

Horizoned by Purpose

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of understanding the relationship between Christ and purpose, and how the Holy Spirit's energies are for reproducing the Man in corporate expression.

Scripture: Ezekiel 1:26, Ezekiel 48:35, Ephesians 1:9

Topics: "Purpose in Christ", "Distinctiveness of Faith"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that purpose is intrinsically linked to Christ, presenting them as complementary rather than separate entities. He illustrates this connection through the Scriptures of Ezekiel and Ephesians, highlighting how both begin with a divine throne and culminate in a corporate expression of God's glory. Sparks warns against the loss of distinctiveness in both Israel and the Church, noting that unfaithfulness to God's revealed purpose leads to confusion and weakness. He stresses the importance of the Holy Spirit's energy in fulfilling God's purpose, urging believers to remain committed and surrendered to the Spirit's leading. Ultimately, the sermon calls for a return to a purpose-conscious faith, contrasting it with the perplexity that often characterizes modern Christianity.

Transcript

The consideration upon which we now enter follows immediately upon the former one, or runs parallel to it, namely 'Horizoned by Christ'.

When we speak of purpose being the horizon of all things, there is no contradiction of the other. We are not changing Christ for some thing called Purpose, we are only bringing into view the complement of Christ.

The Person and the Purpose are complementary, they form one whole. To rightly see the Person is to understand the Purpose. Purpose is not an abstract, detached, and impersonal thing, it is the extension of the Person, albeit something very definite.

We are now and here going to cite and link together two couplets of Scripture - Ezekiel 1:26; 48:35, and Eph. 1:9-12; 3:21: -

"...above the firmament... was the likeness of a throne, and upon... the throne was a likeness as the appearance of a man upon it above."

"And the name of the city from that day shall be the LORD is there."

"Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he purposed in him [Christ] unto a dispensation of the fulness of the times, to sum up all things in Christ... according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his will..."

"...unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus..."

In each of these two Scriptures two things are noticeable.

In Ezekiel, the beginning is a throne in Heaven and its Occupant - "a likeness... of a man upon it." The end of all the history contained in the book is a House, a Kingdom, and a City, with the final statement, "The LORD is there."

In 'Ephesians' (so called) the features are similar. The Letter begins with Christ exalted to the heavenly throne, and proceeds to the House, the Church, the Body, and the Lord as there - "...glory in the church..."

In Ezekiel, all that is between the beginning and the end is the expression of that throne. The end is the issue of the throne-activities, and it shows what all those throne-activities are leading to. The beginning is individual - one Man glorified and governing. The end is corporate, a people with the glory and the dominion.

The same is true of 'Ephesians'. The One in Heaven leads to the corporate Body in ascendancy.

These two main features of the books explain and justify our bringing them together although there are many more corresponding features in them.

There are two factors which stand out in clear relief in Ezekiel and 'Ephesians' (and in many other places):

- (a) All-governing purpose.
- (b) The mighty energies of the Holy Spirit in relation thereto.

The connections, of course, are different, but they are one in principle.

ISRAEL = historical, earthly, temporal.

THE CHURCH = eternal, heavenly, spiritual.

Both were chosen - elect - for one thing in their respective realms; namely, the testimony of God in the universe.

The dealings of God with both are shown to be with that purpose in view.

From the history of Israel and the history of the Church one thing springs into light and is unmistakably evident, that is that

There is no Substitute for Light Once Given by God

Unfaithfulness to light once given by God results inevitably and unavoidably in confusion, weakness, bondage, limitation, and tentativeness.

These are clearly the features of Babylon in Israel's case, and of the Church's case in the twentieth century.

Someone has said that

"The Church of the first century was power-conscious.

The Church of the twentieth century is problem-conscious."

We could not improve on that, but we might paraphrase it by saying that

The Church of the first century was PURPOSE conscious.

The Church of the twentieth century is perplexity conscious.

'Ezekiel' is peculiarly the Old Testament book of God's reaction in judgment to lost distinctiveness of purpose. 'Revelation' is its New Testament counterpart, with many similar characteristics in symbolism.

When anything becomes something in itself, turning, in doctrine and practice, into a circle instead of a way and a means, confusion, frustration, and bondage become its characteristics; limitation and powerlessness will mark its existence.

