

Because He Saw His Glory - Part 2

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the necessity of understanding and embodying God's purpose to find true significance and strength in the Christian life.

Scripture: Isaiah 6:1, Ephesians 1:21, Ephesians 2:6, Hebrews 7:25

Topics: "Gods Purpose", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks preaches on the purpose of God, emphasizing that God seeks a people in whom His purpose is revealed and who are constituted according to it. He highlights the importance of being governed by the consciousness of God's purpose to avoid weakness and susceptibility to various trials. The sermon stresses that God's purpose confers significance, not based on who we are but on His sovereign choosing. It also explores how God meets all needs for His purpose, the disillusionments often faced in fulfilling God's purpose, and the deep experiences that shape individuals according to God's purpose.

Transcript

Chapter 2 - The Purpose Of God

Keeping in mind the passages that we have been considering (Isaiah 6, 2 Chronicles 26, and John 12:37-41), let us try to summarise what we have been saying so far.

GOD REQUIRES A PEOPLE OF PURPOSE

We have noted, firstly, that, in relation to His full purpose, God is ever found seeking and taking up a people in whom that purpose has been revealed, and whose life is constituted according to it. God's saving work, and God's conforming work, are governed by a purpose, which is centred in His Son. Nothing that God does is, in His mind and intention, something in itself, or an end in itself; all is related to His clear and definite purpose. The Bible throughout shows us that God is ever in quest of a people who have seen what that purpose is, and who are under His hand to be constituted according to that purpose, to serve Him in it. That is the explanation of the whole Bible, and that is what lies behind this passage in the sixth chapter of Isaiah in particular.

I hesitate to pass on from that, lest its real significance and value should be missed. I used a phrase earlier which I think touches this question quite directly and seriously. I said that, unless Christians are

governed by this consciousness of purpose, in their being saved and in God's dealings with them, there is lacking a constituent, and there is a constitutional lack, in their Christian life. We know that, in the physical realm, if a person has a constitutional deficiency, he or she is always open to, a prey to, the many maladies which are floating about. They lack resistance to the germs that are in the air. They are caught this way and that way; they have no defences against these things; and so they are the people that go down whenever there is something about. It is a constitutional deficiency.

Now, if there is a 'constitutional deficiency' like that in the Christian life - whether it be of an individual or of a company, or of the Church as a whole - that individual or Church will be in a state of weakness; it will be suffering from many maladies, and it will be caught by all sorts of things that are floating around. How true that is of many Christians - they seem to be caught by anything that's going! First they go off on this line, and then on that, and then they are caught by something else. You never know what is the next thing that is going to get them! They lack this central, unifying, defensive thing - the knowledge and consciousness of THE purpose of God concerning the Church, concerning His people. God is ever looking for and seeking a people that He can take up as an instrument in relation to His ultimate and full purpose.

ONLY GOD'S PURPOSE CONFERS SIGNIFICANCE

We went on to say that it is not the person or the persons - it is not the instrument, be it individual or collective, AS SUCH - that are the primary factors. There is sovereignty in this, and you never know what God is going to take up. He defeats all our calculations and judgments as to what He will use. It is not the vessel or the instrument or the person or the place; it is the purpose, the purpose of God's sovereign choosing, which gives significance to anyone or anything. We are not called because of what WE ARE. We are 'the called according to His purpose.'

Is it not an impressive thing to see how many of the great vessels that God used had a strange end to their ministry?

Take Moses: God buries him, and no man can find his place of burial (Deut. 34:6). You can never put up a stone over the grave of Moses and say anything about HIM - what a great man he was. God just buried him.

What of Isaiah? We are entirely dependent upon tradition as to what happened to Isaiah. It is said by tradition that he is the one referred to in Hebrews 11:37, as having been "sawn asunder". But that is mere tradition; the Bible tells us nothing about it.

Think of Jeremiah. What a man Jeremiah was! While we have said what we have about the vessels, nevertheless these men did a great work, and suffered greatly, and took on a very great significance, because of their function. But Jeremiah - what a man! What about his end? Does anybody know what happened to Jeremiah at the end? No, it is all guesswork. No one knows. He may have died in Egypt with the last company that went over there (Jer. 43:6, 44:1-30). But we don't know - he just disappears. How strange of the Lord to let a man just go out like that!

