

The Horizon of Divine Purpose - Part 1

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the concept of divine purpose, highlighting the all-governing purpose of God and the mighty energy of the Spirit in realizing that purpose.

Duration: 59:58

Scripture: Exodus 19:5, Exodus 34:14, Numbers 25:1-3, Deuteronomy 7:6, Isaiah 5:13, Jeremiah 50:1-2, Ezekiel 1:26

Topics: "Divine Purpose"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of seeing the person and purpose as interconnected. They express a strong burden for delivering this message and believe it is crucial for the current time. The speaker mentions the presence of defilement and corruption in the world and the need to return to a pure testimony to God. They refer to the major and minor prophets in the Bible, highlighting their focus on specific characteristics of God. The sermon concludes with the reminder that the battle for testimony revolves around the impact of the Lord's presence, emphasizing the necessity of recognizing and meeting Him.

Transcript

Three or four brief passages of scripture, two of which are in the prophecies of Ezekiel. Prophecies of Ezekiel, chapter one, at verse 26. And above the firmament that was over their heads was the likeness of a throne, as the appearance of sapphire stone, and upon the likeness of the throne was a likeness as the appearance of a man upon it.

Above the last chapter of those prophecies, chapter 48, verse 35, there shall be 18,000 reeds round about. The name of the city from that day shall be the Lord is there. The letter to the Ephesians, chapter one, at verse nine.

Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure, which he pompous in him, that is in Christ, unto a dispensation of the fullness of the times, to sum up all things in Christ, the things in the heavens, the things upon the earth, in him I say, in whom also we were made a heritage, having been foreordained according to the purpose of him, who worketh all things after the counsel of his will, to the end that we should be unto the praise of his glory, we who had before hoped in Christ, in whom ye also, having heard the word of the truth, the gospel of your salvation, in whom having also believed, ye were sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise, which is an earnest of our inheritance, unto the redemption of God's own possession, unto the praise of his glory. Chapter three, verse fourteen, for this cause I bow my

knees unto the Father, that he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, he may be strengthened with power through his Spirit in the inward man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, to the end that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be strong to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye may be filled unto all the fullness of God. We are going, dear friends, at this time to be occupied with matter which so clearly springs into light as we read such passages of those which have just been before us, the great governing reality of divine purpose.

In our last time together at Easter, at which, yes, at Easter, we were occupied with what we then called the horizon of Christ. Christ, the horizon of all things. Now we follow with what is the complement of that, the horizon of divine purpose.

And in saying that, of course, we do not set aside Christ as the horizon of all things, but we only bring alongside of him that which is the complement of himself, the purpose, as we have read, which God has purpose in him. The person and the purpose are complementary. They make one whole.

To see, to rightly see the person is to see the purpose. For the purpose is but the extension of the person. The person is explained and defined in the purpose.

These two go together. And may I here pause for this personal emphasis. I am very heavily burdened with the sense of the importance of this word for our time.

I think I could say that I have never been more conscious of being gardened with a message for the hour. I say that only to draw you away from a great deal of material may be employed to the essential importance of our meditation. What I have on my heart to say, I trust, will be an inspiration.

I trust that it will be an encouragement, an incentive. I trust that it will be instructive, but I know that it's going to be challenging. It may be correction, may be rebuke, it may cause some offense, but it's got to be said.

We have read from Ezekiel, we're going to be occupied very much with Ezekiel's message. The word of the Lord to Ezekiel in commissioning him was, son of man, speak unto them whether they will hear or whether they will forbear. Speak unto them, son of man.

I trust that that second part is quite unnecessary here. There will be no forbearing to hear. Believe we are here in the main because we want to hear, whatever it means.

And so I ask you, come with me into this most serious and important of all considerations, the horizon of divine purpose. In the scriptures which we have just read, you will have noticed that they resolve themselves into two couplets. In Ezekiel, the beginning.

The beginning of everything, a throne and a man upon it. That is the beginning, the throne and its occupant. The last word in those prophecies in that whole book is indeed the end.

