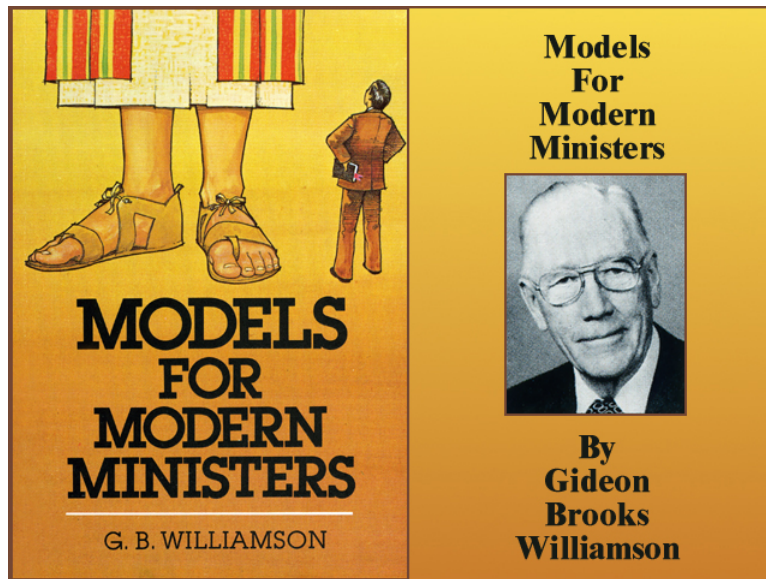


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MODELS FOR MODERN MINISTERS

By Gideon Brooks Williamson



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DEDICATION

This offering is made with prayers and deep interest for the effective ministry of my three ordained sons, Joseph, Franklin Cook, and John. May they, and all others, minister the Word in the power of the Holy Spirit.

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FOREWORD

Dr. Gideon B. Williamson has earned the right to offer us this book on modeling the ministry. It is evident to those of us who have known and heard this man of God that he himself has modeled the preachers about whom he writes in this fascinating study. In turn he has been a model for an entire generation of ministers, especially in the Church of the Nazarene.

The first time I heard the author preach was at the 1944 General Nazarene Young People's Convention in Minneapolis. His memorable sermon on that occasion was a powerful and stirring exposition of Christ the Word from the prologue of John's Gospel. Also unforgettable was his deeply moving Communion sermon on Christ's atoning death preached the opening Sunday morning of the 1964 General Assembly at Portland, Ore. Whether pastor, college president, or general superintendent, Gideon B. Williamson was first and foremost a preacher of the Word, a minister of Jesus Christ:

More than all else, we ministers need models. Models not only instruct, they also inspire. They whisper to us, "You, too, can be like that!" To read these biographical sermons is to experience this instruction and inspiration.

These sermons themselves are models. They breathe not only the spirit but also the language of the Bible. The beautiful King James Version has become so much a part of the author's vocabulary we cannot always tell whether the words are his or those of Scripture. Like Wesley's sermons, these abound in both quotations and allusions of Holy Writ.

Gideon B. Williamson is preeminently a preacher's preacher. I commend these sermons to you, to read and study prayerfully and meditatively. Let them remind you afresh what it means to be a minister of Jesus Christ after the model of the prophets and the preachers and apostles of the ancient Church of God.

-- William M. Greathouse

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PREFACE

The character and influence of the Church is determined by the preaching heard from its pulpit. P. T. Forsyth declared, "It is upon preaching that Christianity will stand or fall." Countless illustrations can be cited to prove that point. Preaching is the backbone of the living truth of the Bible.

It is the purpose of this book to help keep alive and influential the men who gave vitality and character to the Word of God as they preached it. It is not expected that modern ministers of the gospel will seek to reproduce the words and deeds of men who lived in an ancient culture. It is to be hoped that glimpses of those men may cause ministers of this generation to respond to God's call, live in intimate fellowship with Him who was very God and very man, and receive and deliver a message from God to man. It is not how many go to church, but how many hear a word from God.

Among Paul's last exhortations to Timothy was "Preach the word" (2 Tim. 4:2). Let that be the imperative that rings in the ears of every man who stands behind the sacred desk in any church anywhere.

* * * * *

01 -- MAN SENT FROM GOD -- Text: John 1:6

Introduction

Preaching has from the ancient times been God's first means of communicating the knowledge of himself and His redemptive purpose to men. He has used other means, but He has never discarded preaching. The decline of the influence of the pulpit has always been accompanied by spiritual decay. Wicked men have sought to silence the preacher's voice. They imprisoned Jeremiah, beheaded John the Baptist, crucified Jesus, stoned Stephen, beheaded Paul, and burned Savonarola. But history rises up to do honor to those martyred for the faith. Voices that speak above the din of persecution and the silence of death are heard with far greater respect than those who found refuge and immunity by prophesying smooth things to please their hearers.

Material abundance has been offered as the remedy for man's plight. But while we have things better than ever, the malcontent is deeper. False teachers have called for overthrow of established governments and social systems and have offered fragmented independence with socialism as the answer. But confusion is the more confounded. Is there no one to speak with authority and act with courage to lead us out of our wilderness wanderings?

Unfortunately the church of our time has not proved to be a city on a hill, a voice of assurance; nor has it pointed the way to the promised land. Bishop Nolan B. Harmon said at the merging conference of the Methodist church and Evangelical United Brethren on April 22, 1968: "They say that no person of intellectual responsibility for the last 40 years has said anything about the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting.., our Methodist and EUB fathers did... they did not lose members as we have been doing -- they gained them.

"The church has had much more influence on earth when it talked of heaven, than it ever does when we are so heaven-bent on saving the earth and we turn ourselves into an earthly pressure group... our preachers do not even have time for private prayer; the social action committee has taken the place of the prayer meeting."

These times are not unlike those which befell men some 2,000 years ago. The voice of an inspired prophet had not been heard for four centuries. But the long-silent voice of Malachi had left a promise that was precious to the prisoners of hope:

"Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me: and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant, whom ye delight in: behold, he shall come, saith the Lord of hosts. But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like fullers' soap: and he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness" (Mal. 3:1-3).

At long last the messenger came. The promise of God was fulfilled. The people heard a voice, saw a light, and the way of the Lord was prepared. All this was personified in John the Baptist: "a man sent from God" (John 1:6).

I. A Man Sent From God Must Have Certain Godly Qualities Of Character

Man was made in the image of his Maker. Now in Christ he is a new creation. He has "put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness" (Eph. 4:24).

A godly man is one who has the power of choice and exercises it in favor of that which is good. He, like his Lord, loves righteousness and hates iniquity. He does not wear religion as a cloak to cover his own unrighteousness or use sacrosanct forms as a pretense of godliness. He is God's "workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works" (Eph. 2:10).

The man of God is endowed with a godly capacity for moral judgment. Jesus said, "My judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which hath sent me" (John 5:30). Those who are to guide the destiny of men and nations must ever abhor evil and cleave to the good. One who gives heed to the command of God to be holy in all manner of living does by precept, preaching, and example, call those to whom he is a God-sent man, to refuse the evil and choose the good. His own will is fixed to do God's will. His character is tempered in the hot fires of temptation that he might conform to the holy character of God, and therefore, his call to repentance and holiness is heard, and by some, obeyed.

Let no man who would speak as one having authority, relax into careless habits of life. God's Word is "Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Pet. 1:16). The Ten Commandments are a transcript of God's holiness. They change no more than the immutable God changes.

A man who comes in the name of God is godly in that he is a spiritual being. In this day of crass materialism it is easy for anyone, even a preacher of righteousness, to be conformed to this world. He is embedded in the material, like gravel in concrete. His deliverance requires transformation by the renewing of the mind. He must be loosed from it by the miracle of the new birth. "That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit" (John 3:6). "If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his. And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness" (Rom. 8:9-10). "We have this treasure in earthen vessels" (2 Cor. 4:7). Man has a body. But that body is redeemed unto God and is the temple of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, the Spirit-filled Christian has the mind of Christ by which he discerns the things of the Spirit. He is led and inspired by the Spirit of God. He has capacity to evaluate the things that are spiritual and eternal.

Preaching today is essentially worldly. In the attempt to be relevant, the preachers have forsaken the fountain of living waters and hewn them cisterns that hold no water (cf. Jer. 2:13). Their minds are held by the things seen, and they and those to whom they are sent have lost sight of the eternal. Therefore, the pleasures of the world and the mad quest for its fleeting values compete successfully with the Sabbath day rest and the hearing of God's Word. Preachers lament that their pews are empty; their churches are deserted. They have lost sight of the heavenly vision and talk only of marsh lights and glowworms. Those to whom they are sent with a redemptive message do not believe it because they do not hear it. They are groping in darkness, and their shepherds are as blind leaders of the blind.

The man sent from God must have the love of God-the agape -- shed abroad in his heart by the Holy Ghost which has been given to him. This is no part of unregenerate man. He is afire with eros and dead to agape. The love of God is the same that made the Supreme and Eternal Father give His only begotten Son to save whosoever will. This love comes with that gift of the Spirit of God who is known only by those who have received Christ as their Savior and Lord. This is the love that binds man to God in holy obedience. It is the bond of perfectness which unites all Christians with one another and their neighbors. It crosses all barriers of race or religion. Christ is all and in all.

This is the love that burns like a fire in the heart and compels all who know it to witness, to evangelize, to give, to go that all men may know the love that gives all for all. Thus, the heart full of the love of God knows the meaning of the words love made flesh, and confirms the message the lips proclaim to all men.

II. Such A Man Of God Is Qualified To Be God's Messenger

John the Baptist was, in the truest and highest meaning of the words, "a man sent from God." He, like Isaac and Samuel, was a child of promise. And like Jeremiah, God knew him before he was conceived, and He sanctified him before he was born. He appointed him a prophet to the Jewish nation.

He was a marked man -- a Nazarite. No razor touched his head and he took no wine or strong drink. He was set apart by God's choice and by his own voluntary commitment. Often God has His eye on men to serve His purpose long before He makes it known to them. By His wisdom and grace He calls them, and by His Spirit He leads them. Nevertheless, they must cooperate with His purpose. John was obedient. He was so fully yielded that he was willing to be different. He accepted the implications of his Nazarite vow.

He, no doubt, took the course that would prepare him for the succession to the office of the priest to which his father belonged. I remember hearing a learned man say years ago that John the Baptist spent 30 years in preparation for a ministry of six months. Certain it is that he was not an uncouth illiterate who emerged from the wilderness to arouse the rabble and lead a revolution. Nevertheless, he filled the

role of a man sent from God by supplementing his birth and formal training with a period of isolation in the wilderness. He was in the desert until his showing to Israel. He was to come with a word from God to his day. There is always an element of the esoteric in a prophetic message. It is not simply what has been read in textbooks and libraries, or heard in lectures of the classroom. It is a word from the Lord direct to men. It comes with divine authority and fits the needs of those to whom it is sent.

As a messenger from the Lord, John broke with tradition. The scene of his preaching was not the Temple or the synagogue, but the banks of the Jordan River. He did not take of the goods provided for the Levites. His meat was locusts and wild honey. He wore no vestments or robes. His raiment was of camel's hair, and a leathern girdle was about his loins (cf. Matt. 3:4).

He did not employ the stately language of the ritual, or the lofty cadences of the litany. He read no dissertations on theology loaded with archaic language of creeds and dogmas. He offered no profound, unoffensive recitations for the elite with their aesthetic tastes. There were no threadbare cliches in his preaching. Those who heard may have been angry in their protests, but they suffered no boredom as they listened. The Baptist did not pontificate.

John was not an organizer or promoter, nor was he a man of affairs. He joined no clubs and spent no time rushing to and fro for publicity.

John was a man of courage. Elijah was the one of whom he reminded his hearers. Jesus said of him, "Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed" (Matt. 17:12). His ministry brought all the people from the region round about Jordan to hear what he had to say. To those who responded by confessing their sins, he administered baptism. But when the self-righteous Pharisees and intellectually proud Sadducees came from Jerusalem seeking baptism without confessing their sins, he mocked at their claim to be Abraham's seed and declared God could raise up children unto Abraham from the stones under their feet. He cried, "O generation of vipers, who hath warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance" (Matt. 3:7-8; cf. v. 9).

He dared tell King Herod that it was not lawful for him to have his brother's wife. It would be well if some prophet should tell men in high places that flagrant flaunting of God's command, "Thou shalt not commit adultery," disqualifies them for a position of honor and great responsibility, regardless of position held or wealth possessed. That daring pronouncement cost John his head. But a man of conscience with no head is more powerful than one who saves his head but sears his conscience. John did not watch to see which direction the wind was blowing before he spoke. He spoke the truth without regard for the favor of men even at the cost of his life. Jesus asked and answered some rhetorical questions:

"What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind? But what went ye out for to see? A man clothed in soft raiment? behold, they that wear soft clothing are in kings' houses. But what went ye out for to see? A prophet? yea, I say unto you, and more than a prophet. For this is he, of whom it is written, Behold, I send my messenger before thy face, which shall prepare thy way before thee. Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist... And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent take it by force" (Matt. 11:7-12).

John was a man of great humility. Courage and humility are complementary qualities of spirit. It calls for courage to live humbly and for humility to show courage. John spoke of himself as a "voice crying in the wilderness." He was forerunner to prepare the way of the Lord. Of him John the apostle wrote, "There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear 'witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which" lighteth every man that cometh into the world" (John 1:6-9).

Of John, Jesus said, "He was a burning and a shining light; and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light" (John 5:35). For a light to shine, it must burn. To burn is to be consumed. A man who saves himself will live blended into the darkness which surrounds him. The one who will be consumed will turn many from darkness to light. So clear and bright was John's witness that when he was dead and Jesus came doing mighty works, the people said He was John the Baptist risen from the dead.

III. John Came From God With A Message For His Generation

The Baptist was absorbed with his message. He had no concern about status, ego fulfillment, or how his report would sound. It is obvious he had no desire for ease, luxury, comfort, or security. His fearlessness before others and his carelessness for himself awakened the interest of those who heard him. His words were weighted with meaning. They were not like the chaff which the wind driveth away. He was serious, and he made his listeners think of their sins and their accountability to God.

John related his message to the law and the prophets. He proclaimed that he was the messenger of the covenant of whom Malachi had prophesied and the forerunner to prepare the way of the Lord as Isaiah had foretold.

His message had roots deep in the law of God. This law had been forsaken and forgotten; he was the restorer of the breach. He called for repentance, return, and renewal. He pointed to the ancient landmarks and called for a return to the good way.

John's message was pertinent to his day. The plain people from the region about Jordan came, asking, "What shall we do?" He replied, "He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat, let him do likewise" (Luke 3:11).

The publicans came, saying, "Master, what shall we do?" He answered, "Exact no more than that which is appointed you" (v. 13).

Then came the soldiers, demanding, "What shall we do?" And he told them, "Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages" (v. 14).

This is a social gospel if any has ever been preached. It came forth as a reformation born in revival fire.

Then the Trojan horse of Judaism poured out its legalists and skeptics, much as they come from within the church today. And John spoke his stern words to them, counseling that if they were to receive his baptism, they must repent just as the publicans and soldiers and plain people were required to do. John was no respecter of persons. Fishermen, tax gatherers, soldiers, Pharisees, Sadducees, and kings were alike before him, even as they are before God. John also spoke to the nation, "And now also the ax is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire" (Matt. 3:10).

The Word of God is as pointed and powerful in our generation as ever it has been. As one contemporary preacher has put it, "A Scripture passage when properly used is more powerful than any other combination of words." If we would speak clearly and convincingly to men today, let us speak the Word of God, quickened by His Spirit, because we ourselves have believed it and are walking in its light.

In a depressed era of human history with darkness and confusion everywhere, John the Baptist brought a message of holiness and hope: "As it is written in the book of the words of Esaias the prophet, saying, The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be brought low; and the crooked shall be made straight, and the rough ways shall be made smooth; and all flesh shall see the salvation of God" (Luke 3:4-6).

"I indeed baptize you with water unto repentance: but he that cometh after me is mightier than I, whose shoes I am not worthy to bear: he shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire" (Matt. 3:11).

"Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29). "He must increase, but I must decrease" (3:30).

This was the Daystar in a dark sky. This is "the Sun of righteousness [that has risen] with healing in his wings" (Mal. 4:2).

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02 -- MAN OF AUTHORITY -- Text: Acts 7:22

Introduction

Moses is most frequently called the lawgiver, the mold and leader of the nation of Israel. He was also a prophet and a preacher. That he was among the prophets, he was himself fully aware. He prophesied, "The Lord thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken" (Deut. 18:15). He, in that utterance, clearly identified the Messiah as one like himself. Jesus Christ was the greatest of the prophets. Moses ranks next to him. Jesus spoke often of "Moses and the prophets." A prophet foretells the present message of God as well as foretelling what the future holds.

