

The Horizon of Divine Purpose - Part 5

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the concept of the great divide between life and death, and how the Lamb's Book of Life is the key to eternal destiny.

Duration: 53:30

Scripture: Exodus 32:31-32, Philippians 4:3, Hebrews 12:23, Revelation 13:8, Revelation 17:8, Revelation 20:15, Revelation 21:27

Topics: "Divine Purpose"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the concept of life as portrayed in the Bible. He emphasizes that man's disobedience led to the withholding of a completing factor, resulting in a life marked by vanity and unfulfilled quests. The speaker highlights the importance of life as the ultimate criterion and the key theme throughout the Bible. He points out that the purpose of Jesus' incarnation was to provide humanity with this life. The sermon encourages listeners to test and experience this life for themselves, as it brings true satisfaction and fulfillment.

Transcript

I want to bring a number of fragments of the Word of God together, one in the Old Testament and the others in the New. From the Old Testament, in the book of the Exodus, chapter 32 and verses 31 and 32. And Moses returned unto the Lord and said, O, this people have sinned, a great sin.

Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin, and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of thy book which thou hast written. To the New Testament, to the letter of Paul to the Philippians, chapter 4, verse 3. I beseech thee also, true yoke fellow, help these women, for they laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life. The letter to the Hebrews, chapter 12, at verse 23.

Ye are come to the general assembly and church of the firstborn, who are enrolled in heaven. The book of the Revelation, chapter 13, verse 8. And all that dwell on the earth shall worship him, everyone whose name hath not been written in the book of life of the Lamb, that hath been slain from the foundation of the world. Chapter 17, verse 8. The beast that thou sawest was, and is not, and is about to come up out of the abyss, and to go into perdition.

They that dwell on the earth shall wonder, they whose name hath not been written in the book of life from the foundation of the world. Chapter 20, verse 12. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened, and another book was opened, which is the book of life.

The dead were judged out of the things which were written in the books according to their works. Verse 15. And if any was not found written in the book of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.

Chapter 21, and verse 27. And there shall in no wise enter into it anything unclean, or that maketh an abomination and a lie, but only they which are written in the Lamb's book of life. The Lamb's book of life.

You will see that with that last fragment we are near the end. The whole story of the ages of this world. And things are being gathered up for the end.

Everything is being drawn together and is being put into very precise and concise statements. It's a very great and comprehensive everything. Because here in these words, Sonia, the end, we have two words which are the key, not only to the whole Bible, but to the whole history of God's relationship with this world.

Those two words are the Lamb and life. The Lamb, life. The Lamb's book of life is the whole clause.

The Bible is all about the Lamb and life. We are going to begin where this fragment ends. Life.

For that is the great word. That is the all-inclusive thing. Life.

That is the issue from beginning to end. The Bible is a record. Almost from its commencement to its very close are the tremendous conflict.

It's a book of conflict. Forces inimical to one another are found ever active, relentlessly active, throughout this whole volume and throughout all the history that it covers. And if we ask, what is it all about? What is all this? What is the meaning of this whole thing? The answer is found in that one word.

That's the issue about which the contention is going on. It's what the Bible calls and means by life. Life.

For the Bible's meaning for life, as it is mentioned in such passages as those we have read, the Book of Life, the Lamb's Book of Life, the Bible's meaning for life is quite a different thing from what we call life, man calls life, what the world calls life. This Bible word is a very discriminating thing. It divides the whole race at all times in the history of the race.

That word divides into two categories. Category of those who have that life and the category of those who have not. One great discriminating fact in human history, the race of mankind, life or its opposite, death.

And again, what the Bible means by death is not what man thinks of as death. Just as this life is so much greater thing than the world means and understands by the word, so the Bible word for death, as we may see before we are finished, is a very, very much bigger thing than just the body dying and going into the grave. That, by the way, this word is a very discriminating word.

