

The Horizon of Divine Purpose - Part 8

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the need for the church to return to its divine purpose amidst spiritual corruption and loss of distinctiveness.

Duration: 38:22

Scripture: Numbers 22:1-6, Ezekiel 21:19-21, Ezekiel 21:27, Ezekiel 28:2-19, Hebrews 12:26, Revelation 2:1-5

Topics: "Divine Purpose"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of having a clear understanding of God's purpose in our lives. He warns that if we lose sight of this purpose, our Christian life will suffer and we will be devastated. The purpose of God is to gather all things in Christ and have preeminence over everything. The speaker also discusses the rise and fall of world powers and how they are part of God's plan. He concludes by urging listeners to not become complacent or formal in their faith, but to continually seek God's purpose and live it out in their lives.

Transcript

The whole of the message of these days in particular will be gathered up this evening or found to be gathered up in one fragment in the prophecies of Ezekiel. In chapter 21 and verse 27, I will overturn, overturn, overturn until he come whose right it is and I will give it him. You will see if you look that those words have a very wide context.

They have an immediate context. The life ministry of the prophet, his times were to see the beginning, the carrying forward to some quite serious degree of the fulfillment of these words. But there is also an expended context and the expense of that context has not yet reached its final stage.

But here in the scriptures, much of that expended context is noted and mentioned. The overturning, overturning, overturning very soon began when the prophet was caused to make this proclamation of Jehovah's intention. The immediate context then was that of Jerusalem and Jerusalem as the symbol and representation of the nation.

The nation which as we have been seeing in earlier hours was chosen elect of God for a purpose, God's special purpose. The nation which had been so carefully, painstakingly and patiently constituted and disciplined unto that purpose and then withal had so lamentably failed, so tragically missed the mark. And unto that nation the words were addressed, I will overturn, overturn, overturn the reasons, those which we

have noted, the lost distinctiveness in their life.

They had gone out to the world in illicit and forbidden relationship of a spiritual character and the world had been let into them in a defiling and corrupting way. Resulting in that thing which as we have said is always and ever an abomination to God, mixed in and amongst his people, the lost distinctiveness of their life, the lost vitality in the means which God had provided for the realization of his purpose. He has provided tabernacle and temple, priesthood and ordinances, sacrifices and feasts and much more, made a great provision in this way.

But all to be a vital and effective means to an end and not as an end in itself. But that vitality had been lost, temple, priesthood, sacrifices, ordinances had become a formality, a daily routine, something being kept up, something just in themselves, a great formalism without life. Vitality in the means of God and his deposit was dead in their midst.

Lost vision as to their existence, they had lost both the sense of consciousness and the knowledge of why they were the Lord's people. They were boasting that they were the Lord's people. They were claiming to be a special people amongst the people.

They were using his name, taking it, the purpose for which they were the Lord's people, had been lost to their consciousness. Their vision of the great object and end of God in choosing them from among all the people of the earth had been lost. You know that the cry of the prophets, their threefold note is heard along those lines.

Their cry is against this mixture, this loss of distinctiveness, this corruption, this defilement. Their cry is against this mere formalism. As we pointed out yesterday, through Isaiah, the word of the Lord came, cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their sin, their iniquity, their transgression, and a house to be swallowed their sin.

Yet they seek me daily, they delight to know my ways, carrying on, but without vision, without purity, without vitality. All that led to this, I will overturn, overturn, overturn, I am not going to preserve mere form, mere shell, mere profession, it's all to me hypocrisy, unreality. I will overturn, because of these things, the things that characterize a people under the true government and in the true energies of the Holy Spirit are gone.

Things that really matter, because of these things, there was the lost authority in Israel. Authority in the nations, an authoritative voice in their own midst. They were not registering those who spoke in life and in word, in testimony with authority.

It's a very tragic situation when the people of God lose their authority in the world, and they always do it when they mix in with the world, and the world is mixed in with them. Lost unity, here we see the crumbling of the nation, breaking up and disintegration, till the only suitable picture is that of the valley of dry bones, very many and much scattered. Unrelated, unarticulated, disintegrated, that's the result, divisions if you like, divisions.

