

The Horizon of Divine Purpose - Part 7

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the horizon of divine purpose and how God works according to a specific purpose from eternity to eternity, highlighting the significance of Ezekiel's ministry and the Holy Spirit's work in believers.

Duration: 1:01:49

Scripture: Ezekiel 3:17-19, Ezekiel 12:6, Ezekiel 33:7-9, Matthew 6:33, Romans 8:28, Ephesians 4:10, Revelation 1:1

Topics: "Divine Purpose"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the purpose and work of God in the lives of believers. He emphasizes that God is working to reproduce the image of Christ in every believer through new birth and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The speaker also highlights the importance of discipline, training, and various life experiences in the development of Christ-likeness. He acknowledges that the ways of God may be incomprehensible to us, but they ultimately produce a message and make believers messengers of life. The sermon concludes with a call for believers to embrace their responsibility as witnesses for God and to be watchmen who understand the times and convey God's purposes to others.

Transcript

We are with the very slightest look back on all the ground so far covered, going to continue straight on from where we had to break off this morning in this great matter of the horizon of divine purpose, that God has horizoned everything by a definite and certain purpose from eternity to eternity. God has been, still is, and while time shall last, will be moving according to a specific purpose, and everything under his rule, which is universal, is governed by purpose. We are not so much concerned at this time with what the purpose is, although there will be quite definite reference to it.

In the conference at Easter we were occupied with what the purpose is. At this time the emphasis is upon purpose itself, the fact of purpose. Now we have been seeing that a great Old Testament interpreter of this matter is the prophet Ezekiel.

We have also seen that prophecies of Ezekiel have a counterpart in the letter of Paul to the Ephesians, so-called, and in the book of the Revelation. I mention that because I do want you at once to realize that we are not just moving in the Old Testament in a time that is past, long ago. We are right up to date, very much up to date, in this matter.

I trust that will come to you with divine impact as we go on. We have seen, or we began to see, that the book of the prophecies of Ezekiel is particularly a book of God's reactions in purpose, because his people in general had lost that sense of divine purpose, that government of divine purpose, that tremendous incentive of divine purpose, and had just become a people with his name in a very general way, a great deal of mixture and confusion resulting in weakness and growing limitation. The Lord raised up the prophet Ezekiel, amongst others, but in a particular way to call his people back, to re-enunciate the great reality of divine purpose, to warn of the consequences, the inevitable consequences of missing God's way as to their very election.

Ezekiel is peculiarly characterized by this particular ministry, but it is not Ezekiel's exclusive and unique ministry. It is the very thing that the Lord Jesus himself took up, and it is the very thing that we find so clearly in the ministry of the Apostle Paul particularly, and in that final writing of his church writing, this letter which goes by the name of the letter to the Ephesians. The emphasis is repeatedly upon this.

He is working all things after the counsel of his own will, according to the purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus before the world was. That's the note, and that is the outstanding note. Coming back to Ezekiel as our interpreter, our great instructor in this matter of divine purpose, we want to note this afternoon some things that stand out most clearly as to God's methods in this matter.

It is necessary for me to repeat for the sake of any newcomers that the church is eternally elect for this very purpose of God in Christ. The existence of the church in the mind of God from before times eternal, when it was chosen, as Paul says, in Christ Jesus, before the foundation of the world, the very existence of the church is explained by this word purpose as it is in the mind of God. The Holy Spirit took up this matter from the beginning and has ever pursued it with diligence and energy right through history.

This is a revelation of the mighty energetic goings of the Spirit of God in this very connection that is seen perhaps far more clearly and fully with the day of Pentecost and immediately after than anywhere else. That church in the eternal thought of God as an elect instrument for that purpose was then born on the day of Pentecost, and the Spirit came upon it and into it, and from that moment those energies of the Spirit are seen to be moving, yes moving, but producing in the church this sense of existing in relation to some divine intention. The mighty energy is not just the abstract energy of God's power, they are a people who have the incentive and dynamic of a particular purpose.