We are now going to look more closely at this matter of lost distinctiveness.

That distinctiveness of life and testimony is demanded by God is self-evident in the whole Bible. A word frequently used to express God's thought as to His people is the word 'peculiar'.

"A Peculiar People"

"...ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me" (Exodus 19:5).

"...the Lord hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people" (Deuteronomy 14:2).

"...they shall be mine, saith the Lord of hosts, in the day that I do make, a peculiar treasure" (Malachi 3:17).

The Hebrew word segullah denotes 'an enclosure', i.e. something separated, a preserve, a protected area. The Greek word denotes something acquired as out of the ordinary (Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:9).

So the Hebrews were a distinct race separated and hedged around for a distinct purpose. The time came in the days of the Prophets when they removed or destroyed their 'hedges', their spiritual boundaries, and the line of demarcation was obliterated so that all kinds of wild things grew around the 'choice vine'. This gave rise to the denunciations and warnings of the Prophets. The whole work of the Hebrew Prophets related to this one thing.

Each prophet had some distinctive feature of God's holiness for which he was fighting and suffering. The four - called 'Major' - represented four major characteristics of God. The twelve called 'Minor' (only because of the smaller size of the books bearing their names) - had each some particular feature of the testimony of God. Mixture is an abomination to God. The Prophets were a challenge and a call to recover distinctiveness of testimony through distinctiveness of life.

In the New Testament, Christians were known as the People of the Way. This was a distinguishing designation. Distinctiveness of testimony is not some testimony distinct from the whole purpose of God. Nor is it a special part of that whole. It only arises when the general state has lost its true character, its

characteristic distinctiveness. It is not a system of teaching, a form of practice and procedure, an exclusiveness of fellowship. It is the life and lordship of the Spirit; it is the pure and powerful river of God vitalizing everything.

The whole battle rages around this distinctiveness of life and testimony. The Old Testament and the New are alike in this particular battle. The wall of Jerusalem was a symbolic representation of the Divine line of demarcation. Hence the sieges and battles. Hence the deeper spiritual meaning of 'Nehemiah'. The first three chapters of the book of 'Revelation' are a return movement of the Lord on this line in relation to New Testament churches.

The feature of the Fall and the mark of Satanic interference with what is of God is loss of distinctiveness, purity, transparency. Hence, when Satan is finally cast down, as in the last chapters of the 'Revelation', "that which maketh a lie" has no place, and everything is "clear as crystal".

So we come face to face with the major factor and the distinctiveness of the purpose of God.

1. The Inclusive Factor - The Energy of the Spirit

Looking back at Ezekiel it is impossible not to see that both the Prophet and his book are particularly characterized by the energies of the Spirit of God. Ezekiel was himself a man of the Spirit. The word occurs some twenty-five times. He was moved, carried, led, strengthened, and, indeed, entirely governed by the Spirit.

The book is a record of the goings of the Spirit. In the wheels, the living creatures, the visions, the valley of dry bones, the River, etc., the Spirit is represented as the energy of everything.

The New Testament counterparts are 'Acts', 'Ephesians' and, in particular, 'Revelation'.

The point is that in all this the Spirit is moving in relation to purpose in all the immediate diversities unto final completeness, the ultimate fulness.

Let it be clearly recognized that the end and object of all the Spirit's energies is to reproduce that Man in corporate expression for glory and government. That will be the Spirit's triumph and the vindication of the Man who 'emptied Himself, was found in fashion as a man, took the form of a bondsman, became obedient unto death, yea, the death of the Cross, wherefore God highly exalted Him and gave Him the name which is above every name.'

Before we leave Ezekiel in this particular connection, that is, of the Spirit, it is important to note that such a vessel or vehicle of the Spirit's energies unto purpose is a wholly and utterly committed man. Surrender and submission to the Spirit is seen all the way along. The same thing was true of the men of the New Testament from Pentecost onward. Only so can God reach His end. Only so can we have anything resembling New Testament progress. 'Ephesians' as the Letter of eternal purpose gives a very large place to the Spirit. The Spirit is the Earnest of the inheritance. The Spirit is the Revealer of the inheritance. Hence the demand there "Be filled with the Spirit".

We suspend our consideration here for the time being, and then look at several distinctive features of the Spirit's energies in relation to purpose.

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