

The Divine Purpose From Eternity

by T. Austin-Sparks

The divine purpose from eternity is to have a man-race, a corporate man in whom God's own thoughts and features are reproduced in a moral way, and the man after God's heart is one who does all God's wills and surrenders his own judgments, feelings, and standards to God's will.

Scripture: Psalm 89:19

Topics: "Obedience to God", "Divine Purpose"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that the Bible is filled with men who embody distinct features of God's character, ultimately pointing to Christ. He illustrates how figures like David represent God's thoughts and purposes, particularly in being a man after God's own heart, which involves complete obedience to God's will. Sparks contrasts David with Saul, highlighting that true devotion to God requires the rejection of personal judgment and the natural life that opposes God's work. The sermon culminates in the understanding that the collective body of believers, the Church, is the fulfillment of God's eternal purpose, reflecting His moral nature. Ultimately, the message calls for a heart aligned with God's desires, exemplified in the life of David and fulfilled in Christ.

Transcript

Reading: Ps. 89:19-20; Acts 13:22; Heb. 1:9; 1 Sam. 13:14.

The Bible abounds with men. It abounds with many other things; with doctrine, with principles; but more than anything else it abounds with men. That is God's method, His chosen method, His primary method of making Himself known. These men who were in relationship with God, with whom God was associated, bring distinctive features into view. Not in any one man is the whole man acceptable and every feature to be praised, but in every man there are one or more features that stand out and distinguish him from all others, and abide as the conspicuous features of that man's life. Those outstanding distinctive features represent God's thought, the features which God Himself has taken pains to develop, for which God laid His hand upon such men, that throughout history they should be the expression of certain particular traits.

Thus we speak of Abraham's faith, of the meekness of Moses. Every man is representative of some feature wrought into him, developed in him, and when you think of the man the feature is always uppermost in your mind. Our attention is drawn, not to the man as a whole, but to that which marks him in particular. So by one apostle we are called to recollect the faith of Abraham, while another will bid us remember the patience of Job. These features are God's thoughts, and when all the features of all the

men are gathered up and combined, they represent Christ. It is as though God had scattered one Man over the generations, and in a multitude of men under His hand had shown some aspect, some feature, some facet of that one Man, and that one Man is able to say, "Ye search the scriptures, because ye think that in them ye have eternal life and these are they which bear witness of me..." (John 5:39). There is a Man spread over the Bible, and all who have come under God's hand, have been apprehended for the purpose of showing something of His thought, which in its fulness is expressed in His Son, the Lord Jesus. Recognizing that, we are better able to appreciate the words we have just read, which in the first instance related to David, but are clearly seen to reach beyond to a greater than David. Read again Ps. 89: and you cannot fail to see that two things merge into one another: "I have laid help upon one that is mighty; I have exalted one chosen out of the people". You have to look for a greater than David for the complete expression of that. In the words "I have laid help upon one that is mighty..." we have one of the great foundations of our redemption. A greater than David is here. David in those principal features of his life under God's hand was an expression of God's thought concerning Christ. You cannot carry the statement, "I have found... a man after my heart..." through the whole of David's life, and say that when David was guilty of this and that particular thing which marred his life this was after God's heart. We have to see exactly what it was, in and about David, which made it possible for God to say that he was a man after His own heart. It was just that which indicated Christ, pointed to Christ. It is only that which is Christ which is after God's heart.

The Divine Purpose from Eternity

"The Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart..." (1 Sam. 13:14). Remembering our previous meditations, we shall find a large setting for a statement like that. It speaks of the creation of man, of the Lord seeking to have a man-race, a corporate man in whom His own thoughts and features are reproduced in a moral way. The Lord has ever sought Him that man. It was the seeking of such a man that led to the creation. It was the seeking of such a man that led to the Incarnation. It is that seeking of a man which has led to the Church, the "one new man". God is all the time in quest of a man to fill His universe, not one man as a unity, but a collective man gathered up into His Son. Paul speaks of this man as "...the church, which is his body, the fulness of him..." (Eph. 1:22,23). That is the fulness, the measure of the stature of a man in Christ. It is the Church which is there spoken of, not any one individual. God has ever been in quest of a man to fill His universe.

