

# The Cross and Eternal Glory - Part 6

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The sermon explores the subject of the Bible, the function of the prophet, and the importance of intelligent ministry to God's people.*

**Duration:** 51:02

**Scripture:** Genesis 1:26-27, Exodus 3:2-6, Joshua 1:1-9, Esther 4:14, Matthew 6:33, Hebrews 4:12, Hebrews 9:22

**Topics:** "Eternal Glory"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of understanding the word of God and its spiritual principles that apply to us today. They urge the audience to focus on God's work of recovering his people and revealing his original intentions. The speaker highlights the role of sin, atonement, and removal in the Bible, particularly in the first five books, as they introduce the concept of the cross of Christ and the priesthood. The sermon concludes by posing the question of what the Bible truly means and whether it is simply a collection of historical events or something more profound.

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## Transcript

It will be appreciated by newcomers that we are in a course of considerations and that it is impossible at this point to go right back over all the ground that we have covered. We have yet much to consider today and we must go right on. But for your sake, I'm sure the others who have been here will be very patient with a very brief word of explanation.

We have the Bible and when we take the Bible, our question is what is it all about? What does it all mean? Is it just a collection of bits of history, biography, and church affairs, and so on, brought together and bound up in a volume? Or is there one thing we could write down on a title page as containing everything that is in the Bible? And there is. There is just one thing about which the whole Bible is. And it is that one thing that we are occupied with at this time.

Of course, we can only take it in fragments and in a very general way. But I trust with sufficient detail to bear out that this thing that we have said is the entire subject of the Bible. And so we would write on our title page, covering the whole of this volume, this book contains the revelation of an eternal fact.

That fact is that God desired to have a universe created by himself, full of his glory. To express himself in terms of glory throughout a vast creation with man at his centre. That is the subject of the Bible.

And everything in some way or another is related to that. And so, taking that as the key, we read it. We study it.

And we find that we are able to arrange its matter in a certain order. In the first place, we are told of a state of glory existing with divine persons before the world was, before creation. One of those divine persons is known as the Son of God, who himself here on earth, in prayer to his Father, referred to the glory which he had with the Father before the world was.

And then he introduced into those divine councils of glory, before times eternal, a people. In the same prayer, he referred to those whom the Father had given him, and asked that they might be with him, where he would be to behold his glory. And then said, the glory which thou hast given me, I have given them.

And then in the illumination of the spirit of glory, a great apostle spoke about the mystery of God's will being made known, which is that we, he's speaking about the Church, should be unto the praise of his glory. So that way back there, in the glory of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, there was pre-vision and determined that there should be a creation with man at its centre, reflecting and expressing the glory. Out from those councils, creative activity proceeded, and the Godhead set to work to bring the creation in.

The first phase ended in a prophecy of glory. When all things were found to be to God's complete satisfaction, he was able to say, it is very good. Prophecy of glory, that in the end, everything should answer entirely to the divine mind, and so answering should be a glorious creation.

The course was interrupted. Interrupted, as we have seen, two realms in heaven and on earth. And the glory was suspended.

And held in reserve because of sin, of rebellion, because of the entry of that which could never pass with God as very good, but was now very bad, and therefore could never come to that ultimate glory. From that point, God began a course by which all that should be remedied and repaired and put right, so that his original intention should be ultimately realised. And the first phase and stage of the Bible, as in the first five books, introduces the great basic factor of sins.

Atonement and removal, the altar, foreshadowing of the cross of Christ, the sacrifice, the priesthood, that is, that whole work of mediation concerning sin. And there really, dear friends, back in those books, we are not reading so much about the people, Abel and Noah and Abraham and Moses, as if we only knew it, we're reading about Christ. For God has thrown the shadow of Christ crucified right down the ages.

And in all these people of the altar, people of the sacrifice, people of the shed blood, people of the slain lamb, there is the picture, the intimation of Christ crucified, God's way of dealing with what has entered into this universe in order to recover, to restore and establish the glory. So the first section of the Bible is particularly occupied with that. The second section, the long one, as we saw this morning, from the book of Joshua to the little book of Esther, sees another stage and phase brought in.

That is, the necessity of supreme government being established. In the realm of rebellion, of anarchy, of division and disintegration and disruption, they're all going their own way. One great need is for the establishment of a central government, everything united in a throne.

