

Bible Lessons



“How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!”

Romans 10:15

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Quarterly Bible Lessons for Adults and Young People

THEME FOR BIBLE LESSONS FOR THIRD QUARTER, 2017

The Glorious Gospel

The theme for this quarter has me all excited! In this study, we will find that the message God sent to the world way back in the beginning—through the patriarchs, who, moving through the lands of the heathen sought to convert them to the worship of the true God; through the psalmist, who in poem and prose sang the Jubilee “good news” message to the nations; and through the prophets, who peered far into the future to the time of Christ and the expansion of His kingdom to the far reaches of the earth—is the *same message*, now in glorious fulfillment, heralded by the apostles and missionaries of the New Testament. We will study how God called the different prophets of the Old Testament and the ministers of the New. We will examine the qualifications of a gospel minister. We will rejoice in the power of the gospel message and seriously reflect upon the sufferings associated with spreading the gospel.

Some of our lessons will have a slightly different format. Instead of verses to read, there will be a biographical outline. Each class will need to decide if you have time to read the outline word for word, or just use it as a reference as you continue into the discussion.

As the children’s song says, “He has called us too,” we want our hearts to be challenged to share this glorious gospel until the end of time.

How will *you* tell it today?

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

JULY 2, 2017

THE GOSPEL TO ALL NATIONS PROPHESED, PART ONE

Genesis 22:17 That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies;

18 And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.

Psalm 2:8 Ask of me, and I shall give thee the heathen for thine inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for thy possession.

9 Thou shalt break them with a rod of iron; thou shalt dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel.

Psalm 19:2 Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge.

3 There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not heard.

4a Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.

Psalm 22:27 All the ends of the world shall remember and turn unto the Lord: and all the kindreds of the nations shall worship before thee.

Psalm 68:11 The Lord gave the word: great was the company of those that published it.

18 Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the Lord God might dwell among them.

31 Princes shall come out of Egypt; Ethiopia shall soon stretch out her hands unto God.

Psalm 86:9 All nations whom thou hast made shall come and worship before thee, O Lord; and shall glorify thy name.

MEMORY VERSE: Declare his glory among the heathen, his wonders among all people. —Psalm 96:3

CENTRAL THOUGHT: God’s promise to Abraham was that all nations would be blessed through his seed, which was Christ, and the Psalmist prophesied of the spread of Christ’s word and His kingdom throughout all the heathen nations.

WORD DEFINITIONS AND PROPHECY FULFILLMENT

Genesis 22:17 “Thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies”: a prophecy of Christ being victorious over all the power of satan and sin. See the fulfillment: Matthew 16:18 and Luke 1:70-75.

Genesis 22:18 “In thy seed”: the Lord Jesus Christ, as proven by Galatians 3:8, 16 and 18.

Psalm 2:9 “Thou shalt break them...”: a prophecy of the Word of Christ breaking the kingdom of darkness in heathen nations. The power of the gospel message conquered. See the fulfillment: Revelation 2:26-27.

Psalm 19:2-4 “Their line is gone out”: a prophecy of the gospel message, first preached by creation itself, seen and heard globally. See the fulfillment: Romans 1:19-20 and 10:17-18.

Psalm 68:11 “Those that published it”: literally, “Great was the company of the women that heralded it.” The Hebrew word here is in the feminine gender, chiefly referring to the women, who with songs and music—as Miriam and Deborah and the women who sang the praises of King Saul and David—celebrated the triumph of war, rousing the valiant men and chanting the victory. See the fulfillment: Joel 2:28, Matthew 28:8, Acts 1:14, Acts 2:1-18, Acts 21:9, Romans 16:1 and Philippians 4:3.

Psalm 68:18 “Thou hast ascended up on high...”: a prophecy referring to the ascension of Christ and subsequent sending of the Holy Spirit to indwell the hearts of believers and bestow the various gifts necessary for preaching the gospel. See the fulfillment: I Corinthians 12:1-11 and Ephesians 4:8.

LESSON BACKGROUND

In the Word Definitions we have noted the different prophecies and their scriptural fulfillments. In Genesis, God had already established a covenant with Adam concerning his Seed Who would bruise the head of the serpent; now with Abraham, He again promised victory over the enemy through the Seed, which is proven in the scriptures to be Jesus Christ. This promise was given to Abraham after he had willingly offered his son Isaac upon the altar and God had provided, in Isaac's stead, a ram for an offering.

The remaining verses from the Psalms reveal a line of inspiration concerning Christ, the publishing of His gospel to the nations, the establishment and spread of His kingdom and dominion, and the work of the Holy Spirit through His church—men and women who would herald the good news throughout the earth.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *The Gate of His Enemies*: Explain how this is fulfilled in the gospel day.
2. *Ask of Me*: Of whom would this prophecy be speaking?
3. *Rod of Iron*: Of what is this speaking, and how would it rule the nations?
4. *Their Line/Their Words*: Explain how the “gospel” is preached in this way.
5. *Psalm 68:18*: Name the three things in this verse that point to what Christ did.

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

The theme of the verses in this lesson seems to be two-fold: the powerful Word that would go forth to all the world and its effect upon the nations.

When Constantine the emperor saw a vision of the cross in the sky with the words, “By this you shall conquer,” I’m afraid he misunderstood the meaning. I don’t believe at all that it was a message for him to go to war; rather, it spoke to him of the true way Christ would conquer the world. Not by human warfare or force; His rod of iron was His Word—the message of the cross! The gates of enemies that He would possess were the sinful hearts of

mankind that had been ruled by satan! As people heard the gospel and the good news of the cross, satan's strongholds were broken in pieces. His kingdom crumbled. Heathenism and paganism lost their powerful grip on the nations of the world, as people turned to the true God and left their idolatry, immorality and violence behind. Whole governments changed; communities were transformed. The gospel message and the truth of the Bible continued to flourish wherever it was proclaimed, although it was later shrouded in apostasy for many years, pushed underground and outlawed, and its followers persecuted, imprisoned and killed.

These prophecies are illuminating. We can see God's plan from the very beginning. He chose a man, through him a people, and through them He established His laws and covenant, which pointed forward in shadow to the full substance of the new covenant. In this way, He revealed His character and His dealings to the world: His merciful longsuffering and his righteous judgment, His wisdom and His power, His love and His holiness. Also through this family line came the Savior. He was not only Prophet, Priest and King to the Jews, but to every nation and people as God foreordained.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

This glorious gospel truly is the greatest gift to mankind. Revelation 14:6 says, "I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people." The power of the Gospel does the same work in every human being. It is universal. It fills the need of man's soul. It cleanses and makes new. It is all powerful. I've met people in some very poor conditions in Mexico where the gospel was preached and it brought about such a positive change. In Russia's very desolate places the gospel had the same effect on their lives. "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek" (Roman 1:16).

God saw the world's desperate need and gave us an everlasting gospel to preach to the world. The gospel gets down to the root of our problems. It strikes at the very head to destroy the sin working in our lives. It does not play around. There is a fountain filled with blood that still flows and cleanses every sinner that plunges beneath its flood. It brings man back in harmony where sin had broken the fellowship and peace with God. It brings homes

together where husband and wife have been separated. It brings happiness and joy and restores hope, peace and comfort. It is truly a glorious gospel.

—Bro. James Bell

“Oh, glorious love of Christ my Lord divine!
That made Him stoop to save a soul like mine.
Through all my days and then in heaven above
My song will silence never; I’ll worship Him forever,
And praise Him for His glorious love.”

—By John W. Peterson

JULY 9, 2017

THE GOSPEL TO ALL NATIONS PROPHESED, PART TWO

Isaiah 2:2 And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord’s house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. (See parallel passage in Micah 4:1-3.)

Isaiah 9:2 The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined.

Isaiah 42:1 Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him: he shall bring forth judgment to the Gentiles.

4 He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth: and the isles shall wait for his law.

Isaiah 49:6b I will also give thee for a light to the Gentiles, that thou mayest be my salvation unto the end of the earth.

9 That thou mayest say to the prisoners, Go forth; to them that are in darkness, Shew yourselves. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places.

Isaiah 55:5 Behold, thou shalt call a nation that thou knowest not, and nations that

knew not thee shall run unto thee because of the Lord thy God; and for the Holy One of Israel; for he hath glorified thee.

Isaiah 60:3 And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising.

Isaiah 61:1 The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;

2 To proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn.

Daniel 7:14 And there was given him dominion, and glory, and a kingdom, that all people, nations, and languages, should serve him: his dominion is an everlasting dominion, which shall not pass away, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed.

Hosea 2:23 And I will sow her unto me in the earth; and I will have mercy upon her that had not obtained mercy; and I will say to them which were not my people, Thou art my people; and they shall say, Thou art my God.

MEMORY VERSE: For from the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the Gentiles; and in every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering: for my name shall be great among the heathen, saith the Lord of hosts. —Malachi 1:11

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Isaiah, Daniel, Hosea and Malachi all continued the inspired prophecies of the message of salvation to the Gentiles and the prediction of the world-wide scope of the kingdom of God.

WORD DEFINITIONS AND PROPHECY FULFILLMENT

Isaiah 2:2 “The last days”: the time of the Messiah. “The mountain of the Lord’s house”: the true church of God, the heavenly Jerusalem, typified by the temple in the earthly Jerusalem, which was set upon Mount Moriah. God’s church would be a city set on a hill, which cannot be hid (Matthew 5:14), out of which God would shine (Psalm 50:2).

Isaiah 9:2 “The people that walked in darkness...”: a prophecy fulfilled in Matthew 4:13-17.

Isaiah 49:6b “A light to the Gentiles...”: a prophecy fulfilled in Luke 2:32.

Isaiah 61:1 “The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me...”: a prophecy fulfilled in Luke 4:17-21.

Daniel 7:14 “And there was given him dominion...”: a prophecy fulfilled in Revelation 11:15-18.

Hosea 2:23 “I will have mercy upon her...”: a prophecy fulfilled in Romans 9:25-26 and I Peter 2:10

Malachi 1:11 “In every place incense shall be offered unto my name, and a pure offering”: a prophecy fulfilled in Romans 15:16. See also a parallel verse in Isaiah 66:19-20.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Isaiah is known as “the Gospel prophet” because he continually pointed forward to the birth, life, ministry, death and resurrection of the Messiah and the establishing of the kingdom of God, the church of God in the earth. Again in the Word Definitions we have included the verses in the New Testament describing or pointing to the fulfillment of these prophecies. Isaiah was contemporary with Micah and Hosea; they all prophesied under kings Ahaz, Jotham, and Hezekiah—Hosea beginning a little before Isaiah.

Prophecies were also given through Daniel, Hosea and Malachi. Daniel saw many visions that detailed future events in the kingdoms of this world, the center of his dreams being the establishing of Christ’s kingdom, the world’s opposition to it, and its final triumph. Many of Daniel’s visions correspond with Ezekiel’s visions and the visions the Apostle John saw while on the Isle of Patmos. Comparing between them often helps to give clues as to their interpretation.

Hosea’s experience was unique: he was told by God to marry a woman who was a harlot. They had children together, then she forsook the family for her lovers. Hosea sought after her and brought her back, again at God’s command. This scenario was an object lesson before the children of Israel, to bring an appeal to them and show them how their unfaithfulness and their divided heart was to Him as heart-breaking as unfaithfulness and adultery in a marriage. Hosea also portrays how God courted the affections of not only the

rebellious Israelites, but also the heathen Gentiles, making them His people as well.

Malachi, whose name means “my messenger,” was the last inspired messenger of the Old Testament. For about fifty years, Malachi supported and encouraged Ezra the priest and Nehemiah the governor in the period after the captivity in which the holy law and the holy city were re-established. His words were cited in the New Testament by Matthew, Mark and Luke, and also by Paul.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Identical Prophecies:* Which two prophets prophesied of Zion being exalted above the hills and all nations flowing into it?
2. *Identify:* Of whom was Isaiah speaking in chapter 4?
3. *Confirmation:* What elderly man recognized baby Jesus as the Light spoken of in Isaiah 49:6?
4. *Unto Thee:* To whom (or to what entity) was the prophet speaking when he said that the Gentiles would come to “thy light”? Give an example of how that happened in the book of Acts.
5. *Name the Scene:* Who fulfilled Isaiah’s prophecy in chapter 61? Describe where this happened.
6. *Among the Heathen:* Give an example of this (from our memory verse) by citing a story from missionary history.