Moses was a preacher, too. Among Old Testament writings, Deuteronomy holds a primary place. It was often the source book from which Jesus quoted. The latter prophets and the apostles draw heavily from it, too. The greater portion of the book is the record of Moses' final and farewell addresses to the people whom he had led for 40 years. It is actually Moses preaching with conviction, authority, and passionate pleading to the people he loved so much. His advice is sound, his warnings are solemn, and his reassuring promises are inspiring. He was the lawgiver, the leader, and the preacher whose voice rang with authority. He preached for a verdict. He called for decisive action as he clearly declared the alternatives.

Stephen, under the powerful anointing of the Holy Spirit with irresistible wisdom, described Moses as "learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and... mighty in words and in deeds" (Acts 7:22). No clearer pronouncement of preaching with authority has ever been uttered.

I. There Is A Firm Foundation For Preaching With Authority

When preaching is full of speculation or equivocation, it is futile and unfruitful. The Bible speaks with authority. One who preaches the Word of God deals in great affirmations. He has no time for raising questions without answers or for hair-splitting discussions about trivialities that matter little whether they are true or false. He has a word from the Lord. There were a few notable stones in Moses' foundation:

A. Learning

According to Stephen, learning was an important stone in the foundation for a life of mighty words and deeds. Learning is not simply an accumulation of theories or even facts. It is knowledge that has been comprehended by the intellect and applied to life, personally and socially. It means one has found himself in order that he may exercise a redemptive influence on mankind. He has confidence in his own usefulness and a positive faith for the improvement of his fellowmen.

Learning provides maturation and will to achieve, purged of pride and activated by love. It inspires vision of need and purpose to minister to it. Learning sharpens tools and gives the know-how to use them effectively.

One cannot serve the present age with only dedicated ignorance; but the intellect of man must bow to the revelation of God. Man does not judge the validity of divine revelation. He is subject to the truth of God's Word. He is subject to judgment. Knowledge with reverence is never in oversupply.

I remember well an outstanding editorial by the sainted Dr. James B. Chapman. It was titled "Full Heads Bend Over." He wrote, "In a field of wheat when the ripened heads stand stiff and straight, they are empty. The ones loaded with grain, bow." In like manner, when men have wisdom in their heads, they bow in reverence to God. The wise man knows that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Ps. 111:10; Prov. 9:10). God is the Fountain of light and wisdom. He is the Source and Personification of truth and holiness, the One from whom the capacity to learn is received. The learning received from God is never wasted. It is the inspiration for love and service. It keeps one aware of his servanthood.

It is acknowledged that Egypt, in that ancient day, was the most advanced nation of the world in learning. There were mathematicians, astronomers, scientists, and persons of literary and philosophical attainments. Moses was the legal son of Pharaoh's daughter; he grew to manhood with access to the court of the kings and all the sources of learning available. He was schooled in statescraft and military expertise. This was good preparation for his life's tremendous task. Josephus records that Moses had led successful military expeditions for Pharaoh before he left Egypt.

It must not be overlooked, however, that he was deeply rooted in the fundamentals of the Hebrew faith. His devout and capable mother had been a good teacher while she received wages from his foster mother for nursing her son. She, no doubt, felt he had a destiny important to the people of Israel. So deep was that influence that he made his great choice with his mother's teaching in mind.

B. Godly Choice

The inspired author of the Epistle to the Hebrews records:

"By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible" (Heb. 11:24-27).

With widely contrasted values in view he made his choice. That decision was the second great stone in the foundation of Moses' life of mighty words and deeds. It was a long-range choice because he endured as seeing Him who is invisible.

C. Zeal, Then Delay

The third important factor in the preparation of Moses for his great career as a leader of God's people was brought about by his zeal and rash judgment in seeking to be a self-appointed deliverer of Israel. He saw an Egyptian and a Hebrew striving together. Moses, wanting to do a heroic deed, intercepted in the contest; and, in defending the fellow Israelite, he killed the Egyptian. Thinking to hide his wrong, he buried the dead man in the sand. This did not conceal his crime. The next day he saw two Hebrews in an argument. Again Moses intervened; whereupon one of them turned on him, asking, "Who made thee a prince and a judge over us? Intendest thou to kill me, as thou killedst the Egyptian?" (Exod. 2:14). Moses knew the thing was known, and he fled to the land of Midian. Providential appointments brought him to the house of Reuel to eat bread and to marry a wife, Zipporah, the daughter of Reuel, the priest of Midian. These events closed Moses into a life of herding the sheep of his father-in-law for 40 years. This gave opportunity to the youthful man of 40 years to mature in patience, self-control, and wisdom in dealing with people.

Involved in the process of growth was the discipline of delay. In God's calendar of events, timing is important. One may try to do God's will at the wrong time and meet humiliating failure as Moses did. F. W. Boreham, the famous Australian essayist and preacher, relates a conversation with his mother in his childhood. He began,

"Mother, I am concerned that the mulberry leaves are ready, and the silkworms are not here to do their work."

She replied, "Son, don't be worried. Nature is never off in timing; when the leaves are ready, the silkworms will appear." And sure enough, they did. In this, God and nature are alike. He is never tardy or ahead of schedule; when the task to be done is ready for action, God will be there to help His servant.

While God was getting Moses ready to be the emancipator of enslaved Israel, He was preparing the people to accept his leadership. The Egyptian taskmasters

under Pharaoh's command were getting the people ready to accept the risks of moving out of the land of bondage.

It takes strength and patience to endure the discipline of delay.

Included in the maturation of Moses was the discipline of isolation. Here was an Egyptian prince and university graduate herding sheep for 40 years. Perhaps no test of character is more exacting than that experienced in being alone. Moses had no one his equal with whom to communicate. This, doubtless, led him to lend a listening ear to the voice of God. It is certain that was of great importance to Moses' success in leading Israel from Egypt to Canaan over the following 40 years.

The discipline of doing one's best in a distasteful task was also a part of the preparation of Moses for what God planned for him to accomplish. To an Egyptian, herding sheep was an abomination. Moses' mind had been influenced by the culture of Egypt. But when following the flock became his work, he made up his mind to do what he had to do to the best of his ability.

The preacher who complains that the church has never recognized his talent, and, therefore, he has never had an assignment worthy of him, has consigned himself to a life of frustration and defeat. All should be ready to serve an apprenticeship. They should do with their might what their hands find to do. The only sure way to have a better, bigger assignment is to make the one you have into what it can be. One who takes a job as a stop-gap is an opportunist. He does not deserve success or promotion. If one accepts a task, he should stay long enough to see something worthwhile and permanent done. He is not looking for greener pastures.

D. Spiritual Experience

The fourth and final life-changing experience in the foundation of preparation for great service was the most important of all. It was a personal confrontation with God. It came to Moses, not by appointment at a designated time and place, but as he was pursuing the path of duty in obedience to what he knew to do.

He was leading his sheep to the best grazing fields and the refreshing pools of water. He saw a desert bush on fire; yet it was not consumed. He turned aside to see what it meant. The strange sight was to gain Moses' attention. The important thing was that out of the burning bush God spoke to Moses. He said, "Put off thy shoes... the place whereon thou standest is holy ground" (Exod. 3:5). It was holy, not by enchantment, nor by noteworthy achievements of men or previous manifestations of Deity. It was, rather, the place of great confrontation between God and Moses and of a vision splendid, of what God had for Moses to do for his people. This was an epoch in the life of Moses. It was the opening anew of God's plan for Israel. It was prophetic of a scheme of redemption for all mankind for millenniums to come.

God told Moses, "I have seen the afflictions of My people under the rigorous persecution of Pharaoh. Moses, you are to go and tell Pharaoh, 'Let My people go.'" With some meek protests of his own limitations, Moses accepted God's assignment in obedience. He was now ready to do what he longed to do according to God's will and specific command.

II. Moses Was Mighty In Words And Deeds

All that had been done was to prepare Moses to be "the servant of God." He was to speak and act with authority as he was directed by Almighty God. He was told when the people of Israel asked, "Who sent you?" to tell them, "I Am has sent me; the God of the past, the God of the present, and the God of all eternity has given me the great work to do." The afflicted people, not without some question, accepted Moses as their emancipator. To Israel of all generations and to the world, Moses remains a man "mighty in words and deeds."

He became the mouthpiece of God. God spoke to Moses; he to Aaron; and Aaron to the people.

At Sinai, God first spoke the Ten Commandments in the hearing of all Israel amid fearsome manifestations of His awful presence. They responded, "All God has spoken, we will obey." But they added, "In the future let God speak to Moses, and he will speak to us." Then, God gave Moses the Decalogue, written on tablets of stone, thus suggesting they were to be permanent in their authority over the conscience and conduct of Israel and over all who would receive the law through them. From then until now those commandments, which came from God through Moses, have been the foundation of the legal code of all civilized nations. They have not been obeyed, except by a few, but they have been proclaimed and known. To many, the law of God has become the law of Moses. Jesus Christ elaborated and applied the law in the Sermon on the Mount.

In the repetition of the law as recorded in Deuteronomy, Moses gave instructions for personal and family retention of God's commands:

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might. And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates" (Deut. 6:4-9).

For obedience, great blessings were promised to Israel. How different our world would be if all who have a Bible in their hands had followed these instructions.

These are only a few of the mighty words spoken by Moses to Israel and all men -- words that were inspired of God.

Moses spoke mighty words to God on behalf of his people. They, with the consent of Aaron, had sinned grievously at Sinai because they feared that Moses had disappeared. They had vowed obedience to all the commandments; but in 40 days they had flagrantly transgressed the first and most important one of all. They were in the act of worshipping a golden calf, a typical god of Egypt, when Moses came down from the mountain with the tablets of stone on which the finger of God had written the law. He was angry and God's wrath was kindled against them. God said, "Stand aside, Moses, and I will destroy this nation and raise up another from you." That had no appeal for Moses. He asked, "What will the Egyptians say, and what will other nations say if that happens?" Then Moses interceded for the rebellious people. He prayed, "Oh, this people have sinned a great sin, and have made them gods of gold. Yet now, if thou wilt forgive their sin -- ; and if not, blot me, I pray thee, out of the book which thou hast written" (Exod. 32:31-32). God heard that sobbing intercession and spared Israel. These were mighty words spoken to God on behalf of Israel. God restored the covenant written again on tablets like those Moses had broken. He heard another prayer of Moses, who received the assurance that His presence would go with him and the people and give them rest.

The prayers of Moses on many occasions were heard by God in extensions of forgiveness and mercy during the long, frustrating years of wilderness wandering. How important that men who preach shall be men of prayer. A prayerless preacher is a powerless preacher.

Moses was mighty in deeds as well as words. While yet in controversy with God about his own limitations and the unwillingness of Israel to accept his leadership, God asked, "What is that in thine hand?" Moses replied, "A rod" (Exod. 4:2). After giving some convincing signs to Moses, God ordered, "Thou shalt take this rod in thine hand, wherewith thou shalt do signs" (v. 17).

That common shepherd's staff, like those in the hand of all shepherds, in the hand of God became the instrument of many mighty miracles. The rod of Moses became the rod of God. "Little is much if God is in it." It is not how much know-how we have to give, but how completely what we do have is placed without reservation in the hands of God.

The miracles ascribed to Moses were for the most part performed with that rod in his hand. The 10 devastating plagues which were invoked upon Egypt, the dividing of the sea, the water from the rock, the victory over Amalek, all were done with the rod of God in Moses' hand.

Too many modern preachers spend their time in conjuring words that tickle the ears of those to whom they preach. If they read, much of it is about trifling issues. What they preach may be more accurately described as good advice rather than good news. Many are more concerned with brevity than with a message that will convict sinners, lead believers into holiness, and mature saints in Christlikeness.

Pews are often empty because the preaching is boring. The church cannot compete with worldly producers of entertainment. Preaching has more to do with the spiritual climate of the church than any other feature of the service. People go to the theater or the game for entertainment and excitement. If they go to church consistently, they go to hear the Word of God delivered in the power of the Spirit and to learn of the way of salvation and life eternal. "Let the church be the church." Let preaching be with the authority of a message from God's Word.

03 -- PLAIN MAN -- Text: Amos 7:14-15

Introduction

In popular parlance the seers of the Old Testament are known as the major and minor prophets. Such a classification is undeserved. It is in large measure due to the length of their messages. The judgment should be made on the content of the utterance rather than its length. On that basis none of the briefer 12 deserve to be called minor. Every one of them had a message of fundamental importance for his day and every day.

Scholars of the last several decades have found in Amos preaching that is timeless. It is as applicable to our day as it was when Amos delivered it more than two and one-half millenniums ago. A message of divine truth is changeless.

God sent Amos especially to Israel, the Northern Kingdom, while Jeroboam II was reigning king in the most prosperous period of that nation's history.

Amos preached to the neighboring nations, including Judah. Nevertheless, God sent him with a message for Israel. He preached to the other peoples, especially of Judah, over the shoulder of Israel. The truth he proclaimed was universal, but it pointed to Israel as the one in whom his prophecies would most immediately come to pass. The day of judgment came in 722 B.C. when Israel was captured by the Assyrians. The best of the Northern Kingdom were carried away to Nineveh. In their place alien peoples were established in Israel. This produced the mixed race called Samaritans of Jesus' time.

All that came to Israel in 722 B.C. befell Judah 125 years later at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.

Among the 12 falsely called minor prophets, Amos is outstanding. He spoke with authority and clarity. He has a message all nations should hear and heed today.

I. Amos Was A Plain Man

The prophet was a native of the village of Tekoa, located about 12 miles south of Jerusalem. He is introduced as a herdsman (Amos 1:1). He told Amaziah, the priest of Bethel, that he was a herdsman and a gatherer of sycamore fruit (7:14). Thus, he was identified with the people of poverty and lowly station in the society of his day. This makes Amos typical of millions of plain men who have heard God's call and responded with obedience. Most of them have done work for God that has made large and lasting contributions to building the kingdom of God. Possibly more souls have been saved through their faithful service than by the gifted men whose names are often listed among the great preachers of church history.

There are some self-educated men who have been named among the noted preachers of all time. Seldom does an extensive number of great preachers appear that does not include Charles H. Spurgeon of London. He did not have the advantages of formal education. He was diligent in his efforts for self-improvement. He made a name for himself, and in his school for preachers he helped to train thousands of men. His insight into God's Word was profound. In large measure it was a gift of the Holy Spirit. To that divine endowment Spurgeon added his diligent study. He did not seek for eloquence or to use profound language. He is reported to have said, "If expressions of truth in beautiful words that would please his hearers came to mind, he would pluck them from his mouth and employ simple words easily understood by all."

The widely known and read Helmut Thielicke was pastor for many years in Hamburg, Germany. It was reported that he preached to the largest congregations in all Christendom. In his book Encounter with Spurgeon, translated by John W. Doberstein, Thielicke writes:

"In the midst of the theologically discredited century there was a preacher who had at least six thousand people in his congregation every Sunday, whose sermons for many years were cabled to New York and reprinted in the leading newspapers of the country and who occupied the same pulpit for almost forty years without any diminishment in the flowing abundance of his preaching and without ever repeating himself or preaching himself dry. The fire he thus kindled and turned into a beacon that shone across the seas and down through the generations was no mere brushfire of sensationalism, but an inexhaustible blaze that glowed and burned on solid hearths and was fed by the wells of the eternal Word. Here was the miracle of a bush that burned with fire and yet was not consumed" (Ex. 3:2).

In contrast to Spurgeon, John Wesley was a recognized scholar. He was at ease among the learned of Oxford University. He preached to that intellectual

congregation. He did, however, determine within himself that he would preach the gospel in plain English. He never sought to display his scholarship by the use of rare and obscure language. He preached as a plain man to plain people in language any hearer could understand. Let all preachers of the gospel of Christ learn from Spurgeon to make the most of their advantages, even if limited. And let all the learned scholars simplify their language so that the unlearned of their congregations will understand. The use of simple, familiar words in an artful way is proof of learning.

Amos spoke the most profound truth in the simple language for those who heard. He revealed his intimacy with God when he said, "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets" (Amos 3:7).

He set forth a principle for unity among all God's people when he asked, "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (v. 3).

Amos used figures of speech of unmistakable meaning when he spoke for the Lord: "I also have given you cleanness of teeth" (4:6). All understood that the time was near when there would be no food to eat. In a skillful use of words, Amos reminded Israel of the various judgments of God and made the truth effective by the repeated refrain, "Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord" (vv. 6, 8-11). He climaxed that warning with the familiar exhortation, "Prepare to meet thy God, O Israel" (v. 12). Thus, he brought home to mind and conscience their sins and God's judgments.

