

Spiritual Leadership Seminar



"Called To Serve"

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"The Prerequisite For This Service"

Session 1

"The Assurance Of A Divine Call"

Scripture: Exodus 3:1-14

Introduction

After 53 years in personal ministry, I have come to the conclusion that many people are in the ministry for the wrong reasons. Some have chosen it simply as a job or vocation. Others have chosen it hoping to make money and gain respect or prestige. Yet, God's Word teaches that no person should be in Spiritual Leadership anywhere in the work of the Kingdom of God without having been given the direct call of God. The question I ask you today is, "Do you have the assurance that you have been given a Divine call to the role that you are now in?" If you do not, you should leave your position and seek other places to work or serve. Today, we will look at the call of Moses to see what is truly involved in a "Divine Call From God."

I. NOTICE THE PREPARATION FOR THE CALL. v. 1

The first thing we notice as we look into this Scripture passage is how God prepared Moses in advance for the call of God in his life. I am sure that Moses had no idea as he looked after his father-in-law's sheep what God was preparing him for. But, as we learn even in verse one of our text, whatever is happening to us today will probably be used by God to get us to the place where we need to be in His perfect will for our lives. We may discount what is happening to us, or what even we might be doing or where we might be working, but nothing is accidental. God in His sovereignty is working all things out for our future good in His perfect will. We might not see what God is doing today in the present, but as we learn in **Deuteronomy 33:18-23**, we will definitely see the hand of God in everything in our lives if we view it in the past. In other words, we probably will not see God's plan for our lives until we look backward and see what His hand has done for us.

A. Moses was prepared by learning responsibility. v. 1a

I believe one of the hardest things we will ever have to learn in our lives is what personal responsibility God has given to us presently, and also what we will be responsible for in the future. Just like Moses, God might have us in a little insignificant place to watch over little insignificant sheep in order to truly teach us personal responsibility and loyalty. The little job at the back side of the desert may not seem like much now, but with time God will use our little insignificant responsibilities and turn them into some amazingly great and wonderful fruit-bearing responsibility. In Moses' case, he was taking care of little old stinking sheep where no one was watching. But, unbeknown to him, God was for surely watching

over Moses to see if he would be faithful in that role which was non-significant to see if Moses would be found dedicated in this little role. And for sure, we need to know that God was not going to give him a greater role until he had proven himself in a lesser role.

So my dear friends, when we find ourselves in the back-side of the wilderness all alone trying to carry out a non-important role seemingly, then we must remain faithful in order to see God take us from that inconspicuous place to a greater place of service and ministry. Right now, God may have you in a sparsely productive place just seeing if He can count on you in the small things before He gives you a much larger and more prominent work for Him. Are you willing to be patient? I trust that you are because you might just be on the threshold of the greatest ministry God has ever given you.

B. Moses was prepared by living with roughness. v. 1b

The second very important truth that God brings out in verse one of this text is that sometimes God puts us into one of the most difficult or roughest places on earth to prepare us for His call on our lives. Just stop and think about where God put Moses in the backside of the desert to take care of Jethro's sheep. Can you imagine with me the conditions that Moses found himself in as a very young man. There was not enough water available at certain times of the year. Then, there had to be wild animals which tried to attack the sheep day after day and night after night. There were probably wolves, bears, mountain lions, poisonous snakes, and many other creatures that would make Moses' task as a shepherd very dangerous and difficult. In addition, no doubt that he had to deal with various diseases that would kill the sheep and probably even human beings. In other words, Moses was being tested and tried by God almighty day after day in order for God to make him tough for the call of God on his life. God had a plan of roughness to prepare him for the call because God's bigger plan would even be much worse as Moses was sent by God down into Egypt to deliver the Israelites who were in bondage to Pharaoh the king of Egypt.

So you see folks, sometimes when we are having it so hard where we are, and it just seems that there is so little comfort of ease, God might just be preparing us for a greater task which He is calling us to do. The idea of roughness is not nice, but the outcome certainly can be. Therefore, rather than sitting or standing around complaining about how bad things are where we serve presently, maybe we should just stop and think about the bigger things that God has for us in the future if we respond to the present roughness the way we should. The experience may not be nice and comfortable, but the outcome can be one of the best learning experience of our lives.

C. Moses was prepared by lodging in relationship. v. 1c

In the last part of verse one, we are told that Moses was keeping Jethro's sheep in the backside of the desert at a place called Mt. Horeb. The name Horeb actually means the place of dryness, but it was at a place at the foot of the mountain where God would very soon give Moses the Ten Commandments. You see, Mt. Horeb

and Mount Sinai are the same mountain in the southern part of the desert in what is today the Sinai Peninsula. The mountain is approximately 7,500 feet high. It is on this mountain where God would give Moses the commandments while the people made a golden calf at the foot of the mountain and worshipped other gods.

Now, let me give the spiritual meaning of this experience for Moses. It is very obvious that no servant of God can ever discover the perfect will or call of God unless that person dwells in a close relationship with God the Father and Christ the Son. God sent Moses down to one of the lowest parts of the earth in order for him to establish a relationship with the God who would reveal Himself upon the mountain so that Moses could receive the call of God and go forth from this spot to faithfully obey God. You might say that it took dwelling in the backside of the desert in a lonely place far from everyone else so that Moses could fellowship with and get close to God in order to discover the call that God had for him.

This is a great truth for us. We will never be able to discover the clear will and call of God for our lives unless we get alone in a quiet place and lodge close to Jesus Christ so that He can reveal himself to us. When we are in a crowded or noisy place, it is often impossible for us to hear the voice of God and get the clear word that we must have in order to discover what God wants us to do with our lives. The place where we might need to go may not be a beautiful place, but if the place is barren and deserted, we will be more prone to focus on Him and not on the beauty of a luxurious place. It is one thing to enjoy nature and the creation of God, but it is another thing to experience the sweet presence of God and to hear His voice when He speaks to our hearts. Folks, are you listening for the voice of God? If you aren't, you might need to leave the place where you are being distracted and go to a place where it is just you and the Lord.

II. NOTICE THE PROCEDURE OF THE CALL. vs. 2-6

As we move on in this study of Moses' call, we need to pay close attention to the actual procedure of the call because this unique story has a world of biblical truth for us as we listen for the call of God for our lives. So, I admonish you to please not miss the step-by-step procedure of Moses' call because there is so much truth to glean from each of the verses from two through six.

A. The procedure included the appearance of the Divine Messenger. v. 2a

Now, who is this angel in this second verse? Well, I am convinced that this angel was none other than our precious Lord Jesus Himself! Many so-called scholars debate whether this angel was truly Jesus, but a lot of conservative scholars believe just the way I do, that this angel appearing to Moses here in the Old Testament was indeed a Christophany in the Old Testament. A Christophany was where Jesus Christ appeared to someone in a different form than just a spirit being. In this case here in Exodus three, Jesus appeared to Moses in the form of an angel right in the midst of the burning bush. This appearance of Christ was truly God giving Moses the privilege of getting his call straight from Jesus Christ, God's Son, and from no one else. This messenger was truly Divine because it was Jesus our Lord and Master.

May I say to you that every child of God in this dispensation of time is still called directly by our Lord Jesus Christ. He may use His Holy Spirit working through His written Word, but definitely it is Jesus that calls each of us who have genuinely been saved and will stop long enough to pay attention to the call of God. For sure, we need to develop our life and ministry within the call of God, but this cannot and will not happen unless we know for sure that we are really saved.

B. The procedure included the amazement of a definite mystery. v. 2b

Moses' amazement at the burning of the bush was that instantaneously a fire began to burn in the bush, no doubt very brightly. The burning of the bush suddenly and the brightness of the fire got Moses' attention immediately, and he looked gazingly with much intensity and curiosity and he just could not get his eyes off of the flame. Then, the most astonishing thing was that the bush did not burn up. This was the truth that produced so much mystery to the man of God.

Let me illustrate this by my call to the Gospel ministry. I got gloriously saved when I was nine years old, but there were a few years that I was not dedicated to the Lord, and sorry to say, I didn't even go to church regularly. However, after just a few miserable years trying to run away from God, He truly got my attention, and then I earnestly began to seek His will for my life. The only problem was that when I began to believe that God might be calling this country boy to preach, this idea was such a mystery that it not only scared me, but it almost caused me to laugh. Why? Because it was beyond my comprehension that the God of the universe would call me to preach His Word; especially when I wasn't even a very good student in High School. It was probably as much a mystery to me as it was for Moses to see God in the burning bush.

Now, let me go out on a limb just a little bit. I would like to say that if there is no mystery in the call when God calls someone to His service, it may just be that there is no Divine call. Why? Because when the great God of the universe speaks to any finite human, there has to be some mystery in the experience. This is why I surely believe that there are many in the ministry today who are not called by God. If there is no Divine mystery, there is not a true call from God. The mystery may not be a modern-day burning bush experience, but there has to be the mysterious presence of God speaking to an individual in a special way. We just don't grow up as a Christian and then one day, we just evolve into a God-called servant. There has to be a call that is mysterious coming directly from God. And, you may be saying, "what is this mysterious call like?" If I could describe it for you, then it would not be mysterious!

C. The procedure included the alertness of a dedicated man. vs. 3-4

As we continue to look at this wonderful text, it is very important that we see the next steps in Moses' call. Notice if you would in verse three that Moses decided to stop and turn aside to see the great sight of the burning bush burning, but not being consumed. Obviously, God had gotten Moses' attention, but in order to hear the voice of God which is mentioned in verse four, there has to be an alertness or

sensitivity to the voice of God. And truthfully, this alertness only comes when a child of God is willing to stop, look, and listen; to use an old statement which we used to hear so often in the years gone by. God doesn't often knock us down to get our attention, but He will speak frankly and clearly and tell us what to do and where to go, but we have to decide to turn to Him to get the clear message.

May I ask you, "what does it take for God to get your attention?" Have you stopped recently and paid attention to the voice of God in your burning-bush experience? By the way, please notice on point C, what I have said about this procedure to get the assurance of a Divine call. You must be a dedicated servant of God if you are to receive and understand the call of God. It is completely impossible to know the mind of Christ and His will for our lives unless we are living a dedicated and clean life before God. We must understand that regardless of how dedicated a person believes he or she is, unless there is a clean and sanctified life, there will be no discernment of God's call and plan. This is brought out so clearly in **Romans 12:1-2**, when these verses talk about "Presenting ourselves as a sacrifice holy and acceptable to God" in order to discover the perfect will of God for our lives. Regardless of what this modern generation of religious church pretenders say, God does demand holiness in our lives if we are to fellowship with Him and discover His call for our lives.

In verse four of our text, we are told that when the Lord saw Moses turn aside to see the burning bush, He called Moses from the midst of the burning bush and spoke to him personally. Please notice what I just said! God spoke to Moses personally and called him by his name. And when God called Moses by name, then Moses responded quickly by saying, "**Here am I.**" Folks, I love the way Moses responded. He responded immediately, and in his response he said to God, "I am here Lord." You don't need to look any further, but I am here ready to obey your command. Can you imagine the intrepid fear that must have been in Moses heart at the appearance of the burning bush and from the verbal voice of the Lord coming out of the bush? Surely, Moses must have been scared inexplicably, but he did not allow his fear to cause him to run away or meltdown in unbelief.

Moses' immediate reactions in this story tell me that Moses wasn't overwhelmed by his fear because he obviously had been talking to God there in the backside of the desert. In other words, if we want to hear the call of God clearly, then it only stands to reason that we must always have a good relationship with our Lord so that when He speaks, we are familiar with His voice and we can recognize His voice instantaneously because we have been used to talking with Him. So, because of Moses' regular fellowship with God, he was able to recognize the voice of the Lord and respond to God's call right away.

