

The Persistent Purpose of God - Part 9

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon highlights the necessity of preserving the spiritual essence of the church over reducing it to mere technicality.

Duration: 52:41

Scripture: Ezekiel 43:4, Ezekiel 43:7, Matthew 6:33, John 5:39, Ephesians 3:8, Ephesians 3:10, Colossians 1:27

Topics: "Purpose Of God"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of being filled with the Holy Spirit. They describe a house as a channel through which God's life flows, and this life is not something artificial or secondhand, but a natural outpouring. The testimony of this life is what truly matters, not just a system of doctrine or teaching. The speaker also highlights the threefold purpose of the house: as a place of God's glory, a representation of the new creation in Christ, and a vessel to fill all things. Ultimately, the sermon encourages believers to live a life filled with the Holy Spirit and to let that life be the testimony of their faith.

Transcript

I'm happy to welcome you this morning to this house, which was revealed to the Prophet Jesus. And I'm sure that as you have read these six chapters, you have found very great difficulty in getting a clear picture of the home. I have tried many times to draw a plan of this house with all its details, and its correct measurements.

Up to the present time, I have not succeeded. That is not because it is impossible. I expect that there is some architect here this morning who might succeed.

But I have come up against the Lord in this matter. Or the Lord has come up against me. I have got my paper on my board.

And I have got all my instruments. Then again and again, I have started on this plan. And I have not found that I could get on very far.

It was as though I was trying to do something that the Lord did not want me to do. I wonder if you have had that experience. You try to do something, but you just have no life in it at all.

The thing becomes dead. And if you are spiritually sensitive, you just have to say, well, the Lord is not in this. And that has been my consciousness every time I have tried to reduce this thing to a plan on paper.

And that is the point at which I begin this morning. Because I believe that contains a very important principle. As we read these chapters, we find ourselves in the presence of a great mess of details.

It is very difficult to cope with all the details. If we were to try to deal with that in these sessions, we should find that we had undertaken an impossible task. For one thing, we would have to be here till next year.

And for another thing, we might begin to lose our sense of life in it. My point is this. It would be very easy for us to fall into the very mistake that we must most carefully avoid.

There is one thing that you and I must be very careful to avoid. And that is to resolve spiritual things into a technical system. To be taken up with the technique of the house of God.

That is a very great peril. And I do want to emphasize that this morning. If we were to resolve this into merely a technical system, we could easily destroy the life.

I therefore urge you brothers to be very careful on this matter. Be very careful not to reduce the house of God to a technique. Immediately if it is resolved into a system, then it is in danger of losing its life.

That is the very thing that has happened again and again in the history of the church. Before you get to the end of the book of the Acts, you find that that thing is happening. The whole present system of Christianity was beginning.

And as you know, Paul wrote his last letters to Timothy to restore the spiritual nature of things. He sought to show that the offices of the church are not just offices. They are spiritual men.

Already men had begun to make spiritual things into an earthly system. And during the past centuries, God has done something of a spiritual character. He has given a fresh revelation of the spiritual nature of things.

And for a time, things went on in that spiritual life. And then men took hold of it and reduced it to a fixed system. They brought it out of the heavenless onto the earth.

And in doing that, they killed the spiritual life. That is the history of so many things in Christianity on the earth today. Many of them did begin in real spiritual life.

They were in spiritual power. And out from them went a river of life. But then men took hold of them and organized them into a system.

They introduced a technical element into things. And in doing that, they killed the life. So that the things remain just an empty, cold, dead shell.

That is the ever-present peril in things of God. I do urge upon you to be alive to that peril. And to guard very carefully against it.

Especially those of you who have responsibilities. Do beware of this danger. It would be so easy for this beautiful thing that God is doing to be just a technical system.

You might have all the rules and all the principles and lose the life. I'm quite sure that you will allow me to say that to you. It is the peril that I have been fighting for many years.

It has been my definite business to try and avoid that. We do not want people to go about saying, this is how it is done. This is how they do it in Taipei.

And this is how they do it in Honolulu. May the Lord deliver us from there. You cannot just put people into a system and make them live.

Well, you, I'm quite sure, see the importance of that. Now we come back here. Of course this whole presentation does show how exact and how careful God is.

It shows how particular the Lord is about the smallest detail. We recognize that. That is the law of the house.

God is most particular about the smallest thing. Every little thing has its own measurement. It is a measurement which is given to it by God.

You are not allowed to make that smaller or larger. That must exactly express the mind of the Lord. Well, as we have said, there is a tremendous mess of detail here.

But every part of it represents God's particular concern to have things according to his mind. We recognize that. But we must at the same time In this vision of the house, God was not presenting a system.

He was not presenting an organization. He was presenting a person. This is the person of his son.

This is a spiritual house. Not a system of truth. The supreme characteristic of this house, what to do with it, is life.

