

The Voice of Isaiah (Continued)

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the importance of spiritual perception and understanding in the Christian life, highlighting the significance of Isaiah's prophetic ministry and the role of the Holy Spirit in understanding God's message.

Scripture: Isaiah 6:9, Matthew 13:14, Acts 13:27

Topics: "Spiritual Perception", "The Prophetic Voice"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of the Prophet Isaiah's voice in the New Testament, noting that his prophecies are often linked to Israel's rejection of God's messengers, particularly Jesus Christ. He highlights the tragic irony that despite the frequent readings of Isaiah, many failed to perceive the truth of Christ's presence and message. Sparks warns that true understanding requires spiritual rebirth and the ability to hear with faith, contrasting the blindness of Israel with the enlightenment of those who accept the Holy Spirit's guidance. He challenges listeners to reflect on how the teachings of Isaiah and the prophets have transformed their lives, underscoring the importance of not just hearing but truly understanding and applying God's word. The sermon concludes with a call to recognize the dual nature of prophetic voices, which can lead to both comfort and judgment.

Transcript

"They knew not... the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath" (Acts 13:27).

"And unto them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah..." (Matthew 13:14).

It is very impressive that the Prophet Isaiah is quoted so many times in the New Testament. Over fifty-five times is Isaiah cited. Perhaps still more impressive is the fact that so many of these quotations are related to Israel's antagonism to God's messengers, and particularly to His Son, Jesus Christ. In the Gospels, where Isaiah is quoted so often, there are only two exceptions to this fact.

If this Prophet alone has such a very large place in the New Testament, which is the record of Christ; in other words, if there was so much Christ background to this Prophet, how very true it must have been that the Lord said so early to this Prophet as to his ministry:

"Tell this people, Hear ye indeed (marg. continually), but understand not; and see ye indeed (marg. continually), but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their

eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart..." (Isaiah 6:9,10).

"Read every sabbath," said Paul, but not perceived, not understood.

We, who now have the cumulative story, are amazed and cry: 'O, can it possibly be that Jesus, the Son of God, could be so imminent, both in prophetic ministry and His own personal presence, speaking, living, suffering, working, for so many years, and people be in close approximation without really perceiving and understanding?'

Yes, it is all too possible that, after years of hearing and being in touch, the final verdict should be: 'After all, they have not seen, the root of the matter is not in them, and they can persecute and discard without a pang.' There is no Prophet who brings Christ more into view than Isaiah. Probably no Prophet has suffered more at the hands of Biblical criticism. It is always significant that where Christ is brought most to view, there the opposition of every kind is fullest and fiercest. The work of discrediting will be found to reach its strongest when and where the glorifying of Christ is most present. We have heard it said in our own time: 'We don't want prophetic ministry; we want simple preaching!'

Tradition has it that the Prophet Isaiah was sawn asunder, and that the reference in Hebrews 11:37 is to him. If this is true, it alone would indicate how vehement is the hatred of the exaltation of Jesus. A focal point of this rejection is the pre-incarnate Divine sonship of Jesus Christ. One of the most remarkable statements in the New Testament relates to this. Quoting Isaiah 6:10, John says: "These things said Isaiah, because he saw his glory; and he spake of him" (John 12:41). This means that "The Lord, sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple... the Lord of hosts... the King, the Lord of hosts" is identified by John with Jesus. It is an astounding statement, and makes the matter of spiritual perception and understanding quite an acute one. Nevertheless, John understood it, and it is a part of that tremendous difference between the old Israel and the new spiritual Israel. The blindness of the former, due to pride, prejudice, and jealousy, has meant for them this closed heaven and has cost them dearly.

Hearing the voices of the Prophets, and not only the words, is thus no less a matter than one of life or death, salvation or condemnation. We repeat what we have said before: the New Testament, Gospels, Acts, Epistles and Revelation, is built very largely upon this faculty of the new creation of 'having an ear to hear, and hearing'. It is a faculty, like that of seeing, which - through new birth - gives capacity for knowing meanings, and not only theories or "the letter of the word". It is a simple fundamental of the Christian life; hence it stood right at the inception of things relating to the Kingdom, as in the interview of Nicodemus - the scholar and teacher - with Jesus. New birth means a new entity with new faculties.

Israel, as a nation, not believing and being born again, was doubly deaf by a judgment. This is the first thing that Isaiah says and 'voices' in relation to the Son of God. We have heard, read and said much about Isaiah 6, the Throne and the Lord upon it; the Train and the Temple; the Seraphim and their thrice Holy chant. Also the cry of woe from the Prophet, and his call and response to God's appeal. But we have learned little of the terrible issue of his commission. We know that Isaiah was read in the synagogues of Israel, for at Nazareth the ruler of the synagogue handed that Prophet to Jesus to read publicly. The Ethiopian eunuch of Acts 8 had been to Jerusalem and probably secured from the Temple or synagogue a copy of Isaiah's prophecies and was reading it in his chariot. He confessed his blindness as to its meaning, and confessing in humility, his blindness was removed. "He went on his way rejoicing," while Israel - who had the same scrolls - went on their way to perdition. It is not what we have, but what we

know that we have, and whether what we have changes our lives, that matters.

The Holy Spirit, who inspired the Prophets (1 Peter 1:11), made the Apostles and believers understand that it was as the Spirit of Christ in them (the Prophets) that they wrote of Him. Thus they saw Jesus by the Holy Spirit where those who had not the Spirit were blind. This is not only a statement; it is a test.

Prophetic ministry, which is just the proclamation and presentation of God's mind, always has a threefold meaning:

(1) It brings that presentation of the mind of God into the presence of men.

(2) It challenges to the humble obedience of faith, with which is offered the new capacity and faculty of spiritual understanding.

(3) It determines destiny according to - not the hearing of the words, but - "the hearing of faith" and the consequent walking according to 'knowledge', or otherwise.

The serious and solemn question must be honestly and sincerely faced: 'How much of all that I have heard has really changed and shaped my life?' 'Is it so much teaching, doctrine, theory, or is it the truth of God?'

The right answer will be the ground of life and salvation.

The wrong answer will be condemnation and judgment.

The voices of the Prophets have a stern as well as a comforting note. This is peculiarly true of the voice of Isaiah.

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