

The Foundation of All - the Lamb of God

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes that Jesus Christ is the foundation of the new dispensation, and that He provides a way for people to come into the presence of God and experience a new spiritual, heavenly Israel.

Topics: "The Lamb of God", "Spiritual Israel"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that God is forming a spiritual and heavenly Israel in this dispensation, transitioning from the earthly principles of the Old Testament to the spiritual realities of the New Testament. He highlights Jesus as the foundation of this new Israel, referred to as the Lamb of God, whose sacrifice fulfills the role of the Passover lamb and opens the way to God. The sermon explores the significance of Jesus in establishing a new covenant, marked by an opened Heaven and a new relationship between God and His people, contrasting it with the closed Heaven of the Old Testament. Sparks illustrates how the old Israel's failures are replaced by a new Israel that is born of the Spirit, emphasizing the importance of being spiritually reborn to be part of God's family. Ultimately, he asserts that Christ is the true temple and the center of worship, uniting believers as the living temple of God.

Transcript

Let me remind you of the all-governing truth which we are considering - that is, what God is doing in this dispensation in which we live. We must be completely clear as to what it is that God is particularly concerned with at this time in the world's history, and, therefore, what it is that we who are the Lord's children are called unto.

The thing that God is doing in this dispensation is the formation of a spiritual and heavenly Israel. In doing that He is repeating the laws of the old Israel IN A SPIRITUAL WAY. He is following along the lines of His ways with the old Israel, but now ON A HEAVENLY AND NOT AN EARTHLY BASIS, because, while God's methods may change, His principles are changeless. He has left the earthly basis of the Old Testament and has moved on to a heavenly basis in the New Testament. He has moved from the temporal to the spiritual, and the spiritual is far greater than the temporal.

We are now going to see this in the Gospel by John. This Gospel is all one with the Letter to the Hebrews, because it is just a part of the whole thing that the New Testament represents. It is the embodiment of this matter of the spiritual Israel in a very wonderful way. There are two things that are so clear in this Gospel: one is the Jewish background of the Gospel and the other is the spiritual background behind the Jewish. That spiritual background is in this Gospel being brought to the front and is being made the ground for the

whole new dispensation.

Let us look at this. There are at least sixteen marks of the Jewish background in this Gospel by John.

Before moving on to a consideration of these, let us note again that the introduction is a presentation of God's Son. He stands right at the door in the new movement of God toward the heavenly Israel. We are all familiar with this wonderful presentation of Him at the beginning of the Gospel: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that hath been made"... and there is much more than that, as you can see.

Corresponding to that is the introduction to 'Hebrews': "God, having of old time spoken unto the fathers in the prophets by divers portions and in divers manners, hath at the end of these days spoken unto us in his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, through whom also he made the worlds; who being the effulgence of his glory, and the very image of his substance, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had made purification of sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."

The point is that God has founded the dispensation upon His Son and He is the governing factor in it.

Now we go on to what we have called the 'Jewish background of Christ'.

(1) The Foundation of All - the Lamb of God

"On the morrow he seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold, the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!... And he looked upon Jesus as he walked and saith, Behold, the Lamb of God!" (John 1:29,36).

We know that the whole Jewish system was built around the Passover lamb. It was the very basis of everything in Israel: the constitution of them as a nation and the greatest governmental factor in all their history. It would be impossible to count the lambs that were offered in Israel through those many centuries. There would have been many millions of lambs slain and rivers of blood from them all!

John sees Jesus and says 'THE Lamb!' 'This is GOD'S Lamb!' "Behold, the Lamb of God!" Thus he distinguishes Jesus, marking Him out as the unique Lamb, the one toward whom all the millions of lambs had ever pointed. And just as the Passover lamb was the foundation of the old earthly Israel's life, so we know that this Lamb of God is the very foundation of our whole Christian life. He is the foundation of this dispensation. In the upper room in Jerusalem, on that Passover night, Jesus laid the foundation of the Church for this dispensation, and, while there are other features of the Church's life, the central one is the Table of the Lord. Everything centers in that Table, gathers around it and issues from it. If you had gone into any assembly of the Lord's people in any part of the world in New Testament times, you might have found different things in the different assemblies, but you would have found one thing that was the same in them all, and that was the Lord's Table: the Lamb of God at the center of everything.

