

The Entry Into the Land

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of faith in entering into God's rest, which is the apprehending of Christ, and that this faith is the basis of rest and determines the length of the journey.

Scripture: Deuteronomy 1:2, Isaiah 9:6, Romans 8:17, 2 Corinthians 5:19, Hebrews 3:19 - 4:1, Hebrews 7:25, Hebrews 10:5, Hebrews 10:22

Topics: "Faith In Christ", "Gods Rest"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks delves into the concept of entering into God's rest, emphasizing the vast difference between ourselves and Christ, and the importance of faith in bridging that gap. The end goal of the journey is reaching 'God's rest', which is immediately present to faith and dependent on our understanding of Christ's significance. The sermon explores the foundation of faith in Christ as God given to us in Sonship, our Kinsman, His own Priest, and His own Sacrifice, highlighting the power of faith's appropriation in shortening the journey to rest.

Transcript

Reading: Deut. 1:2-3, 8:2; Heb. 3:19, 4:1.

We have been thinking of the distance of difference between Christ and ourselves. In virtue of the shed and sprinkled blood, Israel had been brought out of Egypt and made the people of God; they were the Lord's redeemed ones. But even so a fact existed which could not be overlooked, ignored or made light of, a fact which had to be recognised, and fully so. That fact was, and is, that even when we are the Lord's, in ourselves there is a vast distance of difference between ourselves as ourselves and Himself. Eleven days and forty years -- not a fixed period, a period fixed by God; that is, not of necessity forty years. The distance is determined, not by geography or time, but entirely by the appropriation of faith.

Entering into God's Rest

What is the end of the journey, the goal? What is it all unto? God calls it "My rest". Rest, God's rest, that is the end of the journey, and how soon we reach the end of the journey entirely depends upon our apprehension of the meaning of rest, our faith's apprehension of the meaning of rest. You can be out of Egypt and into the end of the journey in no time where faith is large enough for it. But "we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief". The end of the journey is always immediately present to faith. It is not distant. It is nearer or farther according to faith.

Faith's Foundation for Entering into God's Rest

But we want to understand what the basis of this faith is, and therefore what the meaning of God's rest is. We have said that it is the apprehending of Christ. This letter to the Hebrews, which brings the journey and its end so much into view, is entirely given up to laying the foundation of faith unto God's rest. Chapter by chapter or stage by stage, it presents us with that foundation, or those foundations. We might just look at one or two of them, but we begin with the all-inclusive and comprehensive one, the presentation of Christ at the beginning of the letter. There the whole background of all the rest is presented to us, the foundation of all that follows.

a) God given to us in Sonship

It is that Christ is God given to us in Sonship: "the express image", "the effulgence"; to use the words of the prophet, "unto us a son is given" (Is. 9:6). Not only "a child is born", but "a son is given." It is God manifest in the flesh, Christ is God. Again, referring to the prophet's words, "His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Prince of Peace, Father of Eternity" or Everlasting Father. This Son is called that, the Father of Eternity.

What is the value of that for rest, for faith unto rest? Oh, surely it must appeal to our hearts as being of supreme and infinite significance. You see what the apostle is saying here. In the past the great revelations of God Himself were mediated through angels. What mighty and marvellous things were done through angels! The greatest things in that dispensation were done through angels. God came to men through angels. God communicated Himself through angels, revealed His mind through angels, and exercised His power through angels. The angels of God were constantly ascending and descending in that dispensation, to carry on the purpose of God amongst men. The highest form of God's manifestation was through angels.

But here the apostle says: not unto angels, not through angels, but better than angels, higher than angels, Son-wise. God has given Himself in terms of Sonship. It is a great word of the prophet, "Jehovah has become my salvation" (Is. 12:2). Yes, the Name, the highest Name of all, Jehovah, the Lord Jehovah has become my salvation. Not a representative of the Lord, not even an angelic representative, but Jehovah Himself has become my salvation. The Lord Himself has come forth in this matter of our salvation, and if that is true, well, we must believe, our faith must go the whole way and believe either that Jehovah can fail or that He cannot, that Jehovah can do His work or He cannot, Jehovah can see this through or He cannot. If Jehovah cannot, it cannot be seen through. It is ultimate, final. It is no less than the Lord Himself.

