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"Here Am I; Send Me"

by T. Austin-Sparks

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"I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us! Then said I, Here am I; send me." (Isaiah 6:8).

Whenever these words have been used in Christian circles - and they have been, and still are, very frequently employed - it is almost invariably in relation to missionary work among the 'heathen' or in non-Christian countries. It may, therefore, be something of a surprise and, maybe, a shock to have it pointed out that they were never so related when first spoken. Not the 'heathen' or 'nations', but the Lord's own people were the occasion of this missionary call and challenge. The Prophets - Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and others - were called to be missionaries to the people of God, and God only knew how desperately necessary that was!

Never was a 'heathen' nation more desperately in need of missionaries than were the Lord's people in those times. Speaking generally, we should find very little more sympathy and support than did those "missionaries" if we said the same things of the Lord's people today. Indeed, we should receive the same kind of treatment - in different ways - that was served out to them.

But there are two things to say about this. Why all the Conventions and Conferences? Why all the magazines and literature, and books? Why all the preaching and teaching? All of which carries as its strongest note and emphasis the unsatisfactory condition of Christians today. There is a wholesale deploring of that condition, and there is no fundamental basis for all these conventions and special spiritual occasions if all is well and as it should be. That is a general fact, although we may not take account of all those who have a *special* 'axe to grind', some particular line or aspect of teaching. The measure or degree of feeling and conclusion as to the declension or poor condition will be discerned in the messages given and emphases made.

There is, however, a further and much greater factor in the appraisal, and this is by no means general.

On what ground and as a result of what did this 'missionary' call and challenge come to the prophet? If that question were to be put to Isaiah, to any other prophet, or to Paul, Peter, John; that is: How did you come to see and to feel as you do? How did you come to be so utterly committed to and involved in this mission and ministry? Their answer - with one voice - would be: "I saw the Lord"!

"I Saw the Lord"

That was all, but that was enough. Whether it was Moses at one end or John at the other - with the many between - their life and work was due to their having seen the Lord. But that seeing of the Lord always meant a seeing of what the Lord wanted as opposed to the existing state. It was a comparison and a contrast. It is always impossible to see the Lord and to remain satisfied with things as they are. Any seeing of the Lord means a new seeing of what He wants, and is therefore a challenge and a commission. As in the time of Eli and Samuel the low spiritual state was because "there was no open vision".

There is therefore only one thing for the real spiritual purifying and uplifting of the people of God, and for their release from the captivity of lesser conditions, and that is a new revelation or seeing of the Lord. This will produce ashamedness, sorrow, repentance, and a new committal. It will humble us, it will empty us; but it will inspire us.

The most vital reality of seeing the Lord is not in the immediate emotional effect, but in the fact that we see the Lord Himself as the model or pattern of everything. We spend so much time and energy on plans, orders, arrangements, and forms. But the Lord is all that in Himself, and the government of the Holy Spirit will result in an *organic reproduction* of the Lord as the sum of all things.

Despite all our fussing and effort to reproduce a 'New Testament Order' we never get more than a man-made institution. The New Testament and what is there never came about in that way. If ever they got near to arranging things by discussion (and they did once, at least), the thing touched earth, touched death, and the result was stalemate. Everything then was the free and spontaneous movement of the Holy Spirit, and He did it in full view of the Pattern - God's Son. The ministry of the Holy Spirit has ever been to reveal Jesus Christ, and in revealing Him, to conform everything to Him.

No human genius can do this. We cannot obtain anything in our New Testament as the result of human study, research, or reason. It is all the Holy Spirit's *revelation* of Jesus Christ. Ours it is to seek continually to see Him by the Spirit, and we shall know that He - not a paper-pattern - is the Pattern, the Order, the Form. It is *all* a Person who is the sum of all purpose and ways.

Who will say that the Lord's people do not need above all things men and ministries which have behind them this dynamic - "I saw the Lord".

There is a desperate need for missionaries to scattered, defeated, and imprisoned 'Israel' - the spiritual Israel - of such as have seen the Lord and who are thus in a position - the only right position - to say: "Here am I; send me."