

The Holy Spirit - Part 3

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the critical role of the Holy Spirit in fulfilling God's eternal purpose and empowering the church through the advent of Pentecost.

Duration: 59:20

Scripture: Matthew 16:28, Mark 1:14, Acts 1:3, Galatians 4:4

Topics: "Holy Spirit"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses the four major features of the function of the eternal spirit as revealed in the Bible. The first feature is the eternal spirit's commitment to effecting God's eternal purpose. The preacher cites scriptures that show the spirit's active role in creation and as the custodian of the divine purpose. The second feature is the fulfillment of time, as seen in the coming of Jesus and his preaching of the gospel of God. The third feature is the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Jesus, which are foundational truths in Christianity. The fourth feature is the diverse and varied ways in which the Holy Spirit works to accomplish God's purpose, with different methods employed at different times. The preacher emphasizes the unchanging and eternal nature of God's purpose, while highlighting the changing methods used by the Holy Spirit.

Transcript

As we embark upon this full day of ministry, ministry of speaking and of hearing the Word of God, may I preface it by pointing out what all ministry of the Word of God ought to contain. There are, in the main, three things that such ministry should have as its object. The first, the greatness and the nature of our calling of God in Christ.

May I underline those two words, the greatness of our calling in Christ. The nature of our calling. The second, the meaning of the experience and the conflict and the discipline that goes with that calling.

For in our calling in Christ, we find ourselves very soon in a great conflict and we find that we have been brought under very severe and continuous discipline and it is very necessary, therefore, for us to know the meaning of that conflict, what it's all about and the meaning of that discipline, what it is unto. And thirdly, the provisions and the resources available to the Lord's people for a triumphant issue of the calling and the supper. That, I feel, comprehends ministry and those three things, although we are not going to dwell upon them, will lie behind all that we have to say today.

We are now then coming back to the second chapter of the book of the Acts. You have that before you. I am not going to embark upon an exposition of the chapter in its verses or its clauses nor in its particular and specific subjects.

It is the chapter as a chapter not in the Bible nor in the New Testament, but as a chapter in history. There is a very great importance, dear friends, attached to our understanding of this one chapter. I think as we go on, it will become more and more clear to you what an important chapter this is.

I trust that you will see its importance more fully and clearly than ever you have done before. But I repeat, it is fundamental to all Christian life, fundamental to the three things which I have mentioned as constituting ministry to the Lord's people, that we understand the second chapter of the book of the Acts. Perhaps you think you do.

You have read it and heard it read and heard it preached on numerous times. When I say what I am saying now about it, I am fully aware that more than fifty years of ministry lie behind what I am saying and I wouldn't dare to come to you with this whole thing exhausted and begin to give you something of an exhausted subject. What I mean is that I am more and more aware myself as time goes on of the inexhaustible fullness of this one chapter.

Well, let us approach it. There are, as we Christians well know, three major truths which lie beneath our Christianity. Those three being the incarnation of the Son of God, second person of the Trinity, coming into this world in man form, the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, meaning his death and his resurrection.

Two sides of one thing, the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the third, what is now conveyed to our minds by the word Pentecost, that is the advent of the Holy Spirit. These are the three major truths of Christianity.

There is a sense in which each of these might be said to be the greatest. We might say that coming into this world in a body is the greatest thing that has ever happened in the world. Coming in of God in Christ in human form.

Quite easy to make that the supreme thing. But then we might, as we contemplate it, say the same about the death and the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. The greatest thing that has ever happened in the history of mankind.

And then again, how easy it would be to say that of the day of Pentecost. The greatest thing in human history. But we cannot say that of each or any of these separately.

We can only say it in a related way. For they all three comprise one marvelous combination of divine activity. They are not separate from one another.

First leads to the second and the second to the third and they are interdependent and interrelated. Not one of them exclusively comprehends the whole movement of God so far as this world is concerned. Without the incarnation there would be no redeemer.

Without the cross there would be no redemption. Without the advent of the spirit there would be no church with its wild mission. All these combine then to make Christianity full.

