

Ye Are Come to Zion - Part 4

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of spirituality in men and women and the elimination of what is foreign and worldly, as revealed in the letter to the Hebrews.

Duration: 51:41

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Acts 19:9, Ephesians 2:20, Hebrews 12:22, 1 Peter 2:6-7, Revelation 1:20

Topics: "Zion"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of truly knowing and experiencing God for ourselves. He highlights the danger of relying on others for our spiritual understanding and warns against being deceived by false teachings or disappointed by human leaders. The speaker references the Book of Revelation and the concept of God shaking everything that can be shaken to reveal the true depth of our faith. He encourages listeners to have a personal relationship with God and to stand firm in their faith, regardless of external circumstances.

Transcript

In the first letter of Peter, first letter of Peter, chapter two, verses six and seven, it is contained in scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious, and he that believeth on him shall not be put to shame. For you, therefore, which believe, is a preciousness. But for such as disbelieve, the stone which the builders rejected, the same was made the head of the corner.

And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offense. Letter to the Hebrews, chapter 12, verse 22, Ye are come to Zion. I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone.

Ye are come to Zion. This letter to the Hebrews, as it is traditionally called, but as it has proved to be, in the dispensation, this most serious document for the Church was written at a crisis. It had to do, and it will again have to do, with a crisis.

A pounding point in the dispensation. It is not sure to our knowledge when the letter was written. Opinion differs, but the difference only amounts to a matter of perhaps two or three years.

But it is very strongly believed that it was written about the year 69 A.D. In the year 70 A.D. the whole Jewish system, as centered in Jerusalem, and the temple, and the priesthood, was swept away. That was the year when everything changed from what it had been for many centuries. An established system, a

recognized and accepted world system of religion, with its teaching and its practice.

In A.D. 70, it was swept into the vortex of that overflowing of the pagan world, hostile to God. And from that day till this, there has been no temple in Jerusalem. The nation has been scattered, and the Jewish system has been practically inoperative as it was before.

Anticipating that turn in the sanctuaries, in the dispensation, the Holy Spirit led to the writing of this letter, the producing of this document. It read in the light of that great historic event. It is much better understood, appreciated.

Its significance is more clearly grasped. Yes, a mighty age crisis is represented by the letter to the Hebrews. Nothing less than the passing of a system or an economy.

If we look into that and examine it as to what it was that was passing, what that signified, we shall get the real abiding message of this letter. And we shall see that what is here in its real significance and abiding meaning will lie behind another crisis, which crisis we are in our day seeing. Dear friends, it is no exaggeration to say that you and I have come actually to live in a time when the whole complexion of things in Christian tradition is changing.

I have got to try to be careful not to be misunderstood and wrongly reported, and I know I am taking risks in what I am going to say. Nevertheless, we have got to be very faithful and look things clearly in the face. For something over, well over a century, God has been moving in a certain way which has not been his ultimate and fundamental and supreme way, but which has been in his sovereign way, for reasons which we need not stay to discuss or even point out.

He has been moving by means of a system of things, realizing much of his purpose. That method of the divine movement is completely changing. It is passing.

The day of organized foreign missions, organized foreign missions, note my word, is ending. We are seeing the close of that order and method. But what is foreign is now being wound up in nations.

It does not mean that God is finishing or has come to an end of his work. It is a method, a kind of means. Now come back to this situation here, represented by the crisis of this letter.

It was the passing of a system or an economy which was meant by God to achieve one thing. It did achieve that one thing up to a certain point and then ceased to do it. And from that time its days were numbered.

The thing which it was meant to achieve in the economy of God was the securing of spiritual men and women. The 11th chapter of this letter or that part of the document which has subsequently been marked off by that number 11. We would be well to dismiss those numbers from our minds at the moment and view the document as a whole.

But that point which for our convenience is registered with number 11 shows how that by a certain economy through the ages God secured spiritual men and women. A galaxy of spiritual men and women is found in that section. God took out from the world and attached to heaven, attached to himself something intrinsically valuable to him.

The men and the women of such faith that the world was counted as nothing and life as nearly in the light of this relationship with God and his purpose. The economy was sovereignly raised up and used for that and for no other purpose than to secure spiritual men and women out of the nations. Not to secure an adherence to an earthly system of religion though there was a pattern of things in heaven.

Not to secure adherence to a pattern but through the pattern to secure men and women in that of which it was the pattern of heaven. That is the all-governing law and principle of the old testament. The means was employed not to be an end in itself.

