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The Holy Spirit's Answer to Prophecies

by T. Austin-Sparks

Reading: Acts 2:1-5, 12-16, 22-33, 37-38; John 1:41-43; Luke 5:8; John 21:18-19 (all R.V.)

I expect you note that each of these passages is a prophecy, something is foretold, something which is going to be is declared beforehand. Each of those prophecies had its fulfilment in principle and effect on the day of Pentecost, the third of course did not have immediate fulfilment in utterness, but it had it in principle then.

The thing in my heart for this message is the answer of the Holy Spirit to certain personal prophecies. The Holy Spirit Himself inspired these prophecies, for the Lord Jesus uttered them by the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit fulfilled them.

The Holy Spirit is the foreteller of certain things which He Himself is to fulfil. Many prophecies were fulfilled on the day of Pentecost which were also far-reaching. We read of Joel's words and there was a great deal more than that, for in addition to and within the wider range of prophecy there were personal factors, personal so far as Peter was concerned. Look at them and note the simple, but important significance for ourselves. Believers can all stand in the place of Peter in this respect.

In John 1:41-43 we find the prophecy referred to a change of character. "Jesus looked upon him" carries more than meets the eye. One of the writers of the gospels says that the Lord Jesus "knew what was in man" and needed not to be told. He looked on Simon and read him through, then He said "Thou art Simon, thou shalt be called Cephas, a rock, a stone." That was a prophecy! It tarried for its fulfilment several years and in the meantime it was shown how necessary it was for the prophecy to be fulfilled, and the change to be made. Simon would have been quite willing to be called Cephas at once, for he had a great opinion of his own rock-like character. He thought he could stand anything without breakdown or failure. There was a great deal of self-confidence and self-

assurance about Simon. Probably he did not understand the Lord's words at the time or appreciate their meaning.

It is one thing to be given truth, and another to be brought into the living good of it. It is one thing to be told the Lord's mind for us, and another to be right there in accordance with that mind, and it was necessary for Simon to have a revelation of the mind of the Lord and to be brought into the living reality of it, to the place where if it was not a living reality then, "I'm a lost man" would have been his cry. Something of that process has to be the experience of all who are to be brought into the Lord's purpose.

There are three phases when the mind of the Lord is indicated and His purpose is disclosed. First we think of it and appreciate it in our minds; there is danger there if it is not in our hearts. Then there is the stage of disillusionment, when we find we are getting further from that thought instead of nearer to it, when it seems as if our mind was receding and we are not appreciating it; that it is far beyond our reach. That is a very healthy sign. Then when we have come to the point where we have lost all confidence in ourselves in relation to that revelation and realise that if it is to be done at all, the Lord Himself must do it. It is necessary to have close association with the Lord for this; if Simon had not followed and been in close touch with the Lord he would not have reached the end of the prophecy. Out of touch with the Lord he would only have had himself, but in touch with the Lord he could see the growing contrast between the Lord and himself. It is necessary to learn what the Lord has been showing us. The prophecy carries, but it is with good purpose and at length it is fulfilled.

The marks of the prophecy are very clear for our apprehension. The Lord knows us better than we do ourselves. He knows exactly what is needed in us. He knows what is best for us, and shows us the need, and that it can and will be met, for there is that in the Holy Spirit that will meet the need of every life, the peculiar need of every make-up. There is a prophecy of the Holy Spirit in relation to our life. It is there difficulty is found and there are difficulties which only arise when we take hold of His prophecies and they are in ourselves, for He does not tell us HOW, but that it shall be. The Lord knows and utters the prophecy, but the result is not immediate. Simon was to be called Cephas and that meant a change of character; then unto that change there was a revelation of the utter worthlessness of what was before. That is a necessary part of the Lord's programme, of His dealings with us, and perhaps at that time there are more groans than at any other as we discover what we are in ourselves, what the truth is of ourselves and that we are anything but what we thought we were. It is not that the Lord is heaping on us anything extra to ourselves, but it is the Lord unveiling more of what we are. We might see and think there were many things to admire in this warm-hearted and zealous man who was swift to move, and was actuated by the best of intentions and purposes. There was nothing sluggish about Simon, there was nothing indifferent about him, we can see many good points, and he was the sort of man people often love, he was the type of man one can hardly help liking, yet is a very difficult sort of man to deal with.

