

Vocational Fellowship - Part 6

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing spiritual crossroads and returning to the foundational truths of God's purpose for His people.

Duration: 53:43

Scripture: Jeremiah 6:16, Jeremiah 17:12, Matthew 6:33, Acts 2:42, 1 Corinthians 14:33, 2 Timothy 4:3, James 1:5

Topics: "Fellowship"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses a crisis that has been reached in the lives of the people. They are experiencing unrest, weariness, and a sense of futility. Some have accepted this way of life, while others are confused and fearful. The Lord comes in with his word, urging them to stand at the crossroads and reflect on their situation. He warns against forsaking the fountain of living water and instead creating broken systems that cannot hold water. The speaker emphasizes the importance of being in line with God's purpose and allowing the spontaneous flow of life to guide their actions.

Transcript

I'm going to repeat the fragment of scripture which has stood over our time together in this weekend, not to dwell particularly upon it, but to have it there as standing over all that we have to say. The prophecies of Jeremiah chapter 17 verse 12. A glorious throne set on high from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary.

And now for this present time, you turn back to chapter 6 and verse 16. Thus saith the Lord, stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths wherein is the good way, and walk therein. Stand in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths wherein is the good way, and walk therein.

At this point, in the ministry of the prophet, he is commanded to indicate to the people that they have come to the crossroads. That the position and the condition in which they were at the time represented, constituted for them crossroads. The roads were crossing and dividing, and from this time their choice of road was going to seal for them their future, determine their destiny.

At some point, which is not easy to trace or fix, at some point in their history, a deceitful current had entered the stream of their life. This may have been very small at first, as these things usually are almost imperceptible, the nature and meaning of which is not recognized, the significance of which is not measured. It had been so with these people, small, and yet as it went on, it gathered momentum, until the

time of these prophecies it had taken control and was carrying almost everything in its course.

The Lord knew about it, knew the trend of things, knew the implications, knew what it pointed to, and saw that people must be called upon to stop and face this whole situation. And this is the word with which he challenged them. Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, wherein is the good way, and walk therein.

The effect of this something, this foreign element, which had crept in, was to bring about an almost total loss of a central, controlling, integrating authority. That, by the way, is the point of this all-governing Word, chapter 17, a throne on high, the central, uniting government. That was what was needed, because, as I have just said, it was just that which had gone, resulting in complete confusion.

If there is no single voice of authority, no one center of government, no one uniting vision and purpose, then there is confusion. No one knows what is right and what is wrong, whether things are right or wrong. That's how it was then.

And that produced unrest, unrest, this appeal, as you notice in verse 16, chapter 6, walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls. Unrest, weariness with the whole business, a sense of futility, not getting anywhere, and then the crumbling to pieces, breaking up, divisions, and schisms, and conflicts. All for one reason, but that is how it was.

Some people, and it would seem a large number if not the mass, accepted this way that things were going, and abandoned themselves to it. Some others were confused and bewildered, died all. Some were fearful and distressed.

The Lord knew all about it, and came in with this word, crisis has been reached, you are at the crossroads, you have got to stop and consider. The first thing you notice is, stand in the waves, and see, stand, stop, pause, reflect, take in the situation, break this peril, stand at the crossroads, and see, look, take account, take note, for this is a critical time. That brings us right back to the whole message of this conference, so called, because the one uniting, coordinating thing in the life of any people of God, or any individual child of God, the essence of which is bound to bring conditions like this, like these.

The one, all integrating thing is a clear apprehension, and strong grasp of why we are God's people, why has the Lord called us to himself. Why do we exist as people of God? What we have been trying to see and to show, is that it is not just to be his people, not just to be different from other people in the world, not just to be a saved people, who are on our way to heaven, but he has called us, he has chosen us, he has brought us to himself, for a great purpose. And that purpose is to be instrumental in our time, we can leave past times and future times to those who belong to them, but in our time, to effect that measure which belongs to our time, of the purpose of God to bring all things into his son Jesus Christ.

To gather up, as the word is, to reunite all things in Christ, to bring back that which is his by eternal appointment of the Father. We dare not take time this evening to dwell upon that, but make no mistake about it, anything other than that, anything less than that, will undoubtedly result in the conditions which we find here in this book of prophecies. Firstly, arrested spiritual development, arrested spiritual development, having gone so far, then stop, and from that time, no progress spiritually, no enlargement of spiritual life, no increase of spiritual stature, arrested spiritual progress and growth, they had stopped in that.

Why? Not for a moment because they ceased to be the Lord's people, and not for one moment because they ceased to carry out the ordinances, and the ritual, and the forms, and the ceremonies, and all the whole system which had been given to them, which was their religious tradition and inheritance. They were as active in their temple activities, their sacrifices and ordinances as ever was going on. No, not because the outward forms of their relationship with God had ceased, not for these reasons, and we might add others to them, but for this one reason, they had ceased to realize that they were called to be the Lord's people, and that everything that was bound up with that had one object, to constitute them a people in this world, by which the world would be brought to know God, to constitute them an instrument unto the nations, unto the nations.