Priesthood was no end in itself and that is what is stated in this letter. The tabernacle was no end in itself. That whole system was no end in itself.

It was something used sovereignly by God or meant by God to secure men and women who saw through the pattern to the spiritual reality and became attached to that. Men and women on this earth but related to heaven. The things that were real.

That was the system and that was God's meaning in it and it did do that for so long. The time came when it became something in itself. An end in itself and it was no longer producing spiritual men and women.

It was producing religious people who were still carrying on the forms, the ceremonies and the whole paraphernalia of the system but they were no longer spiritual men and women in relation to heaven. The thing was going on but it was empty. Meaningless.

It was not serving the purpose for which it was meant and God wrote it up. God defined its conclusion. Letter to the Hebrew seed.

The executing of that decree. The carrying out of that decision and if it was written in 69 it was only a year afterwards but all that is written here about things which can be shaken, being shaken and more than shaken, brought down. Then we are told that that was done in order that the things which cannot be shaken should remain.

And the whole letter you see is concerned with this. Not with being part of a religious system and tradition even something which God has in the past used to his end. But men and women who are now wholly, not immediately but wholly and directly and immediately related to the ultimate thing that God is after.

That is spiritual men and women. That system which was meant to secure that end when it ceased to do that and just went on perhaps on its own momentum, by its own drive, because of its traditions, because of its antiquity, because of a past which was glorious under the hand of God. All that now God simply being carried on as something in itself stripped and erect and empty of its real spiritual meaning so far as God is concerned.

That past in the year AD 70, that is the crisis of this letter, that system though used in the sovereign purpose of God though meant to reach that end was strictly governed by spiritual laws. I cannot underscore that heavily enough. The whole thing was governed strictly by spiritual laws.

It was not something in itself. No movement of a priest or Levite of old, no vessel that he used, nothing whatever at any point in that system was something in itself. It had behind it a spiritual meaning, a spiritual significance and was governed by a spiritual law.

Nullify that spiritual law and the thing is no longer even sacred to God. The amazing thing is that then that thing is in its right relationship to God. You cannot touch it without meeting God.

Touch a vessel of the sanctuary in its right relationship and you meet God and will be split. You die if you touch that also. The thing is vibrant with the very majesty and glory and holiness of God when it is in its right relationship because it is getting the end.

And get those same things whether they be altars or any vessels or anything else. Then the real spiritual object is no longer being served, is not sacred to God. You just hand it all, the whole thing over, send it away.

There was a time when if that ark went amongst full of spines, the full of spines were very glad to see the back of it. There was a time when that ark could be disposed of and no one felt its impact at all. No longer accompanied by any sign of God.

God doesn't care for the sea. What was at the beginning a wooden chest overlaid with gold became something which was full of the throne of heaven. There was a time later when it was no more than a chest like any other chest overlaid with gold.

You see, things that God raises up, he does not commit himself to eternally so far as instrumentality is concerned. He only commits himself to anything when the object for which he raised it up is being reached. And God's one all-inclusive object is to secure men and women who are spiritual people.

Anything, anything that claims to be related to God which is not serving that end has no place, no sacredness with God. And the day will come when that can go. Tremendous things to say but it's perfectly true.

It's true to history and it's true to today. You see, I have a very great regard for the instrumentalities that God has used. When I speak like this, don't think for a moment that I am despising or undervaluing those sovereignly used instrumentalities.

For God has used missions and missionary institutions and many things like that. He has used them and blessed them and they have been vibrant with God. Many of them.

So, as time has gone on, various elements, various elements have become dominant. And one element is foreign. It's what is represented by the word foreign.

All, all if men only saw, realized, had perception of discernment, spiritual sensitiveness, how they would, they would not only have God but how they would shrink, shrink before that name foreign missions. That word has spelt the doom of missionary activity. It's foreign.

It's important. It's something that belongs. Not to the place where it is operating but to somewhere else.

You see, Christ is never a foreigner. He is never foreign. There is nothing foreign about Christ.

And the true church, the body of Christ is nothing foreign. The very element of what is foreign has to be eliminated. Completely eliminated.

I'm not, even meaning by trying to accommodate yourself to native habits and dress and so on. But I mean becoming so, so much bound in the spiritual concern for the spiritual interests that it is perfectly manifest

that this is not something from the outside. This is from heaven.

This bears the imprint of heaven. This is Christ, who is not national or anything like that on this earth. This is something outside, altogether different.

It's not bearing this, this stigma of what is foreign. Do not break up with that, dear friends. And it's because of that word that we are seeing this change.

