

The Messenger Must Be the Embodiment of His Message

by T. Austin-Sparks

The messenger must be the embodiment of his message, and the message must be wrought into the messenger's own experience.

Scripture: Ezekiel 2:1

Topics: "Embodiment of the Message", "Responsibility of the Messenger"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes that the messenger must embody the message, using Ezekiel's three titles: 'Son of Man,' 'a watchman,' and 'I am your sign.' He explains that 'Son of Man' signifies God's original thought of man, while 'a watchman' denotes the responsibility to discern and declare God's timing and warnings. The title 'I am your sign' illustrates that the messenger's life must reflect the message they deliver, as seen in Ezekiel's experiences. Sparks stresses that true ministry arises from personal experience and transformation, making the messenger a living testament to God's truth. Ultimately, the church must express Christ as the corporate man, embodying His message in their lives.

Transcript

Now we come back again to the prophecies of Ezekiel. There is a large section of this book with which we shall not be able to deal in detail, so we must find some comprehensive way of dealing with it simply. I think that way will be by looking at the three different titles by which Ezekiel was called. Perhaps you have noticed that in these prophecies Ezekiel has three different titles, and these three titles gather into themselves this large section of the book - (1) "Son of man," (2) "a watchman," (3) "I am your sign."

"Son Of Man."

The first of these three titles is "Son of man." Look at chapters two and three:

And He said unto me, Son of man... (2:1);

And He said unto me, Son of man... (2:3);

And He said unto me, Son of man... (3:1);

And He said unto me, Son of man... (3:3).

And so it goes on right through the book. That is one of the main titles of the prophet. Perhaps you would like to go right through the book and note how many times "Son of man" occurs.

We note then, at the beginning, that this title was peculiar to the Prophet Ezekiel. No other prophet is called by this name in the same way. It marks out Ezekiel in a special way. Now we know that the Lord Jesus chose as His favorite title for Himself, "The Son of Man," but we must not think of Ezekiel in the same way. Ezekiel was unique among the prophets in this title, but Jesus as The Son of Man was unique among all men. So let us be careful not to confuse the two titles "Son of man" and "THE SON OF MAN." If there is any relationship or similarity, it is in the function, and not in the person. That is the matter that we shall now consider.

We have seen that on the Throne above it there was the likeness as of a man, and we have seen that the predominant feature of the cherubims was the man. Therefore, we take note of this place of man in this book; it is a special idea. We also know that man means representation and speech for God. Man is not only a person, he is a Divine idea. There is a man upon the Throne, and while that man is a person, he is not only a person, he is a Divine idea. The idea in God's Mind in creating man was that he should represent God. "Let Us make man after Our Own image, in Our Own likeness." Man is God's fullest thought, and God's final thought.

In the creation God ended with man, and He headed all things up into man. When God has reached such a man, He pronounces His verdict and takes His rest. When He has the man according to His intentions, then He says about everything, "It is very good"; and then God takes His rest. God finds His rest when He has His man according to His Mind.

However, that is not the end of everything. At that point God looks for reproduction. He says to that man: "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth." And the law of creation was that everything should reproduce "after its own kind." Things were never intended to change their form, but everything was given a definite and distinct form. It was a kind of creation, and everything was to reproduce after its kind.

You see, God has made man, and before man has fallen, God says, "Be fruitful, and multiply." God's idea was that unfallen man should multiply, and that unfallen man should fill the earth. But we know that man fell, and the earth was filled with a kind of man that God never intended. Therefore, God put a limit to his life; He fixed the number of his years so that man should not go on indefinitely. I think you see from this that God's idea is a man according to His Own Mind. In a full way, the Lord Jesus was that; therefore, He is "The Son Of Man," and in a sense we can say He was the ONLY Son of Man.

So, the principle of manhood is taken up for the people of God, and that is where Ezekiel comes in. It is not the person, but the function; it is the principle, so that "Son of man" speaks of two things. It means bringing into view God's original thought and pattern. That was a principle that the Lord was wanting to have realized in Israel. Israel is a man in God's eyes, but in this book of Ezekiel Israel is not the man that God intended. In this book Israel is a man which has been marred, and God is moving along the principle of manhood to recover that idea in Israel. Later we shall find that He was unable to do it in Israel as a whole, and He therefore sought to realize it in the remnant. However, the Old Testament closes with this idea as a complete failure in Israel.