Now they had become something in themselves. The limits of their horizon were fixed with themselves. All this was turned into themselves, and they had either forgotten or completely violated the laws of their very existence, that they were raised up as a people by whom the nations should know God, and should be left with no excuse whatever for ignorance, and on the other hand, with all that which would make them understand what kind of God he is.

And what he requires. It was the vocation of the people that governed everything. The vocation of the people under that glorious throne on high from the beginning.

Integrated with that one all-governing throne purpose and throne vision, because remember dear friends all that we have said, that Jesus on the throne, the throne of heaven, embodies and represents the purpose of God for all the nations at large. One throne over them all, when the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdom of our God and of his Christ. That throne is the symbol of universal rights, authority, government vested in the Lord Jesus.

They had lost the vision of the throne, they had lost the vision of their calling, and they had lost their divine vocation, which is the very meaning of their existence. That being so, the purpose having fallen out, everything went. Everything went.

And it was on that one issue which included everything, and one issue does include everything, that this word came through Jeremiah, Paul the Halt. Paul the Halt, we're at the crossroads, we've got to look right into this thing for the nature of it, see, stand still. Now dear friends, before we go on, while you will see that this was true as to Israel at that time, we'll probably see features of it in our own time.

Let's come very close to this. If there should be arrested spiritual progress and growth in any life, or in any company of the Lord's people anywhere, or in the church at large, if that should be the state. While they are the Lord's people, while they're very busy in the Lord's things outwardly, and yet not spiritually growing, growing and increasing with the increase of God.

Now what I don't mean numerically, it may be that as well, but I mean spiritually growing, so that there's no doubt about it, there's a difference now from what even so long ago there was in the knowledge of the Lord, in the enjoyment of the Lord, in the understanding of the Lord, the meaning of the Lord. If it's not like that, stand still and ask, what's the meaning of this? You're at the crossroads. Sooner or later you'll have to recognize that, that you cannot just go on like this, unless you're going to throw everything away.

What does it mean? And while, of course, spiritual arrests may be due to many things, particular things in any one life or in any one place, the thing that I am bringing to you this time, as an inclusive thing, is just this. Stand still and ask, whether you may not have had your life, your spiritual life, brought into something

less than God intended, or into something other than God intended, and brought you into being for. Personally and collectively, whether some deceitful tyrant has crept in and is taking charge, resulting in something other, less, different from that which was the original vision, and that which is revealed to be the supreme purpose of God in the existence of the Church, which means you, individually, as a true Christian.

The way of progress, the way of growth, the way of life, is the way of the full purpose of God. The way of limitation is the way of something either less or other. Like that.

If there is confusion in your life, so that you don't know, you don't know what is right, what is wrong, if there's a loss of an all-governing authority that integrates, that unites, holds in one steady way, and you're scattered and divided, stand still, stand still, and see, and ask again, have I, somehow, for some reason, by some means, been sidetracked, got off the main way of God's intention? Got into something that is less, something that is other, that is different, not the whole counsel of God. Stand still. I'm sure that you will agree that spiritual progress and spiritual prosperity are bound up with this, an all-unifying, inspiring, dynamic purpose.

Like that, isn't it? Find a person or a people without a purpose, governs their whole life, touches everything, not only in their meetings, but reaches out through them to everything, in the homes and in the business. It's just, it's, it's, arms just reach out and affect everything. Everything is in the light of this one great all-governing object, the face of Jesus Christ in God's intention.

Fullness of place for Him, everything being made to bend to that, to bow to that, to serve that. I tell you, your life will be in confusion, and it will be a divided life, and it will be a weak life, it will be a limited life, unless you have come to this. My business, my home, all my affairs, my society, my occupations, my everything has got to focus upon this, the serving of God's end concerning His Son Jesus Christ.

That in all things, He shall have the preeminence. He shall come into His crown rights in this world. I may not be able to settle that issue in some distant land, may not be mine to see that that is so in India or some other place that is not my country to which God does not send me.

But here I am. Here, whether it be, forgive me, on a road, or Richmond, or Deel, or Canterbury, or any other place, it may be a limited spot, that's a part of the nations. That's just as much a part of the nations as any country in this world.

Don't be romantic and sentimental about China and India to the loss of that patch upon which God has put you. That locality, that town, that sphere of influence, that place of business, that home, that's in the nations as much as any other place is. And so far as God will help you, it's your business to see that Christ reigns there.

The throne is there. Everything is gathered to Him. You'll make spiritual progress if you have it like that.