So that long section brings into view the whole matter of government or authority. An essential, an essential to glory is the throne. And how much scripture, if only you could call it to mind, just floods in when we say that.

A throne of glory, a glorious high throne, a glorious throne set on high. The throne of glory. Well, I must leave that because that occupied all our time this morning and pass quickly to the next part of the Bible, this third large section running from Isaiah to the end, Malachi.

Here we introduce in a specific way and in an emphatic form what is called the ministry and function of the prophet. But I put it like that, a specific and emphatic way, because this is not the beginning of prophetic function. It only comes up here in this way, so pronounced and definite, because the situation calls for it in a special way.

The situation has so developed that this is the thing, more than anything else at the moment, that is required. Call for the prophet. You see, the prophetic function has been operative right from the very beginning.

You look at a passage or two like this in the Gospel by Luke, and it's rather interesting that this is kind of little parentheses, it's in brackets, in the first chapter of the Gospel by Luke at verse 70, as he spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets which have been since the world began. Prophets which have been since the world began. And that statement, and again it's interesting on both occasions it comes from the same man, Luke, is repeated in the book of the Acts.

That is, it is Luke that writes it in the third chapter of the book of the Acts and verse 21. Whom the heaven must receive until the times of the restoration of all things, whereof God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets which have been since the world began. So the prophetic function does not belong exclusively to what we call the prophets of the Old Testament, that is the prophetic section.

Indeed the Hebrew Bible does not relate them exclusively to those books which we call the books of the prophets. The Hebrew Bible divides the prophets into the former and the latter, and in the former prophets it includes Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. In the latter prophets, the three that we call the major and the twelve, the minor.

These all comprise the prophetic section of the Hebrew Bible. That's only technical by the way, doesn't convey very much of a spiritual message. But my point is that this prophetic function has existed right from the beginning.

And you will see as we go on why. It's nature, it's value, it's importance. But I repeat at a certain time because of certain conditions, this came out in this most emphatic and definite form.

So that today when we speak of the prophets we really only think of these beginning with Isaiah and ending with Malachi. Enoch was called a prophet. Abraham was called a prophet.

The patriarchs generally were called or regarded as prophets. That was in addition to other functions which they were fulfilling. Well now the function of the prophet is the best interpretation of the call of the prophet.

That is, the demand for the prophet is best understood by recognizing his function. Or shall I take out that word his and say its function. Because this ministry is a function before it is persons.

Because the function exists, the persons who fulfill it are raised up. But we can very largely lose sight of the persons and see what God is doing in the ministry, in the function. The function of the prophet was first of all simply to speak for God.

To speak for God. To be as God himself speaking. Thus saith the Lord is the word of the prophet.

Perhaps the best illustration of that is found in the case of Moses and Aaron. Moses, the Lord said to Moses that Aaron should be his prophet. And how did he define that? Why he went a long way.

A way that we would never venture to go were it not in the Bible. Thou shalt be to him as God and he shall be thy prophet. Clearly defining the function of the prophet, that is, it is God speaking.

Though by man, the man is the voice of God to the people. Or the function is the voice of God speaking at any given time. But that is only the inclusive definition goes on.

The function of prophecy, or if you will, the prophet, is to represent God. And I would prefer to break that word up because you get the significance more clearly if I do. To re-present God.

Re-present God. Present God in his thoughts, his mind, his heart, his will over again. To bring God back again to the place that he has held, that he has claimed.

To re-present God in God's thoughts. To embody God's heart. You cannot read these prophets of Israel without realizing how they themselves embody the heart of God.

What cries come from their hearts to them, it's, oh my people, oh my people, if only thou wouldest. It's a cry of the heart that comes through these men. It is God's heart crying.

You can hear God's sob, God's sigh, God's groan, God's longing, God's disappointment, God's agony. And it's pouring out of the heart of the prophet, and that's the prophetic function. There's nothing merely official, ecclesiastical, professional about this.

There were plenty of professional prophets in Israel, but for the most part in these days they were false prophets. Some of the true prophets exposed them because they were proselytizing for gain and for popularity. But the true prophet was a man with a heart of agony.

You cannot read Jeremiah and his lamentation without recognizing that and it is God's heart beating in sorrow, in disappointment. Some of the prophets expressed the heart of God in burning shame, burning shame. I'm not going to take you to the subject matter, you can see it for yourself.