II. Amos Was A Courageous, Rugged Preacher

The man from Tekoa had no concern to please his hearers. He had no desire to identify with the teachers who had itching ears. He would not exchange a clear conscience for the praise of men who had turned their ears from the truth and accepted fables (2 Tim. 4:3-4). Amos was not a rigid, legalistic preacher who demanded, "Do as I say or go to hell." He proclaimed a rugged message to all who heard him, but left judgment to the righteous God.

"The Lord said unto me, Amos, what seest thou? And I said, A plumbline. Then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumbline in the midst of my people Israel: I will not again pass by them any more" (Amos 7:8). A plumb line determined whether a wall was exactly perpendicular. A level determined if the wall was straight horizontally. These instruments made judgment of a building according to design, accurate. God said He would make honest and fair judgment of His people. "The high places of Isaac shall be desolate, and the sanctuaries of Israel shall be laid waste; and I will rise against the house of Jeroboam with the sword" (v. 9).

To Amaziah, the priest at Bethel, Amos prophesied,

"Thy wife shall be an harlot in the city, and thy sons and daughters shall fall by the sword, and thy land shall be divided by line; and thou shalt die in a polluted land: and Israel shall surely go into captivity forth of his land" (v. 17). That was rugged truth for the king and the priest to hear. Amos had no particular grudge against the king and the priest. He had God's stern word for all who did not live according to His commandments. To the rich who • lived in luxury, he declared, "Hear ye this word.., which oppress the poor, which crush the needy, which say to their masters, Bring, and let us drink. The Lord God hath sworn by his holiness, that, lo, the days shall come upon you, that he will take you away with hooks, and your posterity with fishhooks" (4:1-2).

"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord God, that I will send a famine in the land, not a famine of bread, nor a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord: and they shall wander from sea to sea, and from the north even to the east, they shall run to and fro to seek the word of the Lord, and shall not find it" (8:11-12).

There can be no more serious judgment upon a nation than a famine of the Word of the Lord. But it is even more serious to have the Word from God and reject it. Amos warned:

"Woe unto you that desire the day of the Lord! to what end is it for you? the day of the Lord is darkness, and not light. As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him. Shall not the day of the Lord be darkness, and not light? even very dark, and no brightness in it?... But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream... Therefore will I cause you to go into captivity... saith the Lord, whose name is The God of hosts" (5:18-20, 24, 27).

To illustrate the near complete stripping of the land, Amos warned, "Thus saith the Lord; As the shepherd taketh out of the mouth of the lion two legs, or a piece of an ear; so shall the children of Israel be taken out that dwell in Samaria" (3:12).

The well-known passage from Micah summarizes quite well the teaching of Amos as to how those who profess to be the people of God should live. "He hath shewed thee, O man, what is good; and what doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Mic. 6:8).

III. Amos Sounded A Note Of Encouragement In His Message

The preacher who offers no ray of light or some extension of mercy will have no one to whom to preach or only a few fatalists. To the righteous minority of Israel, Amos offered salvation.

"Forasmuch therefore as your treading is upon the poor, and ye take from him burdens of wheat: ye have built houses of hewn stone, but ye shall not dwell in

them; ye have planted pleasant vineyards, but ye shall not drink wine of them. For I know your manifold transgressions and your mighty sins: they afflict the just, they take a bribe, and they turn aside the poor in the gate from their right [they do not render fair judgment]. Therefore the prudent shall keep silence in that time; for it is an evil time. Seek good, and not evil, that ye may live: and so the Lord, the God of hosts, shall be with you, as ye have spoken. Hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate: it may be that the Lord God of hosts will be gracious unto the remnant of Joseph" (Amos 5:11-15, italics added).

In the midst of a solemn pronouncement of judgment, Amos gives a promise that a remnant of Israel shall be saved.

"Behold, the eyes of the Lord God are upon the sinful kingdom, and I will destroy it from off the face of the earth; saving that I will not utterly destroy the house of Jacob, saith the Lord. For, lo, I will command, and I will sift the house of Israel among all nations, like as corn is sifted in a sieve, yet shall not the least grain fall on the earth... In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen... and I will build it as in the days of old... Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed; and the mountains shall drop sweet wine, and all the hills shall melt. And I will bring again the captivity of my people of Israel, and they shall build the waste cities, and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and drink the wine thereof; they shall also make gardens, and eat the fruit of them. And I will plant them upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up out of their land which I have given them, saith the Lord thy God" (9:8-9, 11, 13-15).

On this positive, reassuring note Amos ends his prophecy to Israel. As a plain man he has delivered his rugged message to all who heard and all who read. He had a message for the ages. May his word live on as it is proclaimed today.

Amos learned how to put his message from the Lord into language that would make it receivable in every age. Plain man as he was, scholars observe that in Amos there is found some of the purest and best Hebrew in the Old Testament. A preacher does not need to accept mediocrity. By diligence and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit he can excel and leave a message for generations following.

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04 -- MAN OF VISION -- Text: Isa. 6:1

Introduction

Among the qualifications for a spiritual leader, vision has a place of high priority. In words ascribed to Solomon it is affirmed, "Where there is no vision, the people perish" (Prov. 29:18). It is not expected that all the people are to be blessed with clear vision, but those who are charged with responsible leadership must

possess dependable understanding of values current, permanent, and eternal. John R. Mott, a distinguished leader and voice for missionary enterprise in the early years of the 20th century, defined vision as the ability to see what others do not see, to see farther than they see, and see before they see.

Among the men of the Bible who were blessed with keen, discriminating, farseeing vision, Isaiah certainly would be given first place. In the sixth chapter of his prophecy a life-changing experience is described. That meaningful vision became the dawning light that shines through all the years of Isaiah's long and brilliant ministry.

I. Isaiah Saw Accurately The Current Situations

Men who would lift a clarion call to guide their own generation must be aware of prevailing conditions. Those who do not, speak into a vacuum. They are detached and unrelated to their contemporaries. To be sure, a prophet must not be obsessed with current events. Nevertheless, he cannot live in the past or dream only of the future. He must be a man of today.

This prophet, who proclaimed a message both timely and timeless, saw the Eternal God, transcendent. He was high and lifted up. But he also saw God as immanent, active in the affairs of now. The transforming vision came in the year that King Uzziah died. He was the God of the present crisis in the affairs of the nation. God inhabits eternity. Nevertheless, there is nothing hidden from His all-seeing eyes. They run to and fro throughout the earth. Darkness does not dim His sight.

Included in Isaiah's vision was a revelation of himself as a man of unclean lips. They were not defiled by the fact that he was in a sinful environment, but rather from the corruption of his own defiled nature. The prophet saw himself in the light of God's holiness. He also saw God could -- and would -- make him holy. The seraphim were crying, "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts" (Isa. 6:3). Then flew one of the seraphs with a live coal in his hand which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar. He laid it upon the unclean lips and said, "Thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged" (v. 7). Isaiah reached his hand to touch the faith line. He was sanctified wholly centuries before Pentecost.

The youthful prophet was now qualified to preach to the people of unclean lips among whom he dwelt. He heard God ask, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" In obedience he responded, "Here am I; send me" (v. 8).

Now with eyes wide open, Isaiah saw the deplorable degradation of the society with which he was identified. He preached it: "The whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot even unto the head there is no soundness in it; but wounds, and bruises, and putrifying sores: they have not been closed, neither bound up, neither mollified with ointment... Except the Lord of hosts

had left unto us a very small remnant, we should have been as Sodom, and we should have been like unto Gomorrah" (1:5-6, 9).

In this corruption and lawlessness, religion had become formal and decadent. To the Temple-treading priests God declared: "When ye spread forth your hands, I will hide mine eyes from you: yea, when ye make many prayers, I will not hear: your hands are full of blood" (v. 15).

The faithful seer pronounced woe and judgment upon the evildoers among his contemporaries. He said woe to the greedy; the drunkards; those who mixed their moral judgments, calling good evil, and evil good; the intellectually proud; and those who justify the wicked for reward (5:8, 11, 20, 21, 23).

Therefore, the anger of the Lord was kindled against His people. His hand of judgment was stretched forth still (v. 25).

In spite of the prevailing evil, God was willing to show mercy. He always is. The prophet sounded an invitation and a promise: "Come now, and let us reason together, saith the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool" (1:18).

Men of clear insight and understanding see danger and disaster. They sound a trumpet blast to warn of impending peril. But they are never morbid or despairing; they see light against a dark sky. They declare that faith in God does not go unrewarded.

II. Isaiah Saw That The Present Relates To The Future

The "prince of the prophets" knew that the strength and victory of any nation depended upon its righteous character more than on its military might. He believed that if Judah would keep God's commandments and trust in God, she would be invincible when other godless nations made war against her. Therefore, when the kings of Syria and Samaria came to Jerusalem to depose Ahaz, the king, Isaiah counselled the king, "Say ye not, A confederacy... neither fear ye their fear, nor be afraid. Sanctify the Lord of hosts himself; and let him be your fear" (Isa. 8:12-13). His word to the king was: Immanuel, God in the midst, is the Source of your strength and victory.

When King Ahaz proposed an alliance with Assyria, the prophet warned that they would be shaved with a hired razor, and that God would then use Assyria, a more wicked nation, as the rod of His anger to punish His own stubborn and rebellious Judah -- the people of His choice.

When Assyrian armies had conquered Syria and Samaria, the Northern Kingdom of Israel, and carried them captive to Nineveh and had invaded Judah and conquered much of the land, making the nation pay heavy tribute, Sennacherib, the

king of Assyria, laid siege to Jerusalem. The present king, Hezekiah, received a threatening letter urging him not to resist the might of Assyria. The king spread the letter before the Lord and prayed for deliverance. God heard his prayer and sent Isaiah to say to the king, "The king of Assyria... shall not come into this city... By the way that he came, by the same shall he return." Then the angel of the Lord went forth and smote in the camp of the Assyrians 185,000. The next morning they were all dead corpses. The king of Assyria returned to Nineveh to be murdered by his own sons (37:14-38).

Later in the reign of Hezekiah, when he had been threatened with death and recovered, he received a delegation from Babylon, ostensibly to congratulate him upon his recovery. Instead, they were probably there as spies. Flattered by their visit, Hezekiah showed them all the treasures of his house. Upon learning what the king had done, Isaiah predicted, "The days come, that all that is in thine house... shall be carried to Babylon... and... thy sons... shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon" (39:6-7; cf. 1-5).

The days came when that prophecy was fulfilled: Nebuchadnezzar's armies came in their might to carry captives to Babylon. Finally, because the then reigning king rebelled against the Chaldeans, their land was laid waste, their city and the Temple were destroyed, and Judah and Jerusalem were shorn of many of their able people. They were carried into captivity for 70 years.

Nevertheless, Isaiah saw and declared that a remnant should return. He promised, "The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away" (35:10).

Isaiah was a prophet of the court of the kings. It is possible that he was of the royal family. Living close to the kings as he did, he could warn them that what he saw taking place before his eyes, and theirs, was a portent of what would transpire in the next 100 years. Any nation in any day needs seers and prophets like Isaiah.

III. Isaiah, Inspired, Saw Future Centuries And Millenniums

By special divine inspiration the prophet received telescopic vision which gave him this long-range view. Especially did this pertain to the coming of the Messiah, Savior, and King. Isaiah foresaw the coming of the virgin-born Son of God. He said, "Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14).

This is one of those announcements rather frequently found in Hebrew prophecy which is capable of double interpretation. It had an interpretation fulfilled in the immediate future. Nevertheless, there was a fulfillment some 700 years later. Matthew proclaims the birth of Jesus, Son of God and Son of Mary, is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prediction (Matt. 1:21-23).

That was the beginning of the earthly life of Jesus of Nazareth. In Him "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

Isaiah portrayed the Servant role of the Messiah in four poetic Servant songs. He sang, "Behold my servant, whom I uphold; mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth; I have put my spirit upon him... He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed shall he not break, and the smoking flax shall he not quench. He shall bring forth judgment unto truth. He shall not fail nor be discouraged, till he have set judgment in the earth" (Isa. 42:1-4).

In the second song, this word is found: "The Lord hath called me from the womb... And he hath made my mouth like a sharp sword; in the shadow of his hand hath he hid me, and made me a polished shaft; in his quiver hath he hid me" (49:1-2).

In the third song of the Servant an appropriate description is included: "The Lord God hath given me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary... I gave my back to the smiters, and my cheeks to them that plucked off the hair.., the Lord God will help me... therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed" (50:4, 6-7).

The fourth word picture of the Suffering Servant of Jehovah begins in 52:13 and includes the entire 53rd chapter. Here is the most accurate portrayal of what took place at Calvary to be found in the Sacred Record. The heart of the song and of the gospel story is this middle verse: "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed" (53:5).

Because He provided full atonement, the prophet saw eyes of the blind opened and the ears of the deaf unstopped; the lame man did leap as a hart, and he heard the tongue of the dumb sing (35:5-6). The Servant Savior is the Almighty Redeemer of the fallen race of man. He had authority on earth to forgive sin, which He proved by His miracle-working power.

In His hometown of Nazareth, Jesus read Isa. 61:1:

"The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound." He added, "This day is this scripture fulfilled" (Luke 4:21).

Among the prophets, Isaiah is unique in that with deeper understanding than any other, he saw and declared the gospel of the new covenant. He has been called the gospel prophet. His farseeing vision included the glorious promises of Christ's

coming again. Some of his beautiful passages blend both the First and Second Advents. One of these is in chapter 9, verses 6 and 7: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever." Another great utterance yet to be fulfilled is "Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save" (63:1).

While Isaiah preached in lofty accents of the great things to be in the eternal kingdom of the Father, he also gave wonderful promises to encourage his readers for all time to trust God for grace and power to live victoriously every day. He said, "No weapon that is formed against thee shall prosper; and every tongue that shall rise against thee in judgment thou shalt condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their righteousness is of me, saith the Lord" (54:17). With great confidence, he cried, "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint" (40:31).

If any preacher is looking for an ideal, he can see him in Isaiah. Great preachers are never in oversupply. They appear only occasionally in the history of Israel and the Church. Of all of the great ones, Isaiah is without a peer. For beauty of language, for inspiring content, for truth for today and every day, Isaiah is the model.

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05 -- MAN GREATLY BELOVED -- Text: Dan. 10:11a

Introduction

It is altogether proper for a man who represents the Christ of God to be loved. To be loved, he must be loving. Jesus is the prime Example of love made flesh. He said, "As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love... This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you" (John 15:9-10, 12).

It is certain that a man of honest convictions, who embodies lofty principles and preaches according to the Word of God, will not enjoy the loving approval of all men; but there will be many to admire and love him. There have been some faithful prophets who stood for truth and righteousness who have suffered rejection and martyrdom. But future generations have honored them and garnished their tombs. Probably some men of more courage than wisdom have invited hostility and

persecution. Any who do, and do so voluntarily, might enlist the love and loyalty of some friends with willingness to die for them. Let every preacher declare the truth for the sake of truth; all who raise their voices with mixed motives may do the cause of Christ as much harm as good. All true prophets of God are delivered from the corroding effects of self-interest.

Daniel earned the characterization of a man greatly beloved, being honest with himself, straightforward and humble in dealing with all others, great or small, and by a serene faith in God.

I. Daniel Was A Man Of Consistent Self-Discipline

One cannot imagine temptation to compromise with an evil environment more severe and demanding than that to which Daniel and his three Hebrew companions were subjected. Nevertheless, they stood the test with admirable equanimity and strength. They were no doubt brought to Babylon with the first group of captives carried from Jerusalem by the Chaldeans. No one knows how long they had been in captivity, nor how old they were. They had been through a careful screening process. They were chosen because of their extraordinary intelligence and charm. It seemed certain that they were headed for promotion and favor with the king.

It would have been easy for them to have offered a rationalized defense for going along with the rest who were in their class. They were in a completely new culture where their standards were utterly unknown. They were far from home, parents, teachers, and religious influence. No one who cared would know what they did. The food and drink offered them was normal in their present situation. Any refusal to do the expected thing could lose them the opportunities within their grasp. If their action was considered rebellion, they could be imprisoned or put to death. Their names were even changed to those that referred to heathen gods.

But those who had trained them in the Hebrew traditions and faith had done their work well. They were confident that to do right, as they understood the right, was the only course to pursue. They were persons of free moral agency. They had no concept that situation ethics was a choice open to them. When Melzar warned them of possible results of their decision, they simply replied, "Put us to the test." While others were eating a diet of choice meat and drinking wine from the king's table, they were on a strict vegetarian diet.

