The Persistent Purpose of God - Part 3

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the persistent purpose of God through the lens of Ezekiel's prophetic ministry and its implications for our spiritual lives.

Duration: 1:06:38
Scripture: Ezekiel 1:28 - 2:2, Ezekiel 4:1 - 5:9, Ezekiel 25:1 - 26:15, Ezekiel 33:1 - 34:6, Ezekiel 40:1-48
Topics: "Purpose Of God"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker begins by suggesting a method for the audience to better engage with the message. He then provides a broad outline of the book being discussed, acknowledging its difficulty to understand. The speaker emphasizes the importance of taking time to reflect and adjust to what the Lord reveals, drawing parallels to the prophet's experiences. He briefly mentions the different sections of the book, focusing on the first section and the preparation of the prophet for his ministry. The speaker concludes by acknowledging the need for deep experiences and the death of the flesh in order to effectively carry out the ministry.

Transcript

...the prophecies of Ezekiel. [redacted] And I'm going to ask you to do something which I think will help me, and I think it will really help you. [redacted] When I come to the actual message, I'm going to ask you not to write it down.

[redacted], [redacted] But just to listen to what I'm saying. [redacted] Afterwards, I will go over the points, and if you want to put them down, you can. [redacted] I really think that that method will help you.

[redacted] But to begin with, I'm just going to give you a very broad outline of this book. [redacted], [redacted] This you can put down. [redacted] But let me say here, that I have no intention of [redacted] It is not my fault to study the whole of this book.

[redacted] I'm just going to take out some of the great features. [redacted] There is a large middle section that we shall hardly consider at all. [redacted], [redacted] This is one of the most difficult books in the Bible to understand.

[redacted] I expect you have discovered that in reading only the first three chapters. [redacted], [redacted] And so I will just give you this very broad outline of the whole book. [redacted] You can fill in the details.

[redacted] You want to know first of all what the whole book is about. [redacted] Can we put on the first page anything that sums up the meaning of the whole book? [redacted] I think we can. [redacted] This is the book of the persistent purpose of God.

[redacted] The divine energies in relation to divine purpose. [redacted] If you want a New Testament fragment that will explain that, you have it in Ephesians 1.11. [redacted],[redacted] According to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will. [redacted],[redacted] Ephesians 1.11 is the key to the book of Ezekiel.

[redacted] That word in Ephesians 1.11, who worketh, is a strong word. [redacted] The Greek word is energeo, which means energy. [redacted]energy,[redacted] So that God is energizing all things after the counsel of his own will.

[redacted],[redacted],[redacted] In a special way, that is what we have in this book of Ezekiel. [redacted],[redacted] You must read the whole book in the light of Ephesians 1.11. [redacted] I think we shall see that as we go on. [redacted],[redacted] Now for the broad outline of the book.

[redacted],[redacted] We begin with the prophet himself. [redacted],and his preparation for his ministry. [redacted] That covers the first three chapters.

[redacted],[redacted] The prophet himself. [redacted] The prophet's vision. [redacted] And the prophet's commission.

[redacted] Chapters 1 to 3. [redacted] The next section is from chapter 4 to chapter 26. [redacted],[redacted],[redacted] That section has to do with the nation of Israel. [redacted] There are three things in that section about the nation.

[redacted],[redacted],[redacted] Firstly, their departure from God. [redacted],[redacted] Secondly, their denunciation by God. [redacted],[redacted] And thirdly, their judgment.

[redacted],[redacted] Then the next section is from chapter 25 to chapter 32. [redacted] [redacted] [redacted] This section has to do with the nation. [redacted] There are first of all four nations dealt with.

[redacted] Ammon, Moab, Eden, Philistia. [redacted],[redacted],[redacted] And then there are two, Tyre and Sidon. [redacted] There is a very brief interval referring to the restoration of Israel.

