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"With Him... That He Might Send Them"

by T. Austin-Sparks

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Reading: Mark 3:13-19; Luke 6:12-17.

This, as you note, is a further step in the relationship of the disciples with the Lord. They had been called to discipleship some months before this, during which time they, with a large number of others called disciples, were on probation. It does not mean that all the others failed on probation, that they were not selected, but it does mean that these, amongst others, were very carefully and prayerfully chosen.

But the first point is that there is a calling to discipleship which is probationary and has something more in view. It is important not to confuse two things - the Lord calling us to Himself as disciples, that is, as followers and those who are to learn everything from Him, and full apostleship. I think a good many people have blurred that distinction, and I am afraid that the whole trend of organised Christianity is to say, "As soon as you have come to the Lord, you ought to be an apostle" with somewhat disastrous consequences. On the one hand, of putting such people in a false position; on the other hand, of making many others suffer at the hands of novices. There is a definite relationship to the Lord by His own call which is, nevertheless, a probationary thing and the time will come when a further step on His part will be taken provided that He, in His own sovereign judgment, knows that that step is to be taken where any one particular person is concerned. We are all on probation.

Then there comes this step which is not the final step at all; it is the second step. Whether there will be a final step in our case or not, we shall see, but it will be as well for us to recognise that there is an intermediate position, and that is the one that is marked by what we have read this morning. From the large number of disciples, He chose twelve "that they might be with Him, and that He might send them forth to preach". Those two things had to be kept together. Of course, they always will have to be kept together, but there is a special significance in it here - being with Him and being sent forth by Him, but every time coming back to Him. We might call it 'partial apostleship'. It is where we are serving the Lord, doing His work, in close relationship with Himself, but not yet fully and completely separated from all other things unto apostleship.

There is a difference between this and what happened on the day, and from the day, of Pentecost. Then it was fully-fledged apostleship; that is, the full purpose of their original calling and their subsequent selection came into view on that day. There is a position where many of the Lord's people are between the two. As I have said, it may be that many of these will not be sent out to a fully-fledged apostleship in this third sense - given a great life-work as these men were, and specially selected and appointed, as undoubtedly they were. The New Testament has these two lines running right through - those who have a specific purpose to fulfil of a very full, complete nature, and you have to say, "Well, that one and that one has been marked out for a particular work for God - and we see that in the New Testament and we see it since New Testament times, those who undoubtedly had a specific work to do, a purpose to accomplish for the Lord. On the other hand, there is a far greater number of those who are serving the Lord, who are preaching, who are, in a sense, being sent forth, but it is not in that particular and specific way where you can say that they are distinguished people for a great life-work. A greater number are in this second position, but it is one of very great meaning and value to the Lord, and for many it continues throughout their lives. But then, of course, we do not know, there may be in the case of any one of us something that is going to particularly characterise our lives, so that at the end it will be known perfectly clearly that one was chosen by God for that particular and unmistakably clear purpose. We need not take this on too seriously, to be elated or depressed, but here are these three stages in the lives of these men. The first, calling to discipleship, a probation; the second, selection unto partial apostleship; and then, ultimately with them, the breaking out into a particular, peculiar purpose for which they were chosen from heaven.

With Him to Learn by His Words

Now, this little phrase, "that they might be with Him", which had a twofold value, firstly that they should hear what He had to say, that they really should hear His words; and then that they should know His ways. Two things always to be kept together - His words and His ways.

It was a period which had two sides. By reason of His words and His ways, they were compelled to unlearn quite a lot. He went up into this very same mountain and taught them; that is, He called His disciples unto Him and opened His mouth and taught them, and when you read what is called "The Sermon on the Mount", you find there is nothing like it. It is altogether revolutionary, it is upsetting the whole of the ideas and standards of even the Jewish teachers. It is a new idea altogether, this of the kingdom, that the kingdom is something of meekness, peace-loving, righteousness, hunger and thirst after righteousness, and so on. It is getting down inside; it is saying "The kingdom is within you. It is an inward state, not what you are looking for which is an outward, temporal order." And so, by His words throughout, they were having to unlearn a very great deal and be corrected in their ideas and in their standards of values.

And then they had to learn, of course, on the positive side. But here the learning was very partial and imperfect. They were not understanding His words, they were not understanding what He was saying. After He had given parables they, probably led by Simon, came and said, "explain to us the parable, we do not understand". He called them "the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven", and they were mysterious, even to these men. They were not understanding what He was saying, but it was necessary for Him to say things, whether they understood or not, because He was laying in a deposit which was going to be the basis of the Holy Spirit's operation throughout the rest of their lives.