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

These verses, and especially the scenes of their fulfillment, represent some very touching events in Bible history. I especially love the scene of Jesus as He takes the book of Isaiah and stands before the congregation in the local Nazareth synagogue. If you were there, eyes fastened on Him, would you wonder what He would say? Then, as He read about opening the blind eyes, would you have thought about the many who had been healed; as he

spoke of the prisoners being loosed, would you have remembered those who had been freed—at Jesus' word—from the possession of satan?

Think of the spacious courtyard of the centurion Cornelius, filled to overflowing with his Roman friends and relatives, hands reaching out, tears streaming down their faces as they heard, for the first time, the story of Jesus—the prophecies concerning His birth, His ministry, His death, His resurrection, His saving grace and abundant life now available to all through His Holy Spirit. Would you, a Gentile, have knelt in contrition as Peter led the way to repentance and faith?

Imagine standing with the excited crowd outside the upper room, when the disciples of Jesus come streaming out the door, and you, a Phoenician from the upper coast, begin hearing words of praise from a meek peasant woman and realize, she, a Jewess, is speaking to you in your language and explaining about the Man Jesus! How He loves you and sacrificed His life to allow you to have fellowship with the Creator God, and how He isn't dead at all now, but is alive and sharing His life, like a flowing fountain, with anyone who would believe and ask Him.

These were people, just like you and me, hearing the GOSPEL for the first time. What an awesome thing it must have been!

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

Rahab, the harlot from Jericho, testified to the spies, "I know that the Lord hath given you the land, and that your terror is fallen upon us, and that all the inhabitants of the land faint because of you. For we have heard how the Lord dried up the water of the Red Sea for you, when ye came out of Egypt, and what ye did unto the two kings of the Amorites, that were on the other side Jordan, Sihon and Og, whom ye utterly destroyed. And as soon as we had heard these things, our hearts did melt, neither did there remain any more courage in any man, because of you, for the Lord your God, he is God in heaven above, and in earth beneath." Rahab believed in the one true God, regardless of her heathen background.

Ruth, the woman from Moab, embraced the God of her husband and his family to the point that even after his death, she refused to return to her home. She, instead, chose to follow Naomi, her mother-in-law, back to Bethlehem and said, "Intreat me not to leave thee,

or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge, thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God." Ruth loved the ways of righteousness, embraced the truth and followed in the paths of holiness.

This salvation has been graciously offered to each and every person. What a joy it is to see a soul embrace it even when they may not have had the advantage of a Christian home or godly environment. It is so refreshing to see them follow and love the ways of truth and righteousness. On the other hand, it is very heart-rending to observe those souls who have had such advantages, only to throw such opportunities away and regard this great salvation as nothing. How much do you value it?

—Sis. LaDawna Adams

JULY 16, 2017

GOD'S CALL TO ABRAHAM

Genesis 12:1 Now the Lord had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will shew thee:

2 And I will make of thee a great nation, and I will bless thee, and make thy name great; and thou shalt be a blessing:

3 And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.

4 So Abram departed, as the Lord had spoken unto him; and Lot went with him: and Abram was seventy and five years old when he departed out of Haran.

5 And Abram took Sarai his wife, and Lot his brother's son, and all their substance that they had gathered, and the souls that they had gotten in Haran; and they went forth to go into the land of Canaan; and into the land of Canaan they came.

Genesis 17:1 And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.

2 And I will make my covenant between me and thee, and will multiply thee exceedingly.

3 And Abram fell on his face: and God talked with him, saying,

4 As for me, behold, my covenant is with thee, and thou shalt be a father of many nations.

Genesis 18:19 For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the LORD, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him.

Genesis 22:15 And the angel of the Lord called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time,

16 And said, By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son:

17 That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies;

18 And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice.

Romans 4:3 For what saith the scripture? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

20 He staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God;

21 And being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.

Hebrews 11:8 By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

MEMORY VERSE: Look unto Abraham your father, and unto Sarah that bare you: for I called him alone, and blessed him, and increased him. —Isaiah 51:2

CENTRAL THOUGHT: In the record of God's call upon Abraham's life—the covenants He made, the trials of faith He sent, the blessings He gave—we can see a pattern of how God deals with those to whom He gives special callings and responsibilities of leadership and the character qualities for which He is looking.

WORD DEFINITIONS AND PROPHECY FULFILLMENT

Genesis 12:1 “Abram”: high father, or exalted father; his name at birth, which God later changed to Abraham, meaning *father of a multitude of nations*, at age ninety-nine, when he gave him the covenant of circumcision (Genesis 17:1-10).

Genesis 12:3 “In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed”: (See the fulfillment in Galatians 3:6-9; 14; 26-29.)

Genesis 17:1 “Perfect”: blameless; without blemish; complete; full; sound; without spot; undefiled.

LESSON BACKGROUND

In this lesson we can only briefly outline the dealings of the Lord with Abraham, whose story you may read beginning in the last part of Genesis 11 and continuing on into chapter 25.

We first include the beginning of Abram’s journey when God called him at age seventy-five to leave his kindred and homeland and go, by faith, to an unknown place solely at God’s direction. Next we refer to the time when he was ninety-nine and God repeated His covenant with him, giving him the commandment of circumcision as a token of that covenant. We then take note of the statement of confidence God gave concerning Abraham’s obedience and integrity at the time when He talked with Abraham concerning his promised son and the destruction of Sodom. After that we look in at the scene in which Abraham, again at God’s command, and again by faith, had obeyed God by willingly offering his only begotten son, Isaac. God intervened and provided a substitute sacrifice, then proceeded to prophesy His covenant of blessing and victory upon Abraham and his descendants. The verses in Romans and Hebrews give the New Testament perspective on these events, showing the significance of Abraham’s faith and obedience to the Israelite nation and believers worldwide in all the generations following.

Our memory verse from Isaiah notes that God called Abraham *alone*, a precedent repeated many, many times throughout the following years as other faithful followers of God obeyed Him, separated themselves from home and family and carried His gospel to unknown places and people.

Abraham truly is the father of the faithful; a pattern of faith, obedience, self-sacrifice,

courage, intercession for the lost, unselfishness, peaceableness, humility and godly fear. He had common human frailties and fears, but triumphed over them by faith and obedience, as God testified of him later to Isaac: "...Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes and my laws" (Genesis 26:5).

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Faith:* Note incidents in Abraham's life where he demonstrated belief, trust, and dependence upon God.
2. *Obedience:* Share instances where Abraham obeyed when God commanded him.
3. *Prayerfulness and Intercession:* Recall an event in which Abraham pleaded with God for lost souls.
4. *Peacefulness and Unselfishness:* Share how Abraham pursued these characteristics in his relationships with others.
5. *Courage:* Show how Abraham demonstrated this quality.
6. *Self-sacrifice, Humility and Denial of Earthly Reward:* When did Abraham portray these characteristics, and how are they important in the life of one called to minister the gospel message?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

The purpose of our lesson today is to study how God called and dealt with Abraham and apply these truths to our own lives as God calls and deals with us.

I think the first thing to consider is that God called Abraham alone, sending him on a mission to unknown lands, commanding him to leave his familiar friends and loved ones, forsake the idolatry of the countries round about and establish the worship of the true God. Because Abraham was willing to do this, God established His covenant of salvation for the entire world, in and through him. Through his family line arose the entire nation of Israel, the covenants and prophecies, the ceremonies and laws, and eventually, the promised Messiah,

Savior of all men. We also may be called away from friends and family to take the gospel. There are times we may feel quite alone in the task God calls us to undertake; we may feel misunderstood, unappreciated and unnoticed. Let us take courage from Abraham's example and go to our mission with renewed zeal and vigor.

We want to also consider the essential character qualities portrayed by Abraham, and apply these to our lives as we seek to develop those qualities so necessary to the spread of the true worship of God, and His saving gospel in our day. We have mentioned several in the Discussion segment. Another important practice of Abraham was his diligence to pass on his faith to his family; by his faithful life he commanded their respect and allegiance to the true God. His righteous life of piety and devotion influenced his son Isaac, his grandson Jacob, and extended farther on to Jacob's children and descendants. In the New Testament, bishops (shepherds or pastors) or deacons must qualify in this area, having their households under loving command and in godly order.

Another characteristic to notice is the way Abraham refused reward or payback for his part in the rescue of Lot and the neighboring kings after they were taken captive by Chedorlaomer. This is particularly of importance to those who have been called to leadership in Christ's kingdom. Peter mentioned these things when he admonished the elders to not do God's work only for "filthy lucre." This concept is balanced by other scriptures which command those who benefit from the gospel message to support the gospel worker, giving, not to influence or bribe the minister, but "as unto the Lord."

There were times when Abraham did some unwise things because of moments of doubt and fear. We can learn from his mistakes and be comforted by the mercy of God that delivered him and helped him work through the consequences of his errors.

It is so important that we grasp the importance of simple faith and obedience: the great chain of events that were started; the world-wide influence that was created; the eternal implications that resulted. Our life, ministry and influence is no less significant. "It remains to be seen what God will do with a man who gives himself up wholly unto Him" (D. L. Moody).

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

Answering the call of God requires a willingness to pursue Him wherever He can be

found. Many times this deep desire leads to leaving the comfort of one's surroundings and following God into the unknown, often without knowing where He is leading.

I am reminded of the African prince Kaboo, who after his conversion to Christianity took on the name Samuel Morris. As a boy of fifteen or sixteen, Kaboo was kidnapped by an enemy tribe to extract ransom payments from his father, who was the chief of his tribe. The young prince often suffered vile beatings that left him weak and nearly unconscious, but just before his captors could kill him, he was delivered by a bright light and an audible voice that said, "Get up, Kaboo, get up and run away."

He was led by God to a plantation in western Africa, where he was introduced to the Gospel. He then knew it was God who had miraculously rescued him and he accepted salvation. After his conversion, he learned more and more, and one day an acquaintance read to him about the Holy Spirit. Sammy, as he was now called, soon developed a deep hunger and thirst to learn more about that Spirit.

Unable to find anyone with a deeper knowledge of the Spirit in Monrovia, through simple, childlike faith and God's answers to his prayers he was able to board a ship to New York City. Once in America, his powerful connection with God, who he simply called "my Father," touched nearly everyone he met, particularly those who considered themselves Christians. His fervency brought about conviction, and many proceeded to rededicate themselves to the truth of the Gospel.

Samuel Morris died at about the age of twenty, and never got to fulfill his desire of taking the gospel back to his people, but his life has led many to the Lord, and he has been sometimes called a "missionary to America."

Let us—like our spiritual father Abraham and the many others who have followed his example—cling to the promises of God's word in faith and obediently go wherever He may call.

—Bro. Fari Matthews

JULY 23, 2017

GOD'S CALL TO MOSES

Exodus 3:7 And the Lord said, I have surely seen the affliction of my people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters; for I know their sorrows;

8a And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land...

10 Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth my people the children of Israel out of Egypt.

11 And Moses said unto God, Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?

12a And he said, Certainly I will be with thee;

Exodus 4:1 And Moses answered and said, But, behold, they will not believe me, nor hearken unto my voice: for they will say, The Lord hath not appeared unto thee.

2 And the Lord said unto him, What is that in thine hand? And he said, A rod.

10 And Moses said unto the Lord, O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou hast spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech, and of a slow tongue.

11 And the Lord said unto him, Who hath made man's mouth? or who maketh the dumb, or deaf, or the seeing, or the blind? Have not I the Lord?

12 Now therefore go, and I will be with thy mouth, and teach thee what thou shalt say.

Hebrews 11:24 By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter;

25 Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;

26 Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompense of the reward.

27 By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.

MEMORY VERSE: And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after. —Hebrews 3:5

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Moses, born a Hebrew but raised in Egyptian royalty, having in his heart a burden for his own people, after a rough beginning and many years of desert training, was commissioned by God to be a prophet to God's people and lead them out of Egyptian bondage to the Canaan land of promise. Feeling inadequate and unfit, he nevertheless obeyed God and faithfully carried out his calling.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Our lesson today focuses on another very important Old Testament man of God. Something very special about Moses at his birth caused his parents to refuse to surrender him to the king of Egypt's murderous command concerning Hebrew boys; instead, they kept him hidden three months, then placed him in God's hands as they put him in a little vessel and set him at the river's edge.

