

That He Might Fill All Things - Part 4

by T. Austin-Sparks

The church's ministry is not for its own sake, but for the sake of others, and its purpose is to bring people to the fullness of Christ.

Duration: 48:21

Scripture: Psalm 68:18, Matthew 6:33, Acts 8:17, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Ephesians 4:7-9

Topics: "Spiritual Gifts", "Ministry Development"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the scripture from Ephesians 4:7-16. He emphasizes the importance of understanding our calling and the distribution of gifts given by Christ. The speaker mentions how in the early days of the New Testament, the apostles would lay hands on believers to receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit. He challenges the listeners to examine if their ministry is resulting in an increase of Christ in their lives. The speaker encourages the audience to be a ministry church, actively supplying and ministering to other parts of the body of Christ.

Transcript

To continue our meditation, we will read a little extended section of the part of scripture in which we are finding our key in the letter to the Ephesians, chapter 4, verse 7. But unto each one of us was the grace given according to the measure of the gift of Christ. Wherefore he said, when he ascended on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men. Now this he ascended, what is it but that he also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same also that ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.

And he gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of ministering unto the building up of the body until we all attain unto the unity of the faith and of the full knowledge of the Son of God unto a full grown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. So we now come to the essential service of the church in relation to the divine end that he, Christ, shall fill all things. We saw this morning that that is the divine purpose fixed in eternity, unalterable and undefeatable.

We saw that alongside of that the church which is the body of Christ is said to be the fullness of him. That fills all in all. Therefore the medium, instrument and vessel by which the divine purpose shall be fulfilled that he shall fill all things.

And then we went on to see the method of that fulfillment as made so clear in this letter. The apostle begins to sum up all that he has said and headed up to this sublime issue of the married relationship between Christ and the church, the divine method. We saw illustrating from the book of Esther what that marriage relationship means.

Divine election, divine redemption, divine enrichment and adornment, divine covenant, all illustrated in the case of Esther. And there we stopped. We stopped short of the next thing, the essential service.

For it is perfectly evident in that book, that book of Divine Sovereignty in Operation, for undoubtedly that is the meaning of the book. It is perfectly evident that Esther was not just selected, chosen, called to the king, to the palace, released from the embargo of her exile and captivity, redeemed and then adorned with everything essential to make her suitable for the presence of the king and enriched with his riches. It is evident that all that was not just for the sake of Esther and not just that she might be able to sport herself in her new position and her privileges and strut in and out of the palace and show off all that she had come and with which she had been endowed.

The real meaning of that book, as the sequel shows, is that that Divine Sovereignty was in operation in all those ways in the behalf of a people. A people who had got to be delivered. A people who had got to come into all the good of that sovereignty of the throne.

People who were under threat. They came under an edict from a very evil source. You may say from very hell itself, represented by that Agagite.

Only got to mention that name with any knowledge of the Old Testament, Agag. And you'll remember the attitude of Samuel toward Agag. He shooed him in pieces.

Something very evil against the throne. A hand against the throne. That's what it was.

And against the people of God. And here in this book of Esther, this evil thing has come up from the pit but it's designed to destroy the people of God and the testimony of life which is within them as of Esther. And Esther, to use the so familiar phrase, came to the kingdom just for such a time as that.

It was the essential service of Esther and when you come to the letter to the Ephesians we have seen all these features of Esther in spiritual expression. Every one of them is in this letter. You come here, you arrive at this.

That it is not just for the church's own sake. Good and benefit and glory and pleasure. This elect vessel instrument is what it is as elect and foreordained in a vast, much vaster context than itself.

Just as the city at the end of the Bible stands in the midst of the nations to mediate life to the nations through its tree of life and river of life. It's only another figure or symbol of a great divine truth. Right at the heart of these is this elect body.

Elected, foreordained to minister the fullness of Christ within its own compass and beyond its own. The ages to come and now. That is the essential service.

Now with that service in view, the apostle is led to bring us to this matter of the church's ministry as the way to the end of his filling all things by means of it. The church as a ministering instrument or vessel. That is what is here.

