

The Heavenly Calling - Part 12

by T. Austin-Sparks

The letter to the Hebrews emphasizes the superiority of Christ to all that had come before, and the importance of looking up to Jesus for strength and guidance in spiritual life.

Duration: 54:52

Scripture: Hebrews 1:4, Hebrews 3:1, Hebrews 3:14, Hebrews 6:9, Hebrews 7:19, Hebrews 7:22, Hebrews 8:6, Hebrews 9:23, Hebrews 10:34, Hebrews 11:16, Hebrews 11:35, Hebrews 11:40, Hebrews 12:24

Topics: "Heavenly Calling"

Description

The sermon transcript discusses the theme of 'better' in the book of Hebrews. The speaker highlights various verses in the book that emphasize the concept of 'better,' such as better than the angels, better things, better hope, better covenant, better promises, and better sacrifices. The speaker emphasizes the importance of having a large conception of Jesus in order to navigate through trouble and testing. The letter was written to encourage Christians to persevere and not draw back from their faith, reminding them of their heavenly calling and the better things that await them.

Transcript

There are some words in the letter to the Hebrews about which I feel led to speak to you this morning. They are in chapter 3 and verses 1 and 14. Wherefore, holy brethren, companions of a heavenly calling, we are become companions of Christ if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end.

We have been seeing that this wonderful letter embodies the transition from the old Israel of the earth to the new Israel of heaven. This morning we are going to concentrate upon one aspect of this. It is the superiority of the heavenly Israel to the earthly.

The writer of this letter, whoever he was, was giving himself wholly to the immense superiority of what had come in with this dispensation. It was as though he said to himself, the time has come for someone to let these people know how superior is that which has come in with this dispensation. This final movement of God in the history of this world is greater than anything before.

And that is what he set himself to show to the people of his day. But God meant it for more than that. God meant it for his people for all time.

Who wrote this letter, no one knows. Many names have been mentioned. Some have been very certain about it.

And then someone else has come along and upset that certainty. Some have been very sure that Paul wrote this. Others have very nearly proved that Paul did not write it.

Some have thought Apollos wrote it. Others have said it was Barnabas. Apollos, because he was a man mighty in the scriptures.

So it was said of him. And it certainly did require a man mighty in the scriptures to write this book. Barnabas, well, Barnabas was a Levite.

He knew all about the Levitical system of the Old Testament. So he would be a good one to write the book. As for Paul, well of course he was the perfect master both of Judaism and of Christianity.

And it needed such a man to write this book. If Stephen had not been martyred I would have chosen him. Because I think in his last great discourse you have all the substance of the letter to the Hebrews.

Well, we cannot say. You wonder why I take time to talk like this. And I have a reason.

Because this letter is something that really only the Holy Spirit could write. The Holy Spirit required all that knowledge of the old dispensation and of the nature of the new to set down what is in this book. The fact is that it needed someone who knew all about Israel and all about Christ to write this book.

Just for this very reason that the message of this book is the wonderful superiority of Christ to all that had been before. I am touching on very old and well worn ground when I remind you of the place that the word better has in this letter. That word better occurs more often in this letter than in all the rest of the New Testament put together.

And here is a study for the beginners in Bible study. Get out your box of colored pencils. Choose a good color that you think is suitable to better.

And underline that word through this letter. You will find that you have it occurring 13 times. And always in a very instructive connection.

I am just going to run through them. Chapter 1 verse 4. Better than the angels. Well, that's a high place to begin at.

Chapter 6 verse 9. We are persuaded better things of you. Chapter 7 verse 19. A better hope.

Verse 22. A better covenant. Chapter 8 verse 6. Again, a better covenant and better promises.

Chapter 9 verse 23. Better sacrifices. Chapter 10 verse 34.

A better possession. Chapter 11. 16 and 35.

A better country. A better resurrection. Chapter 11 verse 40.

Some better things. Then alongside of that you can put... Chapter 12 verse 24. The blood of Jesus speaketh better things than that of Abel.

And then in chapter 1 verse 4. And chapter 8 verse 6. You have the words more excellent. And again in chapter 1 verse 4. Chapter 3 verse 3. Chapter 10 verse 25. The phrase by so much more.

Well, that word itself is a key to the letter. Everything here is better than it has ever been before. And we can come back with that to our own key words.

Holy brethren, companions of a heavenly calling. Called to something so much better than has ever been in the history of this world. Now just again let us remind ourselves of why this letter was written.