God took over from there, even making a way for him to be trained the first few years of his life by his own mother at the request of his adoptive mother, the princess of Egypt, who had discovered him hidden in the water. Later, Moses was "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds" (Acts 7:22). When he was forty, his heart became touched by the plight of his Hebrew brothers, and he tried to avenge their suffering by killing an oppressing Egyptian, supposing that his people would understand that he was God's chosen deliverer to them. They did not understand, however, and in danger of his life, Moses fled to the desert, there to marry, become a father of two sons, and serve as a shepherd to his father-in-law's sheep.

For forty years he was thus trained by God, until one day he took notice of an unusual burning bush and turned aside to examine it. God called to him out of the bush and revealed to him that it was now time for him to go back to Egypt and deliver his brethren out of their bondage.

He may have been mighty in words and deeds and in Egyptian wisdom, but by this time, his heart was humble and he knew his weakness. Questioning God to the point of angering Him, Moses was given answers of comfort and assurance that he would not be

alone; back in Egypt, his brother Aaron was also being called to go with him, and most of all, God assured him of His presence.

At one point of protest, God asked, “What is that in thine hand?” When Moses showed Him his rod, God then used the rod to work several miracles or signs with which he could prove to his brethren and to the Egyptians that he was working at God’s command.

Another protest, “Who shall I say is sending me?” brought God’s answer in an awesome revelation of His name which had never been revealed to mankind before: “I AM has sent you.”

The verses from Hebrews tell us that Moses, through faith in God, laid aside his royal Egyptian status, the pleasures of sin and idolatrous living, and chose instead to suffer the reproach of Christ and be identified with the people of God, even in their afflictions. He counted these things as true treasures and looked ahead to an eternal spiritual reward. The courage and endurance he had throughout the many years of leading more than a million headstrong, rebellious people was because he had a vision of something invisible and unseen by mortal eye. I believe it was an image stamped upon him from that burning bush, don’t you?

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Counted it Loss:* What are some of the things Moses counted as loss when he left Egypt to serve God and His people?
2. *Given a Sign:* What did God use to verify His call to Moses before the people and Pharaoh?
3. *Given a Promise:* When Moses protested, “I am not eloquent,” what promise did God give?
4. *Given a Vision:* What did Moses see that gave him strength to endure?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

How could one adequately express the importance of this one man to the history of mankind? Certainly it is impossible in this short lesson. When we put it into the perspective of using his life as an example of how God calls and equips men to fulfill His message and His purpose, there are many lessons from which we can draw instruction and encouragement.

We too are called, many times, to places where *nothing* upon which we might have placed human dependence matters—royalty, education, riches, human wisdom, youthful strength. All must be laid aside and only God is to be our support.

We must also lay aside our feelings of inadequacy, as Moses had to do. Humanly, it was preposterous for an eighty-year-old man to take on the task of leading the migration of an entire nation from one country to another, on foot, with herds of animals; while establishing a civil government, a system of worship, and a military; providing food, water, and waste management, and facing hostile enemies! No wonder Moses drew back in protest. But Scripture says he was faithful. He was meek. He took all his troubles to God and did what God told him to do.

Just like Abraham, Moses had his time of failure and weakness. He forfeited his privilege of being the one to take the children of Israel on into Canaan because of it. Still he maintained a heart for the people and the vision he received at the burning bush.

He was a great prophet. He received the law and the covenant from God's mouth and led the carrying out of all those details into the actual construction of a working system. He wrote the first five books containing the history of man from the beginning of time, the books of laws, and the journeys of the Israelites. He wrote poetry and psalms. In many ways, he typified Jesus, of whom he prophesied (Deuteronomy 18:15) and with whom he appeared in the Mount of Transfiguration, along with Elijah, and spoke concerning Jesus' death (Luke 9:28-36).

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

Like Moses, many of us can minimize our contributions and concentrate on our inadequacies, but if God calls us, he also qualifies us. We should understand that God's

process of qualification is initiated long before the call and continues well beyond our acceptance of it.

Moses' qualification did not begin with this initial conversation with God. It started when he was just a babe in a basket by the river. God ordered the events of his life and used them as part of the qualification process. He does the same with us. He orders the circumstances of our life then uses them to equip us for the work he calls us to do.

God asked Moses: "What is in thine hand?" His answer—a simple rod. God uses what we have, not what we don't have. He then instructed Moses to cast the rod on the ground. In other words, release it and give God control of what we have in hand, no matter how insignificant or inadequate we may deem it to be. Prompt obedience and trust are vital principles that must be learned by everyone whom the Lord uses.

This was a "teaching moment" for Moses and is for us as well. Encapsulated in this lesson is the fact that God doesn't need our commentary on our inadequacies. He already knows them. The key is that we must be obedient to the call, relinquish control, and allow the Lord to animate our insufficiencies with his Spirit. As the scripture teaches us, our sufficiency is of God.

—Bro. Darrell Johnson

JULY 30, 2017

ELIJAH, THE FIERY PROPHET

Summary of Elijah's Life

I Kings 17:1 Unheralded, Elijah dramatically appears before Ahab and announces a drought in Israel.

I Kings 17:2-7 God commands Elijah to go to the brook Cherith, where he is fed by ravens and drinks from the brook, until it dries up.

I Kings 17:8-16 God sends him to the home of a widow and her son, where all three are miraculously fed by an undiminishing barrel of meal and cruse of oil.

I Kings 17:17-24 The widow's son dies, and Elijah travails in prayer until his life is restored.

I Kings 18:1-16 Elijah comes out of hiding, reveals himself to Obadiah, a God-fearing man who helped the prophets, and then to King Ahab.

I Kings 18:17-40 Elijah challenges the Baal worshippers on Mount Carmel; proves the true God by fire from heaven; slays the prophets of Baal.

I Kings 18:41-46 Elijah teaches his servant a lesson about persevering prayer by praying seven times for rain, then preparing Ahab for the deluge of rain.

I Kings 19:1-18 Jezebel, angry at the slaying of her prophets, threatens Elijah's life. Feeling he is the only true worshipper of God left, he hides in the wilderness and wishes to die. God prepares food for him and touches him twice to renew his strength, then speaks to him with a still, small voice in a cave, and gives him three missions, assuring him there are still 7,000 true worshippers in Israel.

I Kings 19:19-21 Elijah casts his mantle upon Elisha, who bids farewell to his parents and follows Elijah as his assistant.

I Kings 21:1-29 Ahab cruelly and dishonestly gains land by having Naboth killed; Elijah pronounces judgment from God upon him until Ahab humbles his heart. Later, Ahab and his wife Jezebel both die just as Elijah prophesied.

II Kings 1:1-18 Evil King Ahaziah (Ahab's son and successor) is injured and Elijah pronounces death upon him; he sends soldiers to capture Elijah, but because of their arrogant spirit they are destroyed. A humble captain is spared, but Elijah still gives the sentence of death to the king, and he dies, as God has said.

II Kings 2:1-25 Elijah goes up in a fiery chariot to heaven; Elisha asks for a double portion of his spirit, which Elijah promises if Elisha sees his departure. Elisha remains vigilant, receives his mantle and goes forth working miracles and endowed with the powerful double-portion of Elijah's spirit.

Malachi 4:5 The prophet Malachi points forward to John the Baptist, who would come in the fiery spirit of Elijah, as forerunner and herald to the Messiah, a fearless messenger and reformer who would call for repentance.

Luke 9:28-36 Elijah, with Moses, appears in a glorious scene with Jesus, and talks with him about his death.

James 5:17-18 James speaks of Elijah as just a man with human passions, yet prevailing in prayer.

MEMORY VERSE: And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. —I Kings 18:21

CENTRAL THOUGHT: One of the most unique and dramatic characters in the Bible, Elijah brought God's words to Israel's kings in a time of great apostasy.

WORD DEFINITIONS

I Kings 17:1 "Elijah": Yahweh is my God. "The Tishbite": of Tishbe in Gilead, to distinguish it from another Tishbe in Galilee. "Who was of the inhabitants of Gilead": the rocky region that lay on the east of Jordan. "In forming to ourselves a conception of the great Israelite prophet, we must always bear in mind that the wild and mountainous Gilead, which bordered on Arabia, and was half Arab in customs, was the country wherein he grew up" (*Barnes' Notes on the Bible*). "Ahab": son and successor of Omri; he reigned over Israel 22 years. He was more evil than all before him, because he introduced the actual worship to Baal, not just to the golden calves which Jeroboam had set up. The calves were supposed to "represent" the true God, but this was actually a false god, or devil.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Our lesson structure is somewhat different today. Since Elijah's biography extends throughout several chapters, I have only summarized the main points of his life with their chapters and verses. There are several special points of interest which I will add.

Elijah appears in Scripture as abruptly as priest Melchisedek; no mention of beginning, no father or mother, and no record of his call to office.

John the Baptist closely mirrored his spiritual predecessor, Elijah, even in appearance. Elijah was described as "an hairy man" girded with leather; John wore camel's hair and leather as well. The ministries of both were like a "voice in the wilderness," and both chose to live in rugged, desert conditions. Both spoke fearlessly to kings and queens. Jezebel's wrath had Elijah on the run while Herodias violently ended John's life.

There are similarities between Moses and Elijah as well. Both were taken from this life in uncommon ways: God Himself disposed of Moses' body, and no one ever found it, and Elijah was lifted up in a fiery chariot with a whirlwind. Both rebuked wicked kings, evoking great wrath. Both were especially honored by God to appear with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. I wonder what they said as they discussed Jesus' death?

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *I Kings Chapter 17*: Give the promise and its fulfillment concerning the widow's meal and oil.
2. *I Kings Chapter 18*: How many of God's prophets had Obadiah kept sustained and hidden in a cave?
3. *I Kings Chapter 18*: How many total barrels of water did Elijah pour over his altar?
4. *I Kings Chapter 19*: How many times did the angel touch Elijah and feed him, and how many days was he strengthened by that food?
5. *II Kings Chapter 1*: Of whom had King Ahaziah enquired when he was seriously injured by a fall? How did Elijah rebuke him?
6. *II Kings Chapter 2*: What did Elisha say as Elijah was taken up to heaven?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

"As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand..."(I Kings 17:1)

"How distinct and abiding must the vision of God have been, which burned before the inward eye of the man that struck out that phrase! 'Wherever I am, whatever I do, I am before Him. To my purged eye, there is the Apocalypse of heaven, and I behold the great throne, and the solemn ranks of ministering spirits, my fellow-servants, hearkening to the voice of His word.' No excitement of work, no strain of effort, no distraction of circumstances, no glitter of gold, no dazzle of earthly brightness, dimmed that vision for these prophets [Elijah and his

successor, Elisha]... action not interrupting vision, nor vision weakening action. To preserve thus fresh and unimpaired, amidst strenuous work and many temptations, the clear consciousness of being 'ever in the great Taskmaster's eye,' needs resolute effort and much self-restraint. It is hard to set the Lord always before us; but it is possible, and in the measure in which we do it, we shall not be moved" (*MacLaren's Expositions*).

Truly, this must be the motive and guiding principle of every gospel worker!

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

Our nation and the entire Western Culture are far along the path of apostasy as Elijah's Israel was. Christians in the West are entering an ever increasing era of persecution. We pray that God will call and embolden each of us to unashamedly declare the Word of God in our circles of influence.

We are also praying that God will raise up fearless gospel ministers like Bro. D. S. Warner with "foreheads of an adamant harder than flint." An adamant is something that pricks like a thorn and can leave a scratch on any surface because it is as hard as a diamond.

God wants to give us authority over everything that opposes His righteousness and He wants us to exercise this authority. David was motivated by this authority when he faced Goliath. Thankfully we have many modern examples of Christians who boldly proclaimed the gospel with authority amidst great persecution.

Bro Yun was a poorly educated Chinese youth to whom God miraculously revealed Himself and called to preach during the end of the bloody Chinese Cultural Revolution. He was called "The Heavenly Man" because of his boldness to proclaim the gospel amidst great persecution. Upon being commanded to bow before the power of judges and the godless leaders torturing him, he was inspired to command them to bow immediately before the Almighty God.

God worked many miracles for and through him including simultaneously opening the doors of the prison and healing his dead legs that he could walk through the guards and out of prison in broad daylight.

Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit may we each "count not our life dear unto ourselves" and "shun not to declare all the counsel of God to" others.

—Bro. Jeremy Booher

AUGUST 6, 2017

GOD'S CALL TO ELISHA

Summary of Elisha's Life

I Kings 19:15-21 God commissions Elijah to anoint two kings as well as a prophet to be his successor. He finds the man the Lord had chosen, plowing his field, and throws his mantle upon him. Elisha, prepared by God, understands the sign perfectly, says goodbye to his parents, prepares a sacrifice and feast for friends and family, then leaves his home and ministers to Elijah.

II Kings 2:1-14 Close to his departure, Elijah tests Elisha's faithfulness; Elisha resolves to stay near his master, even quieting the curious younger prophets who would distract him. He asks Elijah for a double portion of his spirit, which Elijah promises he will grant if Elisha witnesses his departure. Elisha perseveres, sees the whirlwind and chariots of fire take up his spiritual father, then gathers up Elijah's mantle and parts the Jordan with it. He is ready for God's work.

II Kings 2:15-25 Elisha discourages men from looking for Elijah; works a miracle of healing upon the prophets' water supply; pronounces a curse upon children who mocked both him and Elijah's passage to heaven.

II Kings 3 King Jehoram of Israel forms an alliance with King Jehoshaphat of Judah and the king of Edom to fight against rebellious Moab; they enlist Elisha's help. He disdains them, but for Jehoshaphat's sake employs a minstrel who sings an inspired song which gives them direction. They win the battle against the Moabites.

II Kings 4: 1-7 Elisha provides a miracle supply of oil for a widow woman so she can sell it and pay her creditors.

II Kings 4:8-37 A childless couple from Shunem provides a comfortable lodging place for Elisha; he blesses them with a promised child. The child dies and Elisha restores him to life.

II Kings 4:38-44 Elisha performs a miracle preserving the lives of the prophets who had eaten poisonous gourds; he then feeds a hundred men with twenty loaves of barley and some ears of corn.

II Kings 5:1-27 In a unique and humbling way, Elisha heals the Syrian captain, Naaman,

of leprosy. He refuses a reward. His servant, Gehazi, covets and dishonestly asks for the reward and is cursed by leprosy.

II Kings 6:1-7 The prophets, building a new dwelling, take Elisha with them. He miraculously causes an axe-head, which a man had borrowed and lost in the Jordan river, to float to the top of the water.

II Kings 6:8-23 The king of Syria makes plans of attack upon the king of Israel; Elisha reveals it to the king of Israel every time, until the king of Syria finds out who the informer is and comes to capture him. God surrounds him with a heavenly host and reveals them to Elisha's servant. Elisha smites the army with blindness, then brings them to the king of Israel in Samaria. He advises the king to feed them and send them home.

II Kings 6:24-33 Benhadad, king of Syria, besieges Samaria, resulting in famine and dire conditions. In angry desperation, the king threatens to kill Elisha, to whom the Lord reveals the plot.

II Kings 7:1-20 Elisha's prophecy of God's supply to Samaria comes true.

II Kings 8:1-6 The woman whose son Elisha had raised to life is miraculously granted favor with the king when he learns of the miracle Elisha had done for her, and he restores her property which had been lost because of a seven years' famine.

II Kings 8:7-15 Elisha predicts the death of Benhadad and the evil reign of his successor, Hazael.

II Kings 9:1-37 Elisha sends one of the sons of the prophets to anoint Jehu to be king of Israel; Jehu accomplishes the awful judgments of the Lord upon Jehoram, king of Israel, Ahaziah, king of Judah, and Jezebel, Ahab's wicked queen.

II Kings 13:14-21 Elisha is sick unto death; he challenges King Joash concerning conquest over Syria. Joash halfheartedly responds and loses an opportunity. Elisha dies and is buried; a man being buried later is accidentally thrown against the bones of Elisha and revives miraculously.

MEMORY VERSE: And he answered, Fear not: for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. —II Kings 6:16

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Elisha, successor of Elijah, is known as a "Model Spiritual

Leader.” His name means “God is Salvation.” He prophesied through the reign of four kings and performed his service over sixty years.

LESSON BACKGROUND

When Elisha asked for a double portion of Elijah’s spirit, some scholars feel he was referring to the property inheritance customs of that time, where the oldest son received twice as much of the father's inheritance as each of the younger sons. In this interpretation Elisha is asking that he may be seen as the "rightful heir" and successor to Elijah. “Elisha considered himself the only child or first-born of Elijah, as the disciples of eminent teachers were called their children; so here he claims a double portion of his spiritual influence, any other disciples coming in for a single share only. ‘Sons of the prophets’ means no more than the ‘disciples’ or ‘scholars’ of the prophets. The original words mean two parts, rather than double the quantity” (Adam Clarke, *Clarke’s Commentary*). Others interpret it to mean that he asked for greater prophetic power, which was proven by his performing twice the miracles than Elijah did.

Elisha possessed a double portion of Elijah’s spirit, yet differed from him in manner. He was milder and gentler, in contrast to Elijah’s rugged sternness. He was not as confrontational with the kings, nor was he given to bursts of despair, but quietly and calmly went among the common people, kings and captains alike. His miracles were acts of gentleness and mercy; healings, supplying needs and comforting mourners.

These were troubled times. Jesus later noted Elisha’s healing of Naaman as a miracle performed in a time of little or no faith. The kingdom was divided and there was not one good king who ruled over Israel. Judah was blessed by some good kings; however, some followed Israel’s kings in wickedness. There were political rebellions and uprisings, famines and sieges. Elisha’s steady patriotism, quiet humility, unwavering faith and faithful service provided both Israel and Judah with spiritual stability.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Industrious*: What was Elisha doing when Elijah found him?
2. *Willing*: Was Elisha ready to follow Elijah? What was the only thing he needed to do?

3. *A Servant:* According to I Kings 19:21 and II Kings 3:11, what was the main thing Elisha did while he was with Elijah?
4. *Initiative and Courage:* Share how Elisha exhibited these qualities when he struck the Jordan with Elijah's mantle?
5. *Compassion:* Note times where Elisha performed acts of mercy and love for those who were in need.
6. *Spiritual Vision:* Share how Elisha's motivation and strength came from "seeing the invisible".

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

We can learn much about spiritual leadership while studying the life of Elisha. Not much is said about him while he served Elijah. He was content to remain in the background. He didn't strike out on his own, even when given the opportunity by Elijah. His zeal for God's work above his own interests challenges me. He didn't show disdain for his predecessor; he valued his accomplishments yet wanted to go farther, accomplish more, and more greatly promote God's cause.

In the same humble spirit of Abraham, he disdained bribery and refused reward when it was offered. He did not curry favors with kings or captains. He quietly laid truth right where it was.

Elisha made the most of what he had learned under Elijah and improved upon it. Gehazi and King Joash had the same opportunity to learn from Elisha. Gehazi let covetousness rob him of advancement in spiritual matters; Joash missed his opportunity of complete defeat of Israel's enemies when he was indifferent and lazy. Surely he knew there was something important—something more than just a game with arrows—when a dying prophet was giving him his last words!

The man who was serving Elisha at Samaria had the opportunity of a lifetime when God drew back his mental curtain and allowed him to see what encouraged and empowered Elisha. May God give us that same vision that our faith would never fail!

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

Isn't it just like God to send a man to help people in the greatest time of need? Elisha was that man. He was positive, energetic and willing to respond to the needs of his day. Maybe because he sensed the declining faith of the people, he knew that he could use a double portion of Elijah's spirit to meet the needs of his time. Elisha's confidence in God was real. He with Elijah's mantle and Elijah's God parted the river Jordan, made the axe head float, neutralized the poisonous gourds in the soup, supplied oil for the widow, healed Naaman the leper, uncovered secret plots that would have destroyed lives and prophesied of future kings.

Certainly, his influence in different situations and the various manifestations of God's power was proof enough that having Elisha around during their times of great distress was a real comfort to the people. They could rely on him to help in so many ways. He won the confidence of kings and the poor people alike. He was their "Savior." Got a problem? "Call Elisha" was the term people relied on in his day. He was a lot like Jesus in that he did many miracles.

Today God places special calls upon the lives of saints who believe and who will allow God's glory and love to be manifested through them. Isn't it comforting to have men and women of God among us that we can rely on to help us in our needs today? God loves for us to reach out for divine help, and He loves to give us the desires of our heart. He works through His people to bless and answer the prayers of all those whose hope is in God.

—Bro. James Bell

AUGUST 13, 2017

GOD'S CALL TO JEREMIAH

Jeremiah 1:4 Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying,

5 Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.

6 Then said I, Ah, Lord God! Behold, I cannot speak: for I am a child.

7 But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak.

8 Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord.

9 Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth.

10 See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.

16 And I will utter my judgments against them touching all their wickedness, who have forsaken me, and have burned incense unto other gods, and worshipped the works of their own hands.

17 Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them.

19 And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee.

Jeremiah 20:9 Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor speak any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay.

MEMORY VERSE: Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart: for I am called by thy name, O Lord God of hosts. — Jeremiah 15:16

CENTRAL THOUGHT: God called young Jeremiah to reprove, rebuke, warn, predict judgments, and console with promises the Israelite people. He was rejected and persecuted by his own people, yet maintained his faithfulness and trust in God, even after the woeful fulfillment of his prophecies.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Jeremiah 1:5 “I sanctified thee”: I set you apart, or consecrated you.

Jeremiah 1:17 “Confound”: to shatter or dismay.

Jeremiah 20:9 “Forbearing”: to contain or hold in. “Stay”: endure; be able.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Jeremiah began his ministry at about age fourteen, during the thirteenth year of Josiah’s reign (Judah’s last good king). Along with Hilkiah, the high priest (not thought to be the same as Jeremiah’s father), the prophetess Huldah, and the prophet Zephaniah (other contemporaries were Habakkuk, Daniel and Ezekiel), he worked to help King Josiah in the reformation of the worship of God. His first call was to proclaim God’s message to Jerusalem; then, about five years later, a book of God’s law was found in the temple, and he toured the cities round about to announce its contents.

He ministered eighteen years during Josiah’s reign and several months under Jehoahaz. Under King Jehoiakim, however, the priests, prophets and people called for his execution. The princes intervened, but put limits on his ministry. In Jehoiakim’s fourth year, God commanded Jeremiah to write his prophecies and have them read to the people of Israel. The king became so incensed that he slashed the scroll with his knife and threw it into the fire, then tried to harm Jeremiah and his scribe, Baruch, but the Lord hid them. Jeremiah wrote again God’s words on a scroll, this time adding many more.

Jeremiah was afterward imprisoned and left in a miry dungeon until Ebed-melech, an Ethiopian, beseeched the king to allow him to take him out. He then remained in the court of the prison until the day Jerusalem was taken. Later, God spared Ebed-melech’s life as a reward for his faithfulness.

Although for forty years Jeremiah had been persecuted by his own countrymen, as a true patriot, he chose to stay with the remnant rather than live under the protection of the Babylonians after Jerusalem had been taken captive. Living to see the heart-rending results of his prophecies, he wept over his beloved city and wrote the sorrowful poem, *The Lamentations*. He was later forced to accompany the rebels when they fled into Egypt, where, according to tradition, he was stoned to death.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Foreknown:* Jeremiah was known, set apart, and ordained by God before_____.
2. *A Child:* About how old was Jeremiah when God's word came to him?
3. *His Mission:* What six things was Jeremiah called to do?
4. *Pressure of Duty:* What happened when Jeremiah decided not to speak any more?
5. *Rescued:* Who showed Jeremiah kindness by bringing him out of the dungeon?
6. *His Joy:* What caused Jeremiah to rejoice even though he was so persecuted?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

Today we focus on the prophet Jeremiah, who was divinely called to warn the Jews about the coming destruction. His ministry was marked by opposition from his own people, including the priests, the other prophets, several kings and his own family. From his example we are challenged and encouraged to speak God's Word wherever and to whomever, even in the midst of severe persecution.

