

"The Lord is There"

T. Austin-Sparks:

When we speak of anything being a criterion, we mean just what the dictionary gives as the definition, i.e., 'the principle taken as the standard of judging'; 'any established law or principle by which propositions or opinions are compared, in order to discover their truth'. So a criterion is that by which the truth and value of any matter is determined. By such-and-such a principle or fact the whole thing stands or falls; is true or false. That then is our objective in relation to Divine Purpose. Can we put our finger definitely upon that Divine Purpose and see that it is the climax, the culmination of all God's ways? Well, what is that climax, that one Divine end, by which everything is to be judged, now and for ever?

In these chapters we have been allowing the prophet Ezekiel to be our guide and interpreter, seeing that the book which goes by his name is not only a book about prophecies and history, but a book of spiritual principles with a much greater context than earth and time. When we reach the end of that book, we find ourselves in the presence of that great ultimate, that universal climax, that realised purpose, and it is all summed up in the brief, though vast, phrase:

"The Lord is There".

What a wide field is opened by that climacteric phrase! The Bible is bounded by this supreme concept. It opens and closes with the presence of God with man. It is the governing issue throughout all its pages and phases. There are almost countless aspects of this one thing, but, be it so, the issue is just this alone: Is the Lord there or is He not? Is the Lord in that or is He not? Is the Lord with that, with him or her, in that place, in that decision or course, or is He not? That is the criterion. His presence with unfallen man and His departure from disobedient man is an eternal principle. His presence in the beginning indicates purpose. His presence by the Incarnation of His Son is unto the redemption of the purpose. His presence by the Holy Spirit is to make that purpose actual as an inward thing.

The major aspects force us back to basic considerations. Let us not hurry on with greatness of vision, but pause and quietly tell ourselves that what is more vital and important than anything else in all our life is that the Lord is with us. Futility, vanity, disappointment and remorse will most certainly overtake us, sooner or later, and overtake all our undertakings if, at length, it should be found that the Lord is not with us. It is a perilous thing to go on without the Lord. Moses, who did know something, cried: "If thy presence go not with us, carry us not up hence". Mere assumption in this matter may well prove to have been fatal presumption. "Supposing him to be in the company" may lead to the necessity to retrieve the value of the whole journey (Luke 2:44).

The Bible shows that nothing can be done which will be of eternal value unless God is in it.

When we have settled this basic fact and let it become the ever- and all-dominating principle in life and work, we are ready to appreciate certain other things which stand out so clearly in this connection. The first of these is:

The Holy Spirit's Meticulous and Scrupulous Exactness.

If the Holy Spirit is jealous for the main object, He is shown to be equally jealous for the detailed features. This can be seen in various connections.

If the creation and man were intended for the presence of God, they had to be a meticulous expression of God's mind. God was Himself the Architect. God was Himself working scrupulously to a Pattern. (The whole Bible shows that Pattern to be His Son.) The Holy Spirit became the Custodian and energy of that Pattern. Nothing was haphazard, left to chance, or left to man or angels to conceive or design.

Another great and forceful example of the principle was the Tabernacle of Testimony. Here, again, nothing in design, even to a pin or a stitch, a measurement, a material, a position, was left to man. It was all to be according to "the pattern shewn". The Holy Spirit took charge of the artisans, and only when 'all things were according to the pattern' did God presence Himself. The slightest deflection would have meant that it was only an empty shell without God.

The same is to be noted in the Temple of Solomon and the Temple of Ezekiel's vision.

When it comes to the consummate presentation of that which (Him who) is typified in the Old Testament - the

Incarnate Son of God - "Emmanuel, God with us" - again, the Spirit of God takes over and governs all the details of His conception, birth, life, history, works, death, resurrection, etc. See the place of the Holy Spirit in the life of Jesus. God's Son will Himself declare that "the Son can do nothing of [out from] himself, but... the Father" (John 5:19).

After the Person comes

The Corporate Body - The Church.

The Architect is God the Father. The Builder is God the Son. The Custodian and energy is God the Holy Spirit.

Here, again, nothing in conception and planning is left to angels or men. If man interferes, insinuates himself, and tries to organize or run the Church, so much the worse for the man, as the New Testament both shows in results and declares in words. Nothing but confusion, frustration and shame can follow man's hand upon that which exists wholly for the presence of God.

The last chapters of the Bible must be read in the light of all the immediately preceding chapters. There we see the progressive judgment in every realm - beginning with the churches - of everything unsuitable to the presence of the Lord. The end is all that removed and a state - symbolically represented - which is suitable to Him, and "the Lord is there".

What a challenge all this is: to the Christian to "walk in the Spirit"; for the Church and the churches to be governed and sanctified by the Holy Spirit.

The hand of man is a defiled thing. Only "he that hath clean hands, and a pure heart" can "ascend into the hill of the Lord". We may not put our hand on one another for judgment or control. We may not put our hand on the House of God. We may not (like Uzza) put our hand on the ark. Woe to Uzzah, to Ananias and Sapphira, to Diotrophes, who touch the holy things of the Lord's presence with fleshly hands of natural strength, ambition, and pride!

How safe it is to be where the Lord is if, through the Cross, we are made suitable. How dangerous it is even to draw near without taking off the shoes of association with the cursed world!

These are shorter chapters in the 'Horizon' series, but they are particularly concentrated and must be taken more for intrinsic values than for volume of material.