The Lord is there. And everything that comes between the beginning and the end is directed toward moving toward that end. That end, which is the end of all things.

It's not only the end of Ezekiel's prophecies. It's the end of all the content of the ages. The last thing that will be said will be, the Lord is there.

That is the ultimate expression of that throne. That is the triumph of that throne. That is just what the throne is for.

To secure for the Lord a place of eternal habitation, in satisfaction, in joy, in pleasure, under the throne. Everything has that in view as its end. The Lord is there.

Where? Well, in Ezekiel. You know the closing chapters are occupied with the house and with the kingdom. The New Testament is occupied with that.

The end is the house and the kingdom and the Lord is there. The end, I have said, is the issue of all the activities of the throne. And that end shows what everything under that throne is moving toward.

There's a great deal under that throne, as this extensive book of its 48 chapters makes perfectly clear. A great deal indeed. But one thing explaining this and that and everything.

The end. The Lord is there. Dear friends, if you and I want an interpretation, the divine interpretation of everything in our history, experience, and in this world, the answer is there.

A throne about to be set up is governing and governing toward one end. And that end, with all that is contrary to it, vanquished and expelled. And the Lord is there.

The answer to every challenge. The answer to everything that seeks to put him out or deny him a place in you, in me. In his church, in the world.

The answer is, at last, in spite of everything, the Lord is there. We have often here said, at last, some of us will look at one another and say, well, we are here. We never thought we would get here.

Or at times, we thought we'd never get here. That is the glory. At times, when it looked very doubtful, many questions, but something more than that is, the Lord is here.

For if you and I have had our progress toward glory, challenged, impeded, and assailed many a conflict and many a doubt, what about the Lord and that throne? All the universe seems to have been stabbed against that throne. It is so today. It's the explanation of everything that's going on.

There's a hand against that throne. There's a mighty power against that throne. The Lord is being greatly challenged in your heart and my heart, in our lives as Christians, in the church.

He's being challenged. His place is being disputed. If he can be displaced, then hell will displace him and leave no stone unturned to do it.

If he can be kept from coming into his ultimate full place, then there's plenty in this universe to make it so. Neither he nor we are going to be there without the greatest, the most immense victory in this universe that ever has been. And to shout at the end of all this, and those of you who are familiar with the book of Ezekiel, you know what a lot is in it.

What a lot is in it. The Lord, what a lot the Lord has to overcome in his people, with his people. And in the kingdoms of this world, when you get through it all, every incident and detail, and then right at the last word, the Lord is there.

That's no small thing. It is the triumph of the throne which is set above. The beginning, the end.

You will notice that in the beginning it is individual. It is that man on the throne. We may say in the light of this whole book, a rather lonely figure.

When you get to the end of the book, you have a people. You have a people, a kingdom, a whole corporate company, in glory, with him, in service. That's the triumph of the throne.

Now you turn to the so-called letter to the Ephesians. You wonder why I put it like that. Perhaps some of you know, because you are scholars in the world.

For others, let me say that this letter was not specifically, specifically sent to Ephesus. It was a circular letter. You read the end of the letter to the Colossians, and you find that the apostle refers to two circular letters, which he wanted to be read in the churches of Asia.

And undoubtedly this is one of them. And I say that now, not just to make a technical point, because there's a very vital point here in this. The message is to the churches.

All that is here is to the churches. And the local churches are back. And the local churches have got to hear all about this, and come to line with it.

We reserve that for presently. In what is called the letter to the Ephesians then, the title has to be given to it, purposes of reference. We begin chapter one with the exalted one, and have to raise him up, set him at his own right hand, far above all rule and authority.

Here is the throne again, and the man upon it, above. When you get to the end of this matchless letter, for never in all the writings under the spirit of God has there been anything to equal this document. You get to the end.

That individual is with his church, and his church is with him in glory. Beginning individually, ending corporately, but the end is the issue and triumph of that throne. The church is to come there with him in glory.

