

The Transition

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the transition from the temporal to the spiritual, as represented by Peter, and the importance of manifold trials in bringing about the salvation of the soul.

Scripture: Isaiah 55:8-9, Matthew 21:43, Luke 22:32, Acts 1:6, Hebrews 4:12, 1 Peter 1:5-9, 1 Peter 2:5, 1 Peter 5:8

Topics: "Transition from Temporal to Spiritual", "Salvation of the Soul"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significant transition represented by Peter, who serves as a link between the old Israel and the new spiritual Israel. He highlights that this transition involves moving from a temporal understanding of God's kingdom to a spiritual one, where believers must embody the truths of this new Israel. Peter's experiences and teachings illustrate the challenges of accepting this spiritual reality, especially in the face of trials that test our faith and selfhood. The sermon underscores that the ultimate goal of these trials is the salvation of our souls, which is a profound and ongoing battle within us. Sparks encourages believers to recognize the importance of this transition and to remain vigilant against the temptations of self-sufficiency.

Transcript

We have already seen that Peter, as the first of the twelve Apostles, represents the link between the former Israel, which forfeited the Kingdom of God, and the new Israel, which inherits the Kingdom. The Lord Jesus said to the Israel of old, in the culmination of that dispensation: "The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matthew 21:43). Peter represents that transition, and in a very real way is the link between the two.

In turning to Peter's first Letter we have begun to see something of what this new Israel is: its nature, character, position, function and vocation. All of these are so clearly set forth in Peter himself, both as to his personal history and his ministry. We are not going over the ground again which we have already covered, but will just take the matter up where we left off.

The Transition

I must, however, repeat and re-emphasize one thing which must be kept very much to the fore in our minds in this matter. It is how Peter himself in his own life, in his being, through his experience and spiritual history embodied all that which Jesus came to initiate: this new heavenly and spiritual Israel. It is a matter that has impressed me so greatly, and does so more and more as I read what Peter wrote. At

almost every point in his letter, not only in the verses, but in the very clauses, there is something of what the Lord Jesus intended by His teaching and His work, by His coming, in relation to this new Israel. This is very impressive, and I do want you to keep that in mind all the time, because, while it is very interesting to know that one Israel belongs to a past dispensation and another one has taken its place, the important thing is that every one who belongs to this new heavenly nation, this Israel of God, has to embody the truth of that Israel, for that is the first and fundamental thing that Peter says. What Peter went through in order to become a personal expression of this great new dispensation reality! What pains the Lord took with that man in order that he should pass from the realm of mere teaching - though it were the teaching of the Lord Himself - into being that teaching! So that is what we must underline to begin with, and it is the thing that really concerns us. I think you will see how real and true that is, both in Peter's case and in ours, as we proceed.

We have read the first verses of Peter's first Letter and noticed the beginning of this wonderful changeover, this transition, this passage from the old to the new. The wonderful thing, of course, which covers it all, includes it all, is the change from the temporal to the spiritual. It was at that point that Peter, with the others, had his first battle. Don't fail to recognize that! It was just there that the battle began and had to be won before he, and they, could get any further.

You see, right up to the point after the Lord Jesus had risen from the dead and appeared to the disciples during those forty days, coming and going and speaking the things of the Kingdom, their question was: "Lord, dost thou at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6). Their Old Testament ideas about the Messiah and what He would do are still there! They are still there in their own hopes and in their own interpretation of the kingdom, and what a battle it was for them, and no less a battle for you and for me, to make that transition! The most difficult thing for the believers of this dispensation is really to accept and settle down on this: that everything now is spiritual and not temporal.

This is where the battle began. What were they expecting? What were they wanting, hoping for? Just everything, again, in the temporal realm. The temporal kingdom of Israel, an earthly world power - perhaps the world power - with a temple, and everything else that belonged to the old. But all that has gone. All that is finished with, and now there is introduced something that is wholly spiritual. That is one of Peter's words - "a spiritual house... to offer up spiritual sacrifices" (1 Peter 2:5). We read that, we quote it, we use it in our worship, and we know it, but really it represents the battleground of our lives. The Lord is not dealing with us, in the first place, on temporal grounds, of things seen and things that we can handle. He is putting it all away from that realm of our own ability to grasp, to have, to hold, and to understand, and putting it in another realm altogether.

This spiritual life is a very difficult life! Is it not true that it tests us every day? But it is the basic and inclusive thing about this transition, and the marvellous thing that had happened in this man Peter, who, perhaps more than all the others, was out for this temporal kingdom of God. My, he had a great business in letting it go! We will see that as we go on, but here that has happened and he is now altogether occupied with the spiritual side of everything in the Kingdom.