But the point is that the prophetic function was to make the heart of God felt, as well as the thoughts of God known, and the will of God to become an ultimatum with the most serious concept. There was no option about this with the prophets. The alternative was too terrible to contemplate.

But for them, for them, it was an imperative laid upon them, and there was no way out but doom. Further, this function was to restore God to his place in the midst of his people, to restore God to his place with his people, to recover God's place for him in the heart of his people. So the prophets was an all-round ministry.

See, the prophet had to do with the priesthood, because a decadent and apostate priesthood was failing to deal with this whole matter of sin, was rather making way for sin than putting it away. The prophet had to do with a decadent priesthood and an ineffective altar. Prevalence of sin, which that very priesthood and altar should have made impossible, and thus the prophet's function was to bring back the effectiveness of the altar and the sacrifice, and put it in its right place.

Those of you who know your Bible know how true that was. And then the prophet had to do with a king. Some of these men really did have to do with the kings.

Think of Amos, away there in the gate of Samaria, waylaying the rulers, crying, O ye kings of Ishmael. And he didn't mince his words at all. Dealing with kingship, with the throne, the prophet in Judah, in Jerusalem, and in Israel in Samaria, were dealing with this whole matter of a false government, an evil rule, which was not fulfilling the function of holding everything in righteous judgment, righteous balance.

And because of the breakdown of the true principle of authority, the people were, rather than united, all divided. Rather than receiving the good, the administration were starving and impoverished. All the meaning of true government had gone.

The prophet had to deal with the king, or the function of authority. How all round was their business with the priesthood, the iniquity of the land, the rebellion. And you see, the prophet saw through, saw through this.

The prophet never looked just upon the surface, the face of things, and saw the thing that people were doing, or the things that people were doing, and stayed there. Well, robbery, death, robbery, and all sorts of other things. But what the prophet saw was what lay behind these things.

They saw that this was complicity with the devil himself. And that all this was really resulting in the devil's counter of the value of the altar and the sacrifice, making a mockery of it, bringing shame and disgrace upon the very altar. That's what the devil is always wanting to do, to make the cross of Christ either of none effect, or make it ridiculous.

They saw through. Behind this, there were other intelligences at work. Behind this, take envy, collapse, the broken down, disintegrated authority.

They saw what they called iniquity. And that word iniquity just means rebellion against God. That takes it further than the thing by which it is expressed.

It may be iniquity to steal, to commit immorality, it may be iniquity, but that is not the heart and root of the Hebrew word. The Hebrew word iniquity means rebellion. Great outstanding illustration is Saul, first king of man's choice, when he disobeyed the Lord.

When he, the man who was ostensibly, professionally in the place of authority, disobeyed the Lord in relation to the altar, Samuel confronted him and said, rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft. Witchcraft, what's that? That relates to another world, of evil spirit, something behind. That's iniquity.

Well, this is very serious, but it's necessary to get right into the heart of this thing in order to recognize what the function of the prophet was, deal with iniquity which is expressed in rebellion, and to deal with authority as here gone wrong and manifested in disruption and in anarchy. Well then, the symbol of the prophet is always a man. The symbol of the priest, as you know, is the ox.

The symbol of the king is the lion. The symbol of the prophet is a man, a man. And what does a man signify? First of all, man signifies, or is supposed to signify, as distinct from all other creations, intelligence.

Intelligence. Understanding. Understanding knowledge.

Knowledge with understanding. What that word intelligence means, in a particular, peculiar, and unique way, intelligence. Man is, by God, regarded as a responsible being because he has intelligence.

The symbol of the prophet is man. The man who has intelligence as to God's mind, God's thought. He has intelligence.

What a long way that carries us and carries things, doesn't it? Because leaving all titles out, all titles out, and let me say here most emphatically, no one claims or should claim in our time to be a prophet in this sense, or take the title or the name. Nevertheless, the function is still required. The work is still necessary, and perhaps as necessary today as ever before.

And that surely, surely is borne out in this, that there's a need, a crying need, for an intelligent ministry as to God's thoughts for his people in fullness to be exercised. Can't help it. Like it or dislike it, and I know it will be very much disliked, nevertheless, you cannot get away from it, that speaking quite generally, must you, the people of God in the world today have very little intelligence about God's mind.

