

The Sealing of His Brethren

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the significance of being sealed with the Holy Spirit as a mark of assurance, purpose, and responsibility in the believer's life.

Scripture: Acts 4:13, Ephesians 1:13, Ephesians 4:30, Hebrews 3:6, Hebrews 6:1, 1 John 2:27, 1 John 3:14

Topics: "Holy Spirit", "Spiritual Sealing"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks preaches about being sealed with the Holy Spirit, emphasizing that the Holy Spirit is the seal given by God the Father, not by the Spirit Himself. The sealing is the receiving of a Person for indwelling, ensuring a real, secure, and certain transaction in the believer's life. The Holy Spirit as the seal brings a mark of reality, certainty, and distinction, giving believers a resemblance to the Lord. This sealing with the Spirit as an earnest of our inheritance signifies a legal pledge, a promise, and a token of the glorious future inheritance in God.

Transcript

"...In whom ye also, having heard the word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation, -- in whom, having also believed, YE WERE SEALED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT OF PROMISE, WHICH IS AN EARNEST OF OUR INHERITANCE, unto the redemption of God's own possession, unto the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:13,14).

Sealed with the Holy Spirit

I want you to note at the outset a very important little word: "Ye were sealed WITH the Holy Spirit", not by the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not the sealer, but the seal. God the Father seals, and the seal is the Holy Spirit. The value of that is that the sealing is not a matter of some feeling, some experience in the realm of our senses. The sealing is definitely the receiving of a Person for indwelling.

The apostles were very careful and very particular as to this divine consummation of saving faith. They never left anything to chance. If there was a profession of faith in the Lord Jesus, if there was a declaration of the acceptance of Him, the acknowledgment of Him as Saviour and Lord, they never allowed it to stop there. If a report came that some had turned to the Lord through the preaching, they went to verify and to see that the thing was sealed, and for them the consummation of that saving faith, that faith unto salvation, was that they received the seal of the Holy Spirit. You notice here that, although it is in Ephesians, which goes so much beyond beginnings, it is connected with "having heard the word of the truth, the gospel of

your salvation, -- in whom, having also believed" (heard the Word and believed), "ye were sealed".

Now the enemy will allow anything short of that. He will allow you to have a lot of sensations, to make a lot of declarations, sign a lot of papers and cards, and go out to a lot of penitent forms. He will allow anything short of this particular thing, and it was there that the apostles were making so sure, not accepting anything less than this, that these people definitely and positively did receive the Holy Spirit as a Person to indwell them. "Ye were sealed by God with the Holy Spirit of promise as an earnest of our inheritance". Well, that is all bound up with this little word "with" -- with the Spirit.

Then come these two words which are word-pictures -- "sealed" and "earnest". "Sealed with the Spirit as an earnest."

The Effect of a Seal

(a) The mark of reality

What is the nature and effect of a seal when it is put upon anything? I think it has several meanings and several effects. First of all it is the mark of reality; that is, of security. It introduces this element: "Now, that is that! That is a real transaction, that is a definite act. Something has happened that is very real -- you cannot get away from that." In the New Testament, when this sealing took place, when they received the Spirit as a seal, it was precise, it was real, it was definite; it was lifted entirely out of the realm of vagueness, indefiniteness. It was a mark about those first Christians which was unmistakable. The seal gives that character to the life: that is, the receiving of the Holy Spirit as a Person makes everything very real -- it makes for an unmistakable addition to the life that has to be noted, taken account of. From that time, if it is a genuine thing, there is nothing vague about that one's Christian life, nothing indefinite.

(b) The mark of certainty

And then the seal is the mark of certainty. When we receive the Spirit, when this seal is set to believing faith, there enters in something that is very positive in the life. We have certainty; that is, we know. That positive note is struck so much by John. "The anointing which ye received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any one teach you" (1 John 2:27). That does not mean that we are exempt from instruction in the things of God, but it does mean that we do not need that anyone should tell us we are saved -- we know. "We know that we have passed out of death into life" (1 John 3:14). It is the seal of security and certainty.

(c) A mark of distinction

And another thing about a seal is that it brings a resemblance. When we put a seal upon a thing, that seal bears a mark. It may be the Great Seal of the realm, it may be a family seal, a business seal, a personal seal -- an initial or monogram. It bears a mark, has a character; it distinguishes that which is sealed. And in the same way the Holy Spirit gives a certain mark, a certain character, a certain resemblance, a certain design to the life. He brings in this mark of the Lord.

