

# The Way to God's End

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*God's end is to bring to heavenly fullness, and He chooses vessels, individual and collective, to do something in a peculiar way to reach out to many others beyond them.*

**Scripture:** Joshua 1:1

**Topics:** "Sovereign Grace", "Heavenly Purpose"

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## Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that the ultimate goal of God's plan is to bring heaven's fullness to earth, illustrating that everything earthly must align with heavenly principles. He explains that God sovereignly chooses vessels, both individuals and communities, to fulfill His divine purpose, often through extraordinary experiences that prepare them for a larger mission. The sermon highlights the importance of humility and servitude, as exemplified by Joshua, who began as an attendant before becoming a leader, and underscores that true ministry arises spontaneously from what God has done in us. Sparks also points out that God's grace often operates through unlikely means, as seen in the story of Rahab, and that the natural man must be left behind to embrace the spiritual life. Ultimately, he calls for believers to recognize their collective role in God's heavenly purpose, which transcends individual experiences.

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## Transcript

We are not going to read at the moment, but we shall have the book of Joshua open before us, for reference as we go along.

### THE END OF THE WAY

It is necessary for us at the outset, before considering the way to the end, to bring the end of the way right into view. We commenced by noting that God began with the heavens and then proceeded to the earth, and at the end of the Bible it is that which comes down out of heaven which consummates the whole process of His activities through the ages, so that the end is a full expression of what is heavenly, or an expression of what is heavenly in fullness. That is the end. We said to begin with that the heavens govern everything. As it is in nature, so it is in the things of the Spirit. Everything is governed by the heavens, and the earth and all that is earthly has to reckon with and answer to what is heavenly.

Get that as a spiritual truth. What is true in the realm of the natural creation is but an expression of the spiritual mind of God: and that means that, just as this world, this earth, is so governed and controlled by heavenly forces and heavenly bodies that if it should get out of right adjustment or relationship with those

bodies it would disintegrate, it would cease, it would freeze up or burn up, it would cease to function as an organic whole: the same thing is spiritually true. The whole Bible is taken up with this fact, that what is here is related to what is in heaven, and everything comes out from heaven and has to answer to heaven and keep adjustment to heaven - everything in our lives: because the Holy Spirit, having come down from heaven, is the link between what is here and what is there.

These things are not just abstract ideas. They are the factors which lie right behind everything we have of Divine revelation in the Scriptures. The whole of the Bible from the first verse to the last can be summed up in that one thing - that heaven is challenging this earth, and this earth has got to make an answer to heaven. There are countless details covered by that, but it is a fact; so that the end of all things will just be that heaven is fully realised in the creation and, especially in a spiritual way, in the people of God. That is the end which we bring into view at once.

Now, in relation to that end, we must note another governing truth. But let me first say something in parenthesis. Some of these phrases are very familiar, and I am always a little afraid that familiarity with phraseology may take something of their edge away. When we use that phrase 'a governing thing', let us stop to get the force of it. It means that, if we are under the government of a law, we cannot escape that law. There are laws of nature, in our bodies, in this world. They are there, and if you disregard those laws it does not put them out of operation. You find that in the long run they will break you; in the long run they find you out. But come into line with them, and they will mean your salvation, your life. They are 'governing', whether you like it or not. Thus, "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7). That is a law; you cannot escape it. There are numerous laws like that. So when we speak of a 'governing' law or truth, it is something established by God in His universe, and it is best discovered and obeyed.

#### GOD'S SOVEREIGN CHOICE OF VESSELS

Let us come, then, to this further governing truth, in relation to God's end: that God chooses vessels, individual and collective or corporate, and brings them in a peculiar way sovereignly into relationship with His full end, and then does that in them which He means for a much larger company than themselves. He sovereignly chooses vessels - whether individuals or companies - the Bible is just full of that - and then sets to work with those vessels to do something in an extraordinary way, in a very much fuller way, in order that, by means of what He is doing in such elect vessels, He may reach out to many others beyond them. That is a governing truth. He does something in an elect vessel which is meant for many more than itself or its members.