In this prophecy this man sees his real value. It is revealed in association with Christ as something very different from his face value. He is a man who, with strong assertiveness and declaration, is denying his own profession with oaths and curses to save his own skin. He may say, "I will follow unto death", and the next minute on a girl chipping and taunting him, he can't stand it and goes all to pieces; it is a terrible disclosure of himself. We do not know ourselves before the time, but the Lord Jesus takes us in hand and brings us to view our whole self. He brings us to see ourselves, in order to get rid of ourselves, to make room for that New Man, so that we may have no confidence in the flesh. If we find we are not sufficient for things there may yet rise up a bit of the old personal self-life, but we shall recognise this thing and that it has been dealt with before. We see the Lord's prophecy in the way of fulfilment and that He has brought us to the place where we know in our

deepest hearts that WE shall fail, when we are there, the Holy Spirit is the answer to the prophecy. He alone can deal with the situation. The Holy Spirit changes us.

If I understand Pentecost aright, it meant that Simon had come to know his own need by the revelation of Christ, that the Overcomer at the right hand of God was made strength in the man who knew he had come to the end of himself. It is Christ coming in to take the place of this worthless self, when we know the real value of what this self is. We ought to be very dubious of any filling of the Holy Spirit which is not the result of a deep and anxious hopelessness of ourselves, and that as far as we are concerned everything is hopeless unless the Lord does it. That is the safe basis if something is to be wrought in us which is not merely theoretical, then the Lord will be in evidence, and not so much of Peter.

It is noticeable that at Pentecost there was an immediate opening of the lips of Simon, and in a moment or two a pouring out of a magnificent presentation of the Lord Jesus, exalting and extolling Him. Here is the evidence of a changed man, a man who not so long before had wilted before a serving maid, now standing up before thousands and dealing blow after blow till they cry, "What SHALL we do?" The change was in Simon who was now made Cephas by being brought into oneness with Him who is the Rock. In an inward way he became part of that spiritual Rock Christ Jesus, and his name was changed because his character was changed.

Let us all take the challenge and meaning of all this to our own hearts. In what realm are we? Are we in the realm of Simon before the prophecy? That is, have we never come under the breaking and revealing activities of the Holy Spirit? Has that breaking work been taking place so that we are growingly coming to a place of hopeless despair of ourselves? There is something wrong with us if such an experience is not ours. Is there still some element of self-confidence or self-assurance in us? Brokenness is an indispensable characteristic to usefulness. Moses would tell you that. Jacob, David, Paul, and many others would tell you that. It means that before the light can be manifested, the earthen pitcher must be broken. Can we say we are broken? It is a blessed thing if we can say we have reached the third stage and know that the excellency of power is of the Lord and not of ourselves; it is of the Lord and is nothing to do with us. One thing from which we should always shrink is to boast that WE could go through anything, but we trust the Lord and go through. Then we have changed Simon for Cephas; we have changed our natural state for what He is. The Holy Spirit is the Key and answer to all.

In Luke 5:8 we have the answer to the other prophecy "Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." He was amazed at the draught of fishes, "Fear not... take alive men (literal Gk. or, thou shalt catch men)". This prophecy has to do with vocation. Earlier the Lord Jesus, walking by the sea, had said, "Follow Me, I will make you fishers of men." They followed, but went back; now the Lord comes. He knew them well and had closely associated with them and tells Peter to launch out, and Simon Peter, knowing Him, replied, "We have toiled... taken nothing... at Thy word..." (Luke 5:5).

Now the prophecy concerning a change of vocation, "Henceforth you shall take alive men" (literal Greek). It is a contrast to that draught of fishes which will soon be dead, those at best are but dead works, henceforth the fish you shall take shall never die, and the prophecy was largely fulfilled on the day of Pentecost. Peter took alive men; it was a change of vocation.

