

God's End Is Always Present in His Beginnings

by T. Austin-Sparks

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that God's ultimate purpose is embedded in His beginnings, as illustrated through the life and ministry of Ezekiel.

Scripture: Exodus 15:13

Topics: "Divine Purpose", "Spiritual Calling"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that God's end is always present in His beginnings, illustrating this principle through the Book of Ezekiel and the song of Moses in Exodus. He explains that while Israel had just begun their journey out of Egypt, God's promise of their future dwelling place was already declared, showing that divine purposes govern earthly events. Sparks highlights the importance of recognizing the spiritual meaning behind historical events and the need for ministers to have a personal and urgent message from God for their time. He encourages believers to be aware of their calling and the necessity of God's hand upon their lives to fulfill His purposes.

Transcript

The principles that we were considering this morning are the key to the Book of Ezekiel in a special way. We begin this evening by indicating one of those principles in another way - God's end is always implicit in all His beginnings. Thus, we have Genesis in the Book of the Revelation and the Book of the Revelation in Genesis. Let me repeat this principle again: God's end is always present in His beginnings. Perhaps you would like an illustration of that. We have it in the fifteenth chapter of the Book of Exodus. Chapter fifteen, verses thirteen and seventeen:

In Thy lovingkindness Thou hast led the people whom Thou hast redeemed; in Thy strength Thou hast guided them to Thy holy habitation... Thou wilt bring them in and plant them in the mountain of Thine inheritance, the place, O Lord, which Thou hast made for Thy dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, which Thy hands have established.

Now do you recognize what that has said? Israel is just out of Egypt, they are just over the Red Sea; this is the song of Moses and all Israel when they escaped from Egypt and Pharaoh. They had only just begun their journey. But here it says: "In Thy strength Thou hast guided them to Thy holy habitation... the place, O Lord, which Thou hast made for Thy dwelling, the sanctuary, O Lord, which Thy hands have

established." That takes us right on to the end of their history. Hundreds of years would have to pass before the Temple was built, before Jerusalem - the holy mountain - was secured. They had to go a long way, for a long time, before they came there. But here, right at the beginning, it is spoken of as though it were already accomplished. So we can see from this instance what I mean by God's end always being right there at the beginning. Heavenly things always govern ALL the earthly things. Invisible things govern ALL the visible things. Spiritual things govern ALL the temporal things. Universal things govern ALL the local things. That is something you must always remember when you are reading the Bible. And that is something which must be kept in mind as we approach this book of Ezekiel.

Human history is not just human history, but it is God's history! This book of Ezekiel seems to have a lot of earthly history in it, but the truth is that it is all governed by the Divine End and Purpose. Now the big question which we meet right at the beginning of this book is "Does this book have a message for the Church in this dispensation? - Does it just relate to a period in the past history of the people of Israel? Does it relate to the future dispensation in the matter of prophecy? - Or is its main message for the Church in this dispensation?" We shall be compelled to face those questions as we move into this book, especially in those parts of the book which we are going to particularly consider. The answer is found not in the earthly, but in the Heavenly; not in the temporal, BUT in the Spiritual.

So we come to the setting and reason for this book: we must recognize when the book was written, and why. What is in this book happened at a time when a whole system had broken down and failed. The reason for that breakdown and that failure was because that system became something in itself. It lost its Spiritual and its Eternal meaning. We must recognize that this is something that constantly recurs in the history of the things of God. It happened in Israel. It has happened in Christianity generally. It has happened in many movements and in many pieces of the work of God. Such began with a great testimony, just as Israel began. It was a wonderful testimony to the Lord with which Israel's history began, but then that whole thing broke down. It completely failed because it lost its Spiritual meaning and became something in itself. The same is true of Christianity. It had a wonderful beginning, but, speaking generally, Christianity has broken down and failed because it has become an earthly system - something in itself, and has lost its Heavenly meaning.

Now we return to this book of Ezekiel, and we find God moving away from Jerusalem; and God is found outside and not inside, and the thing in which God once was has now become an empty shell. That which was once vital and effective, and was greatly used of the Lord, has become a merely formal and empty thing with God on the outside. That is the setting and the occasion of this book.

A Prophet Represents The Full Mind Of God

Now let us look at the prophet himself. You know that Ezekiel did not begin by being a prophet. Ezekiel was a trained priest and not a prophet. You notice verse three of chapter one tells us that. And then at the beginning, verse one refers to "the thirtieth year": "Now it came about in the thirtieth year" - the thirtieth year was most probably the thirtieth birthday of Ezekiel. It was at the age of thirty that the priests finished their training and entered upon their ministry. You remember that it was when the Lord Jesus was thirty years of age that He entered upon His ministry. His preparation was finished and His ministry began. So, at the age of thirty, Ezekiel ought to have commenced his priestly ministry; but instead of fulfilling his ministry as a priest, he was called to be a prophet. His whole life and training and vocation were changed.

A prophet is one "who represents the full Mind of God when that Mind has been lost." It is impressive to note that Ezekiel had to take up something altogether different from that for which he was trained. The situation which existed required that. We shall come back on that again later.