They may have intelligence about certain things that are in God's mind, but as to God's full mind concerning his people, there's a very little intelligence. You're amazed and you're distressed to find how small the intelligence of Christians is, speaking generally. But it is not possible to go beyond a very limited measure, with a great mass of Christians, before you get them right out of their depth, and they say, it's all going over our head, it's all words.

They're only saying, our measure, our measure doesn't represent capacity for anything more than the simplest. Ah, it's tragic, it's sad, but it's true, it's true. And again I say, leaving out the title, and leaving out the person.

Remember that God has always, from the beginning of the world, seen the necessity for the function of keeping his full thought for his people in view. And I believe we could say, although this might sound like adding to scripture, not meant to be that, that inasmuch as it is declared that it has been from the beginning of the world, it will be to the end of the world. There will never come a time when this function will be dispensed with.

God will always want a representation of his mind, and his full mind, as far as he can have it, on this earth. That is the function. God will always want a representation of his mind, and his full mind, as far as he can have it, on this earth.

That is the function. That, dear friends, sets the standard and the nature of true service to God. Because man is not only intelligent, but he's God's servant.

He's God's servant. The prophet, peculiarly and particularly, brings this idea of the servant of the Lord into view, doesn't he? You read through Isaiah, the servant of the Lord, the servant of the Lord. And Moses was known as the servant of the Lord, but Moses said, a prophet shall the Lord, your God, raise up unto you from among your brethren like unto me.

And what did Moses do in the prophetic ministry? He wrote, in a very rich way, God's mind into view for his people. Real service is that. You may have to adjust your ideas of what it means to be a servant of the Lord in the light of this.

The servant, the man's servant, is the one who keeps the mind, God's mind for his people. For men may begin with the unsaved to make his mind known to them, but it must not stop there. It must follow on to make the saved right from the beginning know that God has a very large heart for those who are being saved.

It can only be calamity to leave them there, where they are, without making them know that they have come into an immense state. Some people argue, you know, that you mustn't go too deep with beginners. Well, I don't know.

Who makes the best swimmers? The one who is taught to swim in a depth that they can always put their feet on the bottom, or the one who's thrown into the deep from the beginning? And I am strongly of the opinion that you can only make weak Christians if you keep them in the shallows at the beginning. If you don't take them a bit out of their depth and make demands upon their faith. At any rate, I think that's what God does before very long.

Well, the knowledge of his will in ever greater fullness. Of course, not all at once. That's not what I mean, but more and more, more and more.

The man symbol of the prophet is intelligence, is service, is likeness. Likeness that does make man in our own image and after our own likeness. The idea of man is to represent God.

And the prophet was therefore called to be so much more than a professional man saying things. There was wrought into the very fibre of his being the thing that he got to say. Sometimes it's most distressing to read what these prophets went through and had to do.

What they suffered. It was carried into the innermost chambers of their lives. One prophet will have to marry a harlot and another see his wife becoming a harlot in order, in order to fulfill his ministry and bring home to the people this that Israel is God's wife, is God's wife and she's deserted and gone wrong, gone wrong, become corrupt by illicit communications with the gods of the heathens.

It's all a spiritual matter, you see. But the man had to go into something in his own history, domestic life, in order to make him feel as God felt, so that he could rightly represent God. And I say again, dear friends, true ministry is like that.

We're not going to just take up our Bibles and study subjects and then give it off like that. If we are going to really serve God, this is going through us and we are going through it. And what we say will sooner or later be brought home to us and we'll be challenged by it.

The Lord will say now then, what about that that you said last Sunday? Here's a first class opportunity of doing it and living up to it. And I tell you it's time to do it. So much so that some of our speakers often feel we'll never speak again.

The thing is far too drastic. Jeremiah did that. He said some things and then it came home and it came home so hot and strong that he said, I'll never speak again.

He decided to withdraw from the ministry and then he said, but I couldn't. The word was like a fire in my bones. I just couldn't, just couldn't.

I had to go and do it again and land myself in for more trouble. I tell you that's the real nature of service. It's no laughing matter that it works out like that.

See God doesn't want professions, doesn't want just a class. He wants men. The symbol of the prophet is man.

Men made by this. Well then, seeing that we see the way to the glorious. You see all this, all this for the prophet was a real deep working in and out of the cross, wasn't it? In some of the utterances of these prophets you find you are not quite sure whether he's speaking about himself or some other man.