The transition, then, is from the temporal to the spiritual. We noted that Peter says: "God... begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, unto an inheritance". An inheritance! Think back again to the saints of the Old Testament, and their whole mental hope and complexion of their inheritance! A parcel of ground for each tribe in the land of promise. Their inheritance was on the earth, flowing with milk and honey, and every temporal and physical benefit and blessing that heaven could give,

and they were saying: 'That is coming back again with the Messiah. That is going to be ours when Messiah comes. That is what we are looking for!'

Peter, however, has gone through something that makes him say: "Unto an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven". It has gone from this earth. It is somewhere else, and if you read through this Letter you will not detect the slightest tone of remorse in Peter. There is no sorrow about this. It is not: 'We have lost something'. Oh, no! "Ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory." That is the tone of this Letter. It is about the gain of the heavenly, and how superior this inheritance reserved in heaven is to all that the old Israel had.

The Salvation of our Souls

"Who by the power of God are guarded through faith unto a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, ye have been put to grief in manifold temptations, that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold that perisheth though it is proved by fire, might be found unto praise and glory and honour at the revelation of Jesus Christ: whom not having seen ye love; on whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice greatly with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls" (1 Peter 1:5-9).

The end, the culmination, the consummation, is "the salvation of your souls". That end is reached through manifold trials, but it is the explanation of the trials, the defining why the trials, and the nature of the trials - "the salvation of your souls".

What has Peter in mind? What is behind this? As we have said, all the way through this Letter, in almost every sentence, there is some reference to something in the past, the old dispensation, which has now been taken over. That is the background.

Look at Hebrews 4:12: "For the word of God is living, and active, and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing even to the dividing of soul and spirit..." Do you notice that that verse begins with the word "for"? It is a conjunction and links with what has gone before. And what is that? "If Joshua had given them rest, he would not have spoken afterward of another day. There remaineth therefore a sabbath rest for the people of God." And that throws back to, what? The wilderness, and the intended rest of the land. It is saying: 'In the wilderness the whole nature of things was manifold trials.' Was that true? There were indeed manifold trials in the wilderness, and how many those trials were! They were supremely trials of faith every time. If you saw that wilderness you would understand that from the sheer physical side it could well be a place of manifold trials. I have crossed it quite a number of times by air, and have looked down and said: 'My word, forty years in that!' That could put you to the test even physically, and to be tried in relation to God in an arid, desolate desert like that for forty years was something! But what was happening? It was a battle with their souls through the trials. You know what the soul is! It was a battle with their minds; their minds about God, their thoughts, their ideas, their reasoning, their judgments, and all that goes on in the mind. It was a battle with their feelings, and there is plenty of ground for feelings to have a very large place there! It was a battle with their choices: what they would choose. How truly it was a soul battle; whether their souls were going to be saved, that is, delivered, brought out from all this, or whether through their souls they were going to be defeated and lost. And so it proved for that generation - their souls were lost in that wilderness, and not saved.

Peter is referring to this when he says that 'the end of your faith, through manifold trials, is the salvation of your souls.'

Now, you need not go back to Peter, nor to the old Israel, nor to the wilderness. Come back here into yourself. Is it not true, dear friends, that the whole battleground of the spiritual life is here in our minds, in our feelings, and in our choices? Is it not a battle between ours and God's? "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord" (Isaiah 55:8). There is a vast expanse between God's thoughts and ours! "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts." There are two kingdoms, the earthly and the heavenly, and naturally we belong to the earthly. And I say that on this side is the mentality that is ours - and that is only another word for one of the three aspects of our souls: the mentality, the thought realm, the reasoning realm, the way we judge things, we interpret things mentally. That alone is a battleground through all trial. Get into trial, be put to it, and see what a battle you are precipitated into as to how you look at it, how you judge it, how you explain it! In the end you simply have to throw it on one side and say: 'If I lean to my own understanding I am lost, for I cannot. I have no understanding here to lean to. I am lost, but either I go out with my inability to understand God's ways with me at this time, or I believe God. I have faith in God where I cannot understand.' Is that easy? Is that a battle? You know it is if you are put in manifold trials!

It is the same over our feelings when we are in the trials. How they get worked up! What we feel about it, about God's ways and dealings with us, and what we would do, how we would exercise our power of choice and volition if it were left with us. Oh, we would quit this to start with, and then we would do a lot of other things rather than this. That is the soul! And Peter says here: 'The end of the manifold trials is the salvation of your souls.'

We must understand this, though it is very difficult. But I am saying this out of a little experience - it is not just theory.

The soul has been the seat of all the trouble since Adam capitulated his soul to Satan. All the way through, in human life and in human nature, the soul has been the seat of all the trouble since the beginning, when Satan made his focused attack upon the soul, the reasoning, the thinking power, and drew Adam out in his mind and upon his desires, his feelings. 'It is good. It will be good for you.' And then, of course, his act, when he captured Adam's soul. Adam capitulated his soul into the power of Satan, and the soul has been under that power ever since and always is in unregenerate humanity. In the believer; the regenerate humanity, the discipline begins here in the soul. The change-over begins here by manifold trials.