It decides between man and man, this class and that. There was a point, as the Bible shows, at which this great divide commenced. The opening chapters of the Bible bring that historic event out very clearly.

God had created man and we understand from much more of the Bible that man was not complete when he came from the hand of God. There was still something to be added to make him complete. He was

complete so far as he went, but that was not far enough to satisfy God.

And in the symbolic presentation of the great spiritual divine truths, God put that something which was needed to make him complete in a position where the man could on certain terms, on certain grounds, have it and become complete. But it was possible for the man not to come onto that ground, but rather to ignore it or violate it, fail to come to the terms of its possession. So he was put on probation under test about this thing, this something that was for his completing.

We know the story. He failed. He disobeyed.

And then that which was the symbol of this supreme, this superlative, this consummate factor for his completing was put away beyond his reach. And he was separated from it so that he could not have it. In his disobedience, the great divide took place.

There is this that God meant him to have, but it's in an enclosure now and he cannot have it in that state of fallenness. And here is he, out in the world, incomplete. We have words that we use to express, define that.

We say that man in his own heart of hearts is not a satisfied creature. He's a dissatisfied creature, discontented creature. He's always wanting something that he feels belongs to him and he ought to have, and he can't get it.

He labors, strains, works, and does everything to try and get hold of that something, but it eludes him all the time. And he knows that until he has it, he is not complete. There's something lacking in his very being which keeps him in this intropic state.

The Bible calls that condition vanity. Now our English word conveys a different idea from what the Bible means by vanity. Vanity with us is perhaps self-importance, self-consciousness, getting ourselves up in a way to make an impression and so on.

We call it people's vanity and we'd say they're very vain, but the Bible doesn't mean like that by this word. The Bible means something that cannot be put into one word. It means that you're always craving and working and striving for something that eludes you when you never get it, can never put your hand on it.

You go on through life like that and many die. They die with this, somehow I have missed the way, I have missed what was meant for me and what I was meant for. It's vanity.

It's all in vain. That something was this life spoken of by the Bible. That peculiar, particular, unique thing that God meant man to have.

Now dear friends, it's not for me, not my desire for one moment to indulge in theories and philosophies of life, to get out into that world of mental concepts. I like and must bring this thing to the test all the way along, step by step. And we must have the evidence and the proof of what we are seeing.

And in this little hall tonight, with this comparatively small company of people, the majority, if asked to do so, would stand up and with beaming faces say, I know it is true that since I received that gift, my heart has been satisfied. I have found what my nature craves for, what my life wants, to open up to it the way of satisfaction. This can be put to the test at any time.

If you don't know, you can put it to the test in this very hour and know it. And by the way, this great divide took place at a certain time in the history of the race. Through man's disobedience, there was withheld from him this great completing factor.

His life became marked by this vanity in his heart, in his labors, in all his quests. It was something that he could never get hold of, eluding him all the way. This is the factor, the great transcendent reality, which becomes the final, the ultimate criterion of everything.

That is why the Bible ends on this note, as just an aside, a parenthesis. If you have not done it, you Christians or anyone else, take your book of the Revelation and underline the word life or living. See what your book looks like when you've done it.

It's a great issue. And because this is the last book of the Bible, and because, as we have said, we are moving here to the end of everything in the history of this present world, this matter of life comes up like this in clear, strong relief, becomes the issue. It's the issue.

It's the one thing to which everything else has moved, about which everything else has been speaking, to which it has been pointing. This is it. All the Bible and all history has centered in this one tremendous issue.

It is the ultimate criterion. The chapter we read tonight from this book shows, and passages that we read show, that the great divide in the greater size at the end comes to light on the one side, a great multitude who go away into judgment. Judgment are those who have not this life.

They are, their names are not found written in the Lamb's book of life. On the other side, a great multitude, a great multitude. There's no man to number.

These are before the throne, God and the Lamb. These are they whose names are found in the Lamb's book of life. They have this life.

