

The New Age of the Holy Spirit

by T. Austin-Sparks

T. Austin-Sparks explores the transformative nature of the new age initiated by the Holy Spirit as depicted in the book of Acts.

Scripture: Romans 8:17, Romans 8:29, 1 Corinthians 15:46, 1 Corinthians 15:54, Revelation 21:2

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Spiritual Transformation"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks preaches on the book of Acts, emphasizing the transition to a new spiritual age marked by the arrival of the Holy Spirit. He challenges the traditional title 'The Acts' for limiting the focus on outward activities rather than the spiritual essence of the new dispensation. The sermon highlights the importance of recognizing the spiritual nature of the new age and the work of the Holy Spirit in transforming believers to reflect the image of Christ. It underscores the sovereignty of God's Spirit in orchestrating His divine purposes despite adversities and challenges faced by the Church.

Transcript

The book which goes by the title "The Acts" is the book which introduces a new age; it marks the passing of certain days, age-days, and the arrival of a new day, a new age-day. But it not only marks that change; it sets forth the character of the new day. Among the many very important things which the Lord's people need to recognize anew is this, the real Divine nature of the new day which came in with that recorded in this book.

The established and accepted title of the book is limiting, and to some extent misleading. You must remember that the writer of the book never gave it that title. Luke, who wrote it, did not call it, "The Acts", nor "The Acts of the Apostles", nor "The Acts of the Holy Spirit". He did not give it a title. If it had a title at all, it is in his introduction, and that purely by inference. "The former treatise I made..... concerning all that Jesus began both to do and to teach", and the inference is that this is a further treatise of all that Jesus began to do and teach.

I say the established title, "The Acts", is limiting, and to some extent misleading, for this reason: it puts all the emphasis upon activity, and in so doing obscures the nature of the activity, the real character of what had been brought in, the very essence of things; that is, it very largely obscures the fact that this new dispensation is absolutely spiritual in every sense.

We know how "the baptism of the Spirit," "the filling of the Spirit", all that is meant by the use of the word "Pentecost", has been taken up by men and interpreted in terms of manifestations, things that can be outwardly noted, activities, works, done in a certain kind of heat and enthusiasm and strength and assertiveness. You know what the general mentality is when mention is made of being filled with the Spirit. At once our minds leap to certain forms of manifestation. But that is not the basic thing. The basic fact is that something has changed altogether, and there is a new character given to the new age; and that is, that for this age everything is essentially and absolutely spiritual.

I think Paul, in his first letter to the Corinthians, not with this object in view but under the same Spirit's direction and inspiration, has given a full summary of what this changeover really is. It occurs in a phrase in I Corinthians 15:46: "Howbeit that is not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; then that which is spiritual." First that which is natural; afterward that which is spiritual. That is only saying, in other words, that the days which have gone were natural days, the days in which Divine things were manifested naturally, on natural grounds. They could all be grasped by natural apprehension, men could see, men could feel. All that realm of God's activity was possible of observation naturally; but now that has passed.

"And it shall come to pass afterward..."; "afterward that which is spiritual." That represents a Divine order and an established economy in the arrangement of this world's history. First that which is natural in everything; afterward that which is spiritual, and this book (we will use its accepted title, "The Acts") is the afterward that is spiritual. And one of the most wonderful things is that this book comprehends the Old Testament and changes it right over into the spiritual realm.

You go back to the opening chapters of Ezekiel and you find all the Divine intentions and thoughts are being projected; the counsels and purposes of God are in view - the wheels and the living ones and the spirit in the wheels: Divine counsels, the purposes of God in motion, and they are all under the government of this One Who is upon the Throne. All these Divine movements in relation to Divine intentions concerning a people for God are all under the government of that One upon the Throne; and they go straightforward, they turn not as they go; they are not deviating, they are not hindered; they go and they go straightforward because there is One Who is in the place of absolute sovereignty, and nothing, however it may seem otherwise, can really divert His purposes. So, in this book of "The Acts", whatever happens which seems to be a diversion or a subverting or a hindrance or a contradiction, and however much it seems to be out of the straight way, it is found in the end to be compelled by a governing hand ready to reach God's end and fulfill it, and not hinder it. He is going straight forward. It is because of the Man in the glory.

Yes, He is God's Son, very God, but it is the MAN ("I see the Son of man...."). As the Man He is the full embodiment of the perfection of God's thoughts concerning man that is ultimately to be, man that is eventually to occupy God's realm, and as Son of man He is installed, enthroned, established as the perfect model of how things are to be; and God is taking the straight course in the power of the Spirit to that end, to have things according to the Man in the glory.

Pentecost in its outworking, or the presence of the Holy Spirit here, will mean that those in whom the Spirit operates and has His way will never be able to rest short of God's full thought for themselves or for others; that what is there should be found here - that what is true of Christ, the Man in the glory, should be more fully expressed here in this new man, the Church, the Body. What is the place of glory where God will dwell? It is no place on this earth as geographically located or materially constructed. It is a spiritual sanctuary, a habitation of God through the Spirit. It is something which has been spiritually constructed,

constituted, and perfected, and His dwelling and His habitation will be there; and it will be the place of His glory unto all ages for ever and ever.

What is it? In other words it is the realization in a people of that conformity to the image of His Son. God, by His Spirit, is working to make us a glorious Church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing, for His own habitation. "And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God (Rev. 21:2-3, 10-11). This is none other than the corporate man in Christ perfected and glorified. That is a vision of Christ and what Christ means in the thought and intention of God. It is a revelation of that for which the Holy Spirit has come, and an explanation of what the Holy Spirit is doing to get rid of all in us which cannot be glorified! Having brought life and incorruption to light by the gospel, he is working unto that day when this corruptible shall put on incorruption, this mortal shall put on immortality, and death shall be swallowed up in victory; when the Church is a glorious Church, where God Himself is found without restraint and in which He is worshipped in His universe.

The Man in the glory, being at God's right hand exalted, established, settled, is the assured realization of God's end. He cannot be there without His members. He cannot go on there alone. All the meaning of the presence there of Christ, the Son of man, would be stripped from Him if His Church never came there, made like unto Him; there would be no meaning in it at all. He is, after all, but the First-born among many brethren; He is bringing many sons to glory. The Spirit of sonship has come, not to try and do something, not with a hope that it may be; He has come in all the sovereignty of that One there, and it is going to be.

Settle your faith in this. However many questions you may have as to yourself, however often you may despair in yourself and be on the point of giving everything up, who that knows his own heart does not know the frequent temptation to do this? Yet there is no need for despair. There is another view; there is something else going on. The Spirit has come, He is within. He sees One at the right hand of God, and in spite of our despair about ourselves, in spite of the discouragement and impossibility that we find in ourselves, the Spirit of God is holding us to the Man in the glory and going on with this work; and it is not until we abandon faith in the omnipotence of the Spirit of God that hope departs and despair settles down. While we will believe that the Spirit of Christ has come in all that omnipotence of the exalted Son of man and is in us to do the work, hope springs eternal; there need be no despair. He is working in sovereignty.

I do believe that this book of "The Acts" says so loudly and clearly this one thing: out from heaven the Spirit of Almighty God has come in sovereignty to see things through. Let Herod do what he likes; let the kings and the nations have their confederacies; let all conditions work adversely; let Satan and all his forces operate; the Church goes on and these very things are drawn right into the train of Christ's triumph and made to serve the Divine ends. The things which befall work out for the furtherance of the Gospel, and the very things which look like disasters and calamities prove at long last to be complementary things under the sovereignty of the risen Lord. The spirit of God is in charge.

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