You'll be a unified person or people if it's like that. One of the things that the Lord had to say through Jeremiah, you will read here as this, my people have committed two evils. They have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and have hewn them out cisterns, broken cisterns that can hold no water.

What a picture. In line with God's purpose, in full line with God's purpose, the river flows, the fountain springs, the spontaneous life wells over, spontaneous. As over against this, hewing out cisterns, hewing out all the labor, all the hard work, all the weariness, hewing out from solid rock of a cistern and then filling

it up and find there's a crack in it and it all seeps and leaks away which can hold no water.

Your work, your effort, your organization, what you are doing, instead of this spontaneous thing that God does. What a contrast. In line, and I know what I'm talking about dear friends, in line with God's purpose, the river flows.

On some other line, near what we call organized Christianity, we've got to do the work. We've got to find the resources. And isn't that just what Christianity is doing, laboring and toiling to find the resources to carry on Christian activities and largely leaking.

Oh, what a lot of leaky cisterns, disappointment, they can hold no water. The difference, in line with his purpose, it's spontaneous. It is so.

You have honest, conscientious work to do in the right way, but it's the flow. It's the flow of the life. It comes along this course, along this course of the divine purpose concerning the Lord Jesus.

We said this afternoon, God commits himself to that. He's with you in it and carries you along. If it's not like that, stand for the crossroads.

Stand and see. And at least ask, are we on some lesser line, some other thing? Are we trying to make something? Trying to constitute something? Trying to create something? Trying to form something? Are we doing that? Or are we in something that God is doing? God is doing. We are not carrying this.

This thing is carrying us. It's like that when you have your course set wholly in line with what that throne from above from eternity has meant. We are not carrying this.

This thing is carrying us. It's like that when you have your course set wholly in line with what that throne from above from eternity has meant. Everything gathered into the Son of God.

Stand, reflect, consider, take it all in. Allow yourself to be made aware of what this alternative is. What is this alternative? What is the meaning of it? If you look into this book and into the history of Israel, which brought them to the crossroads, you'll find they left the heavenly way and come down onto an earthly way.

Their original history indeed was a heavenly way. Everything was from heaven. Everything was linked with heaven.

Everything was meant to be like that. If you had gone through the tribes of Israel as they were there arranged around the tabernacle in the wilderness, gone through them, their thousands, you would have found that there was a certain, may I put it this way, fashion prevailing. Fashion in dress, for everybody had on the edge of their garment a blue fringe.

No, it was not the mark of the temperance society, but there it was. Blue was the predominant color in Israel and it was everywhere. And from what did it derive? There was one man right at the center and heart of the whole nation, the high priest, who had a marvelous blue robe.

And everything in Israel corresponded to that. It was like a piece of it. It was corporate blue.

It's a new phrase for you. Blue is the heavenly color. And God ordained this, you see, from center to circumference.

Everything was to be heavenly. So their food came from heaven. They were sustained from heaven.

Their guidance through the wilderness came from heaven. Their government came from heaven. All their times were appointed by heaven.

Their law was given from heaven. Their water came from heaven. They were, while here in this world a heavenly people, moving steadily on to a heavenly country.

The consummation of their heavenly life here. Well, that's the picture. They've been like that.

Been like that. And in the days when it was like that, there were days of joy, of harmony, but they had left their heavenly position while perhaps maintaining the forms. They left it and come down to earth.

Come down on to the level of the other peoples of the earth. You read the book. I can't take you through it, but there it is so clear.

So clear. And again and again that happened in Israel. It happened in the days of Samuel when they said, make us a king like unto the nation.

The Lord said to Samuel, they have not rejected me, thee they have rejected me. The glorious throne on high was rejected to have a throne on the earth. Throne on the earth.

The Lord let them have their throne and their soul and their king. But all these conditions followed. Frustration, limitation, came down to earth.

That's the battle. Keep on the heavenly level and not to be brought down, forced down, tricked down. But this deceitful current that came in had that with it to bring them down on to an earthly level.

Many of you may not understand what that means, but many of you do. Just the battle there. Something like the rest.

Something as they do it in this world. Something that is down here. But note the challenges.

Ask for the old part. Is there some hint in that? Some suggestion, some implication that the trouble, the trouble, the condition, the state of things was due to, oh we are tired of all this, let's have something new. Let's have something fresh.

Let's have a change. Let's have a change. You know one of the prophets put his fingers on that.

Where there are no changes, where there are no changes. People can't, can't just bear not to have variety, not to have changes, what they call freshness and so on. But there's a peril in that.

There is a freshness, a newness about the things of God, divine things and divine life. Something that is right. When it becomes something like this, oh we are tired of the old thing.

Tired of the old thing. Let's have something new. There may be something in that deceitful and so throwing off restraint and throwing off that which God established, that which God brought in and hankering after variety and novelty and something different.

