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## "Jehovah Shammah"

*by T. Austin-Sparks*

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### "The Lord is There"

*"The name of the city from that day shall be, JEHOVAH-SHAMMAH" (Ezekiel 48:35).*

So, the end sees the eternal object attained: that which prompted creation; that which motivated Providence; that which has always been the dynamic of Sovereignty; and that which carried through Redemption.

The supreme and all-inclusive object has been God's presence in pleasure and satisfaction in the midst of men.

The City of Ezekiel's prophecy has its realisation in the "holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God" (Rev. 21:2). "And God himself shall be with them" (verse 3).

This has ever been God's quest. From one of many standpoints, the Bible can be said to be from beginning to end a record of God's quest for a place and for conditions suitable for His presence. In many symbols, types, and representations, this is the spiritual principle which governs and explains.

In a comprehensive way the Incarnation gathers up everything in this one connection: "Immanuel - God with us". The Cross is set in this one relationship - to clear the ground for God's dwelling. The Advent of the Holy Spirit must be seen supremely in the light of this eternal purpose. The Church is explained and justified in this one design. The individual believer is apprehended with this pre-eminent Divine thought. In all God is working toward this one issue and verdict:

"THE LORD IS THERE".

If this is true, and surely it is obvious in the Scriptures, then certain very practical conclusions and issues follow.

### **1. This is the Explanation of the Cosmic Conflict**

That there is such a conflict is surely more apparent now than at any previous time in history. The new attitude toward this matter is one of the many signs of the times. We have passed through a phase in which Satan's cleverest ruse has been widely successful. He has persuaded men not to believe in him, and has resolved the whole matter of evil into 'complexes', 'neuroses', 'good in the making', etc. Theology has bowed out the Devil, and he has grinned behind the mask of deception, as he sees his dupes so 'clever'. But there is a come-back, and it is largely due to an altogether new appraisal of the New Testament and of Paul in particular. Paul has come into a place that he has never before held, and this postulates a principle, that a return movement is always stronger than the first position because it has in it all the strength of bitter lessons learned through experience.

A modern writer of no mean authority, a professor in one of the premier universities of Scotland, drawing attention to this return movement on the part of other outstanding intellectuals, says:

*"It is the cosmic range and the sheer malignity of the evil they have seen in our world which have led them to re-espouse the Pauline view [of demonology]. And when we see, as we have seen in our time... insensate madness taking complete possession of a great and cultured nation and issuing in unspeakable horrors and cruelties - can we wonder that thoughtful men draw the Pauline conclusion?"*

*"There is no metaphysical reason why the cosmos should not contain spirits higher than man who have made evil their good, who are ill-disposed to the human race, and whose activities are co-ordinated by a master-strategist."*

This writer goes on to illustrate.

*"There are times when the police lay their hands on a criminal, and yet are not satisfied. Behind this petty thief is some other person, dimly guessed at, some master-hand moving the pawn. The police can recognise that other's strategy, for the man in their hands could never have thought it all out by himself. The marks of Satan-like strategy in our world have moved many to Paul's view that more than human agents are pitted against us in the battle, that 'the Power of darkness' is more than an outworn figure of speech, and that, though Luther said, 'his doom is writ', he still contrives to bedevil the affairs of men and nations."*

What is the inclusive objective of this kingdom of evil? It is nothing less or other than to oust God and usurp His throne; "setting himself [Satan] forth as God" (2 Thess. 2:4).

So we find ourselves in a time when the battle is joined, on a scale beyond anything known before, between a *true, spiritual, heavenly* expression of 'God's House', and the anti-God forces. No, not between the evil powers and formal and lifeless Christianity, but between them and any *vital* representation in corporate form of God in Christ as here by the Holy Spirit. The more vital, the more intense the conflict! Truly spiritual and devoted people of God, who are more concerned for Christ than for 'Christian' *things*, are feeling the pressure from that dark and vicious realm in a way that sometimes nears the overwhelming point. God is present in them and in the midst of them, and from Satan's point of view they are a menace and must be 'liquidated'. This intensive pressure

points to a nearing advent of Christ, when His presence will bring the other presence to a climax. "The devil is gone down... having great wrath, knowing that he hath but a short time" (Rev. 12:12).

## **2. This is the Ultimate Criterion of Christianity**

There is a 'judgment beginning at the house of God' to which the Bible brings us in the first part of its final book. The climax of the sevenfold interrogation, examination and judgment of chapters 1-3 finds Christ outside of the door of a Christian church (3:20). The verdict passed and the admonition given shows that the ultimate criterion is whether God is found within.

To put that in other words: It is not our orthodoxy, 'soundness' of doctrine, correctness of procedure, many 'good works', zeal, 'success', reputation, etc., that is the final criterion and justification (so say all of these messages), but whether the Lord is met with in us and in our midst. The Lord never commits Himself to that which is not according to His mind. If He is truly present and can be sensed by open-hearted and pure-spirited seekers after Him, then that is the argument for things being, at least in measure, not contrary to but according to His heart. The Lord Himself is the 'First and the Last', the test of everything. The final question is: 'Do I meet the Lord in that man or woman, in that company and place?'

Many other things are made the basis of judgment by so many, but this is God's test "Jehovah-Shammah" - "The Lord is there". This does not mean that there is never any room for a larger measure of His presence. The measure will always be determined by suitability to that presence. 'To fill all things' is the determined end made known as God's purpose.

This leads us to

## **3. The Meaning of the Life of Believers, Individual and Corporate**

It is sometimes a good thing to stand back from all that comes into our lives as believers, both personally and collectively, and ask some fundamental questions. 'Why, really, are we here? Why am I a Christian? What did God mean when He brought Christ into my life? Above and beyond all the details of life and work - the trials, sufferings, perplexities; the hopes, blessings, and activities - is there one thing that, in God's thought, governs all?'

Yes, there is! It is that there may be written on the life initially, to become progressively clearer and more luminous: "Jehovah-Shammah" - "The Lord is there". This is a statement of fact supported by the whole Bible. This is a test of everything and the standard of all values and judgment. This is the explanation of all discipline and suffering.

The same is true of the collective aspect. The 'meetings', 'congregations', 'services', 'churches', etc., are to God's pleasure and satisfaction just - and only - in the measure in which it is positively true that the Lord is there, and is met there. Not artificial and formal ways and means of making an impression of solemnity and reverence; not mysticism and artistry; not soulful emotions, either sober or ecstatic; but the sin-challenging, life and light-giving, heart-satisfying and soul-saving presence of God. The verdict must be - not this or that about any feature, but - 'We have been in the presence of the Lord: the Lord was there; we have met the Lord!'

May the Lord keep us alive in all things to this ultimate criterion. May we ever be exercised that when people meet us they shall meet the Lord, and that when they gather with us the predominant and abiding impression may be - *"THE LORD IS THERE"*.