

THE CHURCH'S MISSION IN THE WORLD

Mark 16:15

Intro: Perhaps you have a notation in your Bible to the effect that vv. 9-20 are not in the two oldest Greek MSS that we have of the Gospel of Mark, and is omitted in many others. However, they do not always tell you that there are many MSS in which it is found. (Robertson, while doubting the genuineness of these verses, i.e., that they were written by Mark, says that this ending to Mark is found "the great mass of the documents" of Mark's Gospel. See Vol. I, p. 402.) Therefore, I am inclined to treat it like any other portion of the Gospel of Mark--as a real part of the Word of God.

I believe this for other reasons:

- 1) It is incredible that Mark would end his Gospel with v. 8.
- 2) There is nothing wrong with what is contained in these verses.
- 3) The content of these verses is consistent with that which is found in the conclusion of the other Gospels.

MT. 28:16-20; LUKE 24:44-49; JOHN 20:21-23; ACTS 1:3-8.

But this is not the place to state the pro's and con's of such a point. However, I personally believe that we should approach this part of Mark's Gospel just like we do the rest.

The verse that I have chosen as my text is certainly consistent with what we have in the other Gospels, and in Acts 1:8, although the wording may be a little different.

The Lord was preparing to leave His disciples to return to His Father in heaven. His work of redemption was finished, but there was still much to be done. Our text answers the first question that we need to ask.

I. WHAT WERE THEY TO DO?

The answer can be given in one word: "Go."

This command was given initially to the eleven disciples, but it is issued for every child of God. We are to "go" with this message to the world.

Why do we need to go with this message? Let me give you several reasons.

- A. We need to "go" because the Lord said so.
- B. We need to be told to go because we have a natural hesitation about going. It is hard for us to do this.
- C. We need to "go" because people will not come to us. No one seeks God on his own, or her own. It is

especially true in our day that no one is asking how to find God, or how to get to heaven.

- D. We need to "go" because the need is urgent. Life is so uncertain. Death is so sure, and there will be no second chance after death.

We may have the finest church building to accommodate a large number of people, but that does not relieve us of the responsibility of going. We can invite people to church, and pray that they will be saved, but we still need to "go."

The next thing that we need to inquire about is,

II. WHERE WERE THEY TO GO?

The Lord said, " . . . into all the world . . . to every creature."

Our mission is to "go." "The field is the world" (Matt. 13:38). The object is to reach every person in the world with whatever they were to do. We will come to that in a moment.

Now the Lord does not call us all to leave our country to go some other place, but His command is for us to "go" with the world as our goal.

Probably Acts 1:8 gives us the plan that the Lord had in mind: "Jerusalem . . . Judaea . . . Samaria . . . the uttermost part of the earth." We start where we are, and we work out. No person can do it all. It wasn't given to just one person. Notice how Paul described the spread of the Gospel into Thessalonica and beyond. Cf. 1 Thess. 1:2-10.

Obviously this is a task that is never completed. People are always dying, and others are being born, so that the work actually has to be done all over again in every generation.

Why "all the world . . . to every creature"?

For at least two reasons:

- 1) Because every person in the world has the same need for salvation. All are sinners. Our languages may differ, and our customs may differ, but our need for the Lord and for His salvation is the same in every country in every generation throughout the whole world.
- 2) Because there is only one Saviour. We are not trying

to make people religious. We want to see them saved, born again, transformed from sinners into saints, delivered from the power of the Evil One and brought into glorious liberty through Jesus Christ.

This, then, brings us to the final question:

III. WHAT WAS THEIR MISSION?

It also was stated very simply by our Lord: "Preach the Gospel."

What is the Gospel?

Mark gave a strong indication of that as he began writing his Gospel. Note what he said in Mark 1:1:

The beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ,
the Son of God.

This was probably what Mark was using as the title of his book. The expression probably is the equivalent of saying that this is the good news about Jesus Christ. The disciples were to "go . . . into all the world . . . to every creature" for one reason: to tell them about Jesus Christ. It is actually the good news about Jesus Christ. We are not politicians intent on social reform. We are not philosophers sent to argue with people about the mysteries of life. We are not psychologists who are supposed to be experts on all kinds of human problems. We are witnesses, sent to tell people the good news about Jesus Christ--to give them the message contained in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John, and to tell people everywhere the good news of the Saviour Who came to take away our sins so that we could be right with God and have eternal life.

