

# Vocational Fellowship - Part 1

by T. Austin-Sparks

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*The sermon explores the profound connection between fellowship with God and the church's vocation to serve all nations.*

**Duration:** 56:37

**Scripture:** Jeremiah 1:5, Jeremiah 17:12, Matthew 6:33, Acts 1:8, Romans 8:28, Ephesians 1:4, 1 Peter 2:9

**Topics:** "Fellowship"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of recognizing the real nature of God's call to any life or ministry. The fundamental factor in God's call is fellowship with Himself. The Bible is centered around God seeking to have a relationship of fellowship with mankind. True Christianity is defined by fellowship with God, and Jesus desires to have the same perfect fellowship with His followers that He had with the Father. The speaker encourages listeners to grasp the significance of belonging to the Lord and being part of His eternal purpose.

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## Transcript

This is of Jeremiah chapter 17 and verse 12. A glorious throne set on high from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary. We shall have much to say about those words as we go on.

For the time being I want to range alongside of them two other passages. One in the first chapter of Jeremiah's prophecies. At the end of verse 5, I have appointed thee a prophet unto the nation.

The other in the first chapter of the book of the Acts, verse 8. Ye shall receive power when the Holy Spirit is come upon you. And ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria. And unto the uttermost part of the earth.

I have appointed thee a prophet unto the nation. Unto the uttermost part of the earth. A very brief contemplation of the context of each of those two passages will reveal that they have many things in common.

And amongst them some things are very great, indeed are the greatest importance. The one inclusive thing which they have in common, as lies right on the surface, is that here is a ministry God appointed and heaven governed unto all the nations. That was Jeremiah's calling, or shall we say the calling of the prophet.

That was the church's calling and ordination. The ministry of the church. There are, alongside of that inclusive fact, or contained in it, these other features.

Each of these, both in the case of the prophet and of the church, was linked with that past eternal intention of God. The present, in each case, was seen to be bound up with something that had always been in God's intention. The complete statement in verse 5 of chapter 1 of Jeremiah is a tremendously suggestive, significant statement.

That before Jeremiah ever had a being in this world, the Lord knew him, called him, formed him, and appointed him. So that his very being was linked with something before time. That is perfectly true of the church as we so well know.

The present, in the prophetic ministry, in the church's vocation, thrown back into those eternal thoughts of God. That one eternal intention. In the second place, in each case, God is seen acting again because a cold vessel had failed him.

How true that was in the case of the prophetic, or the prophet's ministry. The vessel that God had called, with which he had taken such infinite beings, had failed him in this intention of his. We know how true that was.

The time, the great crisis, out of which the church came, was born. One cold vessel, nation, had completely failed. The Lord was reacting.

The case of Jeremiah, in the case of the church, in the way of recovering a vessel, or constituting a vessel, in relation to the failure that had been and was. In the third place, each of these, Jeremiah, representatively as of prophetic ministry, and the church, was an embodiment of God's sovereign ways of working in relation to his intention. It is fascinating.

It is tremendously instructive and helpful to study, to observe, God's sovereign ways with Jeremiah as his servant. And how those ways with him set forth God's principles of service at all times. It is on this wise that God works.

And if we want to know what true service to God is, we have to look into the life of Jeremiah and others. And not only by what they say, but to see God's handling of them, God's dealing with them, God's relationship to them. There we learn the way, the laws of the service of God.

I'm making these statements, they've got to be explained as we go on. This is the foundation. What is true of the ministry of the prophets, represented so largely by Jeremiah, whom I consider the greatest of the prophets, was true and is true of the church.

The church is the embodiment of God's principles of service. Its very history shows how God works, on what line God works. It's like this.

A prophet unto the nations, a ministry to the uttermost parts of the earth, is constituted on certain quite clearly defined laws. And God is the one who makes those laws and applies them, and keeps the history of every chosen vessel to those laws. Here with Jeremiah, as with me, we have the spiritual history of a chosen vessel.