An entirely new orientation of the whole picture and course of things is being demanded. And so it will be that if there is going to be a continuation of what we call evangelization, it will be just by men and women and not by institutions. They may have to be business, professional men and women, but it will be not what they are professionally as so-called missionaries.

It will be because they are men and women of God. Because they bring Christ in and not some institutional interest from somewhere else. That is happening today.

That defines the present crisis, a tremendous changeover. Everything that God uses is conditioned most strictly by spiritual laws. And when the spiritual laws are not discerned and observed, the thing's day is fixed.

The end of that is set. It will pass no matter what its tradition, what its history, what its past may have been. It has become something in itself.

And for itself, it is wound up. I want a lot of time, whether we be able tomorrow, to spend more time on this matter. And I want a lot of time to speak about this whole conditioning of everything by spiritual laws.

But there's the statement. That system which was about to pass, that crisis of the dispensations which was imminent when the letter to the Hebrews was written, that system was at most only for a matter of time. However much we may say about Israel's past or future, it is only a temporal thing.

Even if there is a future for Israel. Some dispute that, but most believe that there is. We don't argue.

If there is, it will only be for a time. It will all give place to the eternal age, a new heaven and a new earth, in which there will not be a Jewish nation and others, not even Jews in the church. It is at most for a time, and it was at most for a time, until, until, is a governing word, Mark you, over the history of Israel.

Oh, until. The time factor, Mark you, the time factor was fixed in the eternal counsels and foreknowledge of God. You cannot get away from this as you read the Bible.

Things are moving to a timetable. Moving to a timetable. I remember that Dr. Meyer was traveling once in America and sitting in the compartment of the train or in the coach.

On one knee he had his Bible open and on the other knee he had a timetable. A man sitting by looked at him. With something of a smear he said, you don't, don't tell me that you believe in that worn-out out-of-date book, do you? Pointing to the Bible.

Dr. Meyer looked up and in his quiet wave, which some of us knew so well, kindly smiled at the man. My dear friends, do you see that on my other knee I have a timetable? And do you know why I've got that timetable open on my knee? I'm taking this long journey and I've seen the timetable that we are due at a certain time at certain points. Now the next stop will be so and so at such and such a time.

I'm watching to see if we're on time at each point. In this other book that I've got here open, I find God's timetable. There are time marks when certain things will happen.

And as I look back over history, I see that those things happened just when God said they would happen. Jesus came in the fullness of the times. And so he went on.

He said, that's why I believe the Bible. You don't want me to scrap the timetables of your country, do you? And say they're out of date, outworn, no good, unreliable. They are proved to be something of value because here they are, they say, such and such a time at such and such a place, and within perhaps a few minutes we are there.

No more can I scrap my Bible. I see God is working to a timetable. Dr. Meyer went further and dealt with some of the other signs of the times.

But that's sufficient for our point. There is a timetable. Back of everything.

Fixed in the foreknowledge of God that things happen when God appointed beforehand they should happen. And are doing so. And yet, and this is one of the difficulties, the problems, connected with such a fact.

While the times were fixed in the foreknowledge of God, strangely they coincided and synchronized with certain conditions. Those conditions were not brought about by God. They came about, and when they came about something happened which had been before determined.

The time synchronized with certain conditions. I note, as to this letter, all so much had been foretold, made known beforehand concerning Israel and what would happen. Lord Jesus had in a parabolic way spoken of and acted toward the fig tree.

The fig tree withered from its roots, symbolic of Israel being set aside. I'm not going into all the prophecies concerning this matter, but there it was. But it would take place, not just willy-nilly, but strangely enough in the knowledge of God because of certain conditions.

And so it coincided with what? The system and framework having become a substitute for, or something more than, the essential purpose for which it was raised up. The thing had become a substitute for the purpose of its existence. Or it had become more than the purpose.

In some way the real purpose had shrunk or disappeared. And then the thing happened. The thing that was fixed to happen in a time synchronized with that condition.

And marvel, God works like that. There is a time fixed when God will sift out everything in Christianity. Sift it all out to find out just how far the real purpose of its existence is being fulfilled.

And the things which can be shaken will be shaken. Spirituality in men and women is the thing which governs all this and decides the crisis. Decides the crisis.

We shall come to that crisis individually sooner or later. Why do you bear the name of Christian? You call yourself a Christian? We call ourselves Christians? Why do we have that name of Christ? Sooner or later it will be found out whether we are Christ ones or not. Whether it is Christ? How far it is Christ? I wonder if I dare, in a parenthesis here, introduce something that I've read recently.