They come to know that they exist for something, and they are beginning by the Spirit to see, and going on seeing more and more of what that purpose is through the teaching of the divinely raised up ministers. The churches are the local expressions of that work, that energy of the Holy Spirit with this purpose in view. Now that brings the whole matter very near to us doesn't it? We said this morning here's a company, not a vast concourse of people, comparatively small company of people here today, but representing quite a number of local companies of the Lord's people, assemblies of the Lord in different places, and the purpose in God's mind of the existence of such companies of the Lord's people distributed here and there on the earth is just this, to be there in the hands, in the power of the Holy Spirit with this mighty sense of vocation in relation to God's purpose.

You can lay hold of that, it will help a great deal as we go on. We proceed this afternoon to note some of those things which come out in the prophecies of Ezekiel or in relation to the instrument himself which show us God's method in this matter of recovering, re-establishing his purpose in his people here and there. And in this connection we have the three major designations of the prophet Ezekiel.

They are full of instruction. The first you are very well aware or you ought to be if you have read this book at all is the designation or the title given to him of son of man. That is a unique designation of a prophet.

No other prophet is so called. It's Ezekiel's own title. Son of man.

No fewer than 90 times in his prophecy he is so called. That's impressive. See how often, how often he is so addressed and that no other prophet is so addressed must surely have a meaning.

We said very early in this time that every prophet, every prophet of the four and the twelve had a peculiar aspect of this purpose of God to which they were committed. This title indicates very clearly what the aspect of the divine purpose is where Ezekiel is himself. Son of man.

Of course we know that the Lord Jesus took as his own favorite title for himself the son of man. It was not given to him. Others did not use it of him.

He chose it himself. He used it on himself. 82 times in the New Testament we find it the son of man.

Now here we want to be careful and explicit. Ezekiel and Jesus are not identical because there is such a similarity in title. The son of man is unique.

The definite article puts him in a realm category alone. There is no other such son of man. He stands by himself.

But if Ezekiel representing a function in the method of God more than an individual, a function, a ministry, is called son of man, the similarity between him and the Lord Jesus is not in person, it is in function. To understand that is to be helpful. What does this title, this designation really carry with it means and imply? Well, surely on the very face of it, it means firstly identification with man in the purpose of God.

Coming into very close relationship with the human race in the very purpose for which God created it. It is a word of identification. That of course in the case of the Lord Jesus in a way deeper and fuller and more complete than in any other.

But here it is. God has man in view. God has man in view.

God has not a system of things in view. Not an organization, an institution. Not a machine, not a thing at all.

God has man in his mind in relation to his purpose. And any movement of God toward his full purpose is governed not by things at all. Not by things at all.

Not even religious things. Not by systems. Not by institutions.

It is governed by this idea of man. You see how much the prophets and Ezekiel in particular was identified with the people to whom he was sent. For whom he was laboring and suffering.

He says I sat where they sat. I sat where they sat. I was not just a preacher standing apart and back from them and preaching to them or at them.

I was not just some detached ministry. I sat where they sat. It's indicative of an identification with the people.

Son of man. You're a part of the people. You're a man more than a prophet, more than a minister, more than an instrument, a vessel.

You're just a man but you're a man. You're a living person and a part of this very race which God has intended to come into his full purpose. Son of man identification one with.

One with. There's much more in that dear friends for our instruction and for our correction than perhaps lies on the surface. We have heard and only heard in the last day or two of missionaries so-called.

God have mercy upon them going from one country in the west to another country and telling the people of that country that they of course the missionaries are much more civilized and educated than these people and that these people of the east must take note of this fact and begin they begin right at that point of a superiority. Superiority which creates great problems for governments and completely discredits the work of the Lord Jesus. I'm a missionary and I come from a civilized country and from a college of education and you poor people have none of these advantages.

Therefore therefore you have got to listen to me and do what I tell you. God deliver from any such spirit that is not a servant of God in the sense of Ezekiel. Son of man naturally naturally you are no different from any other.