The Likeness is Moral and Spiritual

God thinks thoughts, desires desires, and wills a will, and those thoughts, and desires, and that will are the very essence of His moral being, and when He has thus reproduced Himself in this sense, He has a being constituted according to His own moral nature; the man becomes an embodiment and personification of the very moral nature of God; not of the Deity of God, but of His moral nature. You know what it is in life to say that anything or anyone is after your own heart. You mean they are just exactly what you think they are and what you want them to be for your own complete satisfaction. The man after God's heart is like that to Him.

Devoted to the Will of God

There is a third thing which defines that to some degree, which puts its finger upon the root of the matter. What is the man after God's heart? What is it that God has sought in man? The verse in Acts tells us: "...who shall do all my will" (Acts 13:22). If you look at the margin you will see that 'will' is plural: "all my

wills" - everything that God desires, everything that God wills, the will of God in all its forms, in all its ways, in all its quests and objectives. The man who will do all His wills is the man after God's heart, whom God has sought. The words are spoken, in the first place, of David. There are several ways in which David as a man after God's heart is brought out into clear relief.

Firstly, David is set in striking contrast with Saul. When God had deposed and set aside Saul, He raised up David. Those two stand opposite to one another and can never occupy the throne together. If David is to come, then Saul must go. If Saul is there, David cannot come. That is seen very clearly in the history, but let us note that in this we are confronted with basic principles, not merely with what is historic and to do with persons of bygone days. Before God there are two moral states, two spiritual conditions, two hearts, and these two hearts can never be in the throne together, can never occupy the princely position at the same time. If one is to be prince, or in the place of ascendancy, of honour, of God's appointment, the other heart has to be completely put away. It is remarkable that even after David was anointed king there was a considerable lapse of time before he came to the throne, during which Saul continued to occupy that position. David had to keep back until that régime had run its course, until it was completely exhausted, finished, and then put aside.

It would be a long, though profitable, study, to go over Saul's life as shown by his outward behaviour. Saul was governed by his own judgments in the things of God. That is one thing. When God commanded Saul to slay Amalek - man, woman, beast, and child; to destroy Amalek root and branch, it was a big test of Saul's faith in God's judgment, God's wisdom, God's knowing of what He was doing, God's honour. If God commands us to do something which on the face of it would seem to deny something in God's own nature of kindness, and goodness, and mercy, and we begin to allow our own judgment to take hold upon God's command and to give another complexion to the matter, to take obedience out of our hearts, we have set our judgment against God's command. In effect we have said: 'The Lord surely does not know what He is doing! Surely the Lord is not alive to the way His reputation will suffer if this is done, the way people will speak of His very morality!' It is a dangerous thing to bring our own moral judgment to bear upon an explicit command of the Lord. Saul's responsibility was not to question why, but to obey. We recall Samuel's word to Saul: "Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. 15:22). The man after God's heart does all His wills, and does not say: 'Lord, this will bring You into reproach! This will bring You into dishonour! This will raise serious difficulties for You!' On the contrary, he replies at once: 'Lord, You have said this; I leave the responsibility for the consequences with You, and obey.' The Lord Jesus always acted so. He was misunderstood for it, but He did it.

Saul was influenced in his conduct by his own feelings, his own likes and dislikes, and preferences. He blamed the people, it is true, but it was he himself who was at fault after all. It was his judgment working through his sentiments. In effect he said: 'It is a great pity to destroy that! Here is something that looks so good, that according to all standards of sound judgment is good, and the Lord says destroy! What a pity! Why not give it to God in sacrifice?' Now we know that it is true of the natural man that there are these two aspects, a good side and a bad. Are we not, on our part, often found saying, in effect: 'Let us hand the good to God!' We are quite prepared for the very sinful side to go, but let us give the good that is in us to the Lord! All our righteousnesses are in His sight as filthy rags. God's new creation is not a patchwork of the old, it is an entirely new thing, and the old has to go. Saul defaulted upon that very thing. He reasoned that the best should be given to God, when God had said: "Utterly destroy."