When we come to the matter that is before us, gathered into that town, Pentecost, we do know that Jesus placed very great importance upon the advent of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, he placed a greater importance upon it than upon his remaining in this world in the flesh. It is expedient for you that I go away.

I go away. The thing that struck consternation into those who heard it. The thing to which they reacted with a sense of hopeless and hopeless despair if it should take place.

Everything for them. Everything. All their training, all their religious education, all their hopes and expectations, all their committals.

Bound up with the Messiah here in this world and he said over against all that. It is expedient that I go. I go away better for you.

Indeed it is the best thing for you for if I go not away the comforter, the advocate, the Holy Spirit will not come. So he vested a very great importance in the advent, the coming of the Holy Spirit as much more than his own physical presence in this world. That advent would mean for him his own release into universality of ministry, of power, and of presence.

He knew that. I am straightened, he said, until this passion baptism is accomplished. I am straightened.

But here at this time the Lord leads us to contemplate at least if we do not comprehend the vast significance of that which took place on that particular day in Jerusalem on their day of Pentecost. The vast significance of that in the divine design. Perhaps our best way of making contact with that is to look at the titles and designations given to the Holy Spirit.

Not all. Perhaps one or two today. One of them will be enough for the day or for many days.

Just as we are instructed as to the person and walk of the Lord Jesus by the names and titles which are given to him. And ever remember dear friends, names and titles of the Lord Jesus are indicative of his person and his work. And as we are brought to understand who he is and what he represents by the very titles that he bears.

So it is with the Holy Spirit. We come to know, to understand the Holy Spirit in his person and in his purpose by looking into the titles which are given him in the word of God. We leave for the present this general and common title.

The Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit. About that we may have something to say later if we are able.

But leaving that so familiar title of the Holy Spirit. That which introduces us to the comprehensiveness of his person and his function. Is the one which is mentioned in the letter to the Hebrews, chapter 9, verse 14, who through the eternal spirit, the eternal spirit, and that means two things.

The former of which we are not going to say much. It means that he is one with God eternal. That speaks of his Godhead, his deity, as a member of the divine trinity, dateless, timeless, eternal, as truly so as ever we mean when we speak of eternal God.

That's the obvious first meaning. We leave that. But this title also relates to his office and his function.

His office and his function as the eternal spirit. And there is our door through which we walk into this vast, this great revelation of God to man. In this second connection of the eternal spirit, we find in the Bible four

major features of his function.

I will mention them. I have very little hope of being able to speak about them all, or about 90% of what I have in my heart to say. We have just got to go as far as we are able.

I'll mention them and you can have much fuller meditation than I am able to give our exposition. Firstly, the Bible reveals concerning the eternal spirit, as the eternal spirit, his committal to effecting the eternal purpose of God. The holy spirit is, in his divine function, committed, committed to the effecting of God's eternal purpose.

There is a statement. Your Bible lies open with that statement. Creation.

He is palpating. He is there as the active agent in the beginning. And from that moment onward, spirit of God, moving, moving, all the time moving, in an executive, active way, as the custodian of the divine purpose.

In charge of something to which he has committed himself. Leave that and come back in a few moments. That purpose of God is fixed and unchangeable.

Let that be clearly recognized. There is a purpose that God has concerning this world and its place in his universe. And that purpose is a fixed purpose.

And it is an unchangeable purpose. And the holy spirit is the one committed to see to it, that it is not changed, but that it persists, cannot be defeated. He has taken responsibility for that.

It is a fixed, unchanging and unchangeable. But that purpose is pursued by the holy spirit by diverse means and in various ways through history. So the Bible is a record of the diversity and variety of divine methods and means in relation to the one ultimate purpose.

And the spirit will at one time move in this way, take up this means, and another time, another way, by another means. How many, how diverse and varied are the ways of God as recorded in the scriptures. The means employ the goings of the spirit.