These are very simple things, but this is the outworking, the immediate result, of receiving the Spirit. You have only to look into the book of the Acts to see this borne out. "They took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). They knew the seal, the likeness; they saw the mark, the design.

"An Earnest of Our Inheritance"

"An earnest of our inheritance." Of course, in ancient times this was a very well-known thing, as it is today. It is the legal pledge of a commercial transaction. In old days, if a man was buying a piece of land, he was given by the seller a handful of the earth of that land as an earnest that he was to have the whole, the whole was his by right, it was his inheritance. The word "earnest" is the Greek word arrhabon (Hebrew erabon), which means a surety, a pledge, such as an engagement ring; that is, I make you a promise, I commit myself; this is a token. That is the word that is used here of the Holy Spirit. He is the pledge, He is the promise, He is the token of all the inheritance which God has for us in His Son. "An earnest of our inheritance"; the "Spirit of promise".

"An earnest of our inheritance." A little earlier the apostle has said, "in whom also we were made a heritage". A little later he will speak of God's inheritance in the saints, but here he is speaking of our inheritance; not God's inheritance in us, but our inheritance in God. This letter to the Ephesians has a very vast sweep. It looks right back to past eternity, and tells us of the great purpose of God from before times eternal, before the world was, "the eternal purpose"; it tells us of our election, "chosen in Christ before the foundation of the world", and it tells us unto what; and then it sweeps on through time, through the ages, on to the eternity future, and shows us the realisation of that purpose and that election -- and what a glorious picture is brought into view of being "unto the praise of his glory", "the glory of his grace"!

The word "glory" here is the key to it all. I am quite sure that you have been impressed with the fact that the New Testament is so futuristic -- not just in the prophetic interpretation of the Bible, but in the sense that the writers are always looking on. Whatever they are doing, they are looking beyond this life. They have their eyes filled with a wonderful future. The apostles are full of that, straining after that; their teaching is concerning that all the time. They are seeking to bring the believers, the saints, the church, into the mighty inspiration of a glorious hope, a marvellous future, and this letter to the Ephesians, perhaps more than any other, brings into view that great future realisation of eternal purpose and calls it our inheritance -- that to which we are heirs, through the grace of God, in fellowship with our Lord Jesus Christ.

But my point in saying this is that this is not just some glorious presentation of ideas, or even of truths in words. How shall we know that it is not a beautiful story? How shall we know that it is not just the production of men's imagination? How shall we know that it is not just wishful thinking? How shall we know it is not just a dream, a beautiful dream? How shall we know that, having given up everything in this world and abandoned all interests here for this, we shall not at last find that we have made a mistake and have lost both worlds? How shall we know that this is true? And the apostle answers all such questions and says, "You can know in a very real and practical way right here and now -- in as practical a way as it is possible to know anything. You can know it right inside yourself!" And I venture to suggest that that is a more real way of knowing things than any other way. I am not always certain of you, you are not always certain of me -- but I am perfectly certain of what goes on inside of me! That is the real thing. And so the apostle says, answering all questions as to whether this inheritance is a solid thing, whether this eternal purpose is a real matter: "He has given us the Holy Spirit as an earnest".

A Positive Sense of Purpose and Destiny

This is borne out very clearly and precisely, inasmuch as when we receive the Holy Spirit, when we have the indwelling Holy Spirit, the first thing that results is that He gives us a positive sense of purpose and destiny. He lifts life out of unreality and vagueness, and we become conscious that there is, after all, some real purpose in our being on this earth. Whatever we may have felt before, as to its having been a matter

of chance, or as to there having been anything accidental in our coming into this world, a mere fragment among the teeming multitudes: now it is as though we -- individually insignificant as we are in ourselves naturally -- are, in a right sense, somehow characterized by a tremendous importance. I mean that rightly. A meaning, a significance, is given to us; we feel that we are bound up with some tremendous thing. When the Holy Spirit comes in as the seal and the earnest of our inheritance, a sense of positive destiny takes hold of us. We know we are linked on with something. You can test yourself by this, as well as testify to the truth of it.

And then the Holy Spirit gives us a positive urge and incentive towards something. We become aware that we are apprehended -- there is an urge in us, there is an incentive, there is a pull; we are gripped, we are being drawn on, led on; and that is the explanation of all our reactions. If we lapse, if we get slack, if we cease to press on, presently we shall have a bad reaction, we shall realise that something is lost, we are losing out; life has lost something: we must see to this matter. The Holy Spirit has linked us with that purpose, and He is the incentive within us, the urge, the dynamic.

