

The Authority Is Invested in the Man on the Throne

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon teaches that the Lord's movements are guided by the principle of directness, and that He demands absolute liberty for movement, and that the ministry of a servant of God is a combination of sweetness and bitterness.

Scripture: Ezekiel 1:15

Topics: "God's Authority", "The Paradox of Ministry"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the authority of the Man on the Throne, illustrating how God's movement is symbolized by the wheels in Ezekiel's vision. He explains that these wheels represent mobility, directness, and the necessity for God to have freedom to move without human interference. Sparks highlights that God's movements may sometimes pause, waiting for our readiness, but His purpose remains unchanged. He connects this to the New Testament, asserting that all authority is given to Jesus, who calls us to follow His lead into the world. The sermon concludes with the paradox of ministry, where sweetness and bitterness coexist, reflecting the nature of the Cross.

Transcript

As you know, this first section in chapters one through three deals with the preparation of the Lord's servant for his ministry. So far we have considered firstly the prophet in himself and then the opened heaven, and then we have gone on with the visions of God. And we still have a little to say about the first vision. We have considered the Chariot-Throne of the Lord, and we have considered the four living ones. There are just two other aspects for our consideration. The first of those two is the wheels. That section is in Ezekiel one, verses fifteen through twenty-one. You have read this so that we need not go over it together this morning. There are several aspects or characteristics of the wheels, and I think they can be set down as five things.

First of all, wheels are symbols of movement, they signify mobility. And then the wheels here speak of directness. Thirdly, they begin upon the earth and then they are lifted up from the earth and then they seem to touch the earth again at different times. In their movement they seem to come back to the earth from time to time. Then fourthly these wheels are full of eyes. All around the wheels there are eyes. And in the fifth place, the Spirit of life is in the wheels. I think just to mention those things is to indicate their teaching. We need not spend a lot of time upon each point, but we will just go over them again with one or

two remarks.

Wheels Represent Mobility

Number one: the wheels represent mobility. That suggests two things. Firstly, God is on the move. We are here in the presence of the movements of the Chariot-Throne of God. In the second place, God demands absolute liberty for movement. He requires complete freedom for His movements. If you are not quite sure of what I mean by that, you have only to remember that you are really dealing with what is in the Book of the Acts in this book of Ezekiel. And when we speak of the Book of the Acts, we understand that we are speaking about the whole of the New Testament. All the letters of the apostles came out of the Book of the Acts - the Acts comprehends the whole of the New Testament. We are going to have to see that in more detail presently. But when we come to the Book of the Acts, we find these two things: the Throne is on the move. There is no doubt about it that The Man on the Throne is moving. We can see the goings of the Lord in the Book of the Acts. That is not a stationary book. He is not a Lord Who is standing still. He is on the move.

But the second thing is the Lord demands liberty to move. That liberty of movement must be recognized and accepted. We remember Peter and the house of Cornelius. That vision that Peter had on the housetop is always present in our minds. The Lord is on the move from Israel to the Gentiles, from Jerusalem to the regions beyond. That is what we have in Ezekiel. But Peter would stop the movement of the Lord - he would say, "Not so, Lord." But the Lord will not have that arresting hand of tradition. The Lord will not have the arresting hand of prejudice. This was a tremendous crisis for Peter, and this was the nature of the crisis. The Lord was saying in effect to Peter, "Peter, I am going on. Are you going on with Me? If you are not going with Me, it makes no difference. You just stay behind. But if you are going with Me, you have got to give Me perfect liberty of movement. Your mind must not interfere with My movement. Your religious traditions must not interfere with My movement. Your prejudice must not interfere with My movement."

The Lord is on the move, and He demands absolute freedom of movement. That is what is here in the wheels at the very first. God is moving, and God claims the right to keep on moving. That is not something just stated to you this morning. There is a very great deal bound up with that. We must remember that God is always moving toward His Eternal End. And we must put nothing in the way of the Lord. Again and again the Lord may come up against things in us, our mind about things, or even our past experiences, our ideas that we know all about it. The Lord says: "I have still yet more light and truth to break forth from the Word. You have not yet come to the end of all My movements. There is far more in front than there is behind, and you must give Me perfect liberty to go on."