We only make the statement, and note that, right from the beginning God takes up the figure of the old and makes it the spiritual reality of the new. That which was earthly and temporal in the old Israel is now heavenly and spiritual in the new Israel.

That is the first thing about the Jewish background leading to the heavenly foreground.

(2) The Closed and the Opened Heaven

Reading: John 1:43-51

Do you need to have it pointed out to you that there is quite a lot of Jewish Old Testament in that section? "Moses and the prophets" (verse 45), Jacob and his ladder (verse 51) - they are all there. But Jesus is saying: 'There is a transition from that old to a new, and that is in Myself. Moses and the prophets spoke of Me and the new Israel is centered in Me - an Israel which is not the Jacob in whom there was guile.'

However, the really deep thought and truth in this part concerns the closed and the opened Heaven.

When Jesus said to Nathanael: "Ye shall see the heaven opened", He was pointing to an entirely new dispensation. The one characteristic of the Old Testament Jewish system was a closed Heaven. You know that in the old dispensation it was on pain of death that any man came into the presence of God. What a terrible place was that mountain where God was! There were thunders, lightnings and earthquakes, and even Moses said: "I exceedingly fear and quake" (Hebrews 12:21). So terrible was the sound that the people dared not draw near, and if a beast touched the mountain it had to die. During the whole of that dispensation it was 'Keep out! Do not come here where God is, or you will die!' Jacob said: "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved" (Genesis 32:30), meaning that it was something unusual. It was a closed Heaven and there was no way for the people into the presence of God. Everything said 'Stay out!' and the people knew it. It was a terrible thing to come into the presence of God, for it just meant death. The High Priest had to have very special provision to go into the most holy place, and when God made that provision He said: 'Lest he die'. The Jewish system was a system of judgment and death, of the closed Heaven. There was no way through for man.

But Jesus says: 'You shall see the Heaven opened, and a way between Heaven and earth, between God and man, made clear. I am that way. I will open Heaven by My own blood.' Therefore we can come to Him "by the blood of Jesus, by the way which he dedicated for us, a new and living way" (Hebrews 10:20). Jesus said: "I am the way... no one cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6).

So the second Jewish feature is a closed Heaven, and the second feature of the new Israel is an opened Heaven. And we are enjoying that! We do not stand outside in fear and trembling, wondering whether, peradventure, we dare draw nigh. We can come "with boldness unto the throne of grace" (Hebrews 4:16). Oh, this new dispensation is a better one! This new Israel has privileges which the old one never had.

That is what God is doing in this dispensation, and He has done it in His Son, so that many, many who have been shut out are now finding their way in. God has provided in His Son an opened way for all.

(3) The Marriage Failure and Resurrection

Reading: John 2:1-11

(Note in verse seven: "Jesus, knowing in his heart that the Father's time had come...". That was a very important factor for, remember, Jesus would never move on any ground whatsoever without the knowledge that His Father wanted Him to move. He waited for that. When He knew in His heart that the Father said 'Yes, go on', "Jesus saith unto them, Fill the waterpots with water".)

Now where is the Jewish background? We have said that the Lord's Table was, amongst other things, the time when the Lord instituted His marriage with His people. In the Old Testament a marriage covenant

was made in the Passover. Jeremiah spoke of this when he said: "the day that I took them by the hand... I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord" (Jeremiah 31:32), and that was on the Passover night.

Jesus knew what He was doing at Cana. How many times we have heard people talk about Him being of a social disposition and, therefore, He was quite happy to attend marriages! That might be true, but it is not the meaning here. Jesus was always acting on spiritual grounds. The marriage between God and Israel had broken down, for Israel had violated the terms of the covenant of marriage with Jehovah. They had, as the prophets said, become an adulterous nation and had gone after other gods. Therefore the marriage had broken down. That is here, in figure, in Cana.

