

# **THE NEED OF THE HOUR -- SPECIFIC MINISTRY**

By T. Austin Sparks

As we take account of the situation in the Church today we feel more and more deeply convinced that the greatest need of the hour is for men of vision and courage.

But we use the word 'vision' in the specific sense in which it is used in the Bible and not in the general sense of enterprise. That is, what is needed above all else is men who have had a Divine illumination by the Holy Spirit in their own hearts as to God's purpose in this dispensation, and as to the particular Divine emphasis for the present hour.

There can be much enthusiasm and zeal put behind a more or less generally conceived idea of what needs to be done, with a resultant activity and 'movement'. The opposite of this, and that which we are seeing to be so much more needed, is a burdening of the hearts of 'chosen vessels' with God's own most pressing concern at this time, resulting in an all-consuming passion which will accept all the cost of its realization.

There are many earnest and devoted servants of God who are seeking to be faithful in the work to which they feel God has called them. There are passionate preachers, and men on full stretch for the furtherance of 'the Kingdom of God'. What we are saying is no overlooking of this and of much more, neither is it an undervaluing of the great amount of devoted and sacrificial service to the Lord. Nevertheless we press our point. There are very few men in our day of whom it can be truly said, 'That man has a message from God for the time in which we live'.

There can be all the difference between being saved and then going into Christian service with the consequent studying of the Bible, the preparation of sermons, addresses, lessons; collecting material, mastering themes and subjects, and so on, and giving this out as required or as opportunity affords—there can be all the difference between this and an open Heaven, an anointing, an unveiling by the Holy Spirit. It is the difference between our labouring to get, in order to meet a constantly recurring demand, and the Holy Spirit continually revealing Christ in us. This is a general difference, though it is a very real one, and it may represent all the difference between bondage and liberty, between limitation and fulness, even between life and death in ministry. But this is not our particular point. The need of the hour is not only for a higher spiritual level of ministry in general—it is for men with a specific anointing which will meet the situation as it is now.

No one who knows anything about present conditions will disagree with the statement that the Church is in tragic need of men with a message. Our point is that what is needed is the knowledge of what is *the* message for the time. *That* message must come from God to men chosen for the purpose. This is not a ministry which can be taken up. For such ministry there is usually a long and deep history with God, a history full of mystery and suffering. Many phases are passed through, all in the permissive will of God, or in His directive will, inasmuch as they are intended to educate and give experience; the course is never that of the established and settled kind, and so big changes may be called for, each of which comes by a new spiritual crisis.

No one can do anything in the making of such vessels, however much they may be concerned for them. This is God's work alone, and they have to be left in His hands. We may sometimes almost despair as we look in vain for such, but there may be many more under the Lord's hand than we have any idea of, and He will produce them in His time. We do urge this need upon the consideration and prayers of the Lord's people today.

But what about *courage*? Men of vision and courage! Yes, and more courage will be required here than in any other realm of which we know.

A specific message may-to begin with-set a distance between such as have it and such as have not. This will give rise to many possibilities. Even the best servants of God who have not so seen will probably stand back. It will mean loneliness, and going on alone perhaps for quite a time. It will mean ostracism, misunderstanding, misrepresentation, suspicion, closed doors (so far as man can close them).

Then, no commission from God is ever just verbal truth—it always involves practical issues. These practical issues will appear like the crystallizing of the truth, so that those who obey it will become marked people. This raises a new set of opposing elements. If God has given an unveiling concerning His purpose in Christ which is of such vital importance as to have called for all this special history and preparation, we must realize that it is of very great moment to Satan's interests, and he will leave nothing unused to make its course impossible.

Let it be understood that in the line of a ministry such as Paul's the only way of fulfillment is that of Paul's abandonment and courage. Listen to him again: --

“Circumcised the eighth day,

Of the stock of Israel,  
Of the tribe of Benjamin,  
A Hebrew of Hebrews;  
As touching the law, a Pharisee,  
As touching zeal, persecuting the Church;  
As touching the righteousness which is in the law, found blameless.  
Howbeit what things were gain to me, these have I counted loss for Christ.”

(Phil. iii. 5-7.)

Here is birth, religious training, tradition, status, prestige, family, friends, reputation, all touched by his new revelation. He let them go as it became necessary in the fulfillment of his received heavenly vision.

And this was not all, for even in the apostolic circle Paul very largely stood alone.

If the greatest need of the hour is that of men of vision, along with it will go the need for willingness to pay the price. But there is another side, and that is God's side.

It is a great thing to be in possession of an open Heaven and of a mandate from God.

--T. Austin Sparks