

The Persistent Purpose of God - Part 5

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon explores the persistent purpose of God in creating a new representation of Himself, through the vision of Ezekiel and the symbolism of the cherubim.

Duration: 58:15

Scripture: Ezekiel 1:26, Matthew 6:33, Acts 2:42, Acts 13:46, Hebrews 8:1, Hebrews 9:24, Revelation 21:1

Topics: "Purpose Of God"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the symbolism found in the Bible, particularly focusing on the number four. The four living creatures mentioned in the Bible are analyzed, with their four likenesses and four wings representing the number four, which symbolizes creation. The speaker emphasizes the responsibility of believers to provide the Lord with a true expression of his mind on earth. The importance of recognizing the man on the throne, as seen in the New Testament, is highlighted as the source of power and inspiration for the early church.

Transcript

Before we proceed with our consideration of this message of residual let me say that I have not prepared an outline of yesterday morning's study because we broke up in the middle of a section When we have completed this section, I will give you the second outline We are still occupied with the preparation of the Lord's servant for his ministry and yesterday morning we were considering the throne above the firmament and the likeness of a man upon it and you will remember we concluded yesterday by pointing out the importance to the servant of the Lord of seeing that throne what it means to the Lord's servant to recognize that there is a throne and that there is a man upon that throne We passed on into the New Testament and we saw that it was that that accounted for everything in the first

days of the church They were able to sing and to pray and to preach and to suffer and to die because they knew the man was on the throne So that part of the vision came first and was of very great importance to Ezekiel I think you know what the name Ezekiel means If you do not, let me tell you that it means God shall be my strength and Ezekiel had to have vision and experience that made his own name true All this that Ezekiel was seeing was just establishing the meaning of his own name God is my strength We shall only have strength as we see the man on the throne That is a very important thing for ministry Now before I go on I want to say a very definite word to you brothers and sisters here I see in the prophecies of Ezekiel something which seems to correspond very closely to what God is

doing out here You know that God did a great thing in the West It was in the West that the Lord raised up a very strong ministry and testimony and from the West for many years the Lord sent out spiritual blessings all over the world It is through the West that many countries owe a very great deal I think that is recognized by everyone In the West there were many great teachers There were great men of God and from these men of God and their teachings, blessing has come to many parts of the world We can say that Christianity or the church in the West has been greatly used in the past But that is not as true today as it was The West has lost something The testimony has become weak The state of the church has become very poor The measure of spiritual value has become very limited and it seems

to me that the Lord is moving away from the West and it looks to me as though he is moving to the East and I see the Lord doing a new thing in the East It would seem that he has made a beginning all over again and in the last 30 or so years God has been doing a very wonderful thing in the East and I believe that you are a part of that thing that the Lord is doing The Lord is seeking to raise up here a testimony a testimony in spiritual fullness You see, the Lord must have this He must have his purpose and his truth represented on this earth This that he has revealed in the letter to the Ephesians is not just something in heaven This that he has revealed in the letter to the Ephesians is not just something in heaven That is something that must be found on this earth We know that this is

the purpose of this dispensation We know that this is the purpose of this dispensation The Lord must have it A representation of his own thoughts concerning the Church That is the manifestation of Christ in his body I repeat, the Lord must have it He has not got it in the West Only in very small ways I believe that it is there in small companies But speaking of the people of God as a whole, the Lord has not got it The Lord has tried to have it But his people have failed him Now he is beginning again And he is beginning in the East There is a very great responsibility resting upon you, brothers and sisters It is no less a responsibility than providing the Lord with that which he must have before the end of the dispensation There may be weaknesses and imperfections We are all conscious of

those Probably you are conscious of those But the Lord is seeking to do something To do something in a new way and in a fuller way That which will be on this earth a true expression of his mind as fully as he can have it Now I have said that to you And in saying that, I have pointed out your great responsibility And that will explain very many things It will explain why the Lord will not allow you to be satisfied with anything less than his full thought Well I trust that you can see more than I have said But if you could recognize it, that is exactly what is in the book of Ezekiel The Lord had had a full testimony in one place His people failed him there And what we see here is the Lord moving away from that and bringing his revelation in another place And what we see here is the Lord

moving away from the earthly to the heavenly It is as though the Lord was saying I am not able to do what I wanted to do there The condition of things there does not permit me to realize my full purpose So I move away and start again from there That is what is in this book Because that is the kind of thing that the Lord has done from time to time He has begun to do something in a certain place with a certain people For the time being there has been something very much of the Lord there And then the Lord has come up against something that prevented his going on It put a limitation on the Lord The Lord has been patient But then he found that he could not go on And he has had to say I cannot do what I intended there I must do it somewhere else You see that is true to history Now I don't want

to give you a sense of too great importance This ought to be a very humbling thing It ought to bring upon us a very great sense of responsibility That brings me back to what I said at the beginning this morning It

was in that movement of God that Ezekiel was found It was a movement of God onward but away from the place where he had been for so long It was a new movement of God And for that ministry Ezekiel needed the strength of God So his name means the Lord shall strengthen If you like you can write that name over yourselves I don't know what the world would think if they saw that your whole name is Ezekiel But in your great responsibility write that name spiritually over your heart The Lord has called us into a great responsibility But the Lord will be our strength Now I think that is