#### REPRESENTATIVE VALUES

Now let us stop with that for a moment, because our mentality always needs helping. It might very well be that many of you, reading these lines, would say, 'Well, I cannot see that I am an elect vessel, in that specific way'. You are thinking of the men to whom we have been referring as the pioneers of this heavenly way - Abraham and Moses and so on. You say, 'I am not a Moses or an Abraham; I do not see how I come into that category at all'.

Well, while it may be that there are individuals among you who are chosen of God for something of this nature beyond the ordinary rank and file, as we say: while that may be true, there is this other side - that you may be a part of a collective or corporate vessel, just a part of it; and if you are - and most probably you are; I think I would go as far as to say, 'and you are ' - if the Lord has laid His hand upon you and put

in you this sense of destiny, of having been called to something more than just 'being a Christian', a strong sense of calling - if that is in you, you may take it that you are related to a larger purpose. If that is true, you must not just regard yourself, as an individual, and therefore your experiences and God's dealings with you, as though you were the only person, as though you were something very special.

Let me put it the other way round. You may be going through what God is doing with a collective vessel and you may not see, so far as your own individual and personal life is concerned, any meaning for what you are going through. 'Why am I going through this?' Well, because you are a part of a larger whole - that is the answer. So often we find that great pressure upon us individually. When we begin to compare notes, we find that other people spiritually related to us are having the same experience. It is the great law of the Body. "Whether one member suffereth, all the members suffer with it" (1 Cor. 12:26). What is it all about?

Well, you see, it is collective, it is corporate; and although we cannot follow it all, to see how it is working out, God is doing something in a related way, and we are part of that. We are bearing the brunt of something very much bigger than ourselves. That spiritual relatedness is involving us in this larger purpose of God, which has to do with the heavenlies, much bigger than this earth. It is that that makes us one. It is not that we join something, that we have our name on a membership roll, or that something is done to recognise us publicly as a member of a certain company. It is not that. You may be many miles, hundreds or thousands of miles, apart, and yet, because you are bound up with this heavenly thing that God is doing, you may be feeling the repercussions thousands of miles away. Because when you get into heaven all these earthly things disappear; geography and distances and time all go; they do not obtain up there.

If only we could get the heavenly conception of the Church! Oh, how foolish our earthly conceptions of the Church are! We must get off this earth, and all that is here, as to what is called the Church. You find it is just one unit in heaven. All this does not obtain there. That is where we were when we were speaking about the passage of Jordan in our last chapter. In that Jordan something was left behind. The people moved off earthly ground on to heavenly. We shall come back to that again presently. But that is to be a spiritual reality, a consciousness into which we enter. While we ourselves cannot explain and understand why we may be having such a bad time, the heavenly explanation is that we are involved in something related to God's fuller purpose, and we are suffering, or we are going through this experience, in a related way; and it is very wonderful, as from time to time we meet others with whom we know spiritual fellowship, how we find they have been going through exactly the same thing as we have. The Lord has been saying something to them, and doing something with them, which is not the ordinary or the usual thing, but something quite extra.

## INTRINSIC VALUES

Now that is all connected with the fact, mentioned earlier, that God chooses individual or collective vessels, and does in them that which is meant for a very much larger company. Those vessels, be they individual or be they collective, are representative of something that God is after on a larger scale, in a larger sphere. It begins in them. I think that is what Paul meant when he said, "in me as chief [first one]... for an example" (1 Timothy 1:16). I think he meant by that that he was representative of what God was going to do through him. All the Lord was going to do through him in the larger realm, in the churches, the provinces and the nations, was representative, was in token. God was going to operate in the wider scale through this man - not by giving him something to say, but by doing something in him.

That is where we have gone astray. God does something first. He brings into being a living representation of His fuller thought, by means of peculiar, unusual and extraordinary dealings with a vessel. There is very little that is ordinary in the life and experience of such a vessel. It is all extraordinary, unusual. Such representative vessels, individual or collective, are chosen that in them there shall be established the essential, intrinsic values intended for the larger sphere and realm; something which can be expanded, which is capable of going far beyond itself, capable of great enlargement and expansion.