That is quite clear, isn't it, in these two letters. That common factor justifies our bringing together Ezekiel and Ephesians. They are both documents of the throne, and its mighty issue in the place where the Lord is, and is in fullness of satisfaction.

The Lord is there. Now there are two things which arise very clearly, stand out in clear relief in this connection. One is that there is a purpose over all things, and in all things, an all-governing purpose.

You're so familiar with that word, with such language, that perhaps it fails to strike a chord in you, but I ask you, dear friends, are we not sometimes tempted, even we Christians, to wonder whether there is a purpose in all this that's happening to us, that we're going through? Where is the purpose in it? So often it seems purposeless. Should I put it in another way or use another word? Is there a meaning attached to all this that's going on? In our own experience? In the experience of companies of the Lord's people? In the experience of the church? In all that is happening in the world? Is there a meaning? Is there a purpose? Now here you have the categorical statement that he works all things after the counsel of his own will, and you will notice that in that presenting of the man in the throne, it's in every realm, heaven and in earth, in every realm, it's the things celestial, the things mundane, and the things satanic. He is working to a purpose.

Make no mistake about it. We've got to get hold of this anew. We'll be in complete confusion, bewilderment, and utter weakness, unless we are sure on this one thing.

There's a meaning in what's happening. There's a purpose to which that throne is working in all things, all things according to his purpose. That is the thing under which we are going to be gathered, I think, mainly in these days.

The all-governing purpose. The second thing that comes so clearly to light in these two books, and of course everywhere else, but here it stands out so conspicuously. The mighty energy of the Spirit of God.

The mighty energy of the Spirit. No one who has read the prophecies of Ezekiel has failed to see that here is a book of the energies of the Spirit of God. We shall come back to this, of course, a great deal.

We mentioned when you take out this letter to the Ephesians, you meet the Holy Spirit. You meet those energies strengthened with all might by his Spirit in the inward man. A fragment but a mighty fragment.

Here we are then in the presence of these energies of the Spirit of God in relation to this all-governing. Of course they're here in two connections. In Ezekiel we have Israel.

The historical, earthly, and temporal side of this great truth of purpose and Holy Spirit energy. In Ephesians and elsewhere it's the church, not Israel. And here within the realm, not of the historical and earthly and temporal, but the eternal.

The heavenly, spiritual. But although that may be true in two realms, earthly and heavenly, the principle is the same. The truth is identical.

A great purpose is in view. And the Spirit of God is committed with all his energy to realize that divine purpose. The end.

All that it means, of course, it's just a statement. In the Hebrew it's the name Jehovah Shammah. The Lord is there.

Oh, how comprehensive that is. What a lot there is in that. Now, in both cases, Israel and the church, there is this common thing.

They were both chosen by God for one purpose. And that purpose? The testimony of God in this universe. Israel was chosen for that.

The church is chosen for that. And both Israel and the church are dealt with by God in the light of that one inclusive purpose. Look at God's dealings with Israel.

Many-sided dealings. Long, patiently drawn-out dealings. All his dealings with Israel in the light of the purpose for which Israel was chosen.

The testimony of God in this world. Enlarge the horizon, and you see that the church is chosen, not as a thing of time and the earth, but chosen in him before the foundation of the world. And for this identical purpose, the testimony of God in this universe.

What does God's dealings with us? With you, with me, with his people, with his church? What is it? To recognize it is truly to be helped. To fail to see it is to miss the way entirely and wander and wander as

Israel wandered. What is the Lord doing with you, with me? Why is he dealing with us as he is? Why all these dealings of God with us to at last, at last have us, individually and together with all others, to form that holy sanctuary as a place where he can be without restraint, without limit, without any clouds or shadows, where it can be said of you, me, and of all believers, the Lord is there.

The Lord is there. And dear friends, if we have the most simple, fragmentary experience of that, what a blessing it is. Is it not true that our one coveting and longing and yearning is the presence of the Lord? The presence of the Lord.