Now we look at that from both sides. Life will demand exactness in behavior. Life will demand exactness in order.

But we can have the order without the life. It is possible for the system or the technique to destroy the life. It is possible for the system or the technique to destroy the life.

Since you have the technique of the Bible, it is easy to lose the life of the Bible. It is easy for the Baptist to create a system like Judaism. The law of this house is the holyness of life.

That is how Ezekiel first saw it. You will see that there were two views of this temple given to Ezekiel. First of all, he saw it as a whole as from a distance.

He was given to view it from the very high mountain. He saw it comprehensively in that way. He saw its broad outlines.

He saw its boundaries and its inclusiveness. He saw its boundaries and its inclusiveness. And then the Spirit took him in.

And he saw it from the inside. He was shown all the details from the inside. It is important that we see it in that way.

The first thing that we see from this heavenly standpoint is the great size of this house of God. The whole area of the house was revealed to Ezekiel. And it is, as we saw yesterday, a very great thing.

We must be very careful not to make Christ or his church smaller than it really is. We must not make Christ smaller than it really is. The Christ that belongs to us.

The Christ of our locality. We must be very careful that we don't make Christ smaller than God has made him. And we may not make the church smaller than God has made it.

This is not our little church. It is not anybody's little church. This is much bigger than our thought.

It goes much beyond our imagination. This is a very great Christ and a very great church. Here again we must guard against a peril.

That is the ever-present peril of reducing the size of Christ and the church. Reducing the church to the measure in which we have seen it. The measure of the church is not our measure of understanding it.

The measure of the church is not the measure of our comprehending it. The prayer of the Apostle Paul in Ephesians concerning the church was that they should have an enlargement of comprehension. He prayed that the church might know what is the breadth and the length and the height and the depth.

This is a knowledge which surpasses all human knowledge. If there was one thing about the Apostle Paul more than another, it was just this thing. He was always overwhelmed with the greatness of Christ and the greatness of the church.

So we must see it like that. And always guard against the peril of reducing Christ and the church to our own size. That is to the size of our knowledge of it.

You and I have yet to learn far more about the Lord and his church than ever yet we have seen. And the realization of that fact should always save us from littleness. Here then is the compass of gratefulness.

This fills all things and all things are to be filled into it. This house is to affect all things to the uttermost bound of the earth. That is what we come to of course when we come to the river.

The river is the influence or effect of this house. It is what goes out from this house to affect the world. And it is to affect the whole world.

So that stored up in this house there are all the potentialities to affect the uttermost bounds of the earth. You notice that this house, the whole dimension of the house is square. It has four sides.

I'm speaking now about the whole area of the temple. Really everything is made up of squares. We are not going to deal with that at the moment.

We are dealing with the whole temple area. It is one great square. Four sides which are equal.

Now you remember what we said about the number four. When we were beginning we pointed out that the number four is the number of creation. Four embraces the whole creation.

And this house represents the new creation in Christ. Paul tells us that he is to fill all things. And all things are to be filled into him.

Or to use another phrase of Paul. In Ephesians 3, 9. To make all men know. To make all men see what is the stewardship of the mystery.

Do take note of that. To make all men know what is the stewardship of the mystery. That does not necessarily mean that all men will accept it or understand it.

We must be very careful that we do not confine church truth as we call it to just a few. Now we are the people who have seen the church. We stand on the ground of the church.

We hold the truth of the church. We have seen the meaning of the body of Christ. Many other Christians have not seen it.

They do not stand on that ground. Therefore what conclusion do we draw? We must be the church and they are not. You see that is a very artificial conclusion.

We have got to be very careful of that danger. There may be a difference in apprehending the truth. There may be a difference of position as to the church.

But the will of God is that all men should be made to know. To make all men see what is the stewardship of the mystery. You cannot get outside of all men.

That is the range of God's will. And we must enlarge our hearts and our minds to God's measure. This is something the Lord would say to us.

I might just stay here to say that I have had very deep exercise before the Lord early this morning. I felt that I must put this whole thing back. And extricate myself from this mass of material.

And ask the Lord now what really is it you want me to say? What do you want these people to know? And these are some of the things that he has definitely put on my heart to say to you. You cannot make Christ too big. You cannot make the church too big.

Provided it is God's church and not man's church. So we have here the comprehensiveness of Christ. I said that Paul was overwhelmed with that consciousness.

He was constantly crying out under that tremendous overwhelming of the greatness of things. He spoke of all the depth of the riches. Of the wisdom and knowledge of God.

How unsearchable are his ways. He spoke of the exceeding riches. Paul was overwhelmed with this greatness.

What it amounts to is this. That a real apprehension of the church will make us big and not small. There is nothing that will save us from littleness more than a true apprehension of Christ.

If we become little or if the work becomes little in its mind it has not really apprehended Christ. So that is the first thing that we see here. How great this is.

