

Vocational Fellowship - Part 3

by T. Austin-Sparks

Fellowship with God unto a vocation is the heart of the Bible and Christianity, and the basis of the church's existence and ministry.

Scripture: Jeremiah 1:4, Jeremiah 1:6-7, Matthew 5:14-15, Revelation 1:20, Revelation 22:13

Topics: "Fellowship"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the disintegration, division, confusion, and paralysis that can occur within the church. He relates this to the state of Israel during the time of the prophets and the churches in the New Testament. The speaker emphasizes the importance of maintaining a true fellowship with God and being a testimony to the world. He highlights the tragic tendency of churches to turn inward and become self-focused, losing sight of their world ministry. The sermon draws from the book of Jeremiah to emphasize the need for a dominant consciousness of being part of a great world ministry.

Transcript

Before we read again from those places which have been before us in the former gatherings of this season, may I say to you that I really have a sense that the Lord has something to say to us of a very vital character just now, that we are not here and I am not here in ministry just to give so many addresses or so much teaching from the Bible, but rather that there shall be a word from the Lord for this time. I don't know how you view it, whether you think about it or not, but if you allow me to say this on my own part, that I approach these times with a very serious, solemn, seeking of the Lord that there shall be a word from him for the hour. And you will forgive me if I say that on my own part in these times I always have to have in mind the thought that it may be the last time, the last conference in which I minister to you here.

And with that thought, I am the more earnest in my seeking of the Lord shall not be just words, but a message, and a message from him. And I say this by way of seeking to draw you to the seriousness of such a time, if it should be that the Lord wishes to speak to us for the hour. And my sense is that it is so.

Whether those of you who have been here thus far have been able to discern the essential message in all that has been said, I want to focus down upon that this evening, and with the help of the Lord, try to help you to see what that word is that I believe the Lord wishes us to have just now. Having said that, let us read again from the beginning of the book of Jeremiah's prophecies. First chapter, verse 4. Now the word of the Lord came unto me, saying, Before I formed thee, I knew thee.

And before thou camest forth, I sanctified thee. I have appointed thee a prophet unto the nation. Then said I, Our Lord God, behold, I cannot speak, for I am a child.

But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child. For to whomsoever I shall send thee, thou shalt go. And whatsoever I shall command thee, thou shalt speak.

Be not afraid because of them, for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord. Then the Lord put forth his hand and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth.

See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to pluck up and to break down and to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant. And then again, Acts 1.8. 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.

Now as I have said, we are this evening concentrating upon the heart of things. For give some reiteration of the view to so focusing everything. The heart of the Bible, the heart of Christianity, of the Christian life, the heart of Christian experience and all God's dealings and God's ways with us, with his people.

Is fellowship with himself unto a vocation. Fellowship with God vocationally. Not fellowship as something in itself or an end in itself.

But fellowship unto a vocation in time and in eternity. If you would keep that in mind continually, all the time, it would explain everything. Because that is the explanation of the Bible from beginning to end.

And of all that there is there from man's creation and the creation of the world to the glorious consummation. And fellowship, their final glorious and wonderful statement. And his servants shall serve him and they shall see his face.

That's vocation in fellowship, isn't it? It means anything at all. And you know that that stands at the end of the Bible as the ages of the ages take the place of time. Now I want to be very careful, not concerned to preach.

I want to talk and make sure that what is said is from my side explained carefully. And I want you to come into this with me and make it your business to try to understand and grasp what is being presented. We have taken these verses from the beginning of Jeremiah's great ministry.

Great in every sense. Stretching over some 45 years. From there about.

So full and so meaningful. And we have seen how it began. How the Lord laid his hand on him.

How the Lord spoke to him and what the Lord said to him. And what his great commission was. You follow through this lengthy book and you find that all working out from chapter to chapter to the end.

That beginning with all its towns is working out. Now Jeremiah is a representative prophet. You may have your preferences amongst the prophets.

And when you heard me say that I think that Jeremiah is the greatest of the prophets, you might not agree. Because you like Isaiah better. Or someone else.