That is the significance bound up with this first presentation in the letter to the Hebrews -- the effulgence of His glory, the express image of His Person. God in Christ in terms of Sonship (the significance of which we shall note again in a moment) has come forth. That is the foundation of everything. The Lord personally, directly, immediately and absolutely, has taken this thing in hand. He has not committed it to the hands of angels or men, but has said, I Myself will accomplish this thing, I will go down and do it! "God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). That is the full foundation for faith that can lead us into rest, and immediately the journey is shorter or longer according to our apprehension of that; whether we are able to stand alongside of the apostle, even when the gale is blowing, the storm is as a blast, and say, I believe God! (Acts 27:25). I say the journey to rest is shorter or longer according to our ability to take that position. If Israel in the wilderness had taken that position, it would not have been forty

years; but they did not believe God.

b) God in Christ our Kinsman

Then you pass on in this letter and you find that is broken up, expressed in different forms. In the next place, God is revealed in Christ as having come to us in kinship. Passing into chapter 2 from verse 10, you know that sublime section about "I and the children whom God hath given me"; I and the brethren -- "I will declare thy name unto my brethren". Or again, "Since then the children are sharers in flesh and blood, he also himself in like manner partook of the same." And then about the sons -- "bringing many sons unto glory, to make the author of their salvation perfect through sufferings." Children, brethren, sons: God has come forth in terms of sonship to bring about a kinship, to be the redeeming kinsman Himself. It is God Who is redeeming in Christ. Heirship -- "joint heirs with Christ" (Rom. 8:17), and so on. He is redeeming the lost inheritance, He is the redeeming kinsman. If redemption is to be at all, it must be by somebody Who Himself has a right to redeem because He is in the family, and Who Himself can and will make the family's condition His responsibility.

The family has lost its inheritance, has lost its all. Somebody has to take responsibility for recovering, and God in Christ has come down to take responsibility for our lost heritage, to recover it all in terms of kinship. The Father through the Son has done it. The point that I want specially to emphasize is that it is God Who has assumed this form of a kinsman to redeem, and if it is God Who has taken responsibility for it -- and He has -- that is the basis of faith unto rest.

You see how impossible it would be, because of the utterness of the situation, for anyone to enter into rest and deny God. You cannot enter into rest if you deny God. We are not dealing with truth, we are not dealing with doctrine, we are not dealing with things, we are not dealing even with angels, great as they are. We are dealing with God, and here He is coming to us in and through His Son in terms of kinship, so that in Christ He is to us our brother, our brother to redeem, taking responsibility. Usually even in earthly families, the elder brother is looked up to and trusted. So often he is the most wonderful person in the family for the rest of the family. There is nothing he cannot do. It is not always so, but so often it is. That is the idea brought in here. It is a family of sons that God has constituted, with the eldest Son, Who was able and willing to take full responsibility for the family's title, the family's heritage, the family's destiny, the family's honour, and to secure it all in Himself. That is what is being said here. He has done that. What could we do? Nothing! But He has done it, and faith apprehending that can enter into rest, God's rest.

c) God in Christ His own Priest

But then we pass on and find the next phase, God in Christ becoming His own priest. Priests have failed, failed to carry things through to finality. They all failed, they made nothing perfect -- that is the argument here. So God Himself became His own priest. It is God in Christ in priestly activity carrying out all the functions of priesthood, and the functions of priesthood are just to satisfy God in all His requirements. This is where the subtle fascination and attraction and power of Rome lurks. The Roman system is built upon the idea of priesthood. The priest stands between you and God, and stands for you, and all you have to do is to pass everything over to him and take no responsibility yourself; you need not take any responsibility, the priest will take all responsibility for you. That, of course, has degenerated into this kind of saying: Do as you like, pay the priest and he will clear it up with God. But behind that there is this fact that man craves to have the responsibility God-ward taken off himself by somebody, to be freed from that responsibility for himself, and to come to that absolute rest where the responsibility is not his at all. The Roman system has

provided a false answer to that craving of man and put man in a false position. But the craving remains. You and I have it. Our deepest longing and need is for a priest, somebody to take responsibility for us, so that we do not have to take that responsibility. Oh, that I might be free from an evil conscience, may be perfectly at rest because someone all the time is standing and answering to God for me. And here it is: God has said, I will answer to Myself for you, I will be My own priest to satisfy Myself on your behalf.