And if you were to look into it, you would see that this is true to type. The history of every chosen vessel is more or less the repetition of the history of these vessels alone. The vessel embodies something that is spiritual history with God.

It's not just objective. I'm trying to say that the vessel is not just picked up and used and spoken through. But a history is wrought in that very constitute.

It is a spiritual experience out of which its ministry comes. That is a very important thing ever to remember. No vessel chosen of God will be allowed for long while in his hands to get outside the realm of reality.

And often it's terrible reality. God is doing something before he is saying something. And all the singing comes.

Now, the focal point of all this is fellowship with God. Fellowship with God. That is a deep and inexhaustible fellowship.

A very great deal of weakness, confusion, and failure is traceable to one basic defect. It is failure to recognize the real nature of God's call to any life, to any instance. The real nature of God's call to you and me, either individually or collectively, is a call into fellowship with himself.

We have other ideas about what it is to be a Christian, to come to the Lord, however we may put it. But the fundamental thing about any call of God to any life, to any instrument, his choice of any vessel, the fundamental factor is this. Upon which everything else is based where he is concerned.

Fellowship with himself. The Bible contains a great many things that you no doubt realize. But it could be truly said that the whole Bible is gathered into this one thing.

From the creation of man right the way through to the end. The one thing that governs everything in the Bible is God seeking man and his creation on the basis of fellowship with himself. What a lot is gathered into that.

How many aspects of that, but that is the one thing. The Bible is all about that. And if Christianity is the spiritual sum of the Bible, as undoubtedly it is, then Christianity rests upon this one thing.

Fellowship with God. Fellowship with God. We are called, and this is a statement of scripture, into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ.

And the Son has made it unmistakably clear, indeed he has taken pains to make it clear, that the relationship between himself and his Father, which was a relationship of perfect, is the relationship that he desires to exist between his own himself and the Father. They in us, we in them, as I am the Father, so they. That is the sum and the center of true Christianity.

It is fellowship with God. Perhaps it is necessary to step back to what was said immediately before that. A great deal of confusion and weakness and failure is due to our not recognizing that that is what it is all about.

Why are we Christians? Why do we belong to the Lord? What does it all mean? What is it all about? The answer, dear friend, you can apply it to every detail and you will find it fits. The answer is fellowship with God. That is what he is working at.

And through that he does all his work. So that the closer, the fuller the fellowship, the better and the greater the service that God calls true service. You can see by only a superficial knowledge of the life of the prophets, who indeed were the great servants of God, that God did take infinite pains to see that these men were not just mechanical contrivances to serve some end of his.

They were men whose lives were brought into the deepest fellowship with God. And out of that all their service came. That explains the New Testament.

Listen. We should not have 90% of the New Testament if that were not true. 90% and one could press it beyond that.

90% of the New Testament bears down upon this one thing. God's seeking fellowship on the part of his church with himself. And that of course includes the individual believer.

Well that is what the Bible is about and that is what the New Testament in particular is about. But further, it is a fellowship called in relation to vocation. It is not only in a secondary way a call to salvation.

It is a call to salvation, but that is by the way shall we say. But we make everything of salvation in our interpretation of Christianity. Salvation of course is essential.

Nothing can be apart from it. But God's call, God's call, while through salvation essentially, is not ultimately the call to salvation. It is to vocation. It is to vocation.

It is a call according to purpose. And the vocation to go back again is only possible by fellowship. It is a fellowship vocation.

A vocation springing out of fellowship with God. Perhaps I must pause to say this. Perhaps you from time to time or even now could argue back on what I have said.

Many there are who are doing a lot of good work for God. Indeed there is a tremendous amount of what is called Christian work or service. And it is possible to be carried away with the service, with the work.

But listen. If those concerned are really in the hands of the Lord. If their lives have really been surrendered to the Lord and are under the government of the Holy Spirit.

You will find this. That God is very, very careful about things in the life of which he does not approve. And you don't get away with it.

There is something there that the Lord does not agree with. You come up against it. It is possible for your whole life to be held up.

