

# The Power and Challenge of the Kingdom of God

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The sermon explores the profound implications of the Kingdom of God, emphasizing the need for spiritual power and the importance of Jesus' lordship in the life of believers.*

**Scripture:** Luke 9:27, Acts 1:1

**Topics:** "The Kingdom of God", "Spiritual Warfare"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the profound significance of the Kingdom of God, illustrating the spiritual battle Jesus faced against worldly kingdoms during His earthly ministry. He highlights that the true Kingdom is not of this world but is established through the Holy Spirit, which empowers believers to challenge the opposing forces of darkness. The sermon calls for a deeper understanding of the Kingdom's inward nature and the necessity of letting go of self to fully embrace God's will. Sparks urges the Church to recover the spontaneous challenge of the Kingdom, emphasizing that true effectiveness in preaching comes from the power of the Holy Spirit rather than mere doctrine. Ultimately, he encourages believers to recognize their role in manifesting the Kingdom of God in a world that desperately needs its transformative power.

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## Transcript

But I tell you of a truth (I tell you very definitely, emphatically, positively). There are some of them that stand here, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God" (Luke 9:27).

"The former treatise I made, O Theophilus, concerning all that Jesus began both to do and to teach, until the day, in which he was received up, after that he had given commandment through the Holy Spirit unto the apostles whom he had chosen: to whom he also showed himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing unto them by the space of forty days, and speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:1-3).

"There are some of them that stand here, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God." "...by the space of forty days speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God." The theme with which the Apostles were being occupied by the Lord during the forty days after His resurrection - the theme of the risen Lord - was the kingdom of God.

## The Battle of Two Kingdoms in our Lord's Earthly Life

Looking back into the years of His life from the Jordan to the Cross, we can see that, in His own personal case during that time, the battle of two kingdoms was going on. Along various lines and through various instrumentalities, influences were being brought to bear upon Him. He was moving within a circle of forces and activities the object and direction of which was to get Him to have a kingdom. At the very beginning, the conflict with the adversary in the wilderness during the forty days and nights headed right up to that issue.

"The devil... showeth him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; and he said unto him, All these things will I give thee, if thou wilt fall down and worship me" (Matt. 4:8-9). His own disciples were constantly pressing upon Him with their Messianic mentality and expectation, making it very difficult for Him in this way - that He knew they were as yet such children spiritually that it would be a disaster to disillusion them too quickly and disappoint their expectations and hopes.

Those expectations, hopes and visions, and all that they included for these men, were for the Lord like barbed wire all the time pricking Him. He could hardly say anything of a disillusioning character but at once the disciples were offended, questioning, thrown all over the place, even to revolt. The crowd, the hysterical multitude, on one occasion would come and take Him by force and make Him king. There is something at work, coercing. He was fighting that something all along, putting it back, rejecting, repudiating; and it was no easy thing.

At the last, as He stood before Pilate, when the accusation against Him was that He said that He was a king, Pilate said, "Art thou the King of the Jews?" and Jesus said, "My kingdom is not out from this world system - if my kingdom were out from this world system, then would my servants fight but now is my kingdom not from hence" (John 18:36). It was the repudiation of a kingdom; which meant that inwardly He was standing for another. It was not the repudiation of the Kingdom.

He was fighting all the way along against a false for a true, against a temporal for a spiritual; but the powers that existed were seeking to precipitate this other matter, to get Him involved in a kingdom which was not His real one. You can easily see what an involving it would have been. Suppose He had capitulated, accepted a kingdom out from this system, put Himself on this level; well, a little thought at once betrays the sinister nature of the pressure, the offer. No, He was not accepting the framework which embodied the kingdom of Satan - that is what it amounted to.

Within the kingdom out from this system, Satan, the prince of this world, was established, and the Lord was not accepting that at all. Through all these temptations, even though they might come through the lips and by the mistaken zeal of a beloved and devoted disciple of the inner circle - no other than Simon Peter himself - He was adamant. On that very matter of His going up to Jerusalem and being delivered into the hands of men to be crucified, when the human counsel is "Be it far from thee, Lord: this shall never be unto thee," the instant rejoinder is, "Get thee behind me, Satan" (Matt. 16:21-23). He sees Satan entrenched in the very suggestion, and that is not the kingdom the Lord will accept. There would be a kingdom which He would have, but not of that kind.