It was not in a self-righteous spirit; these Hebrew captives were simply living according to the customs and convictions of their fathers. The commandments of God and the teachings of Moses were the basis of those convictions. If righteousness is to be preserved in the earth, succeeding generations must not adjust moral standards to relieve the social pressure. If in any modern set of circumstances men would see the Lord's power displayed, they must live by the

changeless principles that were given of God to Moses. God will defend the righteous man or nation in the power of His almighty Spirit.

Daniel and his compatriots passed their test with flying colors. At the end of 10 days they were fairer and fatter than any of those under consideration for promotion to positions of trust; "and in all matters of wisdom and understanding, that the king enquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and astrologers that were in all his realm" (Dan. 1:20).

As a result of Daniel's unshakable purpose, he was blessed with a long life of wise counsel to kings, even to the reign of Cyrus the Persian. His fellow captives were strengthened for even more severe tests in the future. When Nebuchadnezzar required them to worship the golden image which he had set up or to be cast into the furnace heated seven times hotter than usual, they said, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we are not careful to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace, and he will deliver us out of thine hand, O king. BUT IF NOT, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up" (3:16-18, small caps. added).

The story of their deliverance is well known. They came out of the fiery furnace without a hair on their heads singed and with no smell of smoke on their garments. The final word of the king was, "I make a decree, that every people, nation, and language, which speak anything amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, shall be cut in pieces, and their houses shall be made a dunghill: because there is no other God that can deliver after this sort. Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, in the province of Babylon" (3:29-30).

The far-reaching effect of Daniel's steadfast purpose to live a disciplined life cannot be overestimated. He profited greatly. His companions gained strength and honor. The king was convinced there were no gods like Daniel's God. All who in passing centuries have heard the story, have been inspired.

We can still sing loudly:

**Dare to be a Daniel!
Dare to stand alone!
Dare to have a purpose firm!
Dare to make it known!**

All modern Christians and especially preachers and teachers must have firm convictions and live by them.

II. Daniel Was A Man Of Simple And Sincere Devotion To God

It is to be expected that a man, especially one lifted to prominence from among captives, would be an object of jealousy among his peers and subordinates. By several kings, Daniel had been shown special favor and been called upon for counsel more than any other man of the realm. When Darius the Mede came to reign, he, too, saw in Daniel a man of exceptional ability and wisdom. He did not conceal this confidence in Daniel. He "set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom; and over these three presidents; of whom Daniel was first... Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm. Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him" (Dan. 6:1-4).

These envious men decided that there could be no complaint against Daniel except concerning the law of his God. Therefore, they went about to lay a snare for the man they sought to destroy. They prepared a decree that determined that any man who should worship any god except the king for 30 days should be cast into the den of lions. They tricked Darius into signing their decree. Then they charged, "That Daniel... of the captivity of Judah, regardeth not thee, O king, nor the decree that thou hast signed, but maketh his petition three times a day" (v. 13).

Darius was grieved and sought to spare Daniel; but his enemies reminded the king that this decree was according to the law of the Medes and Persians that alters not. Then the king commanded and they brought Daniel and cast him into the den of lions.

How did Daniel behave himself under what seemed to be a sentence of death? He did not act as one who had a chip on his shoulder. He was not as one taking a dare. He did not say, "I'll show you I am not afraid." It was with sublime faith in God and in total commitment to His perfect will that Daniel "went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime" (v. 10). Daniel simply did not change what had been a habit of his daily life. It was that continuous communion with God that gave him strength. He had prayed without ceasing. Therefore, he could trust in the hour of crisis when his persecutors came to lead him to the lions' den. They needed no chain to bind him and used no force to compel him. In calm courage and faith in God, like a stalwart man, he walked to the open door of the den of lions.

Even the king believed God would deliver him. He said to Daniel, "Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee" (v. 16). The king spoke words of truth. Daniel spent a quiet, peaceful night among the lions. Their hunger pangs were suspended. Their ferocious natures were changed. They were like gentle, domestic animals. They seemed like pets to God's prophet. It was God who "stopped the mouths of lions" (Heb. 11:33).

It was the king who spent an anxious, troubled night. His sleep went from him. He was up early the next morning and hurried to the den of lions. He cried with a lamentable voice, "O Daniel,... is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?" Daniel, in clear, full voice, replied, "O king, live for ever. My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me." Then the king ordered Daniel taken up from the den of lions (cf. Dan. 6:18-23).

Daniel asked for no revenge on his foes. He knew that vengeance belongs to God alone. But Darius ordered the accusers of the man with the charmed life, with their wives and children, cast into the lions' den. And before their bodies touched the floor, their bones were broken in pieces. Again, a heathen king gave glory to God. To all that dwell on the earth he wrote, "Peace be multiplied unto you. I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and stedfast for ever" (vv. 25-26).

All this came about because Daniel was a devout and faithful servant of God. The end is not yet. This same God rules forever and forever. He will always give His presence and deliverance to those who keep Him in first place in their lives.

III. Daniel Was Characterized By Utter Dependence On God

When Nebuchadnezzar had forgotten his dream and made the absurd demand of his magicians that they tell him what he had dreamed and give the interpretation of it, they said no man on earth can tell the king what he dreamed. They insisted he tell them the dream, and then they would tell him what it meant. The angry monarch threatened them with death for their failure to do the impossible. He ordered their immediate execution. Daniel was sought to be put to death with the other wise men.

Then it was that Daniel asked that the killing be delayed. He went before the king and asked for time. He went to his house and told his three Hebrew friends the story, adding that they, too, would be slain. Then was the secret made known to Daniel in a vision in the night. He praised God for His revealed wisdom. He informed Arioch, the executioner, who brought Daniel to the king. He told the tyrant, "There is a God in heaven who reveals secrets. He has made known your dream." Whereupon Daniel gave Nebuchadnezzar the content of the dream and the interpretation. The meaning gave honor to the Babylonian ruler and a preview of what would happen for many centuries and millenniums to come, according to many students of Daniel's prophecy. Daniel added, "Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory... Thou art this head of gold" (Dan. 2:37-38; cf. 1-45).

The proud king fell on his face before Daniel and said, "Of a truth... your God is a God of gods, and a Lord of kings, and a revealer of secrets" (v. 47). The king

made Daniel a great man, gave him many gifts, and made him ruler of the whole province of Babylon. At Daniel's request, the king set his three Hebrew partners over the affairs of the kingdom; but Daniel sat in the gate of the king (vv. 48-49).

All this success and honor did not cause Daniel to become arrogant. He maintained his spirit of dependence upon God. When the king had another dream, he found his magicians unwilling or unable to make known its meaning. Daniel came before the man who was the head of gold in the previous vision. This time Nebuchadnezzar remembered what he had seen and reported it to Daniel. Daniel was shocked by what he heard. He waited for an hour before he spoke. No doubt he prayed to God to give him the correct interpretation and the courage to speak the truth. This dream did not flatter the king. It was harsh and humiliating. Nevertheless, the king asked for an honest interpretation, which Daniel faithfully reported. He was to be deposed from his throne. He would be a deranged man, dwelling with the beasts of the field, eating grass as oxen do until he had learned that the Most High rules the kingdom of men and gives it to whomsoever He will (4:25).

The king lived on in pride and power for a year. As he walked in his palace, he said, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built...?" While the words were in his mouth, a voice from heaven said, "The kingdom is departed from thee" (vv. 30-31). The dream and Daniel's interpretation all came to pass. He was driven from men and did eat grass as the oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven; his hair grew like eagles' feathers and his nails like bird claws. In his dream he had seen that a stump of the great tree remained with its roots. This, according to Daniel, was a promise of restoration to Nebuchadnezzar. When that came true, the king made a noble and inspired confession, He blessed the Most High and praised and honored Him that liveth forever. His reason returned.

In all his successes and promotions Daniel remained unspoiled. His ego was never inflated. He always proved to be a man of excellent spirit. One instance or many did not change his awareness that his wisdom and understanding came from God. His life was extended while kingdoms rose and fell; he continued to be an advisor to the monarchs.

When Belshazzar, the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar, came to the throne, in uproarious revelry at a feast with a thousand of his lords, the sacred vessels from the Temple of God in Jerusalem were the containers from which wine was drunk. This climax of profanity met judgment from the God of heaven. Mysteriously, a hand appeared, writing on the wall. The words were in a strange language.

The king was frightened almost beyond control. He called for the magicians to read and translate what was written. They were consternated. But the queen mother remembered Daniel and that he had light and understanding when all other wise men failed. He was called and asked to read and interpret the words that glared from the wall. The message was solemn: "God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it... Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting... Thy

kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians" (5:26-28). Thereupon, the king honored Daniel and declared him to be the third ruler in the kingdom. That night was Belshazzar slain. And Darius the Mede took the kingdom.

Daniel remains forever with record unmarred by failure and with a character blameless before God and men. He is a perfect example of self-discipline, devotion to his God, and dependence upon the faithfulness of God to guide and use him for His glory. He lived a long life, continuing in helpful ministry to his people, to the kings under whom he served, and to the centuries that have come and gone.

May God give the church and the world an army of men to live as Daniel did and serve the present age. All of them will be men "greatly beloved."

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06 -- MAN OF PRAYER -- Text: Jas. 5:17-18

Introduction

To Elijah, listening was a very important part of praying. The reason he prayed effectually was that he had received God's directives before he prayed.

Many praying Christians think of prayer as a one-way communication. They make their requests known unto God and do not listen for God's answer. Such praying is better than none. It does mean that the one who prays is strengthened by his faithful appeal to God. But prayer is communion, as well as petition. For one to know the greatest satisfaction and blessing in prayer, he must learn to listen for the Spirit of God to speak to his consciousness. He does speak in terms of assurance and guidance. This is more important than definite answers to specific requests.

James observed, "The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much" (5:16). He then cited Elijah as a man whose prayers were heard and answered. The reason Elijah's prayers are remembered is that they were answered. They would have been forgotten with their utterance but for the fact that there were answers. The God of Elijah is the God who answers prayer. "The God who heard Elijah answers prayer today."

The clear implication of James is that Elijah was a righteous man. He knew God's law and obeyed it. The Psalmist wrote, "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Ps. 66:18). Listening to the voice of the Spirit leads to purity of heart, which qualifies one to pray in faith and receive answers according to the will of God.

I. Elijah Was A Mystic

The grandest and most dramatic character that Israel ever produced had no genealogy. We know nothing of his family tree. He emerges to deliver a shocking message to King Ahab simply as Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead. He came from an obscure village east of the Jordan. Like his New Testament counterpart, John the Baptist, much of his life was spent in seclusion. Having delivered his message to Ahab, God told him, "Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and hide thyself" (1 Kings 17:3). He remained by the brook Cherith until it was dried up in the drought. It seems that only the ravens knew where he was.

Elijah's next move was to Zarephath, where God had commanded a widow to sustain him. Only a man with an ear and mind tuned to the voice of God would have been willing to obey such an order. It was some distance from the brook, still in the famine-stricken land. The prophet could have reasoned that to ask a widow to feed him in the time of famine was ridiculous. His sense of the fitness of things could have restrained him. But Elijah was familiar with the voice of the Spirit of God, and he obeyed. As he approached the city, he saw a woman gathering sticks to make a fire. Elijah asked her for a drink of water and a morsel of bread. As she turned to go, she informed him that she had only a handful of meal and a little oil which she was preparing to cook for herself and her son. They would eat it and die. This stranger from nowhere said, "Make me a little cake first." It took nerve to say that to her, but Elijah did not stop there. He added, "Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, The barrel of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day the Lord sendeth rain upon the earth" (v. 14).

In his obedience to the word of the Lord, Elijah found food and water for the duration; and through his obedience and faith the widow and her son were saved from starvation. In all his life Elijah was not following a book of rules. He was listening and obeying the voice of God as he heard it. There may be a thin line between mysticism and fanaticism; nevertheless, the men who have done God's will and His work in historic events have had directives that came not through men giving wise counsel, but from the Word of the Lord. None should presume to act out of harmony with God's Word, the Bible; and they should try the spirits whether they be of God (1 John 4:1). There are a few times, however, when a man is sure he has heard God speak. Then there is no risk in obeying. Under some circumstances, only the voice of God's Spirit within can be the deciding influence in making a choice.

On the last day before Elijah was taken up, his movements and communications to Elisha must have seemed strange and baffling. Only because the junior prophet knew his master so well, and was given understanding by the Spirit of God, did he comprehend all that it meant. The mysteries that had characterized his life reached their climax when God took him away in a whirlwind. The sons of the prophets at Jericho were so amazed that they expected their headmaster would be found somewhere in the wilderness. They insisted that they organize a search party and go find him. Elisha told them there was no use; when they persisted, he consented. Their expedition was in vain; Elijah was gone.

There is no room for doubt that Elijah was the great man in all that period of Israel's history. His name appears frequently in the record of the years that followed. A climax of the story came when Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. There, Peter, James, and John saw and recognized him.

II. Elijah Was A Man Of Dramatic Action

Living a secluded life as the prophet did, his public appearances were the more startling. His first appearance to Ahab was a shocking performance. He stood before the king with no previous announcement. He declared, "As the Lord God of Israel liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word" (1 Kings 17:1). Small wonder that the king had him under suspicion from that hour and dubbed him the troubler in Israel.

There is no event in the life of Elijah to compare with the great drama on Mount Carmel. There were preliminary steps that led up to the confrontation with Ahab. Knowing his life was at stake, Elijah showed himself to the king, who instantly recognized him and railed on him the charge of being the cause of the famine. Elijah rejected responsibility and turned the accusation against Ahab himself. He answered, "I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the Lord, and thou hast followed Baalim" (18:18). Without waiting for a reply, Elijah issued the daring challenge to the showdown on Mount Carmel.

Elijah's word to the people was "How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him" (v. 21). There was no answer from the people. The stage for the great, decisive confrontation was set. Elijah alone was God's prophet and representative. There were 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of the groves. Two bullocks were prepared for sacrifice. Elijah said to the Baalites, "Choose one bullock. I will take the one left to me. You prepare your offering and put no fire under it. I will do the same. You call on your gods and I will call on the Lord. The God that answers by fire, let Him be God" (see vv. 23-24).

At all points in human judgment the advantages belonged to the idol worshippers. They were many; Elijah was alone. They were in the favor of the king and the people; Elijah was an offender. They took all day; Elijah, less than a minute to pray. Among the Baal deities was the sun. It was the source of all natural power, light, and heat. If he could do anything, he could start a fire.

The false prophets called on their gods. Nothing happened. They cried aloud; there was no answer. By noon they were spent. Elijah jeered them. They leaped on their altars; they cut themselves with lancets until the blood gushed out. As the sun was setting, they gave up. Their faith, even their hope for an answer was gone. There was neither voice nor any answer.

Now Elijah took command. He invited the people to come near. They responded. He repaired the broken-down, long-neglected altar of the Lord. As testimony to his faith in the God of the patriarchs, he took 12 stones representing the 12 tribes of Israel. He built an altar in the name of the Lord. He dug a trench around it. He put the wood in order and laid the bullock on it. To eliminate all chance of a fake, he ordered the bullock, the wood, and the altar drenched with 12 barrels of water. At the time of the evening sacrifice, Elijah came near. He offered a prayer of about 65 English words. It was about 30 seconds in length. The motivation was to glorify God and turn the hearts of His people back to Him. The fire fell. The sacrifice, the wood, the stones, and the water were all consumed. The people fell on their faces and repeated, "The Lord, he is the God."

The falling of the fire was important in that dramatic performance. But the most important point to be remembered for all time is that the God to whom Elijah prayed answered his prayer. He is the living God of all eternity. He hears and answers prayer. The gods of the false prophets were creatures made by their own hands or in their vain imagination. The God of Elijah was, and is, the Creator God in whom "we live, and move, and have our being" (Acts 17:28).

The man of God, full of courageous faith, had won the victory for the only true and living God. He saw it not as a personal triumph, but as a demonstration to the nation that God is the Almighty One, and that there is no likeness to which to compare Him. This made Mount Carmel the scene of a momentous victory for believing people for all time.