D. The procedure included the affirmation of a Divine Master. vs. 5-6

Now we move on to verses five and six, and in these two verses we truly learn some phenomenal truth. First, God tells Moses in verse five to remove his shoes because he was standing on holy ground. This verse speaks volumes. The content of this verse let's us know that anytime God personally speaks to one of His servants, the place of the encounter is holy or sacred ground. Thus, the presence of

God in this vivid encounter is a reminder of the solemnity of this call. God needed Moses to go down and rescue over two million Israelites from 430 years of bondage by Pharaoh, and the seriousness of the moment revealed the significance of the task before the man of God. We might just say that when God spoke in an audible voice to Moses that He put His stamp of Divine affirmation upon Moses as His chosen man. The practical application is this, "When God chooses His servant and reveals His call to him, then this call shows the seriousness and magnitude of the work God has far ahead for the servant of God." We must always see that when God calls someone, places His affirmation upon this servant, then, the person being called needs to realize the seriousness of his or her call, and the importance of the task before him or her.

In verse six, God gives an even greater affirmation for Moses' call. The Lord tells Moses that He is the same God that had been faithful to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Therefore, He would be faithful in being with Moses when he answered God's call and went down into Egypt to free the Israelites. Thus, Moses did not need to worry or fear because Jehovah God was going to be with Him.

May I remind all of us that if God calls us, He will always be with us if we respond positively to Him when He calls. We will never have to go it alone as long as we are in the will of God and responding by obedience to the call and command of God. There is no greater promise than to know that God will be with us all the way when we respond positively to His call. Please remember what the Bible says in **Matthew 28:20**, where we find these words, "**Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen.**" These precious words were given as a promise to the early disciples when Jesus gave them the Great Commission. The promise He gave them was wonderful, but we do need to remember that it was conditional. He only promised to be with the disciples if they were fulfilling the Great Commission and taking the Gospel to the lost world. So, God calls us, He equips us, then sends us out to tell the world the Gospel message, and if we are obedient and carry out His call, then, He has promised to be with us even till the end of this age. As He was faithful to those First Century Disciples, He will be faithful to us if we have responded to His call with His stamp of Divine affirmation. As someone has said many times, "If God guides, He will provide."

III. NOTICE THE PURPOSE OF THE CALL. vs. 7-10

There is one thing that every Christian ought to know. That is that when God mysteriously calls someone, He always does so with the purpose of using that called person to reach out to others and minister in the name of God the Father. The ultimate end of course is that Christ might be glorified in and through the effort of the one God has called. And truly, the obvious goal of God when He calls a dedicated believer is to help rescue those who need to be saved, either from the eternal punishment of hell itself, or from the bondage of sin down here on earth. I want us to take a good look at the purpose for Moses' call as it is described in verses 7-10 of our text. Please don't miss what God is trying to teach us about the assurance of our very own Divine call.

A. God's purpose for the call of Moses was salvation for the sinner. v. 7-8a

Please notice what the Bible says here in verses 7-8a. **"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; 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 and large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey;"** Friends, have you ever read any more wonderful verses in the entire Bible? I surely haven't and I doubt you have too. These one and one half verses are some of the most precious that we can find in the blessed Book. Why? Because they show the ultimate compassion of our wonderful God toward those that are in the bondage of sin, mistreatment, wrong imprisonment, and other oppressive behavior by those around us. And of course, and most important, these verses reveal God's eternal compassion and concern for those who need to be rescued from hell itself in order to eventually go to be with Jesus in heaven. So, the purpose of God's call to Moses was for Him to be the deliverer of God's people from sinful bondage and bring them out of Egypt in order to ultimately lead them into the Promised Land of blessing.

May I say again to every one of you readers that this is the main purpose or reason why God calls every born-again believer to answer the call for his or her life, and follow the path of obedience to whatever and wherever He might lead. It is truly one of God's ultimate desires to call each of His servants to the place where that person can be a rescuer in the work of God for the Kingdom's sake. In other words, God told Moses that He had a plan for him to become a servant with the primary intent of delivering God's people from bondage. Where others may never have been willing to go, God finally got Moses to surrender his life to the will of God and become the person whom God would use to extricate over two million Jewish people from foreign imprisonment and bondage. Even today, God is still trying to call His children to become leaders in the rescue effort to win the world to Christ in order for them to be delivered from the fires of eternal hell. Right now, there are almost eight million people in the world, and almost two and one half billion have never even heard for the first time the simple plan of salvation. Therefore, we desperately need thousands of believers to leave their private comfort zones and follow Christ as He makes the effort to rescue the perishing and care for the dying, and snatch them in pity from sin and the grave. This combined effort is for every child of God, and no one is excepted from this responsibility. Therefore, we must step to the front of the burning bush of God's mighty call and say yes because time is running out, and souls are truly perishing to the tune of almost 89,000 souls in the world every 24 hours of the day. If we don't go, these lost people will remain in spiritual Egypt and die lost there without the message of salvation.

B. God's purpose for the call of Moses was schooling for the saints. v. 8b

Now, we need to deal with a truth that is not stated, but one that is implied in the last part of verse eight. This part of the verse tells us that God wanted to bring the Israelites out of Egyptian bondage and prepare them for living in the Promised

Land. In order to do this, Moses was going to have to train the people on how to live once they arrived in Canaan. They would have to be schooled on living among some enemy tribes that might be civil, while on the other hand they would have to fight against the evil tribes and defeat them and run them out of the land. Please bear in mind that the entrance into the Promised Land would be delayed for over 40 years because of the fear of the people in the land, and because of the lack of faith that would be demonstrated by believing the 10 spies rather than trusting Joshua and Caleb who would have a positive report. It is sad to remember, but since we know the outcome of the people's lack of trust in God, Moses' training sessions would last over 40 years, and in the end, he himself would not be permitted to enter the land because of his disobedience to the command of God to speak to the rock which had provided the water for the people previously. In **I Corinthians 10**, we are told that that rock was none other than Jesus Christ, and striking the rock the second time instead of speaking to it, implied that Jesus would need to have been crucified twice. So, Moses missed the Promised Land of blessing, but he had to train and prepare the living descendants who had come from Egypt to get them ready to enter the land. Therefore, there is the implication that the purpose of God's call was not only to rescue the two million plus from bondage, but also to train and school them for their Promised Land living.

There is a remarkable analogy here in this story concerning the purpose for Moses' call from God. You see folks, we too are not only called by God to go after those in the bondage of sin, but we are called also to disciple these new converts and prepare them for the victorious life here on earth until we all are called to go on to heaven. Of course, every new believer needs to learn how to grow in the grace of our Lord, but he or she also needs to learn how to fight the enemy tribes sent by Satan to attack us on the way to our promised land of victorious living. It is one thing to get saved and discover the full assurance of our salvation, but it is another thing to grow up in the Lord and discover the assurance of God's call upon us to go after others that need to be redeemed, and then grow these people to live victorious lives in the perfect will of God. Personally as a pastor for over 53 years, I just wished that I could get more professing Christians interested in finding the perfect will of God for their lives, and also to discover the call of God to where they fit in to the Kingdom work of our Lord. We too have too many people dying in the wilderness because they have had too little faith and not enough trust in the Lord. Certainly, God has a call for their lives, but they just never seem to pay the price to stand before the burning bush and uncover God's call. They will die have never reached their potential, but even worse, many of them will die because of their own laziness.

C. God's purpose for the call of Moses was solace for the suffering. vs. 9-10

Folks, it is wonderful to know that our omniscient God always knows everything we are going through. He knows the good times, and He assuredly knows the times of suffering as He did for the Israelites down in Egypt. And more wonderful, God not only knows the battles that are raging, but He is ready to send us a deliverer if we are willing to call upon Him. There is truly comfort or consolation for the child of God when we face the times of suffering in our lives. Let's look at the

comfort that God gave to the Israelites down in Egypt. And, we must remember that He is just as much interested in our welfare as He was for the Israelites.

1. Notice the cry that God had heard. v. 9a

It is so wonderful to know that when we are down in the valley and it seems that no one cares, Jesus surely cares, and He truly hears our cry. There is not one cry that is not heard, and yes, eventually attended to by our loving compassionate God. Sometimes it might seem that God doesn't hear us when we cry out for help, but be assured that this omniscient God is also omnipresent. This means He is everywhere all at the same time. So, don't believe that God doesn't hear you, because He most assuredly does. And as I learned several years ago through a terrible vehicle accident in Africa whereby one of my best friends died, when God seems so far away or absent without leave, He is still there. He is just trying to get us to exercise more faith and trust in Him. I do remember sitting one day on the deck of a missionary's house overlooking Lake Victoria in Uganda following the terrible wreck we experience, and God spoke to my heart even more surreal than doing so audibly. I can remember Him saying, "Stan, if you have to feel me to know I am near, then it doesn't require any faith." My friends, God truly taught me a big lesson. The lesson was and is, "God never leaves us, but sometimes it seems He has in order to teach us to see if we will trust Him by faith and not by feeling."

2. Notice the concern that God showed. v. 9b

Do you ever feel that you are all alone and no one sees what you are going through? I often feel this way, but yet, I know that just like God saw the suffering of the children of Israel down in Egypt, He truly sees whatever we are going through. The last part of verse nine tells us that God saw all the suffering the Israelites were enduring in Egypt under Pharaoh, and He provided a plan by calling Moses to go down and tell Pharaoh to let the people go. God's concern and compassion is phenomenal, and He always stands ready to send a Savior to command Satan to release everyone that is in bondage. He did this on the cross for us, and His death, burial and resurrection is still efficacious to this very day. So, don't quit! Don't give up! The deliverer is on the way because God loves us, and He is ready to come to our aid as He did for the Israelites.

C. Notice the command that God gave. v. 10

God spoke to Moses from the burning bush and commanded Him to come closer and get the message from the Lord because He was commissioning Moses to deliver those Jews in Egypt who were in bondage and had been for 430 years. It was truly time for redemption, and for the extrication of God's people from the clutches of Pharaoh who of course represented Satan himself. We may never know what God is doing behind the scenes to get ready to set us free from the sufferings and problems of this life, but we do know that Jesus was the once and forever sacrifice which paid for our sins and set us free. God's plan is always for our redemption,

whether it be for our spiritual salvation or from the bondage of suffering and problems here on the earth. I would like to tell you that through my many years of service to Jesus, it has been my experience that when the bottom drops out and every kind of problem in the world comes our way, then God calls some other servant and in some way commands him or her to come our way to bring deliverance, encouragement, support, and much leadership and strength to get us out of bondage. God called Moses to go to Egypt and lead the Israelites out of the land of bondage and I can assure you that if you are going through the slavery of suffering, sickness, and many other sorrows, God is already preparing someone to come and lead you out through the power of the Holy Spirit in that God-called servant's life. If they haven't arrived to help you yet, just remain strong because help is on the way.

IV. NOTICE THE PROMISE FOR THE CALL. vs. 11-14

As we near the end of our study in these 14 verses of study, I am pleased to tell you that every time God calls someone to follow Him and become a useful vessel in the Kingdom of God, He always promises some great things to the person who responds positively to the call. Of course, in our text Moses began to make excuses why he was not the man to go down into Egypt and lead the people out. Moses just felt so inadequate for the task, and I believe he had a lot of fear because he had killed the Egyptian who had fought against an Israelite. Moses obviously knew that the Pharaoh of Egypt at the time he killed the Egyptian had been looking for him because of the murder he committed. Therefore, Moses probably felt sure that the new Pharaoh at the time of the Exodus might also continue the quest to kill Moses for the murder of the Egyptian. Therefore, Moses' fear was probably magnified many times over. But as we will see, God made Moses the promise that He would be with him as he went down into Egypt, and the Lord also promised that He would validate Moses' credentials as he responded to the the calling of God. Now, let's look closely at the promise God gave Moses.

A. Notice the contrition that received the promise. v. 11

As we look at verse eleven, we are immediately drawn to the humility or contrition of Moses. God almighty has called this common ordinary servant and is intent on using him mightily by being the instrument to command Pharaoh to release the people of God from imprisonment in Egypt. Moses feels so unworthy, and he expresses his unworthiness to God. It is almost as if Moses just simply can't believe that God has called him for this tremendous task.

Friends, this should be the attitude of every God-called servant. Just to stop and try to imagine that the God of heaven and earth would love us so much that He would choose each of us to be His servant is truly beyond understanding. I love the lyrics of the old Gospel tune by Rusty Goodman when it says, "Who am I that the King would bleed and die for, Who am I that He would pray not my will, but Thine Lord. The answer I may never know Why He ever loved me so; but to the old rugged cross He'd go; For Who am I?" And then folks, every time I stop and reflect upon

where I was at the age of 18 when God called me to preach, I just simply get overwhelmed. You see, when God calls us to do a work for Him, we should never get over the wonder of it all. Moses was overwhelmed that the God of Israel would call him, and so should we be as well. It is truly only the humble and broken person that God reveals His call and will to.