## The Kingdom Recaptured for God Through the Cross

So to the Cross, along the line of repudiating a kingdom after that order; and there, in the Cross, He went behind the framework, behind all the form and the system, and dealt with the prince of this world, and cast

him out. How He cast him out we have been seeking to see in these meditations; He cast him out morally. "The prince of this world cometh: and he hath nothing in me" (John 14:30), so he is morally put out. And, casting out the prince of this world there in the Cross, He captured - let us rather say, recaptured - the Kingdom which had been betrayed by Adam into that usurper's hands; recaptured it as the last Adam, the second man, the Lord from heaven; and, having recaptured it in and by His Cross (a matter about which we have yet to say more) He rose, and His theme was the kingdom of God - the fulfilment of His emphatic statement, "There are some of them that stand here, who shall, in no wise taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God." They saw it on the day of Pentecost, the recaptured Kingdom in the hands of this victorious Christ Who knew how to refuse quick returns - a thing which we know very little about morally; and because He was able to let go, He secured all.

That is a law of tremendous value in spiritual life - being expert in letting go. We have seen the other one expert in laying hold - 'I will, I will, I will.' There again we shall have more to say. But now in the hands of this One, the Kingdom recaptured is brought in on the day of Pentecost in the power of the Holy Spirit.

### The Spirit the Life and Power of the Kingdom

But note, the point for us is that it is a reformed kingdom, that is, its constitution is altogether different from and other than that which was in the minds of the Apostles and was offered to Him by Satan. It is another kind of kingdom, essentially spiritual. It comes in by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is in charge of the Kingdom. He precipitates this thing and He keeps the reins in His hands in the projecting and the developing, the expanding and the establishing, of this kingdom. Everything is spiritual, and we find therefore that the Kingdom is, from first to last, essentially an inward thing. The Lord's words about the kingdom of the heavens being within you were very, very truly proved on the day of Pentecost and afterward - it was the Spirit within that was the nature, the power, the life, the energy and the everything of this kingdom.

### The Spontaneous Challenge of the Kingdom of God Through the Church

If that is the course and nature of things, what really is the heart of it all? Well, the heart of it is this, that when from the day of Pentecost men and women went out into this world in the good of what it meant that the kingdom of God as an actual reality had come, and that it was an inward fact, the thing which characterised them was that there was, by their very presence here in this world, an impressive and overwhelming impact of the kingdom of God upon that other kingdom lying behind the framework of this world system. It just happened. Their very presence disturbed, challenged, provoked that other kingdom, and the fact of these two kingdoms being in such deadly opposition became a manifest reality simply because those believers were there; and, mark you - this is something to be marked - their predominant note in preaching was not the salvation of men from sin (which was the result of something else) but it was the absolute lordship of Jesus Christ. Everywhere they bore witness to the resurrection of Jesus, and they proclaimed Him as Lord. When it came to dealing with exercise of heart under conviction, and with the enquiry, 'What shall we do to be saved?' then the interpretation or the application was that this Lord is also Saviour. You can be saved by Him because He is Lord. You can be forgiven because He is Lord. Let me say again - it is not just because He is officially Lord; but because He is morally in the position to forgive. Leave that again for a minute.

What I want to concentrate upon and keep to is this, that there needs to be recovered the spontaneous challenge of the kingdom of God in the Church. We may be preaching the gospel of salvation - let no one think for one moment any discrediting or weakening of that is intended - but that must come out of the

established lordship of Jesus Christ in the preacher and in the Body representing Christ. It must be that - that Jesus is Lord - not as an item of a creed or of doctrine, but as something which has become an inward power. The lordship of Jesus Christ as an inward power, both in the life and in the Church, has to be registered in a spiritual way, not first upon men. I do not know whether you are able to follow further than I am saying; but why the vast amount of the preaching of the gospel to the unsaved without effect? Does that not exercise you, or is that a question which ought never to be raised? It is true is it not? The gospel is preached and preached and preached with little effect. Is the gospel weaker than it was in those days? Is the Holy Spirit withdrawn from the earth? What is the explanation? Is it that the Lord is different, His gospel is different, or His Church is different? Ah, I think it must be the last. It cannot be the others. What is the difference?