In chemistry we speak of the 'mother-tincture'. We mean, by that, something you can enlarge upon and distribute. It is of the very essence, the concentrated essence. But the effecting of this kind of thing in any vessel, in order to produce intrinsic values, concentrated essence, is terrific work. There is nothing ordinary about it. Some of you may be able to understand this from experience. God's dealings with you are by no means ordinary dealings. Sometimes you feel that the concentration in your experience is far too concentrated! You wonder how you are going to get through at all under this kind of handling from the Lord.

I am keeping very near to the Bible. Do not think that I am talking outside the Bible. I am talking with the background: this is what the Word of God reveals. This is the experience of Abraham - no ordinary experience; a concentration of God upon that man. Think of the vast host who have derived the values from that. Abraham more than once got to breaking point, where he could not support it. God had to intervene to get him through. The intrinsic value of heavenliness is the most testing thing that anybody can ever have to do with.

In our nature we are so utterly earthly and earthy in every way. We must see things - that is earth; we must feel things - that is earth. We must have all the evidences - we must have so much that is earthly. But God takes us off the earth, right off the earth - I mean in a spiritual way - and dangles us, so to speak, in mid-air. It is a most precarious kind of existence, exceedingly trying. You do not know where you are; you cannot explain things; you cannot put your foot down solidly and feel that you are sure about anything. God is upsetting all your powers of reckoning and calculation and interpretation, and making it utterly necessary to have another kind of wisdom and understanding, which does not belong to this earth or world or man at all. It is heavenly. That is the experience of these pioneers of the heavenly way. Hear them crying out of their earthliness, sometimes even complaining to the Lord. Listen to Jeremiah - he is out of his depth. It was the intensive, intrinsic values that God was after.

## SPONTANEOUS MINISTRY

Then further, spontaneous ministry. I underline that word 'spontaneous' - not organized ministry but spontaneous ministry. When it is like that, you have only got to be and it happens. Do you understand that? You only have to be like that and it happens. You can no more shut that up than you can shut up the sun.

You notice that that is what the Lord was after at the beginning of His ministry. He first of all got hold of a set of men, individuals, and He put them through it. It was not all so simple as the reading of the story. You may read the Gospels covering the story of three years' companionship between those disciples and the Lord, and you may read the record of those last days on the earth, and then the Cross. Well, it is a tremendous story in itself; but we have not recorded, because it was not possible to record, all that went on inside those men. Even during those three years, I venture to say that they were again and again at the end of their tether: they did not know where they were, what this meant, what it was leading to. They were

all the time trying to bring things within the compass of their own ideas, their own mentality; to interpret in the light of prophecy, and so on; to bring it down and have it according to the text-book. He was beating them all the time, He was a continuous enigma. They could not fathom this Man. He never did things according to the text-book, not even according to Moses. He is upsetting the whole thing. What is He doing? What does He mean?

And then the Cross. You cannot read the depths of their soul-anguish and perplexity in those days. You can only understand it out of your own experience of when the Lord begins to do things like that - getting you out of your depth and contradicting all your expectations, seeming to go entirely the opposite way from what you felt you had a right to expect of Him. He does not do what you expect. Sometimes you are altogether with your back to the wall because of the Lord's dealings with you. He got hold of men who went through that with a very deep experience.

Then through those men He got churches, He got companies of believers, and the business started. There is a peculiar kind of discipline and training which belongs to corporate life, when you cease to be just a separate unit, even as a Christian, and you have to live a related life, come into relationship with other believers and live this corporate life, a heavenly life on earth. The New Testament shows that that is anything but an easy thing. You may think, viewing it objectively, that it is a very lovely thing to be in an assembly; but it is not always lovely. That assembly may be going through it. There is something happening, there is a handling of God there, which is sometimes so deep and terrible that you do not know what the Lord means by it; you are all registering this. It is a deep way, a suffering way. We suffer together as an assembly; this is corporate suffering, corporate travail. So these churches were brought into being, and they went through it. They were instructed, too; but, whatever happened to them in the way of instruction and teaching, there was always the parallel and the corresponding discipline of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit had His hand upon them and was dealing with them in a drastic way. Things were happening.