You must just take your place there in the realm of a common humanity and it is not what you are at all in yourself that matters. It's what you've got of God to give that defines your ministry and gives you any right whatever to exercise ministry. All ministry dear friends must be on this basis not of what anybody is in themselves assumes to be pretends to be profaces to be claims to be but just what they have got of God that's all.

Now that Mark you is not only as I was trying to emphasize this morning a matter for a certain class of people called ministers or missionaries or apostles or prophets that is for the church and that is for the churches. That is for the local companies we've got to be here on that basis that it is only a matter of what we've got of the law that justifies our being here and claiming anything at all. But we could put it the other way if we really have got something of the Lord that is altogether different from and more than what we are in ourselves that that really is value in ministry.

We're going to follow that up in a minute. Son of man is identification oneness oneness with the people with man. There's no one who took that position and showed it more than our Lord himself.

No there's no class with him of any kind whatever he was one with those to whom he came to minister. That is clear that the title designation son of man means that not only we are one with identified with but that we are representative of before God. This is a great principle running through the whole word of God right back in the early days you see principle that the instrument that God will use is one who stands before him in this identification as representing all others.

Being there as the representative of men before God. Moses was there Samuel was there the prophets were there but the Lord Jesus was there in the presence of God. He said he could say not only that I and they are one identical but I am here as representing them I am here as them and I bring them in my very person into the presence of God before God.

I'm not here in some isolated capacity I am here in a corporate representation. Israel was meant to be that for the nations to bring the nations into the presence of God representatively. It's where they failed it's

where they failed they thought they were superior they were special and they took on an exclusiveness.

The gentiles they called doves instead of standing before God in this way and saying oh Lord oh Lord no better than all these we bring them in representation right into your presence. We being here is in its implication these people are brought into your presence. You hear the prayer of Nehemiah you hear the prayer of Daniel you hear these men they're not there alone before God you see all the people are present when they are praying they're carrying the people with them.

Son of man means that but it indicates the purpose and this is the important thing we started by saying God is concerned with man. Always was. When God made man a man came from his hand fresh.

That was the signal for God to say it is very good and God rested from his labor. The end to which God works and in which he finds his satisfaction and his rest is when he has man according to his own likeness and image. Now that takes us back to the beginning of our meditation.

In the beginning of the prophecies Ezekiel the all-governing thing is a throne and a man or the likeness of a man upon it about and we said then that it is that man in the throne who is governing all that takes place in that book and coming into the larger context it is the man Paul presents to us the beginning of his letter to the Ephesians raised set at his own right hand far above all rule and authority it is that man in the throne who is governing everything the man who Stephen saw I see the son of man standing at the right hand when God finds his man the very representative man who has identified himself with man to bring man to God and God finds his man his son he takes his rest he takes his rest he's satisfied this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased that's only the

counterpart of it is very good I'm satisfied I'm at rest but then the spirit comes as from that enthroned man to make that one enthroned man glorified perfected man to make what he represents in heaven true here of men on this earth to really to really do this thing to reproduce that man in men that mankind here beginning in the church now dear friends this is where we ought to be helped and certainly instructed what is it that the Holy Spirit is doing what is it that the Holy Spirit is doing in your life and in mine through all the experiences the experiences of sorrow of suffering in some realms of disillusionment and disappointment the hard way all the ways of God with us all the Holy Spirit dealings with us personally individually and as companies of his people wherever they are what

is it the one thing that the Holy Spirit is really settled upon determined to accomplish if he can what is the explanation of everything the all things in which God works for them that are called according to his purpose what is it it's only one thing it's a reproduction of that man in you and in me the introduction of him into us by new birth and his spirit the development and increase of him in us through discipline through training through all these experiences the effect of suffering the effect of adversity the effect of godly sorrow the sorrow that the Lord allows to come to us the effect of our difficulties and our problems in this way the right effect should be more of Christ more Christ like and when the Holy Spirit really does have his way how true that is we emerge from some