In the first place it was written to save these Christians from spiritual declension or spiritual arrest. For various reasons they were being tempted to draw back. You remember that those words occur in a warning.

If any man draw back. The Lord says my soul shall have no pleasure in him. It's a terrible thing to get into a place where the Lord hasn't any pleasure in him.

To lose the pleasure of the Lord. And to prevent these Christians from getting into such a position. This letter was written.

Some were inclined to just stand still and not go on any further. So that their spiritual life would be arrested. So that they would no longer go on and grow.

Become just stand still Christians. As it was so it is now. Nothing of the future life governing them.

So to save them from going back and from standing still this letter was written. But we have already pointed out that there was another reason. It was written to carry these Christians through a time of great trouble which was coming.

It was evidently written very shortly before the destruction of Jerusalem. Perhaps the writer saw the signs of that coming. Whether he saw those signs or not.

The Holy Spirit saw what was coming. He knew that a great time of great testing was coming to these Christians. When all that they had trusted in on this earth was going to be shaken.

So the Holy Spirit who knew all about that. Led this writer to write this letter. It was intended therefore to be a strength to them and salvation in a time of trouble.

And the method of so ministering help to them. Was to show again the greatness of the Lord Jesus. The greatness of the heavenly calling.

And how great a thing it is to be companions of Christ and of the heavenly call. And so the writer sets out to bring the Lord Jesus into view. In his superiority to all who had gone before.

But in doing so he does another thing. And this is a very interesting thing that is in this letter. He says down through the past ages there have been men who have had great difficulties.

Men who had many discouragements and trials. And he speaks about Abraham. Now Abraham indeed had a difficult life.

There was the difficulty of the postponed promise. God's promises did not seem to be in the way of fulfillment. God was taking such a long time to fulfill his word.

We all know something about that difficulty. We are in a hurry and God is not. God seems to have all time to play with.

Our trouble is oh if only the Lord would hurry up. And I suppose our prayers are so often marked by one word. Lord hasten it.

Now if any man knew about having to be patient it was Abraham. There was then the difficulty of unfulfilled promises. God taking so much time.

Sometimes Abraham just broke down under that. On one occasion he left the land of promise and went to Egypt. And found himself in still greater trouble and had to tell a lie to get out of it.

The very real testing this matter was to Abraham. I think there are signs that Abraham's wife was not always in sympathy with him. When they were both old and the Lord said that they should have a son.

It says that Sarah in her tent laughed. And the Lord was angry. And Abraham had to rebuke her.

Well we must have full sympathy with Sarah. She was being hard put to it by the way in which the Lord was taking her husband. She was not always able to see as her husband saw.

And to feel just as he felt. Perhaps for that reason Abraham had a certain measure of spiritual loneliness in his life. Then what about that young man Lot.

He was just a lot of trouble. He certainly did not share Abraham's vision. His vision was all on this earth.

His ambitions were all for the present. And you know well the story of Lot. And what a thorn he was in the side of Abraham.

Well I suppose I could add other things to the painful story. Abraham's was not an easy life. You know the New Testament says that Abraham rejoiced.

Abraham rejoiced. And why did he rejoice? Why did he rejoice in tribulation? Jesus himself tells us why. Your father Abraham saw my day and rejoiced.

In some way Abraham had seen the Lord Jesus. Had seen the day of the Lord Jesus. And that got him through all his troubles.

He rejoiced because he saw the Lord Jesus and the day of Christ. You know there's more in this letter to the Hebrews about what Abraham saw. He had seen a heavenly country and was looking for it.

He had seen a city which had foundation. Whose builder and maker was God. Abraham had seen the day of Jesus Christ.

You remember this writer of the letter to the Hebrews says we are come to the heavenly Jerusalem. Abraham had seen that. And seeing the Lord Jesus he was able to go on.

He rejoiced in a long life of trouble. What about Moses? Did Moses have any troubles? Well we could make up a long story of the troubles of Moses. He had to carry a very heavy burden.

There was a time when Moses nearly lost his heart. He said to the Lord oh these people they are too much for me. They are too great a burden I cannot carry them.

Very often Moses had to go back to the Lord like that. Say to the Lord you've asked me to do something that is more than I can do. Through forty long weary years Moses had very many trials.

But we have this word here. He endured as seeing him who is invisible. Who was the him that he was seeing? Notice what this letter to the Hebrews says.

