

The Horizon of Christ - Part 4

by T. Austin-Sparks

Christ is the ultimate range and bound of God's purpose in creation, and his ministry is characterized by a spirit of servanthood, self-abnegation, and self-emptying.

Duration: 41:16

Scripture: Matthew 3:11, Matthew 6:33, Mark 1:4, Luke 3:16, John 1:29, Acts 2:38, Revelation 21:2

Topics: "Christ"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker explores the concept of Christ being the ultimate purpose and representative of God's creation. The sermon begins by discussing how God chose Abraham to be the first of a people who would receive His blessings. Abraham went through a process of discipline to bring him to a place of complete reliance on God. The sermon then delves into the significance of Jesus' baptism and the role of John the Baptist as his forerunner. The speaker emphasizes the importance of understanding what God is doing in our lives and the challenges and trials we may face as part of our spiritual journey.

Transcript

Through the day, we have been occupied with a consideration and recognition of the great truth revealed in the Word of God, that God the Father has appointed his Son, our Lord Jesus, to be the horizon of all his interests and his activities. Horizon, meaning the uttermost bound of his concern and the inclusive sphere of his activities. So this morning, somewhat comprehensive laying of the foundation for these hours, that that word, horizon, occurs in the New Testament, although not in our translation.

It is translated, and we quite sympathize with the translators, the original word is translated, ordained. Whom he ordained. That is repeated concerning the Lord Jesus.

But the word, is the word, horizon. Whom he made the horizon. We are not going to spend any time on the definition.

We are going to get on with what is contained, in that we are seeing God has made his Son the ultimate range and bound of his purpose in this creation. That God has also made his Son the character, the norm, the representative of how things are to be, universally, when God reaches his end. Christ, all, in all.

This afternoon, we commenced along the line of how and on what grounds God moves toward that end. We saw God moving into this system of things, laying his hand upon a man, Abraham, to make him the

first of a people who were to be for him, in his desire, the repository of his full blessing for all men. How from the time that God laid his hand upon that key man, that generic man, he, to begin with, was brought into a history of deep discipline under that divine hand.

On the one side, the discipline of undoing. Undoing. Continuous and oft times terrible undoing.

To bring the man to the place where all he had was God. On the other side, constituting him positively on those principles which are to obtain and govern in the universal state of things to which God is moving. We saw Israel under the hand of God, in discipline, to be made God's servant people.

God's servant people. The principle of servanthood. Governing everything, all God's ways with them.

Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, David, all the other representative ones dealt with on this principle of servanthood. Utter, complete, yieldedness and brokenness before God. That was the way.

Now difficult, at the most superficial glance, to see these men on their faces before God. We want the key to their lives. That is the key.

With all their faults, their errors, their mistakes, their wrongs, and sometimes their gross evils. One thing of God in their history, in their lives, which kept them under his hand was that they were men down at his feet. Broken men.

Emptied men. Humbled men. Men on their faces.

How true that was of David. I may have many things to say against David, but the thing that God takes no doubt is that he's a man on his face before God. Worship.

Adoration. Surrender. In every controversy that the Lord had with him, he comes down.

He comes down on his knees. So became a part of that vessel God was seeking to form for his service. This afternoon again we brought this over into the case of the one in whom all the history of Israel in discipline was summed up.

Who took it up in himself in fullness. In whom this principle of utterness, of abandonment to the will of God comes to perfection. The Lord Jesus.

We looked at his beginnings on this earth. The vessel by which he came into this world. The Virgin Mary.

We saw the greatness of the cost to Mary to accept that vocation. How? The last word after weighing it all up. After facing all that it involved.

Social stigma. Personal dilemma. Religious crisis.

She came out. Behold the handmaid of the Lord be done to me according to thy word and out of that spirit, that attitude Christ came into this world. We may say by that the spirit of servanthood was found in him by the very nature and method of his birth.

We further saw the circumstances of his birth. All those conditions around him at that time, in that event which were anything but the conditions of a Lord, of a King, of a Great One. One of importance and reputation, name, standing, all to the contrary.

He has come in as a servant on the lowest plane of human life. And from that moment onward his life was one long discipline by reason of that Lord, servant. We went on then to the thirty silent years to give that explanation which has so often been sought as to why thirty years should be spent in hiddenness and silence and apparent nothingness.

Learning subjection, submission, patience, faith in God when God is doing nothing. And all that. You see the law of divine service as the way toward that end when all God's universe shall be filled with that spirit.

His servants shall serve him. The last word. Now this evening we take the next step.

The baptism of the Lord Jesus. Another great example of this same thing. Before we can come to him, his baptism, we must look at his forerunner, John the Baptist.

And apprise as far as we can the situation at that time. There is little doubt but that it was a situation of concern. Multitudes went out to John.

Multitudes went out. So many that when Jesus challenged the leaders of the nation with his question, the baptism of John, was it of heaven or was it of men? They said, if we say of heaven, then why didn't you believe him? That's our predicament. If we say of men, we fear the people for all men believe that John.

All men. They went out by their multitudes to John at the Jordan. Why? Well it may be that there was a movement of the spirit of God at that time.