It is the ministry of Christ and of his fullness through the church, through us, if we are truly in and of that body. It's our vocation. I don't want to emphasize this.

I want you to be quite sure that you get hold of this. All that is said here about other people functioning is only within the compass of this. That this is essentially a ministering church or it has missed the way.

It has missed the way. And that is a tragic mistake. Israel was called in the Old Testament, as we said earlier, the wife of the Lord, bride of the Lord.

I became a husband unto them, said the Lord. Israel was called to be the ministering channel and instrument of the Lord to all the nations. And because Israel did not fulfill that high purpose and vocation but built its walls around itself and shut itself in and became an exclusive body in the nations for two thousand years it's been out of the way.

It's missed the way. It is set aside. It is in the place of Vashti who was supplanted by Esther and left the church.

And when we speak of the church, dear friends, don't let us get beyond the individual responsibility. It can be no such thing as a church without the individuals that make it up. And every individual is a part of that church, that body and is intended to be a functioning part.

Every one of you here this afternoon, without an exception, believe me, is supposed to be contributing something out of the fullness of Christ beyond yourself to others. You are in this high and holy calling, vocation to be the channel, the vehicle, the mediator of something of that fullness. Every one.

Every one. The Lord has made his provision for this and having made his provision, of course, he expected and here we have these words When he ascended upon high, he laid his captivity captive and he gave gifts among men. He gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers.

And of course, their job is to bring the church to fullness and the church, well, it doesn't matter, that's their work, that's their job, that's their vocation, that's what they're called for and we just sit and listen to what they've got to say and say that was, well, it was alright, wasn't so good today, or it was pretty good, or it was very good and we go home and that's the end. No, friends, never. There is a misapprehension of what is stated here.

These gifts, as stated here, were given for the perfecting, the making complete of the saints unto the work of ministry. Unto the building up of the body of Christ till we all attain unto his fullness. These gifts are only but essentially to bring the church into a place where it can fulfill its ministry.

Make no mistake about that. The ministry belongs to the church. The Lord has made provision for the church to be helped to fulfill its ministry.

And it's a wonderful statement. As you know, this is a quotation from the 68th Psalm. Do you recall that psalm? It's the psalm of the triumphant return of the victorious monarch after his campaign which he has overthrown his enemies, he has taken great spoils and has brought back many prisoners and in his triumph and in the bounty of his gains is now generously distributing distributing his gifts to his people in his kingdom in order that they may come into the good of his great triumph.

I think that's the picture of Psalm 68 and there's little doubt little doubt, I think, that that psalm has as its historic background David's conquest of Zion. Remember the story? That Zion held by the Jebusites they manned it with their weakest they're lame and they're blind because it was to their mind such an impregnable stronghold that they didn't need anything more than that to defend it.

David threw out his challenge sounding the taking of the stronghold and inspired his men to that great work and they launched their attack and they scaled the height and overthrew the enemy and subdued every opposing force and they took great spoils David followed up in this and took over all these gains though he doesn't say so in keeping with the practice on such occasions distributed his gains to all the people that they might know what a great leader conqueror and king he was that's the picture behind psalm 68 it's a wonderful psalm you can read it again but now isn't it remarkable and impressive that the apostle lifts out of that mighty psalm these words and transfers the whole idea to the Lord Jesus when he ascended up on high you have to put in there words from the letter to the

Hebrews we are come to Zion that seat center of his great conquest place where the king dwells we are come to Zion heavenly when he ascended up on high he laid his captivity and he gave and he gave and of why did he give? for what purpose? that of his fullness the fullness of his conquest fullness of his mighty conquest his triumphant campaign and what a campaign what a campaign in this universe fullness of the good of that might become the inheritance the good of all his people but but that might be so there are distributors of the good and the wealth and the distributors are here named he gave some apostles some prophets some evangelists some pastors and teachers the object another little illustration not so perfect so complete perhaps not in such a good setting but quite an