We set that forth as the very first thought when we come together. We know that everything depends upon that. But if that is realized, everything's all right.

If only we in our individual Christian lives know the Lord is with us, what a lot we can stand up to, and go through, and to have that as not something periodic, occasional, coming and going in consciousness, but in fullness and everlasting fullness, without any variations at all, everlasting full consciousness of the presence of the Lord and no other presence. That is surely the end to which our hearts reach out. What is true day by day is the object of our hearts forever.

The Lord may be present. If, in the company of the Lord's people, people can come in and say, well, this or that, whatever you've got to say, you meet the Lord there. The Lord is there.

That's the answer to everything. What more do you want? Without that, have everything, and you have nothing. Yes, he's dealing with us in this way to this end.

As with Israel, so with his church and its members. Now, this is the divine revelation. This, with all that it demands, and all the means and the methods the Lord has ordained for realizing it, this, dear friends, is a mystery which has been revealed.

This is the purpose which he has purposed in Christ Jesus, to gather together all things in him. This is the revelation which has come in this dispensation peculiarly. The purpose of the ages, as it's called here, the purpose of the ages is this.

And I do stress and underline that it's the revelation. I could enlarge upon it with much detail, but it's in this letter to the Ephesians. The eyes of your heart be enlightened, that you may know what is the hope of his calling.

What is it? If you were asked, put down in few words, what is the hope of his calling? What would you answer? The riches of his inheritance in the saints. What would you answer? The riches of his inheritance in the saints. What are they? What is his wealth of inheritance in the church? What is the exceeding greatness of his power to us all who believe? What is it? What does it mean? Is it abstract, or is it concrete and positive? The answer is this.

This is the revelation, what God is doing and going to have at last. There's nothing tentative about this. The Holy Spirit is committed with all his divine energy to this thing, and he's working at it, in you and in me, on you and in me.

This is the revelation, the eternal purpose, as it is called. Now, we have that revelation. We have it embodied, encased in this volume.

It's there. For the Holy Spirit to reveal to our hearts. If we are men and women of the Spirit, you notice what we read? And hath given us the Spirit? And hath given us the Spirit? And hath sealed us with the Spirit, which is the earnest of our inheritance.

For the moment, my stress upon that is this, and this is where we must take notice, where we may not be quite so pleased. For here, both in the case of Israel and in the history of the church, one thing does spring to light and become very evident. It is this, there is no substitute for light once given by God.

Are you people? There is no substitute for light that God has once given. Unfaithfulness to light given results inevitably and unavoidably in confusion, in weakness, in bonding, in limitation, and in the suspense of everything to a state of tentativeness. All these, mark you, are the features in Israel's case of Babylon.

They had the revelation. The light was given, and they were unfaithful to what God had made known as the purpose for which they had been chosen. Unfaithful to the light.

Result? A nation in confusion. See them. Complete confusion.

The ox knoweth his tool, and the ass is creeper. My people are worse than oxen and asses. Confusion.

Is Babylon confusion in its whole history? We'll be lost. Disobedient. Confusion.

Weakness. Are they in weakness in Babylon? This nation? No doubt about it. They have no strength.

They can just do nothing. They are hopeless and impotent. Are they in bondage? No question about that.

Is there limitation? And what is the one thing that is in the air all the time? It's just this tentativeness. Suspense of everything. Waiting for something.

Waiting for something. Day after day, month after month, year after year, waiting, waiting. Everything in a state of suspense.

Longing? Yes. Crying? Yes. But everything is held up.

Everything is held up. The light given has not found the faithfulness on their part. It's impressive, is it not, when the prophet Isaiah sees the day when all this is going to be changed? And they're coming back.

He cries, arise, shine, for thy light has come. Thy light has come. That's the way back.

That's the way out of all these conditions. Light. Conditions are the result of unfaithfulness to light.

And there is no substitute for light once given. Lay that upon you. No substitute.

Whatever you may try to bring in. Build up. Arrange and order.

