

What Seest Thou?

by T. Austin-Sparks

The sermon emphasizes the critical importance of spiritual sight in understanding God's purpose and the transition from Israel to the Church in fulfilling that purpose.

Scripture: Jeremiah 1:11

Topics: "Spiritual Vision", "Prophetic Ministry"

Description

T. Austin-Sparks emphasizes the significance of the question 'What seest thou?' as a divine inquiry that shapes the spiritual history and destiny of individuals and nations. He highlights that the prophetic ministry, which prioritizes God's full intention for His people, is crucial for spiritual progress and assurance. The sermon stresses the importance of spiritual sight, asserting that true understanding and vision are essential for effective ministry and unity within the Body of Christ. Sparks challenges listeners to reflect on their own spiritual vision and relationship with God, urging them to seek clarity on God's purpose in their lives. Ultimately, he calls for a deep engagement with the question, as it holds the key to understanding God's current dealings with His people.

Transcript

"What Seest Thou?"

"The word of the Lord came unto me, saying ... What seest thou?... The word of the Lord came unto me the second time, saying, What seest thou?" Jeremiah 1:11,13.

"Then said the Lord unto me" Jeremiah 24:3

"The angel that talked with me ... said unto me, What seest thou?" Zechariah 4:1,2

"The burden ... which Isaiah ... did see" Isaiah 13:1

"And he said ... What seest thou?" Amos 8:2

What a very great deal was bound up with this interrogating and changing method of the Lord with His Prophets! The history and destiny of individuals, of the chosen nation, and of the nations, were involved in what they were able to answer. We are not here concerned with the specific answers that they gave, but we are very seriously concerned with the principle governing this so great ministry. In what we are going to say we feel that we are touching one of the most vital factors, if not actually the most vital factor in spiritual

history. It is with us, as with them, a "Burden", something weighty and demanding, for, as we have said, the spiritual history and destiny of God's people are bound up with it; and who is not concerned with that?

Extra weight is given to this matter when we realise that at a certain time in the life of God's people the function of the Prophets took pre-eminence over all other functions. Kings and Priests came under the Prophet's power. Perhaps it ought not to have been so, but there it was, and it has become the accepted way of defining even the offices of the greatest of all - our Lord Jesus Christ as Prophet, Priest and King; giving the prophetic function priority. The reason for this is very clear when we remind ourselves that the function of the Prophet was to set forth, represent, and battle for God's full and final thought concerning His people. The true Prophet has the sovereign support of God in a way that, sooner or later, his ministry will be fully vindicated, and destiny will be determined by it. Thus it is that we must recognise that, while God may appoint some servants particularly to this ministry, and qualify accordingly, the ministry itself is to be so embodied in the people: that they become its expression, that is, the representation of God's whole mind and intention.

When we move among the true Prophets of God we find ourselves in an atmosphere of real and intense concern. It is almost the atmosphere of emergency and crisis. Here everything is positive, momentous, urgent, serious. The Prophet is a man of passion. Reality is the passion of this ministry, and any artificiality or pretence is intolerable.

Having said that, we are brought to the two main things which lie behind this present consideration. They are the seeing and what is to be seen; the principle and the message. But, do let it be understood that, while you may not think of yourself as the messenger or the prophet, your spiritual history and destiny are inseparably bound up with the principle and the message being true in your own case. We embark, then, upon two very big and important matters.

The Principle of all Spiritual History and Destiny

This is contained in the second word of the Divine interrogation - "What seest thou?"

We shall all agree that seeing governs progress, assurance, and safety.

Without sight progress is, at best, limited. To the blind the range and distance of unaided movement are restricted. There is also a real element of uncertainty, tentativeness, and question. Further life for the unseeing is an uncoordinated life. It is lonely and largely isolated.

It was just like this in the time of the Prophets, and we could quote from them immensely as they pronounced upon it. The New Testament very largely has to do with this very matter, and it is most emphatic that spiritual seeing governs all spiritual progress, competence, assurance, reliability and service. The great Apostle Paul with his life and ministry put it all down to this one basic thing: God revealed His Son in him. God shone into his heart, and he said that his life-ministry was "to open their eyes" (Acts 26:18). Jesus said much about, and, by one tremendous act, showed that sight is a birthright. It was to the man born blind that He gave sight this was a "sign" of the spiritual heritage of the 'new-born'.