When Moses was in Pharaoh's palace. And saw his own Hebrew brethren being persecuted. He decided that he was going to take sides with them.

And do you know what he did? And then this letter to the Hebrews tells us something. He chose to suffer affliction with the people of God. And here is a wonderful thing.

He counted the reproach of Christ greater than the riches of Egypt. The reproach of Christ. What did Moses know about Christ? Somehow he had seen Christ.

And he saw that these Hebrew people were called in relation to Christ. And he endured as seeing him who is invisible. This is a point at which our minds have got to get adjusted.

Perhaps we have got the idea that when Jesus came into this world that was the beginning of him. The word of God makes it perfectly clear that Jesus Christ was present in the days of Abraham and Moses. Indeed the word says he was present in the creation of the world.

By him all things were created says the scripture. He was there all the time. He was the one who was appearing again and again and they did not recognize him.

He appeared to Abraham. He appeared to Moses. He appeared to Joshua.

He appeared to Gideon. Yes this same Christ was there active all the time. He did not just begin when he was born in Bethlehem.

He only came then into this world in human form. Do you think that is exaggerating? Well let's come to our letter to the Hebrews. Chapter 13.

Verse 8. Jesus Christ the same yesterday, today and forever. I have left out one little word. Jesus Christ is the same.

He is yesterday. He is today. And he is tomorrow.

There is no yesterday, today and tomorrow with Jesus. Yesterday was the day of the old dispensation. When this writer wrote this letter today was the day in which he lived.

It was the new dispensation that had just begun. Today is the period between Christ going back to heaven and his coming again. That's today.

We have seen already how that phrase is quoted three times in this letter. It is brought over from yesterday to today. Today if you will hear his voice, harden not your heart.

That is a message for this dispensation. Yesterday and today and tomorrow. Tomorrow is forever.

And it's going to be the same Jesus Christ. So the writer of this letter is saying Jesus Christ was back there yesterday. He was in the past dispensation.

The same Jesus Christ as we know today. And he will be the same Jesus Christ forever. Now if you turn again to the beginning of this letter to the Hebrews.

Do you notice how many quotations from the Old Testament are in this chapter? We cannot stay I think to look at them. But the Old Testament is here used a very great deal. And the quotations are things concerning Christ.

So that in the first place it's quite clear he was in the Old Testament. He was being spoken about then. He was present in the minds of the writers of the Old Testament.

There are quotations from David. Jesus Christ was very much in the mind of David. David first wrote that.

And there's much more like it. The quotations from the Old Testament are very many at the beginning of this letter. Which simply shows that Jesus Christ was present then.

Present in the thoughts of those writers. And that Jesus Christ is brought over from yesterday to today. And this writer is simply saying that Jesus Christ of the prophets and the men of old is this one today of whom I'm writing.

This first chapter of the letter just takes up all that about Christ and brings it over here into the present. It's the same Jesus Christ. But now we haven't begun to see the superiority of this today.

Over yesterday. We have only sought to do one thing. And that is the thing that this writer set out to do.

To show that to get through trouble and testing you need to have a large conception of the Lord Jesus. If we are going to get through to the end in victory It will depend upon what kind of a Christ our Christ is to us. The writer realized that these Christians were finding the way rather long and difficult.

And the most testing thing in spiritual life was their need. And that is patience. You have need of patience.

But after you have done the will of God. And so at the end of the letter he says let us run with patience the race that is set before us. And what is the real strength of patience? Oh it's so easy to say to people now be patient.

Don't be in a hurry. These will turn out all right. And I'm afraid when people talk to me like that I never feel so bad.

But this writer did not just say to these Christians now be patient. He did say let us run with patience. It will test our patience.

It calls for a lot of patience. But the thing that will keep your patience strong is this. Looking up unto Jesus.

If we look at ourselves we'll give up the race. If we look at other people there are a lot of people who will make us give up the race. If we look around us on the world we shall lose patience.

And so I like the true translation. Some versions just say looking unto Jesus. Well that's all right.

But the real version is looking up unto Jesus. You must take your eyes off of yourself. You must positively refuse to look at yourself.

You must train yourself in the habit of refusing not to look at yourself. Every time you are tempted to look at yourself you'll have to say no. No, I shut my eyes to that.

You must not have your eyes on those Christians who are disappointing Christians. You must remember that the very best Christians are only human after all. It is a very dangerous thing to think of any man or woman as being infallible.