That is why it is so important for us to be well-acquainted with the Gospel records. Obviously we do not need to cover everything in the Gospels, but we need to have the message very clearly understood in our own minds.

Concl: Now let me go a little beyond my text, if I may, but not beyond the Word of God. Let me ask this question: WHAT ARE WE EXPECTING TO DO ON THIS MISSION? ARE WE EXPECTING EVERYONE WE TALK TO TO RECEIVE CHRIST? May I also ask this: IS IT OUR BUSINESS TO MAKE SURE THAT THEY RECEIVE CHRIST? ARE THERE CERTAIN METHODS I NEED TO USE IN ORDER FOR MY MISSION TO BE SUCCESSFUL? What does the Word say?

First let me say that you cannot spend time in the Gospel and spreading the Gospel without wishing that everyone knew the Lord. And you are going to be praying for neighbors, relatives, friends, that they will be saved. BUT THE LORD HAS

NOT SENT US OUT TO DO THE SAVING. THAT IS HIS WORK.

MORE THAN THAT, THE WORD OF GOD TEACHES US THAT HE HAS ALREADY CHOSEN THE PEOPLE THAT HE EXPECTS TO SAVE. HE KNOWS WHO THEY ARE; WE DO NOT. BUT THEY ARE TO BE FOUND IN ALL NATIONS IN EVERY GENERATION, AND THE LORD KNOWS WHO THEY ARE, AND WHERE THEY ARE. BUT THEY CANNOT BE SAVED UNLESS THEY BELIEVE IN CHRIST, AND THEY CANNOT BELIEVE IN CHRIST UNLESS THEY HEAR ABOUT CHRIST. SO IT IS OUR BUSINESS TO TELL THEM; IT IS THE LORD'S WORK TO USE HIS WORD TO ACCOMPLISH HIS ETERNAL PURPOSES WHICH HE HAS PURPOSED IN CHRIST.

So we are can be certain that our work will not be in vain. He will use His Word to accomplish what He has ordained He would do. What we need to do is to make sure that people hear the message; the Lord will bless His Word to the salvation of sinners.

May God make us and keep us faithful in going and preaching the precious Gospel message.

GOOD NEWS
Romans 1:16

Intro: Rome was the capital city of the great Roman Empire.

When Paul wrote this epistle, he had never been there. He had made plans more than once to go there, but had been hindered because there were so many places that were being opened up to the Gospel, and Rome already had the Gospel, and it had a church. Cf. Rom. 1:13 and 15:22. But at last it looked as though the Lord were leading him to Rome, although he would arrive there in a different way from what he anticipated when he wrote this epistle. He would arrive there as a prisoner of Rome.

Why did he want to go to Rome? He mentioned at least three reasons in this first chapter of Romans:

- 1) He wanted to see them more established in the truth of God. Cf. 1:11.
- 2) He felt a need for encouragement from them for himself. Cf. 1:12. In most places Paul was on the giving end of things, and he felt that he might be able to receive blessing if he went to Rome.
- 3) He wanted to have "some fruit" among them. We must understand this as meaning, from what Paul wrote in the following verses that he meant by that, that he wanted to be used of the Lord in Rome in the salvation of sinners. Although Paul was a great teacher (perhaps the greatest who ever lived apart from our Lord), yet he was never happier than when he was preaching the Gospel.

Years ago someone (I do not remember now who it was) pointed out to me the three I am's of Paul in verses 14, 15, and 16. (Read.) Anyone can see from these three statements that preaching the Gospel was not just a job to the Apostle Paul. It was both the great burden that was upon his heart, and it was the greatest joy of his life. "Ready" conveys not only the idea of being prepared, but also of being willing, eager, and zealous to preach the Gospel.

The words, "to preach the Gospel," are the translation of one Greek verb. It is the word from which we get our word evangelize. It means to preach good news. It is "to bring a joyful message" (Bullinger, p. 596). Paul knew, because this was the truth of God, and because of what the Lord had done in his life, as well as by what he had seen accomplished through the Gospel in many places, that it was indeed GOOD NEWS!

Although this verse is very familiar to most of us, I want to examine it with you tonight so that we can understand why Paul was so dedicated to this message, and what it really was. Like so many other Bible words, the word Gospel has been misused in many places, and so it is important for us to go

back to the original source to confirm in our minds what his GOOD NEWS was.