illustration of this same thing in the life of the same man David during the time when he was driven out by Saul hunted in the wilderness and went to fullest time was given the for his own possession and dwelling the town of Ziklag one day having gone out on one of his raids the Amalekites made a raid upon Ziklag burned it with fire took all its content took David's wives took the people left nothing went off with the lot David and his men returned found the state they were in great distress great distress as they wept until they had no more power to weep David was in great fear for they spake of stoning him but he strengthened himself in his God and he called for the priest to inquire of the Lord whether he should pursue the Amalekites and the answer was yes pursue and you shall recover

all so David went off with his men pursuing far long so far so long after a recent campaign the number of his men were too faint and exhausted to go on and so David left the lot of the staff there and said well you stay here and look after this and we'll go on with this job leaving them there he went on and you remember they found a half dead Egyptian apparently hardly conscious sick and having had no food for three days and three nights and they generously gave him food until he regained consciousness and sat up and then David said to him who are you? who are you? he said I am an Egyptian servant of an Amalekite three days ago we made a raid upon Ziklag but I fell sick and my master just left me to die David said will you bring us down to the Amalekites? you know where they are? which

way they've gone? will you bring us down? he said swear unto me that you will neither kill me nor deliver me into the hands of my master so he brought him down overtook the Lord's word was fulfilled utterly and they made their assault and all but two hundred of the Amalekites were slain outright but it says David recovered all he recovered all and it seems he recovered a great deal more than he had lost always the way with the Lord always more at the end than you had at the beginning when you were moving with the Lord however that by the way he seems to have recovered a great deal more than he lost for on the return

journey came back these men who he had left he's going to give to them of the spoils then certain vain fellows said no not at all they didn't go to the battle why should they

share the spoils ah David said not a bit of it as his portion is that goeth down to the battle so shall his portion be that abideth by the staff and he made it a covenant forever in this land so they got their portion then he came back and you notice what he did at once he started distributing this spoil everywhere sent it to Judah he sent it to how many people look at the story in all directions he must have had a real scoop from the Amalekites in all directions he is giving the gifts of his mighty victory put it round the other way everywhere within the range of David's associations and fellowships they were coming into the good of his victory he had led his captivity brought it back and was now giving gifts to men it's an illustration which fits right in here with Psalm 68 of what the

apostle is saying to us Lord Jesus has made a way he has come out in a tremendous against principles whole mighty range of evil we'll say more probably this evening but this is the position he has turned upon the spoiler and taken the spoiler and brought it back and now he is saying all all my people they must all of my fullness receive they must all come into the blessing of the fullness that is vested in me through this contact they must be my fullness my fullness must be seen in all my people unto that unto that that's the end unto that there are these various ministries these various ministries which I give he gave in his giving of gifts and in Ephesians it's personal gifts in Romans as you know it's the prophecy and so on it's the thing itself it's the function but here's the persons

in the function some apostles it's not for us this afternoon to spend a lot of time on these various functions because that really would take a lot of time we only need remarks that the apostle or the Holy Spirit through the apostle begins with apostles and that is a very significant thing friends when you're in this particular part of the Bible in what is called the letter to the much bigger theme of that when you are here you start from the standpoint of the universal you're going to work inward and finish at some centers but you start from the standpoint of the universal the apostle is the universal remember he sent them out he called them apostles he sent them out and said go into all the world all the world and teach and act that's the universal function act in relation to your this

is not local to begin with this is not local it's the whole range of Christ's kingdom apostleship relates to that and my point at the moment is that God begins with the universal anything other when it comes to the local presently the local must be the embodiment of all that is universal and the expression of all that is universal if it drops on to a lower level if it takes a smaller compass if it becomes something less it has missed the divine thought and you will find that it will lose its power and its anointing will be limited it becomes something in itself it must be here it starts with the universal he gave some apostles in the other place where he refers to these gifts he said firstly apostles firstly apostles that is you and I as in the church and all who are of this church must