Now you must think about that, because that is not only the first thing, but that is the foundation of everything. This Chariot-Throne of the Lord rests upon wheels. It rests upon the principle that God is a God of movement and demands liberty for His movement.

Wheels Speak Of Directness

Then the second thing: the wheels speak of directness without deviation. This is one of the most difficult points in this vision to interpret. But as I see it, it seems to mean this: when God goes forward, God is never held up by something that He has not foreseen. If God does change His direction, that is all in the pattern, that is not an emergency, that is not because God had not anticipated the situation. Now probably you find that difficult to understand. Well, come back again to what we have just been saying about Peter.

It looks as though God is changing His direction, for right up to this point He has been moving with Israel, all His goings up to this point have been related to Israel. Now it looks as though He is changing His direction, and that was the problem for Peter. It was such a big change in the direction of God. Peter wanted the Lord to keep straight on with Israel, and not to change His course to the Gentiles. It looked as though God was changing course, simply because He had come up against difficulties in Israel. That is how some Bible expositors interpret this.

God came up against the difficulty in Israel, and therefore He had to go to the Gentiles. Going to the Gentiles is an entirely different policy of the Lord, simply because the Jews presented Him with a difficulty. That is how Peter viewed the thing, and he felt very badly about it, and he would have said, "Lord, You just cannot do this. You have gone all through the centuries with Israel. You cannot change course now." Now do you see the point? - the fact is that God was not changing course. The Bible makes it perfectly clear that God always did have the Gentiles in Mind. He would reach the Gentiles through the Jews, but that is quite another thing. If the Jews fail to serve Him in that matter, He is going on with His purpose all the same.

These wheels go straight on. They can change direction, but that does not mean a change of purpose. Even in the seeming change of direction, they are still going straight. God is not caused to go out of His Way because of circumstances. He just goes straight on. Now that is a very difficult thing to understand when you read this vision of the wheels, but I think the illustration of Israel and the Gentiles is a key to this situation.

When you come to the end of the New Testament, you come up against another difficulty. This time with the Church in general. It seems as though the Lord has met another obstacle, and it looks as though He has to turn out of His Way to take another course. It looks as though He has to leave the Church in general and deviate to the overcomers. That is only one way of viewing it - the Divine Way is God is still going on with His purpose - this is no deviation in purpose. God still goes straight on. Well, I think we have said enough about that, but there is a lot of instruction in that if you will think about it.

Wheels Touch The Earth And Are Lifted Up

Then point number three: they touch the earth and then they are lifted up from the earth. And then it seems that they come back to earth and stay. The living ones let down their wings, and for a time everything seems to be standing still, and then the inference is that they go on again. I think there is a lot of history in that.

The Lord began on the day of Pentecost. He began at Jerusalem. We might say that He began, as it were, on the earth. And then His movements are above the earth - He is there through that book in a position over the earth, and then He stops. This is not a contradiction of what I have just been saying. There are times when the Lord has to wait - He has to wait for something - His onward movements seem to tarry. What a lot of history there is in that - the whole history of the Church is just that. God moves on and then He has to wait and then when He gets what He is waiting for, He goes on again. There are these movements of God which we can see in history. We need to very seriously consider this matter of God having to wait for something!

Take our own lives. There is a movement of God, and then there seems to be some waiting period - the Lord is waiting for something. It may be He is waiting for our adjustment to some light that He has given. It may be that He is waiting for the removal of something that has come in that is not of Himself, It may be

many things, but we do know that in our own lives there are periods when the Lord does not seem to be going on.

Perhaps He has been stopped in His going on - He is now waiting for something. During that time of waiting, we ought to have very serious exercise - "Why is it that the Lord is not going on? Why is the Lord not going on with me? What is it that the Lord is waiting for? What adjustment have I got to make? What is it that I have got to put out of the Lord's Way?" You see, we ought to have exercise about every seeming staying and waiting of the Lord.