Well that doesn't matter. Jeremiah is a prophet to the nations through the nations. And is representative of the prophetic function and ministry.

Now what I want you to grasp is this. It does not matter one little bit who the prophets were. It does not matter that there were prophets who bore these names.

Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea and all the rest. You can dismiss the names. And if you like in a sense dismiss the men as men.

But you must keep and lay hold of this. That these men were a function, a divine and heavenly function amongst the people of God and in this world. And you've got to get hold of the function.

That is the thing that God was doing through them. And that is not confined to the Old Testament prophets. The prophets of Israel.

There are prophets in the New Testament church. The church of the New Testament takes up the function. We are not given the names of the prophets, all of them in the New Testament church.

But we are told that they are there. And he gave some apostles and some prophets. This ascended Lord in the gifts to the church.

And in as much as he has not marked them out by name in the New Testament church, all of them, I suppose Paul was one. And some of the others who are known to us by name. Fulfilled that particular ministry.

But in as much as he has not given us the names of the prophets in the New Testament dispensation. That doesn't matter. That only bears out what I say.

It is the function that matters. Not the name or the person. It is the function.

And the function which goes a long way back before Isaiah and Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Abraham was a prophet. He called a prophet.

Things started a long way back. It comes right on. The function.

What was it? Related to this one essential, basic, central thing. The whole matter of fellowship with God in vocation. Now you can take that to your Bible.

And the Bible will prove that that is right. Fellowship with God. Real relationship with God in oneness of heart.

Oneness of heart. Unto a vocation. Now that prophetic ministry and the prophets were related in their ministry, their work.

Not to themselves in this matter. Not to themselves in this matter. But to the people that God meant to have the race in that position.

A people in that relationship fulfilling that vocation. They were the prophets of Israel. But the whole point of their life was that Israel as a nation, as a people should be in that relationship with God.

A fellowship to a worldwide vocation. That is why God chose Israel. To put them at the center of the nations.

In order that in this particular and peculiar relationship with himself in fellowship they might fulfill a divine vocation amongst the nations and to the nations. That if by response to God's overtures all men might come into that relationship. The whole world.

It was open to the whole world to come into that relationship with God. Don't make any mistake about it dear friends. For our way of speaking often betrays a faultiness in our conception.

We so often hear people in prayer and other ways speaking of the redeemed in the earth. Praying for the redeemed in the earth and the mentality is that the redeemed is synonymous with the saved. It is not.

It is not. Every child of Adam has been redeemed. Every child of Adam has been redeemed by the cross of the Lord Jesus.

There is not a man, woman or child on this earth that has not been redeemed. The great tragedy, the two-fold tragedy is that so few know that they are redeemed and that so many who are redeemed will not accept their redemption. Judgment you see will rest upon that.

The refusal to have something so costly which is theirs by right. Well that's by the way the function issuing from this fellowship is to let the nations know what God has done by the cross of his son for them. And to bring the nations into that relationship with God which will mean that the nations serve him.

Serve him. But come back. This is what is meant by the prophetic ministry.

Do not think of prophets or prophetic ministry as bound up with a certain cult, a certain class of people. Or speak of in Old Testament terms of priests and prophets and kings. Oh what a lot has to be done in our mentality over this.

The church of Jesus Christ is called into the great prophetic ministry through fellowship with him. It is a prophet nation to the nations. If you're in it, you're in that.

You can call yourself a prophet if you like. It's better not. But it's true if you really are in this vessel.

Your function, your function, your vocation is far beyond yourself. And yourself it's to the uttermost part of the earth in some way. But I'm anticipating.

This is the meaning of what is in the Old Testament. The ministry work of the prophets. It's a ministry that does not end with them.

It's not confined to them. It's a ministry brought right on. And while there is a need for this particular function, it will go on.

Right on to the end. Now you see that while this was true and it is so patently true of those called the prophets in the Old Testament, this was the real nature, the essence of the call of disciples. The very disciples of the New Testament of Christ became disciples on this basis.

And he chose twelve that they might be with him. That's fellowship. And that he might send them forth.

That's vocation. These two always together. Discipleship rests on that.