In chapter 28 verses 25 and 26. [redacted],[redacted],[redacted] [redacted] [redacted] And then the judgment of the nations proceeds. [redacted] And Egypt is judged.

[redacted] Then we come to section four. [redacted] This brings us back to Israel the nation. [redacted] This section is from chapter 33 to chapter 39.

[redacted] This section deals with the watchmen. [redacted] The shepherds. [redacted] The new order.

[redacted] The vision of dry bones. [redacted] And the last enemy. [redacted] Then we come to the fifth and final section.

[redacted],[redacted] That is the restoration. [redacted] Chapter 40 to chapter 48. [redacted] In that we have the temple.

[redacted],[redacted] The Lord. [redacted] The service of the temple. [redacted] The river.

[redacted] The land. [redacted] The inheritance. [redacted] And the city.

[redacted] Now as I said, we are not going to study all that. [redacted],[redacted] That is only given you to help you to get a grasp of the whole of the book. [redacted] We come back to our part of the study.

[redacted] And we are still going to spend some time in the first section. [redacted] I think it is most important that we should spend much time with this section. [redacted] I expect that from time to time you will be saying, well I wish he would get on with the book.

[redacted],[redacted] But I am in no hurry to cover a great deal of ground. [redacted] I want to make sure that we really do get hold of these fundamental lessons. [redacted] So we come back to the first three chapters, the prophet's preparation for his ministry.

[redacted] This is a matter which concerns us very much. [redacted] How the prophet was prepared for his ministry. Or what was true of Ezekiel is true concerning us spiritually.

Yesterday morning we saw the time factor in his ministry. [redacted] The situation to which he was called to minister. [redacted] And the express word of the Lord to him personally.

[redacted] Now this morning we come to the vision. [redacted] You notice what this says. [redacted] I was among the captives by the river Chiba.

The heavens were open and I saw visions of God. [redacted],[redacted] And I want to say right here that while the form of these visions will not be repeated in the case of the Lord's servants. The spiritual principles and meaning must be true of us all.

[redacted],[redacted] [redacted] Our purpose is to get behind what is objective to the meaning of things. [redacted] We shall all the time be trying to get at the spiritual meaning. [redacted] You see the objective side is only the temporary method.

[redacted] It is just the means that God employed for the time being. [redacted] The spiritual meaning is the permanent and the real. [redacted] So we come to the vision.

[redacted] Ezekiel said, I saw visions of God. [redacted] That has two meanings. [redacted] That means that the visions came from God.

[redacted] They were visions which God gave him. [redacted] And it meant that they were visions of the goings of God. [redacted] God was on the move.

[redacted] God was taking a certain course. [redacted] And the prophet was given to see the ways that God was taking. [redacted] That is the meaning of visions of God.

[redacted] But before he saw visions of God, it says the heavens were open. [redacted],[redacted] I am going to speak mostly about that this morning. [redacted] But before I come today, there are one or two things to say.

[redacted],[redacted] The visions that were given to Ezekiel varied in time, in nature, and in method. [redacted],[redacted] [redacted] That is, they varied at different times. [redacted] They did not all come to the prophet at the same time.

[redacted],[redacted] The Lord gave something to the prophet. [redacted] This had the effect of bringing the prophet down on his face before the Lord. [redacted],[redacted] That is what it says at the end of chapter one.

[redacted] Then the Lord put him on his feet. [redacted] And this kind of thing happened from time to time. [redacted] My point is that there were intervals in the prophet's life.

[redacted],[redacted],[redacted] And in those intervals, the prophet had to think about what was being shown to him. [redacted],[redacted] And to adjust himself to what the Lord had shown. [redacted] Now brothers and sisters, I want to put a line underneath this.

[redacted] We must have such intervals in our ministry. [redacted],[redacted] If the Lord shows us something. [redacted] We must take a time to consider it.

[redacted] To face what it means and what it implies. [redacted],[redacted],[redacted] That is a necessity in ministry. [redacted] A very great deal of value is lost by our just continually going on.