You notice that course of things today in Christianity? It's always very near. And it becomes very artificial doesn't it? And strange and false, unnatural. Trying to be different.

It's about trying to be clever. Trying to be clever. Novel.

It's an awful evil. Ask for the old. Let's be very careful what we mean when we say we don't want.

That's just exactly what we do want and need. If the past is the old past, if the days of the apostles of the early church represent the old past, that's exactly what we do want. But here is something that is not true and right.

That is new. Oh I know how much there is in many aspects of newness in what is true. I'm not thinking about that.

This people throwing over everything that God had brought in and established as the basis of the life which had been in such fullness, spontaneity, progress. Throwing it all over. Tired of it.

Stand. See. Ask.

One other element in this state of things. You see, there were false prophets. Jeremiah's bane were the false prophets.

They were the thorns in his side. They were the ones who were making his life a life of contention. But what were the false prophets saying? Look into it again.

They were saying, don't you listen to Jeremiah. If you do, if you do, he'll lead you astray and you will lose your place and you will be found on the unpopular side. You will have the majority against you.

Now listen, it is not politic to go the way of Jeremiah. If you want influence, you want standing, you want position, don't you listen to Jeremiah. In a word, they wanted popularity.

Popularity. And Jeremiah was the most unpopular man on the face of the earth at that time. But was Jeremiah right? Was what Jeremiah stood for God's way? How did it work out? Pause.

Stand. See. This is the nature of a crossroads very often.

You've got to decide whether it is popularity you're after, whether it is the way of the majority vote, the way of the crowd, the multitude of most people, whether it is the way of the cross. You've got to decide. I don't know what is in it, but I do know of a book written by Dr. Wheeler Robinson.

I've never seen it, I've never read it, but I only know its title. And I know that it's appealed to by many. It's called The Cross of Jeremiah.

What a title. What a fine title for this whole book. The Cross of Jeremiah.

What is The Cross of Jeremiah? I say I don't know what's in this particular book, but I know what The Cross of Jeremiah was. It was the way of the minority. The way that was unpopular.

It was the way that was not the way of least resistance. It was the hardest way. That is always the way of the cross.

The crossroads. Is it policy? Is it popularity? Is it common acceptance? Or is it the way of the full purpose of God which may only be taken by a minority? So it works out. And that minority is an unpopular minority.

And about them the others say, don't you go that way? Don't you listen to them? Don't you follow them? You do? You see what you are in for, what you will lose? And policy becomes the ruling thing at the crossroads? Like that. Well I must close. Here is the inquiry at the crossroads as to really what is the nature of this thing.

And then the decision. The decision. Ask for the old paths.

The old paths. That old path of the New Testament which was by way of the cross was the path of the released Holy Spirit through an opened heaven. And what is there in all the creation that is to be compared with an opened heaven and a released Holy Spirit? And that was the old path of the book of the angels wasn't it? It was.

But that was by the way of the cross. It was the way of the exalted Christ upon the throne. And although like Jeremiah it meant for the church suffering, adversity, persecution, pain and cost.

Oh the wonder of that cross. I had thought that sometime during this weekend I would be able to put in a message on the sovereignty of the cross. But I can't.

But I have been fascinated as I have gone through the pages of the story of the cross to see that thought from one side, from the earthly human side, looks like tragedy. And defeat and the triumph of evil and the enemy can be seen from another side to be God working out sovereign purpose in a marvellous way. Even to hint at it is to open up a field of tremendous inspiration.

Oh there it is. There it is. The sovereignty of the cross.

They said this. The sovereignty came in and took hold of that and turned it in exactly the opposite direction from what they intended. Take one point if you like.

They said not Jesus but Barabbas. And then being pressed by Pilate they said we have no king but Caesar. Oh they never said a more foolish and utterly mad thing.

We have no king but Caesar. And they put their king, their true king on the cross. What happened? They got Caesar and he absolutely wiped out their nation in 70 years and scattered them over the world so that they never had a king through these 2000 years.

Alright. There is a throne above you see, above that cross. Working by that cross.

Pilate said put up an inscription and write it in three languages. Hebrew, Greek, Latin. The whole world on that cross.

Ask of me and I will give thee the nations for thine inheritance and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession and he did it by his cross. It is the sovereignty of the cross that wins the nations for Jesus Christ. So I could go on like this for an hour.

It is by the way of the cross. It is the way of the throne. It is the way of the open heavens.

It is the way of the released Holy Spirit. But ask for the old paths and walk therein. Your decision.

Weigh it all up. Look at it. Compare the values of the two ways.

This way and that. The crossroads of having decided. Oh though we gain the whole world.

Though we get everything down here and lose that which God meant. That inheritance in his son. It is not worth it.

This is the way I am going. The way of the cross. The Lord bring us there at this time.

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