Before we examine the message, I want you to note . . .

I. PAUL'S BOLDNESS.

When we speak of boldness in Scripture, do not think of one who is brash--which means tactless, impudent, obnoxious. Paul was not that kind of a person. Think of one who is very confident, assured, positive--and yet at the same time patient, loving, and gracious.

Rome was a city and a government that was enamored with power. Her military power was feared by all people in those days. The Jewish people were under the authority of Rome, and there was nothing that they could do to get out from under it. Many had tried, but their attempts had ended in failure. "Power" was synonymous with Rome!

Rome had accomplished many things with her power. Many nations had been brought under her control. She had imposed her laws upon the people. But there was one thing that Rome could not do, and her leaders knew it! SHE COULD NOT CHANGE THE HEARTS OF THE PEOPLE OVER WHOM THEY RULED! How much easier their job would have been if they could have done that. But that is where their power was limited. And so they always had to resort to brute force to make people do what they wanted them to do.

The word "power" which Paul used here is the Greek word δύναμις. It is from this word that we get our words dynamite, and dynamo. But the significant thing about this word is that it speaks of inherent power, natural capability. The message that Paul preached, the Gospel, had the power within itself, a power which belonged to itself, a power that was not dependent upon the gifts of the preacher, nor upon the mental brilliance of the hearers. It was in and of itself "the power of God unto salvation, to every one that believeth . . ."

The change that Rome wanted to make in men and nations had nothing to do with God. That is, they were not trying to make men acceptable to God. They wanted to make men acceptable to themselves. But the message that Paul brought had the capacity to make men acceptable to God! Paul knew that it could do just that, and he had not hesitation about preaching it. That is why he said, "I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ (some texts read, 'of the Gospel') for it is the power of God unto salvation . . ."

Paul had something which Rome did not have, and it is no

wonder that he was so eager to preach the Gospel everywhere!

Perhaps we need to do some more thinking about this message that we have, too--the same Gospel message. Because it is more natural for us to be "ashamed" of it. We demonstrate that because it is so hard for us to talk to anybody about it. May the Lord help us to understand the unique message that we have. Our governments (city, state, national) are desperately in need of some answers today. More and more they are recognizing how bankrupt for ideas they are. Every plan seems to fail. We have the answer to drug addiction, to alcoholism, to immorality--the worst of which right now is AIDS. We have the answer to racial discrimination, to international tensions. BUT MORE THAN ALL OF THESE, IT IS IMPORTANT FOR US TO REALIZE THAT WE HAVE THE ONLY ANSWER, THE ONLY ANSWER, AS TO HOW SINFUL MEN CAN HAVE THEIR SINS FORGIVEN AND GET RIGHT BEFORE GOD!

May the Lord bring all of us to the place where we are so assured of our message that we, too, will be able to say, as Paul said, "I am not ashamed . . ."

But now there are three things that I want to point out about this GOOD NEWS. The first is this:

II. THIS GOSPEL HAS BEEN GIVEN TO US IN WORDS, AND IT IS CONTAINED IN A BOOK.

This is a very obvious fact, but I have a point that I want to make.

Where, in the final analysis, did you and I learn about the Gospel?

There is just one answer for all of us: WE LEARNED ABOUT IT FROM THE BIBLE, FROM THE SCRIPTURES.

Where are we going to take other people to let them know about the Gospel? TO THE SAME PLACE: THE BIBLE! If it were not for the Bible, we would be just as ignorant, just as helpless, just as doomed as anyone else. But this message has been given to us by God in His Word.

Now remember: I said a moment ago that Paul was talking about inherent power. That which is inherent in anything is, by definition, that which is an essential part of it, that which, as the dictionary says, is "firmly infixed." The motor in your automobile has so much power--and that is all. The only way you can get more power, is to get a new motor, or get a new car. I can't fly like a bird because the Lord did not give me that kind of power.

The Gospel, found in the Word of God, and explained by the words that are there, has the power which is an essential part of it to bring sinners to salvation and to God.