When we move into the New Testament, we find ourselves in the presence of the one new man, that is, the corporate man which is the Church. But we are not going on to that this morning, we are just with the principle. In principle, "Son of man" means speaking in relation to an original thought and pattern of God.

You have got to recognize that as the key to the whole of these prophecies. What is it all about? What does this whole book mean in all its parts? Well, this title "Son of man" is scattered right over the whole book, and it means that the governing thought of God is this conception of man according to God's Mind. If God sends this collective man into captivity, it means that that man cannot stand before Him any longer. God must have another kind of man. The great illustration of that, of course, is the valley of dry bones - bringing up out of the grave of Babylon a new man with a new heart, and a new spirit.

Now I think that is enough to indicate the meaning of this title. God is moving for the recovery of His original thought. That thought has been lost. This is what Paul meant in speaking to Timothy as the "man of God." His appeal to Timothy was, "O man of God"; that is, God's man - that is what God is after.

We must take this up as to our ministry, and that brings us to this: What are we here for? What is the meaning of our ministry and our work? It is that God may have this corporate man according to His Own Mind. That is the meaning of Ephesians, chapter four:

Until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

God is working towards this corporate man. We must remember that God's idea is man. I would emphasize that because so many seem to think that God's idea is some organization, some institution, some thing that is called the Church, a way of doing things, a certain teaching - a whole system - and God is not after that. God is not after the Church just as the Church. The object of the Church in God's Mind is that it should be an expression of Christ! The Church is the Body of Christ. It is not a system of teaching. It is not a special form of practice. It is a Man, and it is Christ in corporate expression! We shall come to that later in this book of Ezekiel, but we take up this principle. It is a very important thing for us to recognize the corporate Man!

So this man-principle speaks of three things. First of all, a presentation - God presents His idea, and then a representation of something that expresses that which is presented, and then a declaration, a preaching concerning that. The thing is presented as a Divine thought, and then the thing is represented in a Body, and out of that comes the message.

Now, brethren, have you got those three things? First there is the vision, the Man is presented. You see the Man in the Throne. You get God's idea. God's idea is manhood, manhood of a certain character. From that God has a representation of this something which embodies the idea, and then when God has got that which embodies the idea, there is a message. We must not put it in the other order, preaching it first. We must first of all have seen it, and then there must be an expression of it. There must be that to which we can point and say, "This is it." The message must come out of something that actually exists according to God's Mind.

I think I need not stay with that any longer, but, you see, that applies firstly to Christ. You must first of all have seen the Lord, and then that must have produced something in you so that it is not only objective and abstract, but the Lord has done something in you as you have seen. And then out of that comes your ministry.

The same applies to the Church. First there must be a revealing of the Church, and then there must be a representation of the Church, and out of that exists a definite expression of the Church - the message goes out. It is almost impossible to preach the truth unless there is something behind it. It is essential that

we are able to say, "This thing works, and I can show you where it works." That will become very clear when we come to our next consideration in Ezekiel, but I do hope that you have got hold of this first idea, the principle in this first title, "Son of man." There is a very great deal of the Mind of God in that title.

"A Watchman"

Now we go to the second title of Ezekiel. In chapter three, at verse seventeen, it says, "Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the house of Israel.

"And the word of the Lord came to me saying, Son of man, speak to the sons of your people, and say to them, 'If I bring a sword upon a land, and the people of the land take one man from among them and make him their watchman; and he sees the sword coming upon the land, and he blows on the trumpet and warns the people, then he who hears the sound of the trumpet and does not take warning, and a sword comes and takes him away, his blood will be on his own head. He heard the sound of the trumpet, but did not take warning; his blood will be on himself. But had he taken warning, he would have delivered his life. But if the watchman sees the sword coming and does not blow the trumpet, and the people are not warned, and a sword comes and takes a person from them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood I will require from the watchman's hand' Now as for you, son of man, I have appointed you a watchman for the house of Israel; so you will hear a message from My mouth, and give them warning from Me" (Eze. 33:1-7).