It was only the dream of a girl. She said that she had a dream. And in her dream she saw a glorious angel sitting.

Sitting on the village green where her home was. And in his hand was a large measure standing up being held by his hand up beside him. And as she looked at that measure she saw it marked off Christ.

There was so much of Christ, an inch of Christ, two inches of Christ, more inches of Christ right after this large measure. And then she heard the angel call. The angel called the name of someone known so well to her who was, who had a great reputation for doing a lot of things in Christian work.

Always running about here and there, always active in philanthropic interests in the name of Christianity. A very busy person in what is called Christian work. And she knew that person so well.

Everybody thought that person was a very wonderful person. That they would stand well in the great day of reckoning. And the name was called.

And this person came up so confidently, quite assured that she would stand well by the measure. Quite assured that well she would stand well by the measure. And when she came up by the measure she began to shrink in her stature.

She became smaller and smaller and smaller until she was a little tiny person down there at the bottom of the measure. Everybody looked, got the surprise of their lives. Is this miscellaneous? Is that really all the measure of Christ after all? The angel gave her some strong timely words of advice seeking to point out the difference between all this that is outward and real measure of Christ inward.

And she went away very crestfallen. And so one by one people known were called by the angel. There was one person whose name was called, known by the dreamer, as a very poor, weak little soul.

No one thought a great deal of her. She lived in a back place in very, very uncomfortable conditions. No one, no one made great friend of her, left her very much alone.

They didn't think she mattered at all. And the angel called her name. And she came forward very tremblingly, fearfully.

Just scared of standing up by that measure. And she came and stood by it. And as she came into touch with it, she began to grow and grow and grow.

Her whole stature developed and increased until she was bigger than all the rest. The angel didn't have much to say to her but just a kindly, kindly word. Yes Mary, yes Mary, I know all about your secret battles, all your secret suffering, and how bravely you have borne the despisings of others, and how you've carried it all in secret to the Lord in prayer, and drawn your strength from Him to go on.

You can't form much in His sight. The dreamer had her name called. And she had it then.

She was very fond of dress, and of worldly appearance, and all that sort of thing. And for her, the things of this world counted for everything. And she, because she was popular, because people thought so much of her, always pointing at her and saying she was a model of a well-dressed person, and the kind of person that everybody would like to be, she thought that she might stand well before the measure.

But she found that as she came near, she also began to dwindle and to shrink, and to lose all her sense of feeling of self-importance. The angel just quoted to her a bit of scripture from Peter's letter, not the adorning, plaiting of hair and ornaments, but the ornament of a meek and a quiet spirit, which is of great price in the sight of God. Now, I have risked introducing that.

It seems fanciful and fantastic, but it perhaps gives point to this whole matter. You see, God's standard, after all, is the spiritual measure of his Son. That is what really is inherent in this word from Peter, I lay in Zion, in Zion a cheap cornerstone.

Now then, everybody measure up. The preciousness of that is to you that believe, but to those who disbelieve my word, what a terrible effect that cornerstone has as a gauge, a gauge of spirituality, the measure of Christ. Well, you see, God is not interested in anything which is not productive of real spirituality.

That's the point. And Zion, as we have been saying throughout this conference, is the Son, the Son of God's thoughts for his people, the Son of the virtues and values and victories of the Lord Jesus, to be apprehended, to be known, to be entered into, to be enjoyed through faith. Zion is the great test.

It's the great test of everything and of everyone. Yes, Zion is like God's plumb line, to change the metaphor, the test of everything. There has to be an answering to God for anything provided by him.

Yes, anything that God has provided cannot, it cannot exist, it cannot be present as though it did not exist. That's a very solemn statement, a very solemn statement, a very challenging, searching statement. Dear friends, if God has raised up anything, presented anything of himself as to his Son, and brought us into the knowledge of that, into proximity to that, into association with that, if that has come within the orbit of our lives, it can never be as though it has never happened.

Sooner or later we shall have to answer to God for that. That is the verdict of the book of the Revelation, which is the Son of everything. We have so often pointed out the beginning of God's weighing up, the presentation of the plumb line in the first chapters of the book of the Revelation was to the churches which the Apostle Paul was used to bring into existence, churches in Asia, who had received that revelation, that wonderful revelation of Christ and of his body, which had been given in a particular and peculiar way to Paul.

Churches have had that ministry. Paul had long since gone to be with the Lord, as he was closing his life, all they which were in Asia turned from him, repudiated perhaps. At any rate, let him go, passed away from him.