Jeremiah's messages from God were full of signs and object lessons: a potter's vessel on the wheel, a marred linen garment, baskets of figs. Knowing his times of deep despair, it is no wonder that some of the most comforting verses in the Bible come from him: "For I know the thoughts I think toward you..." (Jeremiah 29:11) and "It is of the Lord's mercies we are not consumed..." (Lamentations 3:22-23). He also was given the important prophecy of the new covenant (Jeremiah 31:33-34) which is quoted in Hebrews 8:8-12. A most serious warning for anyone called to work or speak for God is given in Jeremiah 48:10: "Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully, and cursed be he that keepeth back his sword from blood."

Like we learned from Abraham, Moses and Elijah, there were times when Jeremiah's faith and courage weakened. He was even so low he decided not to preach anymore and cursed the day he was born. The dynamite power of God's Word soon broke through his despair, and for over forty years he persevered, drawing strength and even joy from that Word. What a delight it must have been to have found that lost book of the law hidden in a dusty, closed-up temple chamber!

Jeremiah was also encouraged by his kind friend when in his deepest despair, sunk to

his knees in the foul-smelling, slimy dungeon. Ebed-melech pushed aside the stone lid and grinned down into the blackness. "I'm here to get you out!"

What a great lesson we can learn from Ebed-melech. How can we help the minister or prophet who is suffering? How can we relieve his pain or deliver him from his dungeon?

What else may we learn here? Though we may be forsaken by our own brethren, it is not time to give up. We don't have to doubt our calling. God never said it would be easy or that all men would receive our message. There is always hope, even in the darkest dungeon.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

The often quoted verse found in Jeremiah 29:11 says, "For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end." No doubt those thoughts gave hope to Jeremiah in his miry pit experience. The Lord is not only able to bring deliverance out of the pit, He is also able to destroy the enemy and work things out for spiritual good in order that His name might be magnified.

Just like Jeremiah, Daniel also had a pit experience: a pit of lions. But the Lord gave Daniel deliverance, caused his enemies to be devoured by the lions and turned the heart of the king. King Darius proclaimed that the God of Daniel was a living God, and His kingdom was an everlasting kingdom that would never be destroyed.

The Lord was faithful to Joseph in his pit of death as well. His brothers had intentions of letting Joseph die in the pit but then changed their minds to send him down with the merchants to the land of Egypt. Joseph kept a pure heart toward God in the up and down experiences of his time in Egypt. He was able to deliver his family as well as the whole nation during the famine. He testified to his brothers that what they meant for evil, God turned into good.

"And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Romans 8:28).

—Sis. LaDawna Adams

AUGUST 20, 2017

THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM

Zacharias to His Family and Friends

Luke 1:67 And his [John's] father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and prophesied, saying,

68 Blessed be the Lord God of Israel; for he hath visited and redeemed his people,

71 That we should be saved from our enemies, and from the hand of all that hate us;

74 That he would grant unto us, that we being delivered out of the hand of our enemies might serve him without fear,

75 In holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.

76 And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest: for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways;

77 To give knowledge of salvation unto his people by the remission of their sins.

The Angels to the Shepherds

Luke 2:10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

John the Baptist to the Multitudes

Matthew 3:1 In those days came John the Baptist, preaching in the wilderness of Judaea,

2 And saying, Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.

3 For this is he that was spoken of by the prophet Esaias, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight.

John 1:29 The next day John seeth Jesus coming unto him, and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world.

Jesus to the Multitudes

Matthew 4:17 From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the

kingdom of heaven is at hand.

23 And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people.

Matthew 11:5 The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up, and the poor have the gospel preached unto them.

The Disciples to the Multitudes

Matthew 10:7 And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.

8 Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give.

Mark 16:20 And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen.

MEMORY VERSE: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. —Luke 24:47

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Fulfilling the vision of the prophets, announced by Zacharias and the angels, and heralded by John the Baptist, the gospel tidings of the kingdom—repentance and forgiveness of sins, deliverance from satan’s kingdom, and healing of all manner of diseases—began to be preached by Jesus and the disciples.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Luke 1:77 and 24:47 “Remission”: from a word meaning *to send away*; deliverance; complete forgiveness; liberty; pardon.

Luke 2:10 “Good tidings”: (Greek) euaggelizó: to announce good news; preach the gospel. Our English word is “evangelize.”” Same word as in Matthew 11:5 and the verb form of “gospel” in Matthew 4:23.

Matthew 10:7 “Preach” and Mark 16:20 “Preached”: to be a herald; proclaim.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Jesus was born during the violent and bloody era of King Herod. Paranoid and moody, suspicious of everyone, he had spies everywhere. He had many members of his own family put to death, including his wife. After his death there were conflicts among those who wanted to become king in his place.

The Jews were under oppressive Roman rule and heavy taxation. There were uprisings among the nationalistic Jews, would-be Messiahs, and revolutionaries whose surges would be crushed by the Romans. Robber bandits roamed the countryside.

Spiritually, it had been over 400 years since a prophet had spoken from God. The Jews were fragmented into four main factions: the Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots and Essenes. Despite the mighty Greek and Roman conquerors, poets, historians, architects, and philosophers, supposed to lift humanity to cultural refinement, the people were in the great darkness of idolatry and moral corruption, proving that the “world by wisdom knew not God.”

It was time for the Savior. The world was ripe for the Good News of salvation. The message for these times, according to the scriptures in our lesson, included these main themes: repentance, forgiveness and complete deliverance from sin, deliverance from demonic powers, and healing for diseases.

These were included in the inspired proclamation given by Zacharias at the circumcision of his son, John. Quoting from the prophecies given by Abraham and other prophets, he spoke of deliverance from their enemies, and his meaning was clear that he was speaking of *the soul's enemies*, the deliverance being the way that people might serve God in holiness and righteousness.

The angels also announced the good news of a Savior, tidings of great joy and God's peace and goodwill to all people.

John went about heralding the arrival of the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world. He preached repentance, or turning away from sin, as the way to be saved, announcing that the Messiah would baptize with the Holy Spirit and “thoroughly purge” the hearts of men and women.

Jesus and his disciples went among the people preaching the good news of the kingdom and working wonders and signs of God's delivering power to the multitudes. All kinds of diseases were healed, devils were cast out, and the dead were raised to life again.

The world was dark indeed. But the darkness could not overcome the gospel Light that had now come.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *The Abrahamic Covenant*: What was the essence of it that was now going to be fulfilled by the Savior?
2. *The Herald*: Who was to go before the Savior preaching repentance?
3. *The Angel Choir*: What is the meaning of their song?
4. *The Signs Following*: Name the things that were done by Jesus and the disciples as they preached to the multitude.

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

In these Scriptures we see the elements of the pure gospel of Jesus Christ. He didn't come with a political or social message, although the message of deliverance from sin would greatly impact those areas. He came to take away sin. He came to rid the soul of satan's possession and oppression. He came to bring a cure for the diseases, many of which were from the effects of sinful living.

Repentance is a vital part of the gospel message. Repentance makes the way for forgiveness and pardon. Without repentance there would be no deliverance. Today, we should beware of any "gospel" or "good news" in written, spoken or televised messages or songs, which does not include repentance, or turning away from sin.

We should also suspect any "gospel" that downplays godly living. According to Zacharias's announcement, living in "holiness and righteousness, all the days of our life" was the purpose for which Jesus, the Redeemer, was sent.

Let us not leave out the good news that Jesus heals the body! There are opportunities all around us, with sin, sickness, devil possession, addiction, and the sorrows of depression on every hand, to proclaim this powerful truth: "Yes, He healed in Galilee, set the suffering

captive free; And He's just the same today!"

The gospel of the kingdom that we preach should always reflect the message that the good news is to every creature, people, and nation. It not only frees from sin and heals the body, but it makes us a member of God's universal church. We are one body, with one Head, Jesus Christ; and one family, with one Father, God; and one kingdom, with one King.

The transcript for the gospel message we preach has already been written and is very clear. Let us be faithful to proclaim this very gospel until the end of time.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

When comparing the greatness of God's kingdom, His Church, with the vast kingdoms created by men in ancient times, one is reminded of Nebuchadnezzar's dream in the second chapter of the book of Daniel, which God revealed to Daniel along with the dream's interpretation.

The image in the king's dream—the head of gold, the body and arms of silver, the midsection of brass, the legs of iron, and the feet of iron and clay—represented many of the great conquerors and kingdoms throughout history. However, none of these has been able to compete with the dominance of the kingdom of Heaven!

This kingdom, pictured as the stone cut out "without hands," is a spiritual one, and one that shall never be destroyed (Daniel 2:44). That single stone, presented numerous times in scripture as none other but Jesus Christ, is the basis of God's universal and timeless church, ever increasing just as the mountain in the king's dream filled the entire earth. Jesus himself described this kingdom as a mustard tree (Matthew 13:31-32 and Luke 13:19), which starts out small, but grows into a great tree that brings health to the ecosystem around it.

There are many who have pressed into this kingdom; those who have forsaken sin and returned unto the Lord as ruler and controller of their lives. As His obedient subjects, each one receives the blessings of His reign through wholeness, righteousness, and peace here below, and eternal life when our time on earth is completed. The greatest news is that this kingdom shall continue long after time has ceased to exist, on and on throughout eternity!

“Tis a kingdom of peace, it is reigning within,
It shall ever increase in my soul;
We possess it right here when He saves from all sin,
And 'twill last while the ages shall roll.”

—Bro. Fari Matthews

AUGUST 27, 2017

JESUS CALLS THE TWELVE APOSTLES

Matthew 4:18 And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers.

19 And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men.

20 And they straightway left their nets, and followed him.

21 And going on from thence, he saw other two brethren, James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother, in a ship with Zebedee their father, mending their nets; and he called them.

22 And they immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him.

John 1:43 The day following Jesus would go forth into Galilee, and findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me.

44 Now Philip was of Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

45 Philip findeth Nathanael, and saith unto him, We have found him, of whom Moses in the law, and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph.

46 And Nathanael said unto him, Can there any good thing come out of Nazareth? Philip saith unto him, Come and see.

47 Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him, and saith of him, Behold an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile!

Matthew 9:9 And as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and

followed him.

Luke 6:12 And it came to pass in those days, that he went out into a mountain to pray, and continued all night in prayer to God.

13 And when it was day, he called unto him his disciples: and of them he chose twelve, whom also he named apostles;

14 Simon, (whom he also named Peter,) and Andrew his brother, James and John, Philip and Bartholomew,

15 Matthew and Thomas, James the son of Alphaeus, and Simon called Zelotes,

16 And Judas the brother of James, and Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor.

Matthew 10:1 And when he had called unto him his twelve disciples, he gave them power against unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease.

Mark 6:12 And they went out, and preached that men should repent. (Mark 6:7 says Jesus sent them forth “by two and two.”)

13 And they cast out many devils, and anointed with oil many that were sick, and healed them.

Luke 9:10 And the apostles, when they were returned, told him all that they had done. And he took them, and went aside privately into a desert place belonging to the city called Bethsaida.

MEMORY VERSE: Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. —John 15:16

CENTRAL THOUGHT: From among the multitude of his disciples, Jesus chose and ordained twelve apostles. He commissioned them and gave them authority and power to preach the gospel, heal the sick and cast out devils. They were with him from His baptism until the day He was taken up to heaven and were witnesses of His resurrection.

WORD DEFINITIONS

John 1:45 “Nathanael”: thought to be the same as “Bartholomew” (a surname which means “Bar Talmi”, or “the son of Talmi”). In Mark 3:18 and Luke 6:14, Nathanael is paired with Philip, who was the instrument of bringing him first to Jesus. After His resurrection, when Jesus appeared at the Sea of Tiberias, “Nathanael of Cana in Galilee” is mentioned along with six other apostles who were present (John 21:2).

Matthew 9:9 “The receipt of custom”: a place where taxes were gathered; a toll booth. As this was by the seaside, it might have been the place where the ferry tax, for carrying persons and goods across the lake, was collected. Matthew was a publican, an officer under the Romans to gather the public revenue.

Luke 6:13 “Disciples”: a learner or pupil; one who follows one’s teachings. “Apostles”: a delegate; messenger; one sent forth with orders.

