

# 'Called According to His Purpose'

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*We are called according to God's purpose, and our lives should be governed by a sense of divine destiny.*

**Scripture:** Isaiah 64:8, Jeremiah 18:5

**Topics:** "Divine Purpose", "Election and Calling"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that God, as the Potter, shapes us according to His divine purpose, highlighting that our existence is not random but intentional, reflecting God's mind and will. He explains that every believer should have a sense of divine destiny, recognizing that salvation is a pathway to fulfilling God's purpose. Sparks warns against rigid doctrines that can lead to spiritual stagnation, asserting that true election is about being chosen for a purpose rather than merely for salvation. He encourages believers to trust in God's power and wisdom, even when they feel unworthy or incapable, as God's patience and persistence ensure that His plans will ultimately prevail. The sermon concludes with a call to embrace our divine calling and live with a consciousness of purpose.

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## Transcript

"But now, O Lord, thou art our father; we are the clay, and thou our potter; and we all are the work of thy hand" (Isaiah 64:8).

"Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith the Lord. Behold, as the clay in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand" (Jeremiah 18:5,6).

Our governing thought is that the vessel made by the potter is an expression of the mind of the potter. It is not just something in itself, but it expresses a thought. So we resume with God represented as a Potter.

God took this conception Himself: it is not an idea given to Him by man. It is God who has the clay in His hands and who is working it according to His own mind. He is therefore occupied with a definite purpose: He is working to have a vessel for Himself, and the vessel is something which He chose before ever He put His hand to the work. The principle which the Apostle Paul embodied is a principle which governs all the work of God. The Lord said to Ananias (of Paul): "He is a chosen vessel unto me" (Acts 9:15), and Paul himself said later: "It was the good pleasure of God, who separated me, even from my mother's womb" (Galatians 1:15). And that Apostle makes it clear to us that all who are called in Christ Jesus are foreknown and chosen by God. It is the Apostle Peter who says that he is writing to "the elect... according to the foreknowledge of God the Father" (1 Peter 1:1), and that elect was scattered abroad throughout

"Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia".

Now this subject of 'election' is a very difficult one, so let us say something that will have the object of getting rid of some of the difficulty.

Every truly saved soul ought to have at their salvation a sense of divine destiny. A consciousness of vocation comes with the consciousness of life, and everyone at new birth ought to feel: 'Now there is something to live for! Now I feel that there is a purpose in life.' Everyone who professes to be a child of God but does not have that consciousness is not a truly born-again child of God.

This is true of every part of the creation naturally when it is right. How busy are all the living creatures on this earth! They have a sense that there is something they have got to do with their life. Look at the little ants on the ground! They are very busy! It is as though their very life depended upon their getting something done. And when life is right it is always like that. If you like to go outside of this building today you will meet a number of wasps and you will prove that what I have said is true. They are going to get something done and are not going to be easily discouraged.

Purpose is a characteristic of life, and if that is true in the natural creation, it is much more true in the spiritual. It is possible to be dead while we live; and that simply means that we have lost the sense of a purpose in living. Have you noticed that when faith declines the consciousness of purpose also fades? Faith and purpose always go together. Little faith means little purpose and large faith means large purpose.

Now we are not given any option in this matter, for it is just a matter of life or death. If we have life we have purpose, and if we have no life we have no purpose. That is because of the divine sovereignty in this matter, and it is all bound up with this matter of election, because God has chosen us for a purpose. The vessels which this Potter makes are not just for ornaments. They are not intended to be put on a shelf for people just to notice, or not to notice. God makes His vessels with an object.

You cannot explain the divine sovereignty in this matter, so you had better give up trying! When God says: "I have chosen thee", He does not invite us to explore the reasons why, nor does He invest the elect with omniscience. Indeed, He does not allow us to investigate His reasons for what He does. As a matter of fact, He makes it more difficult for the elect to understand His acts than anyone else. The clay is not allowed to ask the potter: 'Why did you choose me, and why did you make me like this?' The vessel is not permitted to say to the potter: 'Why did you choose me for this purpose?' God just does it, and He does not allow us to ask any questions as to why.

Hard-and-fast systems of doctrine in this matter often lead to spiritual death, because they put the unsearchable, infinite wisdom of God into a little man-made box. It is very true to experience that hard-and-fast doctrines about election and predestination often lead to death. Those countries where a rigid doctrine of predestination rules are usually the most spiritually dead. You can have Protestantism without life, and you can have 'reformed theology' without life. The reason is that men have put this infinite, unsearchable wisdom of God into a box of fixed doctrine.

The chosen vessel becomes the instrument of a divine wisdom which surprises the vessel itself. Sooner or later that chosen vessel is full of one question: 'Why did God choose me? Why did He call me to this work? He ought to have chosen anyone but me! I am the most unsuited for this kind of life and this kind of work.' That was true of Moses. When God would send him to Egypt, he said: 'Oh, if you can send by

anybody, do so, but not by me.' When God chose Jeremiah, the latter said: "I cannot speak: for I am a child" (Jeremiah 1:6). A prophet, whose one business it was to speak, felt that it was the one thing he could not do. Divine choice is a very extraordinary thing, and it is not always the thing that we would like or would choose that God calls us to. When we are young we have perhaps a great idea of being in the Lord's work, and we leap to it very eagerly as though we can do it, but when we get older we feel more acutely our dependence. It is then that we discover that naturally we are not fit for it, and many of God's chosen vessels have had to be kept in the work by the very power of God itself.

