

The Power of His Resurrection - Closing Scenes

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the power of resurrection life, which is accessed through conformity to Christ's death and identification with Him in death, and is the means by which the Church, the Body of Christ, settles the issue of death.

Scripture: 2 Kings 13:14

Topics: "Resurrection Power", "Victory over Death"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the power of resurrection in the life of Elisha, illustrating how his final acts symbolize triumph over death. The arrow of the Lord's deliverance signifies God's promise of victory, while the smiting of the ground with arrows represents the need for believers to fully appropriate the power of resurrection life. Even after Elisha's death, his bones bring revival to a dead man, showcasing that resurrection life continues beyond physical existence. Sparks encourages believers to embrace the fullness of resurrection life, which is essential for overcoming death and experiencing God's glory.

Transcript

Reading: 2 Kings 13:14-25.

In these verses we read of the closing scenes in the life of Elisha. There are three things which stand out.

1. The arrow of the Lord's deliverance.
2. The smiting of the ground with the arrows.
3. The body of the dead soldier reviving by contact with Elisha's body.

These three instances are a very fitting conclusion to the life of Elisha in the light of the spiritual meaning of his life, namely, that he represents throughout the power of resurrection life; that is, testimony in life all the way through, is one of testimony against death in various and numerous forms. Here we have Elisha at the end, but how wonderfully the life is maintained.

How suited to all that has gone before are these incidents. Life triumphant over death right through to the last! Although it says that he was sick of his sickness whereof he died, that is only one aspect. That relates

to the human vessel. There is another side where Elisha never did die. When the human vessel has gone, even then the testimony to life triumphant over death is maintained, so that the very dead are quickened by that testimony, which goes on when the vessel has departed. It is mighty life.

Here is Elisha on his bed, an old man, on the human side in weakness, and so soon to pass away. The king of Israel comes to him, and he lifts himself in his bed, calls to the king to bring his bow and his arrows, and to put the arrow in the bow. Then the prophet places his hands over the hands of the king, they two draw the bow to its full extent, and that arrow goes in the power of resurrection life from that bed through the open window. The life of resurrection is in that arrow. Life triumphant over death is the strength of that arrow of the Lord's deliverance.

Then there comes the command to the king to smite the ground with his arrows, and he smites thrice and stays. The man of God is wroth with him. There is still much more energy in the dying prophet than there is in the living king. He is the very embodiment of energy to the end. In effect he says: "Why did you not go on; why did you stop so soon; why did you not go right through with the whole thing?" He breathes life and energy.

Then, even when his body is dead and in the tomb, contact with it is life. It is a marvelous conclusion, full of significance and spiritual value. Nothing could more aptly fit into his whole testimony. You could have no finer conclusion and rounding off than that. It would have been a disappointing thing had Elisha just gone as if something of a tragedy had overtaken him and he had fallen a prey to some evil and been killed, or had he simply disappeared from the scene. You can never associate such a thing with that which all the way through represents triumph over death in every direction. You expect that testimony to be maintained right through and beyond, going out of time into eternity. And so it is. That life triumphant over death is something which does not end here, it goes on. It is a testimony which outlives its vessels.

Turning to the three instances we shall seek to understand in some measure what they have to say to us specifically. There are depths and fullnesses in all these incidents in Elisha's life, and in his life as a whole, which we cannot stay to touch upon. But there are some things which seem more or less apparent as lessons to be learned by us in these three closing incidents of Elisha's life.

1. The Arrow of the Lord's Deliverance

It was a question of victory over the enemy. And it is a matter of the Lord's purpose to give full and final victory over the enemy. What the king of Israel entered into may be one thing, what the Lord's thought was is another. He may only have come into it in a limited way, but that was his own fault. The Lord provided for very much more than that. We shall come back to that in a moment.

The thing from the Divine standpoint is the overcoming, fully and finally, of the Lord's enemy. The fullness of deliverance and victory was bound up in Elisha's prophecy. Although for the time being, because of the limited appropriation of the king, the representative of the Lord's people, that prophecy will be long postponed in its full realization, nevertheless the arrow of the Lord's deliverance has been released, and, in spite of postponement, ultimately the Lord's people will have a complete and full deliverance. It is secured to them in the prophecy. This arrow of deliverance is the arrow of a prophecy, the fuller expression of which may be found in the other prophets, such as Ezekiel and his vision of the valley of dry bones, the triumphant side of the activity of the resurrection of the Lord's people, and their ultimate standing upon their feet a mighty army. It is all bound up in this arrow of deliverance. But more than that, there is foreseen in the illustration, in the type, the ultimate full triumph of the people of God spiritually over

the last enemy. "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." The guarantee, the earnest, the title deeds of the final triumph over the last enemy, death, is in the fact that resurrection life is already given to the Lord's people.

