

The Persistent Purpose of God - Part 11

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the centrality of the cross in establishing order and resolving issues within the church.

Duration: 43:10

Scripture: Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Purpose Of God"

Description

In this sermon transcript, the speaker describes a Sunday school with impressive amenities but a problem with teachers not studying or teaching the Bible. The superintendent seeks help and the speaker suggests focusing on the meaning of the cross and the teachers' identification with Christ's death, burial, and resurrection. The speaker emphasizes that starting with the cross is essential and that everything is judged by it. The sermon also briefly mentions the letter to the Romans as a message of the cross and the two sides of Jesus' person and work.

Transcript

In verses 13 to 27, we have the Great Altar and its service. We will not read the whole section, but just the first verses of that section. And these are the measures of the altar by cubits.

The cubit is a cubit and a hand breadth. The bottom shall be a cubit, the breadth a cubit, the border thereof by the edge thereof round about a span, and this shall be 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. This corresponds to Hebrews chapter 11.

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. Those two diagonal lines meet at the place where the Great Altar was. The central place in the whole temple is where the Great Altar was.

The core of the temple is in the outer courtyard. All the lines meet this representation. And I would like you to notice that I have only put it there to show you the position.

The actual temple was temple area. And the central place, 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. Everything was governed around the house.

And then all the ministry of the house was governed. And then beyond the house, we shall see that when we see that the river which came down through the whole land came by way of the altar. But we turn inside first.

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 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 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 force 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 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 hast thou forsaken me? It was the cry of the ashes. When he cried, My God, My God, why hast thou forsaken me? It was the cry of the ashes.

He was poured out on the ground. He knew no sin. In himself, there was no unrighteousness.

He can live after the fire. Thou wilt not suffer thy holy one to see corruption. Because in himself there was no sin, he could not be.

His own 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 has 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.

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 will 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. It spontaneously comes out of the work of the cross.

I do hope that you are writing that in your mind. 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. I remember many years ago, I was speaking in America.

And I was asked to go and speak to the teachers of a great Sunday school. You may know that in America, Sunday school does not mean little children. Sunday school means adults just as much as little children.

And this was one of the biggest Sunday schools. It was in one of the most famous churches in America. They had everything that you could think of.

Right in the center of the great Sunday school building, there was a pond. Up at the back of the great building was a wonderful pipe organ. And then there was an echo organ.

There was a chime of bells attached to the organ. The superintendent of that Sunday school asked me to go out to lunch with him. This was before I was to speak to all the teachers.

At the lunch table, he told me a very terrible story. He said, Mr. Sparks, I want your help. I cannot get my teachers to study the Bible and teach the Bible.

They bring anything along to the Sunday school and read it to the classes. Any book that has anything of religion in it, they bring that and read that as their lesson to the class. They are worldly people.

They will not come to a prayer meeting. And I cannot do anything with them. I dare not say anything or they would resign.

What am I to do? Will you please give me the solution to my problem? I said, yes, I think I've got the solution. He said, I think I've got the solution. So I took my Bible.

And I opened it at Romans 6. Now everybody here knows Romans 6. And I went through Romans 6 with him. And I said, What you need to do is to speak to these teachers about their identification with Christ in death and burial and resurrection. In other words, you must make them see the meaning of the cross.

And I spoke to him about the meaning of union with Christ. That is the real meaning of the cross. And as I spoke to him about that, I saw the light coming into his face.

He said, Mr. Stark, you have solved my problem. You have put your finger on the key to the whole situation. I myself have never seen that before.

Therefore, in my teacher training classes, I have never said anything like that. Therefore, in my teacher training classes, I have never said anything like that. I believe that if I go back to my teacher training classes and speak about this message, then the whole problem will be solved.

That afternoon, I went to the teachers. They had given me my message. And I spoke to them about the cross.

I was very surprised to see how attentive they were. They all opened their eyes and followed every word that I said. They had never seen it before.

I do not know what permanent effect it had upon them. I never heard of what happened afterward. I had to go away.

But there is no doubt about it that the cross made an impression that day. And at least one man saw that it would solve all the problems if only they realized it. If only the cross had its place, all the other problems would be solved.

If only the cross had its place, all the other problems would be solved. 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. 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.

Now I am going to indicate something to you that I shall not be able to follow through. If Brother Wei would just put his fingers in his ears for a minute, and a few other people, I would tell you that I think this is what the Lord is saying to me for Hong Kong next week. So if you want to hear it all, you must all come to Hong Kong next week.

You must all come to Hong Kong next week to hear it. Now I am going to give you the outline. The Romans did not talk about the message of the cross, but they talked about it completely.

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's wisdom.

It is very impressive that the first of these 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 1 Corinthians has 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 a humbled vessel. I can only say these things and leave the full explanation. The letter to the Galatians.

In that letter the cross is brought down upon making Christianity into another legal system and bringing Christianity into another legal system. The letter to the Galatians shows us how the apostle is in that letter. 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. The letter to the Philippians.

The cross in Philippians 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.

That is because of personal interests and pride. Some people will not let go their personal interests. 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 takes aside all that is mere mysticism. And everything that would make Christ less than he is. The letters to the Thessalonians.

Here the cross is the strength for suffering. And 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.

These sufferings are sufferings with Christ. These sufferings are sufferings 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 this survey with the letter to the Hebrews. In the letter to the Hebrews the cross shows how everything is brought to fullness and to finality.

And all 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 affected.

Now I have not just given you some bible teaching. I know that this is true. I could tell you a story out of personal experience.

I have seen all these problems solved just by preaching the cross. I have seen a revolution in a church just by preaching the cross. I have seen the Lord produce.

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 affects 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. It is the cross which gives effectiveness to the ministry.

So the apostles preach everywhere Christ crucified. 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 3 and verse 3. You have this. They set the altar in its place.

For fear of the peoples of the land was upon them. Because fear of the peoples of the land was upon them. They put the altar in its place.

The cross is a great defensive. The cross defends us from the enemy.

Audio: <https://sermonindex1.b-cdn.net/1/SID1182.mp3>

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/t-austin-sparks/the-persistent-purpose-of-god-part-11/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net