The New Testament is very positive that we shall only make spiritual progress, and not be either arrested, turned aside, misted, deceived, or robbed of our assurance, as we "walk in light", as we have 'the Spirit of wisdom and revelation'. In other words, as we see! Further, the whole matter of co-ordination in the Body of Christ, the Church, and the churches is itself dependent upon oneness of vision. It is essential to be of

one mind by one seeing. Weakness, erratic progress, lack of effectiveness, and marred testimony are all traceable to difference in vision, therefore of objective.

Paul spoke of fighting so as not to be beating the air. There is a touch of humour in that. He had evidently seen some boxers using tremendous force and being desperately in earnest, but landing it in the air and really hitting nothing. Every boxer of repute knows how important his eyes are in a contest.

Our spiritual progress, strength, and ultimate attainment depend upon initial, and continually growing, spiritual seeing! The times sadly need such people. In all your praying pray persistently for spiritual sight!

Now we come to the main part of our present "burden" and purpose; the emphasis is on the first word of God's challenge: What seest thou?

This is going to lead us a very long way and into very great truths. We must, however, begin here by putting it to you. What would be your answer if you were asked: "What do you see as to the inclusive thought of God for this present dispensation? What is God doing in this age? What are His people now, and what is the explanation of His dealings with them? Who are you? What are you?"

It is the answer to these questions and challenges that engages us now and in the following chapters. May the Lord help us to put it clearly, and help you to see it unto His final satisfaction! If this is really a matter of serious concern to you, you will be willing to compass much ground with us, for "there is much land to be possessed". So very much is bound up with that spirit and disposition expressed in those words: "If by any means I may attain." The Bible does show us that the people who really 'attained' were the people who meant business with God; and, on the other hand, those who made shipwreck of their lives were those who did not so mean business.

Well: What seest thou?

The New Testament is built upon the Old Testament, and the Old Testament is - in the main - the history of God's elect. The first flash of light is in that dark hour of man's deflection when God intimated that there would be an elect Seed (Genesis 3:15). The thin red line of that Seed runs on with a few individuals known as Patriarchs until it reaches a man called Abram. With and from him the river broadens into a nation, and from that point the Bible is wholly the book of the history of that nation for forty-two generations (Matthew 1:11). So that the New Testament is preponderatingly built upon the history of Israel. In the New Testament the Old Testament is quoted some two hundred and seventy-three times, and mainly in connection with Israel. The many and varied phases of light and shade in that nation's history are drawn upon for exhortation, admonition, inspiration and solemn warning. Again and again some aspect of Israel's life is taken up to support, illuminate, reinforce an appeal or a warning being made to Christians.

The life and history of Israel are recapitulated and relived in the history of Christianity, but with this major difference; in the Old Testament it is temporal, earthly. In the New Testament it is spiritual, heavenly, eternal.

With the New Testament the days of the historical Israel are numbered and that nation is rejected. All its temporal system is wound up and done with and its spiritual principles are passed into another nation and constitute it the new Israel. We make this statement of facts, and presently we shall be enlarging upon them.

In effect the New Testament is the continuation of all that was spiritually true of the Old Testament Israel on the Divine side. The New Testament takes up, not the things and literal history of the old Israel, but the meaning and spiritual principles of their history.

Consequently, the Church of the New Testament is Israel in a heavenly and spiritual form. Everything that was in the earthly life of the Old Testament Israel is now taken up spiritually for either the constitution of the Church, or for its warning. The Church is reliving the life of Israel on a heavenly and spiritual basis. Hence, the Church is called "the Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16 and context) and Peter, having himself passed through the great transition, transfers the major characterisations of historic Israel to the spiritual Church. (See Matthew 21:42-44, and I Peter 2:6-10.) We are going to take up as many aspects of this as we can in order to answer the governing question: "What seest thou?"

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