It began right back there, the divide. It has become the criterion of the ages, and at last it's the criterion of eternal destiny, this question, this matter of life. This, dear friends, is the total and consummate explanation of the incarnation of God's Son.

That is the total explanation of why the Son of God, whom we know as Jesus the Christ, came into this world in man form. He stands right at the center of history. There's one from heaven.

He stands with one arm outstretched, reaching back over all the past to that tragedy at the beginning, that terrible tragedy. He reaches with one hand right back there, and with the other he reaches right on to the end, to the consummation. And standing in the midst of the ages, embracing all history and mankind, he cries, I am come that they might have life.

Clear implication is they haven't got it. No need for me to come from heaven if they've got it. They haven't got it.

The explanation of my coming is all summed up in this one word, life, I am come that they might have life. It is the full meaning of the incarnation of God's Son. Now, of course, I could just go on for a week of years to speak about this life, what it is, its character and so on.

I'm not going to say more about it for the moment than just to bring you to this fact, that this divides men. You either have this particular life or you have not, and you have not got it by nature, by your natural birth. You have another kind of life of which the Bible speaks and the original language of the Bible makes it perfectly clear by the different words that it uses for life.

There is that word which just means the life of all men naturally, word from which we get our word, our scientific word, biology, the Greek word bios, animal life, just ordinary human life. That's one thing. All people have that by natural birth, but that's not the word and that's not the thing that is spoken of here.

The Lamb's Book of Life, it's another word altogether because it's another thing altogether that no person by nature possesses. You do not have it. You may have the highest birth, the best birth naturally, come from the best stock, but nature shouts this one thing that you cannot inherit this life from your mother or your father.

That's the problem and the perplexity of heredity, isn't it? Sainly parents, saintly grandparents, may be generations of saints and yet this generation, black sheep, no saintliness at all. Oh no, you don't inherit this even from godly parents. They may know this life.

They may have it. It may have done for them the great thing that it does and you are born of them and you haven't got it. You cannot, you cannot just rest upon what your parents had.

You may be brought up in the environment of godliness, Christliness, but that doesn't mean you inherit this life. Something that you yourself alone with god have precisely to receive as a gift from him. Well, that's the great issue with which so much in time and so much in eternity is bound up.

I take the middle word of the three, the Lamb's Book of Life, the book. You would have noticed from the passages we read and they are only a very minute selection, that this is a bible idea, this book idea. It may be symbolic.

I don't stay to be troubled with whether it is literal or symbolical. There is something here that has a very real meaning. What does it mean? Well, what I mean by what I just said is this, that none of us think that god has to keep a book in order to remember, literally keep a book in order to remember.

God knows everything and remembers everything. We are sometimes impressed with some people's prodigious memory. The names they remember, the faces they remember, the incidents that they remember.

My, we just, some of us, especially when we are trading out in this matter, are greatly impressed by the memory that some people have, what they have stored up there that they can call up at any moment. But think of god. If this is true of finite man, how much more, infinitely more true must it be of god? He doesn't forget.

Only what he wants to forget. Thank god there is that that he wants to forget. He wants to forget and he does forget.

The scripture tells us that he will remember the transgressions of his people no more. No more. He would put them behind his back, as a way of speaking.

He will cast them into the depth of the sea. He would put them out of memory. He can do that.

We wish we could forget a lot of these. God can forget what he wants to forget, but what he does not want to forget, he has the righteous, it says, in everlasting remembrance. Very descriptive ways of saying these things in the bible.

Can a woman forget her child, the child of her womb? Yes, she may forgetful be, yet will I not remember, not forget thee? I have graven thee upon the palms of my hand. The book, whether it be symbolic or literal, we need not argue, it is certainly a way, a way of putting into vivid, illustrative form, this great truth of God's remembrance. God's having in remembrance.

And what is it that he has in remembrance when it comes to this book? The Lamb's Book of Life. There are many books. We read about them.

Books were opened. The books were opened. But another book was opened.