The last enemy will be overcome in the Church, the Body of Christ, by the power of His resurrection. The Church has been long entering into the value of that. The Church has known, because of its own weakness, only a little of that, but eventually it will be realized to the full. The Word of the Lord is full of that fact, that the end is going to see the last enemy destroyed in the Church. It is to be in the Church, the Body of Christ, that the last enemy is destroyed, and that death is to be finally cast out.

The earnest of that is the fact that Christ, already triumphant over death, is resident within His Body. Take such passages as Ephesians 1:17-21. There is seen universal dominion resultant from the inworking of the power of His resurrection. To put that round the other way in the terms of this Scripture, "the exceeding greatness of His power" - which is that of resurrection - by which God raised Jesus from the dead issues in universal authority. Thus universal authority over all the power of the enemy is resident within the power of His resurrection. Resurrection life contains that very power by which death shall be fully and finally vanquished, and the Church, the Body of Christ, knowing that power - "...that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ... may give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him... that ye may know... the exceeding greatness of His power..." - will come to the place where the Head already is.

Pass from that passage to the third chapter of the same letter, verse 20, and you have similar things said: "...according to the power that worketh in us." What power is that? "The exceeding greatness of His power... which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead..." "Unto Him be the glory in the CHURCH and in Christ Jesus unto all generations for ever and ever." Here is resurrection.

Let us repeat, that the last enemy, death, is going to be finally and fully overthrown in and by the Church, on the basis of the resurrection life of the Lord Jesus operating in that Church as the Body of Christ. Herein is the necessity for you and for me NOW to learn to live on the basis of resurrection life. Herein is the explanation of why the Lord takes pains to bring us to the place where only His risen life will meet our need. Herein is the explanation of the constant application of the Cross to cut from under us every other basis of life save the life of the Lord, because of the enormous issue involved, that the Church is the chosen means by which the risen Head is to settle finally the issue of death.

That brings us to an interesting and significant point in this story of Elisha. Do you notice how the king of Israel addresses Elisha? Look at verse 14 of chapter 13, and you will see there an extraordinary address. What did he mean? Was he expecting Elisha to go the same way as Elijah? Was it an expression of some feeling that Elisha was about to be raptured? I confess I do not know from the standpoint of Joash. But I think I can stand on the side of the Holy Spirit and see some meaning, because if the Holy Spirit inspired this, then there is a spiritual meaning. Elijah went up into heaven in a chariot of fire amidst the shouts of Elisha - "My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof!" That was Elijah's victory over death. We do not have that form of victory with Elisha, but we have the same words. Elisha did not go into heaven by a chariot of fire, as did Elijah, nevertheless exactly the same words apply to him. He comes within exactly the same category of those who conquer death and are not conquered by death. But what is the difference? If Elijah was raptured outwardly, Elisha was raptured inwardly, but it is the same thing. Resurrection life in any case is rapture in its issue. It is victory in its outworking. It is victory over death, and victory over death is rapture. What is rapture? It is glory! And, so far as the principle and basis of rapture is concerned, which is the power of His resurrection, that holds good whatever may be the form of

its outward consummation.

Was not Paul as truly at the end of his life, as he had hoped to be at the beginning? When you read his first letters, the letters to the Thessalonians, there is no doubt but that Paul thought and hoped to be raptured with the Church - "...we which are alive, and remain, shall be caught up..." After many years, toward the end, he came to see that that was not to be the manner of his going, and said so quite frankly. "...I am already being offered, and the time of my departure is come." And he knew by what method it would be. But spiritually in his inner life he was as truly raptured at the end as he had hoped to be at the beginning. It was not death, it was not defeat, it was not the mastery of death; it was victory over death, triumph over death. It was glory. He could go through in perfect confidence and perfect triumph; he could go through with a shout in his spirit. Though the executioner's axe is about to be lifted to sever his head from his body, he could go through with a shout - "the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof!" He is above the whole thing. Whatever may be the course, resurrection life embodies rapture in itself. So that, whether Elijah goes up literally in a chariot, or Elisha goes up spiritually in a chariot, it is the same in the working out.

