

The Persistent Purpose of God - Part 6

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the persistent purpose of God, which is always on the move and demands absolute freedom of movement, and how this purpose is fulfilled through the ministry of the prophet.

Duration: 58:04

Scripture: Colossians 1:9

Topics: "Purpose Of God"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the vision of the wheel in the book of Ezekiel. The wheel is seen as a symbol of movement and mobility, representing God's continuous action and purpose. The wheels also have eyes all around them, symbolizing the complete and perfect intelligence of God's throne. The speaker emphasizes the importance of understanding these aspects of the wheel vision and how they relate to God's movement and purpose in the world.

Transcript

The first section in chapters 1 to 3 deal with the preparation of the Lord's servants for his ministry. So far we have considered firstly the prophet in himself, and then the open heaven. And then we have gone on with the vision of God.

And we still have a little to say about the first vision. We have considered the chariot throne of the Lord. And we have considered the four living ones.

There are just two other aspects for our consideration. The first of those two is the wheels. That section is in verses 15 to 21.

You have read this so that we need not go over it together this morning. There are several aspects or characteristics of the wheels. I think they can be set down as five things.

First of all, wheels are symbols of movement. They signify mobility. And then the wheels here speak of directness.

Thirdly, they begin upon the earth and then they are lifted up from the earth. And then they seem to touch the earth again at different times. In their movement they seem to come back to the earth from time to time.

Then fourthly, these wheels are full of eyes. All around the wheels there are eyes. And in the fifth place, the spirit of life is in the wheels.

I think just to mention those things is to indicate their teaching. We need not spend a lot of time upon each point. But we will just go over them again with one or two remarks.

Number one, the wheels represent mobility. That suggests two things. Firstly, God is on the move.

We are here in the presence of the movement of the chariot throne of God. In the second place, God demands absolute liberty for movement. He requires complete freedom for his movement.

If you are not quite sure of what I mean by that, you have only to remember that you are really dealing with what is in the book of the Acts in this book of Ezekiel. And when we speak of the book of the Acts, we understand that we are speaking about the whole of the New Testament. All the letters of the apostles came out of the book of the Acts.

All you Bible students know exactly where you can fit in the letters to the book of the Acts. So that the book of the Acts comprehends the whole of the New Testament. We are going to have to see that in more detail presently.

But when we come to the book of the Acts, we find these two things. The throne is on the move. There is no doubt about it that the man on the throne is moving.

We can see the goings of the Lord in the book of the Acts. That is not a stationary book. It is not a Lord who is standing still.

He is on the move. But the second thing is, the Lord demands liberty to move. That liberty of movement must be recognized and accepted.

We remember Peter and the house of Cornelius. That vision that Peter had on the housetop is always present in our mind. The Lord is on the move.

From Israel to the Gentiles. From Jerusalem to the regions beyond. That is what we have in Ezekiel.

But Peter would stop the movement of the Lord. He would say, not so, Lord. But the Lord will not have that arresting hand of tradition.

The Lord will not have the arresting hand of prejudice. This was a tremendous crisis for Peter. And this was the nature of the crisis.

The Lord was saying in effect to Peter, Peter, I am going on. Are you going with me? If you are not going with me, it makes no difference. You just stay behind.

But if you are going with me, you have got to give me perfect liberty of movement. Your mind must not interfere with my movement. Your religious traditions must not interfere with my movement.

Your prejudices must not interfere with my movement. The Lord is on the move. And he demands absolute freedom of movement.

That is what is here in the wheels at the very first. God is moving. And God claims the right to keep on moving.

That is not something just stated to you this morning. There is a very great deal bound up with that. We must remember that God is always moving toward his eternal end.

And we must put nothing in the way of the Lord. Again and again the Lord may come up against things in us. Our mind about things.

Or even our past experience. Our ideas that we know all about. The Lord says, I have still yet more light and truth to break forth from the world.

You have not yet come to the end of all my movement. There is far more in front than there is behind. And you must give me perfect liberty to go on.

Now you must think about that. Because that is not only the first thing. That is the foundation of everything.

This chariot throne of the Lord rests upon wheels. It rests upon the principle that God is a God of movement and demands liberty for his movement. Then the second thing.