Luke 6:15 (Also Matthew 10:4) “Simon called Zelotes” (Matthew calls him “Simon the Canaanite”): surnames given to distinguish him from Simon Peter. There are several opinions as to the meanings of these names. Some scholars suppose that both names indicate his connection with the Galilean Zealot party, a sect which stood for the recovery of Jewish freedom and the maintenance of distinctive Jewish institutions. (From the Hebrew “kanná,” zealous; compare the Chaldee “kanán,” by which this sect was denoted.) Others say “Canaanite” doesn’t mean a pagan, or a man of Canaan, but “one of Cana, which by interpretation is Zelus, from whence it is that Luke called him Zelotes.” Some commentators feel “Zelotes” simply means “zealous” because of his great fervency in preaching the gospel. This is an example of the disparity one may find when comparing commentators.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Matthew, Mark, and Luke give us the account of Jesus ordaining and sending forth the twelve apostles. Additionally, they each record more details on the calling of the two pairs of fishermen brothers—Andrew and Simon (Peter), and James and John, sons of Zebedee. John adds that Andrew and another disciple, who were at first followers of John the Baptist, had been previously attracted to Jesus when John said, “Behold the Lamb of God!” After Andrew had spent the day with Jesus, he went and found his brother Simon, and said, “We have found

the Messiah!” and brought him to Jesus. When Jesus looked at Simon, he immediately gave him the name Cephas, or Peter. (There seems to be a period of time between this meeting and the day he called them both to leave their nets.)

Jesus then called Philip, who found Nathanael. Evidently, the two were close friends. To Nathanael’s honest questions, Philip merely said, “Come and see!” When Jesus saw Nathanael coming, He gave him a special, personal witness that He was indeed the Son of God: He accurately read his character and let him know that He knew what Nathanael had been doing under the fig tree.

What do you think he was doing under the fig tree? I think he was praying—earnestly seeking to know about the Messiah. Perhaps he was asking for a more definite witness. Whatever it was, Jesus more than satisfied his doubts.

As for the rest of the apostles, we don’t have that many details. You may read traditional accounts of their labors, travels and the manner of their deaths in other writings.

Adam Clarke wrote an interesting note concerning the choosing of the disciples to be apostles: “It is worthy of notice, that those who were Christ's apostles were first his disciples; to intimate, that men must be first *taught* of God, before they be *sent* of God. Jesus Christ never made an apostle of any man who was not first his scholar or disciple. These twelve apostles were chosen (1) That they might be with our Lord, to see and witness his miracles, and hear his doctrine; and (2) That they might bear testimony of the former, and preach his truth to mankind.”

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Purpose:* Jesus promised Andrew and Simon that He would make them _____.
2. *Previous Employment:* Matthew was a _____.
3. *Preparation:* How long did Jesus spend in prayer before choosing His twelve apostles?
4. *Pairs:* Name the pairs of brothers and the pair of close friends who followed Jesus.

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

The theme I see coming from this collection of scriptures about the calling of the different disciples is that of *leaving all*. Simon and Andrew left their nets, James and John left their nets *and* their father, and Matthew left his table of revenue. Jesus called others too, to leave their positions and follow him, but many had excuses.

These twelve were willing to leave all. It was a big thing to them, for later Peter brought it up to Jesus when he said, “Lord, we have left all and followed Thee.” Being human—and yet carnal—the disciples had tendencies to feelings of superiority but also feelings of anxiety at the thought that their familiar, comfortable ways of providing for themselves had been laid aside and the future seemed a bit uncertain. Who would care for them if Jesus were taken away? They weren’t sure how all of this was going to turn out.

The Old Testament prophets we studied faced this as well. Abraham didn’t really know where he was going or how he would be provided for. Moses certainly inched his way forward with many trepidations. No doubt Elijah felt fear gnawing away in the pit of his stomach as he hid away in the underbrush and listened for sounds of Jezebel’s soldiers. Elisha smacked the Jordan with Elijah’s mantle and said, “Where is the God of Elijah?” And Jeremiah? At age 14, and speaking to people who opposed him constantly, the future looked anything but promising. Yet they all trusted and obeyed...

We too have been called to leave all and trust God to direct our paths and supply our needs. Thank God, we have seen “the end of the Lord” in all of these accounts. We are comforted that God did lead, did provide, did supply, ALL the needs of these prophets and apostles. We can be assured that He will do the same for us when we know He is saying, “Leave it all and follow Me.”

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

It has become a growing trend to see how far back we can trace our ancestry. It is both interesting and intriguing to find our relatives and discover where they fit into the lineage of our family histories. We are their descendants. Their blood runs through our veins.

There is an unbroken connection to who they were and who we are. Without them we

would not exist. What were their personalities? What were their backstories? And most importantly, what was their response to the call: “follow me”?

Every Christian has a spiritual ancestry—one that I believe can be traced, through the Holy Ghost, directly to the apostles of Christ. Their obedience to the call to follow the Lord, to preach the gospel, and to commit those teachings to faithful men directly impacts our spiritual lives today.

The blood of Christ flows through us because of them. Because they were faithful, we too have the privilege of salvation. We are their direct descendants. We are part of their spiritual lineage. They live on through us, and we are spiritually alive because of them.

Twelve men. Twelve personalities. Twelve backstories. Brothers, friends, strangers. A diverse group with diverse histories. One call to follow. One mutual response—they left all and followed Christ. As they followed they inspired others to follow also.

The Lord has called us too. How we respond will directly impact our families and subsequent generations. Will we leave all and follow him? Will our legacy be a part of the unbroken heritage that reaches from the apostles to the coming of Christ? We are the disciples and apostles of this generation. How will we respond to His call: “Follow Me”?

—Bro. Darrell Johnson

SEPTEMBER 3, 2017

THE CALL OF PAUL THE APOSTLE

Acts 22:3 I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day.

4 And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women. (See parallel passages, Acts 9:1-20 and Acts 26:9-20.)

5 As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished.

6 And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus

about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me.

7 And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

8 And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest.

9 And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me.

10 And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do.

11 And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus.

12 And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there,

13 Came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him.

14 And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth.

15 For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard.

16 And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

17 And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance;

18 And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me.

19 And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee:

20 And when the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him.

21 And he said unto me, Depart: for I will send thee far hence unto the Gentiles.

MEMORY VERSE: I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision: But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance. —Acts 26:19b-20

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Saul of Tarsus, later renamed Paul, a strict Pharisee and persecutor of the early church, was specifically called by Jesus, Who appeared to him in a vision, to follow Him and be His minister to the Gentiles.

LESSON BACKGROUND

A Roman citizen, yet a Jewish Pharisee of the tribe of Benjamin and son of a Pharisee; a student of the famous Jewish teacher, Gamaliel; a blameless follower of Moses' law and a zealous militant for what he thought was truth; Saul was heading for yet another mission in his polished career. God, however, had other plans. In a dazzling vision, He arrested this man who with all his heart thought he was doing service to God, and brought him into a personal encounter with the glorified, risen Messiah. Once Paul was persuaded that Jesus was the promised Messiah, he turned all that passion and zeal into doing His will and preaching His gospel.

At first suspicioned by the disciples but aided and befriended by Barnabas, Paul began preaching in the synagogues the very gospel he had first denied. His knowledge of the law and the prophets enabled him to boldly prove the authenticity of Christ. He began to be persecuted by the Jews.

Paul, accompanied by Barnabas, then embarked on his first of three missionary journeys, spreading the gospel from Antioch (Syria) to Seleucia, then the island of Cyprus (where, at Paphos, his name was changed to Paul), then to Pamphylia, Antioch in Pisidia, and Lystra, where he was stoned; to Derbe, then back through Attalia to his starting point.

His second journey took him, this time accompanied by Silas, to Lystra, where they were joined by Timothy, and then to Troas, where they had a vision instructing them to go to Macedonia. From there they went to Philippi where they witnessed Lydia's conversion, were beaten and imprisoned, miraculously delivered, and exceedingly joyful when their jailer and his whole family were saved and baptized. Leaving the new believers in Philippi they came to

Thessalonica and preached there several weeks, establishing a new congregation of believers while experiencing opposition from the unbelieving Jews. Heading by night to Berea, they met honest seekers of truth and found open hearts to the gospel, but were again opposed by the troublemakers from Thessalonica. From here Paul went to Athens, where he preached at Mars' Hill before going to Corinth. At Corinth, he met Aquila and his wife Priscilla, and was joined again by Silas and Timothy. Here he stayed and taught a year and a half, being encouraged by Jesus again in a vision. Leaving Corinth, he sailed to Syria, visited the brethren at Ephesus and then returned to Caesarea and Antioch.

Paul began his third and last missionary journey by first going all over the country of Galatia and Phrygia, strengthening the disciples. He then returned to Ephesus, where he stayed over two years, making Ephesus a center for spreading the gospel all over Asia. Paul made plans to return to Jerusalem, visiting the saints in Macedonia and Achaia along the way. It is believed that while he stayed in Corinth during the winter he wrote the epistle to the Romans. He was then joined by several brethren who met him in Troas, and from there they visited several places before arriving at Ephesus, where he gave his farewell charge to the brethren. Continuing on his way toward Jerusalem, Paul was warned several times that trouble awaited him there; nevertheless, he went forward, visiting saints at Tyre and Ptolemais, and Philip and his family in Caesarea before coming to Jerusalem.

Although gladly received by the brethren at Jerusalem, Paul indeed met with persecution from the Jewish leaders there, being beaten, bound and made to testify before the council. Again he was comforted by a vision of Jesus. Narrowly escaping a plot to kill him, he was escorted by soldiers to Felix the governor, before whom he testified twice. After being imprisoned there for two years, Paul witnessed before the new governor, Festus, and King Agrippa, who acknowledged that Paul "almost persuaded" him to become a Christian.

At last Paul, still a prisoner, was put on a ship heading for Rome, encountering violent storms and a shipwreck at sea, his courage bolstered again by cheering words in a vision. Miraculously delivered, sheltered by the islanders, and healed of a venomous snakebite, Paul spread the gospel on the island of Melita before setting sail again for Rome. There the brethren welcomed him and he was allowed to live in his own rented house, guarded by a soldier, receiving all who came to visit and continuing to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. Here he wrote six Epistles, recording some of his last words, "The time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (II Timothy 4:7).

According to tradition, Paul was imprisoned and beheaded by Emperor Nero about A.D.

67. Of his sufferings there we have no written record, except for a general knowledge of the awful conditions endured by those Christians who were persecuted by Nero.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *The Heavenly Vision:* Describe the times when Paul encountered Jesus speaking to him in a vision.
2. *On Call:* Name the devout brother in Damascus who was commissioned to instruct and baptize Saul (Paul).
3. *His Calling:* Name the four things Paul was chosen to do.
4. *His Journeys:* How many missionary expeditions did Paul make?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

In the brief synopsis of Paul's life and ministry, there is one connecting thread that is *the* life-changing beginning, energizing motivation, renewing purpose, and securing anchor of it all—*the vision of Jesus Christ*.

This is what separated him into the apostleship. It is what gave him the authority over demons and serpents, the energy to travel in all kinds of conditions, the boldness to speak to rulers and kings, the wisdom to appeal to Jews and Gentiles alike, the grace to bear his "thorn."

This must be our heart-cry today. "Lord, give me a vision"! As Paul recognized, it is more important than pharisaical, outward righteousness. It is more potent than the mightiest of earth's monarchs. It sustains through persecutions, upheavals, disappointment in brethren, storms, shipwrecks, prison bars, and death.

Oh, that we might *see Him!* That we might know Him, win Him, fellowship Him! Would we preach the gospel of Jesus Christ? Then seek to have a vision and hear His voice, and then—obey.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

Paul was constantly breaking in on the devil's territory and enraging Satan. We, like Paul, are commissioned by an accompanying power that far surpasses Satan's great power. Satan continually tried to stop Paul, but God protected his life until his work was completed. God has and will continue to work many miracles to preserve the Truth and the lives of His commissioned messengers.

Bro. Andrew, the "Bible smuggler," testified that although the communist authorities knew who he and his helpers were, they could not stop them. Obedience to God's call, reliance on God's supernatural power, and a genuine love for the souls of the persecutors overwhelmed all the power and fear that Satan's men could exert against them.

Christ's call and approval compelled Paul to push through crushing hardships to persuade men everywhere that Christ was the true God they must turn to. God honored Paul's obedience with great power and effect. We too, can experience the exhilaration of God's power in and through us on others as we unreservedly follow Christ's call to burn ourselves out in his service.