B. Notice the content of the promise. v. 12

In verse 12, we discover the tremendous promise that God made to Moses. God told Moses that if he would obey His call and go down to Egypt to get His people out of bondage, then God would manifest His presence to Him and that He would be with him all the way. It was God's promise, and God has never broken a promise in history.

The word token here in the verse means sign or signal. What God was saying to Moses was that if he would obey the call of God, then the Lord would give him His presence as a proof that he was on a mission for God, and if he would be faithful to complete the task of redemption for the Israelites, then God would reward him with the privilege of serving Him on the Mount of Horeb where God would give the Ten Commandments. So, I believe that God's call for Moses to go down to Egypt and free the Jews would be significantly rewarded with the privilege of being the recipient of God's great laws for all humanity. As I write these comments on this verse, I must confess that after studying the Bible for over 60 years that I had never seen this truth before. God rewarded Moses for going to Egypt with the privilege of being God's chosen recipient to receive the laws of God.

May I say to all of us that God always promises His obedient children great privileges and yes, ultimate rewards for our faithfulness in responding to His call for our lives, just like He did for Moses. Truly, just like it happened for the children of Israel because of Moses' positive response to the call of God, every nation on earth will sincerely be blessed if God's people in these nations respond positively to the call of God. Yes, we all may be somewhat reluctant to begin with as was Moses, but when we eventually say yes, God blesses and rewards not only the nation where He sends all of the people like Moses, but He also rewards the obedient individuals as well.

C. Notice the credentials within the promise. vs. 13-14

When Moses finally submitted to the will of God's call for his life, he was still somewhat hesitant because he didn't know how he would convince the Israelites down in Egypt to believe that God had sent him to be their deliverer and savior. And, he also was very fearful that Pharaoh would not believe he was God's man; although Pharaoh didn't really believe in the real God of Israel any way. In verses 13-14, we discover that Moses just needed some affirmative credentials that he had really been called and sent by God to do this seemingly impossible task for these over two million people. So, God just simply tells Moses to go down into Egypt and tell Pharaoh and the Jews in bondage that the great God of the universe had sent him. God said in verse 14 to just tell the people that , **"I AM THAT I AM: had sent him."**

In other words, God gave Moses His glorious presence and His mighty supreme name to give credibility to the task that was before him. Pharaoh may not have understood what Moses was talking about, but surely the people of God would.

So folks, it is still true for us today. When God calls any one of us to go forth and do a task for Him, then He amazingly manifests His mighty power and presence on the God-call servant and He demonstrates enormous miraculous power through the efforts of this surrendered child of God. Once this obedient servant has obeyed the call of God in the power of the Holy Spirit, there can be no doubt who the person's Master is, and the name of this heavenly Master is glorified. When God promises to be with us and we let Him work through us, there is no question about Who has sent us.

Conclusion

Now that we have concluded Session One of this special seminar entitled, "The Assurance Of A Divine Call," let me ask you again, "Are you absolutely sure that you have been called by God to the position that you presently are in?" Maybe you should just stop long enough right here to answer some serious questions in order know for sure if you have been truly called by God. I will give you these questions and some very important Scripture passages to help you determine for sure if God has indeed called you to His service. Please pay close attention to every questions, but especially on Question 3, take the time to look up the Scriptures given to see if you can know for sure what your Spiritual gift or gifts are as described in these passages of Scripture. You see folks, before you can know if you have been called and what God's perfect will for your life is, you must discover what your spiritual gift or gifts are which was or were given you at the moment of your salvation. Once you know what your gift is or what your gifts are, then you can move on to discover if God has really called you to a certain task. Please do your best do make sure of your calling!

Some Serious Questions In Order To Know If You Have Been Called By God To A Specific Ministry Or Task!!

1. Are you absolutely sure that you have been saved?
2. Is there genuine evidence of the presence of Christ in your life?
3. Have you diligently sought to discover your spiritual gift or gifts as described in I Corinthians 12, Romans 12, and Ephesians 4?
4. Before making a decision to accept the role you are presently in, did you spend much time in prayer and Bible study seeking God's will?
5. In making the decision to accept the role you are now in, did you weigh the reasons and motives for seeking the position?

6. Do you get a spiritual high from your ministry, and do you constantly feel fulfilled in the service you render to the cause of Christ?
7. Have you carefully checked all of your motives for wanting to be in the position you are in, and if so, are these motives pure and do they align with Bible principles?

"The Priority For This Service" Session 2

"The Accomplishment Of A Definite Credibility" Scripture: II Corinthians 4:1-18

Introduction

One of the greatest fallacies that Satan teaches to God's servants is that when you are called to a position, you should immediately demand the respect of those around you just because of the position you hold. The truth is, however, that regardless of the authority or power associated with a particular position in ministry, every person must EARN the respect of those around himself or herself. Therefore, the true servant of God will make as his or her priority the building of a credible ministry. In the text we are about to study, Paul, the Apostle, describes for us some valuable information on how to build a credible and lasting ministry. He does this by showing to us some of the characteristics of his own ministry, and also, how he handled the many difficult circumstances he endured as a faithful servant of Christ. Let us take a look at the text and get some practical help for our own ministries.

I. NOTICE THE CHARACTERISTICS OF PAUL'S MINISTRY. vs. 1-7

I must confess openly and honestly that Paul the Apostle is one of my favorite heroes from the Bible. I love Paul because of the glorious change that came to his life after his conversion on the road to Damascus, and because of his tremendous faithfulness in the years to follow. It goes without saying that we would not have one third of the New Testament were it not for the conversion of Paul and of course because of his writing of 14 books of the New Testament. Some people don't believe he wrote the Book of Hebrews, but I do. Therefore, I contribute 14 of the books coming from Paul's pen.

And, I want to say that one of the primary reasons that I love Paul is because of his genuineness as he went out carrying on his three missionary journeys, and of course, his final voyage to Rome under arrest by a Roman soldier. Paul's life was filled with tremendous Christian characteristics, and these were evident not only in the good times, but also right in the midst of his enormous suffering. You might say that whether he was preaching the Gospel in a strange new place, or when he was imprisoned in a prison cell for the cause of the Gospel, Paul showed tremendous Christian deportment and class. He was truly a man of God of integrity and faithfulness wherever his ministry took him. In this study we should learn Paul's characteristics and follow his example in our lives.

A. His ministry was characterized by persistency. v. 1
(Not to become weary or fain in heart)

Every time I study the ministry of Paul, I literally marvel at this man's persistency in life and ministry. It didn't matter whether he was going through a good time or a bad time, Paul was always consistent and persistent. He may have been weary in body and even in mind, but his resolve to keep pushing on was always evident.

If we as God's servants are going to demonstrate a definite credibility or genuineness in our ministries, then we have to be daily persistent to keep on keeping on regardless of what we are going through or have to face. And, if we are going to do this, then the question is why? Let's look at two reasons for Paul's persistency.

1. Paul was persistent because he had been given a ministry. v. 1a

In verse one of this chapter, Paul emphasizes the fact that his ministry has been given to him as a gift from God. The phrase, "seeing we have this ministry," actually means, "since we have been given this ministry," and thus, it is a gift from God. I give this interpretation because the next phrase says, "we have received mercy." This of course means that God has given to us mercy in order to carry out our ministries. Therefore, we dare not give up, faint, or quit, because the ministry we have has been given to us by the mercy of God. So, Paul stated that he and his colleagues would not give up because of the awesomeness of the God Who gave them the privilege of serving Him.

Folks, this is the way we should look at our ministries as well. If our ministries are going to have definite credibility, then we can't be quitters, but we must be persistent and faithful, even in the midst of our many trials as believers.

2. Paul was persistent because he had been given mercy. v. 1b

Now, this part of the verse tells us that because Paul had been extended mercy at the moment of salvation on the Damascus road, and also, when God called him to the ministry, there was just no way that he could give up and stop under the duress and suffering for the cause of Christ. The mercy of God means that we didn't get what we did deserve, while grace means we received the favor of God when we didn't deserve it. Thus, Paul's reasoning to keep on being faithful to God in his ministry during times of difficulty was that God had previously given him mercy instead of punishment for his sins, and because God didn't let him go on persecuting and killing believers as he did before he got saved.

So folks, we too have been given the divine mercy of God and graciously placed in the ministry of our Lord. Therefore, we cannot stop, but we must be persistent like Paul in order to prove that we are indeed genuine and our ministry is credible.

B. His ministry was characterized by purity. vs. 2-4

These next three verses are tremendous verses for every child of God. In these verses, Paul describes how he has lived his life and conducted his ministry in such a way as to not bring genuine reproach on his testimony or his work. In other words, his ministry has been pure without blemish. I did not say sinless or without any fault, but I said without blemish or mark of reproach. Our ministries should demonstrate this same kind of testimony and pattern. Let's look at Paul's purity in these verses.

1. Paul said that he was pure from dishonesty. v. 2a

My, what a statement this was in that day, but more so in the lying age in which we now live. It seems everywhere you look, on the internet, on the TV, on the radio, and in the newspapers, someone is lying everywhere you look. In fact, I believe we are in that day whereby men would rather believe a lie as the truth because of the deception of Satan. Paul said in **Galatians 4:16**, "**Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth?**" The truth is that we are living in that day when mankind would rather believe the lies of Satan as to believe the truth of the Word of God. But, isn't this what happened back in the Garden of Eden when Eve believed the lie of Satan? I would say it is, and it is still very hard to live a life of honesty and integrity in the world in which we live.

So, Paul's characterization of purity was because of his willful choice to not lie, but to renounce things of dishonesty. And for sure, we will never be men and women of integrity and honesty unless we resolve to always be honest and truthful with our words and our ministries. Yet, if we are going to have definite credible ministries, then we must be pure from dishonest ways such as lying, gossiping, stealing, exaggerating the truth, and any other thing that diminishes our integrity as servants of God.

2. Paul said that he was pure from deception. v. 2b

In the second part of verse two, Paul reveals his purity of character by indicated that he is not guilty of being crafty or as the word means, cunning or even devious. In other words, Paul was not a hypocrite who wore a mask trying to hide his real face and appearance. As a matter of fact, Paul was quite the opposite. He was a real man with a testimony of truthfulness, not only in his behavior, but also in how he presented the Gospel message. In other words, Paul was the real deal, and whatever he preached, he also lived. He not only talked the talk, but he walked the walk.

3. Paul said that he was pure from dilution. v. 2c

In the last part of verse two, Paul told the Corinthians that he was a man of character because he did not handle the word of God with dilution. This means that Paul did not corrupt the word of God with watered-down interpretation, but instead he presented the truth of God's Word with pure and clear motives and with the unvarnished truth of God's message to mankind. In fact, Paul is so confident of his behavior before the Corinthian believers that he tells them that he was willing to put up the purity of his life and preaching against the clear conscience of anyone of his hearers. I must tell you that this statement took a lot of courage, but yet he was so sure that he had conducted himself as a pure servant of God that no one could justifiably accuse him of diluting the truth of the Gospel by his life or by his preaching.

May I tell you that after 53 years of ministerial service, I regret to say that I know very few preachers of the Gospel that can give this kind of testimony as Paul did. Everywhere we look today, we see many pastors, many of which are in this younger generation, that are truly diluting or watering down the Gospel in order to take the sting or offensiveness out of the presentation. For some wicked reason, many modern preachers believe that it is not politically correct to preach the Gospel with a message of exposing sin and pleading for repentance. And yet my friends, this is the kind of truthful Gospel which Paul preached everywhere he went. We must understand that if a servant of God is to truly have any credibility in his ministry and testimony, HE MUST NOT AND DARE NOT WATER DOWN THE MESSAGE WITH AN INCOMPLETE GOSPEL! He may win some so-called friends with this corrupt message, but he will not win people to Christ!