You have a bad time. The Lord is working in you to will and to do for his good pleasure. That which is well pleasing in his sight is working in you.

You are not just some thing doing a lot of things. You are a sphere in which God is at work doing things. And being very, very painstaking, careful, and meticulous.

And this involves a considerable amount of exercise and sometimes of pain and suffering in our relationship with the Lord. Because of this one thing. Vocation, real vocation, real service springs out of a fellowship of life and character with God.

There is no true fellowship with God only on the basis of character, is there? Our characters are all contrary to God, persistently, habitually. There is no fellowship with God. It breaks down at once.

That's why. If something goes wrong with us, everything is brought to a standstill until we have got to the Lord to get it right. That's simple Christian life experience.

Now let's take our steps again. The basis of everything is fellowship with God. The fellowship with God is a vocation fellowship.

It has a purpose in view. A work to be done. A service to be fulfilled.

Thirdly, that vocation relates to the nations. It relates to the nations. Everyone called of God into fellowship with God is called into a vocation.

And that vocation is a nations vocation. The horizon of your life when you are brought into fellowship with God's Son can never be small, little, limited, local. It immediately reaches out.

You become aware of the greatness of the range of everything into which you have come. You become a part of this thing which God has had in mind from eternity. A world for himself.

A world for himself. That's what we are born into in our new birth. The nations.

You are a part of the church. And you are that if you are born of the Spirit. Baptized in one Spirit into one body.

Do you see that the first thing that the Lord Jesus said about the church which was about to be born was the uttermost parts of the earth. That's your vocation. That's your setting.

That's your calling. That's your horizon. The uttermost parts of the earth.

Now don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying that every one of you here this afternoon has got to go to the uttermost parts of the earth. I'm saying that's your setting.

You are to have no less a range of responsibility than that. No less a sense of commitment than that. It is the nations which are the vocation of the church.

And therefore of every member of it. If this book of the Acts from which we've taken the key verse sees Christianity precipitated by heaven into this world. For that's undoubtedly what it was.

Christianity, I don't like the term Christianity but it serves our purpose. We use the term the church. People get also wrong ideas.

But if this book of the Acts, let me repeat, sees Christianity precipitated by heaven into this world. It takes its rise from verse 8 of chapter 1. Ye shall receive power, the Holy Spirit coming upon you and ye shall be witnesses unto me in Jerusalem, all Judea and Samaria and unto the uttermost parts of the earth. Now you see what's presented there? Three things.

A called company. A called company. That word called becomes very specific and very inclusive as you go on through the New Testament.

But there it is. It is a company called by heaven into being. It is an endowed company.

A company called, an endowment given to that company. Ye shall receive power, the Holy Spirit coming upon you. It is a company with a vocation.

Ye shall be witnesses unto me, to the uttermost part of the earth. Called, endowed, commissioned or entrusted with this worldwide vocation. You go on into this book of Acts so called and you see that heaven, heaven which initiated this, heaven which precipitated this, heaven which constituted this, takes infinite pains all the way along to prevent this thing settling down and becoming merely localized.

This is as big as heaven and heaven is going to accept nothing smaller than itself. The principle is going to be applied all the way along. Heaven is going to keep the nations in view to the end.

So you see the persons who lead the church, and I use that word, that language, carefully. The persons who lead the church. The church fulfilled its vocation because of heaven given inspirers and leaders.

But notice how heaven had taken pains to undercut in the persons concerned anything less than its own dimension. How heaven had taken pains to undercut in the persons concerned anything less than its own dimension. Very much has been said about Stephen.

Do you know why Stephen was martyred? Do you know why Stephen was martyred? There is only one explanation and it is the explanation. He charged Israel and Israel's leaders with having failed God in their great vocation unto the nations. They had drawn in, settled down in an exclusiveness and pride and conceit that they were the people and the only people.

They had it all. They called the Gentiles dogs of the nations. They were the people.

And it was because Stephen struck at the very heart of that localization and exclusiveness that he was martyred. We did again what he said. That was it.