What about Paul? A great servant of the Lord - no doubt about that; but, so far as the Bible is concerned, he is just left in prison in Rome, and that is the end of the story. Surely he was worthy of something more than that at the end!

Do you see the point? God is not building a memorial to the name, to the instrument. Jeremiah - wherever he is, or wherever he has gone, we don't know. But the Bible does say this: "Now in the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, the Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus (2 Chron. 37:22; Ezra 1:1). It is the FUNCTION, it is the PURPOSE, that God has laid hold of. The man just sinks into the great vocation; it is that that matters. And if the record leaves Paul in prison, tradition may say much about his death, but there he is. Ah! what about the purpose that he has served? God has looked after that! After all, it is true that with all these, and so many others, they are only known to us now because of their service to the purpose of God. In a certain sense, that is their immortality.

Yes: significance is not attached to any name, person, or instrumentality; it is only attached to God's purpose concerning His Son. And you and I will take on value only in the measure in which God's Son is truly served, and comes into His place, by means of us.

GOD MEETS ALL NEEDS FOR HIS PURPOSE

We further went on to point out that God is faithful to His purpose, and - given that there is no deliberate unbelief or pride - He meets all the needs for the realisation of His own purpose. That was the real meaning of this vision that came to Isaiah. We showed in what a devastating situation Isaiah, as a young man, found himself, at the time of that vision. There was the tragedy of Uzziah; there was the state of the people. Read those first chapters of Isaiah's prophecies, and see what a state existed. It was enough to put any young man off the ministry - enough to be utterly disconcerting. It was sufficient to bring complete despair, hopelessness; to make him feel, 'Nothing is possible'.

But then, God is not a God of circumstances, in this way; God is the God of purpose. And so, because of the purpose with which this man Isaiah was related, God came in with the vision, the saving vision, and by it delivered him - and what a vision it was! God meets the need of His own purpose - provided, as I have said, that there are not those things that always stay the hand of God - deliberate unbelief, or pride. God can do nothing where there is pride. But, given there is an openness of heart, a purity of spirit, toward Himself, with all the tragedy, with all the human weakness, with all our own failure, God meets the need of the purpose, and works all things for good in those who are called according thereto.

THE PURPOSE OFTEN INVOLVES DISILLUSIONMENT

Further, we pointed out that this ministry, this calling, this function, concerning the purpose of God, is often fraught with deep experiences of disillusionment, of disappointment, and of breakdown, in the realms in which we had great expectations and upon which we had set our hopes. So it was with Isaiah over king Uzziah. Isaiah's whole life had been bound up with Uzziah. God had blessed him, God had used him; there is no doubt about it, the Lord had been with king Uzziah; he had done a great work for God. What a devastating thing it is to our hearts and to our confidence, when we see something, or someone, which has been so evidently and wonderfully raised up and used and blessed of God, just coming to spiritual tragedy. It makes us feel: 'Then, who can be saved? Who can go through? Can we hope that we shall do better? Can we hope that the thing with which our lives are bound up will have a better end than that?' We feel there is always the terrible possibility that it will go that way with us, and with what we have given ourselves to.

There will be disillusionments, there will be disappointments, there will be heartbreak. But note - the thing that saved Isaiah, in a day like that, was that God established a relationship between him and something

that was above it all: "I saw the Lord, high and lifted up" - the anchorage in Heaven. We never cease to wonder, do we, at that end of the Apostle Paul. It constitutes a problem - but it is a glorious problem. If ever there had been a man poured out for God, it was Paul; if ever a man was jealous for God's highest and fullest, he was; if ever a man suffered in the interests of God's purpose, Paul did. And now, at the last, the churches throughout Asia, who owed their spiritual life to him, had turned away from him; friends around him had left him; he sees his work apparently falling to pieces. Your amazement is that the man himself doesn't go to pieces. You think that if ever a man ought to be in the slough of despond, really cast down and under things, Paul ought to be. Here he is, a lonely man, taken out of his lifework, shut up in prison; converts and friends, and even fellow-labourers, turning away from him - "Demas hath forsaken me", he says. If ever a man ought to be down, he ought to be.