Now you might be unprepared to call yourself by any of the other names. But I'm quite sure you would be prepared to call yourself a disciple if you belong to the Lord. At least that is our relationship with him.

A disciple. Whatever it is. Whatever that means.

A follower. A taught one. One under instruction.

Whatever it means. It's just that basic initial relationship to him. A disciple.

And note again, discipleship, the very first phase of the Christian life, rests upon this fellowship unto vocation. Discipleship was that. Apostleship, and again we put a ring round a certain class and call them the apostles.

Well of course, in a sense that's right, but in another sense it's wrong. Every one of us is a sent one. If you haven't got that consciousness that you are a sent one, then there's something defective about your Christian life.

You may only be sent on a very short errand. Within a very short geographical limit. But you are there as sent by God.

And apostle simply means that. Sent one. Sent one.

The whole content of apostleship is just this. Fellowship unto vocation. And when you leave the individual aspect and move to the collective, do remember dear friend, do remember that while the book of the Acts of course includes necessarily individuals, all the individuals.

The book of the Acts is concerned with the church. Firstly, the church universal. The whole church.

And the church has its very existence upon this one exclusive and inclusive basis. The church is the apostolic church. The apostle church in this sense.

The whole object of the church, and it has none other, is to have a people in fellowship with the Lord to a worldwide vocation. Well that's obvious in the book of the Acts. You see, fellowship unto vocation.

That is the explanation of the church. And when you break up the church, in the right way, into churches. Churches.

The churches. What is the divine idea, mind about churches? Here and there. Planted.

Planted by heaven. Throughout Asia. Throughout Europe.

Anywhere. Here or there. Where are you come from? What is the divine idea of a company, smaller or larger, in any particular location? It's the same.

Fellowship with God unto a world vocation. A world vocation. Churches exist for that.

You got a hold of that? The ministries divinely given from heaven relate to that one thing. Is it a ministry of instruction in the companies unto the person? A ministry of instruction. The ministry of instruction is to result, is intended to result in this double thing.

A fellowship with the Lord. Being right and clear and true and full unto vocation. Any other function in the church or the churches has this same object in view all the time.

The Holy Spirit's presence and activities is all on this basis and on this line. All discipline. All chastening.

All correction. All empowering. Everything that the Holy Spirit will do directly or through instrumentalities has one thing in view.

The right relationship to the Lord. Can you challenge that? Can you dispute that? The right relationship with the Lord. With the object of making those so rightly related, his vehicles and instruments to a wider circle than themselves.

He gave some apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers, for what for? The rest of the statement is, for the making complete of the saints unto the work of the ministry. Unfortunately the punctuation has spoiled that statement. But as a whole, the perfecting or making complete of the saints unto the work of the ministry.

The saints who are to fulfill the ministry. It's the church that is the anointed vessel of ministry. You come into the church, you come into that which is the divinely chosen from all eternity before I formed thee I knew thee.

Chosen from eternity, called in time, endowed from heaven. You come into that church and you come into a place where these two things are implicit from heaven's standpoint. Fail there, you fail of the very meaning of your Christian life and of your church relatedness.

Fellowship with the Lord. Fellowship with the Lord. That's what ought to be in our individual Christian life and in our life together.

Companies of the Lord's people. Basic thing, fellowship with the Lord, but not stopping there. Unto vocation.

Unto vocation. World vocation. So you see the meaning of this ministry.

So far as the prophets were concerned, and they spoke sometimes like thunder, sometimes with broken hearts. Why? Why? Because they knew, they knew dear friends, what I am this night trying to make you know. They knew that if this relationship with the Lord, this real fellowship with the Lord, resulting in this real worldwide vocation, of representing Him to the nations, if that broke down, the very, very meaning of their existence was gone.

There was nothing for it but God to put them aside. When God did set aside any vessel that He had brought in for that purpose, be it a whole nation, send it away into captivity and exile. It was for this thing only.

You have failed in the thing for which you were brought into being. You have failed in the thing for which you were brought into being. To represent me in the nation.

