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"But Ye..."

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"And he said unto them, It is not for you to know times or seasons, which the Father hath set within his own authority. But ye shall receive power, when the Holy Spirit is come upon you; and ye shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea and Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (Acts 1:7-8).

"Now when they beheld the boldness of Peter and John, and had perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13).

"Not... times or seasons... But ye..." The Lord thus turns the whole question of the new dispensation into a matter of people. The old dispensation commenced with a man. He was God's key to everything in the creation. And here, in the book of the Acts, we have the commencement of the new dispensation and the new creation; and it is focused in a Man - the Son of man - and in men. The key to everything is - "But ye..." The disciples were interested in something objective to themselves, and yet in which they would have a place - the kingdom of Israel. That meant they were interested in the interpretation and fulfilment of prophecy - one of a good many themes and subjects; they were interested in teachings. But the Lord said, 'No, it is not teachings, nor truths; not a movement, an enterprise, a kingdom.' All that was to be subsequent to getting the men, and getting the men inwardly in the position which was necessary.

Well, that is a very simple word, but it really goes to the heart of things. What are we waiting for? What are we expecting? Is it a change in our position, circumstances, conditions, location, association? Are we waiting to be precipitated into some movement, for the Church to take action where we are concerned, for others to take responsibility for us? What is it? Well, let us note this: the

Lord says, "Not... but..." Not any things like that, in the first place, but you: the man, the woman, in right relationship with the Lord, under the full government of the Holy Spirit, filled with love for Christ and for others: the man, the woman, whose eyes have seen the King. That is the key to everything. It may change the circumstances, it may change everything; but to change everything without that would not get us anywhere. The Lord says, 'It is you, everything waits for you'. It is not this and that which you can tabulate, something you may be either definitely or vaguely expecting in connection with a day when you will be in some other position and your job will change and you will be out in 'the work'. You will go on like that to the end of your life; you can have any number of changes but not be getting to the real goal. It is not this and that, but ye... The Lord gets us where He wants us and as He wants us.

It is quite clear that is exactly how it works out. We can see that. Here and there are such people, men and women in whom, because of their utterly selfless abandonment to the Lord and because they are so full of the Spirit, the thing is happening. All that we long to see happening is happening with them, the work is being done, there is movement.

So do not let us wait for things. Let us at once recognise the fact where we are. We may not be moved elsewhere. This is to hold good just where we are now, without waiting for some change of time or place or situation or set of circumstances. It is not the thing outside of us at all: we are the key to it all. What is required is that both the Lord and others should be able to look on us and say 'They count, they express the Lord'. And, after all, it does not matter what we might get of official position and place in anything that is going. What is the value of that, however great it may seem to be, if it is not the expression of Christ? Let us ask the Lord to show us clearly just what has to be ruled out in our case - that of which He says, 'No, not that, but ye...'

We are apt to think that if and when the circumstances and conditions of our lives are changed and we are in another position than the one we now occupy, then something will happen, the purpose of God will begin to be fulfilled. The Lord would say, 'No; it is not circumstances, not conditions, at all; it is you.'

Some think that it is a matter of graduation and ordination and office, and that when they get into an official position, and have recognition there, then they will begin to fulfil the purpose of their lives. So they are waiting until they are either ordained or appointed to their work. The Lord says, 'No, it is not office, it is not ordination, it is not placing; it is you; you are the key.'

And alongside that, many are looking to the organization, the society, the mission, the church connection to which they are related, and expecting a new day for themselves to originate there, and that when the institution, whatever it may be, takes action, then the work of their life will begin. And the Lord says, 'It is not the church, the mission, the organization, the society, the institution; it is you.'

These men in Acts 1 were waiting for something to happen outside of themselves. They called it the restoring of the kingdom, the setting up of an order which would be a national - perhaps an international - movement: a new order outside of themselves in which they would find their place and probably be allocated, appointed or ordained to it. And the Lord simply swept the board of all those ideas and said, 'No, it is not that, it is you.' That is how it proved, how it worked out. We individually may be the key to everything in the purpose of God.