Also, that is true of the Lord's work. That is true in our own spiritual life, and it is true also in the work of the Lord. There come periods when the Lord seems to be waiting. It looks as though He has stopped going on. There may be any one of many reasons for that. It is not because the Lord has given up His purpose! It is not because the Lord has ceased to be a God of movement, but He is waiting for us! He is waiting for His people - He is waiting for something in His people. At all such times, we should have very great exercise about this: "What is the Lord waiting for?!"

Well, if we take the history of the Church during the last two thousand years (and it is a very instructive study), on the one side we see those movements of God from heaven - it is as though the Throne was lifted up from the earth and was going on. The Throne was overriding things of the earth - going on in its power. That has happened again and again. On the other side, we see those dark times in the history of the Church, such as what we call the Middle Ages, and other times when it seemed that the Lord was standing still. It has been like that many times. The Lord was waiting for something. And then a people arose who took on that matter and had deep exercise about it. That is the history of the Church. Out of that exercise God went on again!

It would be quite easy for me here this morning, if I had the time, to give you those movements and those stayings of the Lord, but we shall not take time for that. We are just putting our finger upon this principle: The Throne moves, the living ones let down their wings and the Throne stands still for a time, and then it moves on again. Well, think a lot about that. It is full of instruction.

Wheels Are Full Of Eyes

Then we come to the next thing: these wheels are full of eyes, all around the wheels there are eyes. We meet those eyes on several occasions in the Word of God. We meet them in the prophecy of Zechariah, and we meet them several times in the Book of the Revelation; and, of course, we know what they symbolize - they represent the complete and perfect intelligence of the Throne. This government of the Man upon the Throne is the government of a Perfect Intelligence. If we transfer this principle to the beginning of the Book of the Revelation, there we see what it means. The churches are about to be judged, but the One Who judges them is the One Whose eyes are as a flame of fire. That One says to the churches, "I know thy works." Then He goes on to say all that He knows about the churches, and it is shown that He knows more about the churches than they know about themselves.

He tells one church that they think that they are rich and increased in goods, that they have everything. He says, "You do not know that you are wretched and poor and naked." Then what does He say to them? "I counsel thee to buy of Me eyesalve, that thou mayest see," - that you may see what I have seen. The Lord knew more and saw more than that church knew about itself. That is only an illustration of this. All the movements of this Chariot-Throne are in complete Intelligence. That One upon the Throne sees and knows everything. The Lord is not blind to anything and He is not ignorant of anything.

The Spirit Of Life In The Wheels

Then finally: the Spirit of Life is in the wheels. The whole governing principle of the movements of the Lord is Life. The thing which governs that Throne is this main principle of Life. You know so much about Life in the Bible that I need not stay with it this morning. You have been taken right through the Bible on the principle of Life, and you know that Life is the whole governing question of the whole Bible. That is the issue with which the Bible begins, and that is the issue with which the Bible ends. All the movements of God from eternity to eternity are on this basis, and with this question of Life.

ALL POWER IS GIVEN TO ME IN HEAVEN AND ON EARTH.

Now we will sum up and bring this into the New Testament. In the first place, there is very little doubt that we have to read Matthew 28:18-20 into this. Jesus said: "All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth." That is the first half of the statement that He makes in these scriptures; and that brings us back to the Chariot-Throne in relation to the whole creation and the authority that is invested in the Man in the Throne. Do note that word "authority" that He used. He did not say, "All power is given to Me in heaven and on earth"; of course, that was implied, but He used another Greek word. He said: "All authority is given unto Me." That is a bigger thing than power. The power lies within the authority. The authority is the exercise of the power. Jesus said, "Behind Me is all the authority of the government of heaven." - "Men may just call Me Jesus of Nazareth, they may regard Me as just another man, but they are going to find out that behind Me is all the authority of heaven." And that is what they did find out.

Then we have the second half of the statement in Matthew: "For this very reason, go ye into all the world; and I am with you all the days." Here are the movements of the Throne "into all the world," and the authority of Jesus Christ is with the Church. All the authority of heaven is behind the Church when it gets into line with the goings of that Throne.

So, first of all we bring Matthew 28:18-20 right into Ezekiel, and note we are dealing with the preparation of a servant for his work. Ezekiel certainly needed that preparation. If he had not had that vision, his work would have been impossible. Every servant of the Lord needs that vision. You and I need to see that. We need to be assured of that.