The books, ah, they are the books of tragedy, and the books of doom, judgment. But another book, which is the Book of Life. Here is something that God has always in memory, something that he knows, something that he identifies.

When we want to confirm, ascertain, make sure as to people, we go to the books, to the records. We go, in our country here, to Somerset House. Where all the birth certificates are.

We want to identify, here are people who bear a certain name. Is it so and so? Well, let's go and see. See the book.

We identify the people by the book. The book is a book of identification. This Lamb's Book of Life is the book, speaking again symbolically, of those whom God identifies as belonging to this certain category, being of this certain kind, being in this particular class, as being different from all the rest, as marked out a singular people.

God knows them. God knows them. God has them, so to speak, on record.

You notice all the words we've read about this. Paul, speaking of these fellow workers, these yoke fellows, and those who had helped him, he spoke of them, whose names are written in heaven, whose names are in the book of life. This book of the Revelation is just that.

Now then, the work of identification is going on. Can you be identified by the book? Does the book identify you? Are you one of those who, for eternal life and eternal glory, are remembered by God? Had an everlasting remembrance. Oh, it is a big thing, you know, to be not forgotten by the Lord.

The Old Testament is an illustration of this. In two goats, one brought in and offered as a sacrifice unto the Lord, and the other with the sin of the people transferred to it by the hand of the priest, driven out into the wilderness, into the land of forgetfulness, forgotten. Poor goat, out there wandering far away from the habitation of men, in utter desolation without a friend, might well, if it could speak this sense, be heard to say, I'm forgotten, forgotten, forgotten of all men, and forgotten of God.

It's a desolate thing to be forgotten like that. No wonder the dying feet on the cross with the vividness of a sense of reality breaking upon his soul, cried to Jesus next to him, Lord, remember me, when thou comest into the world. Remember me.

It's a big thing to be remembered. It's a terrible thing to be forgotten. No, when the Lord Jesus on the cross fulfilled literally the type and symbol of that goat driven out, sin, the sin of the world laid upon him, he was spiritually, in the desolation of his soul, driven out and for that awful moment, forgotten of God.

My God, why hast thou forsaken me? That's a terrible thing. Thank God that is not necessary for anyone because the Lord Jesus has removed that necessity and made it possible for you and for me to be enrobed in heaven. Thank God that is not necessary for anyone because the Lord Jesus has removed that necessity and made it possible for you and for me to be enrolled in heaven, to have our names in the Lamb's Book of Life.

But it's not just being enrolled as those who have life. It's more than that. You notice the last reference to this Lamb's Book of Life is connected with the Holy City, the heavenly Jerusalem, a great type of that redeemed company at the end.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrews, as we read, says, we are come unto the church of the firstborn ones whose names are enrolled in heaven. The last connection of this very phrase is with what is symbolically called the Holy City, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven. In other words, that redeemed company.

And it's not only that you are going to get into it because you have life. You are going to have the franchise of it conferred upon you. You remember that wonderful 87th Psalm? His foundation is in the holy mountains.

The Lord loveth the gates of Zion more than all the dwellings of Jacob. I will speak of Egypt, of Philistia, of Tyre, of Ethiopia. This one and that one was born there.

What is the psalmist talking about? Oh, this man boasts, I was born in great Egypt. You know, Egypt is one of the oldest civilizations and the most wonderful civilizations. Someone else says, oh yes, that's all right.

I was born in Philistia and Philistia has a great history. You know, you meet Philistia very early in the Bible. You come up against something very, very important.

And I was born there. Another one speaks of Tyre, the great city of Tyre. Read about it in the Bible.

This man says, oh, you who were born in Egypt and in Philistia, you don't know anything. I was born in Tyre. And yet another one comes along and he says, you fellows are boasting about your birthplace.

I was born in Ethiopia. You remember the Queen of Sheba? That's where I was born. And they're all boasting.