4. Paul said that he was pure from dereliction. vs. 3-4

In these two verses Paul makes a tremendous declaration. He tells the Corinthians that if people who have heard his message are still in darkness, it is because they have been blinded to the truth because of their willful blindness brought on by being lost. It would seem that Paul is saying to the people that if people were still lost in their sins, it was not because of his dereliction of duty in presenting the truth, but it was because they had not opened their hearts and allowed Jesus to come in. And truthfully folks, this is the reason all lost people are still lost after they have heard a genuine proclamation of the Gospel message. Light cannot and will not illuminate if it is shut out by the people who are exposed to it. And sad to say, almost every Sunday in any of the real genuine Gospel churches, if people go away still lost on their way to hell, it is not the preachers' fault, but it is the fault of those who see the light and then turn it away because they don't want to exercise their faith and believe the truth of the presentation. This reminds me so much of what this same Paul said in **Hebrews 4:2, "For unto us was the Gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it."** Paul is saying here that in order for a person to received the Gospel message and be changed by its truth, then that person must activate his or her faith and actually believe the Gospel. In other words frankly, it is our responsibility as preachers or servants of God to proclaim the truth of God's Word, but there is the responsibility of the people to hear the Word of God

and act upon their faith to believe and respond personally in a positive way to the truth of God's Word. So very often, those genuine preachers who preach the full counsel of God are blamed because people don't respond, but we must always remember that this is a 50x50 process. The preacher must proclaim the inerrant Word of God as 50% of the responsibility, but then, the people who hear must provide the other 50% by responding positively to the message of God. So, I believe we can truthfully say, "it is not always the preacher's fault if people don't respond." Yet, the preacher must not shirk his responsibility to preach the truth just because some might not believe. We cannot be guilty of being derelict from our responsibility as servants of almighty God.

C. His ministry was characterized by preeminence. vs. 5-6

What do I mean by preeminence? I mean that Paul's ministry was characterized by his preaching the Gospel with the preeminent presence of Christ in his life as he presented the truth of God's Word. In verse five, Paul let the Corinthians know that he did not preach about himself, but instead, he wanted the light of Jesus to shine forth out of his life and through his proclamation. Verse six tells us that Paul had the light of Jesus shining in his heart and life, and thus, when he preached, he preached with a radiant passion due to his strong belief, and because of the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

Let me share three areas in these two verses that stand out with the preeminence of Christ in and through Paul's life.

1. First, he had the preeminence of Christ in his preaching. v. 5a

To be a little repetitious, Paul just simply says that he did not come to preach about himself, but just simply to tell everyone about the Lord Jesus Christ. And in this presentation of Christ, Paul just reminded the people that he was nothing more than a servant of Christ. Therefore, he had nothing to brag about or be proud of except for the indwelling presence of Jesus. In other words, it is just all about Jesus!

2. Secondly, he had the preeminence of Christ in his practice. v. 5b

When I say that Paul had the preeminence of Christ in his practice, I mean that not only did Paul preach about Christ to others, but Paul had the indwelling Christ living in and through him as he faithfully served Jesus. You see, there is no greater person in the Kingdom of God more so than a servant. Jesus said this in **Matthew 20:27-28**, where we find these words, "**And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant: Even as the Son came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many.**" So my dear beloved friends, if we are going to glorify God with our ministries and callings, then we must demonstrate Christ in all that we do, and candidly just practice what we preach.

3. Thirdly, he had the preeminence of Christ in his perception. v. 6

In verses three through four of our text, Paul talked about those from whom the Gospel had been hidden. These are the people that hear the truth of God's Word, but don't respond positively because they are still lost in the darkness of sin. Now in verse six, Paul states that those who have been saved have had the light of God turned on in their lives, and now they can see spiritually. In other words, once a person gets genuinely saved, the light of God's truth comes on in the saved person's life, and now he or she is given divine perception. This perception is not just about getting saved, but also about how to live by the principles of God's Word, and to live with a Biblical worldview. Truly, with the presence of Christ in one's life, then this person has on his or her heart what Jesus has on His. Paul was God's choice servant with the presence of Christ in his life, and therefore, he viewed the world as Christ did, and he had an overwhelming passion to win the world to Christ. Of course we are told in **Luke 19:10, "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost."** So dearly beloved people, if we have the perception that Paul had as one of his characteristics, then we will have a heart for the lost world.

D. His ministry was characterized by power. v. 7

Now to follow up what Paul said in verses five and six about not preaching about ourselves, but instead preaching about Jesus Christ the Lord, we find in this verse seven that Paul is still magnifying Christ by talking about our earthen vessels made from the dust of the earth housing the indwelling power of God. Of course, these earthen vessels are our earthly bodies which are temporary and constantly deteriorating, but inside these vessels there is the power of our Holy God in the person of the Holy Spirit. Thus, we have a great treasure in the power of God, but in and of ourselves we have nothing to brag about. Therefore, we must give God the glory for anything that is accomplished of eternal value because it can only be done by the power of God's Holy Spirit.

So, let me share two more similar thoughts about this indwelling power of God which indwells every believer. Please remember that what we are talking about here is the different characteristics in the life of Paul that gave his ministry definite credibility.

1. Notice the place where the power dwelt. v. 7a

Of course as I have already stated, the place where God's power dwells is in the earthly bodies in which we live. Truly, our human bodies are not greatly powerful and of eternal existence, but through the power of God in us, we can most assuredly do mighty things. This is exactly what Paul is talking about here. In and of our own strength, we can do nothing of eternal and valuable consequence. However, in and through the power of the indwelling Christ, we can do wonderful and lasting things that will be of value throughout eternity. This is especially demonstrated when a lost soul comes to Christ. In fact, there is nothing of more value in this entire world, than the power of God's Spirit Who saves a soul and life for eternity.

2. Notice the potential the power displayed. v. 7b

The word excellency in this verse actually means "beyond measure." The idea is that if we want to reach our potential and accomplish much more than normal then we must be endued with the power of God. When this happens, we can achieve so much more for Jesus than we could ever imagine. Stated another way, we can go far beyond measure or out of bounds or even beyond expectations if we live our lives and serve Christ with the power of God. Paul surely knew the difference in serving out of obligation according to the law which he did before his conversion, and then serving God with passionate commitment because of the indwelling Christ after he got saved. If we truly want to see Jesus glorified and our ministries fruitful, then we have to operate our lives in the power of the resurrected Lord. There will be no fruit and achievement of our potential without the power of God working through us. So like Paul, let us to our best display this power in our entire ministries so that we can give credibility to our service.

II. NOTICE THE CIRCUMSTANCES OF PAUL'S MINISTRY. vs. 8-12

Now, to move on in order to discover more proof of the "Accomplishment Of A Definite Credibility," in Paul's ministry, we need to take a look at some of the different circumstances in Paul's ministry and how he handled them. We can always tell the viable credibility of a person's service or work for Jesus by the way they handle their problems and difficulties, and how they come out of these difficulties with a hope that is often indescribable. Let's look at some of these circumstances in Paul's life.

A. The circumstances of Paul's ministry included many hurts. vs. 8-12

The Book of II Corinthians give a huge list of the many problems that Paul endured as a man of God. He probably went through more suffering than any other man on earth, except for our Lord Jesus when He died on the cross to pay our sin debt. Paul suffered beyond measure and eventually was beheaded for his faith in Christ. Yet, before he died, he gave a very distinct pattern on how every child of God ought to handle the pain and suffering in this life. And, let me add, "very few modern-day believers, especially here in America, ever go through what Paul had to endure." But yes, we know that Paul demonstrated a terrific example of how every believer should handle the hurts of life. Let's take a look at Paul's hurts and see how he handled them.

1. Paul was imprisoned by pressure. v. 8a

In the first part of this verse, we are told that Paul was being troubled on every side, yet not distressed. This means that Paul was being attacked on every side by every kind of person or bad situation. Yet, he did give up and quit because he fully trusted in the power of God to get him through these difficult circumstances he was facing. His pressure was like a prison with the walls coming in on him, and

seemingly, there would have been no way out. However, Paul did not give up or quit on our Lord because He knew that Jesus would be faithful to him.

I don't know if you the reader have ever felt like Paul must have felt, but I surely have. Back in 1993, one of my associate pastors and I were on a mission trip to Uganda when we had a terrible vehicle accident. The vehicle turned over and over, and one of my best friends died in my hands at a Grade B hospital near the airport in Entebbe. My heart was totally devastated, plus my body was seriously injured as well. I brought my dear brother's body back to America, conducted his funeral, and tried very hard to comfort his family. But you see folks, I didn't receive very much comfort and compassion during this terrible event, except from my wife and children, but I sucked it up and tried to be a spiritual giant in order to console my staff member's family at this time of grief. I did pretty well for the first few months, but during my down time, I made the mistake of changing churches because I thought that the vision for my church had left because I had a dark cloud hanging over my head. What I didn't know at that time was that I was in complete depression. Several months later I found out just how depressed I was after moving to a huge older church in the cold country up in Ohio here in America.

One morning in the month of November, I woke up from my night's sleep in uncontrollable tears with the desire to not go on living any longer. I contacted a dear pastor friend in another state, and he and his church made it possible for my wife and me to travel immediately to Dallas, Texas for a week of intense Christian counseling. During that almost unbearable week, I did come to realize and admit that I was truly in the throws of depression. During the next days, weeks and months, I discovered that I had to change my circumstances of hurt in order to get well. So, for the next 18 months I spent hours and hours trying to rest and relax while studying this Book of II Corinthians. And, I had to resign the monster of a church I had in order to get out from under the pressure. It was a long ordeal, but one in which just like Paul, I learned how to deal with the pressure that imprisoned me. Had I not been victorious over the depression, I would have lost my ministry, and probably my life. But, I sit here today rejoicing as I write because I found a hope that transcended that veil of suffering and pressure. I hope and pray that none of you readers ever have to go through what my wife and I had to endure during those days of dark depression. But if you do, please know there is hope found only Jesus Christ.

2. Paul was inundated by perplexity. v. 8b (Perplexed means to be lost mentally with no way out)

In the last part of verse 8, Paul let's us see way down deep into his soul and discover just what a state of confusion he was in. He had been under enormous pressure for sometime, and he was just about lost mentally and did not know at the moment how he was going to get out of the imprisonment of difficult circumstances that he was in. He was trying so hard to not despair and give up, but the truth was that he was just about at his wits end. Obviously, Paul was going through great trials and he was under great attacks from professing religious people. Yet, with the help of Jesus he was trying to hold on to his sanity and not give up at this late time in his

life. Paul just tried so hard to maintain a testimony of hope within his very bad circumstances. If we lose our hope, the will to go on is destroyed!

This might be a good time to personalize a terribly bad experience that I have had in the past few days while I am trying to write this commentary. Just yesterday I received the most vicious letter I have ever received in 52 years of ministry. And believe it or not, the writer of this horrible accusatory letter was from a young Associate Pastor named John from one of our supporting church of our Gateway International Missions ministry. This young immature man had read one of my articles in our GIMI newsletter where I discussed the confusion that is in the world today on how to do mission work. In this article I mentioned how as we have tried to carry out the Great Commission, we no longer go fishing where the fish are biting, but instead we have been led to change the strategy to where we no longer want to work where scores of people are coming to Christ, but instead we are pushed to go to the unreached people groups of the world and try to force the doors open where God has not yet opened them, or maybe He has even closed the doors that used to be open. This young preacher just ripped me to shreds telling me that I was ignorant, didn't know what I was talking about, that I had exaggerated the truth, and he said some other extremely vicious things. Here is a young man that has really never done much of anything for Jesus, and he is rebuking a Senior pastor, evangelist, and missionary for over 53 years. He treated me with such disrespect, and he convinced his own Senior pastor who has known me for years to sign off on his viciousness. Truly folks, this must be the same thing that Paul was going through. It is a horrible place to be, and if it were not for what little faith I now have in Jesus, I would probably give up and quit the ministry. But, with God's help, I will try to go on.

3. Paul was intimidated by persecution. v. 9a

Now in verse 9, we begin to see how Paul the Apostle was so tormented by wicked people that he developed a sense of fear. Of course, this fear was short lived, but it still wasn't pleasant, but was instead very painful and caused much emotional damage. Having been a pastor for so many years, I can attest the fact that emotional pain and suffering is even more detrimental than physical pain. I say this because of the tremendous suffering that I have gone down through the years from people who did not want to hear the truth, so they became my enemy as Paul stated in Galatians 4:16. Persecution and the fear and torment which come from this persecution produces lasting scars in the life of the child of God.