first of all be imbued imbued and inspired with a universal vision and motive we must be gripped by the universality of Jesus Christ in this whole world and that must be a range of vision and purpose nothing less than that something that has got to get hold of us liberate us entirely from all gravitation towards something less than Christ is Christ is so great that he is to fill all things all things the uttermost bound and everything within the other is filled with him and we must have no less of vision, motive and inspiration than that to begin with some apostles some prophets that would take some time to explain to us apparently in the new testament there was still a prophetic gift even in the matter of foretelling by taking the prophetic gift at large it just means this those who are

anointed to interpret the thoughts of God to his whole church who are to bring to his church and keep before his church all the fullness of his thoughts concerning the church in itself and its vocation the prophet has always fulfilled that function of calling back the people if they departed and keeping faithfully before them what God meant in calling them what God's purpose was in choosing them what their real ministry and vocation is under the anointing spirit to have that interpreted of God's thought by revelation from God very important these are the people to whom the Lord has shown something of his mind, his purpose they've come to it not by study not by being informed but it's come to them by the Holy Spirit and that they just cannot get away from it they cannot get away from that

function meet them and hear them you'll find as you would say they're always always on the same line alright so long as it isn't the only line the only line but there it is keep the thoughts of God in fullness ever fresh before the people of God in relation to them some evangelists evangelists undoubtedly were the itinerant messengers of the evangelist preach the evangelist here, there and everywhere but again it's a sovereign gift a sovereign gift dear friends that that dispensation was not part we should not say now these these gifts were alright for what we call apostolic times New Testament times but if we take that position we're forfeiting something very vital these gifts these personal gifts ought still to be here in the church universal really sovereign gifts of the risen Lord to

be recognized to be accepted to be accredited to be honored there are some men you know some men who just cannot speak and just cannot preach without going straight for the unsaved going straight for the unsaved that is their very being their very life but if they get on to anything else the answer goes the Lord is with them there there's no doubt about it the Lord is with them on that life they are given to the church in that capacity they only spoil their own ministry if they try to be something else and it's as well for us to recognize this and then the combined function pastors and teachers pastors and teachers I like that combination it is really shepherds and instructors in one thing pastors and teachers I like that combination it is really shepherds and instructors in one thing you

can be a shepherd rushing around fussing about people all the time and trying to make them comfortable and happy and pleased with themselves and snug and all that sort of thing just doing all that sort of thing shepherd, yes but shepherd and instructor pastor and teacher in one these who you are cherishing that's right caring for looking after trying to help not just to be left there in their own snugness pleased with themselves and very happy that you have been to see them and said some nice things helpful things to them they've got to come to understanding through the pastor and teacher thank God for all pastors and teachers combined I think we can do fairness or to put it round the other way that is it can make people top heavy if it's all teaching without cherishing two things must

work both ways it must be like that but when we've said all this what is the grand object? and what is the test of ministry? test of anointing? test of function? what is it? it's found in this till we all till we all attain ultimately to the full now every divinely given ministry is only only for the purpose of bringing us to comfort and ultimately to the fullness of Christ is it doing that? the point at which we arrive is a very practical point for us all it's not just to hear listen to what is said to us what is brought to us by these various means not just to receive all that they've got to give stores and stores test the test of us to whom ministries come by various instruments the test of us is are we quite sure that that's resulting in some increase of Christliness and that will

necessitate an attitude and an action the Lord has spoken today the Lord has said something today I'm listening intently to this brother to this servant of the Lord to see what it is the Lord has to say listening to

see what the Lord has to say because I'm being involved in a great responsibility by having ears at all what's the Lord got to say and now then if I can in the spirit discern anything that the Lord has said to me I have to go straight away to turn that into life into character into substance into history I wonder how many of us do go after a message get before the Lord and say now Lord it's not good enough for me to have heard that that only may work out for my condemnation as you said the words that I speak they shall judge you in the last day it may only be to my