Paul, the only explanation of Paul is this. God had cast him in the mold of the universal. The worldwide.

And took those pains, those pains which resulted in perhaps the greatest miracle of the apostolic church. That a rabid, bigoted, pharisee of the pharisee should become the apostle of the Gentiles of the nations. His whole background, training, everything, like Jeremiah's, was ordered, arranged by God even before his birth.

And at his birth and through his childhood to constitute him this man who would become God's vessel then in relation to that worldwide purpose concerning Jesus Christ. You see the Holy Spirit working with the persons on that line. You see him working with the places.

The places. And Jerusalem was tending, that's to say the least of it, to become the localized center of everything. Dominate, govern and hold everything to itself.

And heaven moved in and said this is not my idea. It's not my idea. One scattering blur of all that had to yield to heaven.

They went everywhere to fulfill the great design unto the uttermost parts of the earth. And you notice how by the Spirit, by the Holy Spirit the apostles were so strategic in this very matter of the centers that they chose. Out from which whole areas, large areas could be touched.

Heaven was working on that principle all through the book of the Acts. This is a world vocation. Now you see how clear these things are in the case of Jeremiah.

That statement of Jeremiah which we have quoted has a tremendous amount of history behind it. Jeremiah was a priest by birth. He was of the line of Abiathar.

And do you remember that it was Abiathar who was guilty of complicity with Achish in seeking to take the throne from Solomon, God's chosen successor to David. The result was that Solomon sent Abiathar the high priest away to his own home in Anatol. Banished for life and for good and put right out of the high priesthood.

Come down the years and arrive at Jeremiah. He is in his home in Anatol. He is there serving in this limited way in a prescribed priesthood.

Little place, some 40 odd miles from Jerusalem, carrying on some kind of priestly work in a little locality, not even in Jerusalem. And then it says the word of the Lord came to Jeremiah. And said, and I like to paraphrase it or to put it into my own words, look here I've got something bigger than this for you.

I have appointed thee a prophet to the nations. Out of this, this is not my fault for any servant of mine. Some little hole in a corner thing that is not accepted, recognized.

And if you wonder if that is true, we've made a great deal and I suppose we still may make a great deal of it for our own comfort of the word that Jeremiah used when he answered the Lord. I am a child, I cannot speak. Many of us have made a lot of that as I say for our own consolation.

But when Jeremiah used that word I have discovered that he didn't mean what we mean by a child or the word does not mean that in the Hebrew. It means I am one who is not yet recognized by men. I haven't yet got standard or status.

I have not been accepted. Perhaps that's more comforting still. But the Lord said, say not I am one without status or recognition or acceptance.

Thou shalt go to all to whom I send thee. I have appointed thee a prophet to the nations. Here is God's idea coming out today and you see all the nations are in view with God.

And he is moving here sovereignly and we have much to say about his sovereign movement in this connection. Moving sovereignly in relation to the nations. May be firstly through his own people but it's the nations that are in view with him.

Now dear friends if we get in line with heaven. We really get in line with heaven because both here in the Old Testament and there in the New in Acts it is heaven that is on the move. Heaven has got things in hand.

All this is heaven on the go. If we get in line with heaven we shall come spontaneously into these three things. Behold of this.

You forget much else. We shall come into line with a heavenly calling. A heavenly calling.

In other words a heavenly vocation. Get into line with heaven and we almost automatically come into line with a heavenly calling, a heavenly vocation. When we get into line with heaven we spontaneously get into

line with a heavenly endowment for the vocation.

We shall receive power. And when we get into line with heaven we get into line with God's ultimate object. A people out of the nations and then the nations for his possession.

In line with heaven a call. A call according to power. In line with heaven an endowment.

Heaven takes responsibility. Aren't we grateful for that? Aren't we grateful for that? What a lot of history that explains. The Lord's servants, the church, for us, just this, that having come to the place of the most utter abandonment to God, to Christ, to be here on this earth only for him.