But there is something more. Paul had two phases of resurrection in his heart and in his faith. Firstly, he had resurrection inwardly. The power of resurrection was at work in him all the time, so that death was being transcended in all its workings. In his spirit he was always above death. He knew the power of resurrection as an inward thing.

But then, in the second place, Paul had his heart and his faith set upon a specific form of its outworking, in what he called uniquely "the out-resurrection from among the dead." It is Paul who brings into view such a thing. His desire and ambition was not just to attain unto the resurrection from the dead. You have to do nothing to attain unto the resurrection from the dead. If you are saved you will enjoy the resurrection from the dead without any attaining whatever. The fact that you have eternal life is the guarantee that you will be raised from the dead. The Lord Jesus made that perfectly clear, that He would give unto as many as He would eternal life and raise them up at the last day. But there is a day which anticipates the last day, and that was the day that Paul was after. He did not speak of the last day resurrection, he spoke of the out-resurrection from among the dead. This for him represented rapture, in which not even all those who are the Lord's will participate. If Philippians 3:10 means anything at all, if language is to be taken seriously, it does most definitely indicate that this resurrection is not that general resurrection which comes with the gift of eternal life, but this is a prize. Resurrection from the dead in general is not a prize. It accompanies the free gift of God. A prize is always something worked for, striven after, and which may be missed, as Paul makes perfectly clear. This out-resurrection is a prize which extends him fully.

That is where the first phase of this chapter ends and makes necessary the second phase, because the one arrow must lead to the other arrows.

2. The Smiting on the Ground With the Arrows

Elisha does not leave things with the releasing of that one arrow, prophetic of full and final deliverance, but he instantly takes another course, by which he would seek to bring the king at once into the full possession of it, to anticipate the end, and to secure it in advance. It might have been that Elisha had said when the one arrow was released: "The arrow of the Lord's deliverance! Someday - it may be a long way ahead - there will be full deliverance. This arrow declares it." He might just have left it there, and that would have meant a measure of comfort, the comfort which you get from 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 that

ultimately all the saints will be raised, those who have gone and those that remain. The thing will come into the final victory at some time. That is a general statement. What we read in Thessalonians is but a general statement, and you need a great deal more Scripture to get inside of the general statement. Paul there is only making quite a comprehensive statement, he is not giving us anything more. We need much more to break that up. It is not fair to take the general statement, and say that is the beginning and the end of all the doctrine of the rapture, or the resurrection, or the coming of the Lord. It is not by any means!

Elisha does not leave things there. He says to Joash: "Take the arrows... Smite upon the ground." Anticipate the end, get hold of it now, make it good now. And Joash takes his arrows and smites once, twice, thrice, and stays. And Elisha asks why he has stayed, why he accepts less than he might have, why he does not go the full way now and possess the whole at once - "...now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice." That will be your measure of glory. Whereas you might have gone right on and had so much more glory, known so much more ascendancy and victory, you have fixed the measure yourself.

See how wonderfully that fits into Philippians 3. The measure of victory and glory will be the measure of faith's appropriation of the power of His resurrection. We are not dealing with the matter of salvation now, we are dealing with God's full thought as to salvation. And when Paul wrote that letter to the Philippians and came to the part of his letter which is marked by our third chapter, it was as though he smote, and he smote, and he smote, until he had the whole thing - "...but one thing I do, forgetting the things which are behind..." - it was the uttermost taking hold of Him and the power of His resurrection - "...that I may know Him... if by any means I may attain unto the out-resurrection [Greek]..." There is a man who does not stay short of the whole end of God.

The Lord's people are going to come more or less to the fullness of the glory of Christ, more or less to the place of universal dominion, according to the measure of faith's appropriation now of the power of His resurrection. Paul says in another place that in the resurrection there are differences of degree, that there is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars, and that so shall it be in the resurrection. Do you want the glory of the sun, the full-orbed glory of Christ? Well, that demands now a going the whole way in the matter of faith's appropriation of the power of His resurrection - "...that life which I now live in the flesh I live in faith, the faith which is in the Son of God," and then, with that basis laid, a pressing on to know Him, and the power of His resurrection.