The Lord says a lot of things to us which we do not at present fully understand or comprehend. Nevertheless, He says them and it is important for us to recognise this, that the fact that we do not understand a thing now is no reason why we should put it aside and say, "I do not understand that, that is no use to me!" - and reject it. I expect you have lived long enough to know that something which you did not appreciate at all at a certain time of your life has become the very thing that helps you. I have had letters telling me that the first copy of the "Witness and Testimony" received went into the wastepaper basket because it was not understood, but now it is the very substance and food of life. Something has happened. I know of books I once read many years ago that were no use to me at all, I could not get anywhere with them; but I know now. Of course, it works the other way: things which once were so much to us may mean nothing to us now. A change has taken place in ourselves. A great change was going to take place in these men which would make it possible for them to understand all the things which they could not when first He said those things. Things which He says must never be discarded because we do not understand. Maybe I do not see the meaning of it now, but later the Lord may show me something about it; I just leave it there. Let us not reject it.

So the Lord laid in a rich deposit, and you find that in their afterlives, the apostles used it very much. Peter said, "This voice we ourselves heard borne out of heaven, when we were with Him in the holy mount" (2 Pet. 1:18), and if you follow the context of that, you find it had a lot to do with what happened in the days when he was so limited in his understanding. It was ground for the future work of the Holy Spirit, and that is a very important part of our development unto full calling. They were often puzzled by what He said and completely failed to grasp what He meant, or misunderstood. Nevertheless it was important that those things should be said. I expect you and I, even now, know a great deal of that - not being able to understand what the Lord is saying and doing, but "What I do thou knowest not now; but thou shalt understand hereafter" (John 13:7). So we are going to understand a great deal more presently than we do now, and that understanding will be a part of our qualification for the purpose unto which the Lord has called us - not only in the realm of the mind, but in the realm of practical experience.

With Him to Learn by His Works

Simon, no less than the rest, was terrified by that storm on the lake. But he was in the school learning; he was going out into a sea of humanity and world affairs which would be, in a spiritual sense, no less terrifying than that storm on that natural lake at that time. He would meet the terrific adverse winds of persecution and suffering which would arise against the church later on, but he would have to learn along this line of everyday experience in the natural world that the Lord Jesus is superior to the efforts that rage against Him and against His church. Let that boat and that company in the boat represent the church. Christ is there with them, in the midst, and then project that spiritually into the future history of the church. See terrific onslaughts to overwhelm and swallow up the church and Christ and the Testimony and everything; but see the mighty survival and triumph simply because the Lord Himself is there.

This was all a part of the training for full purpose, and we have to go through that sort of thing where, in one realm, we do not understand at all what the Lord is saying and doing, but it is unto a day that is coming. We go through experiences where it seems we will be swallowed up and the end is come, there is no future at all, and that is all stock-in-trade for coming days. We are going to prove that it is not the end because the Lord is there, and it is going to be not only survival but victory and a testimony.

With Him to Be Influenced by His Personal Presence

"That they might be with Him" - and the only word remaining for the moment is that this being with Him apart from His words and His ways, His very personal influence could not but have told tremendously upon them. We do not know how much His personal influence affected them. I feel that we very often become more occupied with the teaching, sayings and the doings of the Lord than we do with His personal influence.

To live with the Lord and near to the Lord has an effect upon us which is far deeper and more revolutionary than even studying His teaching. What can be in the mental realm is one thing, and the study of the technique of the Lord's ways is one thing, but it may be very largely on an outer circle of our being. Life with the Lord Himself gets right to the inside and makes all the difference. It changes us: it changes our manner; it changes our tone. It is impossible to live near the Lord without being checked up on all sorts of things, silently and quietly, without having to be told. That is the most effective way of changing; far better than being told we should do this and not do that, that this is unfortunate, and so on; just to live near the Lord, and come under His hands so that we are definitely checked up.

What is it that makes people change all sorts of things without being told anything about it? When people first come to the Lord, they are not told they should do this and that now they are Christians, but you see them doing it; it is happening. And we should continue in that way where we know that being with the Lord is bringing modifications and transformations and making a difference: influencing and affecting us. But it is something that you cannot put down in a manual. The fact that they had just been with Him probably was the greatest fact in the whole of their future lives, and much would come out of that later on, that simply being with Him apart from anything He said or did.

Let us ask the Lord to keep us with Him, and out of the being with Him will come the preaching. It is a poor sort of preaching that does not come out of being with the Lord.