a worthwhile introduction to our further consideration So we come to the next part of the visions of God which were the preparation of the Lord's service That is what was under the firmament What was directly under the throne And the first part of this was the four living ones What are known to us as the cherubim There are eight references in fullness to the cherubim in the Bible If you like I will allow you to write these down Genesis 3:24 Exodus 25:18-20 Exodus 26:1-32 1 Kings 6-7 Isaiah 6 Ezekiel 1-9 Revelation 4-5 There you have the eight references to the cherubim in fullness There are other references to them in the Bible I only give them to you not because we are going to study all this Now of course we do recognize that these cherubim were not real creatures They are not a real

creation They are only symbols of spiritual things There are many ways in which we could prove that to be so I do not think it would be profitable to turn aside to try and prove that that is so One thing about them is this, that in different places they are different in representation One thing about them is this, that in different places they are different in representation For example in Israel they have four wings In Israel they have six wings That is only to emphasize particular spiritual principles And you will notice that there are other differences in the references to the cherubim This means that at one time in one place certain things are emphasized At another time in another place certain other things are emphasized It is the spiritual principles which are to be taken note of So

that these cherubim are symbols of spiritual reality We must not imagine that they are actual beings We know quite well that especially in the East, symbols are the common way of teaching In the West we do use some symbols In the East it is a much more common thing to use symbols That has always been true I suppose your Chinese dragon is one of those things I suppose your Chinese dragon is one of those things I don't know whether that Chinese dragon ever actually existed But you know that the dragon is intended to represent some spiritual idea So symbolism was the common way of teaching or representation So the Bible right from beginning to end is just full of symbolism Things taken up by God to teach spiritual truth Now then we look at these four living ones First we take account of

their number Their number is four Everything about them speaks of the number four They have four likenesses Each one of the four has four likenesses And there are four of them They have four wings I think I need not say all the details The characteristic number is four And as you may know, four is the number of creation If we want to cover all the dimensions of the creation They are covered in the number four North, south, east and west cover the whole world There are the four seasons of the year Spring, summer, autumn, winter In the Bible the four winds are referred to Four winds are coming from the four corners of the earth Now we know that the world is not square It does not have four corners But this is a symbolic way of speaking The four corners of the earth mean the whole world And

I could go on like that with the number four It therefore represents the whole creation It is the number of creation Keep that in mind as we move on to their four likenesses You see, they had four likenesses The likeness of a man The likeness of a lion The likeness of an ox The likeness of an eagle And those four are representative of four parts of the creation The lion represents the wild creation The ox represents the

domestic creation The eagle represents the flying creation And the man represents the human creation All creation is represented here But then what is the symbolism?

This is so well known that I'm almost afraid to mention it The lion is the symbol for royalty and government The ox is the symbol of service and sacrifice The eagle is the symbol of heavenliness and mystery And the man is the symbol for representation That is the symbolism We ask, what is the meaning of all that? Surely it is impossible to not see that this in the first place is a symbolic representation of Christ Surely it is impossible to not see that this in the first place is a symbolic representation of Christ This is the four-fold capacity of Christ The lion is the lion of the tribe of Judah Out of Judah came the ruler So that the land is the symbol of the government or royalty of the Lord Jesus So that the lion is the symbol of the government or royalty of the Lord Jesus Perhaps you know that the gospel of Matthew corresponds to that The gospel of Matthew is the gospel of the King The ox is the symbol of service and sacrifice And again that is a representation of the Lord Jesus The servant of Jehovah sacrificing himself The son of man came not to be ministered unto but to minister and to give his life The ox corresponds to the gospel by Mark It is in the gospel by Mark that more than anything else Jesus is seen in service giving himself The man aspect of the cherubim is very clear The son of man is come That is the message of Luke Jesus the man And the eagle is the symbol of heavenliness and mystery And that is clearly seen in the gospel by John The Lord Jesus so often in that gospel speaks about his having come down from heaven And yet there is a mystery about him that no one can understand He is a man but he is more than a man This is the eagle symbolism So I say it is quite difficult not to see the Lord Jesus as represented by the cherubim They are called the living ones In our translation a word is introduced that is not there in the original In one translation it is living creatures In another translation it is living beasts To begin with man is not a beast And an eagle is not strictly a beast Those words are not in the original They have had to be there because of the impossibility of translating You know the impossibility of translating some words Probably we are up against that now every day Some words are untranslatable from one language into another What is here in the original text is this Just the plural form of the word life Now you see it is impossible to translate this Life in a plural form In the Greek language that is quite simple and clear You might be able to translate it into Chinese I don't know It simply means the plurality of life The key characteristic of the cherubim was life In him was life What was the life for?

The life of the creation Jesus is the life of the creation That is now the new creation We go back to the first appearance of the cherubim Man has sinned God has cursed the race and the earth He has driven man out of the garden In which there was the tree of life And he has placed the cherubim at the gate To guard the way of the tree of life What does all that mean?

