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A Sign

by T. Austin-Sparks

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What does it mean to be given to the Lord?

Notes of an address given on the last Sabbath evening, November 29th, 1926, in Honor Oak Baptist Church buildings.

"Say ye, I am your sign." - Ezekiel 12:11.

The mental conception of consecration has come to mean to be blessed and to be made a blessing. That is not a true conception if just left there. These passages which we have read contain a proposition which is the central and basic principle of consecration to the Lord, of being given to the Lord. And what is it? That He might make us a sign. They contain this law, which we have often pointed out, that God in His eternal purpose determines that the method of His realisation should be by an incarnation of Himself, that is, a manifestation of Himself in the flesh; and that He should do something in that incarnation which would be a sign to the universe, that should signify something of the infinite Wisdom, Power, and Sovereignty of God - that He should take hold of the form of a man, and in that form do things and say: "Look at that and learn." By what He does in such an instrument, He is making that instrument a sign and signification not only to man, but to angels of the two hierarchies, the Divine and the satanic. As exemplified in Job, that He might do a thing that the whole hosts of angels and demons should look at and learn, and be made wise; so that in every realm, amongst men and in the heavenlies, the lower and the super heavenlies, God should be able to do a thing in those who are His, which might be the means of instructing, making aware,

informing and demonstrating.

Moses was a sign to the Children of Israel. He disobeyed God and God had at once to act, and because Moses stood in such a prominent position before the people, his disobedience was publicly punished. In that judgment he became a sign to the Israelites, lest they should come to lightly regard the sin of disobedience. And with us, there will often have to be a public demonstration and judgment of the flesh, for the warning of others, as well as the vindication of the Truth in its living outworking. Moses was God's sign. It costs to be God's sign. Are we willing? How great the cost to Moses! - but - the afterward!

That this is a principle of Divine dealing is illustrated in the following scriptures:-

Ezek. 12:6. "I have set thee for a sign."

Ezek. 12:11. "I am your sign."

Ezek. 24:24. "Thou shalt be a sign unto them and they shall know that I am the Lord."

Acts 1:8. "Ye shall be witnesses unto Me."

2 Cor. 3:2. "Ye are our epistle... known and read of all men."

2 Cor. 3:3. "Ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ."

1 Cor. 4:1. "Let a man so account of us as the ministers of Christ."

1 Cor. 4:9. "We are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels and to men."

Eph. 3:10. "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in the heavenlies might be known by the Church the manifold wisdom of God."

2 Cor. 2:15. "We are unto God a sweet savour of Christ in them that are saved and in them that perish, to one we are the savour of death unto death, and to the other of life unto life."

I believe that the Lord in these days is seeking to gather out a people, and to gather in a people - few they will certainly be, and one does not say that the Lord can do this with all who are His - who shall be His Sign to the spiritual House of Israel. Their testimony may not be a testimony that the House of Israel is utterly wrong; but their testimony will be that there is a higher and deeper life in God to which He would call them. One feels this borne in upon one so much in these days, and you will understand the signification of this, that when the Lord calls a people, a small company it may be, when He puts His hand upon one here and one there, adds them one by one to a small company of those who are to be a special sign to His household, He deals with them in different ways altogether from those which He follows with other people, and He says: "I will do a new thing."

Now it is no use your making comparisons with others. They may, in their way, have a certain seal and blessing of God upon them; but it does not mean that the way the Lord is leading you is a wrong way; and you dare not argue according to the ways the other people go. This is the way of the Lord for *you*. Do not stay to make comparisons. We stumble at that so often, we who have given ourselves wholly to God, and then have these exceptional and trying experiences to come up against - the full impact of the wrath of the enemy. We look around upon others who have an easier time, because they are not going the way we are going. Immediately we do that the bottom begins to fall out of the whole thing. The point is, the Lord has His wheel within a Wheel, His instrument with which He desires to make a special sign to His people, of His Wisdom, His Power, His Grace, His Methods, His Purpose, so that He can reveal Himself through them to others. Do not have, for one moment, the thought of anyone being on a pedestal, and being in solitary isolation, of special account to the Lord. It simply means that we go deeper down to death, and in humiliation before the world, than anyone else. *And because the Lord takes us deeper, He is able to reveal something higher.*

To speak now as we are closing the days of our sojourn on the older lines, and with certain of the older associations - God is leading us out into a way which is unusual, which is, if you like, peculiar; and doing a thing which we know not of as having been done anywhere else. As He leads us in a fellowship, I believe it is in order that in doing this thing, with all its cost, with all its pain, with all its need of the slaying of every bit of the flesh, pride and arrogance, and its desire for the approval of men, and all that kind of thing - I believe that in His new way He is seeking to have such to go with Him, in order that He may make them a Sign, as something spiritual, and something spiritually powerful; not that men can applaud, not that men may approve, but which perhaps will be like the impact of God from the Throne of God upon the throne of Satan, in these closing days. That is the burden of the Word of the Lord: "Son of man, I have made you a Sign"; "Say unto them, I am your Sign."

I take it that we who are gathered in this place tonight are all the Lord's people. Nearly all of us are in this fellowship of the Spirit, having abandoned ourselves to go with the Lord all the way. It seems to me that this moment is a moment when we should face the implication of this word; as to whether, we are going the popular way, or whether we are going the unpopular way; as to whether we are going to be the Lord's Sign. When Paul uttered these words: "God has made us last of all a spectacle," he was taking account of the holidays of the Romans, when they gathered for a day's sport; when all the other things had been got through, the last thing was the turning into the arena of criminals who were made sport of to crown this holiday, for people to laugh at, jeer at, ridicule, make fun of; and Paul says: "Last of all, we are made a 'spectacle'" - the world laughs. Just as the world laughed at Nehemiah in the building of the walls of Jerusalem.

"God has made us a spectacle." Are we ready to be made a "Sign"? The thing which the world laughs at? The cross of the Lord Jesus has proved ever and always to have been the superlative wisdom and power of God. For the time being the sharing of the cross is the real test. The Master endured the cross, and despised the shame, in order to be made a sign. Was there ever a Sign more glorious and mighty than that cross?

So our Master came to the end, and said: "For their sakes I consecrate Myself, for their sakes I give Myself unto the full consecration; and that consecration is the cross; and I am willing to be made a 'spectacle' to men, demons and angels, for their sakes." The Lord wants us to be Signs. One says this with bated breath, knowing little of what it means, but knowing also that His Grace is sufficient. Beloved, He is just seeking to gather a company of people together with whom He can make a Sign, not only of suffering and affliction, but of Power and Glory, to show to others His Wisdom, His Might, His Sovereignty, His Grace. Will you say on those terms, on that ground: "I am the Lord's. At Thy feet I fall; to suffer, live or die, for my Lord crucified"? This is what it means to be His witnesses. "Ye are my witnesses" - it does not mean going out and talking; it means the Lord working out in our lives, and others looking on, and saying: "That is the Mind of God; that is the Way of God; that is the Will of God." And as He does it, so demons learn what God is, the Glory of God, the Sovereignty of God; angels bow because of His doings in the Church, and glorify Him on our behalf.

May He lead us to give our assent and consent in a new, fresh act of abandonment and consecration individually, and as a people, for these coming days.