The point is that there is something to be lost. That may not be our salvation, but that may be glory in measure, positions which the Lord would have us occupy and enjoy, but from which we may fall short. The Word of God points out that the generation of Hebrews which fell in the wilderness lost their inheritance. And Paul carries that principle forward when he says that you can be saved, but only as by fire. You may not lose your salvation, but you may lose everything else that God intended you to have in your salvation. There is something which God has which we can only have on conditions. And when we view that in the light of God's own need, "His inheritance in the saints," and of God's own purpose, and when we view it in the light of what it has cost God and His Son, it becomes a sin to be satisfied with less than all that God desires. The Lord Jesus did not suffer all that Calvary meant just to get us out of hell, just to get us saved. There is far more than that bound up in His Cross. This has a good deal of light to throw upon the New Testament position.

3. The Revival of a Dead Body by Contact With Elisha's Bones

"Now the bands of the Moabites invaded the land at the coming in of the year. And... as they were burying a man... they spied a band; and they cast the man into the sepulchre of Elisha: and as soon as the man touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet."

The knowing of Christ in the power of His resurrection is by conformity to His death. It is on the ground of identification with Him in death. Here is this man falling into the sepulchre of Elisha and becoming identified with him in his death. Typically he came to the place mentioned by Paul "...that I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death." But that very conformity to His death was the way of knowing the power [of] His resurrection. That very identification with Him in death issued in resurrection life.

We must always remember that the death of the Lord Jesus is not a passive thing. The death of the Lord Jesus is a mighty energy, a mighty power. There is something about the death of the Lord Jesus which death cannot stand. His very death swallowed up death; His very death destroyed death - "...that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death." There is a mystery about that, how a death can kill death, but it did in His case. The death of the Lord Jesus is not the death of any other man: it is a different death, a mighty death, an energetic death.

This man touched the bones of Elisha and found that in the place of death there was victory over death, power destroying death.

That ought to be a very strong additional word to our ideas about identification with Christ in death, because so often people think that when language like that is used it means going out and losing everything; it is all death, death, death! You never do touch the Lord Jesus in His death in any new measure without knowing a new measure of resurrection life. When the Lord Jesus by His Spirit brings us in a further measure into the meaning of His death, let it be settled with us, once and for all, that that is in itself a new measure of resurrection life. The two things go together, it cannot be otherwise. It is death unto life. It is loss unto gain. The life and the gain are of a different sort from the death and the loss. The death and the loss is simply all that which, sooner or later, will go in any case, and even while it remains is of a very doubtful value, but the life and the gain are eternal, and have in them all the values of God. So Paul could, with something of joy, hail conformity to the death of Christ. He speaks about it in no mournful terms as though he were going to lose everything. There is no shadow on his face, or sob in his voice, when he speaks about being conformed to His death. It is the shout of a victor. There is something he is after.

Paul knows quite well the value of this exchange, the exchanging of his life for the life of His Lord, the exchange of which he has been speaking in this very letter - "Howbeit what things were gain to me, these have I counted loss for Christ... for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord." What is the nature of that knowledge? "That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection." That is the excelling quality of this knowledge. It excels everything that could come to a man in this world, that would be regarded by a man of this world as gain, and he has tabulated and catalogued all those things. He has known power, popularity, reputation, position, possession, and he says the knowledge of Christ Jesus is excelling all that. What knowledge is it? It is the particular knowledge of "Him, and the power of His resurrection." Why? Because of what that leads to, all the possibilities of that resurrection life and power: because of its ultimate issue: because of the place to which it can bring him; no less a place than the very Throne of the Lord Himself.

We have left out a good many things, and have not pursued the various lines and questions that may have arisen, content just to give the broad outline of the many features. Questions may have arisen, but let us first of all face the facts and say: Are these facts? Get rid of prejudices, and ask broad questions - "Why should I not accept that? What is there to hinder?" If we are very frank and open, without prejudice in matters like this, we shall get light, and that light will mean a very great deal. But if we have preconceived ideas, preconceptions strongly held, we shall get into a fog as we touch these matters. An open heart provides the way for the Lord to give much light. A willingness to accept what is of the Lord makes it possible for the Lord to show what is of Himself.

Leaving for the moment all the details, let us look at the statements squarely in the face, confront ourselves with the mighty "ifs." "IF by ANY MEANS I may attain unto the out-resurrection [Greek]..." What hangs upon an "if! We may take it that it is not our salvation that hangs upon an "if." Our salvation hangs upon Christ's finished work and our faith therein. But there is something which hangs upon an "if."

The Lord inspire us with His own mighty urge, and the inward working of His exceeding great power unto the full end, that we shall not fall short of His thought.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/t-austin-sparks/the-power-of-his-resurrection-closing-scenes/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net