Yes, that's true. And that aspect of things sees what is changeable and what is transient. Whereas the purpose is unchanging and eternal, the methods of reaching it vary and change from time to time.

Something is taken up just for the time being in that relation, and then that's done and it's set aside. That is what's in the Bible about the Holy Spirit. You see the galaxy of instruments, of menus, and the tremendous range of different forms of the Holy Spirit's activity.

Yes, many ways, but one end. Unchanging end. The next thing about the eternal spirit is that he is committed to the maintaining of the absolute sovereignty of God.

The absolute sovereignty of God. God as very God and only God, supreme and eternal. Alone, God.

One God. The Holy Spirit is committed to the maintaining of that reality, the absolute and undivided sovereignty of God. And the Bible is all about that.

Divide anything between God and another or others and you encounter the Holy Ghost. He's not having it. This is inexorable.

This is unchallengeable. Interfere with this and you see what the Bible says throughout. That dark side of the Bible.

All the tragedies, all the chaos, confusion, frustration, loss of time, loss in every way, because the Holy Spirit is committed to one thing here. God is God and he alone has all the rights in this universe. Question that, dispute that, withhold those rights from him in any detail and respect.

And the Holy Spirit is up against you. And you're up against the Holy Spirit. He's committed to the preserving of the sovereignty of God in absoluteness.

And the fourth thing about the Holy Spirit's committal is his jealousy for and his consistency with the eternal principles of God and his powers. You may be very tired of that word principle or principles. You may revolt against it as some have and say we're always talking about principles.

Well, alright. If you like to take that attitude, you can. For some of us, that's the word that has opened our eyes to a vast realm of divine meaning and explanation.

Let it be recognized and if you have to recognize it, go back to your Bible. Investigate with this thought in your mind and before your eyes and see that God has his own way of doing things and that you cannot get to God's end by any way but God's way. You cannot achieve God's purpose by any means but God's means.

You have got to come into God's thoughts, God's judgments, God's standards, God's estimates, God's values. How God looks at things, sees things, weighs things up. You've got to come into that in order to be one with him in his eternal purpose.

It is God's work in God's way and what a lot of tragic history hangs upon failure to recognize that. As though by any means, any way, any how we can do God's work. Well, it doesn't work out that way.

It doesn't work out that way. And those who get nearest to the Lord and walk closest to him know very well that they've got to ask the Lord about everything, even the things that seem to be the most rational and sensible things. They have to ask the Lord, is this right? Is my natural common sense safe in this matter? How often we have discovered that which seemed to us to be convincingly the right thing did not find the Holy Spirit's assent.

What I am saying then, dear friends, is that the Holy Spirit is very jealous for the divine principles. And it is one of the most fascinating, if one can use that word, about the Bible, one of the most fascinating things to see the consistency of the Holy Spirit with principles. Get hold of a single principle and see how the Holy Spirit is consistent with that.

I dare not say, to put in parentheses instances of it in the Bible, but there it is. The Holy Spirit is just not having that because it's not consistent with the divine principle. But he is having the other.

Because there's no inconsistency, there's no contradiction there. It is sincere. It is wholly in line with the divine thought, the divine feeling about things.

If you want the Holy Spirit to be with you, standing with you, you've got to get right into line with this. And sometimes it requires a lot of sifting out, sifting out, sifting out to get out. Where is it we have defaulted? Where is our mistake? Where have we blundered? What is it that the Lord is not agreeing with and letting

us get away with? What is it? Then after much heart searching and breaking and emptying, we light upon it.

That's it. And when we've got that, the whole thing is released. The Holy Spirit is very jealous about divine principles and wholly consistent therewith.

There is but introductory to this, the Holy Spirit's commitment. The Holy Spirit is very jealous about divine principles and wholly consistent therewith. There is but introductory to this, the Holy Spirit's commitment to the eternal purpose of God.

And it is in those ways. But when we've said that, and there's much more that could be said, we're still here before this committed to the eternal purpose. What is it? What is it? What is the eternal purpose? To which the Holy Spirit is thus, to which he will hold, from which he will not deviate, over which he will be so jealous as to its detail.