But then the psalmist says, glorious things of thee are spoken, Zion, city of God. This one and that one was born there. What Jesus meant by being born from above.

Born again. The franchise of the New Jerusalem. The franchise of the very metropolis of divine government conferred upon you.

It's the freedom of the realm. The freedom of the city. You know what that meant to the Apostle Paul when once taken prisoner and the Roman centurion was about to have him franked.

He said, you know what you're doing? You have your right to beat a Roman, to contest a Roman law. Your right to beat a Roman untried. The centurion thought he'd get round it by saying, well, yes, but, you know, there are Romans and Romans.

Maybe but a common Roman. I am a freeman. He asked Paul a little more.

And then Paul said, here, the centurion had to say with a great price obtained I this freedom. Paul said, but I can go better than you. I was free-born.

Free-born. The man had to give way to that. Just had to let go.

Free-born. He held the franchise as a freeman of the great Roman government or realm. Yes, we, dear friends, when we are enrolled in heaven in the Lamb's Book of Life have conferred upon us all the rights and freedoms.

We can dwell much upon those freedoms. Our heaven, franchise of the heavenly city, born from above, means something more than all the glories of earthly birth, however great they are. Lord Jesus spoke about this, referred to this, when he said the children are free.

The children are free. The womb is passed hurriedly to the end. The Lamb's Book of Life.

Life, the Book, the Lamb's. Where did that idea come from? The Lamb. Oh yes, the Bible has a lot to say about this.

Very early in the Bible you come on the Lamb of Sacrifice. Come on this idea as early as Abel of the very first family of that race referred to. And right from that point on you know how all the way through the Bible the Lamb is in view.

The Lamb is in view. You can't get away from this Lamb anywhere. Where did this come from? This was born in the mind and heart of God before the world was.

We've read it tonight. The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. This is something, and this is my only point for the moment on this.

This is something that is expanded to embrace all time. God knew when he made man and this world what would happen. He knew what would happen.

He had to know. Could not help knowing. But he deliberately did it.

The mystery in the mystery of his ways knowing what would happen. How man would disobey, would sin, would rebel and what the consequences for the human race would be. The long history of that sinful rebellion.

He knew it before ever he started. But when he foresaw he also in his heart and in his mind chose to meet it all in what is called the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. It's an eternal thought.

It's a timeless thought. It covers and embraces all that has come in in time. The Lamb, the Lamb yes, small in itself but heart and immensity of involvement in this little Lamb.

There's nothing that can come into time. Sin. Oh, sin, oceans of sin, mountains of sin.

But they go down before the Lamb. The Lamb is big enough for it all. The Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

God's own unique and all sufficient provision for man. For man's sin. See, when John the Baptist saw Jesus walking and cried, Behold, the Lamb of God has taken away the sin of the world.

It was to that Lamb in the thought of God that he was referring. God's Lamb. Not all the Lambs on Jewish altars slain but the one which they typified.

God's Lamb. Behold. God's Lamb.

Out from the eternal past. Here He is in time. Walking before you.

Here present. The Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world. Identified by John the Baptist.

God's own precious Lamb. God's own precious Lamb. Precious to God.

Not only because He is His Son but because God finds redemption of His whole creation in the blood of that Lamb. Sees the removal of all that has come in to challenge His rights in creation. Oh, He sees all that His heart has ever eternally been set upon made possible and secured by the Lamb.

Dwell upon the Lamb forever and we shall. But this Lamb is very precious. Very precious.

There's a story, a very terrible story in the Old Testament which brings out the tremendous value, importance of a Lamb. It is one of the very terrible stories of the Old Testament and I'm not going to give you names in kindness especially to the one particular person but there was a king. A king who had very much.

He had multitudes, flocks and herds. He had his wives and his children and he had everything that a wealthy king could possess. One day he espied a woman whom he desired to have for himself but she was married.

Her husband was alive and he upon the housetop meditated this thing and came upon an awful decision. I'll get rid of her husband and then I'll have her. So he schemed and devised an awful thing.