You see, it is God's own sovereignty in His choice, and the point is this: It is not the vessel, but the purpose for which the vessel has been chosen.

What is it that unites us as Christians? Now listen to this: It is not salvation, nor redemption, but it is God's power in salvation and redemption that unites us. It is the common consciousness of all believers that they exist for a purpose and that God has saved them with a great purpose in view. This is a very important thing to remember. We may all be saved, and yet we may all be divided. We may all be redeemed by the precious Blood of Jesus and yet remain just individual units. But see what a uniting power there is in everybody feeling that they are called to a purpose! They are united by one common vision. There were plenty of things to divide the people in the days of Nehemiah, for they all had their natural and personal interests, and the enemy was doing everything he could to divide them, but they were all mastered by one purpose - the building of that wall - and that common vision and purpose defeated the enemy at every turn.

To return to the words of Peter: We do not have to be always all together in one place to be so united. Peter said: 'To the elect who are scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia.' It is one elect in many places, united because of one consciousness of divine purpose in life.

Well, that has to do with God as the Potter. Whether we understand it or not, God acts in sovereignty when He calls us to Himself.

I believe most strongly that this is the point where the mistake has been made. Election has been made a matter of salvation when it ought to have been made a matter of purpose. We are not predestined to be saved, but are predestined, through salvation, to come to God's purpose. Election has more to do with purpose than with salvation - salvation is only on the way to purpose.

Israel was God's chosen nation, elect among the nations, and was brought out of Egypt by the virtue of precious blood. When Israel failed of the purpose of God in their existence, they defeated all that had gone before. It was the purpose of their redemption that justified their continuation as God's vessel, and when they lost their purpose they lost their place.

Dear friends, we are "called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

Now much of what I have said is perhaps difficult for you to understand, but it is very important, and it leads to the other things which are not quite so difficult.

Let us walk back to the potter's house with Jeremiah, when the Lord says to him, and to Israel: 'Am I not able to do as I will with My people?'

The first thing that arises, then, is God's ability to do what He decides to do. Supposing we now put ourselves in the place of the clay and are told that God has called us into a great eternal purpose: We are

to become an expression of the very mind of God. What is your reaction to that? I think the best thing we could say would be: 'Well, I don't want to disbelieve God, but I don't think He will be able to do that with me. Forgive me, Lord, if I seem to be without faith in You, but I don't think You will be able to make a success of me.' The Lord just answers: 'Am I not able to do what I decide to do? Do you mean that My power is so limited that I cannot do what I make up My mind to do?' God's choosing carries with it God's power to do that for which He chooses. 'Yes, but Lord, I don't doubt Your power to do what You want to do, but how are You going to do it? I just do not see, Lord, how You can do it with me!' Or it may be: 'Lord, I just don't see how You are going to be able to do it with that person. He is a perfectly hopeless man, and she is a perfectly hopeless woman.' And the Lord answers: 'Do you mean that I have not got the wisdom to do what I have decided to do?' God's power and wisdom accompany His choice.... 'Very well Lord, I don't see how You can do it, but go on.'

Then the Lord begins to work, and He comes on some difficulty in the clay. There is something that is just not yielding to Him, that is not suitable to His purpose, and a crisis arises. It seems as though things come to a standstill, and then we say to the Lord: 'I told You so, Lord! You have got the wrong man. You see, You have got hold of the wrong piece of clay. I tried to tell You that You had made a mistake.' And that does not happen only once - it happens again and again through our lives.

But look at the potter in the potter's house! Look at his patience with the clay, and his persistence, and then look at the people to whom he was speaking. Think of Israel! Apart from ourselves, Israel is the greatest example and demonstration of the patience of God through history. I know what you are thinking! When the vessel that the potter was making was marred, he made another vessel. But I will ask you a question: Was his new vessel made with new clay or was it made with the old clay? The answer to that is given to us in Paul's letter to the Romans, chapters nine, ten and eleven. There Paul says: 'Yes, it is true that the original Israel was marred in the hands of the Potter, but out of the original clay He takes a remnant' - and this is the impressive thing - 'and that remnant is according to the election' (Romans 11:5).

God's work is not all in vain, for in the remnant He sees His full thought realized and expressed. There may be a lot about us that tries the patience of God, but He will never give us up - until we say that we absolutely refuse to go on with Him. But who shall ever say that God's patience is exhausted?

No, dear friends. If God has really called us, He knows what He has called. He knows all that has to be done. His wisdom and His power are very great; His patience and His persistence are just wonderful, and the potter's house tells us that God is triumphant at last.

I think I had better leave it there for the moment. There is very much more to come later on, and there are some things of very great importance in this connection. If you are really the Lord's you can settle this question that you have been chosen. Has God drawn our hearts out to Himself? That settles the whole question of election. Have you really some desire toward the Lord? Where did that desire come from? The one thing that we sometimes have to fall back on is this: 'Lord, I did not create my desire for You. With all my weaknesses and all my failures, You have done something in me so that I cannot do without You.'

Let us just settle, therefore, that God has chosen us according to His purpose and that sense of divine purpose must really govern our lives. Let us have faith in God that He has the power and the wisdom and the patience to realize what He has chosen us for.

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