The soul is just our selfhood. That is a big word! Selfhood - self-interest... a thousand 'selves' all in one. Our minds, our feelings, our actions all being governed, controlled by a principle in our human nature which is self.

Now look at what Peter is saying! Does this represent a big conversion in the case of this man? Jesus said to him: "When once thou art converted" (Luke 22:32) - and what a conversion of a disciple who had had all the teaching, and seen all the works of Jesus, but who had not yet been converted in the real sense. The translation says: "When once thou hast turned again", but that is the same word. It is conversion, and a tremendous conversion had taken place in this man. Now he is on the other side of it, but he is still in the battle and is telling the believers that this is the nature, the meaning of the manifold trials. What is it? Every trial in some way raises this selfhood, this 'I' of ourselves, and it takes so long for us to get to the point where in trial, under the testing, we can really say: 'It does not matter to me. It is not what I feel about it at

all, but what the Lord is after.' That is growing in grace, as we shall see. 'It is not what I think about this at all. The Lord has another mind altogether from mine. It is not what I would do or will. The Lord is after something else in this trial.' I say that it takes a long time to get there, but, you see, that is the nature of things, and that is what is meant by the salvation of the soul, because in every one of the manifold trials, in some way, this selfhood gets up. It is a battle again: 'Not my will, but thine. Not my way, but thine. Not my thoughts, but thine.' That is the battle all the time in any time of trial.

Now you see that Peter says that this is the deepest, the profoundest work of salvation, the salvation of the soul. How does he say that? "Which things angels desire to look into" (verse 12). Angels are not human beings, and they do not understand what is the salvation of the soul because they are not soul beings. But they are able to discern, as spiritual beings, that there is something here which embraces all between that first act of capitulation to Satan and this last act of the salvation of every human soul in Christ, that right down deep there in human nature something is going on. They cannot enter into it in experience, but it is something immense which even "angels desire to look into". It is something beyond them, for it is so deep. The deepest, profoundest work of salvation relates to this recovery of the soul entirely and finally, and this salvation of human nature and for human nature is the battleground between heaven and hell. There is no doubt about that. That is where all the battle rages: around our souls.

Well, that is why Satan attacked the soul of the Lord Jesus, and Peter has come to understand something about that. Oh, it is impossible to say it all, but listen:

A little later on (in chapter 5:8) Peter says to these believers: "Your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour", and he has preceded that statement by saying: "Be sober, be watchful!" Peter, where did you learn that? Where did you get that from? Listen to a voice coming from afar: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan asked to have you, that he might sift you as wheat." Why? Because of Peter's soul! 'No, I will not forsake Thee. Though all the others forsake Thee, I will not. I will go with Thee to death.' This was the asserting of Peter's own self-hood, his self-confidence, his self-assurance, his self-sufficiency. Right in the face of that outburst of that man's soul Jesus said: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan asked to have you" ... (literally that is: 'Satan hath obtained you by asking') ... "that he might sift you as wheat." And so Peter says: "Be sober". He has learned his lesson! 'Be sober, be watchful... be careful about this self-sufficiency, this self-strength, this self-assertiveness. Be sober. Don't get exalted ideas of yourself and what you can do. Be sober, be watchful!' And he is only saying - as he could have said in more words - 'I have been through this and am saying to you something that brought devastation to my soul. Satan was allowed to sift me as wheat because of my selfhood, but I have come through. But you be watchful against any strength of selfhood of any kind, the rising up, the asserting itself of human nature. That happens in the time of trial, of manifold trials.'

Now I said that the trials explain the salvation, define the salvation. Why are they? What are the trials for? Well, on the one side they do precipitate this whole question of whether we are going to stand on our own ground and have it our own way, or whether we are going to let go our souls, deny ourselves and stand on the ground of the Lord's will and thoughts.

You see by this what a tremendous thing had happened to this man! What a tremendous thing had been done in him! There is more to see yet, but here is this and our point, dear friends, is just this: that Peter is Number One in the new heavenly Israel. He is the most prominent of the twelve who are the foundation of the Kingdom, which is what the new Israel is. It is not a temporal thing, but a spiritual thing, and we are tested all the time by the spiritual nature. Oh, if only we could let ourselves go and fight back all the

opposition, fight back in the flesh, using carnal weapons, we think that perhaps we would come out on top. At least we would die in the effort! But the Lord says: 'Not a bit of it!', and Peter says: 'You will be treated wrongfully. Your reactions must not be: Wrong for wrong, and flesh for flesh. No! Take it patiently.' That is something for our human nature, is it not? When we are being thoroughly wronged our human nature does not take it patiently!

May the Lord give us understanding.

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