The lost position to which God had brought them, he had brought them by covenant into the land, and set them there as his own place for them, God's place for them, and they lost their position, their God appointed position, and were cast out of it. Finally, prophecies lead to the lost glory, the lost glory in and over the people of God, glory lifted up and moved right away. The Lord says about such a state, I will

overturn, overturn, overturn, this cannot, and dear friends, may I have your forbearance, if I remind you again that these prophecies are not exclusively concerning Israel in the Old Testament and Old Dispensation.

There is that in the New Testament which corresponds to this immediate context. This terrible chapter 21 of Ezekiel's prophecies has been called the song of the sword, if you read immediately, associated with these words of verse 27, the sword, the sword, the sword, the point of the sword, God's unsheathed sword, and by the sword he is going to overturn and overturn and overturn. May I remind you that we have two corresponding passages in this other realm of the church in the New Testament.

One is in the letter to the Hebrews, I will shake the heavens and the earth, I will shake the heavens and the earth. The other is in the coming of the Lord Jesus into the midst of the seven lampstands, and in that comprehensive and matchless description and presentation of him, there is this, he that hath the sharp two-edged sword, and he begins with it at the churches, at the churches. And his is an overturning, overturning, overturning in the churches.

The sword is cleaving, dividing, finding out, searching, and judging. There is that, which having, having resulted in, so largely resulted in the loss of the specific purpose, falls to the sword of the Lord. These are hard words, but suffer them for the moment.

Like that. The Lord is saying to the churches, representing the whole church, the same things as he said to Israel. I am not a bit interested in or concerned with your religious thoughts.

I am not a bit interested in your nuts religious or Christian activities. I know thy works. I am not concerned with your profession.

The thing for which you were raised up, elected, and constituted, is my eternal purpose concerning my son, that in all things he might have the preeminence, occupy the first, the full, and the final place. And anything that either falls short of that or contradicts that must come under the sword. And judgment begins at the house of God.

Dear friends, if this is true and if we are not mistaken, the church in general is going to meet the sword. It is going to be dealt with in this way and there is going to be a whole lot, a whole lot of activities and works and professions and what not, that is going to the sword. Going to be overturned, overturned, overturned, in order to get to that end which God has appointed.

And what is true of the whole church will be true of any local company of believers. If the Lord sees unreality, sees hypocrisy, mere formality, making his divine things just an end in themselves, turned in on ourselves, and not ministering to and forging toward the great end, progressing and developing as we go on with this increasing fullness of Christ. The Lord will overturn that local company, upset it, will bring the sword in and will scatter and break down and overturn.

It is the history of many a company of the Lord's people who have become merely formal and traditional, having lost their vitality and their vision. And let us come nearer, it will be the history of individual lives. Soon as you and I resolve everything, teaching, doctrine and practice and meetings and what not, into something which is just a rotor being carried on.

It loses that great, mighty, dynamic vision of the purpose of God and loses that tremendous impact of a sense of purpose. Then our own individual Christian life will come under the sword and God will devastate

us. Devastate us.

Just go to pieces. We have to come to this place and I have been on false ground. I have been in a false position.

My position has not been true, not been real. All the teaching that I have received is simply something in my head, in my mind, not a vital part of my very being. All that I am associated with and do hasn't got the root of the matter in it.

The Lord must overturn. That sounds very hard, but wouldn't we have it otherwise? Is it not His faithfulness to do that? To get to, though it be but a modicum, to get to reality. To save a remnant that has the root of the matter in it.

The widening context and application you can see here. And I must remind you that Ezekiel overlapped two ends. One end he overlapped the ministry of Jeremiah.

And at the other end he overlapped the ministry of Daniel. Do you remember the word of the Lord which came to Jeremiah? I have set thee this day over a nation. Lock up.

Pull down. Over. The other end, Daniel.

