

Ministering to the Deliverance and Life of the Elect

by T. Austin-Sparks

The spiritual house exists to minister for the deliverance and life of the elect, and the Church must be proved superior to Satan's power in order to fulfill God's purpose and display the glory of Christ.

Scripture: 1 Peter 2:4

Topics: "Intercession", "Spiritual Warfare"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the Church's role as a spiritual house, built on Christ, to minister to the deliverance and life of the elect. He highlights the spiritual conflict faced by the Church, noting that the presence of this spiritual house invites Satanic opposition, both from within and without. The sermon underscores the importance of intercessory prayer as a vital aspect of the Church's vocation, urging believers to recognize their responsibility in ministering to God's people. Sparks calls for a deeper understanding of the Church's purpose in glorifying Christ through its triumph over evil, and the necessity of bold access to God's throne for both grace and judgment against the adversary. Ultimately, he challenges the Church to actively engage in its divine calling to bring about the life and deliverance of God's people.

Transcript

"...unto whom coming, a living stone, rejected indeed of men, but with God elect, precious, ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:4-5).

"But the priests the Levites, the sons of Zadok, that kept the charge of my sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from me, they shall come near to me to minister unto me; and they shall stand before me to offer unto me the fat and the blood, saith the Lord Jehovah: they shall enter into my sanctuary, and they shall come near to my table, to minister unto me, and they shall keep my charge. And it shall be that, when they enter in at the gates of the inner court, they shall be clothed with linen garments; and no wool shall come upon them, while they minister in the gates of the inner court, and within. They shall have linen tires upon their heads, and shall have linen breeches upon their loins; they shall not gird themselves with anything that causeth sweat." (Ezekiel 44:15-18).

We have been seeking to see some of the major features of this spiritual house, remembering the words of the Apostle, "Christ as a son, over God's house: whose house are we" (Heb. 3:6). Those features which we have already contemplated are that this spiritual house has as its object, in the first place, the setting forth of the exaltation of the Lord Jesus; in the second place, to be the vehicle through which the glory and pleasure of God are ministered to.

The Presence of a Spiritual House the Signal for Satanic Antagonism

Now for a little while we will dwell upon the third of those major features, which is that, in the purpose of God, this spiritual house is here to minister for the deliverance and life of the elect. We shall not dwell very much upon that last word, "the elect." We need not be particularly taken up with it. It is the people of God who are in view; the Church which is foreknown, elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, chosen in Christ before the world was, and the spiritual house exists to minister for the deliverance, and to the life, of that people. This is the great vocation of the people of God, or a part of that great vocation. So great, so vital is it, that immediately upon the bringing in of the Church, all hell was moved from beneath against it. The very bringing in of the Church was the signal and the occasion for a mighty move on the part of the enemy, a move along many lines and by many means, two of which can be clearly discerned, and indeed are being forced upon our attention in these days, if we recognize the fact that behind all that is taking place on the earth at this time there is a spiritual system of things. That twofold move on the part of the enemy from the beginning has been, firstly, by subtle working on the inside to bring the Church to a collapse inwardly; and secondly to overwhelm it by sheer force. I think we need say no more by way of indicating the nature of things. That is indeed Satanic and a Satanic method.

The first indication in the Church's history that Satan was at work was by that secret, inward, subtle movement of the enemy through Ananias and Sapphira, and it was pronounced immediately to be Satanic. "Why hath Satan filled thy heart..." It was something right from the inside and a subtle movement of Satan to bring about internal collapse. But for the swift judgment of God upon that thing, it would have spread like a canker. It would have worked subtly until the Church was seething with that sort of thing. Then, not long after, the other form of Satanic activity became manifest, namely open, direct, aggressive force to try by direct means to crush and trample under foot this instrument of God which had been brought into being; and all that which has been pursued relentlessly and on an ever-growing scale down the ages is itself significant as to the greatness of the vocation of the Church. It is indicative that Satan recognizes the issue to be himself or the Church: these two cannot proceed together.

Let me say again that we are not without ample evidence that the present world happenings are not merely political and temporal, but are spiritual in their nature and essence, and, as even men of the world recognize and pronounce, they are Satanic in their background. If that is true, we may come to one conclusion, namely, that it is not just the suppression of certain peoples on the earth which is in view with Satan. It is to get at something within or among the peoples which is a menace to that world domination of Satan through his Antichrist. If that really came home to our hearts as it ought to and as it may yet be brought home more forcibly by sheer force of circumstances, we should recognize that not only is our existence as the Church at stake, but that we are up against the great test, perhaps the final test, of whether we are fulfilling our heavenly calling.