In righteous wrath Elijah brought all the prophets of Baal present there down to the brook Kishon and slew them there. Then in a commanding voice, Elijah turned to Ahab and said, "Get thee up, eat and drink; for there is a sound of abundance of rain." The king went up to eat and drink; but Elijah went up to the top of Mount Carmel, and he cast himself down upon the earth and put his face between his knees (1 Kings 18:41-42). He prayed after his victory, as well as before it. He told his servant to look toward the sea. He reported nothing. In obedience the servant went again seven times to look. He finally reported, "I see a cloud the size of a man's hand." That was enough for God's prophet. He told the servant to give orders to Ahab, "Prepare thy chariot, and get thee down, that the rain stop thee not." Soon black clouds and wind were in the sky, and there was a great rain. The hand of the Lord was on Elijah. He girded himself and in superhuman strength and speed, he ran before Ahab to the entrance of Jezreel. He was in an ecstasy of excitement and victory. The record of this Mount Carmel struggle is considered by some as the most dramatic story of biblical history. Elijah was the chief actor.

III. Elijah Was Human

In his moments of reflection, depression bore Elijah down. His courage and daring changed to fear. To most, if not all men who achieve mighty deeds, there

comes the time when the pendulum of their emotions swings from one extreme to the opposite.

Elijah discovered that he had not slain all the false prophets at the brook Kishon; for all were not present on Mount Carmel. He soon learned that Ahab had changed only superficially and that his pagan wife, Jezebel, had vowed that he would be dead in less than 24 hours. All this in a moment of discouragement caused Elijah to flee for his life. He reached Beersheba -- some distance from Jezreel -- left his servant there, and went a day's journey into the wilderness. He sought solitude; he wanted to be alone. Discouragement causes more men to quit than any other reason. They want to leave it all. In such moments all men, especially preachers, should find companionship rather than isolation.

Elijah found his juniper tree. There he prayed to die. God knew his servant needed rest, sleep, and food. He gave all to him. The prophet did eat and drink and went in the strength of it for 40 days and nights. From there he went to Horeb, another 175 miles. There he found a cave and occupied it. The word of the Lord came to him. One can never get away from God. The Psalmist cried, "Whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me" (Ps. 139:7-10).

God came to Elijah in the cave. In gentle rebuke He asked, "What doest thou here, Elijah?"

In reply the disheartened man complained, "I am zealous for the Lord of hosts; the people have forsaken Thy covenants and slain Thy prophets. I only am left, and they seek to take my life."

God told him, "Stand on the mount." A strong wind rent the mountain. There followed an earthquake; a fire broke out. The Lord was in none of those powerful forces of destruction. After that display, there came a still, small voice; it was God's voice. When Elijah had repeated his complaint, God contradicted him: "I have left me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him" (1 Kings 19:18).

There are many dark clouds in our sky today. They will never be all taken away. Nevertheless, those who fear God, especially the ministers of the gospel, have much to encourage them. Millions of devout, earnest Christians can be found. They are the salt of the world. As long as God is in heaven, His Spirit will be at work in the world. Holy people will never be wiped out. God is not dead, nor has He forsaken His own. Jesus said, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom" (Luke 12:32).

Then God told Elijah, "There is still something to do." He said, "Go and anoint Hazael to be king over Syria." This, no doubt, was to remind His servant that there would always be enemies of Israel and of God. He also told the prophet that he was to anoint Jehu king of Israel, which was to say: I am not finished with My chosen people. Elijah was again told to anoint Elisha prophet in his place; meaning, Even when you are gone, I will carry on your work; for it is My work, too. Jesus said, "I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it" (Matt. 16:18).

Elijah obeyed God's word to him. He left none of it undone. He knew that the word of Samuel was always true. "To obey is better than sacrifice" (1 Sam. 15:22).

When Elijah turned his feet again to the path of obedience, the old fire began to burn. Iron was restored to his blood; steel strengthened his backbone. God spoke to him with another order that called for courage. Ahab had sinned grievously, inspired by his wicked wife. When Naboth refused to sell his vineyard to the king, a plot to kill him and take his property was executed. Ahab was in the act of taking the vineyard because he was the king. Abuse of power by rulers has long been their practice. "Power is poison." At God's command, Elijah met Ahab in Naboth's vineyard. Again, without apology or introduction, he confronted the king with stern words of judgment. "Thus saith the Lord, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine." The king asked, "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" (1 Kings 21:19-20). Elijah had a further word from the Lord, "The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel" (v. 23).

God gave Ahab a stay of sentence because he humbled himself. But eventually all came to pass according to the word of God to Elijah. Yes, although there were times when he seemed superhuman, Elijah was human. As James observes in his reference to the prophet of ancient times, he was a man like other men. Perhaps the most common misjudgment of preachers is that they have been dehumanized. Their high calling has a tendency to set them apart. They are, however, as sensitive, dependent, appreciative, and desirous to be understood as anyone. They crave companionship. The strongest, most individualistic, most courageous preachers I have known, were men who felt the bite of criticism most keenly. To know them well was to know they were human.

Preachers who live a life of prayer receive an answer in themselves. They have wisdom to make right choices, strength to bear heavy burdens, grace to overcome opposition and criticism. They love God and obey Him. They love people and serve them. They receive honor with humility and rewards with gratitude.

Elijah was a man of power because he was a man of prayer. God was with him and honored him.

* * * * *

Introduction

In many respects Ezekiel was a prophet with whom modern preachers can identify. He was a priest as well as a prophet. He had been trained and inducted into the priesthood before God called him to be His mouthpiece to the people. He was qualified to represent the people before God. And he was an inspired messenger sent from God to preach to the people. All God-called preachers should be men of intercessory prayer as well as men with a message from the Lord.

Ezekiel was a captive among captives. All who preach the saving gospel are sinners saved by grace. They cannot be patronizing, condescending, holier-than-thou peddlers of religion. They, too, have been lifted from the mire and the clay.

Ezekiel prophesied doom but offered hope and faith for the future. Ezekiel was a man who suffered. He knew the pain and shame of being a captive in a strange land. He experienced the agony of knowing that his beloved city was destroyed and his homeland laid waste. But God taught him to hold up his head and to keep believing that in God there was restoration and hope for a better, brighter day. By God's command and with His help, when his wife died, he showed no signs of mourning, that the other captives might be brave and strong when the bad news of Jerusalem's fall came. The man of God cannot allow himself to fall victim to his inescapable sorrow. He must keep on believing and singing even in his darkest hour.

I. The Preparation Of Ezekiel As God's Prophet Is Inspiring

This captive prophet was not without formal education. His training for the priesthood provided him with a foundation of learning on which to build. His mind was disciplined to learn and listen. That kind of preparation is never to be scorned. Those who have been denied it should lament their misfortune. But Ezekiel's spiritual experiences were more important. Without them he would have been only a captive.

His introduction of himself is a testimony in chapter 1, verse 1: "The heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God." That vision doubtless was the most important factor in his unique and farseeing ministry to captive Israel and to the world.

It is the foundation for the mission and continuing ministry of men of God in all generations. The message of Amos, which is adapted to the need of mankind in all the centuries past and yet to be, began when he heard God say, "Go preach" (cf. Amos 7:15).

Jeremiah's ability to stand like an iron pillar, brazen walls, and a defended city was due to the fact he heard God say, "I have put My words in your mouth" (cf.

Jer. 1:9). Isaiah's message, which transcends time and dispensations, and spans millennia with eternal truth, is the result of seeing God high and lifted up. Likewise, Paul heard Jesus say, "I have appeared unto thee..., to make thee a minister and a witness" (Acts 26:16). Long after, he could testify, "I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision" (v. 19).

And what can I more say of Luther, Wesley, Bresee, whose lives were changed and redirected by a vision of God, clear and unforgettable. Of all the long line of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, it can be truly said that their worthwhile service to God and man had its inception in a confrontation with God.

To keep the presence of God an abiding reality in the life of the prophet, God gave Ezekiel a "second blessing." "And he said unto me, Son of man, stand upon thy feet, and I will speak unto thee. And the spirit entered into me when he spake unto me, and set me upon my feet, that I heard him that spake unto me" (Ezek. 2:1-2). No effective preacher of righteousness can rest entirely upon an initial experience for a ministry of continuing power. There must be the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit to make men aware and strong and positive in preaching the Word.

This high calling demands men who stand on their feet in courage and strength when issues are drawn -- when the call comes, "Who is on the Lord's side?" Men who watch the weather vane to see which way the wind is blowing before they cast their vote or let their voice be heard are not worth the price of fringe benefits, to say nothing of their salary. They are unworthy successors of the apostles, no matter how their ordination was obtained. They, like Ezekiel, should listen for the word of God and then speak, "Thus saith the Lord." Men of God should always follow the example of Peter and John who, when commanded to speak no more in the Name, replied, "Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20).

Only when we, like them, are filled with the Spirit will we be able to behave as they did. That same Spirit is available to us today. Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but ye know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you" (John 14:15-17). Peter said on the day the Spirit descended, "For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39).

A third element in the preparation of Ezekiel for his prophetic ministry was given of God. "Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, eat that thou findest; eat this roll, and go speak unto the house of Israel. So I opened my mouth, and he caused me to eat that roll. And he said unto me, Son of man, cause thy belly to eat, and fill

thy bowels with this roll that I give thee" (Ezek. 3:1-3). Let us not take this literally. Neither Ezekiel nor I can receive the Word of God by mastication or digestion. It is received in the mind by studying the sacred pages diligently, by obedience of the will, by assimilating it in character likeness to God until we are transformed by its power and prepared to preach the message of the Word of God which liveth and abideth forever.

With such qualifications given of God to Ezekiel, He directed, "Go to a people whose language you know and they know your speech. They can understand. But the house of Israel will not hearken unto you. They are impudent and hardhearted.' Their faces are hard as flint, but I will make your face like adamant. Son of man, I have made you a watchman unto the house of Israel. If you fail to warn them and they die in their sins, their blood will I require at your hands." What a solemn word for preachers today. "If the righteous man you have warned dies in his righteousness, he shall live; whether they hear or whether they forbear, you have delivered your soul."

All preachers in every age need to have a deep conviction of the sacredness and solemnity of their responsibility. Without it they become casual, if not careless. Their motives become mixed and their power is dissipated.

II. The Performance Of Ezekiel Teaches Lessons

Ezekiel listened to the voice of God; then he obeyed. Some hear and disobey; but more fail to listen and rush on to do their own thing, and the result is failure. "Moreover he said unto me, Son of man, all my words that I shall speak unto thee receive in thine heart, and hear with thine ears. And go, get thee to them of the captivity, unto the children of thy people, and speak unto them, and tell them, Thus saith the Lord God; whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear... Then I came to them of the captivity of Tel-abib, that dwelt by the river of Chebar, and I sat where they sat, and remained there astonished among them seven days" (Ezek. 3:10-11, 15).

This obedient prophet identified with the people to whom he was sent. God spoke to Ezekiel as "son of man" 87 times. He was human, frail, faulty, weak, utterly dependent upon God. Ezekiel testified, "I sat where they sat." I was a captive, too. I listened and learned of their sins, sorrows, and complaints.

A preacher must live among his people to know their needs and minister to them. Phillips Brooks said, "The preacher who is not a pastor grows remote. The pastor who is not a preacher grows petty." The detachment of pastors from their people is not a portent of good for either. A shepherd must live among his flock until they know his voice and follow him.

God spoke again to the prophet. "Then the spirit entered into me, and set me upon my feet, and spake with me, and said unto me, Go, shut thyself within thine

house" (Ezek. 3:24). Save yourself from pettiness by cultivating companionship with God in secret places. Save yourself from being a professional showman. If you have power in prayer and communion with God, you can be a leader of men and act in utter sincerity and true humility. It was the Lord who told Jacob after the night of wrestling at Peniel, "As a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed" (Gen. 32:28).

You can be yourself in the pulpit. You do not need to be one person in public appearance and another in social and private life. The touch of God on your life will make you a man of God everywhere. The anointing of God's Spirit will enable you to speak with authority and compassion in the pulpit and give you charisma and grace at home and in the throng.

Jesus was the Word made flesh, and He spoke as one having authority and not as the scribes. He was Son of God and Son of Man. He lived in the presence of God habitually, and He was a man among men. Such divine enduement is within the grasp of every man called of God. "Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you" (John 15:16).

III. The Proclamation Of Ezekiel Is Noteworthy

The prophet gave a faithful and courageous declaration of a message from God. There is a distinction between a sermon and a message. Some preachers come with a well-prepared homiletical sermon. That is to be admired rather than scorned. Others come with a message. It may sometimes lack homiletical form and literary style. Message and sermon can be put together, but a message from the Lord is more important. Ezekiel was a prophet with a word from the Lord.

This prophet has some plain words about sin. The title of Dr. Karl Menninger's recent book, *Whatever Became of Sin?* is a pertinent question for our day. Ezekiel minced no words. He proclaimed, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezek. 18:4, 20).

To Ezekiel sin was the transgression of the covenant commandments. We would do well to identify sin with disobedience to God's law today. The commandments given of God to Moses are principles which underlie the life of righteousness in all generations. Jesus Christ interpreted and expanded them in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5 -- 7). Condemnation and judgment await all who disobey those fundamentals for a decent society to observe.

Ezekiel held every man responsible for his sin. The proverb "The fathers have eaten sour grapes, and the children's teeth are set on edge" (Ezek. 18:2) was to be heard no more in Israel. Rather, the father could not bear the iniquities of his son nor the son his father's. Every man shall bear his own burden. There is a lot of

loose talk today about where responsibility rests for a crime (situation ethics, environment, society). But none can take away a person's right to choose his way and determine his acts. All men must appear before the judgment of Christ and give account for the deeds done in the body (2 Cor. 5:10; Rev. 20:11-13). That kind of preaching will lead men to repentance.

Ezekiel also proclaimed a message of God's redeeming grace. He preached of full salvation.

Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and ye shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them. And ye shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and ye shall be my people, and I will be your God (Ezek. 36:25-28).

Here is offered pardon, forgiveness of sin, a new heart, a new spirit -- the stony heart removed, a heart of responsive flesh, a willing, obedient heart.

Here, also, is offered complete cleansing and the fullness of the Spirit -- Pentecost. Adam Clarke comments, "Here is the salvation that is the birthright of every Christian believer. The complete destruction of all sin in the soul, and complete renewal of the heart; no sin having any place within and no unrighteousness having any place without. It is the truly cleansing water; the influences of the Holy Spirit typified by water whose properties are to cleanse, whiten, purify, refresh, render healthy and fruitful." This would qualify the restored Israel for fulfillment of the promise to their fathers and the purpose of God for His covenant people.

Ezekiel proclaimed a message of hope and life everlasting in chapter 37, often spoken of in levity as the valley of dry bones and given superficial interpretation. But it was a dramatic way of saying Israel should return to the Promised Land. It implies the resurrection of those who are dead in trespasses and in sin by faith in Christ of Calvary's cross, and by the gospel which is the power of God unto salvation, by saying God would eventually open the graves and restore to life the dispersed and dead nation, Israel. He also pointed to the resurrection of the dead in Christ to enjoy the life eternal.

Ezekiel also proclaimed the message of the expansion of the kingdom of God on earth and its ultimate triumph in chapter 47. Zechariah and Ezekiel go together. The first saw the river flowing east toward the Dead Sea and healing its waters. The latter saw the Mount of Olives split by earthquake so the river could flow through. Ezekiel by far vision inspired by the Spirit of God saw the kingdom of God rise and increase in power and influence until "the kingdoms of this world are become the

kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15).

Now, my dear brethren, hear the word of the Lord by Ezekiel. Follow him in preparation, in performance, and in proclamation. And let the captive people to whom you are sent, hear God's message from your lips, that they may know there has been a prophet among them.

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08 -- MAN OF HOPE -- Text: Jer. 1:17-19

Introduction

That Jeremiah should be named as the man of hope may be surprising. He has been known as the "weeping prophet." One scholar labeled him "the prophet of doom." His own cry of anguish was "Oh that my head were waters, and mine eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!" (Jer. 9:1).

Jeremiah was called to be God's messenger to Judah in the darkest days of her history. Isaiah and the prophets who precede Jeremiah foresaw the days of disaster and defeat. But it was Jeremiah's lot to live in the midst of what they had predicted. The times of this generation were out of joint. Most heartbreaking of all was the fact that God's chosen people had brought the severe judgments upon themselves. In the words of Jeremiah they had committed two evils; they had turned from the Fountain of living waters and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns that could hold no water (2:13).

Jeremiah was the product of his times. No man of thoughtful disposition and depth of concern for his contemporaries and their posterity can escape the impact of the events transpiring before his eyes. Fortunate is the man who can keep hope springing up in his breast when the days are filled with gloom. And how happy are the people who enjoy the ministry of one who sees, knows the consequences, and yet keeps hope alive for himself and his hearers. Such a man was Jeremiah. Dr. Paul Gray declares Jeremiah had a genius for hoping beyond that of any Old Testament prophet.