We're all familiar with how Daniel in his book is set right in the midst of the nation. Isn't it true? We'll come to that in a minute. Here's a wide context in the midst of which Ezekiel is set.

And there passes, passes in review the rise and the fall of the world power. Of the peoples and nations who have exercised power and influence in the history of this world. Prophet here, Ezekiel, begins with the first four.

Ammon, Noam, Edom, Philistia. Oh, it's for you to go and look into. All this you're not expecting or wanting.

But I should trace their history and give their full meaning. Sufficient to say that it was Ammon and Noam who conspired and joined hands to hire Balaam to curse Israel. Balaam, king of Noam, sent for Balaam.

Come, curse me Israel. All right, Ammon. All right, Noam.

Mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceeding slow. Though with patience he stands waiting, with exactness grinds he all. Ammon, Noam, you're going to be grist.

For God's mill will cease. The third was Edom. And what a history.

Edom had a menace, Israel. And the interests of them. And the fourth, Philistia.

Oh, we are tired. We are tired and sick of reading of the interferences of the Philistines. With the interests of the Lord, the uncircumcised Philistines as they were called.

They were that constant, that almost perpetual menace to the Lord's interests. In Israel, these four are brought right into the song of the sword. I will overturn, overturn, overturn, says the Lord.

And so it was. Ammon, Noam, Edom, Philistia went to the sword. And are no more.

And are no more. Prophet passes from the first four to another two. Second two, Tyre and Sidon.

In chapter 28 of these prophecies, you have one of the most amazing, startling and terrible things in the Bible. The King of Tyre. And it's not difficult to see right through what is said here, right through to Satan himself.

Thou walkest up and down amidst the stone. Thou saidest I will ascend into heaven. So on, so on.

And this is said in the first context of the King of Tyre. But you can see right through this to another one. Inspiring this, this exulting against God.

This aspiring to be supreme everywhere. The King of Tyre, read chapter 28 again and see how terrible it is. And the Sidonians was in league with Tyre.

And the word reaches even unto them, I will overturn, overturn, overturn. Where is Tyre and Sidon? What happened? Well, history will tell you what happened. The desolation, the desolation of Tyre.

It's a tremendously thrilling but startling story. And then the prophet moves to one. After the four and the two he comes to one, Egypt.

That empire of antiquity. That wonderful civilization. That great world power.

Of which many other great powers were for a long time much afraid. But Egypt comes to the same thing you said about Egypt. I will overturn, overturn, overturn.

And we know the history. Trying, trying to recover something of their early glory and prestige. But it's a poor feeble business.

God said I will overturn. And so it was. And then we move into a still larger context as we overlap into Daniel.

And before long the great image of Nebuchadnezzar brought into full view. That great image with its four of the greatest world powers in history. We are with the big four here.

Babylon. See this great Babylon that I have made. God gave him a kingdom.

That all nations and peoples and towns should bow down before him how great. Then the invasion of Cyrus the Persian. And the supplanting of the great Babylon with the Medo-Persian empire.

Which is proverbial. In our daily speech we speak about the law of the Medes and Persians. Something that has come to stay forever and cannot be altered.

It lifts itself against Babylon and Babylon goes down. Medo-Persia takes this. And then another great world power comes on the horizon.

Alexander the Great rises up with his Greco-Macedonian empire. And treads all other powers underfoot and looks for new worlds to conquer. And when he has conquered all the worlds that he can find.

He passes in the pageant of empires. And the greatest of them all appears on the scene. The Roman Empire.

All these are mentioned in Daniel. They are presented in the great image. The great Roman Empire.

The greatest of all that had ever been. Those in extent and in power. Here are the world nations.

Here are the world empires. And the prophecy extends to them all. I will overturn.

Overturn. Overturn. Daniel tells us of the overturning.

When he says after, after describing the vision. There was seen a stone. Cut out without hands.

Which smote the feet of the great image. But it cracked. And Daniel says in the days of those kingdoms.

A stone cut out without hands. And it shall endure forever. It was in the very time of the Roman Empire that the stone smote it.