But look - his link is with Heaven! He has seen 'the Lord high and lifted up', and that has saved him in this terrible hour. 'These things said Isaiah, because he saw His glory...' Oh, that we might be so strongly and clearly and positively related with the One in Heaven, that all these things which could break our hearts, and send us right down to the bottom, just do not have that effect. We may have our dark hours - I have no doubt that these men had their dark hours; we may have our times of despondency. But - but - there is something that is more than that. It is the One who is above - we have seen HIM.

EXPERIENCES RELATED TO THE PURPOSE

Next, such an instrument, related to the purpose, is brought into experiences that definitely bear upon that purpose: that is, they are constituted ACCORDING TO the purpose of God. The purpose of God, in relation to His Son, is that Christ shall ultimately fill all things, and all things shall be summed up in Him. He is to be the universal Lord, and what is true of Him, characteristically, is to become true of the Church: it is to take its character from Him, in order that, so doing, it may be the very vessel and instrument of His government in all the coming ages. If that is so, then a very great deal has got to be done in us to make it possible!

For this is not just an official thing: it is not that God just takes us up and puts us into an official position, willy-nilly, as though it didn't matter what sort of people we were. Oh, no - a lot has got to be done to bring a people there. And so we find that in such instruments, as we have them in the Word of God (and they are only indicative of God's abiding methods and principles), the thing to which they were called was wrought into their very being. Isaiah meant this when he said: "I and the children whom the Lord hath given me are for signs and for wonders in Israel" (Is. 8:18). He had given his sons certain names, and those names were descriptive of the very things that God was doing. To Ezekiel, the Lord said: "Say, I am your sign" (Ezek. 12:11). 'When you see God's dealings with me, what God is doing in me, the way God is leading me, then you will see what God is after.' That is an essential thing for any instrument of God.

Let me repeat: You cannot just go and retail Divine truths. You may give good addresses, clever addresses, even brilliant addresses, on Bible subjects; you may give very impressive discourses on the Bible; and people may say they enjoyed it - even go as far as to say that, for the moment, they were helped by it. But you must remember that that is not good enough for the Lord. What the Lord is seeking to do is to create a CONSTITUTION. I do not of course mean a system of laws and regulations, such as when one speaks of the 'Constitution' of a nation. I mean what we mean by 'our constitution': how we are made, what we are made of; our make-up; the very substance of our being. And God is seeking to make a constitution in a people. Any instrument that He is to use must have that constitution, and it has got to come right out of what God has done in us. That explains a very great deal.

EVERY MEMBER AFFECTED

Perhaps you may be thinking, 'How does all this apply to me? How does it affect me? This seems to concern some ideal instrument, perhaps some ideal people, for ministry; or some visionary conception of a church like that. I'm a very simple, ordinary individual: surely I, with a great many more like myself, don't come into that?' Let me say here, with very great emphasis, that such a vessel, such an instrument, is not just made up of public speakers, outstanding personalities, particular ministries and ministers. If you gather with others for prayer, your very coming together with others in that way, even if you do not pray audibly, but are just there in the spirit of prayer and cooperation, makes you as vital a part of that purpose as any particular ministry.

Remember: though there may be men who minister the Word, those whom we point out as 'ministering servants of the Lord' - we would call them 'the Lord's servants' - remember, they will never fulfil their ministry unless you are behind them in prayer. Paul was very, very sure about that: he let us know quite definitely that even he (of course HE would not have said anything like that - 'even I'; but we say, 'even he') could not have fulfilled his great calling, his elect ministry, unless there had been praying people behind him all the time. They were fulfilling the ministry.

That is only one aspect of the whole matter. In a corporate thing - I do not mean an organized thing, but an organism - every part matters; the whole is affected by the least part. And so you are affecting this matter in some way. Even if you are not functioning at all, you are affecting the whole thing. We are called into something that involves us in responsibility.