The wheels speak of directness without deviation. This is one of the most difficult points in this vision to interpret. But as I see it, it seems to mean this.

When God goes forward, God is never held up by something that he has not foreseen. If God does change his direction, that is all in the pattern. That is not an emergency.

That is not because God has not anticipated the situation. Now probably you find that difficult to understand. We will come back again to what we have just been saying about Peter.

It looks as though God is changing his direction. Right up to this point he has been moving with Israel. All his goings up to this point have been related to Israel.

Now it looks as though he is changing his direction. And that was the problem for Peter. It was such a big change in the direction of God.

Peter wanted the Lord to keep straight on with Israel. And not to change his course to the Gentiles. It looked as though God was changing course.

Simply because he had come up against difficulties in Israel. You see, some Bible expositors interpret it in that way. God came up against the difficulty in Israel and therefore he had to go to the Gentiles.

Going to the Gentiles is an entirely different policy of the Lord. Simply because the Jews presented him with a difficulty. That is how Peter viewed the thing.

And he felt very bad about it. And he would have said, Lord you just cannot do this. You have gone all through these centuries with Israel.

You cannot change course now. Now do you see the point? The fact is that God was not changing course. The Bible makes it perfectly clear that God always did have the Gentiles in mind.

He would reach the Gentiles through the Jews but that is quite another thing. If the Jews fail to serve him in that matter, he is going on with his purpose all the same. These wheels go straight on.

They can change direction. But that does not mean a change of purpose. Even in the seeming change of direction they are still going straight.

God is not caused to go out of his way because of circumstances. He just goes straight on. Now that is a very difficult thing to understand when you read this vision of the wheels.

But I think the illustration of Israel and the Gentiles is a key to this situation. When you come to the end of the New Testament you come up against another difficulty, this time with the church in general. It seems as though the Lord has met another obstacle.

And it looks as though he has to turn out of his way. And take another course. It looks as though he has to leave the church in general and deviate to the overcomer.

That is only one way of viewing it. The divine way is that God is still going on with his purpose. This is no deviation in purpose.

God still goes straight on. I think we have said enough about that. There is a lot of instruction in that if you will think about it.

Then point number three. They touch the earth and then they are lifted up from the earth. And then it seems that they come back to earth and stay.

The living ones let down their wings. And for a time everything seems to be standing still. And then the inference is that they go on again.

I think there is a lot of history in that. The Lord began on the day of Pentecost. He began at Jerusalem.

We might say that he began as it were on the earth. And then his movements are above the earth. He is there through that book in a position over the earth.

And then he stops. This is not a contradiction of what I have just been saying. There are times when the Lord has to wait.

He has to wait for something. His onward movement seems to tarry. What a lot of history there is in that.

The whole history of the church is just that. God moves on. And then he has to wait.

And then when he gets what he is waiting for he goes on again. There are these movements of God which we can see in history. We need to very seriously consider this matter of God having to wait for something.

Take our own life. There is a movement of God. And then there seems to be some waiting period.

The Lord is waiting for something. It may be he is waiting for our adjustment to some life that he has given. It may be that he is waiting for the removal of something that has come in that is not of himself.

It may be many things. But we do know that in our own lives there are periods when the Lord does not seem to be going on. Perhaps he has been stopped in his going on.

He is not waiting for something. During that time of waiting we ought to have very serious exercise. Why is it that the Lord is not going on? Why is the Lord not going on with me? What is it the Lord is waiting for? What adjustment have I got to make? What is it that I have got to put out of the Lord's way? You see we

ought to have exercise about every seeming saying and waiting of the Lord.

And that is true also of the Lord's work. True in our own spiritual life but it is true in the work of the Lord. There come periods when the Lord seems to be waiting.

It looks as though he has stopped going on. Maybe any one of many reasons for that. It is not because the Lord has given up his purpose.

It is not because the Lord has ceased to be a God of movement. But he is waiting for us. He is waiting for his people.

He is waiting for something in his people. At all such times we should have very great exercise. What is the Lord waiting for? Well if we take the history of the church during the last two thousand years.

And it is a very instructive study. On the one side we see those movements of God from heaven. It is as though the throne was lifted up from the earth and was going on.

It is as though the throne was overriding things of the earth. Going on in its power. That has happened again and again.