The second title of Ezekiel is "a watchman." This idea is not peculiar to Ezekiel. We have the watchman in other prophets, or, shall we say, we have the function of the watchman in other prophets. Habakkuk 2:1 says, "I will stand upon my watch": that is a function of the watchman. In Isaiah 21:11 we have, "Watchman, what of the night?" So again we have the function, but no one else was exactly called a watchman except Ezekiel. And as you have noticed, that title was applied to him at the beginning of his ministry, and later at his recommission.

Now this title and this function need not keep us very long. We just ask ourselves the question, "What is the function of a watchman?" First of all, the function of the watchman is to know and to declare the time. That was always an idea associated with the watchman. Right down to modern times that is true. I do not know whether it is true in China, or in other parts of the world, but until quite recently it was true in Great Britain. In the country places, the watchman went around at certain times of the night and blew his trumpet or rang his bell and shouted the time. He would ring his bell and shout, "It is five o'clock of the morning." That idea is in Isaiah, chapter 21. Someone is asking the time, "Watchman, what is the time?" And the watchman answers, "The morning cometh, and also the night." The first thing about a watchman is that he must know the time - he must know what time it is in the purpose and work of God.

You know there are a lot of people who are very mixed-up on this matter. They are trying to do a lot of things out of time. There are some people who are confused in the dispensations over this. In this dispensation, God is doing a special thing. There is one particular thing that marks this dispensation in the purpose of God, and it is of the greatest importance that you and I know what it is that belongs to this dispensation.

There are all sorts of systems of teaching which have nothing to do with the purpose of this dispensation. They are very interesting, there may be some truth in them, but they are not right in line with God's specific purpose for this dispensation. I am not going to take your time this morning to illustrate what I mean, even though I could tell you of different systems of truth which have taken people right off the line of God's

specific purpose for now. It is not always a question of how much truth or how much error there is in it. The real question is, "Is that what God is seeking now, in this dispensation?" Now you can usually detect the fault by one thing - has that something to do with this earth now? If it has, then that is not what God is doing in this dispensation. God is not concerned with doing something on this earth, in this dispensation, but He is taking out of the nations a people for His Name. He is building something in heaven in this dispensation. Whether it is Israel, or anything else, that is not God's concern in this dispensation; and anything which has wholly to do with this earth does not belong to this dispensation. That is why the Lord Jesus left this earth and went to heaven. This dispensation is characterized by a Heavenly thing, and not an earthly thing. That is a major test of everything.

Now, of course, I could spend a lot of time in speaking about what God is seeking in this dispensation. That will come later in the Book of Ezekiel. This morning we are just underlining this truth: a watchman's first business is to know the time, and then to give a very clear message as to what the time is. If his note is not clear and distinct, people will not know what the hour is. I do ask you, brethren, to go and think much about that. The whole matter of how much the Lord is with you will depend upon how much you are with the Lord in the purpose of the hour. If you are trying to do something that God does not want done at this time, you are wasting your time, and you are wasting your strength. So, then, the function of the watchman is to be eyes for the people of God.

And then the second thing is to discern what the situation is and what it will lead to. All this is contained in this description of the watchman's word which the Lord gave to Ezekiel. The watchman is looking out, he sees certain things, and he discerns what those things imply. He sees that those certain things mean something evil for the Lord's people - these are signs that there is evil coming. If these things are not guarded against, the result will be death. That is what is here in the description of what the watchman saw. And then on the other side, he sees the Way of Life; and he is able to say, "Now that is the way of death, and that is the Way of Life." But the watchman has to be familiar with what is in the Way of Life and what is in the way of death. So he has to discern the situation and recognize the way in which things are going. It is a very big responsibility. We are all called to be watchmen, and we must have an unmistakable message. We must understand the things that mean death for the Church.

"I Am Your Sign"

This brings us to our third and final title of Ezekiel: "I am your sign." In the Book of Ezekiel, all the things that the Lord commanded the prophet to do are gathered into that title. You look at chapter four, and you see the strange things that the Lord commanded Ezekiel to do.

HE commanded him to take a tile and to draw on it a picture of Jerusalem, a picture of Jerusalem as in siege. And then Ezekiel was told to lie on his left side for 390 days, and then to lie on his right side for 40 days, and then to uncover his arm before all the people, and then the Lord said that HE would put bands upon him so that he could not move, and HE would make his tongue cleave to the roof of his mouth so that he could not speak, and then Ezekiel was told that he must become a baker and he must make enough bread to last 390 days. And then Ezekiel was told to take a sharp razor, to shave his head of all his hair, and then to weigh the hair in balances.

