

The Horizon of Divine Purpose - Part 3

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of divine love, which involves correction, sacrifice, and practical service, and is demonstrated through the life and writings of the Apostle Paul.

Duration: 33:46

Scripture: Matthew 6:33, Romans 12:9, Galatians 6:2, Philippians 4:1, Hebrews 12:6, 1 John 4:7-8

Topics: "Divine Purpose"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the letter to the Philippians and the Apostle Paul's deep love for the church. The speaker emphasizes that Paul is pouring out his knowledge and spiritual understanding to the church, even in his final days. The speaker highlights the practical aspects of love, such as caring for others and sacrificing for their well-being. The sermon concludes with a prayer for the listeners to have a genuine experience of sitting at the feet of Jesus and hearing His voice through the Holy Spirit.

Transcript

We ask that there may come into this very time in which we abide together a literal experience of what we have just said, sitting at thy feet. Lord, there would we be, there would we listen to thee. Give it to us to have that unspeakable privilege and blessed experience of hearing through every other sound and voice the voice of the Lord by the Holy Spirit in our hearts for Jesus' sake.

We are this morning at least, dear friends, turning aside from the main theme of the conference, as I feel we are being led by the Lord, something which, why not, of that continuity is nevertheless of very great importance to us. I would ask your attention to the letter to the Philippians, the letter to the Philippians, chapter 4, verse 1. Wherefore, my brethren beloved, and longed for my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my beloved. We and the Church of God have come to have a very great regard for the Apostle Paul.

We have a very high esteem for that beloved servant of God. When we read his writings, we feel that we meet the Lord in them and in him, and that what he says is really an expression of the Lord. It represents the mind of the Lord.

In this letter to the Philippians, he both speaks of the mind of the Lord. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. And he himself truly reflects the mind of Christ.

So when we read words like these, we have just read, we feel that this is not only Paul's estimate of these believers, it is the Lord's mind about them. My brethren beloved, longed for my joy, my crown, my beloved. Not only Paul speaking, it's the Lord.

What a wonderful thing. A wonderful thing for the Lord to be able to speak like that about his people. If Paul could so speak, where we would be a happy people if so great a servant of whom we had so great an esteem could say that to us, truly, honestly.

But if the Lord could say it, our hearts would rejoice. There is no mistaking the love of Paul for the churches. It's quite unmistakable in all his letters to them.

They breathe the love of God, as well as speak of love for them. But while that is true of them all, without exception, that same love, wonderful love, marvelous love, unfamed and unmistakable love, has a variety of expressions. It's an all-round love.

We reduce that word, that idea so often to a single conception. We speak of love, we have just one thought in our mind. But when we come to this love in the New Testament, we find that it is a many-sided love, a love with many aspects.

And quite hurriedly and briefly, I want to point out to you some of these aspects of this same love. It's always the same, though it seems at times to change in its approach. Take for instance, in the first place, the letters to the Corinthians.

And there is no question whatever of Paul's love for the Corinthian believers. Let that be settled. You only have to be reminded of how much in those letters that word is used, and how much outpouring of heart love is found in expression there.

He cries, our hearts are enlarged. Our hearts are enlarged. You are not straightened enough.

He makes many references to his love. And of course it is in the first letters of the Corinthians that we have the matchless, the matchless classic and song of love in chapter 13. I say that for the Corinthians there is no question or doubt whatever as to Paul's love, and yet, when that is said and recognized, you listen, you hear just as unmistakably a stern note in his voice.

Maybe the marks of sadness in his face. Maybe the expression of an overflowing heart. But as he writes, there is a note that is unmistakable.

It is the note of correction. And in this first letter particularly, love, unmistakable, yet love is corrective. It is corrective.

And dear friends, it is a poor love, a poor love that never corrects. Indeed it is not divine love at all. It is merely human sentimentality, sickly, supine, and weak.

Anything that is called love that never corrects. It will not even take the rod of correction and use it. Shall I come to you with a rod? Says the apostle.

No, it is not kindness. It is never kindness just to give an anodyne for some malady without going right to the root of the malady to clear it up. Probably it is only going to be worse a little later on just to smooth things over in love, what you call love, and make nothing of it, and hide it, cover it, and put the plaster on, and do that sort of thing.

That is not love. That is not love. Paul, whose love was genuine divine love, went right deep down, cut deep, probed deep to get right at the root of the malady, of the trouble which was cursing and plaguing and working like a cancer amongst the saints in Corinth.

Love, yes divine love, has a corrective aspect, and remember that it is just in the application of love in that way that our true Christian character and measure and caliber will be found out. I am so glad that the Corinthians survived this use of the rod. Paul did have to say to them that he had to speak to them as children and not as full grown, but they seemed to grow up under the chastening very quickly.

The second letter, you know, is a big change. They have survived the correction of love and seem to have grown tremendously very quickly between the two letters, but it was a great test to them. You read, you see, discern, as you read the first letter, you discern Paul's fears.