As a man of hope Jeremiah offers to beleaguered men today an inspiring example.

I. Jeremiah's Hope Was Supported By A Sure Foundation

The weeping prophet was fully persuaded that he was called by God. He knew the timing of God's call and, more important, he knew he had heard the word of the Lord. "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest

forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations" (Jer. 1:5).

"But the Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee, and whatsoever I command thee thou shalt speak. Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord" (vv. 7-8).

"Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the Lord said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant" (vv. 9-10). This was an unforgettable experience. Men who expect to bear heavy burdens for the Lord should have the firm conviction that God has placed them in their position of responsibility. Men who gain positions of great responsibility must have a sense of inadequacy when the burden is heavy.

Jeremiah was also certain that the message he had to deliver was the word of the Lord. He could never forget the Hand that touched his mouth and the assurance that God had put His words in his mouth. A preacher of the solemn truth of God must not speak in terms of personal opinions or judgments, but be convinced that he has the word of God. Mysticism, as such, is fraught with peril. But that the preacher has a message from God is the acme of pulpit power. In anointed preaching there is an awareness that the message is from God.

Jeremiah was a man of destiny. He had a message from God for men. He was appointed to give a message to Judah and to the neighbor nations. His message is relevant today. One man, in alluding to the widely taught idea that there was more than one Isaiah (possibly two, three, or more), made this superficial remark: "I do not object to more than one Isaiah, but I surely am glad there was only one Jeremiah." Almost every generation needs a Jeremiah and possibly many of them.

As this man of God heard and obeyed the call of Jehovah, he was supported by God's never-failing promise.

"Thou therefore gird up thy loins, and arise, and speak unto them all that I command thee: be not dismayed at their faces, lest I confound thee before them. For, behold, I have made thee this day a defenced city, and an iron pillar, and brasen walls against the whole land, against the kings of Judah, against the princes thereof, against the priests thereof, and against the people of the land. And they shall fight against thee; but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee" (Jer. 1:17-19).

"In the midst of his ministry of warning and judgment, that promise was renewed" (15:20-21).

II. Jeremiah's Hope Was Sustained Even In The Most Adverse Circumstances

In giving assurance of divine help to the prophet, God did not conceal the fact that serious and overwhelming difficulties lay before him. If any minister in any age presumes that the way before him is smooth and easy with no problems and heartaches, he is sure to come to a time of disillusionment. Nevertheless, God has promised to make the darkness light, the crooked straight, and level the high places and build up the low.

At the beginning, God showed Jeremiah the rod of an almond tree (Jer. 1:11-12). This signified that hard times were near at hand. As the almond tree was first to bud and blossom, so the dark days for Israel were to appear early. There was also the seething pot which faced the north, which was interpreted to mean there would be a coalition of evil and powerful forces bearing down on Judah and Jerusalem from the north (vv. 13-16). It was the solemn duty of Jeremiah to warn Judah that the day of judgment was near.

The most heartbreaking message that Jeremiah had to deliver to his nation was not of the powerful nations moving in for destruction, but that their own sins were the prime cause of God's judgments. He was only using those external foes as the rod of His anger and the instrument of His punishment for their sins.

The chief of their transgressions was idolatry. They had played the harlot under every green tree and every high place. They were transgressing the first commandment, and that led them to trample all of the commandments under their ruthless feet. The wicked King Manasseh, who preceded Amon and Josiah and reigned for nearly threescore years, had even installed images of the gods of the pagan nations in the sacred courts of Solomon's Temple. Having turned from God, they could disregard all His commandments.

It was Jeremiah's task to stand in the Temple gate and remind them that their idea, that because the Temple was standing there was assurance that God was in their midst, was false. He pled with them to amend their ways and gave them assurance that if they would return in sincerity to God, He would yet deliver them from their foes, and they could dwell in their homeland. If they rushed on in their rebellion, his warning is sounded in the familiar words, "The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved" (Jer. 8:20). Nevertheless, there is balm in Gilead, and there is a Physician there.

Our prophet of courage and hope had his dark nights of discouragement and deep depression. God made known to Jeremiah that his relatives and neighbors at Anathoth had plotted to kill him. This greatly depressed the prophet, but God reassured him.

Pashur, son of Immer the priest, and chief governor of the Lord's house, smote him and put him in stocks. The prophet pronounced doom on Pashur. Again Jeremiah expressed despondency: "Then I said, I will not make mention of him, nor

speaking any more in his name. But his word was in mine heart as a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I was weary with forbearing, and I could not stay" (20:9). Jeremiah prayed that he might see vengeance on his enemies. He cursed the day he was born. "But, O Lord of hosts, that triest the righteous, and seest the reins and the heart, let me see thy vengeance on them: for unto thee have I opened my cause... Cursed be the day wherein I was born: let not the day wherein my mother bare me be blessed" (vv. 12, 14). An unworthy prayer, but not unlike the cry of the One who reminded His contemporaries of Jeremiah; even the Son of God cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46).

Later came the cistern episode. The fearful, weak King Zedekiah ordered Jeremiah's release to the court of the prison and commanded that as long as there was bread in Jerusalem, Jeremiah should have his daily portion.

Jeremiah could look beyond the dark days of disaster and personal trial and prophesy that there would be a return and a rebuilding of the city and the Temple. His hope outlived his emotional depression which at times reached almost to despair.

III. Jeremiah Promised God's Victory Over Human Failure And 70 Years' Captivity

The prophet's hope was dramatized. His cousin Hanameel came to Jeremiah in prison, saying, "Buy my field in Anathoth. The right to redeem it is yours." With God's reassuring word Jeremiah bought the field in the confidence that came because God asked, "Is there any thing too hard for me?" (Jer. 32:27). Knowing his own imprisonment with no promise of release, and knowing the Chaldeans were already in the land as conquerors and that the end of captivity was not to be for 70 years, Jeremiah gave evidence of his hope and faith in God by buying the field.

His hope found its most eloquent and far-reaching expression in his proclamation concerning the new covenant.

"Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the Lord: but this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people. And they shall teach no more every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for they shall all know me, from the least of them unto the greatest of them, saith the Lord: for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more" (31:31-34).

Even beyond the inauguration of the new covenant which came about in the first coming of the Messiah Savior, Jeremiah saw that a king of David's line would

come to establish an everlasting kingdom. "In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land... Neither shall the priests the Levites want a man before me to offer burnt offerings, and to kindle meat offerings, and to do sacrifice continually" (33:15, 18). Jesus Christ is the Seed of David. He is also the successor to the Levitical priesthood, a high priest forever after the order of Melchisedec.

Did God fulfill His promise to His prophet, when you consider how he was buffeted, smitten, imprisoned, carried into Egypt, and stoned by the Jews?

God promised, They shall fight against you but shall not prevail. He was never a defeated man. He was God's prophet to the last. Men destroy the body but not the spirit. How long we live is not important, but how well.

Harmon Schmelzenbach risked his life to preach the gospel to the people of the malaria-infected, low bush area of Swaziland. He was warned that blackwater fever would be fatal. The sight of the smoke from a thousand unevangelized villages compelled him. He died at 47 years of age. But he lives on forever in the redeemed lives of thousands of Swazis.

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09 -- MAN OF GOD -- Text: 2 Kings 4:9

Introduction

Of all the characteristics of a model minister, top priority goes to godlikeness. To remind all who observe him of his Lord and Master should be the preacher's highest aim. Let him search his soul with this question, "Does my presence in passing or in continuation call forth the comment, 'There is a man of God'?"

No man of biblical record is a more appropriate model of godliness than Elisha. He was never engaged in the spectacular performance as was Elijah. There was no Mount Carmel in his life story. He would never be called a showman. He was an example of humility, selfless service, and total dedication. Nothing can be found in his biography which would discount his testimony or his influence.

Few men of sacred history can equal his exemplary life. There are none of Adam's race to excel it.

I. Elisha Is A Model In His Response To God's Known Will

Elisha was diligently engaged in his vocation when Elijah, at God's command, passed by as he followed the plow (1 Kings 19:19-21). Elijah cast his

mantle on the shoulders of one who was to be prophet in his place. The older man made no explanation as to the meaning of his strange act. But Elisha needed no information. Doubtless he had been hearing an inner voice speaking to him of a divine call to perform the duties of a prophet. Therefore, he asked no questions. He did not say to himself, "What does this weird conduct mean?" His ready response was, as he ran after Elijah, "Let me, I pray thee, kiss my father and my mother, and then I will follow thee." There was to be no voluntary delay in his obedience. He was not like the man to whom Jesus spoke, saying, "Follow me." He responded, "Let me first bury my father, then I will follow." His father was not dead. He was actually requesting, "Let me wait till my father dies." (See Luke 9:59.) Elisha's only hesitation was "Allow me respectfully and affectionately to say good-bye to my parents." To that request Elijah gave willing consent.

The young plowman made a complete break with home, family, vocation, and friends. He slew the oxen to make a farewell feast for his friends. He broke up the yoke and the plow to make a fire to cook the meat. He was leaving to answer the call of God. He would not return to the former occupation. He burned the bridges behind him. He left nothing to which to return.

Elisha knew industrious attention to the work on the farm was a good foundation for the vocation as a prophet of God; but he also knew it was not adequate preparation. Therefore, he attached himself to Elijah as his teacher by example and by precept. So diligent was he in the school of the prophets that he stood at the head of his class. He was next to his master. How long the Elisha-Elijah association continued no one knows, but it was intimate and rewarding as the habits of the senior prophet took on other-worldly manners. The attachment deepened. The final day with its examinations came. Elijah was paying last visits to his several schools for prophets (2 Kings 2:1-2). The sensitivity of Elisha in spiritual perception had deepened. He was with the headmaster at Gilgal. To test his successor, Elijah said, "Tarry here, I pray thee; for the Lord hath sent me to Bethel." Elisha replied, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee." So they went to Bethel.

Gilgal means round or a circle. Many God-called men have lingered at their Gilgal. They have gone into circular action. They are moving about all the time, but they are going nowhere. They go round and round, year after year. Their lives are full of frustration and futility.

At Bethel Elijah offered the same proposal. "You tarry here. The Lord has sent me to Jericho." Elisha, determined not to miss a blessing, made the same reply (v. 4). Bethel means the house of God. Certainly that would be an ideal place to linger, even for a lifetime. But sweet fellowship and inspiring worship are no substitute for obedience and conformation to the whole will of God.

Jericho was the next station in the day's journey. Again, the older prophet put Elisha to the same test. "Tarry, I pray thee, here; for the Lord hath sent me to

Jordan" (v. 6). The steadfast purpose of the understudy prophet was the same. He would not be tempted by the lure of the City of Palms, the fragrant city, the pleasure resort. The temptation to seek a life of ease is never lacking in its appeal. Many men called of God to do a great work for Him have settled down to feather their nests. They seek security and less toil and risk instead of complete fulfillment of God's holy purpose for their lives.

As the two went on to Jordan, no doubt their thoughts were of the final parting. Having reached the river, Elijah took his mantle and wrapped it together and smote the waters and they divided; the two went over on dry ground (vv. 7-8). An awesome silence was broken when Elijah told Elisha, "Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away" (v. 9). Elisha showed his appreciation for spiritual values when he said, "I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me." It was not a request for twice as much of the Spirit of God as Elijah had known. That would have been too much to ask. It was, Let me as your nearest pupil, receive an eldest son's portion. That would be a double inheritance.

Elijah's reply embodied the last question in the final testing. He said, "Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee: but if not, it shall not be so" (v. 10). A powerful distraction came between them. A chariot of fire and horses of fire parted them asunder (v. 11). But Elisha's eyes were glued to the ascending form of the prophet who went up in a whirlwind. The chariot and horses of fire were caught in his field of vision, but his eyes were in steady focus on Elijah. The mantle of Elijah fell at Elisha's feet (v. 13). The first time it fell on his shoulders as confirmation of his call. It had fallen again. This time it was his certificate of ordination to be Elijah's successor and God's prophet. The younger man with hands trembling with profound emotion took up the mantle and smote the waters, crying out, "Where is the Lord God of Elijah?" and the waters parted (v. 14). As the sons of the prophets viewed from Jericho, they testified, "The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha" (v. 15).

Elijah was gone. His work was done. But the God of Elijah was not gone. He was a continuing presence in the life of Elisha. God's presence and power are available to men of faith, love, and obedience in every generation.

II. Elisha Is A Model In Selfless Dedication To His Fellowman

Elijah's successor was no duplicate of Elijah. God does not deal in duplications. He honors the personalities of a variety of men and uses for His glory all who commit their all to Him. God used Elijah as a great reformer to call his nation back to the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He used Elisha to minister to people of need. His was a ministry of compassionate concern for hurting people. It is said that he did more miracles than any Old Testament man with the possible exception of Moses. Yet all was done with humility shining forth in every act and attitude. Nothing was done for self-exaltation or in vainglory. The ordinary needs of men were met by acts of simple faith in the power of Almighty God.

There was a spring of water in Jericho which was adequate to quench the thirst of many, but the water was bitter. Elisha threw a handful of salt into it, and the waters became sweet. Tourists today, who visit that city, may be shown Elisha's spring (2 Kings 2:19-22).

A young student in the school of the prophets was cutting down a tree that larger quarters might be built to house the growing enrollment. The axe slipped from the handle and fell in the water. With a distressed cry he said, "Alas, master! for it was borrowed." Elisha threw a stick into the water and the iron did swim (6:1-7). The borrower could return the axe to the lender. His integrity was unquestioned.

A widow's sons were about to be sold to pay her dead husband's debts. She had nothing but one pot of oil in the house. Elisha said, "Borrow all the vessels your neighbors will lend. Then in private, pour oil out of your one pot until all the vessels are full." That being done, she reported to Elisha, who directed her, "Sell oil enough to pay the creditors, and keep enough for you and your sons." The boys were saved from being sold into serfdom (4:1-7). Then and now, "Pure religion... is... to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction" (Jas. 1:27).

To reward the woman whose generosity had provided food and lodging for him and his servant, Elisha inquired what could be done for her in return. She asked for a son, and to her a son was born. When he was grown to be a youth to work in the field, he had a sunstroke and died. Elisha, being informed, came to the house in which he had often found food and rest, and restored the son to his mother's gentle embrace (2 Kings 4:8-37). Gratitude for benefits received will find opportunity to express it.

Food was in short supply. The sons of the prophets in the school at Gilgal were hungry. Pottage was prepared that they might eat. When they sampled that which was provided, they cried, "O thou man of God, there is death in the pot." Elisha instructed, "Bring meal." He cast it into the pot that they might eat, and there was no harm in the pot (vv. 38-41). There is oft-recurring occasion for a man of God to protect or restore the health of those to whom he ministers.

Naaman, the Syrian, came to Elisha to be healed (5:1-16). The remedy the prophet prescribed seemed senseless to the great man. His servant rebuked his pride, so he went and dipped seven times in Jordan; his flesh became again like the flesh of a little child, and he was clean. He offered great sums of money to express his thankfulness. Elisha refused to receive it. He only desired that in Syria there should be a witness to the power and greatness of the God of Israel. There are times in the lives of true men of God when their services are to be without charge that the glory of God might be revealed.

There was famine in Samaria so desperate that mothers were ready to boil their babies to obtain food to eat. Elisha was blamed for the disaster. The king had

ordered his head to be severed from his body. Not to save his life, but that the hungry people might be fed, Elisha prophesied that on the morrow food would be plentiful in Samaria. By a miracle the Syrian army fled and left all their supplies behind in their camp (6:24--7:20). Unselfish service to humanity is the virtue of all true men of God, then and now.

The king of Syria learned that his schemes for pillaging Israel were foiled repeatedly (6:8-23). He assumed there was a traitor in his court. When he sought to identify the disloyal subject, one told him there was a prophet in Israel who told Israel's king the words the Syrian king spoke in his bedroom. Spies were sent to locate the prophet. The report was that he was in Dothan. Horses and chariots and a great host were dispatched to take one lone man of God by night. The dawn revealed their presence.

The servant of Elisha was frightened and cried, "Alas, Master, what shall we do?" The man of God replied, "Fear not; they that are with us are more than they that are with them." Elisha prayed, "Lord, open his eyes." With clear vision the servant saw that the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. That the Syrian forces might become impotent, Elisha prayed that they might be smitten with blindness. As they were now helpless in his hands, he led them into Samaria. The king asked the prophet, "Shall I smite them?" The prophet responded, "Would you kill prisoners of war? Set bread and water before them that they may eat and drink and go to their master." They ate and drank and went home. The guerrillas raided Israel no more. Men of God love their enemies. They heap coals of fire on their heads. They never retaliate, nor do they have resentment and hatred toward those who are agents of evil deeds.