Now here is the point that I am making: If that is so, the Gospel is revealed to us in Scripture, and it is the power of God unto salvation, **THEN THE MOST POWERFUL THING THAT I CAN DO IN PREACHING THE GOSPEL, IS TO USE THE VERY WORD OF GOD ITSELF.** People can so easily forget what I say about the Word, or what you say about the Word. But, if it pleases God to bless the Gospel to some sinners heart, as He blessed it to yours and mine, THEY WILL NOT FORGET THE WORD OF GOD!

What is our verse? Isa. 55:11,

So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth:
It shall not return unto me void,
but it shall accomplish that which I please,
and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

And so, in preaching the Gospel, let us use the full power that God has given us. Explain the Gospel as carefully as you can, but be sure to let them hear the very words of Scripture.

The second thing that I want to say about preaching the Gospel is this:

III. THE GOSPEL IS A MESSAGE ABOUT A PERSON.

Who is that Person? He is the Lord Jesus Christ.

Look at the way Paul began this Epistle in vv. 1, 2, 3, and 4. (Read.) I have heard men say that they had been preaching the Gospel, this GOOD NEWS, when they had nothing to say about Jesus Christ.

It is GOOD NEWS that Jesus Christ came into this world as a real human being. It is GOOD NEWS that through all that He experienced here on earth, from His birth to His ascension, he never ceased to be the Son of God. All of the OT anticipated His coming--and He finally came! If He had not come, there would have been no GOOD NEWS.

The One Who gives power to the message of salvation in the Word is Christ! Tell people about Him--not about yourself, nor about your church. Tell them about the Lord Jesus Christ.

What did the the priests and the scribes and the elders object to in the preaching of the Apostles? They were "grieved that they taught the people, and preached through

Jesus the resurrection from the dead" (Acts 4:2). And so what did they do about it? They called the apostles before them "and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus" (Acts 4:18).

What had Peter been preaching? Speaking of the Lord Jesus Christ, he said,

Neither is there salvation in any other;
for there is none other name under heaven
given among men, whereby we must be saved.

You see, we preach Christ, not just as a way of salvation, but as the only way of salvation. And that is going to make enemies for you any time you preach it. But it is true. And we need to tell people about Jesus Christ.

Now I come to my last point:

IV. THE GOSPEL IS A MESSAGE ABOUT WHAT JESUS CHRIST HAS DONE FOR SINNERS.

What did Jesus Christ do? Did He give us wonderful teaching? He gave us the greatest teaching. Are we saved if we try to live according to His teaching? No! Was He a good example for us to follow. You could not find a better example. He did no sin. Are we saved if we try to be like He was? In the first place, you can't live like he did. In the second place, that is not the way of salvation. Well, then, what did He do?

He died! He died on the Cross! He died for sinners! He died to provide salvation from sin!

And He arose! His work had been accomplished, and God was pleased with it--and so He raised Him from the dead. Now our Lord is back in heaven, seated at the right hand of God, and He could not be there is He had not put away our sins by His sacrifice on the Cross.

He did everything necessary for the salvation of any sinner who believes in Him. There is no work that we need to add to what He has done. He did it all. **THAT IS GOOD NEWS.**

Concl: But, you know, most people do not think that this is good news. They would consider it much better news if you told them that they had won in the Oregon Lottery. Or that they had just inherited a million dollars. Or that they had won some fabulous trip, or some expensive car. You see, people are so blinded to what they need that they do not recognize GOOD NEWS when they hear it.

What needs to happen?

They need to be awakened out of their sleep.

But how can that happen?

Well, we have to recognize that it will only happen if it is the will of God for it to happen. But if it is going to happen, if people are ever going to see that they are sinners under the judgment of God and headed for hell, they will only be awakened by that powerful Word of God which we have been talking about. The Psalmist said so long ago,

The entrance of thy words giveth light;

it giveth understanding unto the simple (Psa. 119:130).

Who is a "simple" person? He is a person who does not know what he needs to know. And he can only learn it through being exposed to the Word of God.

After he understands, what then? Then he will see that salvation and he receives it as a gift by faith.

But how can he believe?

This is where the Word comes in again. Paul said,
So then faith cometh by hearing,
and hearing by the word of God (Rom. 10:17).