His fears that they would not survive the test, because this kind of love always finds us out. It always finds us out. You see, if we are going just to remain as little children and are corrected, you know what happens to little children, they become sappy if they are corrected.

They become resentful if they are corrected. They carry a grievance with them if they are corrected. They go about like that if they are corrected.

Spoiled children always do that. I knew somebody who, even not in childhood, but in youth, was so pitted by his mother. She was always talking about him and what a wonderful fellow he was.

Whenever you met, the one subject was this son of hers. When he came home in the evening, well, she just fussed him about and all that. I've lived to know in afterlife how that, that man can never, never accept any correction.

He's been brought up to believe that he is always right. Always right. But he is the one who cannot be wronged.

It's a dangerous thing. That isn't love, dear friends. That is not love.

Paul said to these Corinthians, because I tell you the truth, am I become your enemy? Have you made me your enemy? You regard me as your enemy because I've been faithful with you, frank with you, strict with you, true in love. But it was true love. And I say again, the second letter shows not only the triumph of grace in them, but shows it's a good thing.

It's a good thing for love to be corrected. The wonderful letter, the second letter is, and it's the fruit of faithfulness. Faithful dealings, though they were stern, and hard to bear, and testy, and perhaps even perilous.

If, if there was not the right reaction, I must not stay further with that. I pass you on to the letter to the Galatians. And here we find love.

Well, is, is it not love? There's plenty, plenty of love in the letter to the Galatians. My little children, says the apostle, my little children, for whom I'm again in travail. Is that love? Oh yes, there's love for the Galatians.

The apostle undoubtedly loved the Galatian believers, or the believers in Galatia. But when we read this letter to the churches in Galatia, while we can discern that deep undertone of love, we find that love here is in a state of flaming jealousy and wrath. No letter that ever Paul penned had so much in it anything like

this anger, this wrath, this fiery jealousy.

His language here is almost terrible. It's love in jealous anger. Why? You say, is that love? Oh, let's again get corrected in our ideas of love.

See, there is an idea that largeness of mind is love. Really, largeness of mind is often and only another term for compromise and weakness in the presence of very dangerous elements. Oh, let's be generous.

Let us be large-minded. Well, all right, no one would hold a brief for being small-minded, but let us be careful of our terms. Here is a situation where love cannot compromise, where love cannot be weak.

Too much is at stake for even love to be suspended. It is necessary for love to take on this aspect. What is it? Well, you see, the whole point in Galatia was this point of compromise.

Compromise for something other and something less than the full revelation that had come through this apostle to these believers. He had given them a wonderful unveiling of the Lord Jesus. There's no doubt about that.

He could never have stood up to them as he did if they didn't know. He could never have spoken like this if they were iniquitous. They knew, but they were in danger of letting go something of what the Lord had given and shown.

Compromising perhaps for popularity, for position, for what they would call influence, for standing well, for not having difficulties with others, liking to be and desiring to be in the good books of everybody, and keeping in the middle of the road safety. Call it by its true name, it's compromise. And if ever there was a man on this earth who, apart from the Lord Jesus, would never tolerate compromise over the things of Christ and the church's inheritance, if that man was the apostle Paul, here we have him blazing and flaming in jealousy for all that the Lord wanted his people to have when it seemed to be threatened and in danger.

It's love. Love can be like that, you see. The same love, the same love.

Oh, that we would be corrected by this, because dear friends, we can sacrifice by a false conception of what we term love, which is no love at all. There is need, not for this only, God forbid that this should be the only kind of love that we have, but there is need for this to have a place amongst us, where whatever it means and costs and however involved we are going to be with others, we are not going to let down one whit of all that which the Lord has revealed to us as being his will. We are not going to sacrifice one iota, we are not going to compromise on any point under any consideration where the fullness of Christ is concerned.

I pass hurriedly to the letter to the Ephesians. Don't worry, I'm not going to keep you more than a few minutes longer. We come to the letter to the Ephesians, and if anywhere, if anywhere love reaches dimensions, magnitudes, it's here.

I bet you go back and just read it through, and you can read the whole thing through in twenty minutes. Read it through again, but is it not in this very letter that we have those incomparable and matchless words about love, that you being rooted and grounded in love may be strong to apprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the knowledge surpassing love of God. And more than that, there's no doubt about love here, and Paul's conception of and expression of

love in this letter.

But many people are afraid of the letter to the Ephesians. They're afraid of it, perhaps they're tired of it. Afraid because it's so big.

It's too big. It defeats us. It's too deep.

Carries us so far out of our depth. That is quite true. That is quite true.

I was saying to someone only a few days ago, that after nearly fifty years or more than fifty years of reading and studying this letter, I don't feel that I have got anywhere with it yet. My one longing has been for a long time past that I could have a group of people to whom I could just get down with this letter alone, to plumb some of its depths. But that's by the way I'm saying it's so big.