He's taken responsibility for all that is required. Jeremiah may have some terrible experiences, some terrible times. May look sometimes as though it's the end and an awful end.

But you know quite well that God saw him through. Took responsibility. And that his ministry was successful, although it seemed to be a failure.

But it's got to follow, haven't you, through in the chronicles of Israel. And how did the chronicles begin? That the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled. The Lord stirred up the spirit of Cyrus, made a decree.

Jeremiah comes into his own. God has taken responsibility for seeing that this heaven-given mandate does not fail. Come into that when we come into line with heaven.

And we can never be in line with heaven. And be on narrow, confined, exclusive line. Heaven's view is the nation's or the uttermost part of the earth.

Heaven acts sovereignly to that as we have. Let it be understood, dear friends, that we don't make Christianity. We initiate or project nothing.

Heaven does all this. Heaven does all this. We shall see perhaps as we go on more of this heavenly initiative.

But what I'm trying to emphasize is this. That we get into line with heaven and the rest follows. Oh, how necessary it is not to get out of line with heaven.

We can fail to come into line with heaven. We can turn aside from heaven's line. But if we come into line with heaven, everything else follows.

It's spontaneous. It is spontaneous. It happens.

You haven't got to organize and plan and scheme and try to make something. Have elaborate programs of Christian activity. It happens if you're in line with heaven.

It's spontaneous. Heaven does it. We are but the channels of vessels.

We are not the originator. Heaven goes on. Heaven is going on.

We step aside. Heaven is going on. If we rebel, heaven is going on.

Heaven's attitude is always that. I'm going on. You coming or you going to be left behind.

Just like that. Our life, our service depends entirely upon where we are. Not in the first place upon what we are, but where we are.

Not on what we try to do or make, but where we are. Are we in the place, in the place, where heaven can go on with us and through us? You know quite well that this is the full revelation that has been given to us in one short book of the Bible. It's just that.

Everything there is so full, so strong, so rich, so spontaneous. A letter to the Ephesians. In the heavenlies, in the heavenlies, in Christ.

The vast range of the divine powers. Well, for the present we must break off. Here, the primary point is this.

Christians, believers, children of God, people of God, are the result of a divine act in relation to a superlative purpose in the heart of God. He did not choose me, but I chose you. A divine act.

A divine act. We all have to come there, even at the beginning. We may be told that we can decide for Christ and we can choose the Lord.

We may think that we do it. We know quite well that nothing really happens until we come to the place where if God doesn't do something, it's all nonsense. It's all empty.

Sooner or later that is where we all have to come. It must be from beginning to end, all of God. Our existence and our service is the result of a divine act.

And that divine act relates to this great vocation in the heart of God, which has to do with nothing less than all the nations. All the nations. As we shall see in the first place, it is taking out of the nations, but it does not stop there.

In the last place it is. The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdom of God. Really necessary to go on from that point, but for the afternoon that will be enough.

I can only hope that with all this you catch a glimpse of something. We have so often said it is no little thing to belong to the Lord. To be in relation to the Lord.

It is no lesser thing than to be an integral part of this which was conceived in the heart of God before he made the world. In relation to that world. Concerning his Son, you and I have by divine act been called according to that.

But we shall find the greatness of the Lord. The greatness of his resources. Not brought down to the little measure of our personal horizon.

But as we are lifted clear of all that into the full range of God's purpose concerning his Son, there we shall make discoveries of how great the Lord is in his resources, his ability to get us through. And if you want proof of that, if you want proof of that, there is one very good source and kind of proof with which perhaps some of you are not a little familiar. That the more you are in fellowship with God's ultimate full purpose, the more intense and bitter and relentless will be the activities of hostile forces.

That is perfectly clear. But it is a compliment. Perhaps we don't like those kind of compliments, but it is a compliment to anything when the devil hates it and would seek to destroy it.

So what counts most for God or could count most for God will be the target of most of the enemy's activities. And that's a significant thing. We need our initial thirst, don't we? A glorious thirst.

On high. From the beginning. Our.

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