

The Way to God's Fulness

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the journey to experiencing God's fulness through commitment, self-denial, and spiritual renewal.

Scripture: Colossians 1:14

Topics: "Commitment to God", "God's Fullness"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the profound truth of God's fullness revealed in Christ, as articulated in the Epistles to the Colossians and Ephesians. He highlights that while we are called to understand the fullness God has for us, we must also recognize our role in being His fullness, which requires a willingness to be led and filled by Him. Using the example of Elisha's unwavering commitment to Elijah, Sparks illustrates the necessity of zeal and readiness to follow God's call, even at a personal cost. He stresses that true spiritual progress begins at Gilgal, where the flesh is judged and personal interests are set aside, allowing us to become co-workers in God's plan. Ultimately, the path to experiencing God's fullness involves a daily commitment to self-denial and following Christ.

Transcript

The Epistle to the Colossians is a wonderful unveiling of the fulness of God in Christ, while in the Epistle to the Ephesians we see the church as the fulness of Him Who fills all in all.

"In Whom (in Christ) we have redemption through His blood, even the forgiveness of sins: Who is the Image of the invisible God, the Firstborn of every creature: for by Him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by Him, and for Him: and He is before all things, and by Him all things consist. And He is the Head of the body, the church: Who is the beginning, the Firstborn from the dead; that in all things He might have the pre-eminence. For it pleased the Father that in Him should all fulness dwell; and, having made peace through the blood of His Cross, by Him to reconcile all things unto Himself; by Him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven." (Col. 1:14-20).

"For in Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in Him, Which is the head of all principality and power: in Whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ: buried with Him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with Him through the faith of the operation of God, Who hath raised Him from the dead" (Col. 2:9-12).

"Having the eyes of your heart enlightened, that ye may know what is the hope of His calling, what the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, And what is the exceeding greatness of His power to us-ward who believe, according to that working of the strength of His might Which He wrought in Christ, when He raised Him from the dead, and made Him to set at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come: and He put all things in subjection under His feet, and gave Him to be Head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him That filleth all in all" (Ephesians 1:18-23; ASV).

It is understandable that it is important for us to know the fulness God has purposed for us, but we must not overlook the other side of the coin, that God wants us to be His fulness. Paul speaks of an inheritance of Christ in the saints (Eph. 1:11,18). The Lord has something in us that gives Him pleasure, that which for Him is fulness. The question is just how this will be perfected in us, and whether there are conditions that have to be recognized and met if the fulness of Jesus Christ is to be realized in us.

As an example, in 2 Kings 2:1 and 2, we see how this condition is completely fulfilled in Elisha:

"And it came to pass, when the Lord would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me to Bethel. And Elisha said unto him, As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they went down to Bethel."

Elisha cannot be dissuaded or discouraged from being zealous, but follows his master Elijah, until he becomes witness of his wonderful ascension. This is what God must have in us to build on. There must be in us something of the zeal that inspired Elisha. God does not look for strength in us. He does not look for a certain ability. He simply looks for the willingness to be led and filled by Him with the power of His resurrection, through which the testimony of Jesus Christ in us becomes a reality.

God puts this zeal to the test. He must take us to the point of realizing whether we are serious or not, whether in regard to His fulness it is only a desire on our side, maybe a big desire, but still only a desire, not a willingness to pay any price.

Have we noted that in the chapter mentioned it significantly says: "Elijah went with Elisha"? This shows us that the Lord goes with us when our hearts are set on Him, and that He often waits a long time for us to be ready to move on. Is it not so that He often says to us: "This is My way. Are you ready to go that way? Good--prove it." If we are truly ready and prove this by taking the first step, He then goes with us and very soon we may walk with Him. But the Lord does not urge us to move on. He does not force us to go forward. He waits until we are ready.

The way that Elijah and Elisha walked together is very meaningful. We speak to those whose eyes of their hearts have been opened, who have received a glimpse of spiritual things. What does it mean to see that the starting point of the road was Gilgal?

We know Gilgal. It is the place where the new generation was circumcised; the place where the reproach of Egypt was rolled away. What does this mean?

It means the putting aside of a life in the flesh. Speaking figuratively, it is about the separating work of the Cross. Here all personal interests have come to an end. Every personal standpoint, all holding fast to the

'I' is finished.

If it is a question of God and the things of God, there can be no other starting point than Gilgal. Only where the flesh has been judged and the old man put into the grave, can God turn to us and make us co-workers in His plan.

This is easier said than done. This sounds very 'edifying'. But it costs a lot. It costs that which we are. It costs our life.

Now, let us say again that it is not written for nothing: "If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me" (Luke 9:23; ASV). If we want to be His instruments, if we want to be available for Him, so that He can have His rights through us, then let us come over to His side. Let us give up all our rights. This is the first step towards heavenly fulness.

What do we understand by the reproach of Egypt? One can talk about heavenly things, and yet still live and act in the flesh. It is the reproach of the world that justifiably shakes its head about many a 'Christian' who becomes a stumbling block when holy talk is not followed by deeds. Gilgal means: the reality of heavenly things. And for us too, there can be no testimony without the reality of the life to which we are called to testify.

We should not be annoyed that we always come back to the same starting point for all God's work in us. What is the point if we continue without having laid a good foundation? The good foundation is Christ. As long as we have not grown together with the Crucified in the likeness of His dying, we can know nothing of a life of resurrection. Where there has been no resurrection, there may be some knowledge, but no life. There may be some understanding, but no power. Therefore, let us bear in mind that God's starting point is Gilgal. From Gilgal we may take the first step towards godly fulness.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/t-austin-sparks/the-way-to-gods-fulness/>

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