And both are true. Both are true. Of course we do know that the Bible critics have taken these great messianic chapters in Isaiah and related them wholly to Israel.

Israel's agony and refused to have the predictive element as pointing on to Christ. Well they can argue a case, make out a case for their position, but of course we don't believe and we know they're wrong. But nevertheless there is the fact that there was something about the prophets who said these things in their own lives which really gave color to their prophecy and they were in a sense suffering in this way.

Take that great cry of Jeremiah in the lamentations first chapter. What a cry it is. Is it nothing to you? All ye that pass by, come to hope.

See if there were ever sorrow like my sorrow. Well it's not difficult to hear those words coming from the mouth of Christ on the cross. And surely, surely their prophetic and predictive aspect belongs to that and yet, and yet they're run out by man don't half an experience.

The cross, yes. Isaiah knew something about the cross in his life. Jeremiah did.

Ezekiel did. And did Jonah? In another way, for another reason, oh yes, oh yes, he knew something about it. Hear his cry, cry from the belly of the face.

Isn't it a cry of agony? Is he not going through something not known to him as to the meaning of which the Lord Jesus himself will say later as Jonah was in the belly of the face three days, three nights. These men were going through experiences. They didn't know all of what they meant but they were baptized into the sufferings of Christ to fulfill their mission.

And that's what constituted them prophets. But, but though it be the cross, the cross must ever be basic to true service. Let it be said, all this, all this to take up the prophets again.

And they're not prophets of final despair. Although they have such terrible things to say about which to warn, from which to entreat the people to turn and hold up what seems like doom before their eyes. They all look beyond it.

They all look beyond it. Take the second part of Isaiah, what a transformation it is. And the ransomed of the Lord shall return and come to Zion.

With singing and everlasting joy shall be upon their heads, and sorrow and crying shall be done away. And even Jeremiah, you might think is the most hopeless of them all, goes down to the potter's shed and sees the potter making the vessel. And the clay was marred in the hand of the potter, and the potter made it another vessel, as seemed good unto him to make it.

Jeremiah came out and said, oh, that's not the end. The vessel, the clay of Israel, is terribly marred, terribly marred, but God is not going to throw it away. He's going to make it again.

The note of the triumph of divine sovereignty, so we can go on with the visions of Ezekiel. Oh yes, the glory goes, but the glory's going to come back. The glory's going to come back.

It's going to come back along this path, the path of the cross. The outworking of the cross. Yes, the outworking of the cross in the prophet and in the people.

The outworking of the cross in principle, but of course supremely, supremely and essentially in the cross of the Lord Jesus. The glory's going to come back. I don't think I need to say more.

Prophets, in a sense, all fail. Failure has to be written over their ministry, more or less. And here's the prophetic section of the Old Testament with Maritime closes, and you might write over all that failure.

Ah yes, but there's the conservation of values. They're all collected up in the person of the Lord Jesus, and we mustn't go further at the moment. They're conserved.

They'll all come back. They'll all yet be fulfilled, but glory is coming. It cannot fail.

It cannot fail. Well now, that is instruction in the Word of God. That is bringing into view what is here in this book.

But you see, it's an enunciation of spiritual principles which abide right through the ages. And in their own way, in their own way they apply to us. We don't assume anything about function or office or anything like that, but this is the sort of thing that God has been doing and is always doing.

Let us forget the form and framework, titles and designations and all this, and see God working like this, trying to recover his people to his full thought by bringing out here and there something more of his original mind and making it known. Many, as with the prophets, may hear and many more may forbear, even of the Lord's people. But the word of the Lord is, go speak, whether they will hear or whether they forbear.

Go speak unto the people. Go speak unto the people. And dear friends, the most difficult ministry is to Christians.

Prophets proved that. To one of them the Lord said, I send you to this people, not to a people of a strange tongue and language. Thou dost not know.

If I sent you to them, they would listen. They would listen. I send you to the house of Israel and they will not listen.

Very often, tragically enough, the most difficult ministry is to the Lord's people when it goes beyond a certain point. As to God's will, it seems that all hell rises up against them. It seems that you're involved in every conceivable form of opposition and antagonism.

You go beyond, almost a minimum. Well, that is clear. I think that is quite apparent.

But nevertheless, the Lord says, speak unto them. I send you to them. Go on with it.

Go on with it. They may fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee, for I am with thee, saith the Lord.

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