NEED FOR ABIDING

Let us now go a further step in this summary. We are not actually touching the record and the narrative; we are drawing out the lessons. When we think of the tragedy of Uzziah, we must recognise that the way of safety is the way of abiding deeply in God - abiding under the heavenly government. What a different story would have been told about the end of Uzziah, if he had not taken things into his own hands and sought to become something in himself; if he had not presumed, or assumed, that God's blessing and God's using of him gave him the personal right to take hold of the things of God. But pride found a place in his heart. Until he became 'strong', he was greatly blessed; but then he became lifted up in heart, even through the blessing of the Lord, and the story began to change: it became tragedy in the place of glory. If only we would abide in that place of utter dependence, utter submission, where we are not on the throne, but the Lord is, the story might end so differently; spiritual power would remain to the end. How necessary it is for us to keep in that place of abiding, in that place of deep meekness and humility.

A CRITICAL EPOCH IN WORLD HISTORY

Now, with this summary before us, let us look at this vision: because it is the vision, itself, that covers all that we have said, and more.

"In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple. Above him stood the seraphim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. And one cried unto another, and said, Holy, holy, holy is Jehovah of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. And the foundations of the thresholds were moved at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke" (Is. 6:1-4).

The reference to the time factor is emphatic: "In the year that king Uzziah died". Yes, it was a very, very crucial and significant time. If we could grasp this, we should have a new and wonderful opening up of heavenly meaning. For the death of Uzziah was not merely an incident or an event in the history of Israel: it took place at a period when some of the greatest changes of all time were taking place in this world. It may well be that the present time goes beyond it, in this respect; but that century, eight hundred years before Christ, was the most critical century of the history of this world, and especially in the history of the things of God. The final departure of the glory - the FINAL DEPARTURE of the glory from Jerusalem - was about to take place. Jerusalem had been the place of the glory, the place of His feet, the place of His government. Jerusalem had been the seat of the Divine and heavenly operations. It was there that the glory was, in the Temple. And now, the glory was about to depart for ever from Jerusalem.

Shortly after Uzziah's death, Rome was founded - the great power which would eventually be the doom of Jerusalem and the Jewish nation. When the glory goes, see what begins: Rome is born. The government departs from Jerusalem. The throne becomes empty, and has never been occupied again. The priesthood, corrupted, has been dismissed; it has never been there since. The glory, the throne, the priesthood, all go at this time. Everything that was here of that old system has now come, or is coming, to its close. What a critical time this was! The temple forsaken; the glory departed; the throne permanently vacated; the priesthood corrupted and dismissed. "In the year that king Uzziah died" - the time factor is tremendous - "I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train"- and that word is the word for the High Priest's garment - His high priestly garment 'fills the temple.'

THE HEAVENLY COUNTERPART

But it is a heavenly temple; it is a heavenly throne; it is a heavenly priesthood. We have leapt suddenly out of the old dispensation into the time in which we live. John understood all this when he said: 'These things said Isaiah, because he saw His glory; and he spake of Him.' We are in the day of the throne on high: "...far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name..." (Eph. 1:21). We are in the day of the heavenly priesthood: "He ever liveth to make intercession" (Heb. 7:25). We are in the day of the heavenly temple. And none of us would say that the exchange has meant loss. It is tremendous gain. When everything here has broken down; everything has proved a failure and a disappointment and a tragedy; everything here has gone: then that which abides for ever, a throne, a priesthood, a house, a temple, comes into view. You see, this brings us right over to the present time. This vision is not a vision that belonged to a certain prophet who lived eight hundred years before Christ; it is not just a bit of history belonging to an age far back in the distant past. This is something that is right up to date. Jesus has fulfilled all this - He IS the fulfilment of all this - the Throne, the Priesthood, the spiritual House. Do you see? WE are in this vision, or ought to be. And it ought to be more than a vision: we ought to be in the reality of it. This belongs to us, not to Isaiah; it is ours.