III. Elisha Is A Model Of Strength On His Deathbed And In The Powerful Influence Following

Elisha was now old and sick unto death (2 Kings 13:14-21). Joash, the king of Israel, came and wept over his face, crying, "O my father, my father, the chariots of Israel, and the horsemen thereof."

Here is a contrast in strength and weakness. The king was youthful, well in body and doubtless in full armor. He would be expected to demonstrate courageous, strong manhood. The man of God was aged and frail of health. He might have been trembling and fearful.

But strength and weakness are relative terms. Weakness among the weak is not so noticeable. Nor is strength among the strong. But when strength and weakness confront each other, the contrast is bold. Here the weakness of the king is more impressive as it is seen in the presence of the strong man of God. The king sheds crocodile tears and speaks sentimental and superficial words. He seems not to know the seriousness and greatness of his task. He is as a child at play. He does what the dying prophet told him to do, but with no clear understanding, no strong

conviction, and no rugged determination. As he was told, he opened the window and shot the arrow. He did not see it as the arrow of the Lord's deliverance from Syria. Mention of the Syrians, the enemies of Israel and of God, should have aroused his indignation to a fever pitch; but when he was told to take the arrows and smite the ground, he did it with halfhearted indifference. He stroked the ground three times and stopped. Then the strong man from his deathbed, with firm hands and voice without a tremor, in holy wrath said, "Thou shouldest have smitten five or six times [and could have said, "with all your might"]; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it; whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice." You will settle for partial and temporary rather than total and final victory.

What a contrast between the man of God with clear vision, strong conviction, and vigorous faith; and a fearful, pathetic, temporizing man of insipid weakness! Men of God keep their fighting spirit to the end. Dr. J. B. Chapman was in California in February, 1947. He was examined by his doctor who told him he had six months to live; he had better slow down. Whereupon Dr. Chapman responded, "If I have only six months to live, I can't slow down. I must hasten to do my work." He died the following July, but his hand was still on the plow.

The burial of Elisha was not the end of his life. And last rites are not the end of the influence of a man of God.

Invading Moabites were burying a man, and they saw a band of men in hot pursuit which caused them, in haste, to cast the dead body into the sepulcher of Elisha. When the dead body touched the bones of Elisha, he revived and stood up on his feet.

No, I do not believe dead men's bones have power in them. No bones or relics should be hidden around our altars. Nevertheless, I do know the influence of a holy life does not end at death. , 'Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit... and their works do follow them" (Rev. 14:13).

Dr. Charles L. Goodell told of being in a preaching mission in Rochester, N.Y., years ago. He made the statement in his message that Rochester was different from any city of like size in America. At the close of the meeting an Episcopal rector came to agree with him: "You are right. Rochester is different. It is because the Spirit of Charles G. Finney is still present here."

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10 -- ELDER TO THE ELDERS -- Text: 1 Pet. 5:1-4

Introduction

Peter wrote his First Epistle to Christians, both Jews and Gentiles, in Asia. They were strangers in the world in which they lived. They were elect according to

God's foreknowledge. The purpose for writing this circular letter was to strengthen the faith of those to whom it was addressed.

Persecution had broken out against the Christians in Rome, with violence. No doubt the apostle was concerned lest it spread to the provinces throughout the empire. He was eager to help prepare his fellow believers in Christ to withstand the harsh treatment they might receive. He encouraged them to be courageous, endure hardness, live holy lives, and enjoy the prospect of the glorious hope afforded them. He was giving them assurance that Christ would be with them, sustain them, and reward them. Here are some of his words: "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: but rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy" (1 Pet. 4:12-13). "Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf" (v. 16). "Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator" (v. 19). Providentially, the fierce persecution did not reach the area where those to whom Peter wrote lived. But the Epistle did strengthen them for the inescapable opposition of a hostile world. It was God's inspiration of Peter that he might be a blessing to those Christians of his day and those in every day until now.

As he concludes this letter, the apostle turns his attention especially to the elders. There are different concepts of the meaning of the word elder. It is most probable that Peter was addressing the leaders of the church, whether ordained persons or laymen charged with leadership responsibility. He opened his message to them in these words: "The elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder" (5:1).

I. Peter Possessed The Qualifications To Admonish The Elders

The impetuous Simon was one of the 12 apostles chosen by Jesus. He was one of the 3 who composed the inner circle. He was chief of the 12 before and after the Resurrection. He conducted himself in an unworthy manner on the night of the betrayal and mock trial of the Master. His denial must have been recorded, because the man in shining garments, who was seen in the empty tomb by the devout women, said, "Ye seek Jesus of Nazareth, which was crucified: he is risen... But go your way, tell his disciples and Peter that he goeth before you into Galilee: there shall ye see him" (Mark 16:6-7, italics added).

The tender, compassionate look of Jesus brought tears of repentance immediately and permanently. After the Resurrection, beside the Sea of Galilee, Jesus three times probed the soul of Peter with the question, "Lovest thou me?" To which Peter in sincerity gave affirmative answer. Whereupon the risen Lord commissioned him to "feed my lambs... my sheep." The restored Peter was not absent when the risen Lord appeared to the chosen ones (John 21).

The Big Fisherman was in the Upper Room when the Holy Spirit came on the Day of Pentecost. By that flame of fire the sandy Simon was changed to the rocklike Peter. Cleansed and empowered by the Holy Spirit, he was prepared to be the leader of the Twelve and the Church.

Peter was the first to preach the gospel after the Holy Spirit descended upon the 120 believers in the Upper Room. There seemed to be no design in it. It was the natural and spontaneous beginning of the powerful thrust of the Christian Church. The fisherman of Galilee preached as though he had prepared a manuscript before the meeting was called. It was, however, by inspiration of the Spirit that he spoke. He demonstrated his knowledge of the Old Testament. He took for his text the pointed and pertinent prophecy of Joel. He answered the amazed, inquisitive response of the multitude, saying, "These are not drunken, as ye suppose... But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel; And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh" (Acts 2:15-17).

After showing that what they had seen and heard, God had foretold centuries before by His inspired prophet, Peter turned his attention to the central message of the New Testament, namely the doctrine of Christ. He set forth all the principles of that theme: the incarnation, the crucifixion, the resurrection, the exaltation, the mediation, and the coming again of our glorious Lord. Then the preacher reinforced what he had declared by quoting David, who was a prophet. In concluding, he did what all effective preachers must do. He made what he had said personal and penetrating to those who heard him.

The crowd, stricken with conviction, responded, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Peter answered, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:37-39). "The same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls" (v. 41).

There were many contributing causes for that miraculous harvest. Let no preacher be discouraged that he does not see such results. Be assured that when the Word is preached in the power of the Spirit, it will not return void, but will accomplish that which pleases God (Isa. 55:11).

The preacher at Pentecost was also the one God appointed to open the door of the Christian Church to the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius in Caesarea. His sins had been forgiven and his heart made pure, but he needed a special revelation to make him ready to put aside his Jewish prejudice. This came in a vision on the housetop of Simon, the tanner, in Joppa. There in a vision, he learned that he was not to call what God had cleansed, common or unclean. As he pondered what the true meaning of the vision meant, three men called for him. The Spirit bade him go with them to preach the gospel to the family, friends, and servants of Cornelius, the

centurion of the Romans. Peter obeyed; he preached the gospel as he had on the Day of Pentecost. Cornelius and those present received the message, believed in Christ the Savior, and were filled with the Holy Spirit.

Years later, when the council of the Jerusalem Church was deciding whether Gentile Christians must be circumcised and keep the law of Moses, Peter effectively testified that God had used him to first preach the gospel of salvation by faith in Christ to the Gentiles. His testimony was helpful in reaching the decision which saved Christianity from becoming another sect of Judaism.

To the elders, Peter said he was a witness of the sufferings of Christ. He saw Jesus arrested. He heard the false charges against Him. He saw Him scourged. He followed Him out the Via Dolorosa. He saw Him nailed to the Cross. He was somewhere in sight of Him as He suffered and died on the Cross. This all added to his serious call to be faithful unto death as an apostle. He was, therefore, a devout and committed messenger of the Christ who died for his sins and for the sins of the whole world. He proved his supreme love to his Lord until he died a martyr's death by crucifixion.

II. Peter Advised The Elders Well In His Exhortations

The first point of emphasis is appropriate. The elder said to the elders, "Feed the flock of God" (1 Pet. 5:2). That the flock should be well fed is of primary importance. Fat animals never fight among themselves. When hungry and lean, they are belligerent. It is the business of the shepherds of the flock of God, that is, pastors of churches, to provide adequate, nourishing, spiritual food for those under their care. The prophets of old charged the shepherds with looking for their own comfort and security first. The sheep were a secondary responsibility; for that attitude they were condemned. Could there be any judgment pronounced upon some pastors for such misplaced emphasis in this, our day?

Peter said the overseers were to accept their place of spiritual leadership not by compulsion, but willingly. They were not to be just doing their duty. They were to be ready to go beyond the call of duty. They should be eager to serve those under their care with no consideration of personal advantage. They were to be on call to minister to those in need, day or night. Other well-laid plans could wait. The pastor is the servant of all, the poor or the well-to-do, the wise and the unwise, especially the sick and dying. There is no discrimination among the members of Christ's Body. All are of equal importance to those who are the servants of all for Christ's sake.

The chief apostle warned the elders that they were not serving for filthy lucre but of a ready mind. It was in loving care without thought of monetary gain. Here is one of the most subtle temptations ministers in any age meet. Can decisions be made on the basis of salary and fringe benefits offered, or the prestigious opportunities for promotion? The answer: Only if commitments have been fulfilled

and the will of God has been honestly considered. If God feeds the sparrow, He will certainly care for His servants. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 2:5; read on).

A further word of caution is offered by Peter. He earnestly pleaded that the elders should not be "lords over God's heritage" (1 Pet. 5:3). They were not to be arrogant dictators. Such an attitude does not fit into the mind of a servant. The will of the pastor is not the only consideration in fixing the direction in which the church should move. The church belongs to the members. They are permanent; he may be temporary. His wisdom is not infallible. Their opinions and judgments are to be considered. The leader must be able to see the followers' viewpoint. If he wants them to consider his plans, he should not be too stubborn to give due thought to their ideas. In incidental matters to compromise for the sake of unity and progress is not without merit. Pastor, you are a servant, not a dictator. You lead by the quality of your spirit and the wholesome influence on those you are appointed to help build the church of which Christ is the Head.

Now Peter adds some exhortations to the "younger." It is not wresting the Scripture to interpret "younger" as applying to younger leaders who expect to become overseers. To them Peter gives appropriate advice.

First, he counsels submission and humility (v. 5). These are becoming graces for all who lead or follow. Those who are humble have a teachable spirit. They know they are learners. The cocksure, know-it-all apprentice has a lesson to learn or is headed for a fall. With or without formal training all should discover that "the years teach." Experience brings maturity and wisdom which is from above. Submission and dependence upon God's guidance results in vindication and exaltation. Honor will eventually come to those who deserve it.

Peter, the man trained under the Master Teacher, then admonished the younger to "be sober" (v. 8). In other words, be disciplined. As Paul testified, I keep my body under control lest, having preached to others, I should fall (1 Cor. 9:27).

Sanctification does not eradicate natural desires as for food, drink, and sex. It does not denature a person. It does renature him; and by the help of an obedient will, reinforced by the power of the Holy Spirit, it does enable him to practice self-control. He, by God's grace, can overcome the temptation to live on the low level of indulgence.

"Be vigilant" is the third word of wise counsel to the younger (1 Pet. 5:8). For long years Peter had confronted the adversary. He knew him to have the "subtlety of the serpent as well as the roar of a lion." He had learned that eternal vigilance is the price of liberty. He knew that a person who desired consistent victory over his archenemy could never let down his guard. Two areas of temptation, which are inescapable, are in matters of money and sex. At these points more preachers fail than all others. Strict honesty and strong determination to live an upright, chaste

life must never be relaxed. This goes for everyone: youth, adult, and senior citizen. There is a destruction that wasteth at noonday. There are the temptations that persist even in advanced years. Peter warned, "But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer" (4:7).

III. Peter Cited The Remunerations Accruing To Elders

The blessings of godly leadership are not all reserved in heaven. In his beautiful benediction in 5:10-11, the apostle implies that there are benefits that are received in this life. To be sure, they accrue to all the faithful, including the elders. The climax of this Epistle is in this prayer: "The God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen." Perfection in love by Jesus Christ, stability in holiness, strength for every task and trial for every day, and a firm purpose to be faithful unto death are all included in the inheritance among the sanctified. These benefits are received by faith. If by faith, they are available now.

Peter also anticipates the glory that shall be revealed (v. 1). He is confident that he will partake of that glory, and he believes that the elders will also have a share in that blessedness. They would be included in the glorious Church presented as the Bride of Christ without any spot or wrinkle. They would see Jesus face-to-face in all His glory. They would have a home in His house with many rooms. And according to His promise, they would be with Him forever (John 14:2-3). As overcomers, they would sit with Him on His throne, even as He overcame and sat down with His Father on His throne (Rev. 3:21).

The ultimate remuneration the elders would receive is promised in 1 Pet. 5:4. "And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away." A crown of righteousness awaits all who love His appearing. The devoted, faithful elders will receive a crown of glory that will never dim. The toils, the hardships, the sacrifices of this life, if remembered at all, will then be forgotten. The dark tunnels through which the pilgrim's journey may have passed, will end in that city where they need no sun. The Lamb is the light of that city. "Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (Rev. 1:5-6).

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11 -- MAN OF DESTINY -- Text: Gal. 1:15-16

Introduction

The personal revelations of God to men are confirmed by His providences. Those who see visions but who do not wait on the Lord for His approval by

providential developments, are usually embarrassed by frustration and defeat. Instead of a revelation from God, they have been misled by the concoctions of their own imagination. They look for the pot of gold at the end of the rainbow. The assurance that men have heard from God comes from a persistent inward conviction, the Word of God, the counsel of mature Christians, and finally the open door through which to enter a life of fruitful service.

Those who believe they have been called to preach the gospel have reason to question the validity of the call if no opportunity is offered after a reasonable time of preparation and willingness to go where there is an open door. They can -- and should -- be ready for any service, lowly or great, in whatever area of ministry that may be open to them.

In the life of Paul is found a remarkable matching of God's revelations to him and the providential appointments which came to him. God had a purpose for Paul before he was converted on the road to Damascus. Yes, it was true even before he was born.

I. Appointments In Paul's Life Were Determined By Wise Providence

Saul, as he was named at birth, was born a Hebrew of the Hebrews. This was of special significance for him in all his career. He broadened his base by learning and culture to include other nationalities such as Greek and Roman. But his roots were deep in the Hebrew faith. That his teachings have been influenced especially by Greek philosophy cannot be denied. Nevertheless, his doctrine of God and man is essentially Hebrew. The New Testament cannot be parted from the law and the prophets. The Old Testament is the foundation on which the New is built. Christ is the Chief Cornerstone of that structure, and Paul was a wise master builder.

It was according to the wisdom of God that the apostle to the Gentiles was born a Roman. That fact brought to him honorable discharge before the magistrates at Philippi, saved his life from mob violence in Jerusalem, and gave him free passage to Rome. It also gave him respectful treatment on the voyage and a measure of freedom as a prisoner in the capital city of the empire.

The value of citizenship in a great nation can scarcely be overestimated. It should be highly prized, and its responsibilities should be accepted and its laws and leaders respected. Paul's admonition was to pray for those in authority.

It was more than good fortune that Paul was born in Tarsus, no mean city of Cilicia in Asia. There the tides of humanity from many parts of the world ebbed and flowed. There, also, was located one of the great universities of that era in time. There Paul learned the history and language of a variety of nations.

A more important factor in Paul's education was that, according to his own testimony, he was brought up in Jerusalem at the feet of Gamaliel, one of the most

brilliant and fair-minded teachers of the Jewish nation in his generation. He taught his students not only the content of the law and the prophets and poets, but also the history and the economy of the chosen nation of Israel. This background prepared Paul to fit the Christian doctrines into the sources from which they sprang. To him Christ was not an innovation, but He was the Fulfillment of what had been written about Him centuries before He was born in Bethlehem of Judea. It seems certain that it was by the plan of God that Paul was in Jerusalem when the persecution arose about Stephen. There had been fierce opposition to the apostles and followers of Jesus Christ prior to that time. Of this Saul, no doubt, was well informed. He identified himself with the merciless opponents, among whom were the priests and members of the council. Therefore, he, by choice, was there to witness the martyrdom of Stephen. He confessed in a prayer, "When the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him" (Acts 22:20).