If there's been unfaithfulness to the revelation of God. Someone has said that the church in the first century was power conscious. The church in the 20th century is problem conscious.

Never was a truer word spoken. I certainly cannot improve on that. Neither would I try.

But I could paraphrase it and say that the church in the first century was purpose conscious. And the church in the 20th century is perplexity conscious. Isn't that true? Power conscious.

Purpose or problem and perplexity conscious. That's where we are. In the latter, so largely, will you challenge that? Are we power conscious? How much we've got of truth and teaching and what not.

But our consciousness is lack of power. Real lack of power. How conscious we are.

Problem and perplexity. Rather than of. When anything, listen, when anything becomes something in itself.

Turning its teaching, its doctrine into a circle. Going round and round and round. Rather than as a means leading to a great divine end.

Bigger than itself. Bigger than the teaching, than the doctrine, than the practice of everything. The great end to which it is intended to lead.

When that happens, then you're in Babylon. Then everything comes into straightness and limitation. Powerlessness.

And rather than a purpose it's an existence. From week to week an existence without a mighty purpose. Are we going to look at this matter much more closely as we go on? This matter of lost distinctiveness of testimony.

The distinctiveness of testimony is demanded by God is unmistakable when you read the Bible. If there is one thing that the Bible says about this, and they ponder about this, mixture is an abomination to God. He has prescribed against it in the old law.

No mixture. Symbolic laws in which spiritual principles were embedded. And you notice that it's just this, just this that was the battleground all the time.

When Balaam was unable to curse, he seduced. And by the seduction the mixture came into his trial. And the worst curse that Balaam could pronounce came upon the people.

Terrible results. It's ever-threatening this thing. Even with the remnant that came back.

You read the book of Nehemiah. All that wonderful recovery work in that book. But you've not got through before you're up against this thing again.

Mixtures got in. The enemies on the outside were kept at bay. They could do nothing while this people was pure in heart.

Inside of a single eye and a single motive. No enemy on the outside could do anything. But being defeated, the great enemy behind all enemies said, I'm evidently not going to make any headway from the outside.

I must get on the inside. And that's what he did. And got mixture on the inside.

You know a new form of battle started up then. Far more serious manners. Yet mixed motives.

Mixed ideas. Mixed views. Mixed purposes inside.

And you've gone to pieces. Confusion. Confusion was then in the Old Testament.

One hesitates to be censorious or critical. But I think we should not be far from the truth if we said the weakness, tentativeness, suspense, frustration, confusion amongst the Lord's own people in our time may be traced very largely to this lack of a singleness of motive. Put it the other way, mixture.

The mixed multitude, it says of old Mormon, the mixed multitude. Division, contradiction on the inside. Disastrous.

Most disastrous. God demands what he calls purity. That is singleness of mind, of heart, of purpose.

Singleness of I. No mixture. The Bible shouts that from the house. Notice that the word that is frequently used concerning Israel by the Lord himself is that word peculiar.

Peculiar. Ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me. The Lord hath chosen you to be a peculiar people.

The Hebrew word segalo means an enclosure. An enclosure. Now you put up a fence.

An enclosure. Because that inside is peculiarly yours. No one else's.

That to you inside is peculiarly valuable. You want to protect it, keep it, care for it, guard it. So you put up an enclosure because of its value, its preciousness, and of its purpose.

That's the word. You are a peculiar, an enclosed people. A shut off people.

For me, my peculiar treasure separated you and thrown a hedge around you for a purpose to be mine in a peculiar way. We have the same word in the New Testament. You know in Titus and in 1 Peter that word peculiar is used again, quotation from the Old Testament by Peter.

But the Greek word is also interesting. It means something that has been acquired as out of the ordinary. Something out of the ordinary which has been acquired.

Secured unto the Lord. A peculiar people. Different.

Apart. It's the Lord's idea of his people. Israel was a distinct race from all the peoples of the earth because of a distinct purpose for which Israel was chosen.

A distinctive testimony in this world. In the New Testament, Christians became known as the people of the way. The people of the way.