—Bro. Jeremy Booher

SEPTEMBER 10, 2017

THE POWER OF THE GOSPEL

Romans 1:16 For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

17 For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith: as it is written, The just shall live by faith. (Quotation from Habakkuk 2:4).

Romans 10:9 That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

10 For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

17 So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.

I Corinthians 1:17 For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.

18 For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

21 For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

I Corinthians 2:4 And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power:

5 That your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

I Peter 1:23 Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.

24 For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away:

25 But the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you. (Quotation from Isaiah 40:8).

MEMORY VERSE: But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. —II Corinthians 4:3-4, 6

CENTRAL THOUGHT: The gospel of Jesus Christ is the power that saves, enlightens and transforms, wherever it is preached or written under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, believed on in the heart and received into the life.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Paul wrote the Romans epistle to the Christians who were at Rome, most of whom were Gentiles, but some were undoubtedly Jews and Jewish proselytes who possibly had been to Jerusalem when the Holy Spirit was given at Pentecost, or had been scattered there because of the persecution.

Romans is divided into two main parts, doctrinal and practical, with the doctrinal part showing the plan of salvation. Included in this is the argument that all men are sinners in need of salvation—Jews and Gentiles alike; the explanation of the method of salvation—justification by faith and sanctification through the Holy Spirit; and the revelation of the blessings of salvation. Although salvation as a free gift is expounded, continuance in sin is not encouraged; rather, believers are exhorted to crucify the flesh and live in obedience to the Holy Spirit. The practical part of Romans gives exhortations and instructions concerning Christian duties.

Romans was most likely written by Paul when he was staying at Corinth, and it was delivered to the Roman saints by Phoebe, the deaconess of Cenchrea (an area on the outskirts of Rome).

Paul wrote two epistles to the church at Corinth. In the first he deals with the strife, division and immorality that was there, giving instructions on how to correctly view the ministry, how to keep marriage and all relationships pure and holy, and how to properly use Christian liberty. He explains the doctrines concerning the Lord's supper, spiritual gifts, and the resurrection.

Both epistles were written in the Macedonian city of Philippi and delivered to the Corinthians by Timothy, Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus (I Corinthians) and Titus and Lucas (II Corinthians).

We are also reading from Peter's first Epistle in this lesson. Peter wrote this later in his life, as a man who, filled with the Spirit at Pentecost, had endured many chastenings, persecutions and deliverances, through which he had become solid and sound. In his epistles, he is carrying out Jesus' two commands concerning his mission: strengthening the brethren and feeding the flock of God.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *The Power of God unto Salvation*: To whom does the gospel become this power? What words show the scope of opportunity?
2. *The Just Shall Live by Faith*: From which Old Testament prophet does Paul quote?
3. *The Preaching of the Cross*: To those who perish, it is _____, but to those who believe, it is _____.
4. *Man's Wisdom*: Why should the gospel not be preached in this way?
5. *The New Birth*: What is the powerful seed that is sown in the heart and works regenerating life? Connect with Romans 1:16 and explain what is necessary to make this happen.
6. *The Enduring Word*: From which Old Testament prophet does Peter quote?
7. *Light*: From our memory verse, explain what needs to happen so that man may believe and be powerfully born again by the gospel. Explain what prevents this.

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

In our lesson today, the writers explain so clearly what the gospel message will do when it is preached in the right way. First, it must be *the gospel of Christ*—the *preaching of the cross*—of our sinful condition and need for salvation; of Jesus' death on the cross for our sins and of His resurrection; of how He lives and intercedes for us as our Lord and Savior.

Also included in the preaching of the cross is an explanation of how we crucify our flesh through His cross and are made holy by His Holy Spirit; how the cross delivers us from our sins so that we do not continue in them, but instead yield our lives to God unto true holiness.

Secondly, it must be preached (or written) *in the power of God* and not in man's worldly wisdom. It must be preached under the anointing of the Spirit of God. It is the Spirit that draws men to Christ. It is the Spirit who works the regeneration, or the new birth.

A third important factor is that men must *understand* the gospel message. They must get it. This is so important! No wonder satan works so diligently to *blind the minds* of

individuals so they cannot understand the gospel. Jesus explained that when a man didn't understand the Word, satan could pluck it right out of his heart and it would never germinate, never grow up, never bear fruit. What a responsibility we have as parents, as evangelists to our own children, to make sure they *get it*!

When you *get it*—when the light from that glorious gospel shines *into* your heart convincing and convicting you; you receive it and faith is created in you to *believe it*—that's when the awesome power of the SEED bursts open NEW LIFE into your being, and you become a NEW CREATURE!

Oh, the glorious, life-giving power of the gospel of Jesus Christ!

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

The following is an excerpt from the book "The Persecutor" by Sergei Kourdakov, a leader and persecutor of Christians in communist Russia in 1970:

"Leaving the iron fire door open, we began slinging the copies of hand-written literature into the fire. . . a handful at a time, watching it go up in flames and thinking a fire was all this stuff was good for. What did young people see in this trash? A sense of deep curiosity suddenly came over me. I picked up one booklet and began to read. It was a handwritten portion of the Gospel of Luke, around chapter 11. Some verses were missing. I supposed it was written from memory and the writer didn't recall all the verses and left gaps to be filled in later. As I read, several words caught my eye. They were some kind of prayer or something. Quickly, I ripped out a couple of pages from the child's notebook it was written in and shoved them into my pocket.

"That night, at the first opportunity I had, lying in my bunk at the naval academy, I opened up those pieces of paper and began to read them again. Jesus was talking and teaching someone how to pray. I became more curious and read on. This certainly was no anti-state material. It was how to be a better person and how to forgive those who do you wrong. Suddenly the words leaped out of those pages and into my heart. I read on, engrossed in the kind words of Jesus. This was exactly the opposite of what I had expected. My lack of understanding, which had been like blinders on my eyes, left me right then, and the words bit deeply into my being. It was as though somebody were in the room with me,

teaching me those words and what they said. They made a profound impact on me. I read them again and again, then sat thinking, my mind lost in the wonder of it all.

"The words grabbed my heart. I was somehow frightened and uneasy, like a man walking on unfamiliar ground. I read the words and reread them and put them down, and still they came back to my mind again and again. They haunted me. It was a feeling totally new to me...

"Something deep within me, some tiny ember of humanity, was still alive somewhere inside me. The life I was leading was not the life that I had wanted to lead. Beating old women was not the kind of life I had dreamed of long ago in my early childhood. My first religion, communism, I believed in wholeheartedly and gave myself to it without reserve. It was the first thing I had to believe in . . .but that belief was gone now, shattered by the realities of life as I had seen them. Nothing satisfactory had replaced that belief I once held.

"It was while I was in this confused state that I made up my mind that I could not continue my way of life. I had no idea what I would be changing to, only what I had to change from. I decided to escape from Russia and get away from this life. Something was driving and compelling me."

—Sis. LaDawna Adams

SEPTEMBER 17, 2017

THE SUFFERINGS OF THE GOSPEL

Predicted by Jesus

Matthew 10:16 Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.

17 But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues;

18 And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for my sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles.

21 And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death.

22 And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved.

24 The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord.

28 And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Experienced by the Apostles

Acts 5:41 And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.

Acts 9:16 For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

Philippians 1:12 But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel.

II Timothy 1:8 Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God.

I Peter 4:16 Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf.

MEMORY VERSE: For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. —Mark 8:35

CENTRAL THOUGHT: Jesus instructed his disciples that, along with preaching the gospel, they would experience persecution because of it, which was the way they were to share in His sufferings and bear His cross. When the persecution did come, they rejoiced and glorified God, accepting it as God's way of furthering the gospel. They encouraged all the believers to rejoice in persecution.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Matthew 10:16 "Wise": intelligent, prudent, sensible, practically wise. "Harmless":

unmixed; pure, simple, unsophisticated, sincere, blameless. “Be ye therefore wise as serpents — On the one hand, be so prudent as not to irritate the wicked and those who shall oppose you, either by your behaviour or your doctrine, unnecessarily, and avoid all unnecessary dangers: and harmless as doves — On the other hand, let not your prudence degenerate into craft, lest it lead you to betray the truth, or to encourage or countenance men in their evil practices; maintain at all times a holy simplicity of soul; and to your prudence join a harmless and inoffensive behaviour, rendering yourselves remarkable for integrity amid the greatest temptations, and for meekness amid the greatest provocations” (*Benson Commentary*).

LESSON BACKGROUND

As Jesus chose from among his disciples the twelve who would be apostles, He gave them power over demons and disease and issued specific instructions as to their mission. Then he began a most serious discussion concerning the risks of their mission. I’m sure at these words eyes widened and breaths were drawn in sharply, as He spoke of opposition from their own families and inquisition by councils and kings. With grim predictions sandwiched between many precious assurances and promises, Jesus calmly shared what it would mean to follow Him: they would lose their very lives for Him.

They would need the Holy Spirit to witness thus; after He endued them with power, they immediately saw what Jesus had foretold coming to pass. But the fear that had gripped them when they saw Him on the cross was gone. Instead, they rejoiced; they felt privileged to suffer for His sake. In prison, they sang. Paul saw evidences all around that when he suffered the kingdom prospered and the gospel message reached farther. The courage they portrayed became a beacon that converted their persecutors.

And so it has been through the ages. Even today, the power of the gospel increases exponentially through persecution. Light has come into the world, and the darkness cannot overwhelm it.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Explain:* What do these terms mean to you? “Sheep in the midst of wolves...” “The disciple is not above his master...” “Fear not them which kill the body...” “Counted worthy...”
2. *Illustrate:* Share an example in Paul’s life or in recent history where the afflictions of the gospel resulted in the spread of the gospel.
3. *Remember:* Jesus was speaking to what man when he said, “For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake”? Of whom was He speaking?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

It seems to me that the scriptures of prophecy, the experiences of the Old Testament prophets; the life, mission and death of Jesus; His resurrection, ascension, ever-living intercession and sending of the Holy Spirit; the zeal and passion of the early Christians and the persecution of the saints from all ages—all point toward and focus on this: the triumph of the gospel amid its foes. This is the message of the book of Revelation: the great conflict and the final resolution.

Tertullian wrote in 197, “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” We can see this from hindsight. Centuries of persecution against the true church—first by the Jewish leaders and Pagan Romans, then by popery against the Anabaptists, reformers and Protestants, and even by nominal Protestant churches against the true saints of God, in addition to persecution by Muslims against Christians—has never stamped out the gospel message nor lessened its life-changing power. It has only deepened the resolve of pure-hearted saints, strengthened the bond between believers, shone more brightly the light of God’s Word, and intensified the efforts of missionaries and evangelists, translators, printers and transmitters of the written and spoken word, so that converts are the more coming to Christ in places where the greatest persecutions take place.

We have a great responsibility to spread the pure gospel. We want to be diligent in peaceful times, and we want to be faithful when persecution comes our way. It was said of the saints that they loved not their lives unto the death. Paul said of his afflictions, “None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself.” Let us have this same

steadfastness and passion for this glorious gospel.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

In 1415, the Bohemian reformer, John Huss, was tried and convicted as a heretic for his beliefs, and in an attempt to stamp out any following, was sentenced to death. While being burned alive at the stake, he prophesied, as recounted in Foxe's Book of Martyrs, "You are now going to burn a goose (Huss signifying goose in the Bohemian language), but in a century you will have a swan which you can neither roast nor boil." Just over 100 years later in 1517 Martin Luther, who was greatly influenced by Huss, posted his 95 Theses on the church door at Wittenberg, Germany, an event which has been widely considered to be the start of the Reformation.

The words to the song "I Have Decided to Follow Jesus" are thought to have been inspired by an account in mid-19th century India. The gospel had reached the Assam region in the northeast portion of the country, and one villager, along with his wife and two children, converted to Christianity. This angered the village chief, who called upon the man to renounce his faith before the entire village. The new convert refused, replying, "I have decided to follow Jesus. No turning back." Enraged, the chief had the man's boys killed with arrows and said, "Will you deny your faith? You will lose your wife, too." The man replied, "Though none go with me, still I will follow. No turning back." In fury the chief had the wife executed, and stated, "I will give you one more opportunity to deny your faith and live." In face of death the man replied, "The cross before me, the world behind me. No turning back." He was shot dead like the rest of his family, but with their deaths, the chief who had ordered them killed, moved by the man's faith, became a Christian, spontaneously confessing, "I too belong to Jesus Christ." This inspired the entire village to turn to the Lord.

