

# The Purpose of Companions

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of being a companion of Christ, which means having a personal relationship with Him based on fellowship and oneness, and experiencing eternal life and fellowship with Him.*

**Scripture:** Exodus 33:11, Isaiah 41:8, Matthew 21:43, Luke 22:28, John 15:14, Acts 13:22, Ephesians 1:23, Hebrews 2:3, Hebrews 3:1, Hebrews 3:14

**Topics:** "Divine Purpose", "Companionship with Christ"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the profound significance of being 'companions' of Christ, as highlighted in Hebrews 3:1 and 3:14. He explores the biblical concept of companionship, illustrating how figures like Abraham, Moses, and David exemplified deep relationships with God, ultimately culminating in the companionship offered through Jesus Christ. Sparks stresses that this companionship is not merely an official title but a heartfelt relationship that calls for responsibility and commitment to God's purpose centered in His Son. He warns of the consequences of neglecting this calling, underscoring the importance of remaining steadfast in faith to truly experience the greatness of being a companion of Christ. The sermon invites believers to recognize their heavenly calling and the intimate relationship they are invited to share with Jesus.

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## Transcript

"Wherefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling" (Hebrews 3:1).

"For we are become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end" (Hebrews 3:14).

Our first thing to do is to consider briefly the one word which is going to stand over all our meditations. It is the word which occurs in each of the verses above cited: the word 'partakers'. The Greek word so translated occurs some five times in this Letter to the Hebrews: 1:9; 3:1,14; 6:4; 12:8. In Luke 5:7 it is translated 'partners', and other translations are 'fellows', 'companions'. There are also other variations of the same original word or root.

Having looked carefully into the original meaning I have come to the conclusion that its truest and deepest meaning is 'companions'. Therefore I have taken this to define and govern all that we shall consider in these chapters. 'Companions of Christ': 'Companions of a heavenly calling'.

This idea of 'companions' runs right through the Bible as being the ultimate thought of God concerning man, and man's relationship to Him. Behind everything that is official in relationships to the Lord there is always a personal element. Think of Abraham! Abraham was a great servant of the Lord and he served Him very faithfully. But the deepest thing about Abraham was that he was God's friend. God spoke of him as "My friend" (Isaiah 41:8). That carries with it this idea of a 'companion of God'.

Moses was a great servant of the Lord, and the Lord often spoke of him as 'Moses my servant'. But we know that there was something deeper in it than that - "The Lord spake unto Moses face to face, as a man speaketh unto his friend" (Exodus 33:11). There was a very intimate relationship between God and Moses and Moses and God. In reality Moses was a 'companion of the Lord'.

And what about David? There are many things said about him, but the greatest was that God said he was a man "after my heart" (Acts 13:22). That is the meaning of a companion of the Lord.

When the Lord Jesus came on to this earth He chose His disciples and apostles on the basis of companionship. Call them 'disciples', if you like - those who had to enter the school of Christ and be taught. Call them 'apostles' - those who were to be sent forth by Him. But the deepest thing in their relationship to Him was that they were His companions. Toward the end of their time He said: "Ye are they which have continued with me in my temptations" (Luke 22:28). They were His companions in life and His companions in suffering. He said: "Ye are my friends" (John 15:14).

When we come to the Church, it is not some official, ecclesiastical institution. That is very cold, very formal and very distant. But when the Lord speaks about His Church it is always in terms of love: "The church of God which he purchased with his own blood" (Acts 20:28) - "Christ also loved the church, and gave himself up for it" (Ephesians 5:25). Perhaps we have to recover this idea about the Church: it is called to be the 'companion of Christ'. Its deepest relationship with Him is a heart relationship - just to be His companions in life, in work, in suffering and in glory.

Having said a word about the idea of companions, let us go on to think of the purpose of companions. The Bible is a book of one purpose, and that one purpose lies behind all its stages and phases. It lies behind creation, behind divine foreknowledge, behind election, behind the persons whom God chose, behind all the movements of God through the Bible, behind all the figures and all the types and behind the three main sections of the Old Testament - the section of priesthood, followed by the section on kingship and then followed by the section of the prophets. Those three sections comprise the Old Testament and this one purpose lies behind everything in the Old Testament. God is revealed in the Bible as a God of purpose, and every movement in His sovereignty is governed by this one purpose.

What is this one purpose in and through all? It is centred in God's Son. In all things God had His Son alone in view. The 'all things' is a very comprehensive term, but all is comprehended in God's Son. As we are going to dwell very much in this Letter to the Hebrews, take note of this very factor at the beginning of it.