[redacted] [redacted],[redacted] And not giving those periods of quietness with the Lord over what he is saying. [redacted] [redacted] The Lord says something. [redacted] And then we go and give it out.

[redacted] And we go on and on like that. [redacted] And we do not pause. [redacted] To think about what the Lord is really saying.

[redacted] What this really implies. [redacted] And to adjust ourselves to it. [redacted] I believe that a very great deal of the life and ministry of the Apostle Paul came out of his two years' silence in the desert.

[redacted] He had the vision of the Lord on the way to the Mosque. [redacted] It was a tremendous vision that brought him down on his face. [redacted] It required two years of silence to adjust himself to the meaning of that vision.

[redacted], [redacted] I have often tried to imagine what was going on during those two years. [redacted] What it was that Paul had to adjust himself to. [redacted] How he had to read all his Bible over again in the light of that vision.

[redacted] [redacted] What we have from Paul came out of those two years. [redacted], [redacted] Now I'm not suggesting that after this training course you go away for two years. [redacted],[redacted], [redacted],[redacted] I should get myself into trouble with the Elder Brothers if I suggested this.

[redacted],[redacted] But you see, here is the principle. [redacted],[redacted] The Lord spoke to his disciple. [redacted],[redacted] And his disciple was silent for seven days.

[redacted] He could not go on with his ministry until he had spent those seven days thinking about what the Lord had shown to him. [redacted], [redacted], [redacted] My point is that the Lord does not give us everything at once. [redacted], [redacted] He waits until we have really understood what he has said.

[redacted], [redacted] And he waits until we have adjusted ourselves to that. [redacted] So be very jealous about these intervals. [redacted], [redacted] Say to yourself from time to time, I must get away and think about what the Lord has been saying.

[redacted], [redacted], I must get away from the ministry. I must get away from the work. I must have at least a few hours to think about it all.

That is of tremendous value. I can say that out of my own experience. Sometimes if I only take a journey away from things.

I may go away in my car. Or I may go away by train. Just for a few hours to get right away from everything.

And let the meaning of things come back to me afresh. [redacted], [redacted] Do believe me, that is very important. [redacted], [redacted] Our ministry will become just words, and very thin, unless it is like that.

[redacted], [redacted], [redacted] We have got to come back again and again, all together fresh. [redacted], [redacted] There is a very great deal of what the Lord has said that lies in the past, that has never been applied. And it will only really live as we spend time with it.

[redacted], [redacted] I believe that it is one of the enemy's great methods to try and keep us busy all the time. [redacted], [redacted] He gives us a wrong kind of conscience about the Lord's Word. [redacted] I can tell you this also out of experience.

[redacted],[redacted] I went on for a long long time like that. [redacted] I never gave the Lord his Sabbath rest. [redacted] I got a false conscience about this thing.

[redacted] If I am not doing something from the Lord, then I am all wrong. [redacted], [redacted] I must keep going on and on. [redacted],[redacted] And I felt very bad inside if I was not busy for the Lord.

[redacted], [redacted] But I came to see that that's wrong. [redacted] And because I did not give the Lord his rest, He took it. [redacted], [redacted] And he put me aside for some weeks.

[redacted] Where I could do nothing. [redacted] And then I started afresh. [redacted],[redacted] But in that time, the ministry had become a new thing.

[redacted], [redacted] We are touching a very important principle here. [redacted] This matter of periods between revelations. [redacted] So it was with Ezekiel.

[redacted] He had his quiet time, not just an hour in the morning. [redacted], [redacted] But from time to time, he was silent. [redacted] He was saying nothing.

[redacted] He was alone with the Lord. [redacted] Then this ministry varied, these visions varied in their nature, and not only in their time. [redacted],[redacted] Ezekiel, [redacted], [redacted] So you have the various kinds of visions.

[redacted], [redacted] We are not going to stay with these just now. [redacted] We only mention them. [redacted] First of all, there was the vision of the throne.