Do you think that's the end? Oh no, very well, very well, those very churches are brought to toe the line of what Paul had given to be judged by what the Lord had presented. That's the standard, that's the standard. Sooner or later it's like that, we don't get away from it, it will be.

Perhaps it's not necessary for me to say that with strength, it sounds so hard, it's like a frown, isn't it? But what we're saying is this, you see, that God presented something which had spiritual significance. The thing was kept on with, was held to, the spiritual significance was lost and eventually God judged, not according to their continuation with the form, but according to their departure from its spiritual meaning. It is like that, it is like that, it will be like that now and at the end.

It is just that something, that something that is deeper and more inward than the framework and the form. Even though God may have used that, it is just that something that finds us out, it finds us out. We are, come to Zion, behold I lay in Zion, a chief corner stone, which of course architecturally means that from which and to which everything moves.

It takes its rise from that, it moves from that upward and it all relates backward to that, the whole structure, a chief corner stone, a chief corner stone means that everything, everything is related to that. I lay in Zion, that, that, that's something which is to be the test, the test. Our time has gone for the afternoon, otherwise I should have gone on to show how Zion has been God's instrument of testing in the past dispensation and how that which Zion represents now of a spiritual quality and a spiritual measure is going to be the test of everything at the end, like that.

I think I can stop there for the moment, we may go further, but the afternoon has contained in the purpose of God, I believe, this one particular emphasis. If I am wrong, I'm misleading you and I would not do that. I submit it to your own inquiry, observation, discernment with this question, are we seeing a change, really a change in the whole confection of things in this world so far as Christian activity is concerned? Are we? Are we? Is this thing growing over the year? See, it is so different, isn't it? So different.

Some of us remember so well in our younger days in Christian activity how tremendously we were taken up with this whole scheme of world evangelization along the accepted line. Now, let me say again, it is not for one moment an undervaluing of what God has sovereignly given us, but we know. Now, today we haven't finished our lives yet, we may be getting on, but we have lived to see that it's no longer possible to do it in that way.

What is the use of appealing today for missionaries to go to China? And what is true in that connection? It's growing there through, isn't it? On the old lines, in the old way, it's nonsense now, isn't it? That doesn't mean that the end has already arrived of missionaries going out into the world, but we can see the drift of things. There's a change. There's a change coming.

And if there is going to be a prolonging of this matter, and I don't assume that worldly evangelization is at an end, if there is going to be an extension of time for testimony in the nations, it's going to be in another way, on another basis. By other means, as I have said, it's going to be by men and women as such, and not as, under some title and institution and so on. Just men and women, unprofessionally, being witnesses, perhaps in business and in other ways in the nations.

If it's going to be at all, that's the way for the future. Things changing, isn't it? Now, why? What is the upshot of it? What does it mean from God's standpoint? Oh, you see, it is just this tremendous emphasis of God and of heaven that God, in the consummation of the age, is going to come to the essential and the intrinsic, and to strip off the secondary. To get right to the issue, without going round it in long, drawn-out circles.

Get right to it. Look here, you people in the nations, you have got to know God first-hand, not by foreign means. You've got to know God for yourselves and be able to stand all together without foreign help, in any way.

First-hand, spiritual men and women, and what is true in those nations is going to be true in every nation, is going to be true here. Something is going to happen which will throw us all back upon God. It will, dear friends.

We here in this place are going to be thrown upon the Lord. In some way it's going to happen that if we haven't got a life with God and don't know the Lord, it doesn't matter what the set-up is, it won't save us, it won't help us, it won't suffice. We're going to be pressed into this.

But we are going to be men and women who know the Lord. Our spiritual men and women, that is the issue. And God will overturn anything to get No matter how long it's tradition, no matter how much he may have used it in former times, he's going, in the long run, to just concentrate upon one thing.

Do you know the Lord? How much do you know the Lord? What does your knowledge of the Lord amount to? What can it carry you through? What can it make you stand up to? Those upon whom you have leaned may prove to be broken wreaths. You may find disappointment all round. You may discover things that shock you and could turn you aside and make you offended.

But you're being tested now, according to Zion, whether you stand or whether you stumble. A stumbling block, you see, if we are not really men and women who know the Lord. Oh, do understand this.

If I said nothing more, and I could say nothing more important than this, here, brothers and sisters, what God is trying to do with us, in our experiences, to make us know him for ourselves. We have nothing second-hand, direct, that will not make us independent of one another, make us perhaps the more dependent upon one another, but it's got to be like that. God will shake everything that can be shaken in order to find out how much there is of that kind, conforming to Zion.

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