What is it? May I turn you to some scriptures which are like windows through which we can look. They are but fragments. And the first is in that gospel which is fairly generally believed to be the first gospel record that was written.

And I mention that because if that is true, there's a greater significance about this little fragment. The gospel by Mark. The gospel by Mark, chapter 1, verse 14.

Now after that John was delivered up, Jesus came into Galilee. Now after John, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of God and saying, The time is fulfilled and the kingdom of God is at hand. Hold that for a few minutes while we turn to the letter to the Galatians.

Letter to the Galatians, chapter 4, verse 4. Or was, back now to Matthew's gospel, chapter 16, verse 28. And finally for the moment, Acts chapter 1, verse 3. To whom he also showed himself alive after his passion by many proofs, appearing unto them by the space of forty days, and speaking the things concerning the kingdom of God. Now we have two things here in those four passages.

Two passages on one and two passages on the other. But they're only of course introductory passages to a vast amount more. Firstly, the time is fulfilled in the fullness of the time.

Fullness, there is the word for completeness. Completeness. A whole ray of time is now completed and all its meaning, content, has headed up to this moment.

This is the fullness of all that and this is the climax of all that. First thing that Jesus announced in his preaching was that the time is fulfilled. Time is completed.

All that is now consummated, stretching right back over all time since time began. There has been something moving under the Holy Spirit in those divers manners. That variety of means.

All that we have in the long story recorded in the Old Testament from the beginning. All that under this Holy Spirit has been moving up to this hour. And this hour is the completeness of that.

The fullness of that. All that time. In the fullness of the time God sent forth his Son.

Climax of past dispensation. I'm interested just as, by the way, in noting that Paul in his letter to the Ephesians chapter 1 verse 10 looks on and uses the plural form of this statement. He speaks of that which

will be the fullness of the times.

Here it's singular. The fullness of time. He looks on and says in the fullness of the times God will gather together all things in truth.

There'll be another great climax when all the divisions of time will be gathered into this one thing. But that, by the way, need not stay with that or even hold it for the moment. Here is this wonderful statement.

There has been something in view from the beginning of time. God has had something in his mind right from the beginning of time which was introduced into this world when time was introduced. When God made day and night, summer and winter, springtime and harvest.

Made weeks and months and years and decades and centuries and all the rest of the departments of time. God had a thought that was to run through all that section of time and govern it. We have said the Holy Spirit pursuing that from the beginning.

And now says this startling word that has reached its climax. That has come to its issue. All the meaning of time up to this moment is now divulged.

Its out comes out with the Son of God incarnate in the fullness of the time God sent forth his Son. What is it? Well, the other passages and the other half of the statement tell you. Time is fulfilled.

Kingdom. God is at hand. Now you let right into all that has been in God's mind from the beginning.

What was this eternal purpose? A kingdom. A divine kingdom. God's kingdom.

Heaven's kingdom. The kingdom and the last thing about which the Lord Jesus spoke as was the first thing that he uttered in his preaching in Acts 1 speaking to them of the kingdom. Comprehending his life, he steps out onto the platform of his world ministry and says kingdom is here at hand.

Meaning, more literally, on hand. The right to come. It's imminent, first thing.

And after his resurrection up to his return the last thing he's speaking about is the kingdom. It's impressive here. It's impressive that that was the last thing that the Apostle Paul spoke about that we have any record of.

In the last chapter of this book of Acts in his own hired house receiving all that came unto him he spake concerning the kingdom. Yes, the purpose. Comprehensively is the kingdom of God.

The reign of God. And that order of heaven. Thy kingdom come.

Thy will be done on earth as in heaven. That's the kingdom. That's the kingdom.

So the eternal purpose is this divine heavenly kingdom and rule over this world at least from that general and inclusive truth and revelation we are led to these three things that come out on the day of Pentecost. Because on that day, Matthew 16, 28 had at least a partial and immediate fulfillment there be some of those that stand here and I verily say this to you who shall in no wise taste of death till they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom that happened on the day of Pentecost.