The Church is taking up something, and giving it out, very largely as objective teaching; of course, knowing something of the blessedness of being saved, of the good and joy of what the Lord Jesus is in terms of salvation. That is all very good, it gets so far, but somehow or other there is a tremendous margin of ineffectiveness; and the reason may be - I put it in that way - that first of all the preaching is to men, the registration is upon men, and there is not that which comes from behind spontaneously. The kingdom of God is not something worked up, properly arranged in addresses and sermons, it is not a theme, a subject, but it is the mighty power of the Holy Spirit coming from behind. You are there as the Lord's witness, and there is something more than the power of the enemy present; the power of God is there too. The kingdom of God has come. The kingdom of God is an overwhelming thing. That, is the meaning. It is in this realm that the weakness of so much preaching lies. Now, we will go on with our preaching of salvation, we will proceed with our approach to men and women about this matter of salvation; we must, more than ever. But remember, if we come without the kingdom of God - not as a subject but as a power coming through us, so to speak, as from behind, coming right through and registering itself, not upon men and women in the first place but upon those forces behind in which the whole world lies - we shall be largely ineffective. It is very true that no one can believe, no one is free to turn to the Lord - however much they may crave to do so - unless the Lord does something to release them. This strong man has to have his house broken into by a stronger than he; and who is stronger than he? This kingdom has to be raided by another kingdom greater than itself. And so, although the Lord had given the disciples the sphere of their activity and the commission to go out into it, He said, "But tarry ye in the city, until ye be clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). "John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized in the Holy Spirit not many days hence" (Acts 1:5). 'Until then, do not attempt the commission or you will fail, and the other kingdom will prevail over you.'

You see the point for us. It all centres in that, it is all summed up in that. What is our real business here? Is it to propound doctrines, expound truths, give out volumes of interpretations of Scripture? No! Whatever place that may have for edification, for instruction, it will all be unprofitable so far as real spiritual effectiveness is concerned, unless the kingdom of God is coming through - that is, unless there is the real registration of the fact that Jesus is raised from the dead and is Lord. It is no use saying that, unless you say it in the power of the Holy Spirit. "No man can say, Jesus is Lord, but in the Holy Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:3). That does not mean that you cannot use the phrase "Jesus is Lord," but there is something more in saying than using words. When God said; "Let light be" there was light - and that is the kind of saying that we are thinking of - a saying which is a fiat, an impact. One man may say, "Jesus is Lord," and while it is quite true, the doctrine is correct and sound, nothing happens. Another man in the power of the Holy Ghost declares the lordship of Jesus Christ, and you feel something, you are conscious of something coming through of God. Now, this is not the privilege only of Apostles in the ecclesiastical or official sense. This is

for the Church, and you and I are the Church in representation. Oh, that our prayer should be the impact of the Kingdom upon that other kingdom! That is what my heart cries for; for prayer should not be a list of petitions, a lot of things asked for, but there should be something done behind things. In all our teaching, though it may not be instantly seen, there should nevertheless be a steady work going on which is producing lives in the power of this kingdom - people becoming factors to be reckoned with by the enemy. It is the only justification of all our teaching, that those who receive it shall themselves become in turn factors which are marked by the enemy; of whom, as we have said before, the demons can say, "Jesus I know, and - so and so - I know." It ought to be that we are known to the enemy by name as people to be reckoned with, to be taken account of, and not included in the category of those who do not count - "but who are ye?" (Acts 19:15).

The matter which occupies the risen Lord is the kingdom of God. It is the thing with which He would occupy His servants. The kingdom of God - not some framework of a temporal system, but the kingdom of God - is not in word, but in power; not in eating and drinking but righteousness in the Holy Ghost (Rom. 14:17). That is the kingdom of God; and you and I, dear friends, are in the very happy position of being included in that former statement of the Lord - "There are some of them that stand here, who shall in no wise taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God." That is our privilege - to see the kingdom of God, and for the kingdom of God to come through us with a sense of Divine power. That is the heart of things. I have said already that all the rest we are talking about in these meditations gathers round that.

