

The Altar (The Cross) Governs Everything

by T. Austin-Sparks

The Cross is the central place of everything, governing all aspects of the house and the surrounding area, and is the key to everything, making everything safe for the Lord and the Church.

Scripture: Ezekiel 43:13

Topics: "The Cross", "Centrality of Christ"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the centrality and universality of the Cross in his sermon 'The Altar (The Cross) Governs Everything.' He illustrates how the altar in Ezekiel's vision represents the Cross, which governs all aspects of the temple and ministry, asserting that when the Cross is in its rightful place, everything else falls into order. Sparks explains that the Cross is not merely a doctrine but a transformative experience that brings judgment to the natural man and establishes a new creation in Christ. He stresses that the Cross serves as a defense against worldly influences and is essential for the Church's effectiveness and unity. Ultimately, he calls for believers to recognize the power of the Cross in their lives and communities.

Transcript

Ezekiel forty-three, in verses thirteen to twenty-seven, we have the great altar and its service. We will not read the whole section, but just the first verse of that section: "And these are the measurements of the altar by cubits (the cubit being a cubit and a handbreadth): the base shall be a cubit, and the width a cubit, and its border on its edge round about one span; and this shall be the height of the base of the altar." Then we are given more particulars about the measurement and the ministry. We all understand that the altar in the Old Testament is always a type of the Cross. This altar is the place of the WHOLE burnt offering, and this corresponds to Hebrews, chapter ten, where the Lord Jesus is likened to the WHOLE burnt offering. So we are going this morning to think about the centrality and the universality of the Cross.

Now we have seen that the whole area of the temple was square. If we draw diagonal lines from each corner, those lines meet at the place where the great altar was. The central place in the whole area was the altar. You will recognize that this is different from the tabernacle in the wilderness. The court of the tabernacle was not square, and the altar of burnt offering was right at the gate; but in this temple, the altar is right in the center of a square. It is important to realize that. All the lines meet in the altar, and all the lines go out from the altar. The central place of everything is the altar.

The altar governed everything. It governed everything as to the house; that is, all that was actually in the temple was governed by the altar. It governed all that was immediately around the house. If you had a plan of this whole house, with the different course and the whole area, you would see that all the chambers of the priests were round about; and the places where the offerings were prepared were all around. Everything was gathered round the house, but everything in the house and in the whole area was governed by the altar.

And then, all the ministry of the house was governed by the altar. We could say that there was no ministry that was not related to the altar; and then beyond the house, and beyond the immediate area, right out to the whole land, everything was governed by the altar.

We shall see this when we see that the river, which came down through the whole land, came by way of the altar; but we turn inside the house first.

The Cross In Its Place

Here we have a very important and vital truth. When the Cross is in its place with its full measure, everything else will be in order, and everything else will be given its meaning, and its value. I feel that I cannot say this too strongly. We are so often concerned about the outside of things, about the order of the House of the Lord, about the ministry of the House of the Lord, about the people who are related to the House of the Lord. We are always beginning on the outside. We are trying to set up an order of the House of God. We are trying to put the people of the House right. We are very much concerned about the ministers, and the ministries. But if the Cross was really in its place with its full dimensions, all those things would see to themselves. The people would be right if the Cross was in its place. The ministries would be living if the Cross was in its place. The order of the House would be right if the Cross was in its place. It just does work that way. IF THE CROSS IS RIGHT AT THE CENTER, in full measure, and note that it is a large altar, THEN EVERYTHING ELSE WILL COME INTO ITS RIGHT PLACE, AND INTO A LIVING RELATIONSHIP.

Although it is not said so here, I think we are right in concluding that this altar was of brass. The altar in the tabernacle was of brass, the altar in Solomon's temple was of brass, and I think that we can assume that this altar was of brass. We have already met brass. We have met brass in the Man in the gate, and we have said that with His reed He measured everything according to what He was. Brass is the type of the righteous judgments of God. This great altar represents the fullness of the righteous judgments of God. This altar of brass is measured by the Man of brass, so that this altar represents God's thoughts in judgment.