I don't know what was behind this, but we can judge from a lot of other things that God was behind the failure of the wine. It just HAD to fail because of the spiritual significance. It represented the old marriage relationship which had broken down, had come to an end. There had to be a new basis and a new marriage supper of the Lamb. The salvation of the marriage relationship between God and His people is in Jesus only. It was He who saved the situation here, and everyone knew that something very wonderful and supernatural had happened. It was not natural or earthly. It was heavenly, spiritual, supernatural, and so is that marriage relationship between Christ and His people.

There is a movement from the old Israel, which has failed and has been put aside, to a new Israel which lives by this life of Jesus Christ.

(4) The Temple of God - Temporal and Spiritual

Reading: John 2:13-22

There is no need to point out the Jewish background! It had the temple in Jerusalem as its center. For the Jews that temple represented everything - and Jesus speaks of the destroying of the temple! In another place He said: "There shall not be left here one stone upon another" (Matthew 24:2).

Well, what is going to take its place? God MUST have a temple! Jesus said, in effect, 'I am the temple of the new dispensation. I am going to take the place of this old temple and I am going to be ALL that that temple represented, but in a fuller and better way.' Was the temple the place where men thought that they would meet God? Men will meet God in Christ in a more real way than that. Was the temple the place to which people went to be taught about God? They will learn more about God in Christ than they ever learned in that temple. Was the temple the place where men went to worship God? It will be in Christ that men will come into touch with God for worship.

And that leads us to that wonderful revelation which we have in the New Testament - the revelation of Christ and all His members being made one temple for God.

Christ is our Temple, and in Him we find all that a temple was ever intended to be. Oh, how people have gone astray over this! We go to many places that are called 'churches' and the word is applied to the building. When people pray in those places they usually say something like this: 'We have come into Thy house today. We are in this house of God.' They are really talking about a building. But we don't need a building to give God a temple! "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). People gathered into Jesus Christ constitute the temple of God. It is not a special building, but people who are in Christ Jesus. This is what God is doing in this dispensation.

You know, a lot of people have lost their special buildings, or are not allowed to meet in such places. In some places they are gathering in twos and threes and are enjoying all the privileges of the house of God because the Lord is there. No, the temple now is Christ and those who are in union with Him. So He said, in this way which they did not understand, "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up". Christ in resurrection is the temple of this dispensation. He knew that He was speaking parabolically and what they would say: "Forty and six years was this temple in building". It looked as though He had deliberately misled them, but He was enunciating the change of dispensations.

(5) The True Seed of Abraham

Reading: John 3:1-14

What have we here in Nicodemus? Surely he is a representative of the old Israel! He is of the sect of the Pharisees and they claimed to be very representative of Israel. He is a ruler of the Jews, so he is indeed Israel in representation. He is a son of Abraham after the flesh, the embodiment of the seed of Abraham.

What does the Lord Jesus say to him? In effect, He says: 'You, a son of Abraham, an inclusive representation of the children of Abraham after the flesh, an embodiment of Israel, I look upon you, Nicodemus, as representing all the seed of Abraham after the flesh, as all Israel present here tonight in you, and you, Nicodemus, in that representative capacity, must be born again.' The seed of Abraham after the flesh does not stand in the Kingdom of God.

You know, that is Paul's argument in his Letters to the Romans and the Galatians. He says they are not all Israel which are after Israel. There is a natural seed and there is a spiritual seed.

Jesus was saying to Nicodemus, in his representative capacity: 'The natural seed of Abraham does not stand. Israel after the flesh is no more. You must be born again. There must be a seed after the Spirit. In other words. there must be a new spiritual, heavenly Israel. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh" and "They that are in the flesh cannot please God" (Romans 8:8). "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born anew".'

The new Israel of this dispensation is the Israel of the 'born from above' ones. These are not the sons of Abraham, but sons of God.

And so we are back in chapter one: "As many as received him, to them gave he the right to become children of God." There is a great deal of difference between children of Abraham after the flesh and children of God after the Spirit! And not only a great deal of difference: it is not just an improved species. It is an altogether higher race, a heavenly people.

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