You say, 'Well, instance that'. Look at all the happenings in Corinth. What was it Paul said to them? "For this cause many among you are weak and sickly, and not a few sleep [have died]" (I Cor. 11:30). There is a secret spiritual history there. The Holy Ghost has got hold of the situation. They might have looked at it in a natural way. 'Somebody is ill - send for the doctor.' But wait a minute. May there not be some spiritual factor bound up with it? May not the Holy Spirit have something to do with this? Paul says, Yes! It does not mean that everybody who is sick is a spiritual delinquent, but the principle is there. The Church is being dealt with by the Holy Ghost in relation to God's fuller purpose.

The point is quite clear, then, that God gets hold first of individuals and then of companies, and He deals with them in this way: so that, not because they have been given a message or a truth, but because of what God has done in them, they have a spontaneous ministry. It just happens, that is all; somehow or other, it happens, without our being able to explain it - except thus: that the Holy Spirit has taken account of something and He is using it; He is seeing that what He has done there is expanded, is reaching out. It just happens. Paul said about the church in Thessalonica, "From you hath sounded forth the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but in every place..." (I Thess. 1:8). Do you think that that necessarily meant that they sent out evangelists? They may have done, but it does not say so. Look at the context. You will see that Paul is saying, 'All over the place in other churches they are talking about you; I need not speak of you - it is known'. It is spontaneous ministry out of what God does. God takes in hand to get these intrinsic values, and He is not going to waste them.

So the end that God has in view is governing all His dealings with His instruments. Heavenly fullness is His end, and it motivates all His dealings with the instruments that He has chosen in relation to that end. He is bringing to heavenly fullness.

We must realise that nothing with God is an end in itself. Conversion is not an end in itself. It is an awful tragedy to regard conversion as an end in itself and leave it there, feeling quite satisfied. You stop with conversion, and see what happens, with your own or anybody else's. What happens? All the sense of purpose is quenched, all that vitality in the conversion subsides, and you get simply a lot of converted people. They are converted - they have believed on the Lord Jesus; but they are just a lot of converted people, and probably the greatest problem today is a lot of converted people over this earth. They have stopped; their conversion has become an end in itself.

Assembly life is no end in itself. Gather a company of the Lord's people in a corporate expression, and let them put their own hedge around and be something to themselves, having a nice time on their own and the same thing happens. The work of the Lord: if the work of the Lord is an end in itself - that is, so that it becomes some thing - oh, here again is a tragedy. We take up the work of the Lord in some way, perhaps missionary work as it is called, or some other kind of specified work, and then that particular thing closes down in itself, that sphere is shut up or that line of things is brought to an end - and you have to start all over again and you have lost everything. The work was something in itself.

Now come back to this - if the Lord has done something in you, in me, or in a company, after this character, with this concentrated essence of heavenliness, nothing is an end in itself. The sphere may change, the form may change, but the thing is there. God has got what He wants and He will find a way for it, if it is there, if it is truly heavenly. We only cut off our own usefulness and ministry when we bring it down to earth. That is a true saying. Make it your ministry, my ministry, and you have narrowed it right down to earth. It will not move out, it will not realise God's end.

Oh, this possessing of things in the realm of God and making them ours! I want to say here that, if you have a mandate from God, if you have an anointing from heaven, if you have a ministry God-given, and you are not holding it as yours or stickling for its realisation as yours, it will be fulfilled, and neither earth nor hell can stop it. Heaven will see to it. But it must be held in relation to heaven. The anointing is from heaven and everything that the anointing means has to be held in relation to heaven, and then heaven will see to it. Put Paul in prison and his ministry will be fulfilled. It is related to heaven. "The heavens do rule" (Daniel 4:26). But if we have brought it down to earth somewhere, then heaven is not going to sponsor it. There is a lot of history behind that.