What we in our times might call a revival. But quite evidently by their going out in their hordes, there was a concern about something. Perhaps a weariness of things as they were.

A sense of frustration. That upon which the Lord Jesus put his finger when he said, come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden. Weariness and frustration in quest of some answer.

Further, evidently a real sense of sin. A real sense of sin. Says they went to John to be baptized of him in Jordan, confessing their sins.

Confessing their sins. Sense of sin. And we know from his message, that was the heart of things.

His message was concerning the remission of sin. The remission of sin. That was the situation, the state of things in brief.

But look at John. John with all the appearance of his mission, a ministry. You might think that multitudes, multitudes signified tremendous success of that movement.

With all the apparent success, John was laboring under a sense of limitation. He betrays it. He betrays it.

I indeed baptize you with water or in water. There cometh one after me who is greater than I. And he shall baptize you in the Holy Spirit and fire. Mine is after all a limited kind of thing.

What you need, what I need is that greater, greater thing. He preaches the remission of sin. And they confess their sin.

And he baptizes them unto the remission of their sins. Then he lifts up his eyes and beholds Jesus. And says, behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world.

I can't do that. May have crowds here, but mine is not a cosmic salvation. Mine is not a whole world salvation.

After all, it's but limited. It's this one, this Lamb of God who will expand this whole ministry of salvation, forgiveness, remission and expand it to the whole world. That's the horizon.

That's the horizon. Don't get outside of that. Be tied into that.

But note again, John, what was the principle of John's life? Was it not servanthood? Remember that John the Baptist was the sum and climax of all Hebrew prophecy. The last of the prophets of Israel. There hath not risen, said Jesus, a greater than John the Baptist.

That's saying a tremendous amount. You look over the Old Testament. In him is summed up all the meaning of the prophets of the Old Testament.

He is the climax of that. And what was the meaning? Servanthood. Servanthood every time, all along the way.

Look at John. John, I think, is the most beautiful and impressive picture of a servant. They sent their representatives to ask him who he was.

Are thou he? Who art thou? Who art thou? Ah, what an opportunity. What an opportunity. What a lot of men would snatch at that opportunity.

Why, don't you know I'm Elijah who was to come? Don't you know that I am fulfilling that prophecy of Malachi? He shall send his messenger before his face to know who I am? No. I am a voice crying in the wilderness. A voice.

I, but he. I must decrease, but he must increase. I do this, but he will do so much more.

As for Raman, harbinger of the Christ is so governed by the spirit of service, of servanthood. He brings Christ in on that. He brings Christ before men on that.

I decrease. He greater than I. You hear any loyal servant talking like that? Any pure hearted, selfless servant talking like that? Even in this world, why, I after all, and only an employee, I'm only a servant. My master is the man.

He's the man. He's the one. You want to know anything, you go to him.

Want to see how things ought to be done, you go to him. That's the true servant spirit. We haven't got a great deal of it in the world these days, but that's it, isn't it? And that's John the Baptist, the great servant of the Lord, whose service is constituted on this principle of self-abnegation, self-abasement, self-humbling, self-empty.

I am not. I am only. I am only a voice.

Well, to be less than that, of course, is to be silent. But just to be a voice is the positive side. There is the door.

The door for Jesus. John was the door. John opened the door and let Jesus in.

And that's the kind of thing that the door is. Now we pass to Jesus himself and his baptism. We have quoted, they went out to John and were baptized with him, confessing their sins.

John must have had to listen to a great many tragic and deplorable stories, confessing their sins. What a build-up there must have been on Jordan's banks of confession. It doesn't do to allow our imagination to carry us away in this.

But it says that. Confessing their sins. Imagination, they could say, here's this man coming and confessing perhaps to robbery, perhaps to this and that.

A whole crowd coming, confessing their sins. And that's the setting. And that's the situation.

And Jesus steps right into that and asks to be baptized with the rest. Confessing their sins. And Jesus coming with them, joining in with the sinners and their sins and saying, suffer it to be so now.

John had sufficient perception and discernment to see that this is not one of the rest, the crowd. It's a different one. He is not like these others.

And he would have prevented. No, no. I have need to be baptized of thee.

Comest thou to me? That's discernment. But Jesus insisted. Jesus insisted.

Suffer it to be so now. Thus it becometh us to fulfill all righteousness. Then he suffered him.

Jesus. Jesus. This sinless, spotless Lamb of God without blemish.

Without blemish. Stepping into the place of the sinners. Amongst the sinners.

But John sees in him more than that crowd. He sees the one who take it away, the sin of the world. More than all these terrible stories to which he's had to listen.

All these confessions which have poured into his ears. The whole world sinned. The whole world sinned.

This thing multiplied ten thousand times ten thousand. The horizon is set for sin. Is sin universal? Is sin only the sin of those who confess it? Or is it the whole world? We know what the answer to that is.

And that's the horizon of sin. And Jesus the Lamb, the sin-bearing, sacrificial Lamb, encompasses the whole range of sin. That's his service to God.

That's his service to God. But, but, look at the cost. Look at the humbling.