We find it such a difficult lesson to learn, just what the High Priestly function and ministry of our Lord Jesus is. "Seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us" (Heb. 7:25). You notice what the apostle says about His being able to sympathize because He Himself has been here, been where we are, been along our road, knows all about it, been tempted in all points as we are, although without sin. He has been here and He is a sympathetic High Priest, He understands it all. He is not a stranger, and He ever liveth to make intercession in perfect sympathy, and He is there taking responsibility for us before God. Is not that a ground of rest? Ought we not to be at the journey's end much more quickly if only faith could grasp that. Apart from faith, we shall all the time be trying to put ourselves right with God and be stuck on the road, going round in the wilderness. Progress waits upon faith's apprehension of this thing. Cast the responsibility for your salvation and sanctification upon the One Who has taken that responsibility.

Listen again to words in this letter about being saved from an evil conscience. How? Through faith (Heb. 10:22). Not cleansing our own consciences, but by faith in Him. God has come in the Person of His Son to be the priest that He requires, that is, to satisfy Himself.

d) God in Christ His own sacrifice

What is true of the priesthood is next shown to be true of the sacrifice. "Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body didst thou prepare for me; in whole burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hadst no pleasure. Then said I, Lo, I am come" (Heb. 10:5-7). God in Christ has come to be His own sacrifice. You notice a whole section is given up to pointing out the futility and weakness and failure of the sacrifices of the Jewish system, how they broke down and came short, and how it was not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sin. But then, after the millions and millions of sacrifices offered on Jewish altars, one sacrifice, one for ever, did the work, and God provided Himself the sacrifice. In His Son He became His own sacrifice; and what more perfect than that? That is final surely; one offering for ever. This is the basis of rest, His own sacrifice once for all.

The Journey Longer or Shorter According to Faith's Appropriation

We cannot take all the aspects of this revelation, of this unfolding of the ground of rest, but what I want you to see is this, that this was all present in type in the wilderness for forty years. It was all there in type, and yet they went on for forty years. It was there very early in their wilderness history, and if only faith had grasped the significance of what was present at that moment, the forty years would have been cut down to perhaps eleven days; eleven days' straight journey if faith had grasped what was present all the time.

What I want to emphasize is this, that you and I are not of necessity bound to make a long journey and go over years in this matter. It entirely depends upon our appropriation of what is here today whether we enter into rest. The end of the journey is here now. It was there all the time. Those types that they had of Christ were the end of the journey in spiritual essence and value. There is nothing more at the end of the forty years. When they go over into the land there was nothing more, it was still the same basis. God has not to do anything further, has not to do anything; it is all there right at the beginning. We can come into rest now if we take hold of what God has given us now.

The Power of a People in Rest

But oh, how important it is that you and I should seek to exercise this faith; because you can see quite well that it was not just a matter of entering into a spiritual state of blessing and enjoyment for themselves. Their very vocation hung upon their being in rest. The object of their calling and election was at stake. All God's purposes in them were bound up with their entering into rest. They were ineffective and unfruitful until they were in rest. They were defeated and weak until they were in rest, but when they went over into what typified God's rest, they were mightily effective. You see what can happen by a people in rest. See Jericho's mighty walls going down by a people in rest. They march round the wall, just going round once, and that is the day's work; and again tomorrow; not very hard work. I do not know how long it took them to march round; a good healthy walk, quietly walking round once a day for a week. It was more strenuous on the seventh day, seven times round. And how much energy it takes to shout, I do not know. That was the way; a people in rest in type, and down came Jericho. And as they went on the seven nations mightier than they came down one after another because typically they were a people in rest.

And do you know that one of the great strategies of the devil, in order to hold his own against us, is to get us into unrest. One of the great triumphs of Satan against the church is to get it robbed of its rest, its quiet assurance. Satan can do little against a people in assurance, in rest. He can do anything with people who are not sure, not certain, distracted, restless, fretful, anxious, questioning, doubting. You have no power against him when you are like that, always in the unrest of uncertainty of a tomorrow that never comes, a future that never arrives to keep us from rest today. I do feel that you and I must seek very much to enter every day with a very fervent prayer that that day in itself shall be in the rest of God, so far as our hearts are concerned. Whatever it may hold, whatever storms, in our hearts we are quietly at rest with God, being still and knowing that He is God. There is a tremendous power in that. There is no power in a fretful life, there is no strength where there is doubt, but there is a mighty power where there is a quiet confidence in God; and that is the point. Satan would postpone that and keep us going round in this everlasting circle, a wilderness state, because it is to his gain, and to our loss; it is to the defeat of the Lord in His purpose. "They could not enter in because of unbelief."

Now may the Lord at least lay emphasis in our hearts upon the necessity for giving diligence to enter His rest for every purpose of His glory. Above all things may we seek the rest of faith, because of its tremendous potency against the enemy and in the realization of God's purpose.

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