Now, seeing that God's end is heavenly and spiritual fullness, and that it is by the way of progressive enlargement, we should be very concerned as to what that way is. It should really concern us as to what heaven's way is, what is the heavenly way to God's end. "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning" (Romans 15:4), and this book of Joshua is among the things written aforetime for our learning, and gives us a very great deal of light on this matter of the heavenly way. But the heavenly way is so contrary to the earthly way. I do not know what you are expecting to happen, or to experience, when we talk of God's end being spiritual fullness, and this being something God is working at. What do you expect to happen? I think the first phase of this book contains quite a lot of light upon that.

THE SERVANT SPIRIT

Just look at Joshua himself. Remember that Joshua here is representative in the thought of God of all God's saints and all God's servants, and what God did in Joshua is what God is going to do in all those to whom he is to minister. God did it in him in relation to the larger company. Well, how does it begin? The book begins like this: "Now it came to pass after the death of Moses the servant of the Lord, that the Lord spake unto Joshua the son Nun, Moses' minister..." - that word is really 'attendant'. With all that is in view in this book, you would think that he would get a better start than that. Moses the servant of the Lord, and Joshua just his attendant. He is not brought in with some official title, such as 'the servant of the Lord'. He is not brought in on that official ground at all. All that he is is an attendant. Follow that word through and see where it will lead you. The same word is used of John Mark - "they had also John as their attendant" (Acts 13:5). What is an attendant? Well, if there is one thing about an attendant, surely it is that he knows that kind of subjection that makes it possible for him to do as he is told. That is the mighty Joshua that is to be, and that is where he begins.

We are well aware of the great significance of Elisha. What a tremendous place Elisha came to have, with a double portion of Elijah's spirit and greater works than Elijah did! You remember what was said about Elisha. "Elisha... poured water on the hands of Elijah" (II Kings 3:11). He was his attendant. That is where he began.

In Joshua chapter 10, when Joshua commanded the sun, "Stand thou still", it says, "there was no day like that before it or after it, that the Lord hearkened unto the voice of a man". This man is touching heavenly things. That is tremendous. Where does it begin? With Moses' attendant! He has learned subjection: to do as he is told, to do trivial things, to be obedient, to take a humble position. And do not think it was easy for Joshua. Joshua had as much soul as anybody else. There was a time when there were others in the camp prophesying, and it was Joshua who went to Moses and said, "My lord Moses, forbid them". And Moses said, "Art thou jealous for my sake? would that all the Lord's people were prophets...!" (Numbers 11:26-30). Joshua had a soul; Joshua could assert his own ideas. He was a young man then. But here at last he comes out at the commencement of his great life work; now he is emerging into the real purpose of the sovereign calling of God: and the narrative begins - "Moses the servant of the Lord... Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' minister". Is that not a principle? There is something in that. We must always remember that the Holy Spirit wrote the Bible - and the Holy Spirit, if He is anything at all, is consistent with spiritual principles. It does not matter in what guise they are found; it does not matter when, where or how: the principle remains exactly the same.

The Levites commenced this ministry at the age of 25, but they were not allowed to assume full responsibility until they were 30. They were understudies of fully-fledged Levites for five years. This principle of the Attendant is maintained all through the Scriptures. A probationary period or phase always precedes full approval. Fullness is suspended until the particular purpose of that period as an Attendant is learned. It is the inculcating of ability to obey, to take orders, to be in subjection, to serve. We must not assume that we are anything. What we may be has to come naturally out of what we have been made. Do not expect that, if God calls you to serve Him, there will immediately and inevitably be some great demonstration of His power and fullness. Joshua was the Attendant of Moses long before he was his successor and before the manifestation of the spirit of Moses was seen in Joshua. God digs deep, He has no pleasure in superficiality, and the measure of our usefulness in relation to His full purpose will be the measure of our discipline by testing. We shall never be spiritual leaders until we have learned meekness as faithful Attendants.

Remember, then - succession is never official in the things of heaven. It is never by human selection. It is never assumed by the persons concerned. You cannot assume that you are the successor of what God has been doing. You cannot assume that you come in and have place there, and certainly no one can put you into it. If it is heavenly, succession is sovereign and spiritual. You never know how the Divine sovereignty is going to work, but you can be fairly sure that the Divine purpose is going to work contrary to your expectation, your ideas.