What a precious Word we have? The Word tells us about salvation. It tells us about the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ. It is from the Word that we learn about what Christ did for sinners on the Cross. It is the Word that God uses to open our eyes to things that we have never understood before. And it is even through the Word that we are given the faith to trust Christ, and Christ alone, that the GOOD NEWS OF THE GOSPEL will become GOOD NEWS to us when we learn for ourselves that Christ alone can change the human heart, not just to make us good citizens, or good fathers, or good mothers, or good children, or good anything else. He does all of that. But, best of all, He declares us to be righteous in God's sight. Our sins are forgiven, and our destiny is heaven.

Hear the message tonight, and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ if He is not your Saviour.

THE FIRST ESSENTIAL OF SALVATION

Romans 1:17; 3:26

Intro: If you were to ask most Christians, What is the outstanding characteristic of the Gospel, I am sure that the majority would answer, the love of God.

Now there is no question but that we would have no Gospel if it were not for the love of God. And we have Scripture to back that up. E.g., John 3:16; Rom. 5:8: 1 John 4:9, 10:

In this was manifested the love of God toward us,
because that God sent his only begotten Son
into the world, that we might live through him.
Herein is love, not that we loved God,
but that he loved us,
and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

We can all be thankful for the love of God--and for the other characteristics of God which are related to it: mercy, grace, compassion, etc. If it were not that God had loved us, Christ would never have died for us, and we would never have loved Him.

But the love of God, as great as it is, is not the main thing in the Gospel.

One thing about that answer that is right is that we must expect that in the Gospel there would be some special revelation of God. If we are to find what is the outstanding characteristic in the Gospel, we must turn our thoughts to God. It is "the gospel of God," "the gospel of the grace of God."

And so any idea that the Gospel was given to raise our self-esteem, or to raise our standard of living, or anything else like this that has to do with us, is so far off that you wonder if people who are teaching those things have ever read the Bible. The picture that we have of man in the Gospel is that of a helpless, hopeless, defiled, condemned sinner, and that is the reason that people do not like it until the Lord opens their eyes to see what they are really like in the sight of God.

There is only one answer that is right: The outstanding characteristic of the Gospel is "the righteousness of God." (Read Rom. 1:17 and 3:36.) The Gospel portrays the righteousness of God, and, in doing so, it also portrays the natural and original unrighteousness of every man, woman, boy, and girl throughout the whole world, in every generation.

But let us make sure that we know what we are talking about. What is righteousness, the righteousness of God?

I. THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GOD.

When we use this term righteousness with respect to God, we must use it in its absolute sense. The righteousness of God is a perfect righteousness. It means that He is without sin of any kind. He never has done anything wrong, and He never will! Since His righteousness is a perfect righteousness, we must understand that He cannot sin. It is utterly impossible that God could or would sin.

Most people do not understand God. "God is not in all his thoughts" (Psa. 10:4). "There is no fear of God before their eyes" (Rom. 3:18). Much Gospel preaching is of a low-grade sentimentality which fails to recognize that God is righteous. We have pictured to us a God Who really is dependent upon man as to whether or not there will be any who are saved, and that God is willing to overlook any and everything if we will only believe in Christ! This is not the God of the Bible. It is because He is righteous that He cannot overlook any sin. When our judges and our courts fail to punish sin, they are showing themselves to be unrighteous.

Make sure that you understand this: A righteous God cannot sin, nor can He overlook sin. And the glorious thing about the Gospel is that it does not overlook sin. It takes the sins of man into full consideration, and sees sin as it really is, and has made provision for it.

So the Gospel is not a violation of the righteousness of God; it is the revelation of God's righteousness. There is no place where the righteousness of God is more evident than in Christ and in the Gospel which bears His Name.

Just this past week I was reading Psalm 97. In v. 2 the Psalmist said, "righteousness and judgment (or justice) are the habitation of his throne." The NKJV says, "the foundation of his throne." And then in v. 6 we read, "The heavens declare his righteousness, and the people see his glory." Take your Bible and learn from your Bible about the character of God. There you will find nothing to deny nor to contradict the fact that He is righteous, perfectly righteous, and never anything but righteous. THIS IS WHERE WE MUST BEGIN IN UNDERSTANDING THE GOSPEL AND WHY PAUL REFUSED TO BE ASHAMED OF IT.

But there is more in this verse about the righteousness of God. Paul said that it is . . .

II. A REVEALED RIGHTEOUSNESS.

And he said this in connection with the Gospel. What are we to understand about this?