On the other side we see those dark times in the history of the church. What we call the middle ages. And other times when it seemed that the Lord was standing still.

It has been like that many times. The Lord was waiting for something. And then a people arose who took on that matter.

And had deep exercise about it. That is the history of the church. Out of that exercise God went on again.

It would be quite easy for me here this morning if I had the time to give you those movements and those sayings of the Lord. But we shall not take time for this. We are just putting our finger upon this principle.

The throne moves. The living ones let down their wings. And the throne stands still for a time.

And then it moves on again. Well think a lot about this. It is full of instruction.

Then we come to the next thing. These wheels are full of eyes. All round the wheels there are eyes.

We meet those eyes on several occasions in the word of God. We meet them in the prophecies of Zechariah. And we meet them several times in the book of the Revelation.

And of course we know what they symbolize. And of course we know what they symbolize. They represent the complete and perfect intelligence of the throne.

This government of the man upon the throne is the government of a perfect intelligence. If we transfer this principle to the beginning of the book of the Revelation then we see what it means. The churches are about to be judged.

But the one who judges them is the one whose eyes are as a flame of fire. And that one says to the churches, I know thy works. And then he goes on to say all that he knows about the churches.

And it is shown that he knows more about the churches than they know about themselves. He tells one church that they think that they are rich and increasing good. That they have everything.

He says, you know not that you are poor and wretched and naked. And then what does he say? I counsel thee to buy of me eyes of the Damascus. That you may see what I have seen.

The Lord knew more and saw more than the church knew about itself. That is only an illustration of this. All the movements of this chariot throne are in complete intelligence.

That one upon the throne sees and knows everything. The Lord is not blind to anything and he is not ignorant of anything. Very, very bad for the moment.

And then finally the spirit of life is in the wheel. The whole governing principle of the movement of the Lord is life. The thing which governs that throne is this main principle of life.

Now you know so much about life in the Bible that I need not stay with this this morning. You have been taken right through the Bible on the principle of life. And you know that that is the governing question of the whole Bible.

That is the issue with which the Bible begins. And that is the issue with which the Bible ends. All the movements of God from eternity to eternity are on this basis and with this question of life.

These are the characteristics of the wheels. You can think more about them. But we will sum up.

And bring this into the New Testament. There is very little doubt that in the first place we have to read Matthew 28, 18 into this. There is very little doubt that in the first place we have to read Matthew 28, 18 into this.

Matthew 28, 18. That is the first half of the statement. That brings us back to the chariot throne.

In relation to the whole creation. And the authority that is vested in the man in the throne. Do note that word that he used.

He did not say all power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Of course that was implied. But he used another Greek word.

He said all authority is given unto me. That is a bigger thing than power. The power lies within the authority.

The authority is the exercise of the power. We have often illustrated it in this way. You go out onto your main thoroughfare.

And there at the crossroads stands a little man. He is in uniform. He puts up his hand.

Now that hand would not be able to hold up all the traffic. If one car decided to go on, well it would be a poor lookout for that little man. But behind that little man and that hand is all the authority of the government.

The car has not to deal with the man. It has got to deal with the whole government that he represents. In himself there may not be much power.

But in his position there is all the authority of the government. Well that is a very simple and common illustration. But that is what Jesus said.

Behind me is all the authority of the government of heaven. Men may just call me Jesus of Nazareth. Men may regard me as just another man.

But they are going to find out that behind me is all the authority of heaven. And that is what they did find out. And then the second half of the statement.

For this very reason go ye into all the world. And I am with you all the day. Here are the movements of the throne.

Into all the world. And the authority of Jesus Christ with the church. All the authority of heaven is behind the church when it gets into line with the goings of that throne.

So first of all we bring Matthew 28, 18 right into Ezekiel. And note we are dealing with the preparation of a servant for his work. Ezekiel certainly needed that preparation.

If he had not had that vision his work would have been impossible. Every servant of the Lord needs that vision. You and I need to see that.

We need to be assured of that. Where would you leave that and go on? Now there are other parts of the New Testament which must be brought right into this section. You must read right into the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel the letters to the Colossians and the Ephesians.