In the previous paragraph I talked about a recent attack I received from a young punk pastor who ran me down and criticized me for no reason, except just to be smart, and maybe to get some mission money that his church had been sending to our GIMI Ministry for years. This accusatory vicious letter has made it impossible for me to sleep, and this morning at 3:00 a.m., I was wide-awake because of the lying statements that this young preacher said about this 70 year old preacher. To be run down by a young immature man who doesn't even know me is just one of the worst things that a man of God would have to endure. I am praying like King David in the Psalms when he prayed for his enemies to fall in the pit they had laid for him. I too pray this for this young preacher, not for revenge, but for corrective purposes. This

young man needs to get with Jesus if he is really saved, and let Jesus take his bad attitude away.

4. Paul was immobilized by pounding. v. 9b (beaten down)

We need to remember that this Epistle of II Corinthians was written sometime around A.D. 60 in the province of Macedonia probably while he was at Philippi. Paul had been through some tremendous sickness, and he had been abused by others until he was just beaten down by constant pounding from every kind of person, probably physical disease, and even emotional upheavals from various causes. Paul was somewhat in a state of depression and extreme discouragement, but yet in a state of mind which would not let him quit. In the last part of verse 9, Paul said he was cast down but not totally or completely destroyed. The way this "cast down" statement is written, it seems that Paul had been cast down or thrown down by others. I sincerely believe that Paul was telling the Corinthians about the horrible way he had been treated.

Yet, we know that Paul didn't give up at this point, but we can see that he gave us a tremendous pattern to follow during the times of our discouragements and depression. Satan may knock us down, but he cannot destroy us unless God allows him to do so. He may slow down our progress by making us immobile, but the devil can't destroy us if we are really saved.

5. Paul was infiltrated by pain. vs. 10-12

There is no doubt in my mind that Paul was going through some tremendous physical pain and suffering according to verses 10-12. His body was seemingly wracked with pain, and the constant dealing with the pain had taken its toll on Paul emotionally. Yet, it seems that Paul could keep on going because he knew if he had to suffer like Jesus in the flesh, that he had a life of painlessness ahead for him because of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Thus, Paul wanted very much to handle his trials in such a way as to provide a valid testimony to the working of Jesus Christ regardless of whether he lived or died. Paul would later state in **Philippians 1:21, "For me to live is Christ, and to die is gain."** Paul had truly come to the place in his life that he wanted his life to magnify Christ whether he was living, or whether he died.

And then the last statement that Paul made in verse 12 reveals to us that Paul seemed to know that because of his sickness and pain, that he probably didn't have as much time to live as the Corinthians did. So, he just wanted Christ to be glorified in him, whether truly in life or in death. May I say that Paul truly had the right perspective and right priorities in life. I pray that I can live with this outlook during these last days of my life.

B. The circumstances of Paul's ministry included much hope. vs. 13-18

After having discussed some of the terrible suffering that the Apostle Paul had been in and was probably going through at the time he wrote this letter, it is truly refreshing to know that Paul did find hope to keep moving forward, even with

everything he was going through. Paul had stated in **I Corinthians 15:19-20**, "**If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept.**" These tremendous two verses remind us that even if one is very sick in body here on this earth, and if yes, even if a person dies, there is still hope in Christ because He arose from the dead. He was indeed the first-fruit of one rising from the dead never to die again. Since that glorious resurrection of our Lord, we too have a hope that transcends the suffering and agony while we are in this veil of tears. Paul's hope was not in his ability, but it was in the availability of Christ in life and after that even in death.

1. Paul's hope was the result of his faith in a coming resurrection. vs. 13-14

In these two verses, we find the courage to go on in the midst of our suffering and trials. The reason is that just like Paul, we too have exercised our faith in the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, and therefore, we can rejoice in the fact that the best is yet to come for every saved person because of the resurrection. We can definitely rejoice because one day this resurrected Lord shall come again and resurrect the dead in Christ, and those believers who are living at that time will be raptured out of this world and rise up in the air to meet Jesus in the clouds. This is a promise for all of us because of the wonderful resurrection.

2. Paul's hope was the result of his faith in a ceaseless restoration. vs. 15-16

We now come to verses 15-16, in which we discover the reason for Paul's determination to go on with his life in spite of the difficult circumstances that he was in. Paul told the Corinthian believers in these verses that he wanted to continue on serving God, even after all of the horrible things he had been through just so that he could be the proper example or pattern for these Corinthian Christians. In fact, Paul says here that the things that have happened to him have come to pass because God wants him to be a good example for other suffering Christians. He even tell these people that he wants many people in Corinth to offer genuine thanksgiving to God because of his devotion to Christ in the midst of trials. So, Paul loved these people so much that he was willing to be an example in the pits of despair and suffering just so that others could learn from him how they were to deal with their problems.

Folks, I must tell you that every time I read these words, I feel just somewhat ashamed because I just have a hard time telling the Lord to go ahead and let me go through more suffering in order for me to be a good example or pattern for others. I don't like suffering any more than any other person does, but if God will help me to bear up under the load of suffering, I would love to be a good pattern for others. And in verse 15, Paul says he is pleased that many people will be thanking God for the Apostle's way of handling trials and difficulties. I would like to say that I would love to have others thanking God for my endurance and the way I handle difficult situations. But truthfully, I am not sure that many can because although I have gone

through so many trials and tests during my 53 years plus of constant ministry to thousands of people, I have not always handled them properly.

Now, in verse 16, Paul tells us why he was able to go on time after time in the midst of horrible suffering. The key was, and is still is today, because our Lord has promised to renew us in the inner man. Our outward man or fleshly body may be deteriorating or dying, but God through the Holy Spirit will renew us if we are totally and completely committed to Him. We will not fall by the wayside and faint if we are being renewed or refreshed daily. Yet, I know because I am a 70 year old preacher, that I need renewal and restoration more than ever before. And what Paul is saying here in these two verses is that our renewal and restoration will be ceaseless if we will put our faith and trust in our Lord. But how can this be? Well, the answer is that because we have the indwelling resurrected Lord living on the inside of us, we have access to this resurrection power. Therefore, God has promised to restore us day by day if we will totally commit or surrender our lives to Him. This hope of ceaseless restoration just kept Paul going on and on.

3. Paul's hope was the result of his faith in a confident realization. v. 17

Another wonderful thing that kept Paul pushing on in the midst of so much suffering was his confident realization that it was merely temporary, and that soon it would be past. And as Paul had reminded us in **I Thessalonians, Chapter Four**, Jesus is coming again, and we will get brand new glorified bodies at the time of the first resurrection and the rapture of the church. Pay attention to these words, "**For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore, comfort one another with these words.**" (I Thess. 4:16-18)

So my beloved friends, we may be going through horrible ordeals like Paul was, but when we retain the confident realization that our suffering is just for a temporary time and the best is yet to come, we can with the help of the Holy Spirit muster up enough courage to keep on keeping on for Jesus in the midst of difficult circumstance. I don't know about you, but I surely do want to practice what I preach in this area of my life.

4. Paul's hope was the result of this faith in a celestial reward. v. 18

When we stop to consider that II Corinthians was written sometime around A.D. 60 from the town of Philippi, it might be difficult for us to realize how Paul could have been looking with expectancy toward the day when Jesus would come again and stop our terrestrial suffering, now that we are living over 2,000 years later and Jesus has not yet returned. Yet, we do know that Paul had faith that God would never break a promise, and therefore, he knew with certainty that Jesus would come again and deliver him from this veil of suffering. If Paul could believe this with such certainty, than most assuredly we should be looking with expectancy to that day when we are caught up from this earth, or that we will experience the dead

in Christ resurrection just before the rapture of the church. My point is that there is truly hope for us because one day we will be out of this world and in the celestial world where we will be rewarded for our faithfulness. Thus, our present suffering cannot be compared to the joy and pleasure we will receive when Christ comes again. Difficult circumstances are not too hard to endure if we can keep our eyes on the future when we will be set free from all of this pain and suffering. So, let's pray that God will give us the strength to rejoice in the Lord, even in the midst of a life of agony.

Conclusion

I believe that it is without question that Paul the Apostle had a glorious ministry that was credible in every way. Paul was a man of integrity and powerful influence. Even though he was constantly under attack from those who disagreed with his message, he still had their respect because of his credibility and integrity. Paul demonstrated a great example for us to follow as we build our ministries. There was not phoniness or pretense about Paul the Apostle. He was a genuine and sincere man of God. May God grant to this generation men and women of faith who will courageously demonstrate lives of credibility and sincerity.

Some Serious Questions We Need To Ask Ourselves?

1. Is my life a life of persistency?
2. Am I serving God with sincerity and integrity?
3. Am I morally pure in my thought life?
4. Am I morally pure in my actions around members of the opposite sex?
5. Have I been totally honest with the people I serve?
6. Do I have unpaid debts which I have made no attempt to pay?
7. Do I spend much time in prayer, or do I just talk like I do?
8. Do I spend much time in the study of God's Word in order for Jesus to work in my life?
9. When I make presentations of the Word of God, do I share it just as it is written, or do I dilute the message to keep from offending someone?
10. In my worship experiences, am I genuinely worshiping God, or am I just allowing my emotions to be stirred?
11. If Jesus were to come back today, could I stand before Him with a clear conscience about the credibility of my ministry?
12. As other people today observe me, do they see a life of credibility or positive influence?
13. More than any place, do my family members know that I am real in my life and ministry, or do they view me as a hypocrite?
14. Lastly, to the best of my knowledge, are my motives pure and clean before God?

"The Passion For This Service"

Session 3

"The Aim Of A Demanded Commitment"

Scripture: Matthew 28:18-20

Introduction

In **I Corinthians 3:9**, we are told that we are "**laborers together with God.**" That, my friends, is an awesome thought! We can never comprehend completely that the great and mighty God of the universe Who sent Jesus Christ, His Son, to die on the cross for our sins would allow us to partner with Him in the great task of attempting to reach the world with the Gospel. Yet, He has, and what a glorious privilege that is! Are we taking seriously this privilege as servants to work with Jesus in winning the world to Christ? If we are not, we are not good stewards of the ministries that God has given to us in the Great Commission. The greatest privilege that any Christian will ever have is to share Jesus Christ with a lost and dying world. Let's take a look at the Great Commission and see if we are being good stewards with passionate hearts as personal soul winners. Then, let's analyze our present ministries to see if we are focused on winning people to Jesus as we should be. Hopefully, this study will light a new fire in your hearts to tell people about Jesus!

I. NOTICE THE POWER FOR THIS GREAT COMMISSION. v. 18

Folks, we are living in one of the most confused ages of world evangelism and missions that I have ever seen in my 70 years of life. I will not get carried away and spend a lot of time trying to explain what I mean by this because I have already written an entire book on the subject of "God's Biblical Blueprint For Missions." But, what I am referring to is that we are now living in an age when this new modern generation of so-called believers either believe that we should not proclaim or preach the Gospel, but that we should use our time arguing about the Gospel with personal dialogue instead of a preacher standing in a church pulpit or in an outdoor crusade proclaiming the truth of God's Word. We don't want sermons, we want stories. We don't want invitations and mass appeals that might embarrass anyone, but we want Calvinistic predestination and foolish assumption that God loves to send people to an everlasting hell without even the privilege of choosing heaven. And, we are not to question this because God is sovereign and He doesn't love everybody the same. He loves everybody, but just not in the same way. This is what the new "Young and Restless Reformed" students and preachers believe.

We also see in this generation the concept of presenting the Gospel through apologetics which is nothing more than trying to out argue those who disagree with us, and we have the tendency to put as much faith in what these "non-absolute" people believe and say, as we do in the inerrant Word of God. The truth is that we don't have to argue, dialogue, or invite everyone's interpretation, we just need to

present the truth of the Gospel in the power of the Holy Spirit, and leave the results to God. It is not our ability, intellect, or our expertise that brings souls to Christ, but it is just simply the proclamation of the Word of God in the power of the Holy Spirit, and then God draws the net and people come to Christ. So, let's take a look at the power of the Great Commission as it is describe in this historic passage of Scripture.