How did they get that? The world outside called them that, gave them that name, the people of the way. They recognized that they were different. They were different.

Their way was different. Their way of life. Everything with them was different.

The people of the way. A single way. Clearly defined way.

The way of a specific testimony for God in this universe. The whole work of the Hebrew prophets related to this one thing. Read again.

Hooks of the prophets. You'll find it all focuses upon this thing. Defilement.

Corruption. Mixture has come in. The cry of the prophet is, put away, put away.

Their whole work for which they lived, poured themselves out, and suffered, and some died, was to get this people back onto its pure ground for this pure testimony to God in this world. The four, what we call, major prophets. How they thunder on this.

They bring into view four of the major characteristics of God. I'm not going to tell you what they are. You can look at it.

Four of the major characteristics of God from out through. The four major prophets. The twelve called minor, simply because they're packed into a smaller compass, not because they're less important.

But the twelve. Look again and you'll find that every one of them has some particular feature of God that he is concerned with. They all together, the four and the twelve, combined to focus upon this one thing.

Absolute purity for the sake of an effective testimony for God in this world. Theirs was a challenge to recover the distinctiveness of testimony for which they were called. Now, distinctiveness of testimony, unless you misunderstand and misinterpret, does not mean some testimony distinct from the whole purpose of God.

It does not. The very word or phrase distinctiveness of testimony only arises when the general thing has lost distinctiveness. God is seeking to recover it.

Somewhere he must have it. It's not something particular and peculiar as apart from all the rest that God is doing. It is the heart of everything for God.

Distinctiveness of testimony is not some teaching, some form of practice, some method of procedure. It certainly is not some exclusiveness of fellowship. It is the clear, pure expression of the life of the Spirit of God amongst his people where that river crystal clear is flowing unhindered.

The river of life where the registration is. Though now imperfect and to some large degree limited, yet leading toward the ultimate fullness, the Lord is there. That's the testimony.

None of us with all our generosity and magnanimity and largeness of heart will say that that is the general characteristic amongst the Lord's people. The Lord is there. No.

Distinctiveness of testimony is just that. The Lord is there. There's no mistake about it.

For now, dear friends, I must break up there for the time being. Come back later, if the Lord's will, to some of the major factors in this distinctiveness of testimony. Let me close for the present by reminding you that the whole battle rages around this thing, this one thing, rages to spoil this impact of the presence of the Lord.

Oh, if it does come about that the Lord's presence is not felt, sensed, recognized and met, whatever else there may be, the testimony is gone. It's gone. Anything else being met, whether it be good, bad or indifferent, cannot make up for it.

Only one thing, the Lord is there. We've got to lay that to heart personally. I solemnly lay it to heart myself.

You do it. One thing for which we must labor and pray and suffer and pour ourselves out is this, not to have something, however great, but that the Lord's presence is the preeminent thing where we are gathered together, or where we are. Remember, this is the great triumph over the universal battle.

Oh, yes. The failure, the very feature of the fall, the great fall at the beginning, the mark of the satanic triumph then, was the loss of distinctiveness everywhere. Struck into man, it became something mixed.

It struck into the earth, it became something mixed. Two things working against each other, in man, in nature. We know how universal that is.

Mixture and contradiction, loss of distinctiveness, the mark of satan's interference. It's always like that. In our own life, individually, if there's a loss of distinctiveness of testimony, that's the finger of satan.

In our life, even in our company, the Lord's people, there's the loss of this. All who are spiritually alive and sensitive and safe, the Lord is there. If that is not true, if that is not true, satan has done the thing which he ever set out to do from the beginning, and it's along this line.

Suffer the word. I said it may cause offense, well, let it. It's necessary, but we need these days, dear friends, to get onto ground where God is with us.

God is with us. We need to get onto the line of the mighty energies of the Holy Spirit. That's our only hope, our only hope.

And the way of his presence, the way of his energies, the way of clear-cut distinctiveness of life.

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