To express me to the nation. Failed of your vocation because you have lost your fellowship. That sums up the prophets, doesn't it? Their cry, their appeals, their warnings, their thunderings, and their broken hearts.

And you can see at once if you know Jeremiah, and that he is representative of this particular ministry. You can see at once how true that was. How he cried, speaking for God, my people, my people have committed too evil.

They have forsaken me, the fountain of water, and have hewn out systems, broken systems, man-made contrivances in the place of the living God. That was Jeremiah's cry, or one of his cries. And I am afraid of bringing in too much detail from this long book that if I could take up thing after thing to show that it comes back to this.

People are out of touch with God, and therefore out of touch with the nation so far as a testimony is concerned. Now dear friends, let's come right home in all faithfulness to ourselves. Whether here in this place or in any other place where you may be with the Lord's people.

If ever the Lord raises up or plants an instrument, a vessel, in any place, he does it on this alone basis, on the one side, to bring into the closest and fullest and deepest fellowship with himself that is possible. And on the other side, with the world in view, not themselves in view, not themselves in view, but the world in view. Believe that.

A world testimony is always God's thought in any selective choice and appointment of His. And listen, the essential to the very life of such a people is a dominant sense and consciousness of being in a world ministry. You forget everything else, hold that, and carry it forward for all time to come.

You must dear friends, individually, and you must as companies of the Lord's people wherever you are, you must if you are to conform to the divine mind in your existence, you must have this dominant consciousness that you stand related to a great world ministry. Over that the battle will rage. Anything to weaken that, to dispose of that, to spoil that, break that up, paralyze that, end that.

Don't you see? That every time God has moved in a prophetic way, I mean on this principle of recovering or securing something according to His mind in fullness, every time He has moved, the movement has had a far horizon. It has had something far beyond itself in view. In the days of its livingness, its primal freshness, oh how it spontaneously moved out and became a world force.

No organization, no hewn out systems were necessary, no plans, no programs to do things in the world, but there the thing happened. It happened without effort, without propaganda, without advertising or publicity, it happened and the world was touched. Can we not go through those movements? Yes, we can mention so many of them.

There they are in history. Things that God did from heaven and the result was a wonderful fellowship with Himself in life. A wonderful fellowship with Himself in life.

I'm afraid to mention any one lest I spoil the picture. Some of you know. If I were to pick out the wonderful movement through the Moravian brethren, well it's so, so clear, evident with them on the one side it is a beautiful, wonderful fellowship with God.

Wonderful fellowship with God, their motto. And everything spoke of that. What a fellowship with God.

On the other side, how the world was touched then. Yes, a world testimony and a world impact. Quite spontaneous.

A repetition of what we have in the book of the Acts. Spontaneous. And so we could put our finger upon one thing after another and see this.

And then what? And then God. Now this is the tragedy. They turned in on themselves.

Every one of them turned in on itself, became something in itself, drew a circle round itself, constituted a hard and fast system of teaching to which you must conform. Regulations that you must observe turned in on itself. And what? Disintegration, division, confusion, and creeping paralysis.

Isn't that true to history? You see the reverse. Because that was the state of things, firstly in Israel in the days of the prophets, that we had these prophetic ministries. It's because of that was the situation which was growing in the churches of the New Testament that we have the messages, the beginning of the book of the Revelation to the seven churches in Israel.

Just that. Just that. They are lampstands.

They are lampstands. Jesus himself said, no man lighteth a lamp and puts it under a bushel. A lamp is a testimony for all to see the illumination of all within its ray, something not to live unto itself.

This has always been the peril, always been the battleground to maintain this twofold position. Living, unclouded, unshadowed fellowship with the Lord and a testimony to the world. Yes, beginning, if you like, locally, but ever and always, far beyond having that in view.

And it can be put to the test. It is true. So it works.

If the Lord has to chasten, discipline and sift all such activities and ministries, painful as they may be to those concerned, have this still in view, a recovery of fellowship with himself unto essential vocation. Now then, have you met that challenge, this very moment? Ask your own heart. Have you, dear friends, in your very constitution as a Christian, a sense that you do not live unto yourself, and you cannot live unto yourself, but that you are bound up with a great purpose, a great divine purpose, reaching out and on, drawing out your life.