## SOVEREIGN GRACE

The next movement was to send spies. Joshua sent out the spies. What was the upshot? 'All the land lies before you: I have given it to you.' "This day will I begin to magnify thee in the sight of all Israel." There is immense fullness in view. Well, then, surely there must be something very dignified about this? No. Rahab, a harlot, is the key to the whole situation. A woman without reputation, or with a bad reputation, who has no status or standing at all in the world of repute: everything is bound up with that. That is sovereign, and that is grace: and you are not going to get into the land of heavenly fullness except through those two things. Even the great Joshua-to-be finds that everything becomes dependent upon a woman of ill-fame.

God has strange ways of humbling us. How often we look for something wonderful and big and glorious and noble, something of repute, in relation to the great things of God: and then God brings us down to having to accept something that has no recognition at all, no acceptance at all; puts us in a position where, if we want commendation, that will not commend us; if we want something that will introduce us as an influence in the realm of usefulness, well, this will not do it. There is no chance of getting anywhere along that line in this world. See what influence that woman had in Jericho. Do you think her word would have carried any weight? Not at all. There was no introduction from high quarters. If this is not of heaven, then everything is against it. We are getting no help. No; rather are we out of court here, we have no way, no ground here, if it is not of heaven. He has not got people with influence at court in this matter. It is all of heaven; it is sovereign or not at all.

And it is of grace, for Rahab is in the genealogy of Jesus Christ. Wonderful! When you come to that New Testament genealogy - Rahab! Oh, grace! What can recommend Rahab? What can put her on the inspired record, into Holy Scripture, in the line of Jesus Christ? Nothing but grace, and that is of heaven. It is all like that. If there is going to be anything of real value, it will be because of sovereign grace, and nothing else; no commendation. We are out of court; we have nothing to support our claim, nothing to go upon naturally. It is right down on the level of Rahab. Think of a great Joshua having to come there. But it is the principle all the time through the Word of God. If only I could show you how again and again it is that. You would say, 'Why, God seems to go out of His way to prejudice His own interests, to prejudice the success of His purposes, really to make it difficult. He might at least have chosen a respectable person, even if they were not important or prominent.' But He takes a disreputable person; He goes out of His way to keep this thing true to principle. It is of heaven or it is nothing, and less and worse than nothing. That woman is the key to Jericho and Jericho is the key to the land. That is the kind of key He uses.

## THE NATURAL MAN RULED OUT

When you come to the passage of Jordan and when they are over, Joshua commands that there shall be taken a man representing every tribe of Israel and that they shall take twelve stones and put them in the bed of the Jordan and leave them there. All Israel has been left in the bed of Jordan, every man. That is

what he is in God's sight - right down there, and left there. Something is left behind in Jordan. That which goes through and comes out on the other side is a testimony to the fact that something has been left behind, because Gilgal follows immediately. Something has been left behind. We cannot bring that over here; that has to be left in Jordan. This has no standing over here in heaven. This natural man, this Corinthian idea of man - he is down there, and God has left him there. The waters cover him and flow on, and he is underneath, buried for ever. "They are there, unto this day" (Joshua 4:9). It is the way of enlargement.

But God has to bring that home to us, and it seems to me that Gilgal was the practical application of the principle implicit in the stones in the river-bed. Those stones represented the union of God's people with Christ in death and burial - the natural man who was so in evidence in the wilderness being put out of sight. Gilgal takes up that truth and applies it perpetually. Colossians 2:11-12 confirms this. We have to experience in our souls - our flesh - the severing work of the Cross - the death of Christ. We can believe all the doctrine of Romans 6, and yet there may be great contradiction of it in ourselves. Heaven will not commit itself to the flesh or natural life. If we are occupied with ourselves; talking about ourselves, our work, our having been used, and so on, we are not in the full values of an open heaven. It is so easy to slip all unconsciously from giving glory to God to glorifying a piece of work or glorying in the work itself; and when this happens the atmosphere changes and spiritually sensitive people know that something has happened, a cloud has descended. Heaven is so transparent that no earth-vapour can come there, and heavenly fullness demands transparency in our spirit.

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