[redacted] Then we know the vision of the valley of dry bones. [redacted] Then the vision of the Lord's house. [redacted] Then the vision of the great river.

[redacted] The vision of the land. [redacted],[redacted] The vision of the people in their inheritance. [redacted] And finally, the vision of the city.

[redacted] We leave those for the time being, because we are going to speak more fully of them later. [redacted], [redacted] But in the third place, the visions varied in method. [redacted],[redacted] And this is something we must stay with for a minute.

[redacted] The visions that came to each individual, came in two different ways. [redacted] [redacted] Firstly, they came in an objective way. [redacted],[redacted] Things were presented to him in vision.

[redacted], [redacted] He was like John on the Isle of Patmos. [redacted] He saw things in an objective way. [redacted] But the visions were not always in that way.

[redacted] There was a second method by which the visions came to Ezekiel. [redacted] And that method was by the instruction of the spirit. [redacted] And that was the larger method.

[redacted] Of course these two methods were not always separate. [redacted] But they do mark a distinction. [redacted] In our dispensation, the first method is very uncommon.

[redacted] Paul did have some visions and revelations in the first way. [redacted] In 1 Corinthians 12, he says, I will come to visions and revelations. [redacted] I knew a man about forty years ago.

[redacted] But one was caught up in the heavens. [redacted] Whether in the body I know not, or out of the body I know not. [redacted] But one was shown things unlawful to the other.

[redacted] That was the first method for Paul. [redacted] He had those objective visions. [redacted] The Apostle John had the same.

[redacted] But these were the exceptional. [redacted] And there are very few of us in this dispensation who have that kind of thing. [redacted] Such visions usually belong to the beginning of things.

[redacted] The objective side usually relates to beginning. [redacted] I am tempted to enlarge upon that, because it is important. [redacted] Take the whole matter of the spiritual gifts mentioned by Paul.

[redacted] Such as the gift of tongues. [redacted] The gift of healing. [redacted] These are the objective things.

[redacted] They belong to the beginning. [redacted] Now you have a great Chinese man of God. [redacted] Chinese man of God? [redacted] You may have heard his name, Pastor Xu.

[redacted] If you haven't heard of him, he is well known in the West. [redacted] His life has been written. [redacted] And there was one thing which he said, which is very illuminating.

[redacted] This is what he said. [redacted] When we were breaking new ground. [redacted] And dealing with a heathen who had never heard of Christ.

[redacted] The Lord gave us many outward signs. [redacted] He gave the gift of time. [redacted] He gave the gift of working miracles.

[redacted] The gift of healing bodies. [redacted] All these things were connected with the beginning of things in any place. [redacted] But we notice that when these believers began to grow up in the Lord.

[redacted] These things were withdrawn. [redacted] And they had to trust the Lord not because of signs, but just because of himself. [redacted] Maturity in the Christian life meant the withdrawing of these things which the

Lord gave to little children.

[redacted],[redacted] That is very illuminating. [redacted] [redacted],[redacted] These objective things relate to laying foundation. [redacted] Paul and the other apostles were laying the foundation for this whole dispensation.

[redacted] Therefore they had the exceptional and what we might call the abnormal side of things. [redacted],[redacted] That is the abnormal. [redacted] What is the normal way in this dispensation? [redacted],[redacted]? It is the second method that the Lord employed with these issues.

[redacted] Which had to do with the development of the purpose of God. [redacted] When you come to such a great thing as the house of God, [redacted], and the inheritance, [redacted], and the city, [redacted], it is the spirit who is doing it all the time. [redacted] You notice that is the spirit let me in.

[redacted] The spirit set me down. [redacted] Spirit took me out. [redacted] The spirit showed me.

[redacted] It is all the movement of the spirit. [redacted] That is the normal way for this dispensation. [redacted] The Lord Jesus himself said that that would be the normal.