That left a never-to-be-forgotten memory in the mind of Saul. It was probably one of the scenes that he was contemplating as he drew near to Damascus on that eventful day when, beholding a light and hearing a voice, he surrendered to the Christ, Jesus of Nazareth.

The appointments of God's providence continued in the post-conversion experience of Paul. That a man named Ananias was come to the house of Judas in the street called Straight in Damascus was by God's directive. It was that the man who was praying might receive his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit.

It was God who prompted the Christians in that city to let the new convert down by the wall in a basket that he might escape the wrath of the Jews, who watched the gates day and night, that they might kill God's vessel chosen to declare His name among the Gentiles and the people of Israel.

The interlude of three years in Arabia was included in God's life plan for Paul. He was a convinced and a committed believer that Jesus of Nazareth was the long-expected Messiah of prophecy. After what came to him on the way, and especially after Ananias laid his hands on him, all his rejection and all his doubts had been resolved. But to shift his intellectual processes from Judaism to Christian patterns called for contemplation and time for adjustment. The three years of solitude in Arabia helped to crystallize his thinking and deepen his dedication to the work to which God had called him. He was now prepared for what God had for him to do.

It was God's purpose for Paul to formulate the principles of Christian doctrine. From the time he entered the mainstream of the Church of Jesus Christ, he became the leader in thought and action. It was according to God's perfect will that Paul, with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, should write most of the Epistles of the New Testament as the foundation and guide for Christian thinkers and theologians. This is especially true as related to the all-important doctrine of Christology.

God knew Paul's need for help in his newer years in the faith, and therefore He provided a mature, established Christian friend on whom Paul could depend in the early years of his apostleship. That friend and co-worker was Barnabas. When Paul was still under a cloud of suspicion and mistrust among the believers in Jerusalem, it was Barnabas who brought him to the apostles and declared to them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. Thereafter, Paul preached in Jerusalem, coming and going among the Christians with new acceptance (Acts 9:26-29).

With the blessing of the brethren, Paul was brought to Caesarea and departed for Tarsus, where he spent several years evangelizing in his native city and province. Some years later, Barnabas, having been sent to Antioch to observe the growth of the Church there among the Gentiles, saw there was need for one of learning and wisdom. He therefore went to Tarsus to seek Paul. He found him and brought him to Antioch, where they ministered for a year. Then the Church heard the Holy Spirit say, "Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them" (13:2). When they had fasted and prayed, they laid their hands on them and sent them away. Being sent forth by the Holy Spirit, they went on the first missionary journey, a powerful thrust into the pagan nations of the world.

Barnabas was a strong arm on which Paul leaned in the early days of his life as a Christian. When they disagreed and parted company, it must have been a traumatic wrench on the heartstrings of both of them.

The man of Macedonia, who appeared to Paul in the night at Troas with an urgent plea to come over into Europe and help them, was one more providential appointment for Paul. It was for him to turn the direction of the missionary endeavor toward Europe and the Western world. This was a decisive move for the Church of Jesus Christ. The effect on the West cannot be estimated. It has also proved to be a valuable contribution to the worldwide Christian movement, including the Orient.

II. Personal Revelations Of Christ Challenged And Inspired Paul

Within the framework of God's sovereign providential purpose for Paul, there were encounters with the living, risen Lord Jesus. The beginning was at the time he surrendered to Jesus on the Damascus road. When he asked, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" the immediate answer was, "Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do" (Acts 9:6). Years later, as Paul, the prisoner, bore his testimony before King Agrippa, he included a full account of the commission which was given to him in that life-changing revelation.

This was an outline of God's purpose for Paul. It made clear that he was a man of action. Jesus said, "Rise, and stand upon thy feet" (26:16). Passive surrender is not enough. Christ calls for active obedience. For all his great work, Paul needed time to understand and prepare. But now he was to be a minister and a

witness. The man who has been born of the Spirit and has come to newness of life in Christ accepts the servant role for all his days. He has become the servant of all for Christ's sake. The God-called man is also to be a witness. Standing before Agrippa and the Roman governor, Festus, Paul testified, "Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great" (v. 22). A preacher who hopes to see men convicted, convinced, and converted must himself have a testimony. If he does not have personal experience of God's saving grace, he may be correct in what he declares, but he will be regarded as a theorist by those who hear him.

God's purpose for Paul was creative and progressive. There is nothing static or stationary in the life of a man led by the Spirit of God. Jesus told His new disciple that he was to witness "both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee" (v. 16).

In Arabia for three years the Holy Spirit was his Teacher. Jesus had promised the Spirit of Truth to all believers: "When he... is come, he will guide you into all truth." Paul learned his epistemology from the greatest Teacher, the Spirit of Truth. Furthermore, he learned the doctrine of Christ from the same Teacher. Jesus went on, "He shall not speak of himself... He shall glorify me... he shall take [the things] of mine, and shall shew it unto you" (John 16:13-15). Paul was a diligent learner, and he became a great teacher. He could write to Timothy, "Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 1:13). He further advised Timothy, "The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also" (2:2). Paul knew that the truth which he had taught was from the Source of all truth, the Holy Spirit, and it would endure throughout all time. The preacher who proclaims the Word of God with the Holy Spirit sent down from heaven, voices the everlasting gospel.

Christ revealed himself to Paul in the many afflictions and adversities of his life. He did not dwell on them, nor did he refer to them often. He did not pity himself. Nevertheless, he knew that they were an integral part of the life of one who followed the Christ of the Cross. He saw in the things that befell him a revelation of the all-sufficient grace of God. By faith, he turned persecution and tribulation into a blessing for himself and all to whom he ministered by preaching or by letter.

Paul learned that God is faithful and will, with every temptation, provide a way of escape. He discovered that God will make all things work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose—that purpose being that they might be conformed to the image of His Son. Paul learned that the Christian can be more than conqueror through Him that loved him and gave himself for him. He, by personal experience, found that these light afflictions, which are but for the moment, work for him and all Christians a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

Life's disappointments and trials may defeat and destroy faith. But, when accepted as a token of God's love and proof of our sonship, they can increase the richness and sweetness of the love of God. That means that others will behold, believe, and wonder at the grace of God made manifest in the Christian who is victorious through faith in the almighty and all-wise God. Let them live "not somehow, but triumphantly."

Three times God's reassuring presence was made known to Paul in visions in the night. In Corinth, when opposition was intensifying, a Voice spoke in clear accents, "Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: for I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city" (Acts 18:9-10). Paul stayed in Corinth a year and a half. He saw a strong church established. Too many pastors move at some show of opposition. In most cases, with the encouragement from the Spirit of God, they could stay and win.

Again, Paul's life was in danger in Jerusalem. The same Voice lifted his spirits: "Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome" (23:11). God was fulfilling His promise to His servant to deliver him from the people. He never fails those who have unwavering trust in Him.

A third time, when circumstances were desperate and all hope was gone that Paul and 275 others would be saved from the raging tempest, God brought calm to the soul of His sailor prisoner; and he was able to renew the hopes of all on shipboard. He reported to the crew and passengers what he had heard God say to him. "Fear not, Paul... God hath given thee all them that sail with thee. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me" (Acts 27:24-25). Thereafter, the person and word of Paul began to command respect and confidence. Not a one lost his life.

A normal Christian life is not made up of a series of miracles. It may seem routine and ordinary on many days; but when believing people trust God, He never fails. Living in the will of God can be a challenging adventure and a thrilling romance all the way to the end of the journey. God has a plan for every life yielded to His will. Those who miss it cannot succeed. Those who find and follow it cannot fail.

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12 -- LOVE SLAVE FOR CHRIST -- Text: Acts 20:22

Introduction

Paul was on his way to Jerusalem for the last time. He was returning after his third missionary journey. He was desirous of being at Jerusalem for Pentecost. At the beginning of this tour he had spent three years in Ephesus. He had deep

interest in the church there. He had seen a few disciples filled with the Holy Spirit. They, under Paul's direction, had become a strong church. In that city the Word of God mightily grew and prevailed, in spite of opposition from every conceivable source. From 12 men filled with the Holy Spirit, all Asia heard the Word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

The apostle did not leave that city until his life was in danger. He embraced his beloved disciples in an affectionate farewell and proceeded to Macedonia and Greece. Having accomplished his purpose in returning to that part of the world, he turned his face toward Jerusalem. He did not plan to stop at Ephesus; but when he came to Miletus, he sent word to the Ephesian elders to meet him there. His address to them is the most eloquent and moving message recorded in the Book of Acts, indeed, one of the greatest in the inspired Record of the utterances of men. It is a testimony to his faithfulness to the call of God which he had received. It was also a pledge to finish his course and the ministry he had received of the Lord Jesus.

The text chosen for this message is a strong, unmistakable revelation of the impelling motivation of the Spirit which drove him on to the consummation of his life's goal. He was like his Master, doing the will of God, who had laid necessity upon him. He was not choosing his way. He was bound in spirit. He was driven by an inward imperative.

I. Paul Was A Love Slave For Jesus Christ

In the salutation of his letter to the Romans, Paul introduces himself as the servant of Jesus Christ. Many scholars believe that the more accurate translation of the Greek word is "slave." The apostle unquestionably is alluding to God's instructions to Moses regarding a slave who in the seventh year was to be a freeman. "If the servant shall plainly say, I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free: then his master shall bring him unto the judges; he shall also bring him to the door, or unto the door post; and his master shall bore his ear through with an aul; and he shall serve him for ever" (Exod. 21:5-6).

This was the initiation of what has been called "the order of the pierced ear." Paul was saying, I have by voluntary choice become a slave for Christ. I, who once persecuted Jesus and His Church, now by free will am His slave. This, to Paul and all who make that choice, acknowledged exclusive ownership. There was no possibility of serving two masters. He recognized that Christ held a monopoly on his life. That choice was irrevocable; it was forever. The powerful motive was for love's sake. The most binding relationship in life is the bond of love.

This was in the mind of Paul when he told the Ephesian elders, "I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem" (Acts 20:22). Paul was bound by the commission he received from Jesus. He was sent to the Jews and to the Gentiles, he testified, "to open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of

Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me" (26:18). To that commission he had been faithful for many years of effective ministry. He could declare, "I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision" (v. 19). His response to the word he heard Jesus say to him was one of total commitment. Being transformed, that is completely changed, by the renewing of his mind, he spent all the years proving God's good, acceptable, and perfect will for him.

Paul was bound in spirit by his realization of his debt to his fellowman. Writing to the church at Rome, he testified, "I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also" (Rom. 1:14-15). His debt was incurred, not by what they had done for him, but by the grace of God bestowed on him abundantly. Whatever is received as a gift of God's unmerited favor is given, not to be hoarded, but to be shared with all men. Dr. P. F. Bresee's motto was "We are debtors to every man to give him the gospel in the same measure we have received it." Jesus charged His disciples, "Freely ye have received, freely give" (Matt. 10:8). Paul knew he was unworthy, but he had received God's gracious gift and he must give as he had received. He wrote, "Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ" (Eph. 3:8). Whatever men who preach the gospel receive in the way of remuneration or reward is bonus. They should rejoice in the high privilege of sharing the Good News: "How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things!" (Rom. 10:15).

Paul was bound by the compulsion of love. Love will cause men to do their utmost. Love for Christ has been the inspiration for deeds and lives of valor and sacrifice. The history of the world would be commonplace were it not for the heroes of the Christian faith. Paul wrote, "The love of Christ constraineth us" (2 Cor. 5:14). David Livingstone translated it, "The love of Christ compelled me."

In Africa, on my first visit in 1961, I said to some of the missionaries, "I have seen where David Livingstone was born, and I have stood in Westminster Abbey in London and looked at the inscription indicating that the body of Livingstone was interred there. I would like very much to see the place where he died and his heart is buried." Upon my return to Africa two years later, I learned that the greathearted missionaries had planned to take me to the sacred place in central Africa. It was a round trip of 700 miles. Five grown men squeezed into a compact car. At least one-half the distance was over unimproved jungle roads. To me it was worth it all.

We arrived mid-afternoon. We learned the area was, after many years had passed, still influenced by the memory of Livingstone. We prayed beneath the tree under which his African friends and companions had buried his heart after finding him dead, kneeling beside his rude cot. They embalmed his body according to their primitive custom. They carried it 1,500 miles to send it by ship back to his native land. But his heart is buried near the center of the continent which, as a missionary

compelled by the love of Christ, he had explored and opened to the gospel, which is the power of God unto salvation.

All who hope to leave a lasting testimony for Christ must become a living sacrifice. They must bury their hearts in their work. They thus become love slaves for Christ.

II. Paul Laid Down His Life For The Lord Jesus

To reinforce his commitment, Paul added, "None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear to myself." He had already admitted, "I do not know the things that shall befall me in Jerusalem, save that the Holy Spirit witnesses that in every city bonds and afflictions await me" (see Acts 20:24, 22-23).

Bonds and afflictions did not move him from his purpose to do the will of God. He knew what it was to be bound, imprisoned, beaten with the rods, and scourged with the cat-o'-nine-tails. If, in obedience to the Spirit, he must endure all these things again, he was willing to take it for Jesus' sake.

Silver and gold did not allure him (v. 33). He could not be bought. He was not for sale. His time, his talent, his treasure belonged to Christ. He could not divert or divide his energies to seek material gain. No one knows how much success in building God's kingdom has been discounted by those who have divided interests. For security they have reached for material gain. Paul was willing to work with his own hands to provide the daily necessities. But he knew God asked for his all, even to life itself. God will use and bless all He can have. But His full blessing and power is for those who trust Him completely.

The warnings of dependable people of God did not move Paul. He had the mind of Christ, and he was willing to obey it at all risks. Agabus was a true prophet. He took Paul's girdle and bound his own hands and feet, prophesying, "Thus saith the Holy Spirit, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this girdle and shall deliver him to the Gentiles" (see Acts 21:11). All that Agabus prophesied came true. Paul knew it would be as the man of God had said, yet that did not divert him from doing the will of God. Wise men are never scornful of the counsel of other devout Christians. Nevertheless, there are times when one must obey God. He is bound in spirit.

The tearful solicitations of his dearest friends did not move Paul. His faith in God made him willing to stake his life on the assurance that in life or death God would be with him. The final scene with the Ephesian elders at Miletus is very touching. Having finished his address to them, Paul kneeled down and prayed with them all. They wept sore, and fell on his neck and kissed him, sorrowing most of all because he said they should see his face no more (Acts 20:36-38).

At Tyre the disciples said to Paul through the Spirit that he should not go up to Jerusalem. At Caesarea, where Agabus had given his prophetic warning, they of that place urged him not to go to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, "What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:13).

It was not in a spirit of defiance or cocksureness that Paul had determined to go to Jerusalem, but because he steadfastly believed this was the will of God for him. When a man is fully persuaded that a course of action is according to the will of God, those who truly love him should say, "The will of the Lord be done" (v. 14).

III. Paul Was Determined To Finish His Course With Joy

The greatest Christian of them all had put his hand to the plow; he would not look back. He had started in the race; he would see the finish. He had received his ministry from the Lord Jesus; he would testify of the grace of God to the end of his life, whether it be long or brief. He had always kept in mind that it was not by his choice he was an apostle. He wrote to the Corinthians, "For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel! For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me" (1 Cor. 9:16-17, *italics added*). It was the will of God according to the commission he had received by Jesus.

Paul sought to communicate his sense of urgency to Timothy, his son in the gospel. He wrote, "Stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands. For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind" (2 Tim. 1:6-7). "Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called" (1 Tim. 6:12). As his final exhortation to Timothy, the great exemplary apostle penned, "I charge thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom; **PREACH THE WORD**; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine... But watch thou in all things, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry" (2 Tim. 4:1-2, 5, *italics and caps added*).

Paul was under a strong compulsion. He was a love slave for Christ. In his submission to the will of God, he found his greatest freedom. He discovered that in the exercise of his will to do the will of God, his own heart was set free. In that freedom he rejoiced. He had no reluctance. He offered no protest. He could say in the language of Fanny J. Crosby, a believer-poet of many centuries later:

"Perfect submission, perfect delight;
Visions of rapture now burst on my sight."

In that state of mind, Paul wrote his great valedictory: "I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing" (vv. 6-8).

This was a shout of victory by one who had been a love slave for Christ and was now a prisoner. His hands may have been in chains and his body in a criminal's cell. But his spirit was triumphant and soaring.

All who know they have been redeemed, washed in the blood of the Lamb, can sing:

Thy precious will, O conquering Savior,
Doth now embrace and compass me;
All discords hushed, my peace a river,
My soul a prisoned bird set free.
Sweet will of God, still fold me closer,
Till I am wholly lost in Thee.

* * * * *

THE END