A. Notice the inclusiveness of this power. v. 18a

In the first part of verse 18, we are told that all power in heaven and earth was given to our precious Lord Jesus. He was giving to His disciples this Great Commission, and He knew very well that these ordinary disciples would not be able to carry out the Great Commission without His power. So, he just told them that not only was He 100 percent human, but He was also 100 percent God which gave Him access to the impotent power of God the Father.

And you see, folks, this promise is still available to us today as we go out to tell the entire lost world about Jesus. We have access to His power that can remove any mountain and break down any barrier so that we can take the Gospel message to the ends of the earth. Therefore, we must go forward with the remembrance that we can only be unsuccessful if we fail to appropriate His Divine power. You might just say that we are only limited in what we can do for Jesus by our lack of faith and trust in the One Who lives within to empower us. This power should truly give us the passion to win the lost, but only if we are totally committed to Him.

B. Notice the individual of this power. v. 18b

Of course, we have already been reminded that the power available to each of us as believers to fulfill the Great Commission is in the Person of our Lord Jesus Christ. Truly, this promise of power is conditional. If we go in an attempt to share the Gospel message, He has promised to be with us. We will talk more about this a little later in our study. Folks, just remember that our power is His power, and without His power, our efforts will be useless.

II. NOTICE THE PROGRAM OF THIS GREAT COMMISSION. vs. 19-20a

There is one thing about God's commands to His people that I really appreciate. This is that God never calls any of us to go on His behalf without giving us a concrete and practical plan or purpose which we are to implement. Because our Lord believes in structure as is proven by the skeleton in our bodies, He always provides us with a practical plan that will work in sharing His love for humanity. Now, let's take a look at this program of the Great Commission and find out what we are to be doing in order tell the world about Him.

A. First, it is a program of effort. v. 19a

In the very first word of verse 19, we are told to **"Go ye therefore."** This

command to go is actually written a little different in the Greek. It is the Greek word "poreuo", which means to continue on one's journey. So, this short phrase actually means as you continue on your life's journey, teach all nations. Therefore, the idea is more of an expected action which our Lord anticipates from us. It is not just a command for us to go, but it means as we are going every day in our lives that we are to be sharing the Gospel with a lost and dying world. Of course the idea is that we would automatically want to tell everyone we possibly can about how we got saved so that they will have the same privilege that we have experienced. And may I say that we will not demonstrate the effort to share as we are going unless we have a determined mind set that we will tell others. Soul winning and sharing doesn't just come from us automatically, but we must choose to live daily with souls on our minds, and then use every opportunity we can to share with others so that they will come to Christ. My question to you the reader today is, "are you telling others as you are going?" If not, why don't you stop right now reading and ask Jesus to give you a soul winner's heart and mind.

B. Secondly, it is a program of evangelization. v. 19b

The second part of this verse tells us that as we are going, we should be teaching all nations. The word teach here is the word, "matheteuo" which means to make disciples and instruct and develop others into becoming disciples. Then the word "nation" here is the Greek word, "ethnos" from which we get the word ethnics. It is just simply stating that we need to take the message of the Gospel to people of all nations sharing with individuals within these nations or communities the love of Christ. We are to go with the Gospel to every place where Jesus Christ opens the doors for evangelism. However, according to **Matthew Chapter 10**, we are not to go to places where Christ hasn't opened the doors and try to push the doors open with games, gimmicks, and deception. Yet, this is what we are hearing a lot about today by unlearned and childish people who sincerely believe that this Great Commission is not a command for us to fish where the fish are biting, but instead, they believe that we are to leave the waters where multitudes are getting saved and go to the unreached people groups of the world. What these childish and misguided people don't seem to understand is that we don't just leave the multitudes of fishes being caught in fruitful waters, and then go to the unreached people groups. It is not a matter of either or, but it is a matter of both/and at the same time. Of course, I am totally convinced that we need to fish where the most people are getting saved, and when the fish stop biting somewhere, then we are to move on to new waters. And truthfully, this is what Jesus did tell His disciples when He first sent them out from Jerusalem. He said in **Matthew 10**, to go where they and their message would be received and stay there until all the people were saved, but if the people refused or rejected their message, they were to shake the dust off their feet and go where they and their Gospel message would be welcomed.

This so-called new strategy in missions started back in 1974, when Ralph Winter, a supposedly expert on missions from Fuller Theological Seminary in California went to Lausanne, Switzerland, and spoke at the very first Lausanne Evangelism Conference conducted by the Billy Graham Association. I believe Satan

used him there to change the strategy of mission efforts from that day on. Thousands of evangelists and missionaries were brainwashed with this new strategy, and it changed the course and cause of world missions ever since that time. It was during that meeting that the future president of the International Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention would buy into this new strategy, and when he became the President of the IMB, he spent the next seventeen years changing the strategy of the SBC Mission Program which presently is suffering tremendously because of this misguided effort. The numbers of missionaries has dropped, giving has been going down, and the baptisms on the foreign fields are regularly declining. Why? Because these so-called professional missiologists decided to change God's plan to carry out the Great Commission from God's plan to man's plan, and now people are dying lost without the Good News of the Gospel because many less are being saved.

Folks, the truth of the Scripture is that if we are really saved, then we are to take the Gospel to everyone in the world that will respond positively to the Gospel, and if they reject the Gospel and say no to the presentation, we are to move on to other fertile fields where God has opened the doors. We are not to stay where the message has been rejected and try to force more doors open.

C. Thirdly, it is a program of exemplification. v. 19c

Well, the third part of this verse tell us that we are to baptize those who get saved in order for them to not only identify with the death, burial and resurrection of Christ, but they are to exemplify or set an example for others by going beneath the baptismal waters. Baptism in no way washes away the sins of any person, but it does symbolize outwardly what God has done inwardly. You see, we are not baptized into the body of Christ by water, but according to **Romans 6:3-4**, we are truly baptized into the body of Christ, the Church, by the Holy Spirit of God. Please notice the following verses, "**Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.**" So, my dear beloved friends, at the moment of salvation, we are baptized into the body of Christ spiritually, and then, we are to identify with Christ's death, burial and resurrection by being baptized by water as a symbol of Jesus' death and resurrection. Therefore, as we are traveling in this world, we are to be preaching and teaching the Gospel message, and after this, we are to encourage the converts that get saved to identify with Christ by water baptism. This sets a great example for others to have the courage to follow Christ in baptism. Baptism reveals to the entire world that we are not ashamed of our confession of Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord.

There is one more thing that we need to see in this verse. This is that when we baptize people, we are to do so in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. This is very important because it reveals the triune God that we serve, and that we are proud of His complete revelation as the Trinity. We only have one God, but this God has been revealed to us in three persons. Much to the dismay of many

confused people today, we Christians don't have the same God as the Muslims. The reason is that Allah is their god, and he has no son. God the Father our precious Lord, and He sent His only begotten Son to die for us.

D. It is a program of education. v. 20a

The fourth part of the Great Commission is that once we evangelize and see people come to Christ, then we have the tremendous responsibility to educate or train these new believers. The content of our training is that we should teach these new believers to follow and obey every command of our Lord Jesus. Now, this is not just talking about the Ten Commandments, but it is every commandment which Jesus gives to His children through the Word of God. As we often sing, "Trust and Obey for there is no other way to be happy in Jesus, but to Trust and Obey." These words are so important to every child of God. We cannot and will not be happy in our relationship with Jesus unless we do our very best to obey His commands and follow in the pathway where He leads us. If we don't obey, then we will have broken fellowship with the Lord, and if there is broken fellowship, there can be no peace or happiness.

So folks, once we take the Gospel to the lost world and people get saved, then we must commit ourselves to training or discipling them so that they will see the benefits of obeying the Word of God. Without obedience, there is not fellowship with our Lord, and there is no peace in our heart.

While talking about the responsibility in the Great Commission to educate those who get saved, I would just like to say that in all of my Christian life time, I have never seen a more shallow church than today. And I might also add, never in my lifetime have I seen such shallow preachers in the pulpits of our churches. I blame all of us for not educating and discipling the new believers, but I blame the carnal and liberal Christian colleges and seminaries for the shallow harvest we are reaping in our modern-day young preachers. Truly, we are in a terrible mess with our modern doctrine, our misunderstood mission strategy, our methods of evangelism and outreach, and we are surely negligent in the way we are training our preachers and pastors. Therefore, we need to repent of our sinful negligence, and get back to the basics of interpretative hermeneutics, the method of expository preaching, and the proclamation of God's Word with a confrontational methodology. Regardless of how many people tell us that we should not make people feel guilty with the truth of the Bible, there is just no way for a person to be convicted over his or her sin without the anointed preaching of the Word of God. Without conviction there is no cognizance of sin, and without a knowledge of personal sin, there will be no need for repentance, and without repentance, there can be no forgiveness. Thus, mankind will be lost without the strong passionate preaching with the love of Christ in the preachers' hearts.

Therefore, we need to present the Gospel with the proclaimed truth of the Gospel, and then we need to consistently and persistently educate those who get saved with the unsearchable truth of the blessed Book of God. If we don't carry out the Great Commission in this way, then we will not be completing the task God has given to us.

III. NOTICE THE PROMISE FOR THIS GREAT COMMISSION. v. 20b

Early in our study I talked briefly about the promise of our Lord to be with us as we attempt to carry out the Great Commission. I told you earlier that to have the presence of God in this ministry, we had to meet a certain condition. Now, I want us to take another look at this condition, and then see some other very significant things about God's promise to those who fulfill the Great Commission. I hope and pray that you are busy participating in this great privilege of taking the Gospel message to the lost world.

A. Please notice the condition of this promise. (And, lo)

The last phrase of verse 20 tells us that Jesus has given to everyone of His children an imperative conditional promise if they will meet the condition. Of course the condition is that we must be busy about the proclamation of the Gospel message if we are to receive the fulfillment of the promise of His presence. It is very wrong for us to claim that God's supernatural power will be with us with a special anointing unless we are busy telling the old Gospel story of how Jesus died on the cross and then arose from the grave to give us eternal life. We cannot sit down and have nothing to do with winning people to Christ and still believe that the mighty power of God will be upon us while we devote our lives to selfish interests and activities. The choice we have to make is, "we can either work faithfully in the Great Commission effort with the power of God's anointing, or we can indulge in every kind of selfish activity with no cognizance of His mighty power in our lives." We dare not believe that God will fill us with His sweet presence if we make no attempt to obey His command to take the message of Christ to the world. Just remember, the promise of His presence is very conditional!

B. Please notice the credibility of this promise. (I Am)

When Jesus told his first disciples that He would be with them, He stated it this way, "**And, lo, I am with you alway.**" What He is saying is that He Who was the Great I Am would be with them just like He told Moses when God called him to go down into Egypt to deliver the Israelites. It was not the God Who was, or the God Who will be, but it is the God Who is present tense. With God there is no past or future because He is our eternal God, and He had no beginning and He will have no ending. It is truly the Great I Am Who gives wonderful credibility to the promise He made to all of us if we would just be faithful in participating in the Great Commission.

Let me direct your attention to some tremendous verses which affirm that God never breaks a promise or lies. Notice these verses in **Hebrews 6:15-20**, "**And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath: That by two immutable things, in which it was impossible for God to lie, we might have a**

strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us: Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil; Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec." So my dear friends, we can count on any promise that God makes to us, and because of His credibility, we can claim the promise if we meet the requirement of being busy in the work of the Great Commission.

C. Please notice the continuance of this promise. (End of the World)

The great promise from our Lord in the last part of verse 20 is that if we are busy telling the lost world about Jesus, then He will be with us faithfully until the end of the world. This means that the promise of Jesus which was given to the disciples when He gave this Great Commission is still applicable to us today if we will follow the example of the disciples and be busy with winning people to Him. So, His promise is a continuing promise all the way to the end of this age in which we are living. The fulfillment of this promise is based upon the credibility and character of our Lord, and therefore, we should never worry that He won't be with us if we are going in obedience to His command. We should never fear because we can go in the power of the anointing of the Holy Spirit, and thus, we are assured that we will see much fruit if Jesus is with us and upon us.