Bring the first three chapters of the letter to the Colossians into chapter one of Ezekiel. And then bring the first three chapters of Ephesians into the first chapter of Ezekiel. It is full of instruction.

And those New Testament letters will be the best exposition of Ezekiel 1. Of course I would like to sit down with you with our Bible. But you can do it yourself. Note some of the main words in those chapters.

And some of the governing ideas. Take for it to begin with creation. Can you call up at this moment the first chapter of the letter to the Colossians? There is nothing in all the Bible like that chapter.

As to the place of the Lord Jesus in creation. It is a tremendous chapter on the matter of the relationship of Christ to creation and the creation to Christ. Now you will remember what we have been saying about the living one.

As representing the whole creation. In heaven and on earth. And then the throne is imposed upon death.

That is exactly what you get in Colossians and Ephesians. Take the word heavens as in Ephesians. Well that is all very interesting.

But it ought to be very instructive to us. All this has to do with the preparation of a servant for his ministry. Now I will just spend my last few minutes on this second thing.

And it will only be a very little that I say about it. As you see it is in chapter two. At verse nine.

Through to verse three of chapter three. And then in verse fourteen of chapter three. It has to do with the robe.

Ezekiel says that he saw a hand stretched out. And in that hand was a robe. And it was written on both sides.

With lamentations, mournings and woes. And a voice said. Eat the robe.

And when Ezekiel proceeded to eat the robe. He said it was as sweet as honey in his mouth. In verse fourteen it says.

I went in the bitterness of my spirit. Sweetness in my mouth and bitterness in my spirit. This sounds very strange.

Here is a robe written within and without with lamentations, mournings and woes. How can that be sweet in anybody's mouth? And then as the prophet proceeded to fulfill his ministry. He said he went in the bitterness of his spirit.

Here is a combination of sweetness and bitterness in ministry. What does that mean? How can we explain this? Well I think if I just quote one or two passages of scripture it will explain the whole thing. Jesus is at the Passover supper with his disciples.

Do you know what his mind was about the cup? Presently he will say. Father if it be possible let this cup pass from me. The cup was the cup of his suffering.

The cup of his passion. It was a bitter cup. There is no doubt about that.

And yet it says this. He took the cup and gave thanks. He took the cup and gave thanks.

There is a combination of two things. Bitterness and thankfulness. Suffering and glory.

That is the paradox of the cross. Jesus has told his disciples what is just going to happen. He has told them that he is going to suffer.

He has gone over the whole ground of his cross with them. And then it says and when they had sung a hymn they went out. That is to say.

They sang a hymn. And went out. Do you know what they went out to? You would have thought that that was the last place of ever singing a hymn.

You thought they would go out in absolute silence and sorrow. But they went out to the notes of the hymn. I wonder if you know what the hymn was that they sang.

There is very good authority for believing that the hymn that was sung at the Passover was the 118th Psalm. Now of course we ought to read the 118th Psalm. But right at the heart of that psalm we have these words.

I shall not die but live. It is the psalm of the passion. But it is the psalm of victory.

It is the psalm with the cross in view. But it is the psalm of the glory the other side of the cross. If it really was that psalm that they sang.

Then we see the mingling of the sweetness and the bitterness in the cup. Shall we take another phrase. Who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross.

Bringing together of the bitterness and the sweetness. Is this what Paul referred to when he said sorrowing yet always rejoicing. These two things always go together in the ministry of a servant of God.

The way of the cross always means those two things. It is the way of the bitterness. Often the bitterness of spirit.

But it is not all bitterness. The Lord keeps the balances between the bitterness and the joy. The Lord often uses the sweetness to balance the bitterness.

When we share the same suffering or when we share the same suffering. There is not only the bitter side. In this process there is also the sweetness side.

I think this is what I should say this morning. I will give you a lot to think about. I will give you all that in outline later on.

Then you will be able to take it away and think about it. You see what we are doing in these times together is not completing the work. We are only laying a foundation for the future.

Your training will not be finished when you go away from these times together. Your training will only begin then. I remember many years ago I was preaching in a church in Philadelphia in America.

And just as I was finishing my message. A man rushed up to the steps of the church to the door. And he said to the man at the door, is the sermon finished? The man at the door said, no the preacher is finished but the sermon is just beginning.

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