A Progressive Understanding of God's Purpose

And then again the Holy Spirit gives us a progressive understanding and knowledge of the purpose. It should be characteristic of every Holy Spirit-indwelt life that there is a progressive, increasing understanding and knowledge of God's purpose, the purpose unto which we are called. It was this that governed the apostles in the writing of their letters. They were "moved by the Holy Ghost". They spoke and they wrote "as they were moved", that is, "as they were borne along by the Holy Ghost" (2 Pet. 1:21). The word-picture here in the Greek is of a crowd, a surging crowd, moving in a certain direction, and here is one life standing by, that suddenly finds itself caught up in the crowd -- and what is the good of trying to resist that? It has simply got to let itself go, be borne on with the multitude. That is the word that is used here. They were borne along by the Holy Spirit as they wrote and as they spoke. And what was it they spoke and wrote about? It was about this purpose -- explaining, informing, giving growing knowledge, as they received it from the Holy Spirit.

The same Holy Spirit will do that in us. There is something very wrong with a life -- a Christian life -- which, after a given time, is no better instructed on God's purposes in salvation than at the beginning; something very wrong. The Holy Spirit is there for that very purpose. Growing intelligence is a mark of the Spirit within, as the earnest of our inheritance.

Our Responsibility to Honour the Holy Spirit

Then we are brought by the Holy Spirit, as the earnest of our inheritance, to face the responsibility of His indwelling. Here we have such words as: "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, in whom ye were sealed unto the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30). Our responsibility is to cherish the Holy Spirit, to honour the Holy Spirit. We read so much about "walking in the Spirit", "walking by the Spirit". What does walking in the Spirit mean? Well, it means, in the simplest of language, first of all that we recognise and acknowledge the Holy Spirit. That is the first simple thing -- to walk in the Spirit is to recognise the Spirit and to acknowledge the Spirit; not to ignore, not to affront Him; to give Him His place of honour and right and then to obey -- to yield to the Spirit and to obey.

And the Spirit within us is mainly very quiet. When the Lord speaks by His Spirit within, He speaks very gently. I have for many years tried to train myself to recognise His voice. We expect tremendous impressions, a loud voice, something that we cannot mistake, and my experience is that the Lord very

rarely speaks like that until He has to, that His Spirit is gentle, and if we really were being led by the Spirit, we should be attuned to a very, very quiet voice, just intimating something. How easy it is for us to go on and pass it over, to ignore it, because it is so gentle -- and yet when we look back we have to say, "Oh, what a pity I did not take note of that very simple, gentle little touch of the Lord -- I would have been saved such a lot!"

We should never need to have our ears trained if there were shouting going on all the time. But the ear is trained by having to listen, and this inner ear of "hearing what the Spirit saith" must be an ear that is attentive, an ear that is inclined, an ear that indicates the attitude of our hearts. If someone is speaking, I can be perfectly careless and preoccupied and looking round, but if I realise that what the speaker has to say is of very great importance, I am all attention, showing the state of my heart. "He that hath an ear, let him hear." This is what walking in the Spirit means -- inclining, being set upon knowing all that the Lord has to say and give.

The Need to Press On

I close just by reminding you that the meaning and value of an earnest, of a token, of a promise can all be lost if you do not follow it out to its fulfilment.

The man who received his handful of soil had the guarantee that the whole field was his by right of transaction; but supposing he just carefully preserves the handful, without following up and pursuing the transaction, and taking possession and turning to account his inheritance? The handful is no good to him at all! What it signifies is all lost, nullified. I knew a couple who became engaged, with an engagement ring given, and they went on -- one year, two years, three, five, ten, fifteen, twenty, twenty-five years. They were never married! They were engaged all those years, but the transaction was never completed. We are not, of course, appealing for hurried engagements and hurried marriages! But the point is: do let us follow up -- do not let us make a fiasco of this thing. We have the earnest, we have the Spirit as a seal and earnest, but we have not yet got all that is meant, all that is included; and we can miss it all -- even while we have the earnest we can miss it all -- if we do not follow up, if we do not pursue, if we do not go on.

You know the place of the many "ifs" in the New Testament. "If we hold fast... unto the end" (Heb. 3:6). You know the great urge of the Word that we should go on. "Let us press on..." (Heb. 6:1). Why? Oh, it is not enough to have believed, and it is not enough even to have received the Spirit as an earnest. We must follow on to make good all that is represented by the earnest, to possess all that is included in the guarantee.

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