In this altar of whole burnt offering, the one unrighteous man is completely removed. That altar of brass sees one man brought to ashes. The ashes were taken from this altar and emptied onto the ground at the side of the altar. That is a picture of God's Mind about the unrighteous man, or the natural man. He is consumed in the fire of God's judgment, he is reduced to ashes, and he is poured out on the ground. THAT IS GOD'S MIND ABOUT THE NATURAL MAN. On the other side, it is only THE RIGHTEOUS MAN that can stand here in the presence of this altar. Of course, those are the two sides of THE PERSON AND WORK OF THE LORD JESUS. On the one side HE was made sin for us, and in that capacity He was wholly consumed and brought to ashes. When He cried, "My God, My God, why has Thou forsaken Me" - it was the cry of the ashes! He had been brought to ashes, and poured out on the ground.

But then there was the other side of the Cross - "He knew no sin." In Himself, there was no unrighteousness, and, therefore, He can go through the altar, He can live after the fire! "Thou wilt not suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption." Because in Himself there was no sin, He could not be holden of death. His Holy Nature could overcome all the righteous judgments of God! This is the meaning of the great altar: one man is brought to an end, and Another Man stands in his place. Everything had been judged at the altar. Everything IS judged in the Cross.

We have been judged in the Cross of the Lord Jesus, and in our own selves we have been brought to an end. Everything of the natural has been judged and brought to an end in the Cross of the Lord Jesus. It is a very important thing to recognize that. You see, that makes anything possible. That is why I have said that if the Cross is in its place, everything else would be right. The House will be right; that is, the Church will be right. The ministry will be right. The order will be right. You will not have to go to work to try and bring about a right order. It spontaneously comes out of the work of the Cross.

I do hope that you are writing that in your minds. You may meet disorders in the House of God. You may meet the natural man in the House of God. You may meet conditions which are all wrong in the House of God. How are you going to deal with them? You can only deal with them by the principle of the Cross. You cannot deal with the people themselves, you cannot deal with the things themselves; but if only you can bring the Cross into that situation, you have solved the whole problem. It is like that. We do not start from the outside. We do not start with the people, we do not start with the order of the Lord's House, we do not start with the ministry - WE START WITH THE CROSS. And if only people see the Cross, everything else would put itself right. Everything is judged by the Cross.

The Letter to the Romans is the message of the Cross in its full measure. In that letter to the Romans, you see the great measurement of the Cross. There the Cross comprehends all things. It brings the whole race in Adam to an end, and it begins an entirely new race in Christ risen! It is very impressive that the first of the New Testament Letters should put the Cross there in its full measurement. You all know that the Letter to the Romans was not the first letter written by Paul, but the Holy Spirit has put it first in the arrangement. I think the Holy Spirit had something to do with the arrangement of the books in the New Testament, and in His sovereign arrangement of this book, He has put the altar in its fullness right at the beginning. Well, of course, you have to recall all that you know about the Letter to the Romans to see that.

In the First Letter to the Corinthians, the Cross is applied to the natural and the carnal man inside the Church. The natural and the carnal man has come in where he has no right to be. This unrighteous man has slipped in through the gate, and so the apostle BRINGS CHRIST CRUCIFIED OVER AGAINST THE NATURAL AND THE CARNAL MAN. The Cross in I Corinthians had to do with that man, not outside the Church as in Romans, but inside the Church.

The Second Letter to the Corinthians sets the Cross in relation to ministry. That letter shows us that ministry flows out of a broken and humbled vessel. I can only say these things and leave the full explanation of it.

In the Letter to the Galatians, the Cross is brought down upon making Christianity into another legal system, and bringing Christians into bondage. How strong the apostle is in that letter, but see how he uses the Cross. He uses the Cross tremendously against that effort to make Christianity into a legal system, and to bring believers into bondage again.

In the Letter to the Ephesians, the work of the Cross is to put the Church on heavenly ground. The Cross in Ephesians completely cuts the Church off from all earthly ground. It puts the Church outside of time. It puts the Church outside of the world.

In the Letter to the Philippians, the Cross is applied to that which is spoiling the harmony of the Lord's people. There is a painful dislocation inside the Church. There is a spot where things are unhappy, and that is because of personal interest and pride. Some people will not let go their personal interest. Some people will not let go their pride. They have been offended, and they are not going to forgive. So the apostle brings the Cross in there over against this discord, and dislocation; and he points out that if only the Cross were in those lives, everything would be put right.