period or experience of deep deep exercise and distress and trouble with something more of the graciousness and beauty and understanding sympathy of the Lord Jesus we have a larger knowledge of him in that way in which knowledge is only true knowledge knowledge in our very being in our very experience in our very constitution it's a part of us where did we get that where did that come from how did it come it came by the deep and the dark and the trying ways the Spirit of God has produced that like that son of man the reproduction I'm conscious of the imperfection faultiness of my words and way of putting it

but I see this as the answer to our troubles I have to ask my heart what is the Lord after in all this what is he after well personally he must be after increasing the measure of his

son this kind of man what is he doing in the company of the Lord's people passing through times of difficulty darkness pain and travel producing of his son in greater measure Paul's words to the Galatians are so apropos of larger situations like this my little children for whom I'm again in travel till Christ be fully formed in you travel unto the fuller formation of Christ in local companies well as individuals and through them expansively as far as they will have it to the whole church here may we not say that as the end of the dispensation draws near and the consummation of the Holy Spirit's energies is imminent church will pass into a time of travel and anguish in which it will have to discover and prove the Lord and know the Lord in a much larger measure than it does that's the way

the Lord has of doing it son of man son of man it's conformity to the man the reproduction of the man I must hurry on cause a great deal more in that we have time to even look at the other two designations of the prophet indicating God's method God's method no it's God's method in relation to his purpose greatly concerned about methods greatly concerned about methods in doing the work of God in fulfilling the Commission methods methods methods God has only one method really I know that he moves in variety of ways but is one method is this to make his son I increase to fill all things but then there's this second designation of the prophet mentioned in chapter 12 and in chapter 24 son of man I have made thee a sign unto the house of Israel say unto them I am your sign your sign the prophet

himself is the sign there are going to be many signs in his behavior in what he does what he's called upon to do and how many things strange things peculiar things and things as we said before the world would call mad things the Lord called upon him to do how many hard things bitterly hard things they were all signs but they were all gathered into the man himself these were not things objective to him it was a man the man I think the people who were watching him watching him doing all these strange singular enigmatic cool things saying now what's the fellow doing now what is he up to he is he must be mad they brought it all down on the man that's the point things he did the things he said were not just things given up they were enacted in his own experience they were a part of his his own

history the man and his message however that message came by acts or by words by experiences that came to him that others could see such as the death of his wife that was no inaction of his no choice of his something that came upon him things that made up this man's life with things which were a part of himself message and the messenger were one I am your sign I am not just giving you signs I am your sign very often things happening in the life of this man were both to himself and to others quite incomprehensible quite inscrutable others had to say well I don't know what it is that man is trying to say I don't understand what is going on there all this all this I I can't understand it it's altogether incomprehensible and I'm quite sure that Ezekiel must have felt that about his own

experience sometimes he was taken completely out his depth isn't that true of our experience there are times when we find ourselves in a place where we just cannot understand or fathom what God's meaning is in this experience or in that in this that we are called upon to go through or to do one great why stands over our hearts and our minds in the ways of God why it's a moment of eclipse a moment of eclipse in the life of the Lord Jesus on the cross when that word broke from his lips my God why eternity alone could answer that fully but time afterward did explain it why we know why now sometimes we are called to go into experiences and depths we cannot understand beyond our scrutiny but God is doing something now Paul has something to say about this and I challenge you to explain it I

challenge you to explain it I'd be very glad if there's someone here who can explain it to me I've been at it for 50 years and I haven't got the explanation yet now that now unto the principalities and powers in the heavenlies might be made known the manifold wisdom of God in the church you understand that of course you can give some kind of explanations principalities and powers and the heavenlies are looking on we're on the stage of this great theater and God is doing things and they're learning but does that does that help us you find that that really comforts you in the hour of eclipse in the day of darkness the day of sorrow and suffering does it really comfort you to know the principalities and powers in heaven and learning something I have to be quite frank and say I've never found