Relationship to the Lord Jesus largely means a change from dead to living works, a changing from works which die, to a vocation of works which live on and on and never die, but are in certain and incorruptible life. "They left all and followed Him". Some intellectual person argued as to what happened to the fishes, they must have stopped for some time to deal with the fishes, such a

tremendous haul would mean that something would have to be done, some bigger thing than fishes was in view, and when this happens you lose sight of such lesser things, but the point carries something of real value, for when you have got a living thing, dead things cease to interest you, and it is just possible that servants took the fishes to market. However big, attractive, or amazing a thing is on earth, if it is in the realm of the dying, perishing, temporary or passing, a vision of the living and eternal will very soon emancipate from it and answer all these problems, settle all questions, and make very little of all these difficulties. I think if Peter had any question in his mind about the boats and fishes, Pentecost finished it for ever.

I want to apply this one simple thing. In what realm are you working and spending your life? Maybe the Lord will call you from the shop, the bench, or school, or what may be called secular employment; many have made the mistake, for maybe the Lord has not called you out from your usual work, but it does not affect the issue. Is that the end, or is there a vocation in, through, and beyond, so that there will be fruit in it unto eternal life? To what end are you working? Are you going to the office day after day, working and coming home tired? Is that all? Is that the sum total, or in any other sphere is that all, or is your bench or workroom your spiritual parish, your pulpit? Have you come to the place of proving the tremendous possibility of the Holy Spirit turning your workroom, your everyday circumstances into a heavenly calling for Himself?

I know what the Lord can enable over against odds from which one would have shrunk if He had not come in. It is a case of higher vocation in the realm of life, there is a change of vocation when the Holy Spirit gets possession of us. He brings us into the realm of living order in the midst of death.

John 21:18,19: "When thou wast young". We note that the particular connection of that prophecy was the death by which Peter should glorify God, but I think in principle and wider application it carries with it a change of Master. A change of Master as well as vocation. It is simply this: when you were young you were your own master, but when you get older Another will be your Master; when you were young you made your own plans and decisions, arranged your own life, followed your own ideas and thoughts, you argued for your own way and took the means you believed would bring you to your desired end, but when the Holy Spirit gets hold of you that order will cease.

You will notice from the day of Pentecost Peter was under a new Master, though there may have been a slight altercation. For example, before he went to the house of Cornelius, he argued, "I've never eaten anything unclean" but he had to give way and surrender.

I am not saying there will never be any dispute, but when the Holy Spirit gets hold there will be no trace of argument. If His far-transcending mastery has hold we very soon capitulate. Simon Peter had to see that he was needing that. "Thou shalt never wash my feet." It was a form of self-interest, for when the Lord Jesus said "If I wash not... thou hast no part", he said, "Then wash all".

Again when going to Jerusalem he said to the Lord, "Far be it from Thee...". Simon was again thrusting forth his own opinion, idea, and mind. He girded himself with his own purpose, judgment, and ambition. He saw himself coming to a place in the kingdom and even in association with the Lord Jesus and he took this course because he judged it would bring him to that desired end. All that had to be wound up and destroyed. When we see Peter between the betrayal, death, and resurrection we see him an ungirded man, broken, and with no strength in himself. When the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost Peter found a new Master, and the Lord Jesus girded him. He girded his spirit and mind, and in the end his body too - for Peter would not naturally have gone that way - but there was no rebellion.

We all know the paths along which the Holy Spirit constrains, but we find a shrinking, a reluctance. Our nature would not go that way; we go not because we like it, but because of the constraining of our new Master and Lord we go willingly.

Is that true? Have you a new Master? Do you know what Pentecost means? A complete end of the self-life, self-government, self-direction and abandonment to the Lord as Master.

May the Lord teach us and bring us to Pentecost and its abiding meaning of a new character, a new vocation, a new Master.