Are you? If that is not true, you come into the category of she that liveth to herself is dead while she liveth. Is that true? True? Our life, very life, depends upon this, that we are in union with God with a purpose, with a vocation. And this is no small thing.

It draws us out to the uttermost part. The ends of the earth are our concern. The Lord wants us to go where we are ready to go.

But whether he calls us to the end of the earth or not, our hearts reach there with him for all his interests. And it's not sentimental. It's something, it's a part of our being.

Part of our being. Is that true of you? You just settle right down, nicely settle down into your nest, whatever that nest is. Well, remember the words about the Lord staring up the nest and casting out? That's not a very pleasant experience.

It'll have to be, if we settle down in our nest, if we put a limit that God does not put upon our calling, our vocation. Well, perhaps I've said enough. Here were these disciples in their fellowship with the Lord, being trained, disciplined, instructed.

And it was not all words where the Master and they were concerned. They had some bad times, painful experiences. Heading right up to the inclusive painfulness of the cross, it was all to prepare the way for a new Holy Spirit fellowship with the Lord unto their world vocation, to be with him that he might send them forth.

I think perhaps I should stop. Much more could be said and much more is in my heart to say, but I do feel that this is the word of the Lord. And it comes just right to this one thing.

You and I, every one of us, must be mastered and governed by a great sense of divine vocation in our existence, which vocation for its fulfillment, of course, demands a fellowship with the Lord that is close, that is pure. Because this vocation can never be truly fulfilled unless it is so. That is why the Lord is disciplining us, putting us through it so continually, having such short terms with us on wrongs, evil, questionable things, not letting us get away with it.

Run off, no holding us to it, and working deeply and thoroughly and perhaps drastically, his object is vocation. If you don't like the word vocation, it sounds too technical. It's testimony.

It's spiritual ministry, which is not going on to a platform here and there and everywhere with a Bible, but a life that knows the Lord, a life that is in fellowship with God. You can leave the preaching side. You can leave that.

Don't you worry about the preaching side, or the Bible teaching side as some particular and peculiar function. You needn't worry about that. Jeremiah got to the place where he said, I'll never preach again.

I'll never preach again. I'm not going to do any more of this talking. The preaching took charge of him.

He didn't take charge of the preaching. It came out of the fire burning in his bones. It's got to be like that.

But that fire only burns when you are in real touch with the Lord. That's where the fire burns. Well, have I said enough? Will you be patient, ask for grace to receive this? And do remember, do remember that most of our enemies, if not all of them, and there are many, many of them, most of our enemies have this one object as their target.

Our fellowship with the Lord resulting in our testimony to the Lord. He can undermine, undercut that by any means at all. He's going to do it.

And oh, how many are His men. The Lord help us to receive the world and to yield to it. And go back with this might be new commissioning.

Wherever you go to, go back. I am not here just for here, just to live in this small realm. I am not here with myself and my immediate circumstances as my horizon.

I am here as a part of something far bigger. I am a member of a church which was brought into being. A church universal brought into being for our world testimony to the Lord.

I affect that. I affect that consciously or unconsciously and mostly unconsciously. I affect that.

I touch it. My spiritual life means something to other people of the Lord. Don't know, dear friends, how many of your dark days and bad times are because some brother or sister or brethren and sister somewhere are going through it and you are involved in it.

Now that's New Testament teaching. One member suffer, all the members suffer. How often has come to us a sense of some brother or sister or some of the children of God having a bad time.

It's overcome our spirit and we've had to pray for them. Just had to pray for them. When we've learned the truth, it was just at that time that they needed our prayer and asking the Lord for special help.

It was laid on us. See, in this great spiritual system, time and geography have no place. We are met in our head with Christ Jesus.

Now that's another big matter. But it comes in here. We belong by our very relationship to Christ to something that is far-reaching.

And the vitals, the very vitals of that far-reaching vocation of the church of which we are a part is our relationship to the Lord. Our fellowship with the Lord. The Lord keep that pure.

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