Now there are other parts of the New Testament which must be brought right into this section. You must read right into the first chapter of the Book of Ezekiel the Letters to the Colossians and the Ephesians. Bring the first three chapters of the Letter to the Colossians into chapter one of Ezekiel; and then bring the first three chapters of Ephesians into the first chapter of Ezekiel. It is full of instruction, and those New Testament Letters will be the best exposition of Ezekiel one.

Note some of the main words in those chapters and some of the governing ideas. To begin with, take "creation." Can you call up at this moment the first chapter of the Letter to the Colossians? There is nothing in all the Bible like that chapter as to the place of the Lord Jesus in creation. It is a tremendous chapter on the matter of the relationship of Christ to creation and the creation to Christ.

You will remember what we have been saying about "the living ones" as representing the whole creation in heaven and on earth, and then the Throne is imposed upon that. That is exactly what you have in Colossians and Ephesians. Take the word "heavens" as in Ephesians. That is all very instructive to us. All of this has to do with the preparation of a servant for his ministry.

The Paradox Of The Cross

Let us spend our last few minutes on this second thing, and it will only be a very little that I say about it. Chapter two of Ezekiel, verse 9, right through to chapter three, verse 14, has to do with the roll. Ezekiel says that he saw a hand stretched out and in the hand was a roll and it was written on both sides with lamentations, mournings, and woes and a voice said, "eat the roll"; and when Ezekiel proceeded to eat the roll, he said it was sweet as honey in his mouth. In verse fourteen it says, "I went in the bitterness of my spirit" - sweetness in my mouth and bitterness in my spirit. This sounds very strange. Here is a roll written within and without with lamentations, mournings, and woes. How can that be sweet in anybody's mouth? And then as the prophet proceeded to fulfill his ministry, he said that he went in the bitterness of his spirit.

Here is a combination of sweetness and bitterness in ministry. What does that mean? How can we explain this? I think if I just quote one or two passages of Scripture it will explain the whole thing. Jesus is at the passover supper with His disciples. We know what His Mind was upon: it was upon the cup. Presently He will say, "Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from Me." The cup was the cup of His suffering, the cup of His passion. It was a bitter cup. There is no doubt about that, and yet it says this: "He took the cup, and gave thanks." Here is a combination of two things, bitterness and thankfulness, suffering and glory. That is the paradox of the Cross.

Jesus has just told His disciples what is going to happen. He has told them He is going to suffer. He has gone over the whole ground of His Cross with them, and then it says, "And after singing a hymn, they went out." - They sang a hymn, they went out. You know what they went out to. You would have thought that that was the last place of ever singing a hymn: you would have thought that they would have gone out in absolute silence and sorrow, but they went out to the notes of a hymn.

I wonder if you know what the hymn was that they sang. There is very good authority for believing that the hymn sung at the passover was the One Hundredth and Eighteenth Psalm. Now, of course, we ought to read the whole psalm, but right at the heart of that psalm, we have these words:

I shall not die, but live.

It is the psalm of the passion, but it is the psalm of victory. It is the psalm with a Cross in view, but it is a psalm of the glory, which is the other side of the Cross.

If it really was that psalm that they sang, then we see the mingling of the sweetness and the bitterness in the cup. Shall we take another phrase,

Who for the joy set before Him endured the Cross.

This is the bringing together of the bitterness and the sweetness. Is this what Paul referred to when he said: "as sorrowful yet always rejoicing." These two things always go together in the ministry of a servant of God. The way of the Cross always means those two things. It is the way of the bitterness, often the bitterness of spirit; but it is not all bitterness. The Lord keeps the balance between the bitterness and the joy. There is not only the bitter side of the fellowship of His sufferings, but there is the joyful side of that fellowship!

THE RIGHT HAND OF THE LORD DOES VALIANTLY.

THE RIGHT HAND OF THE LORD IS EXALTED:

THE RIGHT HAND OF THE LORD DOES VALIANTLY.

I SHALL NOT DIE, BUT LIVE... (Psa. 118:15-17).

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