The man after God's own heart does not make blunders like that. His interrogation of himself is: What has the Lord said? No place is given to any other enquiry - What do I feel about it? How does it seem to me?

He does not say: 'It is a great pity from my standpoint'. No! The Lord has said it, and that is enough. God has sought Him a man who will do all His wills.

So we could pursue the contrast between Saul and David along many lines. We are led to one issue every time. It all points in one direction. Will this man surrender his own judgments, his own feelings, his own standards, his entire being to the will of God, or will he have reservations because of the way in which he views things and questions God?

An Utter Rejection of the Flesh

There is another way in which David stands out as the man after God's own heart, and it is this with which we are especially concerned, and with which we will conclude this part of our meditation. It is that which is to be noted in the first public action of David in the valley of Elah. We refer, of course, to his contest with Goliath. This first public action of David was a representative and inclusive one, just as the conquest of Jericho was with Israel. Jericho, as we know, was representative and inclusive of the conquest of the whole land. There were seven nations to be deposed. They marched round Jericho seven times. Jericho, in spiritual and moral principle, was the embodiment of the whole land. God intended that what was true of Jericho should be true of every other conquest, that the basis should be one of sheer faith; victory through faith, possession through faith.

David's contest with Goliath was like that. It gathered up in a full way everything that David's life was to express. It was the comprehensive disclosure or unveiling of the heart of David. He was a man after God's own heart. God's ground of approval in His choice of men is shown to us in His words to Samuel with reference to another of Jesse's sons: "Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature... the Lord looketh on the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). In the case of David, the heart that God had seen is disclosed in the contest with Goliath, and it was that heart which made David the man after God's own heart all the rest of his life. What is Goliath? Who is he? He is a gigantic figure behind whom all the Philistines hide. He is a comprehensive one, an inclusive one; in effect, the whole Philistine force; for when they saw their champion was dead they fled. The nation is bound up with, and represented by, the man.

What are the Philistines typically? They represent that which is very near to what is of God, always in close proximity, always seeking to impinge upon the things of God; to get a grip, to look into, to pry, to discover the secret things of God. You will recall their attitude toward the Ark when it came into their hands. They were ever seeking to pry into the secrets of God, but always in a natural way. They are called "uncircumcised". That is what David said about Goliath: "this uncircumcised Philistine". We know from Paul's interpretation that typically that means the uncrucified natural life, the natural life which is always seeking to get a grip on the things of God apart from the work of the Cross; which does not recognize the Cross; which sets the Cross aside, and thinks that it can proceed without the Cross into the things of God; which ignores the fact that there is no way into the things of the Spirit of God except through the Cross as an experienced thing, as a power breaking down the natural life and opening a way for the Spirit. There is no possibility whatever of our knowing the secrets of God except by the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit "was not" (we use the word in the particular meaning of John 7:39) until Calvary was accomplished. That must be personal in application, not merely historic. The uncircumcised Philistines simply speak of a natural life which comes alongside the things of God, and is always interfering with them, touching them, looking into them, wanting to get hold of them; a menace to that which is spiritual. Goliath embodies all that. All the Philistines are gathered up into him. David meets him, and the issue, in spiritual interpretation, is this, that David's heart is going to have nothing of that. He sets himself that all things shall be of God,

and nothing of man. There shall be no place for nature here in the things of God, but this natural strength must be destroyed. The Philistines become David's life-long enemies, and he theirs.

Do you see the man after God's heart? Who is he? What is he? He is a man who, though the odds against him be tremendous, sets himself with all his being against that which interferes with the things of God in an 'uncircumcised' way. That which contradicts the Cross of the Lord Jesus, that which seeks to force its way into the realm of God other than by the gate-way of the Cross is represented by the Philistine. Who is this uncircumcised Philistine? David's heart was roused with a mighty indignation against all that was represented by this man.