[redacted],[redacted] When the spirit of truth will come, He shall guide you into all the truth. [redacted], [redacted] He shall take the things which are mine and show them to you. [redacted] And the rest of the New Testament is along that line.

[redacted],[redacted], [redacted] The normal way is the anointing spirit teaching us all things. [redacted], [redacted] That brings us back to this first part of the vision. [redacted] The heavens were opened.

[redacted] Now you have heard me say quite a lot about the opened heavens. [redacted] But I want to say it again and a little more this morning. [redacted] The opened heavens.

[redacted] We all know that in the symbolism of the gardens, at the beginning, the heavens were closed to the man who sinned. [redacted], [redacted],[redacted] [redacted] The gardens stand to represent the kingdom of the heavens. [redacted] It is an order which God himself has created.

[redacted]? It is the true representation of heavenly things. [redacted] But when Adam sinned, he was turned out of that realm. [redacted] And the door was closed behind him.

[redacted] And that door has remained closed to all the sons of Adam. [redacted]Adam[redacted] Behind that door is the place where God is. [redacted],[redacted] Behind that door is the place where life is.

[redacted],[redacted] Behind that door is the place where the divine order is. [redacted],[redacted] Outside of that door is death. [redacted] Outside of that door, God is not.

[redacted],[redacted] Outside of that door is no divine order. [redacted],[redacted] And that door is closed. [redacted] It is closed to all the sons of Adam.

[redacted] But that door has been opened again. [redacted] We know when it was opened. [redacted] It was opened to the son of man.

[redacted] You remember his words right at the beginning. [redacted],[redacted] His words to Nathanael. [redacted] He said to Nathanael, Hereafter, thou shalt see the heavens open.

[redacted],[redacted],[redacted] And the angels of God are ascending and descending upon the son of man. [redacted] Of course, that was a picture. [redacted] It was a picture taken from the Old Testament.

[redacted] Nathanael knew what it meant. [redacted] Taken out of the life of Jacob. [redacted] Jacob was in the place of the closed heaven.

[redacted] At Bethel, he saw the heavens open. [redacted],[redacted] He saw the angels of God ascending and descending. [redacted] Nathanael knew all about that.

[redacted] Now Jesus said, I am that letter. [redacted], [redacted] It is over me that the heavens are open. [redacted],[redacted] All communication between heaven and earth, and earth and heaven, is related to me.

[redacted], [redacted] No man comes unto the Father but by me. [redacted], [redacted], [redacted] No man gets anything from the Father but by me. [redacted], [redacted] So, on the banks of the Jordan, the heavens are open to him.

[redacted], [redacted] And Jordan is a figure of his cross. [redacted] In the cross of the Lord Jesus, one man has been put to death and buried. [redacted], [redacted] That is the man to whom the heavens are closed.

[redacted], [redacted], [redacted] On the other side of the cross, a new man rises. [redacted], [redacted] And to him the heavens are open. [redacted] Well, we are familiar with all that.

[redacted] It's very simple. [redacted] But it is over the Lord Jesus as a new kind of heavenly man that the heavens are open. We know that that is exactly what the Lord was saying to Nicodemus.

Nicodemus is a very clever man. Nicodemus is a very educated man. Nicodemus is a very religious man.

Yet he is still a son of Adam. And the Lord makes it very clear to him that he has no open heaven. I think Nicodemus realized that he had no open heaven.

In order to have an open heaven, he had got to be born from heaven. That is the beginning of the open heaven. Do you remember that it was in his cross that the veil of the temple was raised? His blood.

[redacted] And that is what we are talking about in the case of Ezekiel. For him the open heaven related to his ministry. And this is a matter that you and I need to understand.

This is a special aspect of the Holy Spirit. We receive the Holy Spirit when we are born from above. But the anointing of the Spirit relates to ministry.

Jesus was born of the Holy Spirit. But he was anointed of the Spirit for his ministry. [redacted] I do not want to draw too great a distinction between being born of the Spirit and being anointed.