D. Please notice the challenge of this promise. (Amen—let it be so)

I have already mentioned several times in this study that the promise of Christ's presence or anointing on the servant of God is dependent upon that servant's faithfulness in sharing the truth of the Gospel. In other words, Jesus' presence and power for the task He has given us is dependent upon our conditional obedience. This very last statement in verse 20 is an emphatic Amen to what our Lord had been stating. Amen, just let it be so! Let's just pray that this fulfillment of the Great Commission comes to pass. The main reason being is that if we don't fulfill the Great Commission, multitudes will die without the opportunity to hear the clear message about our Lord Jesus and personal salvation. So, my dear beloved readers, we must be busy about taking the message of the Gospel to the lost world!

Conclusion

Are you a personal soul winner? How many people in your area of ministry have you taught to win souls? How many people have you led to Jesus this year? How many people have been led to Jesus by the people in your area of ministry this year? What kind of steward are you in this area of leading people to Jesus? No servant of God will ever be what he or she should be as long as souls are not being saved on a regular basis through his or her ministries. **OUR SUPREME MANDATE IS TO OBEY THE GREAT COMMISSION!**

Some Serious Questions That We Should Ask Ourselves!

1. Is there a passion in my heart to see lost people come to Jesus?
2. Have I asked God to give me a lost soul consciousness wherever I go?
3. Do I have a willful mindset that keeps me witnessing to lost people?
4. Have I led anyone to Jesus personally recently?
5. Do I teach soul winning to those I am responsible for?
6. Have I set any goals concerning the number of people I would like to see saved in a given period of time?
7. Do I work at completing the whole Great Commission by discipling those that I win to Jesus?
8. What immediate plans do I have to reach people for Jesus?
9. When Jesus returns to this earth, will I have any souls to give Him that I have won to Him?
10. Are there presently any lost souls on my heart which I am constantly praying for?

"The Potential For This Service"

Session 4

"The Awards From A Dear Savior"

Scripture: I Peter 5:1-4

Introduction

When the Apostle Peter wrote these words in the Scripture passage we are studying, he as an elderly man was addressing a number of suffering pastors who were facing tremendous persecution for the cause of Christ. No doubt many of them were even tempted to quit or give up. Yet, Peter reminded them that one day when the "Chief Shepherd" comes again, they would be rewarded for their faithfulness if they remained faithful and did not quit.

God is saying the same to us today. Let's take a look at these wonderful verses and see the encouragement that we can discover from the text. We must never forget that in spite of the many disappointments in the service of our Lord here on earth, just to be rewarded by the King of kings and the Lord of lords is really all that matters. When we sincerely contemplate this truth, we should be encouraged to press forward in our service for Jesus until He comes again.

I. NOTICE THE REASONS FOR PRESSING FORWARD TO THIS POTENTIAL. v. 1

As a senior servant of God who has been serving in full time ministry for over 53 years, I must confess that there have been many times when I just wanted to quit and give up. In fact, even today as I write this commentary for this passage of Scripture, I am somewhat depressed and discouraged. I won't go into why, but I am somewhat down right now. Yet, this text is truly an encouragement to me because I have not yet finished my course, nor have I reached the potential that I believe God has in store for me. As a matter of fact, my dear wife and I have talked a lot recently on how we can make the greatest impact for Christ in the short time that we have left. When you are young in ministry, you rarely think of these things, but as you get older, it lays heavily upon your heart. It certainly lays heavy on my heart today, and I pray that God will give me the strength to do my best in whatever time I have left. Maybe it is even God's will for me to make a great impact with these leadership materials which He has allowed me to produce. I surely do hope so!

Dear friends, let me ask you. Are you reaching your potential as God's servant, especially if you are getting older in life? I pray that you are, but if you are not, then hopefully, these words in this session of our study will encourage you to move on and reach your God-given potential. Please don't die like Moses upon Mount Pisgah, where he only got a glimpse of what could have been. If he had not disobeyed God and smitten the rock when God told him to speak to it, there is no doubt that he would have gone into the Promised Land reaching his potential as an

old man of God. Now, let's look at some very important information about why we must press forward to reach our potential.

A. These reasons include the position we presently have. v. 1a

In the first part of verse one, Peter writes addressing the older leaders of the suffering churches which were located in the old Babylon area, or as some scholars believe, it may have been even Rome itself. Personally, I believe he probably was writing to the Roman Christians because they suffered so severely for the cause of Christ. And too, there are those who believe Peter may have made it to Rome and may be buried there, but of course, we have to be careful with this because the Roman Catholic Church falsely believes that Peter was the first pope. Of course, this is totally ridiculous.

So, Peter was writing the profound words to encourage the elderly leaders of the church to not give up, but to keep pushing on because the day would one day come when Jesus comes again, and they then would be rewarded by Him.

Now, let me just mention something here about we seniors who struggle with so many things during our latter years. Even right now as I write today, I have so many health problems that I just don't feel like doing anything this morning. Yet, I have forced myself to come to the computer and try to write this commentary on this great passage of Scripture. When we are older, we have the tendency to be weighted down with physical pain, emotional depression from all of the years of trauma we have experienced, and I have to admit, that sometimes it is very hard to be very spiritual when you ache and hurt all over. Yet, it is my desire, and it should be the desire of all elderly church people to continue to serve as long as we can, and of course to reach an even greater potential. However, may I confess to you that the most difficult thing I deal with during these days of senior adulthood is to know what to plan for ministry when I don't have a clue how I will feel even tomorrow morning. To illustrate this, I just recently made a commitment to make a long hard trip to East Africa this coming fall and work in seven African countries. Just two days after I made the commitment to go, I had a blood clot in my leg, and then a blood vessel burst under my left eye which has affected me for several days. Can you please get the picture? We are older leaders in the churches and we want to continue to do as much as we can, but then suddenly, our plans have to be changed much to our regret, and yes, even end up in a time of depression and despair. We want to go on, but often times we can't. This is why Peter's encouragement is so important to older people trying to lead our churches.

B. These reasons include the price that was paid. v. 1b

In the second part of verse 1, Peter reminds the elderly leaders of the churches that yes, they are probably going through some trying times of suffering, but they must not forget the horrible suffering of our precious Lord Jesus when He was here on this earth, and most assuredly, when He died on the old rugged cross. So, when we ponder the price that was paid for our eternal redemption, I don't believe it is too much to ask that we remain faithful until Jesus calls us home, or until

He returns to this earth to get us. We must remember that Jesus gave up all of heaven and came down to this earth to die for our sins, then to be buried in a borrowed grave, and yes, praise God, arise from the grave to overcome death, hell and the grave. He did this for all men, not just for the predestinated elect which is so erroneously being propagated today like wildfire. I would to God that we might have a genuine fire of revival which would get our people back in the fields winning people to Christ. But no, we are spending more time trying to sell the brainwashing propaganda that Jesus loves some people differently, but not enough to save their souls like He loves the elect. Complete hogwash!

C. These reasons include the promise we have been given. v. 1c

In the last part of verse one, Peter tells the suffering believers that if they will remember and reflect on the suffering of Christ upon the cross that they will be able to better endure the suffering that they are going through. And yes, just like Jesus when He ascended back up to heaven, we will be rewarded with like glory when He comes again. You see folks, when we are going through the agony of the moment, we might be inclined to forget the glory that is to come for every faithful born again child of God. Therefore, we must constantly reflect upon the glory that shall be ours when we get to the other side. We may forget a lot of things as we get older, but be assured that Jesus never forgets what His people have done for Him, and truthfully, He is keeping a record of it. Pay attention to what Nehemiah said while building the wall in Jerusalem when it seemed that no human being was remembering his faithfulness. **Nehemiah 5:19, "Think upon me, my God, for good, according to all that I have done for this people."** Five times in the Book of Nehemiah, this great servant of God asked God to not forget the good things he had done for God's people. Why did he do this? Because those around us seem to forget very quickly while God promises to never forget the good we have done. Peter told the elderly church leaders that God would not forget them, but that they would experience the same glory Jesus had when He returned to heaven. What a great future, we children of God have if we don't give up and quit. Yes, I have felt like quitting many times, but by God's grace and through His strength, I have just kept on keeping on because I don't want to miss my potential.

II. NOTICE THE RESPONSIBILITIES FOR PRESSING FORWARD TO THIS POTENTIAL. vs. 2-3

Now in verse two, we see Peter telling the elderly leaders of the church, many of which were probably pastors, that they had the responsibility to keep feeding the flock of God and to give them their needed oversight and care. The phrase "feed the flock of God" implies many things. These leaders were to feed the people spiritually by preaching and teaching, and they were to provide encouragement and a good example for the sheep to follow. Bear in mind, that Peter was just doing his best to keep the people encouraged so that they would not quit, and he was trying to remind them that they had not been forgotten. May I say that this last statement is so vital to older preachers, pastors and church leaders.

You might ask, "why is this true?" Well, the truth is as a pastor or church leader gets older and he loses his physical strength and mental desire to go on, he feels very depressed and even neglected. Then too, real loneliness sets in because most of these elderly leaders' friends and colleagues are dying and they have no one to talk to, or even turn to in order to get the encouragement they need. And regretfully so, a lot of younger church pastors and leaders just forget how they got to where they are to day by the help of the older servants of God, and so they just turn away from these elderly people and sometimes just rudely neglect the ones who have helped bring them to the point where they are in their ministry. I not only see this as an extreme ungratefulness, but I also see it as willful neglect and disrespect by those who believe they have now arrived in their ministry. They may not believe it, but they act as if they resent these old people getting in their way. So, they don't want any part of hanging out with this older generation of preachers and church leaders. And yet, the younger leaders are the losers because if they didn't have so much damnable pride and a non-teachable spirit, these precious older people could provide so much wisdom and know-how for the younger generation.

Well now, let's move on taking a good look at the responsibilities that Peter lays out for us in these next few verses. Don't miss what God has in store for you.

A. There is the responsibility to provide encouragement to the flock. v. 2a

1. We provide encouragement by proclamation. (feed)

As we have already discussed, the responsibility of the older elders and church leaders is to sincerely do their best to preach and teach the sheep so that they can be properly fed the truth of God's Word. And truthfully, this is needed today more than ever before because of the shallowness of so many preachers and church members. I sincerely believe that when a pastor doesn't preach the absolute truth of the word of God to his people, then he is committing terrible sin against the sheep he has sworn to take care of, and because of his negligence, the flock seems to cater to fast food churches who tell stories and offer therapy rather than preach the genuine truth of God's Book.

2. We provide encouragement by preservation. (feed-tend)

Because of the fact that when Peter told the early suffering elders in the churches to feed the flock of God, he was not only talking about feeding the flock the truth of God's Word, but the word feed also has the implication of tending the sheep. This means that they were to oversee, protect, or preserve the flock. Of course, this also implies that the sheep need to be kept in unity in the fold and in the fields as much as possible. So, if a flock of God's sheep are to remain encouraged, they must feel safe and secure because of the tending of the shepherd. Then too, sheep will not remain with the rest of the other flock, if they don't feel close to the shepherd. Therefore, tending the sheep means that the elders were to protect, defend, and individualize the sheep so that they would feel loved and would not flee away from the flock.

3. We provide encouragement by identification. (among you)

The third thing I want to mention in verse two is that when Peter tells the elders to feed the flock of God among them, this implies that these church leaders should have an on-going relationship with the sheep. This means that they should identify with the people, their problems, the culture in which they live, and this needs to be done from a close relationship, and not from a distance. Sometimes even the very presence of the under-shepherds should bring peace and encouragement to the sheep, figuratively speaking. Yet today, there are multitudes of pastors and church leaders who don't want to get involved in the lives of their people, and they especially don't want to spend much time like a shepherd does his sheep when he carefully tends and takes care of his sheep. The real under-shepherd should be there for their people when there is joy and celebration, and he should definitely be there in times of suffering and grief.

To illustrate what I am talking about, let me share with you that a few months back, one of our dear church members was in a major hospital here in North Carolina. The man who was sick was on a life-support system, and he didn't live very long. But amazingly, while at this hospital with my dear wife trying to encourage this family, the Christian hospital chaplain said to me, "It is truly unusual for the family's pastor to be there to console people when someone was dying." Of course, this sounded ridiculous to me because during all my years as a pastor, my wife and I have always tried to be near during times of suffering and grief. I think any under-shepherd worth his salt should be there "among" his sheep when he is needed; regardless of what the younger pastors are being taught today. My dear pastor friend, "Do you identify with your people on a regular basis?"