I think Paul got very near to doing that once. You know Paul owed a very great deal to Barnabas. It was Barnabas who went off to find Paul.

It was Barnabas who brought him back. And when even the apostles saw Saul of Tarsus come in the door I think some of them had other things to do. Excuse me but I must go and do something.

They were all suspicious of this man. And they drove back. And Barnabas took him by the hand.

And brought him in. He said don't be afraid brothers. He has met our Lord Jesus.

He is now a companion of Jesus Christ. He is one with us. And they received him.

It was Barnabas who brought Paul to Antioch. Antioch was in great need at that time. They needed a very strong minister.

And off Barnabas goes. He says I know the man. And he brings Paul to Antioch.

And so introduced him to his life ministry. Paul owed a lot to Barnabas. It says of Barnabas and he was a good man.

Full of the Holy Spirit. And I think Paul put Barnabas upon a high pedestal. And then that day, that terrible day came when Barnabas fell off of his pedestal.

You know of the division between the Jewish and the Gentile Christians. And the new order of Christ demanded that they should be all one. That they should eat together and drink together.

Peter had learned that lesson over the house of Cornelius. But then that day came where this whole question of eating and drinking arose. Jews and Gentiles meeting at the same table.

It was a very strong dispute. It was a very critical day. Then it says they sent down certain from Jerusalem.

James came down. And some others with him. And Peter withdrew from the table.

He was afraid of James. He was afraid of those others from Jerusalem. He said I must not let these brothers, these senior brothers see me eating with Gentiles.

And so he withdrew. And Paul says, and so strong was the contention that even Barnabas was caught in their dissimulation. Just think of it, Barnabas.

I never believed that Barnabas would do a thing like that. I thought Barnabas was far above anything like that. Sure it was a very great blow to Paul's confidence in men.

And if he had continued to keep his eyes on Barnabas, no one knows what would have happened. He had to look off from Barnabas to Jesus. Paul was always having to do that.

In many ways and situations he had to just take his eyes off and look unto Jesus. I think there's a very real touch of Paul in this letter, looking off unto Jesus. My own opinion is that whoever wrote this letter, Paul

had a good hand in it.

His influence is everywhere in this letter. And certainly he was called upon to look off unto Jesus. Now that is a very vital lesson for us to learn.

Again and again we have to do that in our Christian life. If we get our eyes upon anything but the Lord Jesus, we may just go to pieces. Have all respect for God's saints.

I'm not saying that you've got to eye every servant of God with suspicion. You don't have to be all the time saying, well of course he's not perfect, you know. No, give honour to whom honour is due.

But never build your faith upon any man, however good he may be. And as for ourselves, I think perhaps we are more often tempted to look at ourselves than at anything else. And this is one of our real Christian exercises.

We have continually to remove our eyes from ourselves. Everything to do with ourselves. There's nothing more discouraging than this self of ours.

There is nothing more misleading than ourselves. Our own judgments are all wrong. Our own ideas are all wrong.

Our thoughts are not God's thoughts. We must take our eyes off ourselves. But not look out into space.

Not to be vacant. But look up unto Jesus. And you know how the sentence is finished.

Jesus the author and the finisher of our faith. Did you stop this thing? Are you a Christian because you decided to be a Christian? Well the Lord helped you if that is so. Now he started this thing.

Are you not glad you can say it was the Lord who found me? It was the Lord who put his hand on me. It is very true what he says. He did not choose me, but I chose you.

He was the author of our faith. And it says he is the finisher. He will finish it.

I have so often said that when we get to heaven we will be full of wonder that we ever did get there. Well in our experiences in this life we sometimes feel like that. When we arrived in Asia last week I said to my wife, well we are here.

We are here. And when I said that, that meant a lot. You knew all the history of the past year.

You would say that is wonderful. But that is a very small thing. When we all get to the glory we will just look at one another and say well we are here.

It is a wonderful story. How we got here I do not know. A thousand times I thought I would never get there.

I had given up all hope. But we are here. Because Jesus is the finisher.

Believe that dear friend. In the day of your despair. In the day of your difficulties.

Look up unto Jesus. He has said where I am there shall my servant be also. And if it takes a thousand miracles he will work them to get us there.

Do believe it. Take hold of it with both hands. And trust him to see you right through to the glory.

For that is one of the great things in this letter. Bringing many sons to glory. That means you and that means me.

I have not said anything about the superiority. We can leave that to the person.

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