Are we in the 21st century still willing to make the sacrifice required to spread God's word? Suffering is not just a requirement of God's ministry or of missionaries in foreign lands, it is something every disciple of Jesus must endure to further His kingdom. Let us go to Him without the gate, willing to make whatever sacrifice is needed to "take the little that remains of the cup of tribulation Jesus drank in dying pains."

—Bro. Fari Matthews

SEPTEMBER 24, 2017

QUALIFICATIONS OF MINISTERS OF THE GOSPEL

Luke 22:25 And he said unto them, The kings of the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and they that exercise authority upon them are called benefactors.

26 But ye shall not be so: but he that is greatest among you, let him be as the younger; and he that is chief, as he that doth serve.

Acts 20:28 Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

I Corinthians 4:1 Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.

2 Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.

I Timothy 3:1 This is a true saying, If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.

2 A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;

3 Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous;

4 One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity;

5 (For if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God?)

6 Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil.

7 Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

Titus 1:7 For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre;

8 But a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate;

9 Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.

MEMORY VERSE: Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. —II Timothy 4:2

CENTRAL THOUGHT: While all Christians are called to share the gospel message, God does especially gift and call some to the stewardship of preaching the gospel. Of these He requires specific qualifications.

WORD DEFINITIONS

Acts 20:28 “Feed”: to shepherd; tend; care for or protect a flock; rule, govern; provide pasturage; feed, nourish. “Overseer”: *episkopos*—from a combination of words meaning on and look intently. “A man called by God to literally ‘keep an eye on’ His flock (the Church, the body of Christ), i.e. to provide personalized (first hand) care and protection. Though in some contexts *episkopos* has been regarded traditionally as a position of authority, in reality the focus is upon the responsibility for caring for others” (*HELPS Word Studies*).

I Corinthians 4:1 “Steward”: manager of a household; guardian, treasurer, fiscal agent; spiritually, those to whom the counsels of God have been committed to be made known to men. Accountability is an important part of this.

I Timothy 3:1 “Bishop”: a “visiting”; overseeing; supervision; care and attention appropriate to personal visitation.

I Timothy 3:2 “Apt to teach”: able and skillful in teaching; also, the virtue which renders one teachable; docility.

I Timothy 3:3 “No striker”: not “ready with a blow,” violent, quarrelsome or contentious.

I Timothy 3:6 “Novice”: Newly planted; a recent convert.

LESSON BACKGROUND

Our first scriptures speak of one of the things that Jesus mentioned often to His disciples: the importance of being just a lowly servant. Humility is crucial to gospel work, whether it be the work of a missionary, a pastor, a deacon, a teacher, or an evangelist.

The next scripture gives us the concept of shepherding God's flock. Jesus is the Great Shepherd; we are lowly under-shepherds, but to us is given the commission of looking intently and with care over people's souls, and being diligent to feed and nourish their souls with the pure soul-food of the Word. Paul gave this charge to the brethren at Ephesus as he was leaving them to return to Jerusalem. He had no expectation of seeing them again; however, he did get to return. Sadly, there were those who had turned away from him, and so it is very possible that many of the ones to which he was speaking never saw him the next time he visited before he was sent to Rome. In a few very personal, touching words, Paul gives the essence of a true minister of the gospel in this discourse. He had been with them three years. They knew his life and his humble service.

In Paul's epistle to the Corinthians, he shares the concept of being a steward of the gospel. Faithfulness is the essential quality here. I am reminded of the example of Joseph, who was given the total care over Potiphar's household and business, and the serious way he faithfully went about his business.

Paul's letters of instruction to both Timothy and Titus, young ministers who were personally mentored by Paul, contain much about being a true minister of the gospel. We have listed just a few of the important qualifications. Each of these could be a lesson in and of itself. Together they present a composite picture of a man of God. Looking back into the Old Testament prophets included in this series, we see many living examples of these qualities.

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

DISCUSSION:

1. *Humility*: Share why this is such an important quality in the life of a gospel worker.
2. *Overseer*: How does the true meaning of this word keep a check and balance in the way a pastor deals with the flock?

3. *Steward*: How should this concept affect the way a minister conducts his ministry?
4. *Bishop*: How does the true meaning, “a visiting,” give insight into the type of care a pastor should give to the flock?

COMMENTS AND APPLICATION

We have come to the last lesson in the series on “The Glorious Gospel.” Truly, my soul has been blessed and challenged by this study; I trust yours has been as well. The Lord woke me in the night with this theme, many scriptures, and many of the topics for the individual lessons, and my soul was thrilled at the prospect of study. Now at the end, I am sobered by the responsibility we have to bring God’s message to the world.

I am convinced that being an humble example of the believers is of utmost importance. The qualifications in these scriptures are not optional. We simply will not bring the true gospel to lost sinners, nor present it in a convincing, attractive way, nor will they be able to “get it” if we live shoddy, hypocritical lives. Millions of souls have been turned off by preachers who were greedy for money, lustful and adulterous, proud, self-seeking and domineering. Many children and spouses of preachers have been turned away from Christ because of the harsh, violent, selfish behavior they endured at home, or simply because the parent was so busy with gospel work that the child felt neglected and unloved.

Because these things are sadly true, there is a greater-than-ever need for consecrated, called and qualified gospel messengers. Who will say to the Lord, in response to seeing a vision of Him, “Here am I, Lord, send me!”? Who will leave all for Jesus? Who will suffer for the gospel? Who will be willing to speak when there is opposition? Who will boldly stand before authorities, scoffers and false prophets and not withhold the truth?

—Sis. Angela Gellenbeck

REFLECTIONS

When a job recruiter or an employer posts a position, they give a brief description of the qualifications expected of each applicant. It may require a degree, a certain level of experience, or an appropriate skill-set. They may even request letters of recommendation.

The candidate is then fully vetted. Their moral character, even their financial integrity is scrutinized. Will their personality fit the position and the culture of the company? Do they have what it takes to do the job? Each year companies spend millions of dollars to get the right person for the right position, especially if that person will lead the company or a major division of it. If they fail to meet the required standard, they fail to get the position.

Ministering the gospel is the most important occupation in the world since the days of Christ. The gospel is to be preached to every creature. It impacts every living soul and influences everyone's eternal destiny. No job is more important than that. And nowhere is there a greater need for highly qualified individuals.

Yet there is a shortage of spiritual personnel because there is shortage of spiritual consecration. God is not so desperate that he will just settle for anything and anyone. He will leave the position vacant rather than have His work damaged or destroyed by unqualified individuals who don't meet the standard and can't bear the demands of the job.

Gospel ministry is not just for the church—it is for the world also. We are representing Christ to everyone we meet and we must therefore have a good report from without. We are representing Christ to the church and must therefore have a good report from within.

It is imperative that those who represent the ministry of Christ be qualified to do so. God is greatly concerned about His work. He is equally concerned about the qualifications of the worker He chooses.

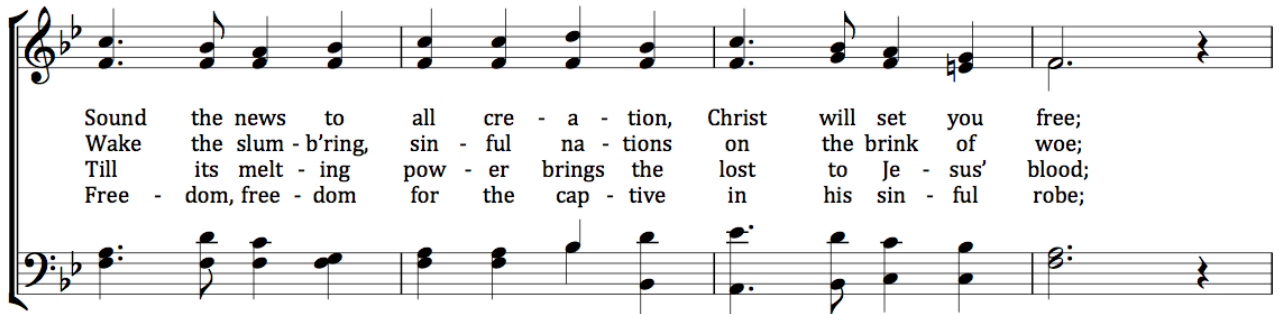
—Bro. Darrell Johnson

The Gospel Trumpet

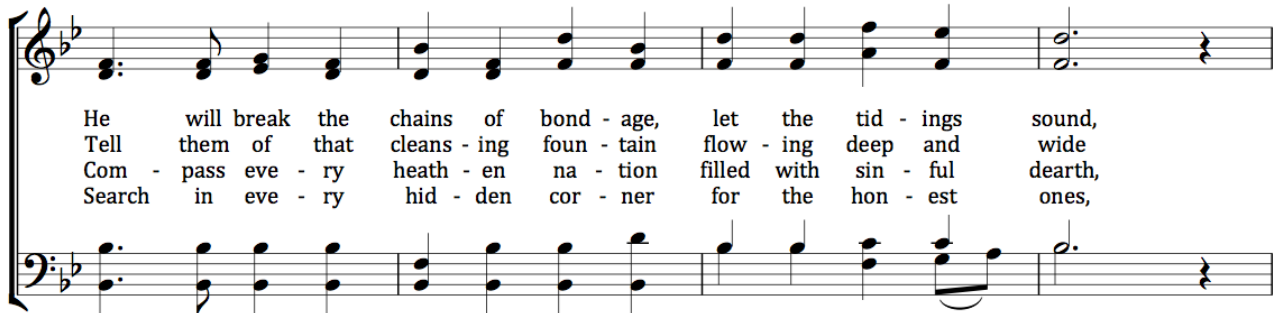
*Blow ye the trumpet in Zion, and sound an alarm in my holy mountain:
let all the inhabitants of the land tremble: for the day of the Lord cometh, for it is nigh at hand. Joel 2:1*



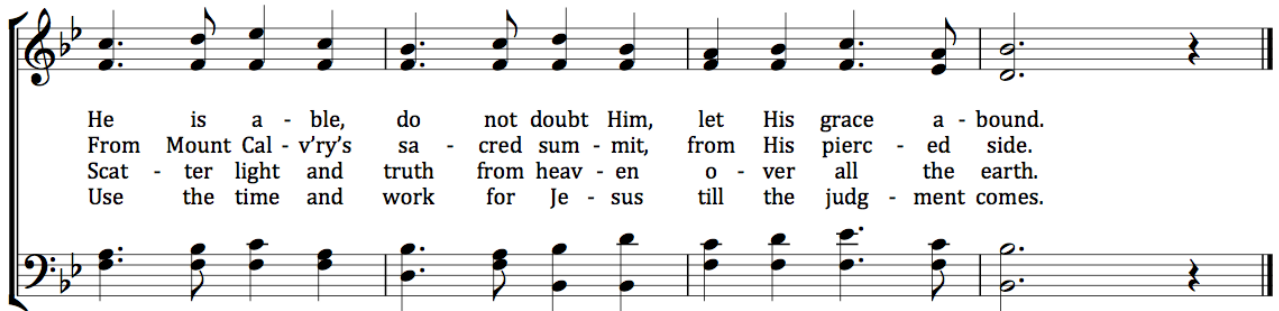
1. Blow the gos - pel trum - pet, broth - er, o - ver land and sea,
2. Sing, and pray, and preach for Je - sus eve - ry - where you go,
3. In the Spir - it's ho - ly unc - tion preach the word of God,
4. Send the gos - pel proc - la - ma - tion all a - round the globe,



Sound the news to all cre - a - tion, Christ will set you free;
Wake the slum - b'ring, sin - ful na - tions on the brink of woe;
Till its melt - ing pow - er brings the lost to Je - sus' blood;
Free - dom, free - dom for the cap - tive in his sin - ful robe;



He will break the chains of bond - age, let the tid - ings sound,
Tell them of that cleans - ing foun - tain flow - ing deep and wide
Com - pass eve - ry heath - en na - tion filled with sin - ful dearth,
Search in eve - ry hid - den cor - ner for the hon - est ones,



He is a - ble, do not doubt Him, let His grace a - bound.
From Mount Cal - v'ry's sa - cred sum - mit, from His pierc - ed side.
Scat - ter light and truth from heav - en o - ver all the earth.
Use the time and work for Je - sus till the judg - ment comes.