The Assault of Satan Against Christ in His House

You see, the whole effort of Satan from the beginning has been to destroy the life of God's people here on the earth, Christ's life in the Church is the objective of Satan in this dispensation, and, inasmuch as the Church is called into relationship with the working out of God's eternal purpose - for the Church is not only called according to that purpose, but is the elect instrument for the working out of that purpose - that very fact must involve the manifestation of the most terrible power that this universe contains against God's purpose.

The Greatness of God's Christ

What is God's purpose? Well, it has to do with the first thing with which we were occupied in relation to this House of God, namely, the exaltation of God's Son to the throne of the universe. That is God's purpose comprehensively, inclusively, and the Church is called in, not only to share that exaltation, but to be instrumental in the working out of that purpose. If that be true, then, we repeat, that involves the manifestation of this terrible power of Satan; because the exaltation of the Lord Jesus to the supreme place is not a mechanical nor automatic thing. It is a spiritual thing, and it is accomplished by spiritual power. That is why we are designated "living stones." We are not just bricks being put together: we are part and parcel of the very life of Christ and of God's purpose concerning Christ, and it is that life of His in a final, full manifestation in the Church which will be the display of the glory of the Lord Jesus. The Lord Jesus cannot be manifested in glory as supreme Lord in God's universe until the elect come through to that place of absolute triumph over all the power of death, and thus it is by the Church's triumph that the glory of Christ is displayed. It becomes therefore a living matter, a spiritual matter, and not just a cold, lifeless, mechanical thing. We are in something very real. We are going to know that, to reach God's end, the instrument by which that purpose is worked out to its completion has to come up against the last fragment and ounce of Satanic power. It involves the drawing out of Satan's power to the full in order that God may display how great His Christ is.

That is the principle which has run right through the Word of God. You can see it standing out again and again in conspicuous instances, one of which is contained in the word addressed to Pharaoh: "For this purpose have I raised thee up that I might display in thee my power." Pharaoh therefore was allowed very much liberty. When Pharaoh in the very first test refused God, God could have come in and crushed him and destroyed him out of hand, and that would have been the end of Pharaoh. But God drew him on, drew him out, once, twice, thrice, on to ten times, the full measure of Pharaoh's resource; drew him out and all that was instigating him, in order that, showing how much power there was against God, God could come in at last and show how much greater He was than the greatest that was against Him. It is only a foreshadowing, a type. But, you see, it is not with mere Pharaohs or dictators that we have to do. We are up against the full power of Satan himself. I say the Church is up against that and the Church, as being the instrument of reaching God's end and fulfilling or working out God's purpose, has therefore to be proved absolutely superior to Satan. Where the Lord gets His life into His people, the one certain thing which will happen to that people is that they will be instrumental in drawing out death against themselves. It is true. It is remarkable, is it not? You wonder why it is that, the more closely you walk with the Lord and the more you are set upon God's full thought, the more you seem to be drawing death upon yourself. One thing with which you are always in conflict is this death-working activity of Satan. That is a part of our vocation. We do not like the idea, we inwardly shrink, and all that is natural about us feels very bad at the thought; but we just have to put all that on one side and trust the Lord in facing facts. We have to face spiritual facts. Therefore we take note of this, that, if it is true that this spiritual House, this Church, this Body of Christ is in existence as the instrument by which God is going to fulfil His purpose concerning His Son, then that

can only be as all Satan's power is drawn out and exhausted, to the end that, in that Church, the life whereby Jesus conquered death should be manifested as greater than all the power of death itself.

You see, then, the steps. The first is that the presence of a spiritual House here is the signal for Satanic action. The second is that the whole effort of Satan is set against Christ's life in that House, that Church, that Body. The third is that the very working out of God's purpose through the Church, the House, necessitates the drawing out of Satan's power and the Church's experience of something very terrible, in respect of what Satan's power is, all to one end, namely, the bringing out, not of the greatness of Satan's power, but the greatness of God's Christ. That is the goal.

The Course of the Conflict

It is quite clear that, through history, Satan has had a Satanic succession of instruments on the earth. He started with Cain. "Cain was of the evil one," the Scripture says, "and slew his brother." Right down through history as disclosed in the Old Testament, you have Satan's unholy succession of instruments. Again and again you come upon them. There they are lying in wait right to his hand for death purposes. There is Doeg the Edomite to hand, subtly to hand, watching for his advantage, with his eye upon God's king. There is Haman, the Agagite, scheming and planning for the death of all the Jews. So Satan has had his succession of instruments for the death of God's people right up to today. They are at work today and we know their names. But God has had His line of succession all the way through from Abel onward. Now these, every one of them, drew out the power of the adversary. Abel drew out the power of death through Cain. It seems as though he went down under it, but it is not so. In the long run we know otherwise, and he, being dead, yet speaketh. His testimony remains. Thus every one of these links in the chain of God's successors has drawn out the adversary to display his power, and then eventually, although in their lives here on the earth they may have gone down under that power, the triumph is with that life which was in them, with the Lord whom they served. That is how it is now.

