the Lamb is come."

And that, may I say again, is the explanation of the particular pains that God takes. It may sound a frightening thing to say that the more we love the Lord the deeper will He take us, the more utter you mean

to be for God the more utter will He require you to be. It is like that; that is a fact: and He takes infinite pains with those whose hearts are really set upon Him; He spares them nothing, He works very deeply and very intensely. He has His opportunity when we say that we mean to be all for Him, but do not let us think that the measure of our devotion to the Lord is going to be the measure of His delivering us from trouble. It will work out the other way. All through it has been like that. The most devoted to the Lord have been the greatest sufferers, but God is taking pains. This ought not to discourage us; it ought to explain to us a great deal. If the Lord really gets hold of us, He is going to do a very deep, thorough work, and we shall have an unusual experience of the way of the Cross, the way of the Lamb. It will be applied at all points, but the issue -- nearness to His throne. The issue is that which satisfies Him most and serves His interests most, for out from that, as we may see later, is fulfilled a marvellous vocation to all regions through eternal ages.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/t-austin-sparks/the-climax-of-the-way-of-the-lamb/>

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