The empty. For him, he knew who he was. He could later say, which of you, which of you convicted me of sin? Challenging.

And yet, as such, coming right down here, for the sin of the world, emptying himself, being made sin, he who knew no sin. That's the spirit of service. In Israel, we have seen the many types and figures of that, in priests and sacrifices, bullets and lambs.

Here is the one who did what all the millions of those sacrifices could never accomplish. Take away the sin of the world. The world.

What is it that I am burdened to impress upon you? This, dear friends, is so patently, according to the word of God, the way, the way toward that great universal issue, when all things shall take their character from Christ. It's the costly way, the way of empty, of suffering, way of accepting charges. Very often, we may be called upon to accept charges which are false.

The New Testament tells us so. When there are thrown at us those things which would put us in a false light, they are not true about us. And we are not allowed to open our lips.

We are not allowed to give an answer. This Lamb of God was silent in the presence of the false witnesses. All the false charges, he knew so well.

That's the spirit which leads on to wherefore God hath highly exalted him. That leads on to all authority has been given unto me in heaven and on earth. There's your horizon of Christ in redemption.

We are not surprised, are we, that when he took that position, he accepted that in the spirit of the true servant Lamb. Immediately the heavens were opened. The horizon was, so to speak, pressed back to the uttermost boundaries.

The heavens were opened. The divine voice was heard attesting, this is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased. Now, that is what happened in his case.

The heavens were opened over him. Clear way right through, right through to heaven, to the Father, God, my Son. All earth's bounds were broken.

All the limitations of a sinful world's horizon were broken through. Heaven was opened. What is in his case is what God is working toward for this whole creation.

An opened heaven. That's where you finish your Bible, isn't it? Carried me away into a great and high mountain. Showed me the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down from God out of it.

Picture which follows the picture of a people under an opened heaven. That was secured when Jesus took his place with the world's sinners and sin in his baptism. I say what is true in his case is what will be true when Christ, in those terms, is reproduced in his people.

It is true, this may sound like teaching, but it can always be put to the test. When the Lord Jesus comes into any life, into his place in any life, call it what you will, conversion, new birth, when he comes in, is it not true that our consciousness is that the dome has been removed from over our heads between us and God? Heaven is opened. The spirit bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God.

When Christ comes into his place, on this ground, that he is the norm and the representation of what God is going to have, and as such coming into our lives, there's an opened heaven. On this ground, that he is the norm and the representation of what God is going to have, and as such coming into our lives, there's an opened heaven. And the inward attestation of the spirit, spirit begins his sealing of us as children of God.

I'm not going to try to carry you further this evening. All this, I don't know how far, how much it is registering with you. I can tell you that so far as I am concerned, it is not studied teaching.

It comes out of a quest to know what it is the Lord is trying to do in our life. What is it? Is he doing anything? He must be because things are so strong, so real, sometimes so terrible. Spiritual experience is

something we cannot get away from.

It's not just all calm, quiet, negative, nothing. It's upheaval, it's discipline, it's challenge, it's trial, it's testing, it's suffering, it's adversity. What is God doing? That's my question, and I'm sure it must be yours.

I have sought the answer, and this I believe to be it. As through the Old Testament, as in the case of his own son, as in the case of the apostles, note it, as in the case of the church and the churches, not long after the Lord comes into his place that you find that this rupture and rift and conflict is set up in furious antagonisms in spiritual consciousness. It's all under the hand of God.

He's permitting it, allowing it. If God is over all, if he is responsible for all, if he is Lord of all, we've got to settle that. Settle that.

He is either Lord or he's not Lord. No half ways over this. If he is, then as truly as God said to the devil over Job, you can go so far.

I give you liberty up to a point. I give to him. I allow you, so far.

As truly as that, in our case, the Lord permits, gives tenure to the forces of evil. What is he doing? He has introduced this historic discipline on the one side to bring us into weakness, into weakness of things we do not like, things we like least of all things, to feel weak. One of the most amazing things a man like Saul of Tarsus should say that he glories in weaknesses, glories in weaknesses.

Feel weak? Yes, he weakened my strength in the way. No emptiness. You haven't got it in yourself.

The Lord doesn't provide it. You're finished. That kind of thing on the one side is going on in Christian life.

On the other side, is it not true that where that has its way, the Lord is given his way, something of the character, I say the beauty, the other kind of strength that is Christ's begins to show itself. An influence. An influence.

Oh, for a mighty influence to go out from our lives, for us to be an influence, for God building up of something positive of Christ. It's the other side. This is the interpretation.

We get much ground to cover, see it in other connections in the life of our Lord, that this again is enough to put our feet on the way of God's work and God's purpose, God's method, God's end. There is no doubt about it that when God reaches the end that he has set, it will be this kind of Christ that is met everywhere. You're not going to strut about heavens, little lords, important people.

I discern when we really reach the end, we will say, it's all of his grace. It's all of his grace. It's all due to the Lord.

It's the Lord. Just the Lord. And that's how it will be for eternity.

It's the Lord. He will be our occupation and our theme of praise.

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