much comfort in that this thing is far too real far too terrible while it's going on but here it is in the inscrutable unfathomable incomprehensible ways of God he is doing something which is producing instruction and a message and making of the instrument a messenger a messenger of life beyond the comprehension of the messenger himself God is doing something that outranges our intelligence goes beyond our understanding I've read through these chapters of Ezekiel's behavior look at him what he's called to do see these people looking on they say one day now what's the fellow doing look at him he's digging a hole in the wall now he's gone into his house and he's packed up his baggage and he's got it on his shoulders and he's pushing through that hole in the wall with his furniture on his

back what's he doing see what I mean and he did lots of things like that but he in his own experience and history was pre-writing and revealing that history of that people the siege that was coming they're trying to break out of the siege and get through and escape and take their furniture their history is written deep in his experience well I don't know how much this helps you dear friends but the point is this that God is not so concerned with having preachers as such or teachers as such or churches as such or any things as such he is really concerned to have a personal or collective organic expression of his purpose so that when whether it be angels principalities powers or men look on if they look with uncritical eyes without prejudice they can see here something that God is doing God

is doing something don't understand it but God is doing something God is saying something and that people that people itself and that person not just saying things but is the living expression something that God is doing do I carry you with me this must be the registration of our lives this must be the truth of our assemblies that we really are the embodiment of something that God is doing we have often said here in years gone by that the Apostle Paul was the great sign of the dispensation his particular ministry charge was concerning the church as the body of Christ the mystery oh see how the Apostle himself not only received it in an objective way and then reproduced it second how the truth deep profound and sometimes agonizing truth of the body of Christ was wrought into that man's

very history he is that he is that in embodiment the message that he has is not something that he takes hold of and gives out he is that before he speaks and as he speaks you can see it a man's history bears out what he says may be a suffering history but it is the sign he is the sign he is the sign the message and the messenger are not two things they are one this is reality the reality that is called for are we not tired very tired of words tired of teaching as teaching and doctrine and truth as being there's a lot we are tired of in our Christianity almost ready to jettison give it up we crave for reality do you do you be careful be careful if you say that honestly before God reality means the things of God are going to be wrought into your very being by experience and you're going

through them they're not only going through you you're going through them now we said at the beginning that Ezekiel was a committed man a committed man God the Spirit could do as he liked with Ezekiel this is

what it means those of you who minister those of you who minister or who want to minister take this to heart you find very often that either before something vital is coming through you or not long afterward you have a very bad time you have a very bad time all hell gets very busy and rages against that which it knows is coming either to spoil before cripple and paralyze before or soon after to take you into such a position as to make you doubt your own message question your own message this sort of ministry is fraught with the most real often the most terrible experiences in the

spiritual life many of you won't understand what I'm saying but some of you do don't worry but it's true I am saying all this just to get at this point God doesn't want people go about with Bibles giving Bible lectures and addresses and retailing things that they've studied up in the Bible God wants many people companies who are the embodiment of his truth who in themselves are the sign of his purpose are the men are the manhood that he is seeking to reveal for his own satisfaction Ezekiel not only prophesied he was a prophecy more in what he was than in what he said come to the end very hurriedly to the third designation again mentioned in chapter 3 and chapter 33 son of man I have made you a watchman unto the house of Israel I have made you a watchman unto the house of Israel you look

see the context is a very solemn one if you warn if you warn and the warning is not taken people's blood would be upon their own heads if you don't warn their blood would be on your head I made you a watchman unto the house of Israel a solemn vocation for the Lord's people this is no new idea of course this is not exclusive to Ezekiel we have it several times in Isaiah we shall remember the great cry from Isaiah watchman what of the night the watchman said the morning coming but also the night but here in Ezekiel applied to this man right early in his commissioning you notice it's in the third chapter but it first comes into view and what is the function of the watchman are you dear friends taking this all this to yourself because it does apply to the Christian and it applies to companies