#### The Importance and Power of Letting Go to God

You say, 'Well, I believe that is true, and all my heart responds, and I pray God that it may be so where I am concerned. I want it to be, but nothing happens. How can it be?' That is just what we are getting at; and I have hinted already how it can be. It is intensely practical. When I said that the Lord Jesus was the greatest expert at letting go, I touched the heart of this matter. We have said again and again that everything is centred and focused in the human will. Let me ask here (though I shall have to refer to it again later on more fully), have you not many times discovered that your real power - the power which delivered you, the power which lifted you up and set you on high - came when you let go? You were holding on - and I am not saying that you were holding on to something that was necessarily wrong; you were simply holding on. It may have been something given to you by God, and your own natural possessiveness had got hold of it, and you were holding something of God to and for yourself, and saying 'hands off' to everybody else. There is no question that Isaac was given of God to Abraham; he was a perfect miracle, impossible unless God had given him. And then we read, "God did prove Abraham." He said, "Take now thy son, thine only son, whom thou lovest" (and, He might have said, whom I gave thee) "...and offer him... for a burnt-offering" (Gen. 22:2, etc.). Abraham did not say, 'Thou gavest him to me, do not contradict Thyself and take him away again; Thou didst make all Thy promises to hang upon him; I am not going to give him up!' He gave him up and he got him back; got him back with a whole kingdom by which he became "heir of the world" - that is the statement (Rom. 4:13). He has the kingdom by letting go - the foreshadowing of this Son of God Who let go. They would take Him by force and make Him a king; He let go. He got His kingly place with increase, but He got it in a realm where Satan could not touch it; it was beyond the power of death. If He had accepted that thing which was offered Him it would have been subject to death. Here in resurrection He has it, and death has no power over it. But He got it like that - by letting go to God. You see, it is intensely practical. Oh, how can this be? By getting yourself out of the picture! That is why it cannot be - because self is in the picture! Self-will, self-interest, self-realisation. That is the kingdom of Satan, and God is not going to give you His kingdom on that ground. That was the ruin

and the loss of the kingdom of God for man. You cannot restore it; like cannot overcome like. Something different, other, is needed; and whatever that self may mean, it has to get out of the way if the kingdom of God is to come in.

This is practical. I have to be quite sure that I am not in this, that some secret ambition of mine, some motive of mine, is not at work. Oh, how subtle are our hearts! You and I perhaps are ready to be utterly for the Lord. We mean well, and we mean it thoroughly. We would sing really with our hearts and with our voices at full strength, 'None of self, and all of Thee,' and we would mean it, and there would be no uncertainty so far as we are concerned. And yet God knows that we are all the time defeated in our very sincerity by secret motives, and nothing but a test position can prove whether we actually mean it. So He brings us to a test - to a prospect, and then a disappointment. How do we react? Is our sorrow, our pain, for the Lord or for ourselves? Are we disappointed, or is it really only the Lord for Whom we are concerned and we are not in it at all? You see what I mean - a test situation to find out after all whether it is 'None of self, and all of Thee.' We can never discover it except in practical ways along the line of very practical testings. The Lord knows it all right, but it is not enough that He knows it. You see, in order for us to come in, we have to come in intelligently and co-operatively. That is the point of every test. The Lord could do a thing with a stroke, it could happen mechanically. But we are in a moral world, and God acts towards man on moral ground. Man has a will that constitutes him a morally responsible person, and so he must exercise his will in co-operation with God.

You remember the words in Deuteronomy 8:2 - "Thou shalt remember all the way which the Lord thy God hath led thee these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble thee, to prove thee, to know what was in thy heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments, or not." Our version does not convey the full meaning. The words as quoted might raise a question as to whether the Lord knows what is in our hearts without trying us out. We cannot have any doubts about that. No, the real meaning is this - "that he might make thee know what was in thy heart, whether thou wouldest keep his commandments or not." It was necessary for Israel to come to the place where they knew their own heart and repudiated what was contrary to the revealed will of God; and that was the battle of the forty years. The Lord had shown that His purpose for them was the promised land. They were discovering that in their hearts Egypt still had a place in opposition to the land; and the Lord was calling upon them to recognize what was in their hearts and to repudiate Egypt - repudiate it as much in the wilderness as they had repudiated it when they had fled from it. It is an inside thing. Until their hearts were wholly toward the land and for the land, the Lord could not get them into it. That is where Joshua and Caleb were - they wholly followed the Lord. Why did they go in when all the others of their generation failed? Because they had completely and finally and utterly slain Egypt, not objectively but subjectively, and embraced the land as God willed. These others were being tested, day after day, year after year, on that ground - 'Do you really mean that you want to follow the Lord? You say, Yes - but do you? Let us try it out!' The Lord was doing that, to make them know what was in their hearts.

I say, this kingdom of God within is very practical, explaining the Lord's dealings with us. When we recognize the laws and principles of that kingdom there must come the test, when we give up our Isaac, not because we know we are going to get him back again but knowing that perhaps the Lord will really require him of us and that he will not be given back to us. There is the battle and the victory. None of us has fully got there yet, and that is why the Kingdom has not fully come where we are concerned; but inasmuch as we triumph in that matter, the Kingdom is coming through - power and salvation are coming through; and also, I believe, rest for our own hearts' deliverance. The Lord show us the meaning of this

word.

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