And it crashed. And in representation it brought all the other empires down with it. I will overturn said the Lord.

Overturn. Overturn. What is the teaching? What is the teaching of all this? In the first place.

Over all these. There is a throne. Another throne.

That throne which we have seen at the beginning of Ezekiel's prophecies. Above the firmament. The likeness of a throne.

And upon it the likeness of a man. Of a man above. Above.

That spreads over. All these kingdoms. Dominions and powers.

There is a throne. To use a fragment from Daniel. Thou shalt know that the heavens do rule.

The heavens do rule. There is a throne over all. For to comfort us.

I have been saying hard things. Painful things. Perhaps you say gloomy things.

Depressing things. But here. What's the lesson? Over all these terrible things there is a throne.

What is the explanation of the downfall of all these world powers? One explanation. One explanation dear friends. Every one of them sought to take the place that was eternally appointed for God's son.

God had appointed him heir of all things. That's the scripture. God's son was the destined heir.

Of this world and its kingdoms. God's son is the right of all nations. And every one of these have stretched out a hand.

To take to itself what belonged by eternal covenant to the son of God. Spreading. Spreading.

From Ammon and Noab in their more limited scope. Spreading out and out and out until Rome spreads itself over all the world. To possess it.

To possess this world. Rule and govern it. For it's their own ends.

And God said. Wait. That's my preserve.

That's the preserve of my son. Don't touch that. Don't touch that.

Don't lay a hand on that. That's secret to my son. Touch that.

And I'll over tongue. Over tongue. Over tongue.

Till he come whose right it is. And I will give it to him. That's history.

That's true. But dear friends, there's still a wider context. A lot of things since Rome went down.

And in our own lifetime we've seen this thing happen. Don't like mentioning it. We don't like mentioning the name.

But we have to in this very context. What about Hitler? Hitler aspired with his ambition and ambitiousness. To dominate all the nations of this world.

Bring them into subjection to his ideology and to his control. To take it. And we know how viciously he repudiated Jesus Christ.

And his church. All right. Mr. Hitler says the throne above.

That is the prerogative of the Son of God. Hands up. And we see the awful, awful wreckage and ruin of both Hitler himself and of his regime.

Some of you have seen it. Some of us have seen some of it. The awful devastation and the terrible story Christ writes interferes with it.

I will over tongue. And we have seen a Mussolini having made for him a great relief map. To stretch the whole width of a great hall.

And we have seen a Mussolini having made for him a great relief map. To stretch the whole width of a great hall. Of the ten kingdoms of the Roman Empire.

And setting up a statue of himself and proclaiming himself as the last Caesar of the restored Roman Empire. All right. Says the throne above.

So far shall thy proud waves come. But no father, look at the shame. That contemporary history.

Our present time is seeing something bigger than any of those. Any of those. Bigger than the biggest of the old great four roads.

Bigger than these that I have just mentioned. Something spreading itself in the denial of God. And the denial of the Son of God.

And the denial of the Church of God. To be the great world power. And the throne above says, if you can't read history and learn from history, you'll learn an experience.

And the same destiny and doom is coming to it. Make no mistake about it. Why? Because this world was made for Jesus Christ.

And the days coming when the scripture will be fulfilled. Kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom of our God and of his Christ. Jesus shall reign where'er the sun.

You know the rest. But note, while that's a glorious prospect, it's a terrible outlook from another standpoint. And it's a challenge.

It's a challenge to us. It's a challenge to our assembly. It's a challenge to the Church of God.

As it is a challenge to the world, the purpose of God is gather together. Reunite all things in Christ. The things in the heavens.

Things in the earth. Things under the earth. That he in all things may have the preeminence.

That's the purpose of God. It is of the most minute application in our lives. It is the object with which the Holy Spirit is working in our spiritual history.

It is the explanation of God's dealings with us and his people. Just as it is the explanation of this world's history. Rise and fall, the glory and the shame of world powers, empires and dominions.

He must reign till all his enemies are made the footstool of him. That's the message. The Lord make the application.

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