These are all strange things, and Ezekiel was to do all these things in the sight of all the people.

Then when you get well on into the book, you come to that very sad thing. In chapter 24 Ezekiel's wife dies, and he is not allowed to mourn for her. He is to just go on as though nothing had happened, and

everybody would look at him and would say, "This is a scandalous thing; the fellow does not care, although his wife has died." Ezekiel goes on just as though nothing had happened.

What is all the meaning of this? It is all gathered into this title: "I am your sign." We will just gather it up in this way: it means that the message of Ezekiel was first of all wrought into his own experience. He was taken through the message before he gave it. The things that he was to say were already wrought in his own life. I do not say we are to have Ezekiel's experience literally, but the whole point is this: the messenger must be a personal embodiment of his message! It must not just be things that we say, it must be things that have been wrought into our own life. Ezekiel did not just give a message, Ezekiel was the message; and when the people looked at him, they SAW the message.

Now see what a big principle that introduces. John put it in this way: "We speak that we do know and testify that which we have seen and that which our hands have handled." There must not be any gap between the teacher and his message. The teacher and the message must be one thing. Our position must not be one of just doctrine or theory, our teaching must be ourselves. The message must be seen in our history, it must be seen in our experience. This will, of course, explain a lot as to the Lord's dealings with us. If the Lord really gets hold of us, HE will not let us just give out theories. The message will be born out of DEEP experience.

We take three illustrations. Peter's commission was "to shepherd the flock," and in his letters he speaks much about that. He speaks of "The Shepherd"; and he speaks of the elders and says, "...shepherd the flock over which the Lord has given you responsibility." What is the key feature of a true shepherd? If we take the Lord as the Example, the key feature of a true shepherd is that he lays down his own soul for the sheep. Notice, I have chosen the word soul. That is the word that the Lord Jesus used. HE spoke about the disciples laying down their souls. Now Peter had a very strong and big soul. You know what the soul is, and Peter had a big one of those, and Peter's great life lesson was how to lay down his own soul. If the soul is the mind and the feelings and the will, we can see what a big one Peter had. Peter had a mind of his own; he had a will of his own; and he had feelings of his own; and he was always pushing these things to the forefront. Peter's life was in the hard school of having to learn how to lay down his soul. You know enough about the whole life of Peter as we have it in the New Testament to show you how true that was. Peter was not a professional shepherd - he had had the principle of the shepherd wrought right into his very being.

Pass on to the Apostle Paul. Paul's great ministry was concerning the Church as the Body of Christ. The principles of the Body of Christ are relatedness, dependence, interdependence, heavenliness, spirituality. Now did not Paul have to have those things wrought into him?! When you remember Saul of Tarsus, you have the very embodiment of independence, personal action, and earthliness, and unspirituality. Saul of Tarsus had no sense of dependence, of relatedness, but see how the Lord took him in hand, and right from the point on the Damascus Road, all the way through, he was having to learn these lessons.

Now Paul was a sign for the dispensation. You think about that! We know the purpose of this dispensation: it is the Church which is His Body. That is not just an idea or a teaching, that is a practical reality. That revelation came to the dispensation through the Apostle Paul, and, therefore, it had to be wrought right into the very constitution of Paul. ALL independence had to be destroyed, ALL unrelatedness had to be removed, ALL earthly expectations had to be taken away. Paul had to have his whole life constituted on the basis of the message that was given to him. He was a sign to the dispensation. That is why we make so much of Paul.

And now, what about John? What was John's particular message? The ministry of John particularly related to life. That is the big word of John through all his writings. John became the embodiment of that principle of life triumphant over death. When all of the apostles had long been gone to the Lord, John is still going on. He outlived all the others, not because he had an easier time than the others. John suffered with the others, and at last John died as others had died; but here is a testimony to Divine Life in spirit, mind, and body. The point is that John really, personally represented the message that he gave. Peter, Paul, and John could also say: "I am your sign."

Brothers and sisters, you and I have got to be able to say the same. People must be seeing in us the message and not only hearing it from our lips. They must be seeing that the message is true in our history and experience.

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