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Set for a Sign

by T. Austin-Sparks

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

The mental conception of consecration is that of being blessed and being made a blessing. If left there that is not a true conception. These passages, which we have read (see below) contain a proposition which is the central and basic principle of consecration to the Lord. It is that He would make us a sign. They contain this law, 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 shall do something in that incarnation which will be a sign to the universe, setting forth something of the wisdom, power, and sovereignty of God - that He will take hold of the form of a man, and in that form do things and say: "Look at that and learn." He is making such an instrument, by what He does in it, a signification, not only to man, but to angels of the two hierarchies, the Divine and the satanic; as for example Job, in whom God did a thing at which all the hosts of angels and demons might look and learn of His manifold wisdom. In every realm, amongst men and in the heavenlies, the lower and the super heavenlies, God would do a thing in those who are His, which should be the means of instructing, making aware, informing and demonstrating to all who behold.

Moses was a sign to the children of Israel. He disobeyed God, and because Moses stood in such a prominent position before the people, God had to act at once and to punish his disobedience publicly. In that judgment he became a sign to the Israelites, lest they should come to regard the sin of disobedience lightly. With us also there will have to be a like 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 was the cost to Moses, but how fruitful 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. 24:27. "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 (lit.) 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 is seeking in these days to gather out 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 "House of Israel". Their testimony may not be that "the House of Israel" is utterly wrong; but rather a testimony to a higher and deeper life in God to which He calls. 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, He deals with them in altogether different ways from those which He follows with other people, and He says: "I will do a new thing".

Now it is no use your making a comparison with others. In their way *they* may have a certain seal and blessing of God upon them; but this does not mean that the way by which the Lord is leading you is a wrong way. You dare not argue from the ways other people go. This is the way of the Lord for *you*. Do not stay to make comparisons or you will be stumbled, you who have given yourselves wholly to God and come up against these exceptional and trying experiences, the full impact of the wrath of the enemy. If you look around upon others who have an easier time, because they are not going the way you are going, it will immediately seem that for you all meaning has gone out of everything. The point is, that the Lord has His wheel within a wheel, His instrument which He desires to make a special sign to His people of His wisdom, His power, His grace, His methods, His purpose; He would reveal Himself through you to others. Do not for one moment have the thought of anyone being on a pedestal, being in solitary isolation, of special account to the Lord. It simply means that more than others you go deeper down into death, and in humiliation before the world. Because the Lord takes you deeper, He is able to reveal something higher.

God is leading such out into a way which is unusual, which is, if you like, peculiar, and is doing a thing of which they have no knowledge of having been done anywhere else. As He leads them thus I believe it is in order that, in doing this thing, with all its cost, with all its pain, with all the need for the slaying of every part of the flesh, its pride and arrogance, its desire for the approval of men, and all that kind of thing - in His new way He is seeking to have such to go with Him - all in order that He may make them a sign; something spiritual, and something spiritually powerful. He will not have

them to be that which men can applaud and approve, but that which perhaps will be like the impact of the throne of God upon the throne of Satan. That is the burden of the Word of the Lord: "Son of man, I have made you a sign"; "Say, I am your sign."

It seems to me that this moment is one in which we should face the implication of this word; as to whether we are going the popular way or the unpopular way, as to whether we are going to be the Lord's Sign. When Paul uttered these words: "For I think that God hath set forth us apostles last of all, as men doomed to death: for we are made a spectacle..." he was taking account of the holidays of the Romans, when they gathered for a day's sport. When all the other items were finished, to crown this holiday, the last thing was the turning into the arena of criminals to be made sport of, to be laughed at, jeered at, ridiculed, made fun of as they suffered. Paul says: "set forth... last... made a spectacle" - the world laughs. In the same way the world laughed at Nehemiah in the building of the walls of Jerusalem.

"God hath set forth us the apostles last of all, as men doomed to death: for we are made a spectacle..." Are we ready to be made a "sign"? Are we willing to become a thing at which the world laughs? The Cross of the Lord Jesus has ever proved to be 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 - in the heavens, in hell, and on the earth?

Thus our Master came to the end of His earthly course, and said: "For their sakes I consecrate Myself". For their sakes I give Myself unto the full consecration; and that consecration is the Cross. 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 of whom He can make a Sign. 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".

The Lord has had different kinds of signs through the years. Sometimes He has raised up outstanding individuals with their peculiar and specific experience and testimony; sometimes a piece of work embodying some particular spiritual law or feature; a place or a mission. Such are ever the expression of Divine sovereignty, and they cannot be repeated or copied by men at their will; they are essentially the work of God. But while we can neither produce nor imitate them, we can and must learn the spiritual lesson which they are intended to teach. The one inclusive object of all such "signs" is to lift the Lord's people to a level which is above the ordinary and natural; yes, above the normal, above the human, above the best that is possible in man of himself. The significance of "the Lord" is what is in point; not the man, the people, the instrumentality, the work, but the Lord. Thus it comes about that, in the course of their ministry, the Lord does not protect them from adversity, but rather seems to allow every devastating force to break upon them, so that again and again they are at their "wits end"; the end seems to have come; the enemy seems to have triumphed; the whole vision appears to have been a mistake. But by "resurrection from the dead" the Lord is glorified and His power is known. When the Lord secures such an instrument He takes pains to strip it of all elements of human glorying, and makes it to be something which is dependent upon Him for its very life. The more we must have of some *thing* in which to boast, the less are we likely to have of the genuine glory of God.

The way of the true "sign" is no way of earthly praise; it never attracts to itself. The very term "sign" means that there is something beyond and more than the thing itself.