Put that husband out into the battle and see that he'd put him the front rank and then the others of the rank were told at a certain time, at a certain point to draw back and leave him alone and he'd be killed. And it happened. And he took the woman to be his wife.

But God's eye had seen and God spoke to one of his servants, the prophet and said go to the king and he went and he wrapped the whole thing up in a story, in a parable. He said there was a wealthy man who had flocks and herds and everything that heart could desire. He lacked nothing.

Nothing whatever. And there came to him one day a friend for whom he got to provide a meal and instead of taking from his multitude of lambs he went and took this one little lamb of one little ewe lamb of a man over there who only had the one and he loved it. It came in, had its meals with him was a member of a family.

He cherished it, fed it, cared for it. He loved it. It was his only one ewe lamb.

And this man over here who had his thousands went and took this one ewe lamb and slew it and gave it to his friend. And when the prophet got to that point of the story the king flayed. He broke out in wrath, in anger.

He said as the Lord liveth a man, the man who has done a thing like this shall die. The prophet said thou art the man. Thou art the man.

And then the prophet said thus saith the Lord the sword shall not depart from your house forever because you have done this thing. In your own family will be your enemies. You know what happened with Absalom, don't you? It was true.

Well, now I leave the story but what is the point that we are making? Oh, there is wrapped up in that Old Testament story a far bigger story. A far bigger story. Do you know, dear friends that for two thousand years there is a people on this earth from whose house the sword has never departed.

All the tragedy of Israel. All the horror of the pogroms. All the stories that even recently has been written.

That's only a fragment of the two thousand years of the sword having never departed from their house. Why? They killed God's one lamb. God had blessed that people richly and abundantly.

They had all that he could give them and they took his one lamb and slew it. The sword has never departed. My point is this.

This lamb of God is very precious to God. Upon our attitude toward this lamb our eternal destiny hangs. Life or death.

Justification or condemnation. Heaven or hell. We're in the balances of how we treat this lamb of God.

I think I've said enough to bring the tremendous issue of life and death of eternity into this word the Lamb's Book of Life. I can only make the appeal to you. Thank God the answer.

The answer will be, can be from so many hearts here tonight. But, what about any others? Go through one by one, one by one as the Spirit of God does. Comes and stands before each one.

Is your name in the Lamb's Book? The old children's hymn. Is my name written there? On the page, bright and fair. Is your name enrolled in heaven? You know it is? How do you know? How do you know? Well, how do you know that you are where you are sitting where you are as an active person able to hear what I'm saying see what there is to see and you say you're alive.

How do you know it? You say, why, of course, I was born. Wasn't I born into this world? How do you know whether you have this other life? Have you the experience, the knowledge of being born again from above? Oh, some of us know that's true. It might not be possible just to put our finger upon the exact moment or day when it happened.

Like a boat from the blue ride out from heaven it may have been a course, a process something that went on for a time but emerged in this. I know that I'm saved. I know today that I have eternal life whether it be in the sudden moment or whether it be on some other line you must be able to stand in this category and say, I know that I am have passed from death unto life.

I know that I have been born from above. I know that I have eternal life. I have accepted the Lamb of God and all that He has done for redemption and my redemption as my sin bearer I have embraced that Lamb brought Him into my life.

I know. If you have not put it in this way you know what this means. My name is in the Lamb's book of life.

Can you say that? Thank God so many of us can say it. Oh may it be true of everyone here and should you have any doubt or question about it dear friend, don't let this day close and pass without your getting alone with Him and saying, Lord, all that is meant in heaven by that word Lamb the Lamb of our redemption the Lamb for sinners slain I by faith receive into my heart I ask you, enroll my name in the Lamb's book of life. Do that if you haven't done it and for the rest, let us rejoice that we are of the company of those who have eternal life and will join in the choir at the end.

Worthy is the Lamb that hath peace. Shall we pray?

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