The first great statement is concerning all God's past ways and methods. In times past God moved by this means and that means, in this way and that way, but at the end of those times He concentrates all in His Son. He gathers all that up together and focuses it in His Son. The Son of God comprehends the whole of the Old Testament and all God's ways in the Old Testament. To emphasize that, this Letter goes on through the first two chapters to bring the greatness of God's Son into view. You know the wonderful things said about God's Son in the first chapter. Here is the One who is above all others, who comprehends all else in the thought of God.

So God's interest in His Son is brought before us right at the beginning, and the declaration is that God's purposes are all centred in His Son. That Son is now known unto men as Jesus Christ. But the point here is this: Having introduced and presented the Son, and having magnified Him, the Holy Spirit, through the writer, goes on in this way (and there ought to be no break in chapters here) 'Wherefore - for this reason, because of this, because of God's purpose concerning His Son, because of the infinite greatness of the Son, greater than all others and all else - holy brethren, you are called into companionship with God's Son and companionship in the heavenly calling of God's Son.'

We come to our third point in this connection. There are two principles related to divine purpose throughout the Bible. The first is what we have just pointed out: God works ever and always and only in relation to His purpose. The statement of the Apostle Paul about God is: "(He) worketh all things after the counsel of his will" (Ephesians 1:11), and that will is centred in His Son. He therefore works ever, always and only in relation to His Son.

The Bible contains almost uncountable things. What a great mass of things there are in the Bible! Things which God created and things which God used. And then what a lot of persons there are that God laid His hand upon! A whole multitude of them. And then how many are the different ways that God went to realize His purpose! The ways of God are very many. The means that He employed - the Bible is just full of these things. And then we have God's blessings. God is very often found blessing people and blessing things. On the other hand, there are the judgments of God. He is a God of judgment and the Bible contains many of the judgments. But when we have said all that (and, of course, we could never really comprehend all that - this Book is always far, far too big for us!), not one of these things, persons, means used, blessings or judgments or anything else is a thing in itself. If God is the God of creation, if He chooses men, if He uses things, if He blesses or judges, He always does so with one object in view. He created all things for His Son. That is a definite Bible statement. He took hold of these persons with His Son in view. It was so with Abraham, and through Abraham we come to God's Son, 'after the flesh'.

Well, let us be content with making the statement. If God blessed, it was because that thing stood right in line with His Son's interests. If we want the blessing of the Lord we must get alongside of the Lord Jesus and be wholly committed to Him. The Father never sees us apart from the Lord Jesus, and it is in Him that the blessing of God is to be found. If the Bible has much to say about divine judgments - and how much is said by the prophets about the judgments of God! - it is because things then were contrary to His interests in His Son. God always keeps His eye focused upon His one object and that object is His Son. God wastes nothing. He is not just interested in little things as such. The little things become very big things with God when they are related to His Son. Are you a very little person? Very unimportant? If you are vitally related to His Son God looks upon you as very important. But it is not your importance, nor mine. It is the importance of His Son.

This is true about any faithful school-teacher. I suppose all of us have been to school and have had our schoolteachers, and some of us in our school-days did want to stand well with our teachers. We tried to please them because we wanted to be happy with our teachers and we wanted to get all that the teachers could do for us. But my recollection of school-masters is this: They did not have me in view. The only thing they had in view where I was concerned was how their object was going to be realized. They had to have good scholars who passed examinations and came out top, and everything that they thought of related to that end. Sometimes they would be very pleasant to me, and then I thought 'What a good boy am I!' Sometimes it was the other way and I knew something about the judgments of school-teachers! Now this was not because they liked me or disliked me. What they really did like was the end when the

examinations came, and everything about me was looked at in the light of the one object.

While we do not like to call God a school-master, the principle is the same. He is looking at us in the light of His Son: 'How does that man or that woman answer to My thought about My Son? How much of My Son is there in that man or in that woman?' Later we shall see how God works on that ground; but note: this is a principle in God's purpose. That leads us to the second principle.

While God is a God of purpose, ever moving in relation to that purpose, going on, no matter what happens, with His purpose, working on the ground of His own sovereign lordship, no man being able to prevent Him, He is going to reach His end. That is why He has given us the Book of the Revelation. Before we reach the end He has told us what it is going to be like. His purpose is going to be realized. Nevertheless, He keeps to this other principle - He always retains man in a place of responsibility. He never lets man off from responsibility. Why is that? Because His purpose in His Son is to be realized in man, the great, corporate man in which Christ is to have His fullness. Christ is not going to realize God's purpose alone. He will not be in glory just as one isolated unit. So we come back to our verse: "Holy brethren, companions of a heavenly calling... we are become companions of Christ, if we hold fast...."

Paul says that the Church is "the fullness of him that filleth all in all" (Ephesians 1:23). Hence there is a responsibility resting upon man, and no book in the Bible emphasizes that more than the Letter to the Hebrews. In that connection this Letter is one of the most terrible Letters in the Bible. On the one side it is the most glorious thing, and on the other side it is the most terrible thing. We shall be seeing that more fully as we go on.