Now when God moves in relation to His full Mind - which has been lost amongst His people - there are always things essential in the instrument of His movement. And if this is going to be done, it is only God Who can do it! You know the course of men is quite different from that. The way of men is to take men and train them and make them able to do the work, so that when they come out of the college, or the Bible institute, they feel that they are equipped for the work; and now, of course, they can do it. They have been trained for it. However, Ezekiel was not qualified for his work. He was qualified to be a priest, and he was called to be a prophet. And what we find is that all through his life, he never found it easy. You see how difficult Ezekiel found his work: he realized that it was only by the help of God that he could fulfill his ministry.

We all have to begin there if we are really going to minister in heavenly things. There has to be this tremendous change where we come to realize that we cannot do this work of ourselves. Only the Lord can do it. There was this great sense of disappointment with things as they were, the overpowering sense that things were wrong, and this state of things had to be made the business of Ezekiel's life. You will have to begin there if you are really going to be used of God. You will have to be overwhelmed with the sense that things are all wrong in this world, that things are not as they ought to be, and that you have no ability to put them right. You sense that God has called you to this, and that your ability to do anything must come from God Himself.

That is where we begin with Ezekiel, and, of course, we take the spiritual principles as we go along. I think I need not go back over that ground. There is a breakdown in things, they are not as God intended them to be. God calls men and women in relation to this situation, and the call changes the whole course of their lives. And in the call is the consciousness that they have no ability in themselves to meet the situation. But God, Who has called them, will be their sufficiency. I have read the first three chapters of Ezekiel into what I have just said.

Let us take one little fragment out of these chapters, which is the commission of Ezekiel: "Son of man, I send thee not to a people of a strange language, whose language you do not understand. If I sent you to them, they would listen. But I send you to the house of Israel. They will not hear you." (Ezekiel 3:4-7; paraphrased). That is a difficult commission, and only the Lord could carry a man through that. But then notice what the Lord says as to Divine equipment: "...I have made thy face strong against their faces, and thy forehead strong against their foreheads" (Ezekiel 3:8). In other words, the Lord is going to be the strength of this difficult work.

Ezekiel Saw What The Lord Wanted

Then we notice another thing. With this sense of disappointment, this whole change in the course of life, this having to take a way for which there was not natural equipment, there goes this second great factor: "Ezekiel saw the Lord." He was given a vision of the Lord, a vision of what the Lord wanted. Now it is very important that these two things that I have just mentioned always go together. If we have disappointment and dissatisfaction without vision, that is negative. There are plenty of people who are dissatisfied with things as they are. They are the people who can always see what is wrong. They can point their finger at the weaknesses and the faults; they are experts in criticizing everything. That is negative, that does not

get us anywhere. With dissatisfaction, there must go vision. But vision must rest upon travail. Vision without travail and suffering of heart is mere mysticism. These two things, vision with travail and suffering of heart, must go together. If you or I feel dissatisfied, and feel that things are all wrong, we ought to be in possession of the knowledge of what the Lord really does want. We ought to have a positive vision of the purpose of God.

Now I want to stop here and say a word to you. Let us read these first verses in Ezekiel:

Now it came about in the thirtieth year, on the fifth day of the fourth month, while I was by the river Chebar among the exiles, the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. On the fifth of the month in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's exile, the Word of the Lord came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans... and the hand of the Lord came upon him (me).

I want to say a word at this point to you about ministry. You notice that what Ezekiel was about to do had a special date for its beginning. It is very impressive how particular Ezekiel is about dates in his prophecies. If you really read through these prophecies, you will see that he is very particular about dates. That gives us our first point for ministry. A minister according to God's Mind must have a message for the time. It will not do for us to be giving out things just in a general way. Our Bible teaching must not be just of a general character. What God needs more than anything are those who have a message for the present hour. When we have finished our life, and our ministry, it ought to be possible for it to be said of us that we had a message for our time, that we were not just one in the general mass of teachers but that we had God's Word for the hour - that our ministry related to a special time in the purpose of God.

Now you servants ask the Lord to make that true of you, that it can be recognized that your ministry relates to the present time - WHAT GOD WANTS TO DO NOW. That is a very important factor in ministry. What does God need at this time? We must pray that we shall be the Lord's instrument for the present time - that there shall be a very clearly defined time factor in our ministry. So the date is a very important thing in ministry. When God really raises up servants, He raises them up for a time.

Ezekiel Was Raised Up In Relation To The Situation

And then the next thing to note: Ezekiel was raised up in relation to the special situation at that time. What we have just read shows that Ezekiel was right there in the situation: "...I was among the captives by the river of Chebar." (ASV). Ezekiel was not preaching to a situation that was distant from himself. He was not preaching to a situation that he had imagined to exist. He was not preaching to a situation that had been reported to him to exist. He was right in that situation. He was in the closest personal touch with the need. The need was his need; he was put right into the heart of the situation, and his ministry came out of that. He said: "I sat where they sat." And that takes ministry out of the realm of the merely theoretical and puts it into the very practical.