But there is a difference. [redacted] Here it is the effect of the Holy Spirit in us in relation to ministry. [redacted] Nevertheless, let us look at them again.

You notice that the apostle has been saying these tremendous things about the calling of the church. It is the great vocation of the church that is in view. [redacted] It is not just the salvation of believers.

That has taken place. But now he is dealing with the matter of the church and its great ministry. Its ministry now and its ministry in the ages to come.

[redacted] That is what we have in this letter to the Ephesians. Do recognize that what is in this letter is not something to individual Christians. It only applies to individual Christians in a related way.

[redacted] What are these spiritual blessings for? [redacted]? Are they just for our satisfaction? [redacted]? [redacted]? Just that we should be blessed? [redacted]? You look at this letter and you see that it is for the purpose of ministry. [redacted] It is that the church shall fulfill its ministry. [redacted] I did not intend to move out of Ezekiel into Ephesians at this time.

[redacted] But perhaps the Spirit is leading us also. [redacted] Now you see what the apostle says here. [redacted]? When he ascended up on high [redacted] He gave gifts among men.

[redacted] He gave some apostles. [redacted] Some prophets. [redacted] Some evangelists.

[redacted] Some pastors and teachers. [redacted] What for? [redacted]? For the perfecting of the saint unto the work of ministry. [redacted] For making the church complete That it may fulfill its ministry.

[redacted] The object of everything is the ministry of the church. [redacted] Now it's because of that ministry That the apostle prays in this way. [redacted] For this cause I also [redacted] Cease not to give thanks for you [redacted]

[redacted] Making mention of you in my prayers [redacted] That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ [redacted] The Father of Glory [redacted] May give unto you a spirit of wisdom and revelation In the knowledge of him.

[redacted] That is the knowledge of Christ [redacted] And you Greek scholars will know That the word knowledge there is full knowledge [redacted] A spirit of wisdom and revelation In the full knowledge of Christ [redacted] Having the eyes of your heart enlightened [redacted] That you may know [redacted] Then the things that you may know are mentioned [redacted] Here is the word of the Holy Spirit In relation to ministry [redacted] In relation to the ministry of the church The church must have the eyes of its heart enlightened [redacted] The church must have a spirit of wisdom and revelation In the full knowledge of Christ [redacted] This ought to be the normal life of the church in this dispensation

[redacted] That it is not the normal life means that things are all wrong [redacted] The church ought to know what is the hope of its calling [redacted] It ought to know what the riches of the glory of his inheritance [redacted] It ought to know the exceeding greatness of his power [redacted] This ought to be the normal knowledge of the church for its ministry [redacted] And what ought to be true of the whole church It ought certainly to be true of its ministry [redacted] This is the meaning of the open heaven [redacted] The spirit of wisdom and revelation has been given [redacted] The eyes of the heart have been enlightened [redacted] We know [redacted] We know the movements of God [redacted] We

know the way that God is taking [redacted] We know the end that God has in view [redacted] And we know that God is working all things after the counsel of his own will [redacted] That is what Ezekiel came to see by the open heaven [redacted] God has an end [redacted] God is moving toward that end [redacted] All the mighty energies of God are directed toward that end [redacted] All these things in heaven and in earth are being governed in relation to that end [redacted] This is what Ezekiel saw [redacted] The book is the book of the persistent energies of God toward his end [redacted] We brothers and sisters ought to know that in our own experience [redacted] Are you saying I don't know anything about this? [redacted]

Are you saying that is not my experience? [redacted] This letter relates to the church in the whole dispensation and afterward [redacted] It reaches unto us [redacted] We can be in this position [redacted] I expect you are saying well how can we be there [redacted] It may be one of the questions that you would raise presently [redacted] I would just answer it in this way [redacted] Go and ask the Lord to do this thing in you at any cost If you will accept the cost [redacted] It was a tremendously costly way for his issue [redacted]

[redacted]

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