Is it true? Well, is it true that the earthly ceased? That the glory departed, the nation was scattered, the throne was vacated, the priesthood ceased to be of any value? Is it true? Of course it is true. Is it true that the glorious heavenly counterpart of that has come in? - that there is One upon the Throne, far above all? Is it true that He is exercising a heavenly Priesthood on our behalf? Is it true that there is a spiritual House? "His train FILLED the temple." You see what we are brought to - a tremendous spiritual reality. It is an immense comfort and encouragement to know that, when the earthly breaks down, the heavenly never collapses. When there is everything of disappointment down here, it goes on.

That is why Paul survived his disappointments; that is why he got through those last terrible days or months of his imprisonment, with everything down here going to pieces - why he got through triumphantly: because this vision of Isaiah was a reality to him. The Throne was not empty; the Priesthood was not set aside; the House was a reality. Has it sometimes constituted for you a very real problem: that here is a man, alone, cut off from his life-work, the churches forsaking him, spiritual decline setting in, things all going wrong, error and false prophets creeping into the churches - and Paul gives us that matchless presentation of the glorious Church, and its unity and its oneness!? You are inclined to say, Paul has surely, surely lost his reason; he is in the realm of pure imagination and wishful thinking!

Oh, no. This is of very great practical importance to you and to me. Look at conditions in the Church today on this earth. Look at it, if you dare! Is it not enough to make one say, 'What nonsense to talk about this Church, as presented in the Letter to the Ephesians! It is not being practical, it is not being real, it is not facing facts! The facts are these: divisions, and schisms, and conflicts amongst Christians and Christian bodies, and all this awful state amongst individual Christians. THESE are the FACTS; Ephesians is fiction!' Ah, but it was while facing that situation, and being alive to it and knowing what was happening and what was coming, that Paul wrote that letter. He was not mad, not imagining things. He was not saying: 'This is how things ought to be. They really are like this, but this is how they ought to be'. No, he is saying: 'This is it.'

THE PURPOSE SECURED IN HEAVEN

I don't know what has got to happen to us, but something must happen to us, to get us to that position where we refuse to accept things as they are down here, but hold on to things as they are in the mind, intention and purpose of God; where we see through to something else. That is the real force of this vision. Everything is secured - not down here, but up there. 'High and lifted up' - it is secured up there. Do you ever have some doubts about your own getting through, about your own salvation? Whether spiritually you are going to win through? Whether you will survive? Have you any questions or doubts about that? Do you sometimes wonder whether you will finish up out of things?

Well, now, you will accept this about your salvation: that it is secured in Heaven. Your salvation is secured in Christ in Heaven, and is not therefore subject to conditions down here. Why not believe that GOD'S WHOLE PURPOSE is just as secure in Heaven, and not subject to things down here? It is so easy to sing: 'God is working His purpose out as year succeeds to year' - oh, yes, we can sing it; but do we realise that this whole purpose of God is secured in Heaven? That is what Paul saw. It CANNOT be defeated, because God cannot be. It cannot fail, because that Throne cannot be vacated. It CANNOT break down, because that Priesthood is an eternal priesthood, and will not cease. "He EVER liveth" - that is the point; the emphasis is upon the 'ever' - "He EVER liveth to make intercession". "He is able to save to the uttermost" - and that word means, as you know, 'right on to the end'.

If that is true about our salvation, because it is secured up there, 'high and lifted up', it is true about the purpose, His purpose. It is secured - not in Uzziah, thank God. It is secured in Jesus Christ. It is not secured in an earthly temple at Jerusalem; it is secured in a heavenly temple, a spiritual house - 'in the heavenlies, in Christ Jesus.'

I hope that you are beginning to see - that the vision is becoming yours. This is our vision, not Isaiah's vision. It is carried right over to us: 'He spake of HIM'. And all this - all the ministry of Isaiah, and of Paul, was 'because they saw His glory'. Oh, that it might be true in our case - their persistence, their going on,

their surviving, their triumphing, their effectual witness, their ministry, their service! These were the fruits, the effects, of seeing His glory. Would that we might be brought again, in a new way, to see the Exalted Lord - the EXALTED Lord; that the effects of that might come upon us as they did upon Isaiah.

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