4. We provide encouragement by observation. (oversight)

The last part of this second verse is deeply profound. Peter tells these senior church leaders that they should be there as shepherds taking the oversight of the sheep, not by force or obligation, but willingly. And, they were to be there for their people even if they didn't get paid extra, or if they didn't even feel like it. They were to be there willingly with cheerfulness or briskness regardless of the circumstance. This means that a good shepherd maintains observation of his flock, and he pays serious attention to where they are in the fields, what they are doing, where they are going, the dangers that are nearby, and even the kind of creatures the sheep might be warming up to. By keeping this oversight, the sheep will be kept out of danger, free from wolves and other predators, and the sheep will be nearby when their wool is needed. Thus, an observant shepherd, watches over his flock and does everything he possibly can to provide everything that the sheep needs. This might mean food, water, compassion, care, or even interference if a wild animal come the way of the sheep. Truly, all of us can be encouraged if we know our shepherd is nearby completely observing what we are doing. And of course, our Great Shepherd is always close by in order to protect and keep us from all harm, unless of course, we need to be tried by the tempter in order to teach us patience. And, when the times come that we get injured or hurt, the Good Shepherd comes to minister to the

hurting or broken sheep or lamb. What a thrill to remember what we learned in **Psalm 23**, where we find the following words. **"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. (Psalm 23:4)** So folks, it is wonderful to know that our Great Shepherd has us under his eyes and he knows exactly what is happening to us. I am very much encouraged by this, and we too should encourage our people in the church by keeping them in our close vision. It is truly wonderful to know that Jesus has his eyes on us, and therefore, we should have our eyes on those we are overseeing!

B. There is the responsibility to provide an example to the flock. vs. 2b-3

Have you ever heard the saying, "we need to practice what we preach?" Well, that is what Peter tells the older preachers and church leader to whom he was writing. He was telling them to not only provide encouragement in several ways, but now he tells them that they needed to live an exemplary lifestyle in order to convince the people whom they were trying to teach that they were real or genuine. We just need to remember that who we are often speaks much louder than our words. Let us take a careful look at the kind of example every shepherd should be for his flock. Of course, these same principles of being an example should apply to the ladies in the church as well.

1. This should be an elected example. v. 2b (not by constraint, but willingly)

In this second part of verse two, Peter tells the pastors and leaders of the churches that they should not have to be forced to set a good example to their flock. Instead, they would choose or elect to willingly set the proper example for others to follow because they are the teachers and leaders of the flock. If we can't count on the leaders to be exemplary, then we need not believe that the sheep will follow a righteous pathway.

2. This should be an expiatory example. v. 2c (not for filthy lucre)

The expiatory sounds like a big hard word, but it just actually means providing a sacrifice. In the third part of verse 2, we are told that we as leaders of God's people should be willing to set a good example for others not expecting remuneration or money, but that we should do it as a heavenly sacrifice because we want to impact the lives of our people in a positive way. The truth is that expiatory gets down to the motives of why we do what we do. As God's chosen leaders, we should willingly and gladly live our lives in such a sacrificial way that others will observe and follow our example. This means that we do what we do with the right motives, and we do our best to pattern the lifestyle of Jesus so that they will see Jesus in our lives. We must never resort to the terrible motives of so many professing preachers and pastors today who merchandise the Gospel to fill their pockets with millions of dollars for their own selfish and sinful ways.

3. This should be an eager example. v. 2d (ready mind)

The questions we need to consider at this point is, "do we regret having to set a pattern for other followers of Christ, or do we do it gladly with a ready mind to bring glory to God?" And, do we have such a passion to help the sheep that we don't hesitate to raise the standard for others to follow so that they can be clean and out of danger spiritually speaking? And, here is a place where I need to mention how many modern believers here in America resent anyone raising the bar or standards to high. I have had this experience for years. You see folks, if you or I try to live a godly exemplary life, then those who have never wanted to climb higher will probably resent us, and maybe even attack us because of our higher standards. I mention this because many years ago, a deacon in a Baptist church came to my office and told me that I had raised the bar to high, and that no one could reach it. I told this disgruntled deacon that Jesus had raised the bar, and if he had complaints, he needed to take them to Jesus. You see the problem was and still is, that this deacon and many others today want to live with one foot in the world and the other foot in the church. They don't want tight standards just in case they want to go have some fun and drink some alcohol, or maybe watch a pornographic movie without any guilt. They want to serve Jesus with some of their lives, but not at the cost of having to be disciplined or give up too much fun and activity at the same time. But must we never forget what Jesus said in **John 17, "we are in the world, but not of the world."** Therefore, we are to have higher standards than the world has, and we are to set the pattern for others to follow.

4. This should be an earthly example. v. 3a (Neither as being lords)

The next thing we see in verse three is that when we try to lead, tend, or oversee the sheep, we are to do so with a down to earth attitude. We are not to be filled with pride or ego, but we are to be humble, meek, and approachable. If we have our heads in the air, and we believe that we are better than our sheep, then God will never use us to bless our people. We must never think or believe that any people are below us, but we should do like Jesus, and spend our time with the down and out, and go to those who are neglected by others. Jesus said in **Matthew 5:5, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."** So my dear friends, we are to willingly and readily step forward and set the proper example for all of our followers if we are going to be spiritual leaders of our people. What we don't need is this new idea that we are to dress like the world, look like the world, smell like the world, and yes, act like the world in order to slip up on their blindside and give them the Gospel. We must live an exemplary life, raise our standards to righteous living, and then, we must love the lost world enough to take them the Gospel message. And when we take the Gospel, it must not be a watered down version for fear of offending someone. The Gospel doesn't need to be contextualized, it just needs to be preached and taught under the power of the Holy Spirit, and then leave the results to God. We must always remember that we don't argue people into the Kingdom of God, but we present the truth of the Gospel and let Jesus draw them to Himself.

5. This should be an enlightened example. v. 3b

Well now, as we finish up verse three, we must see one more very important thing. That is that as we concentrate on living an exemplary life before the world, we must make sure that we understand emphatically that however we conduct ourselves, we are going to leave either a positive heritage or a negative heritage. Therefore, we must understand right now that to participate in the Kingdom work is be a part of God's legacy for the church here on earth for eternity. In other words, if we are going to leave the proper heritage or testimony for other generations to observe and follow, if Jesus delays His coming, then we must know and see clearly that this is all about how our example imitates Him and His plan for the Kingdom of God. When we as spiritual leaders move on to heaven, then our legacy must be that we tried our best to imitate Christ and to leave behind a higher standard that Jesus would endorse. The simple statement is, "it is all about Him right now and forever."

III. NOTICE THE REWARDS IF WE REACH THIS POTENTIAL. v. 4

In verse four of this wonderful study from I Peter 5, we discover the promised rewards for those who are faithful and reach the potential that God had planned for them. When time has come and gone, the only thing that will be eternal is that which we have done for Jesus with a clean and clear conscience, and with the right motives. God used Peter to remind all of us as either the elderly or seniors in the churches to please remember that once we leave this world and get to heaven, we will all give an account of our faithfulness as the Judgment Seat of Christ. And the wonderful thing is that if we have been faithful and dedicated here, Christ will give us some wonderful rewards for our service. There are three promised rewards in verse four that we need to see.

A. There is the reward of the Savior's presence. v. 4a (And when the chief Shepherd shall appear)

Every time I stop to think about all of my 70 plus years of living here on God's earth, I can't help but think about the many blessings of God upon our lives, but also, the huge amount of trials that my family and I have gone through during our 53 plus years of ministry. We have many lasting scars to prove the severity of our battles. And, I will confess to you that right now I have battle fatigue from the many years of war with Satan. Yet, as I state so often to keep me going, we know that we are on the winning side, and that our Lord Jesus, the Chief Shepherd, is coming again to reward us if we remain faithful. His coming will truly be a refreshing presence if we have tried our best to serve Him. Therefore, the very thought of Jesus returning very soon to reward us for our years of service is the main thing that keeps me going. Truly, He will soon appear again to gather all of His people home, and to establish His earthly reign during the millennium. God has glorious things waiting for us if we will just remain faithful until the very end. Yes, it is wonderful that we now have the sweet presence of the Holy Spirit, but then we will have His royal presence in reality!

B. There is the reward of the Servant's prestige. v. 4b (ye shall receive a crown)

When we think of a crown, we immediately think of royalty, position, rank, and yes, much prestige. In the second part of this last verse in our study, we are told that when Jesus, the Chief Shepherd, shall appear the next time, He will give His true and faithful servants a crown expressing His appreciation for our faithfulness. And of course, the implication is that those who have not been faithful shepherds and elders of the flock will not receive this crown. I mention this because it stands to reason that if this false Calvinism were true, then every person who stands before the Judgment Seat of Christ would receive a crown, making this occasion nothing to long for, and better still, nothing to work for. It would be like what is happening in this modern "don't offend and be politically correct world," in which we now live. Instead of giving trophies to the winners, we are now giving trophies of participation for everyone that plays the game. Do you get what I am saying? If there is no special crown to work for or to look forward to if we are faithful in our service to Christ, then why would we even give it any effort? But because we know that only the faithful believers who have voluntarily chosen to do their best will be rewarded with a crown, then we should be faithful and do everything we can to be good and dedicated servants of our Lord. We may not receive much prestige now because we are hated so much by those who hate Jesus, but we will one day be recognized with love by the One we love and serve.

C. There is the reward of a shining preservation. v. 4c (glory that fadeth not away)

What a tremendous promise this last statement is to the dedicated servant of God who will remain faithful to the very end. Peter tells the elders and shepherds that although they may have to endure many hard times down here while trying to oversee the flock, there will come a day when they will be recognized with a crown of radiant glory that shall never fade away. This is a reminder to all of us that we will experience the glorious radiance of Christ which shall be with us forever in the world to come. We will be with Jesus Who shall honor us with this crown. And then truthfully, like we are told in Revelation 4:10 about the twenty-four elders bowing before the Lord and laying their crowns at His feet, we too will joyfully lay our crown at the feet of our precious Lord. This glory that we shall experience will never fade away, and we will enjoy His presence forever and forever.

My friends, my question to you is, "Are you so living as a faithful servant of God that you will receive one of our Lord's crowns?" If not, this would be a great time to bow before Him now and commit yourself to being His faithful service so that you will indeed reach your potential in His service and be recognized at the Judgment Seat of Christ.

Folks, I can't help but stop and think how embarrassed those who are saved, but yet are not really serving as good shepherds, are going to be when they see some of their ministerial friends receive their crowns while they themselves receive none. Truly, that is going to be a shameful and embarrassing moment.

Conclusion

It is truly an awesome thought to think that we as servants of God will one day stand before Jesus to give an account of our personal ministries, and to receive the rewards that God has reserved for us. It is my prayer that the very thought of what Jesus ultimately has in store for all of His faithful workers will keep us faithfully serving Him until He comes again, or we leave this world through death. Hopefully, this study has helped us to get better prepared for the Judgment Seat of Christ which is ahead of all of us. I am resolved to use whatever time I have left more effectively for the cause of Christ. It is my prayer that each of us will one day receive this crown of glory from our wonderful "Chief Shepherd." May God graciously grant this!

A Time For Personal Reflection and Prayer!

As we come to the end of our Spiritual Leadership Seminar, I want us to take a few moments and reflect upon the kind of spiritual leaders we are in view of what we have studied in this seminar. Then, I would like to ask that we sincerely confess to Jesus the areas that we have been failing in, and then, ask Him to help us to improve in these areas. I ask each of us to get rid of the negatives in our leadership, and implement the positives that will make us strong and effective leaders for the cause of Christ and His Kingdom.

Let me close by thanking you for your faithful participation in this Spiritual Leadership Seminar. It is my prayer that God will take you back to your homes and places of service with a new fire and passion in your hearts for this work. May the Lord richly bless you, and may you have a safe journey!

Pressing for the Crown,

Dr. Stan Frye
President of Gateway International Missions, Inc.
Matthew 9:35-38