The sinful and fallen creation can never have that life That life can only be had by a new creation Between that which represents the fallen creation And that which represents the unfallen creation Stands Christ as the door Christ says there is no life for that sinful creation There is only life in a new creation So the cherubim stand between You see Christ always stands between an old creation and a new There is no life outside of Christ There is life inside of Christ Christ as the life stands at the door He says no to one creation No and yes to another Well I think we can say that the cherubim represents Christ They represent Christ and the life Now it is also very difficult not to see that the cherubim in relation to the throne Affects the whole creation The throne is linked with the

creation In creation and redemption On the one side it relates to the creation On the other side it relates to the redemption of the creation God's throne governs those two things The chariot throne of God is linked with God's creative and redemptive power This throne says that God is concerned with the redemption of

the creation You notice over the throne there is a rainbow The rainbow is the symbol of God's covenant of redemption You will find that rainbow again in the book of the Revelation And presently we shall see its connection in that book But let us be quite sure of what we have just said Here is the chariot throne of God Underneath are the symbols of the whole creation The whole question is the question of life for the creation But we have seen the tremendous energies and power

of those movements of the throne We can see here how the throne moves forward God's purpose and action are all connected to a new creation Which is a creation of redemption That the throne is moving in relation to divine purpose The divine purpose in creation That movement is by way of the Lord Jesus That new creation is to have him as its king That is by way of his service and his sacrifice That would be an expression of his heavenly character And it is all summed up in the man after God's own heart You will see that the man's feature is the predominant feature in the cherubim Now if we want to have a New Testament explanation of that, we have one We have it all in that very full 8th chapter of the Letter to the Romans In that chapter the creation is seen as in bondage You remember the

words The creation was subjected to vanity The whole creation groaneth and travails in pain It is groaning under its bondage Waiting for its deliverance That is the thing we see in Romans 8 And then we see that the heart of that situation is the sons of God Waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God Until God has sonship in the creation, the creation cannot be delivered The sons of God are involved in this situation But then this chapter shows us God's eternal mind about those sons Whom He foreknew He foreordained to be conformed to the image of His Son Whom He foreknew, them He also justified Whom He justified, them He also called Whom He called, them He called First of all, the emancipation of the sons And then when that has been accomplished, the emancipation of the creation When

the sons are released, then the creation will be released We have all that in the 8th chapter of Romans It's a very wonderful chapter You can take that right back into the beginning of the prophecies of Ezekiel In principle, that is exactly what is here in this vision God had a thought concerning a people He created man with that thought Man failed Him God brought the whole creation of man into bondage It is groaning in its bondage Paul says we ourselves groan within ourselves Waiting for our adoption But God is moving He is at work in the groaning creation All the energies of God are toward getting those sons out of the groaning creation He is getting those sons now They are not recognized by this world But the day is coming when the sons shall be manifested When God shall display to the

whole universe the sons that He has redeemed That is what we have in the 4th and 5th chapters of the book of the Revelation A great multitude of redeemed ones displayed to the whole universe And when that comes to pass, the creation itself shall be delivered It will not be long before God says, I create a new heavens and a new earth The former things are passed away All that is here in principle Now here is a very significant thing In chapters 4 and 5 of Revelation, you have the four living ones In chapter 4, they are connected with the creation The song in chapter 4 is, For Thou didst create all things In chapter 4 of Revelation, the song is, For Thou didst create the world And the world is created by Thy creation The living ones are there in connection with that The divine purpose in

creation He created all things in Jesus Christ The living ones are a representation of Jesus Christ He sacrificed heaven and earth That gives the meaning to the creation All things were created in Him And the living ones are there in the presence of the song of creation And in a special way now, it is the song of a new creation In chapter 5 of the book of Revelation Another song is being sung And the living ones are there This is the song of redemption God has redeemed That's the new song And the living ones are there

The purpose of creation in Christ Jesus Jesus as the purpose of creation And when the new creation is secured, the living ones are there It is a new creation in Christ Jesus The song of redemption God has redeemed us And the redemption is in Christ Jesus I think that's all

very clear You see that takes us back to Ezekiel The cherubim in the first place as a representation of Christ On the one side related to creation On the other side related to redemption And all these mighty energies of God concentrated upon them All the doings of God are unto death One creation has failed God is going to have a new creation One representation of God has failed God is going to have a new representation Israel has failed as a representation of God He will have his church That is what comes out later in these prophecies Now I must leave it there There is only half of it The other half as you see is the wheels I think we must leave that for this morning This is all not only interesting but very instructive It also helps us to see one thing Here is the throne of heaven

Concentrated upon a full and perfect representation of God Representation of the Lord's might When we sum up this whole section we shall see more of what that means for us But it is a tremendous thing to be right in the way of the doings of God Not alongside of the doings of God Not in some little bit of the doings of God But right in the full way of the doings of God That is where we shall find the support of the throne That is how it was at the beginning of the history of the church So surely the Lord wants it like that at the end And I believe that the Lord is moving in that direction That will be true of the creation The Lord wants it to be true of the church I think you are storing up quite a lot of questions

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