The Letter to the Colossians - this letter shows that the Cross delivers from all false spirituality. The Cross sets aside all that is mere mysticism, and everything that would make Christ less than He is.

Then we have the Letters to the Thessalonians. Here the Cross is the strength for suffering - an inspiration unto the coming of the Lord. There may not be much said about the Cross actually, but the principle of these letters is the principle of the Cross. The people were suffering for Christ's sake. They were suffering the loss of all things, and they had thought that the Lord would have come to deliver them, and the Lord is delaying His coming. So the apostle tells them that their sufferings will issue in the coming of the Lord and glory. The sufferings of suffering with Christ. They are suffering for Christ's sake: it is fellowship in the Cross, but the sufferings issued in the glory. The Lord is coming, and then it will be all right. The Cross has a very real message for suffering believers. And then we just conclude with the Letter to the Hebrews.

In the Letter to the Hebrews, the Cross shows how everything is brought to fullness and to finality. Now all of this relates to the House on its inside. It touches conduct. It touches character. It touches order. It touches ministry. If the Cross is in its place, everything will be effective.

Now I have not just given you some Bible teaching. The Cross is the key to everything. Then what is true on the inside is also true on the outside. It is the Cross which effects the whole range of the Church's influence. The river comes by way of the Cross, that is, the influence that goes out from the sanctuary to the whole land. It is the Cross which gives effectiveness to the ministry to the whole world. So the apostles preached everywhere Christ crucified.

The Cross Is The Defense Against The World

And then we note another thing, the altar was the great defensive against the enemy. If you look in the Book of Ezra in chapter three, at verse three, you have this: "so they set up the altar on its foundation, for they were terrified because of the peoples of the lands..." Because fear of the peoples of the lands was upon them, they put the altar in its place. The Cross is a great defensive - the Cross defends us from the world. The world is the great enemy of the Church. The spirit of the world has always been the Church's great enemy. Satan has always tried to get the world into the Church and so wreck the Church and its ministry, to destroy the influence of the Church in the world. It is a very clever and subtle move of the enemy to destroy the influence of the Church in the world by bringing the world into the Church. For Paul said, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal 6:14).

A truly crucified people are never in danger of the world. It is only when the Cross has not done its work that the world has a place. The world has no place with a crucified man or woman, or a crucified company

of believers. The Cross is a great defensive against the world. IF YOU WANT TO KEEP THE WORLD OUT, PUT THE CROSS IN ITS PLACE. If the Cross is truly in its place in fullness, then everything else will come into order. THE CROSS is the great defensive against the world. THE CROSS is the great defensive against evil powers. THE CROSS makes everything safe; it makes everything safe for the Lord.

You see, the Lord wants to commit Himself. He wants to trust Himself to His people, but if the Cross is not there at work, the Lord cannot trust Himself to them. The Lord says, "It is not safe for Me to give Myself there, or I should be involved in their un-crucified condition." The Cross makes everything safe for the Lord, and the Cross makes everything safe for the Church. If the Cross is really at work in all of us, we can trust one another. It is quite safe to trust yourself to a crucified man or woman.

Now I close this morning by emphasizing that the Cross is not a doctrine to be taught. It is not a subject to be preached. Of course, it will be taught, and it will be preached. But in the first place, it is not a subject to be taught. It is not just a doctrine. The Cross is power. The Cross is an experience. The Cross is an event in our lives. The Cross is a crisis. The Cross is a revolution. The Cross is an earthquake. There was an earthquake when Jesus was crucified. If the Cross comes into our life, there will be an earthquake. Everything will be shaken, everything will be overturned. The Cross is an earthquake. It is something tremendous. The Cross is not just a theory, not just a doctrine: THE CROSS GOVERNS EVERYTHING. Well, that is our message about the centrality and universality of the Cross.

The Lord grant that we shall all be crucified men and women. The assemblies to which we belong - may they be crucified assemblies. The Lord grant that His whole Church may see and view the meaning of the Cross.

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