We must be very careful of our deductions, and in one connection especially, namely, with regard to the fact that the Lord gives the enemy a good deal of rope, and the enemy gains many advantages and has a large measure of success. But, remember, Satan's power and Satan's success are not in spite of God but because of God. If you can draw that distinction, you will be greatly helped. Satan's Power is not in spite of God, but because of God. God is allowing it. It is under the sovereignty of God. God is simply drawing it out, extending it, and when the cup of iniquity is full, then God will come in and show how overwhelming He is. That is the end. Beware of your deductions when you see evil having a great measure of success. Understand what God is doing. He is not going to show His power against the thing in its infancy. What power of God would that be? No, God displays His power when a thing is fullgrown.

Now, while I must not diverge and get on to another very important aspect of what we are considering, I would here point out a very startling fact with reference to the matter of sonship. While sonship, which is full-grown manhood, is a Divine end, and with sonship comes the manifestation of glory, (that is, when things have become full, then glory is manifested - "waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God,") sonship is also a principle operating on the side of Satan. The Lord Jesus said to those Jewish rulers, "You compass sea and land to make one proselyte; and when he is become so, ye make him twofold more a son of hell than yourselves" (Matt. 23:15). He chooses His word - fullgrown expression of hell. A terrible thing! But, you see, all that happens on that side under the sovereignty of God is bringing things to maturity before judgment comes in. The sovereignty of God requires that iniquity must come to the full, and its coming to the full is not because God is impotent or unable to cope with the thing. It is not in spite

of God but because of God; and God is going to answer the sum of Satan's power through the Church. Thus, in the end, it will be "unto him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus unto all ages for ever and ever."

The Church's Vocation

Now then, what is the vocation of the Church in relation to all this? We are here, as we said at the outset, for the purpose of ministering to the deliverance and life of the elect. The real ministry arises in a day like this. It is the ministry of intercession, priestly intercession: "a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices." We are being launched into our vocation now perhaps as never before as we see the enemy coming out more fiercely and terribly against the life of Christ in the Church. We are here to stand in God for that life, and we have to be very careful in this matter that we are not put off our ministry by any subtle, secret working of the enemy. We cannot say too much about this secret internal activity, this propaganda of the spiritual powers to put the people of God out of action by breakdown and collapse from within, and it is in this very connection that we have those assurances and exhortations with regard to our access unto God. Let us remember that these comforting words about access, of being allowed even boldness to draw nigh, are not just for our own comfort and satisfaction. It is this vocation that is in view, and I believe that is proved again by the action of the enemy. Is he not continually trying to get the people off their ministry of prayer by throwing some doubt upon their acceptance, their access, bringing them under accusation and raising up the sense of some kind of spiritual barrier between them and the Lord so that the very heart is taken out of prayer. "What is the good of praying? There is that and there is that and the other thing about me; my very state keeps me from prayer." Ah, yes, and if we act upon that accusation, on the one hand it is a sheer denial of the value of the Blood, setting it aside, which is what Satan wants, and on the other hand it is playing into his hands and giving him the advantage over the people of God. Remember, all interference with our prayer life is a strategic movement on the enemy's part to destroy our vocation and to gain the advantage over the people of God. We are here for the deliverance and life of God's people. That is the very purpose of the Church's existence.

Now, will you take that as more than something just said? Will you listen to that from within? If you truly are a child of God, will you pray at this time that you may both see and accept all the meaning of the fact that you are a part of Christ's Body, a living stone in the spiritual house, and that your very existence as such is in relation to the life and deliverance of God's people everywhere. You are not an individual, you are a part of a house, and that house is God's means of deliverance and life for His people everywhere in this intensifying conflict with the power of death and darkness. We exist for that, and if we are not ministering to that, we are denying the very object of our existence. Do take that to heart, because there is no option about this. It is not an optional matter whether we fulfil an intercessory ministry or not, and pray for all saints at all seasons. You are not invited to come and do that IF YOU LIKE. That is not the House of God. We have to see that the House of God is not some inanimate lifeless thing. It is living, and the very marks of its life are that it is active, energetic, in a spiritual way; and it is characterized by the spirit of intercession. The position is not that you have prayer meetings at different times and people pray or do not pray according as they feel like it. The House is characterised by intercession, and it is that which determines whether we are corresponding to the very nature of our life as God's children. If we were really living up to what we are in Christ, whenever there is an opportunity to pray, we would be on the mark. At the least we should be alive to it, and, whether we prayed audibly or not, we would be in it; it would be spontaneous. Life is spontaneous: and so intercession is a part of life, which is spontaneous. If the Spirit of the Lord really has His way in us, we will be people of intercession. We cannot help it, it will be so.

