

The Voice of Ezekiel (Continued) II

by T. Austin-Sparks

True Christianity is the presence and expression of a Person, the Living Son of God, and not an organization, an institution, a tradition, a form, a creed, a ritual, etc.

Scripture: Ezekiel 12:6, Luke 2:34, John 1:1, John 14:6, Acts 13:27

Topics: "Incarnate Truth", "Living Ministry"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks delves into the profound significance of God incarnating truth in His messengers, making them the message itself. He emphasizes the close identity between the person and ministry of God's servants, illustrating this through the lives of prophets like Ezekiel and apostles like Paul, Peter, and John. The sermon highlights how Jesus, as the ultimate representation of God, brought everything to a personal level, displacing fixed traditions and systems with His living presence. T. Austin-Sparks challenges believers to embody the truth rather than imitate it, emphasizing that true Christianity is the expression of the Living Son of God, not an organization or institution.

Transcript

"They knew not... the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath" (Acts 13:27).

If the prophecies of Ezekiel were read in the Synagogues, as no doubt they were, the hearers would hear a phrase three times repeated - "I have set thee for a sign"; "Say ye, I am your sign"; "Thou shalt be a sign unto them" (Ezekiel 12:6,11; 24:27). This designation as applied to the Prophet embodies and signifies the greatest of all of God's methods with man. It is therefore something of which to be taken very careful and serious notice by all who are called to represent God in this world; and what Christian is not so called? Indeed, that is the vocation of the Christian and of the Church! This supreme method of God is that He incarnates the truth in His messengers: that means that He does not just give a message in words, but He makes the messenger the message. It is not just that something has been said, but that there has been a person in the place. It means that the spiritual history of the representative is the ground of the message. That is why the factor and element of life is so very prominent in Ezekiel's prophecies. God is not working mechanically - machine-wise, but by "Living creatures". It is the life which is the essence of the testimony.

How strongly this law is applied to Ezekiel! This Prophet is not saying: 'I have an address, a teaching, a discourse, to pass on to you.' He is saying: 'I AM your sign.'

So the Lord makes him painfully set forth the message in his own body, and causes things to happen in his life, even his domestic life - the death of his wife - to make very personal and ocular God's message. This is very challenging and searching; but it is also very enlightening as to why God deals with His servants as He does. We can see the close identity of the persons and ministry of Paul, Peter, John and others. They had to go through the ministry before it could go through them. We could enlarge upon this at many points, but it would involve us in such an extensive necessity. We must keep close to the law of God's ways. It will now be seen how and why our basic Scripture - Acts 13:27 - is related to Christ by Paul. The argument of the Apostles was always that there had been a Man amongst men, and that that Man was Himself God's message, not only His messenger. Jesus enunciated this law and Divine method every time He said: "I am!" He was God's representation! To see Him, He said, was to see God. Not so to see Him was the very nature and judgment of spiritual blindness. Read John's Gospel again in this light. So 'the voice of the prophet' has become a living person.

When it came to the incarnation of the Son of God, that incarnation came to be shown as something vastly more than God taking flesh and blood. When John wrote: "The Word was God... and the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us" (John 1:1,14), that was just the introduction or preface to his Gospel. He then went on to elaborate and extend that, and to show what the incarnation meant. This - in his Gospel and the fight given him from heaven - resolved itself into two contrasted things. On the one line John brings out into clear definition that everything relating to God had, by the Jews, been resolved into a crystallized system; a fixed tradition, as such; an institution, a creed; a ritual; a form; a binding legality; and, although they might not use the word, an organization.

Along the other line, John shows throughout that Jesus was persistently, unbendingly, and with a constantly reiterated "Verily, verily" - "Most truly, most truly" - bringing everything to the Person, making it all personal. He was the Law. He was the Temple. He was the Lamb. He was the High Priest. He was the inclusive Shepherd and the Vine, both of which were Old Testament symbols of Israel as the Lord's flock and the Lord's planting respectively. Jesus would not allow the people of His time to get away from Himself. Everything in the incarnation had become a Person, and that Person was - when the Holy Spirit came - to be not only the personal Christ (that would remain) but corporately manifested.

All those things mentioned above, which Judaism had become, had been displaced by the Person. This was the Sign. This is what the inspired Simeon meant when, taking the infant Jesus in his arms, he said: "This child is set for the rise and fall of many in Israel, and a sign that is spoken against" (Luke 2:34). This is the significance of Christ.

True Christianity is therefore not an organization, an institution, a tradition, a form, a creed, a ritual, etc.; it is the presence and expression of a Person, the Living Son of God! The living Son of God and an organization are complete antitheses. Organization is mechanism, committee, congress, directorates, arrangements, schemes, and so forth without end. It is man's hand of control, and man's mind of ideas as to the work of God. Christ repudiated all this, and the Spirit of Christ just brushed it all aside and took independent control, and the comparison is obvious. Have we travelled a long way from Ezekiel? Not in spiritual truth or principle!

Because the Jews failed through their fixed position, prejudice, pride, and bondage to the system, to hear this voice of the Prophet, they missed the significance of the Sign as tragically as they did in Ezekiel's time, with such baneful consequences. The Sign is a test, a stumblingblock for the rise and fall of many. This will be the effect of every ministry which is a personal embodiment of the truth, as differing from a

secondhand retailing of studied material.

May it be ours to be so concerned for reality as to hear the 'voice' as more than words, and, above all, may we be the embodiment and not the imitation of the truth and testimony!

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