When he was about to lead them he said not many days hence not many days hence happened but when it happened the advent of the kingdom the long delayed the long awaited the long prophesied kingdom the

long illustrated kingdom when it happened what were the three things that related to its coming?

Well look look at Acts 2 If Acts 2 is the advent of the kingdom in the consummation of time up to that point the thing, the first thing that is brought right into view so powerfully so pre-eminently is the King is enthroned the King is enthroned God raised him up He has ascended upon high because we need to crowd into that all this other wonderful teaching in the New Testament God raised him and set him at his own right hand far above all rule and all poverty and every name that is named sat down at the right hand of the majesty in the heavens and so on and on but that is here on the day of Pentecost it is both explicit and implicit that this one whom they crucified God hath made Lord and Christ the King is in his place the King is there you must have the King in order to have a kingdom

so with the coming in of the kingdom great reality of Christ's Lordship it becomes the dominant note of apostolic preaching we've heard it He is Lord of all we can say that from one standpoint the whole of this book of the Acts so called is the account of his Lordship in many ways but there it is inexorable unchangeable unchallengeable because in the hands of the Holy Spirit this kingdom of this King is something eternal not just of an hour the King is installed the kingdom has come with power with power with all the hearts sinking comes with our contemplation of things today where we are concerned where the church is concerned the spiritual state is concerned it still remains that this kingdom is a kingdom of superior power it's a kingdom of power seems to me that the Holy Spirit went

out of his way causing this record to be written to indicate this feature of the kingdom its power well if you've ever been caught in anything like a hurricane you know something of the meaning of power get into a gate on the sea and see what you can do with it some of us have travelled on the mightiest ships that exist those great vessels with their immense engine power and we have been hosed to for many hours because the gale was too great couldn't cope with it the only thing to do was stand still let it blow itself out wait it's useless to try and cope with that a mighty rushing wind is the simile of the advent of the Holy Spirit to convey the idea that this kingdom is a kingdom of power oh yes you're saying with me oh for the recovery of and experience of that oh to know something

more of that but our failure and the church's failure indeed it has it wins us it's not my subject it's not the Lord's fault it's not the change of the Holy Spirit it's the church's fault entirely that this power is not in manifestation as it should be but of course it's still working and very mightily working hiddenly very largely over the story there will be red at last when we can see even what the Holy Spirit has done in days like these when everything seems to be in suspense or defeat or rest oh the Spirit of God hasn't evacuated the scene and has not let go his committal not at all but the advent of the kingdom is in power and you shall receive power said the Lord as he was going when the Holy Spirit is coming I dear friends do not want to be just giving out a lot of words and ideas

even though this may be the truth for me there's a challenge in it all the time and I want that challenge to come to your hearts our powerlessness our weakness our ineffectiveness our impotence and confusion cannot be attributed to the Holy Spirit we ought to seriously and solemnly investigate see why it is there is not more power oh for more power in our preaching the Holy Spirit registering with impact as the word is given that's what I call it but oh for more power in our hearing and our receiving there may be in us like the hammer blows of the word of God yes we are sadly in need of the power of the kingdom for the kingdom is still amongst us and the third thing that characterized the coming of the kingdom such a significant thing was the birth of the church the birth of the church on

that day the church was born and what is the relationship of the church it is here of course that the reason is given for so much careful serious instruction about the church you have lost any of the great impress of that word by reason of familiarity if it has become but a system of truth to you an idea in a more or less objective way listen now and ask the Lord to recover that loss because you see this that is called my church my church has a very very close place to the heart of the kingdom of the Lord in relation to his kingdom what is it where if we use a figure from the word of God this is the innermost thing in the whole range of the divine rule which is to be ultimately the divine rule kingdom is a very far reaching and comprehensive thought and intention of God to embrace all

things but right at the heart of that great spiritual territory there is a city there is a city city is a divine idea or it is taken up by God and used as a divine idea it is

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