At this point it is very important for us to recognize another matter, and this is what comes out in this Letter. Indeed, it is going to be the thing which governs all our consideration through these days. If God takes up a vessel in relation to His purpose - it may be individuals, or it may be a company of people, like Israel, or like the men whom God took up in the Bible - and that vessel does not respond to God's will, God will pass by that vessel and find another. He will call in others to take its place.

The greatest instance of this is seen in Israel. God chose Israel to be the vessel through which He would bring in His Son. Israel was called and chosen of God in relation to His Son and His purpose in His Son. And what did Israel do with God's Son? They refused Him, and therefore they refused God's purpose, so God put them aside and passed on. Jesus said: "The kingdom of God shall be taken away from you, and shall be given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Matthew 21:43).

That is the very meaning of the Letter to the Hebrews, as we shall see. No one can say of Israel now: 'They are the companions of Christ.' Israel was once the companion of God, but the companion of God failed God.

What a lot of light this throws upon the fact that the Lord Jesus called Judas amongst the twelve! He was one of the twelve, called to be a companion, and he betrayed his Lord. Israel was called to be the companion of God and of Christ, and Israel betrayed the Son of God - a companion set aside, rejected, while God goes on with His purpose and brings in others to take Israel's place.

So this explains the wonderful Letter to the Hebrews. It is the Letter of the place and of the greatness of Jesus Christ. It sets forth the wonder of being called to be a companion of Christ, and then it makes it so clear what a terrible thing it is for those who are called to be companions to fail the Lord. It says: "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?" (Hebrews 2:3). You can never understand that phrase

'so great salvation' until you understand what it means to be a companion of Christ. Is there anything greater than being a companion of Jesus Christ? When you think of who He is, and of all that God has purposed concerning Him - and then to think that you and I are called to be companions of that Son of God! That is indeed a very great salvation! It is the 'so great salvation'.

We have spent our time just going round this one word 'companion'. The New Testament is built around that one word and around the one idea of companions of Christ. Christ is first seen choosing His companions, and then He is seen teaching them by word and by deed. Then He is seen testing and sifting them. Are they true companions? Or are they only associated with Him for what they are going to get from Him? You can have plenty of companions if you give them everything and if they can get all that they want from you. But what about the day when you can give them nothing but suffering? And persecution, and everything that is against their natural interests? You can only offer them a place in the Father's house! So He sifted them, He tested them, on more than one occasion it is said "... many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him" (John 6:66). Companionship is something which is tested and sifted through adversity. So if you have an extra lot of testing and of suffering in your relationship with Christ, remember that He is seeking to have us as His closest companions, in fellowship with Himself, not only in His glory, but in His sufferings.

So the relationship with Christ is on the basis of fellowship. Oneness in life, in purpose, in experience, in discipline, in death, burial and resurrection, in anointing and then, at last, oneness with Him in His heavenly glory.

We must realize that Jesus is repeating Himself in a spiritual way in this dispensation. When Luke wrote the book of the Acts, he commenced with these words: "All that Jesus began both to do and to teach" (Acts 1:1). His implication was: 'I am now going to write what He is going on doing and teaching. It is the same Jesus. He is doing the same work and doing the same things - but there is a difference. Before it was by illustration in a temporal way. Now it is the meaning of those things in a spiritual way. The meaning that was in the things then is now in what He is doing with us in a spiritual way. Did He open physically blind eyes? He is now opening spiritually blind eyes, and that is much more important.'

This same Jesus is going on with the same work in meaning now with you and with me. He is repeating His earthly life in a spiritual way. He is more on the line of meaning than of acts now.

Why do we say that? Well, when we were children we used to sing a hymn (and I think when we are grown up we often feel the same!):

"I think when I read that sweet story of old,

When Jesus was here among men,

How He called little children as lambs to His fold:

I should like to have been with them then!"

Do you feel that you would have liked to have lived with Him then, on the earth? Is that the best thing that you can think about? Let me tell you that you have something far better than that now! That same Jesus is with us, but, oh! on a much more wonderful basis than He was then. And we are called now to be companions of Christ and companions of the heavenly calling. His dealings with us, perhaps, are far more real because they are spiritual and eternal, while His dealings when He was on earth were only physical,

and for the time being. It is a good thing to look after people's bodies and to help them in this life, but there is something very much more than that. It is that heavenly calling, that which is eternal, that which will not pass as our life work when time is no more - "Wherefore, holy brethren, companions of a heavenly calling... we are become companions of Christ if we hold fast".

All that is only by way of laying a foundation. As the Lord helps we shall build on that foundation.

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