of Christians very very definitely and particularly what is the function of a watchman well the function of the watchman was and is to know and to voice the meaning of the hour of the time to have that intelligence about the situation why things are as they are why things are as they are what are the portents of things as they are what will come if things proceed as they are proceeding what does God want in this hour what is he after to be the intelligence of the people in a day when that intelligence is at a discount because the watchman functions in the night his work is the work of the night time watchman what of the night I repeat to be intelligence for the Lord people at large many of whom for one reason or another lack this intelligence this disarmament but these people whether they

be individuals and I especially have the companies of the Lord's people in mind of this time they're the burden of my heart these companies of the Lord's people here and there that they shall be there as a witness for God as to what the meaning of things is in their time why things are as they are how God would have them to be what will happen if they are not changed if they do not conform to God's mind it's a warning note it's a note of exhortation it's a note of information that's the watchman's business portents periods alive to the time is that true our local companies so true that through through us through us people of God can receive enlightenment as to the meaning of things warning as to the peril of certain portents certain causes the arresting hand upon ways that are contrary to

the will of God to the mind of God oh the Lord make us more like that eyes for his people eyes for his people we've almost worn this quite bare so far as words are concerned he would grant unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him the eyes of your heart be enlightened but not just for yourself it's the whole church that is in you they may benefit may be saved may be delivered may be

instructed by spiritual discernment and enlightenment that has come to us watchman watchman watchman's message must be an unmistakable one no use of watchman being out there on the watchtower in the night and giving a confused message an indistinct note one must know what he's talking about what he's saying when cry went out watchman what of the night watchman said well I don't know

really I don't know where I am I don't know what things mean at all it's no use asking me what's the good of a watchman like that but mark you many many churches are like that and many of the Lord's people are like that no use asking me I don't know where I am I don't know the meaning of things at all I don't understand the Lord wants to bring out people who know who know where they're going know the meaning of things who have a distinct note and message everybody who meets them is able to say well they they are people who know where they stand and they know something that is very important to know this is a very responsible ministry a very responsible ministry many many may have their destiny affected by our faithfulness to this very ministry or our failure in it oh do ask the Lord in

all your praise for your local companies just where you are to constitute you together as a people a watchman with intelligence with knowledge with understanding and with a clear and unmistakable message to his people when they see you when they meet you when they hear you they meet people who about whom there is nothing indefinite nothing whatever uncertain they meet something very positive and clear cut the impression that we give is we know where we are and we know why we are where we are and we know where we are going and we are going are going people that impress are definite men now I have made thee a watchman said the Lord I've made thee a watchman to the house do you notice what happens when the people when the people so largely and generally rejected the watchman rejected the

ministry that God raised up everything that God intended was lost where they were concerned with the ministry went the purpose and they found themselves in Babylon all lost that is completely confused stripped of all meaning helpless and impotent limitation and bondage with the ministry given the purpose was bound up stood or fell it's a very responsible thing but it does give surely it does give to us something very vital in our existence I know I'm failing to get to you what is in my heart I feel that at any rate but I do want to close on this note dear friends we are here as God's people where we are in our companies and as our companies we are here for a very positive purpose and positiveness of purpose must characterize us we must be a people upon whom God has laid a great burden a

great concern a great responsibility we must feel that we must sense that we must be committed to that we must be what Paul called himself one slave of Jesus Christ just captured captivated and dominated by a sense a mighty sense that we have been called according to purpose God is working that purpose in our history that's our word this afternoon in order that he may place us here and there and people will be able to say of us now he's not and she's not just a religious person not just some ordinary Christian my word he or she or they have got something they've got something but you know that's a costly way a very costly way I could not exaggerate that to be like that here and there sir means sometimes I've been very torn to pieces brought into perplexity beyond our power of

understanding now Paul says all this you know he does use these words cast down perplexed pursued like that but out of it out of it coming this rich effective ministry oh we have a very costly heritage and we have a very vital calling the Lord impress you with it you don't grasp what is being said may come upon us all there's a need for recovery of this thing called purpose strengthening of this element this force this dynamic of purpose that we are here for something in the eternal counsels of God God help us

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