It represents the whole of a new creation. In the ages to come it will fill all things. And all things will be affected by it.

That is a glorious vision. We must therefore be very big people. Big in spirit and big in heart.

Then we notice the three-fold purpose of this house. First of all it is the place of God's glory. Chapter forty-three.

Verse seven. And he said unto me, Son of man, this is the place of my throne and the place of the soles of my feet where I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel forever. And the house of Israel shall no more defile my holy name neither they nor their kings nor by their whoredoms and by their dead bodies of their kings in their high places.

You notice that it is the word glory that leads up to verse seven. Verse two. And behold the glory of the God of Israel came from the way of the east.

Verse four. And the glory of the Lord came into the house by the way of the gate. Verse five.

And he said this is the place of... this is the place of my throne. This is the place of the throne of glory. Now the glory had left Jerusalem nineteen years before this.

It is not returning to the literal earthly Jerusalem. It is returning to the spiritual house. The glory left the earthly Jerusalem when God's Son was rejected.

And it had never come back to the earthly Jerusalem. But it did come back to the spiritual house on the day of Pentecost. This house is the house of God's glory.

And you notice from the whole of that seventh verse that the glory is the glory of holiness. It is not just some bright shining. It is a spiritual condition.

No defilement has a place here. No dead bodies have a place here. There is no death or corruption here.

The glory is the glory of holiness. Where corruption and death have been removed. Do remember that the glory depends upon the spiritual condition.

It depends upon the holiness. This then in the first place is the place of His glory. And then it is the place of His government.

This is the place of my throne. It is the seat of His government. Remember that this is a heavenly house.

The seat of His government is not in a church on the earth. Whether that be in Rome or in anything else. The seat of His throne is in heaven.

We only come under the government of God when we come into a heavenly position. Now that is a very strong statement. It carries very much with it.

We really only come under this government of God when we are in a heavenly position. And I am sure that you would agree that it is a very important matter to be under the government of God. What hope is there for any of us or for a church that is not under the government of God? Well, what we have in the book of the Acts just states this very clearly before us.

There the church is under the government of heaven. And it is a very effective church. When the church got under the government of man, it lost its effectiveness.

The government then requires a heavenly position. But this is a church or a house that is holy according to Christ. That is necessary for a heavenly government.

The government of the Lord will come by way of things being just according to Christ. This is the place of my throne. What place? The place that is according to Christ.

Everything here in this vision is Christ. Christ stands over everything. Everything takes its measure and its character from Christ.

And this is the place of the throne. And then this is a house that is entirely ordered by the Spirit. You notice the place of the Spirit in this.

The Spirit lifted me up. The Spirit brought me in. The Spirit took me out.

The Spirit took me round. All this is in and by the Spirit. This is the revelation of Christ by the Holy Spirit.

And this is the constitution of the church government where the whole church governs itself. The whole church selects its minister. The whole church votes on everything that is going to be done.

That is democratic government. None of these systems have a place here. They are all merely official.

The government of this house is the government of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit may use men. He may choose those who are called elders.

But there is a great deal of difference between the official and the spiritual. You can be what is called an elder officially and not be an elder spiritually. If you are an elder spiritually, you are bound to become that officially.

Your spiritual measure will be recognized. And whether you are made an elder or not, you will be one if you are spiritually one. The government I am saying is spiritual.

The men of the New Testament were described as men filled with the Holy Spirit. They were the apostles, they were the elders, they were the deacons. That was the thing that made them what they were.

Men filled with the Spirit. And then the third thing. This house is the channel or vessel of God's life.

Out of a house like this house, life flows. It is from this that the life flows. You do not have to stop the life flowing.

You do not have to make this life. This life comes from a stream. You do not go and collect buckets of water.

And then try to pour them out from this house. There is nothing artificial about this. There is nothing second hand about this.

There is nothing of man's doing about this. The life just springs up. And it flows out.

It flows out of a house like this. A house where the Lord's throne is. A house where the government of heaven is.

A house where the Lord is. Out from that house, the life flows. The testimony itself is in that life.

John said, this is the testimony. Do you want to know what the testimony is? The testimony is not a system of doctrine and teaching. The testimony is not a technique.

This is the testimony that God has given unto us eternal life. And this life is in His Son. The testimony is in the life.

And when the testimony is in us, when the life is in us, the testimony is in us. So the test of everything is life. That is a certain statement.

Life is that which determines the presence of the Lord. Life is that which tells whether things are according to Christ. Life tests whether this service is the service of God.

Life tests everything. The question is, is it ministering life? Is this thing a living thing? And is it pouring out life? Pouring out life to the ends of the earth. If that is not true, there is something wrong with it.

It may be a very wonderful technique and system. But there is something wrong with it. Everything is tested by life.

I think we shall have to leave it there this morning. I haven't got my pretty little picture yet. We can leave the Lord with us tomorrow morning.

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