But because it is like that, many are afraid of it. And their reaction is, oh let us have something more simple. Something that we can understand and grasp.

This is beyond us. You see that is just the setting of love here. The meaning of love.

Here in this letter the apostle is abandoning himself, and that's not too strong a word, to give his fullness to the church. He's near the end of his course. All through that long course he's been gathering and gathering knowledge, spiritual knowledge.

Coming to see more and more of the vast ranges and profound depths of Jesus Christ. At last, taken away from all the outward activities of church responsibility and travel and what not, he's shut up and he has the opportunity and the time to just pour into these last documents all that he's got. He's pouring it out without reserve, you see.

And in so doing he's just overwhelming us and crushing us and beating us and breaking us. But what is the interpretation of love in that? Listen friends, listen. Love is never going, if it is true love, to allow us to settle down into the small comfort of smallness and narrowness and littleness.

Our natures want that. We want that. We don't like to be stretched.

We don't like to be expanded. We don't like to be pulled out of our depths. We don't like to have big demands laid upon us.

And if they are, we do not think it's very kind and very loving to make such demands upon us, to call upon us to rise to such. But love does that. The love of God is never going to leave us with less than all that he meant us to have.

If it means stretching and taxing, even exacting, if it seems like that, his love wants us drawn to the full dimensions that you may know, the breadth and the length and the height and the depth. This letter is a letter of immense expenses of Christ. The church has got to know by the spirit of revelation what those expenses are.

And if we sometimes feel overwhelmed, broken, stand back and say I can't rise to that. I can't answer to that. Love is not going to let us off.

It's going to work and work until we have capacity beyond what is natural. For capacity is an important thing when it comes to the end, isn't it? I hurry to the end then. Philippians, back to Philippians.

Oh here is love in another aspect. Here is love rejoicing, love overflowing, love with an unshadowed smile on its face, love thankful, love appreciated. My brethren, beloved, longed for my joy and crown.

My beloved. Very little correction in this letter. Slight touch of correction just at one point is so wrapped up in love and kindness that you hardly feel the sting of it.

No correction here. There's no fiery, jealous, burning, blazing here. No.

It's love and joy. Real joy. Glad that it can be like that.

There are some peculiar factors which make it possible for love to be like that. Why this aspect? It is an aspect. Would to God that it were more possible for love, the love of the Lord, to be like this always with us.

But there are some things you see that make it possible, and I can only just put my finger on perhaps one or two, point them out and leave them. One was this, and it comes out so clearly in the letter. You read it again.

The very true and real evaluation of the gospel. That word gospel occurs quite a number of times in this little letter, notice. Of the gospel.

Of the ministry that had come to them. And of the vessel who had carried the burden for them. Such an evaluation born out of suffering.

You never value anything unless you suffer for it. You only value a thing in the measure in which you have entered into suffering for it. These people undoubtedly had to pay a heavy price in suffering.

In suffering. For the gospel. For what they had received.

We know the history of Philippi, don't we? We know it started in suffering. It started in a prison with the messenger's lash and bleeding. We know that.

And these Philippians had entered into that sort of thing. And they had suffered for the truth and with the Lord's messenger. And they had come through suffering to recognize that this thing was no cheap business.

This was costly. Infinite costly. It cost Christ everything.

It has cost Paul everything. That's what's in this letter. He emptied himself.

And Paul says, all the things that were gained to me I've counted lost. It was costly and they had in spirit entered into the cost and costliness of what had come to them. And they had a deep evaluation and appreciation of it.

And when it's like that, a smile comes into the Lord's face. And love just beams forth that these people have recognized that what has come to them has not come easily, not come cheaply. This thing is a costly thing and they've entered into it in their own hearts and in their own lives and experiences.

They have suffered with their Lord. It is given to you, listen, it is given to you in the behalf of Christ not only to believe but also to suffer. They knew it.

And they held very, very precious what no wonder the apostles heart was ravished. No wonder the heart of the Lord Jesus rejoiced. No wonder you could speak like this, my brethren beloved, longed for.

Back where we started, do we want the Lord to be able to speak of us like that? It'll be on this ground. But note this, the practical aspects of love at Philippi is nothing sentimental. It's very practical.

Look again and see their thought, their thought for Paul. They lived with him in his sufferings and sent to him for the amelioration of his suffering. They ministered to him in a practical way.

He had to say that the Corinthians hadn't done that. They hadn't done that. They were so self-centered, these Philippians.

There's Paul far, far away there in Rome. He must be having a difficult time. He must be having a hard time.

He must be in need of help, some financial help. He must be sometimes hungry and cold. Let's do something about it.

They thought, they cared, they showed concern, and they sank even unto sacrifice. That's love. My beloved, and longed for, this attitude of the Lord toward us, this standing in the compass of his love like this, his joyful love, is set in very practical realms of suffering and of service.

The Lord give us that.

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