condemnation there's no no guarantee that my hearing a lot of divine truth is going to result in my spiritual measure being increased willy-nilly I've got to do something about it I've got to take this to the Lord and do something about it no difference how possible it is for volumes and volumes over the years to be given spiritual measures very small it says that reluctantly point is here it is all these gifts are given for the perfecting of the saints unto the work of ministry for the building up of the body of Christ till we all attain unto the fullness of Christ this is the essential service you are not called to office you are called to function a lot of people are quite ready to begin to do something if you'll only put them into a uniform or stick a badge on them or call them by

some title missionary or reverend or something like that they'll get busy about it then but oh no that's not what is here the Holy Spirit through this apostle is speaking to the church till we all, till we all, till we all is speaking to the church and he's saying that every one of the all has to increase in the measure of Christ through ministries given and have through that increase something themselves to give so that it is possible for people who are in need of light and life and help to say so and so has got something he's got something she has got something those people have really got something and it's something vital not just light as such but something vital they count for something by what they have it must be like that dear friends this is the essential service and to just

refer to Esther again we mentioned how it worked out because she came through grace marvellous grace, abounding grace into the riches, the wealth, the glory of her married relationship with the King a whole nation derived the benefit and was saved from death into life put in a rather quaint way isn't it at the end and they had a good day and they had a good day they kept the feast and they had a good day oh don't the Lord's people need a good day I trust we are having a good day today but surely we have it for all the Lord's people a good day in this sense of release, deliverance, escape from the devices of the enemy the councils of hell the verdicts of death all the good that Esther, that is the name it's a really crying need perhaps we are here today with some the sense not only of that

need but this is really what the Lord wants I hope with all my heart as we are here today we are speaking to one another your hearts are able to say now this is what the church needs what I need, what the church needs this is it, I wish it were like that I hope it is in some measure dear friends, have that desire and wish in your heart strong enough, strong enough and whenever there is a message comes through a messenger of the Lord anointed messenger of the Lord in whatever capacity or function he may fulfill his will as the Lord is saying today what is it that marks this time as from the Lord we can do something about that we can do something about that and that kind of attitude will bring into spiritual measure spiritual increase, spiritual wealth and lead on lead on the least we can

say is lead on to the ultimate objective obtaining unto the measure of of the Lord's burden if necessary to burden us with this great sense of vocation we are called to the throne we are called to marriage union with the king we are called to administer his resources to his kingdom, to his people we are called now to be ministers of Christ yes ministers of Christ and perhaps in a much much more real and wonderful sense

than very often is tied to that word minister and have the name and have the word it can be used of people but the Lord what it means we are called to be a ministering church in every part now go and get to it get to the Lord about it say well I know I'm nothing very much I haven't got very much life I don't know very much I'm not very much good but here we are the Lord has

said this I've got to do something about it small as I am mean as I am contemptible as I am worthless as I am the Lord has said this to me that I'm a part of his body and his body is called upon to be a ministering body in every part and I'm in the body and that which every joint supplies I've got to be in this supply supply to other parts of the body the Lord helps you to really take that attitude you will find in that way your deliverance from so much so much not of our trouble with your friends paralysis confusion and what not is due to our being turned in in a corporate introspection occupied with ourselves corporately and our problems oh it's a trigger but the Lord give us the great vision of himself and our calling and blessed be God of his distribution his distribution oh if I were

to add a word I'd put it this way you know, you do know that in the New Testament times the beginning when people really came to the Lord really came to the Lord and were saved and baptized the the apostles did lay their hands upon them and pray for them they did and if you look into the matter for this that by the Holy Spirit they should become functioning members of the body of Christ the Holy Spirit distributing gifts for function qualifying to be functioning members the Holy Spirit doesn't recognize or accept any passengers in the Church of God does not every one single one of them functioning member by the Holy Spirit who's been given to us and while that's a challenge statement that may worry us a bit remember it is meant to show us this that the Lord has made provision for what he

requires he really has and we do know the Holy Spirit does help us in certain ways this is the way in which the Lord is with me this is the way in which the Spirit helps me this is where I find the Lord helping me yes, that's he has distributed according to his will and it's for every one of us by real exercise to find out what it is that we have to do and contribute in the body of Christ don't try to do what someone else is doing but get it from the Lord

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