But unto that, we have to watch these points where our intercession is assailed, and the points at which intercession or prayer is assailed are numerous. Remember, a basic point is this matter of access. We have to be sure of our access unto God, and to be sure about it, we have to know the infinite value of that precious Blood, and we must not be deterred by anything, for the Blood forbids us to be deterred. That Blood exists to deal with anything that would deter us. Yes, we may fail, we may blunder, we may breakdown; there may be those things which grieve us and grieve the Lord, but oh, let us recognize that the precious Blood makes possible the keeping of the shortest accounts with those things, so that instantly, right now, and not waiting until we have got over the violent reaction and sting of our mistake and feel a bit better, that precious Blood must be appropriated to deal with that. Let us remember that all this persistence of the enemy to lay us low has something more in view than just laying us low. It is to destroy our spiritual vocation in prayer and thereby to give him opportunity for assaulting and oppressing the saints. We are responsible for the life and deliverance of the Lord's people. That is what we are here for.

The Church and the Power of the Throne

Seeing that is so, it is necessary for us always to bear in mind that, while for ourselves, as sinners, God's throne is a throne of grace, it is also a throne of judgment for the enemy. What to us is the throne of grace is the throne of destruction to Satan. We have not only to come in boldness to the throne of grace for ourselves and for the Lord's people needing grace, we have with equal boldness to come to that same throne as the throne which spells the undoing of Satan. Always remember there are two sides to that throne. There is the grace side and the judgment side; the grace side for us because of the precious blood, and the judgment side for the Adversary.

This latter aspect of the throne is that which comes so prominently into view with Esther. It had to do with the undoing of Haman's devices. We have to recognize that the throne has not only to be in the midst of the Church as the throne of grace, but in all its meaning as the throne of Divine power for undoing the work of Satan. It is a different aspect of prayer, a very important one. You and I should know the touch with the throne against the enemy on behalf of the Lord's people. That throne must be in the Church.

A Final Word on the Trust Committed to the Church

Well now, we must close, and we do so by just gathering it up in this way. This whole trust of the life of the people of God is given to the Church. That is a tremendous thing to say, and an equally tremendous thing to contemplate. I know that, in a very true sense, all is secured in Christ in glory, but it is equally true, according to Divine revelation, that there has to be an outworking, and this latter is committed to the Church. We are workers together with God. We were created in Christ Jesus unto good works which God foreordained that we should walk in them. The Lord has put this tremendous trust upon His people, the working out of His purpose, which is the deliverance and life of His people unto that glorious consummation - the display of the greatness of Christ in His people, through His people.

You see, when Christ comes, He is not just coming to be seen in glory, to be manifested as the glorified, glorious Christ; not just that. He is coming to be glorified IN His saints and to be marvelled at IN all them that believe. Christ's glorification is to be something in the Church at last. Unto that, you and I and all the Lord's people are given the trust of working it out. The Lord gives us light. Then, while He is not out of touch with us, in a sense He stands back and says, Now then, that is your business; I have given you light, now get on with it! We are all the time appealing back to the Lord to do it. Lord, come in and do this! Lord, come in and do that! The Lord's attitude is, Get on with it! I am here, I give you the supply of the Spirit, but

I have made known to you what your business is: do your business! Oh, that the Lord's people would rise up and recognize that He has committed to them this great trust of working out His purpose, of ministering to the life of His people unto that glorious consummation, when the very greatness of Christ shall be displayed in that people. That is our business: and so it is not for us continually to appeal to the Lord for Him to do it as apart from us, but for us to get to the business of prayer and intercession, and in this way minister His life to His people, bring about the deliverance of His people by prayer, standing in touch with His throne for their deliverance from the Evil One and the power of death.

Now, if the very deliverance and life of God's people is at our door by God's appointment, that is no small thing. I believe that the Word clearly reveals that the Church exists for the purpose of taking up this question of the Lord's glory, the Lord's triumph, the Lord's greatness, as that which is to be ultimately displayed in the triumph of His people. It is our responsibility. The Lord give us grace to accept it and to commit ourselves to it, and may we be very much before Him that we shall be found, not as those coerced to pray, but marked by the Spirit of intercession as the very evidence of our life.

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