You will notice that this was true of all the prophets. They did not speak to the Lord about the Lord's people as THEY - "THEY are in this situation; THEY have done these things; THEY have these needs." The prophets always spoke to God, "WE are in distress." Read the prayer of Nehemiah in chapter one at verse 2-11, and read the prayer of Daniel in chapter nine at verse 3-19. They were a part of the situation. And for you and I to be effective servants, we must be there.

The Word Came Expressly To Ezekiel

And then the third thing: this ministry has to be very personal. You notice what it says in chapter one, verse three: "The Word of the Lord came expressly to Ezekiel the priest." That means TWO things. Firstly, it means that Ezekiel did not get his ministry out of books. He did not fulfill a second-hand ministry. His ministry was not the result of study. This came to him personally. These visions of God were his own. His message was original and not second-hand. It must be like that. Our ministry must be like that: it must be the result of something that God has said to us personally.

Secondly, the meaning of the Word of the Lord which came expressly to Ezekiel is that THERE WAS AN URGENCY ABOUT IT. You know the meaning of that word, "expressly." You speak about an express train. Well, what do you mean by an express train? One that must get there quickly, it is very urgent. You remember the word of the Apostle Paul: "...the Spirit speaketh expressly" (1 Timothy 4:1; KJV) - there is urgency about this! "The Word of the Lord came expressly to Ezekiel." There is something very urgent about this. You have got to get there as soon as you can. There is very serious business on hand. All your energy must be concentrated upon this object. That is how it has got to be with us. There has got to be a tremendous urgency about our message. There are very great issues at stake. I would say to you one thing before you deliver your message. Stop and say to yourselves: "What is God's Mind for His people - because you are going to influence lives, PERHAPS, FOR ALL TIME AND ALL ETERNITY."

Now the things that I have just said are the things which make up the kind of servants God needs. I would like for you to go back over them again. Remember that Ezekiel is a man whose whole life has been revolutionized by the purpose of God. GOD'S NEED has changed the whole course of his life! GOD'S NEED has disappointed him so far as his natural life is concerned! Something of the disappointment and dissatisfaction of the heart of God has entered into this man's life!

And so on that very thing God moved all the way along through history. I suppose Abraham was, or most of his life was, very satisfied with "Ur of the Chaldees." He had all that he wanted there, but then there began to come into his heart a great dissatisfaction with that life; and his heart was reaching out for something that he did not know. All he could say was, "This is not what I was made for. I am sure there is something more in life than this. There must be some greater purpose and meaning than this. This does not satisfy me." It was on that ground that God moved in his life. It was God working into Abraham HIS OWN DISSATISFACTION! And when that dissatisfaction was there, God could give the positive side of what really was His purpose.

And that was true of all the great servants of God. I believe it was true of Moses. I am quite sure it was true of Ezekiel. It was true of Paul: I believe that we can detect even in Paul (Saul) of Tarsus, something of dissatisfaction. GOD PREPARES HIS WAY LIKE THAT. We must have this in us before God can do anything else. In order to bring His Great Positive Purpose In, He must write the negative in our hearts. This is the way of service - on the one side, it is disappointment; on the other side, it is God's appointment - and then the consciousness of having no natural ability, and all the ability having to come from God Himself. A work that no man could do, and certainly a work that no man would take on himself - that was Ezekiel. But God had taken hold of this man, and everything that happened to him was because "the hand of the Lord came upon him."

For this evening, I am going to finish there. It is a matter of the hand of the Lord being on us; if the hand of the Lord is upon us, then we cannot help ourselves. While it may be difficult, the disappointment may be great, the demands may be beyond our ability, nevertheless, we just cannot help it. We have got to go on!

You remember what Jeremiah and other prophets said about this?! Because the people would not listen, and because his ministry meant so much suffering, Jeremiah said that he decided never to speak again. He was going to give up the work of God. But then he said: "While I kept silent, the fire burned. The Word of the Lord was as a fire in my bones, and then I broke all my resolutions. I began to speak again. I just could not do otherwise" (Jer. 20:9; paraphrased). That is what Ezekiel meant by: "The hand of the Lord was upon me." You see what that meant afterwards, how that "the hand of the Lord" moved Ezekiel everywhere?! He was a man under "the hand of the Lord." Do pray that you may be like that. That it will not be your choice one way or the other, but that your lives will just be because "the hand of the Lord" is upon you. The Lord needs men and women like that. Pray that you may be like that. You are not in the thing because you like it, because you choose it, because you have any qualifications for it. You are in it because "the hand of the Lord" is upon you. And to take yourself out of this work, would be to take yourself out of "The hand of the Lord."

Now, if it is like that, something is going to happen. You will have a message for the time. You will have a message for the situation. You will feel the urgency of this message. "The word will be like a fire in your bones." The Lord make us ALL messengers like that!

Now you can see what I meant at the beginning. It is spiritual value that matters. It is not the intellectual knowledge, but that we are men and women like this - that is SPIRITUAL EFFECTIVENESS. Do ask the Lord to make you like that: that everybody is able to recognize that you have a heart that is burdened by the Lord - that, on the one side, you have seen what is wrong, and that, on the other side, you have seen what God wants, and that you feel that He has laid HIS HAND on you in relation to that!!!

LORD MAKE THAT TRUE OF ALL OF US!

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