That constitutes a very big issue indeed. It has not to do merely with a sinful world. There is that in the world which is opposed to God, positively set against God, a sinful state that is recognized and acknowledged by most people. That is all against God, but that is not what we have here. This is something else that is to be found even amongst the Lord's people, and which regards nothing as too sacred to be exploited. It will get into an assembly of saints in Corinth and call forth a tremendous letter of the Apostle about natural wisdom, the wisdom of this world expressing itself as the mentality even of believers, and thus making the Gospel of none effect. This spirit that is not subject to the Cross creeps in and associates itself with the things of God, and takes a purchase upon them. It is not so much that which is blatantly, obviously, and conspicuously sinful, as the natural life which is accounted so fine according to human standards. The Lord's people have always had to meet that in one form or another. Ezra had to meet it. Men came and proffered their help to build the House of God: and how the Church has succumbed to that sort of thing! If anybody offers their help for the work of the Lord, the attitude at once taken is: Oh, well, it is help, which is what we want; let us have all the help we can get! There is no discrimination. Nehemiah had to meet it. There is some help that we are better without. The Church is far better without Philistine association. That is the sort of thing that has assailed the Church all the way through. John, the last surviving Apostle, in his old age writes: "...but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the pre-eminence... receiveth us not..." (3 John 9). You see the significance of that. John was the man of the testimony of Jesus: "I John... was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God and the testimony of Jesus". The great word of John's writings is 'life': (John 1:4); "...this life is in his Son" (1 John 5:11). Diotrephes could not bear with that. If Christ is coming in, Diotrephes, who loveth to have the pre-eminence, must go out; if he that loveth to have the pre-eminence is coming in, then Christ is kept out.

The man after God's own heart is the man who will have no compromise with the natural mind; not only with what is called sin in its more positive forms, but with all that natural life which tries to get hold of the work of God and the interests of God, to handle and to govern them. This has been the thing that has crippled and paralysed the Church through the centuries; men insinuating themselves into the place of God in His Church.

You see what David stands for. He will take the head off that giant. There has to be no compromise with this thing; it must go down in the name of the Lord.

The Price of Loyalty

Now notice this, that for his devotion David had to suffer. This man, who alone saw the significance of that with which he had to do, this man who alone had the thoughts of God in his heart, the conceptions of God, the feelings of God, the insight of God; this man who alone with Samuel amongst all the people of Israel in that dark day of spiritual weakness and declension was on the side of God, seeing things in a true way,

has to suffer for it. As he came upon the scene, and, with his perception and insight into what was at stake betraying itself in his indignation, his wrath, his zeal for the Lord, began to challenge this thing, his own brethren turned upon him. How? In the cruellest way for any such man, the way most calculated to take the heart out of any true servant of God. They imputed wrong motives. They said in effect: You are trying to make a way for yourself; trying to get recognition for yourself; trying to be conspicuous! You are prompted by personal interests, personal ambitions! That is a cruel blow. Every man who has come out against that which has usurped God's place in any way, and stood alone for God against the forces that prevail, has come under that lash. To Nehemiah it was said: 'You are trying to make a name for yourself, to get prophets to set you on high and proclaim through the country that there is a great man called Nehemiah in Jerusalem!' Similar things were said of Paul. Misrepresentation is a part of the price. David's heart was as free from any such thing as any heart could be. He was set upon the Lord, the Lord's glory, the Lord's satisfaction, but even so, men will say: 'It is all for himself, his own name, his own reputation, his own position.' That is more calculated to take the heart out of a man than a good deal of open opposition. If only they would come out and fight fairly and squarely in the open! But David did not succumb; the giant did! May the Lord give us a heart like David's, for that is a heart like His own.

We see in David a reflection of the Lord Jesus, who was eaten up by zeal for the Lord's House, who paid the price for His zeal, and who was, in a sense above all others, the Man after God's own heart.

It has not been our intention to make this a study of the life of David, but just to show how the Horizon of Christ reaches backward as well as forward in all God's thoughts.

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