



The Online Library of T. Austin-Sparks

Published as a PDF by Austin-Sparks.net

Email: info@austin-sparks.net

In keeping with T. Austin-Sparks' wishes that what was freely received should be freely given and not sold for profit, and that his messages be reproduced word for word, we ask if you choose to share these messages with others, to please respect his wishes and offer them freely - free of any changes, free of any charge (except necessary distribution costs) and with this statement included.

The Day in Which We Live

by T. Austin-Sparks

First published in "A Witness and A Testimony" magazine, Mar-Apr 1963, Vol. 41-2, as an Editor's Letter.

In seeking the Lord for the specific note to strike at the commencement of and over this further issue of the paper, in the quiet hours of the night that note has seemed to sound in one's own heart. It seems to be wrapped up in a phrase used by our Lord when He was about to leave Jerusalem and all that it stood for. In His tone there was a mixture of sorrow, pain, reproach, rebuke, anger, warning, He cried: "If thou hadst known in this day... the things that belong unto peace, but now they are hid" etc., or, "If thou hadst known in this *thy* day", etc. (Luke 19:43). The part especially underlined is "this thy day".

The Bible as a book of the history of God's ways with man is marked by that word 'Day', in the sense of a period and phase of time. Such 'Days' always had two sides. On the one side it was what obtained with man: the conditions, the tendencies, the ways. On the other side was what God was doing in relation to those ways. Those 'Days' were usually distinguished by some particular feature which stood out and made it possible for ever to speak of such times as 'the days when - such-and-such was the predominant characteristic'. For instance: there were the 'days of Enoch'. Enoch comes down in history as the man who walked with God. To say that is to be invidious, to make a comparison and a contrast. It is to say that, in Enoch's days the general condition was definitely otherwise; men did not walk with God, they walked away and apart from God, and the quite unusual thing in those days was for a man to walk with God. Jesus spoke of "As it was in the days of Noah", and then proceeded to describe the particular features of those days.

So we go on. The forty years of Israel's sojourn in the wilderness are spoken of as "the day of the temptation (tempting of God) in the wilderness". The whole setting and nature of the ministry of Prophets is referred to as "in the days of the Prophet...". Jesus referred to His own brief period in the flesh on this earth as "this thy day". He constantly referred to a coming dispensation as "in that day". We speak of "In the days of the apostles". Thus we characterize certain times and happenings right down the centuries as such-and-such 'days' or such-and-such 'a day'. Well, what is the point? If we are to catch the warning or pleading tone in the Lord's cry: "If thou hadst known", giving the emphasis to the "If" which some translators render "Oh, that thou hadst", surely the point is that it is all-important, it is of vital consequence that we should be aware of the particular nature and significance of the day in which we live. It has ever and always been the special function of prophetic ministry, or shall we say, the specific work of the prophetic function, to make the people of God aware of the nature and meaning of the particular period "Day" in which they lived. This undoubtedly was true of the Prophets of Israel. It was distinctly true of the greatest of all Prophets - our Lord Himself. This was that prophetic aspect of the apostles themselves: and it is this with which the Bible closes in great emphasis through John. Again and again since what are called 'New Testament days' - or 'times', God has raised up a Voice to make His people know what belonged to their particular time. Sometimes it has been a man: sometimes a movement: sometimes personal: sometimes corporate. The Wind of God has blown and men have been aware of a certain 'going'.

Too often, as in the day of our Lord, prejudice, preoccupation with something temporal and earthly, religious traditionalism, etc., have dulled the spiritual senses, dimmed or blinded the spiritual eyes, and the "day of visitation" has left them high and dry. Having done no more than intimate a very big and far-reaching matter, we are under the necessity of putting our finger upon the particular feature of our own "Day". And yet, it is not peculiar to our day, it is the persistent enemy of God's interests and God's people through all time. But it seems to have become more widely and paralytically real in the last few years than ever.

It is the deadening hand of mediocrity. The dictionary describes the mediocre as 'the middle rate', 'the moderate degree', 'middling'. In other words, the general as over against the specific; the indistinct as over against the unmistakable; the lesser as over against the absolute; the small as over against the immense; the meagre as over against the abundant. These contrasts could be multiplied but they are sufficient for indication. In no realms are there the outstanding leaders, teachers, preachers, artists, singers, politicians, etc., of the last century. Only here and there is there a man who is a little above his fellows and a bit more outstanding as a leader, preacher, or teacher, than what is general.

How ordinary has almost everything become. We call to mind the Piersons, Gordons, Simpsons, Moules, Webb-Peploes, Meyers, Hudson Taylors, Spurgeons, Parkers, and the whole galaxy of spiritual giants in the realm of Christianity, and we say, 'Where are there such today'. There seems to be no voice which rings out so that the whole Church can hear God's distinctive word to His people today. No specific testimony is given a chance. While there is a big quest for God to do a new thing, God must be careful not to upset tradition or interfere with the set and established order or system!

Everything that does not conform to a fixed and 'recognized' design is suspect. The historical form must be preserved. Of course, we are *not* referring to fundamental and essential doctrine. We are concerned with the absolute sovereignty of the Holy Spirit. Too many watchdogs of man's fears have been set around the citadel of truth. We have known of several instances of outstandingly used servants of God who had a vital message for the times, because they spoke - incidentally - of

something that was not in *the* doctrinal economy of the particular convention movement, being for ever after excluded from the platform; to the eternal loss of God's people, and we have lived to see the movement become mediocre and finding great difficulty in getting 'speakers' with a real and adequate message. The apostle Paul was a positive menace to all mediocrity resultant from fear, jealousy, compromise, and prejudice.

The note has been struck and to it all that follows in the ministry of this little paper is tuned. The Lord, in faithfulness, keep us from falling a prey to this historic enemy - mediocrity, the middle measure, loss of distinctiveness of testimony, definiteness of vision and purpose. We have an immense Christ; a superlative calling; and unsearchable riches of resource.