God has "revealed" Himself in many ways. He is revealed in creation. He is revealed in His dealings with men and nations. We have many ways to learn that He is a righteous God. Physical death is evidence of the righteousness of God. AIDS is evidence that God is righteous. The fact that man will not have anything to do with God is evidence of God's righteousness. That is what the Bible calls spiritual death.

But pre-eminently the righteousness of God is revealed in Christ and the Gospel.

Now I am not saying that this revelation not made until Christ came. It is apparent in the sacrifices of the OT. It is apparent in the preaching of the prophets as they foretold the coming of the Messiah. The Gospel is not new in the OT. The Gospel of the NT is the Gospel of the OT. The promises of the Gospel have now been fulfilled in Christ, but the Gospel of God's grace is, as far as human history is concerned, as old as the Garden of Eden. Actually the Gospel has its roots before the foundation of the world.

But any thoughtful person, reading the Bible, would certainly ask, Why should a Person like Jesus Christ have to suffer and die like He did on the Cross? He was not guilty of any crime. His enemies had to bring false witnesses against Him. Why, then, did He die such a terrible death? And why was He so determined that He would die?

The answer is found many places in the Bible. Let me give you one that is very, very clear. It is found in 2 Cor. 5:21. This is what it says:

For he (God) hath made him (Christ) to be sin for us,
who knew no sin;
that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.
**THE DEATH OF JESUS CHRIST DEMONSTRATES BEYOND ALL OTHER
EVIDENCES THAT GOD IS A RIGHTEOUS GOD.**

God does not close His eyes to sin. He does not excuse man's sin. He does not decide that He will forget man's sin. Sin must be judged because God is righteous, and He cannot accept sin or the sinner. If the love of God is to succeed in providing salvation for sinners, the righteousness of God must be upheld, recognized, and satisfied.

This is what God has done in Christ. Christ fully satisfied God on behalf of all of those for whom He died.

And so it is now possible for God to be righteous in not only forgiving sinners, but in declaring them to be righteous in His sight.

This is where my second verse comes in. Paul said that through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the Cross, where He became sin for His people, it is now possible for us

To declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus (Rom. 3:26).

Read that whole section from v. 22 of ch. 3 on down to v. 26.

So God's righteousness is not violated by His love, by His forgiveness of sin and sinners. Christ took our sins upon Himself so that they have been atoned for, and God can be perfectly righteous in forgiving repentance sinners.

But there is yet one more thing that I need to point out. It has to do with the last part of both of these verses which I am using tonight. It has to do with . . .

III. THE NEED TO BELIEVE.

Note what the last part of Rom. 1:17 says. And then note what the last part of Rom. 3:26 says.

This is what John 3:16 says. (Quote.)

In Rom. 1:17 Paul was quoting from Hab. 2:4. This shows that salvation in the OT was the same as salvation in the NT. It is always by faith.

What is faith?

Faith is believing, believing that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, believing that He came to satisfy the righteousness of God for guilty sinners, but it also means that we are taking our stand on what Christ has done as being all that God requires to forgive us of our sins, and to make us perfectly acceptable in His sight.

Believing is trusting. Our trusting is not our contribution to what Christ has done. Our trusting is dependence upon what Christ did. We take salvation as a gift from God, and we know that Christ's death on the Cross is enough for our salvation, however great our sins might have been.

What it means to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ has been beautifully expressed in the words of that old hymn which

reads like this:

My faith hath found a resting place,
Not in device nor creed;
I trust the Ever-living One,
His wounds for me shall plead.

Enough for me that Jesus saves,
This ends my fear and doubt;
A sinful soul I come to Him,
He'll never cast me out.

My heart is leaning on the Word,
The written Word of God,
Salvation by my Saviour's Name,
Salvation through His blood.

I need no other argument, I need no other plea,
It is enough that Jesus died,
and that He died for me.

You see, salvation is not just the evidence of God's love, but it is the evidence of God's love manifested through His righteousness. Jesus Christ took upon Himself the full penalty of all who were saved before the Cross and of all who will ever be saved. He took our sins upon Himself. He became our Sin-Bearer that we might not have to die for our own sins. Instead, we can be clothed in the righteousness of God.

Are you trusting the Lord Jesus Christ as your Saviour tonight? If not, come to Him now. Delay no longer. There is no other Saviour. If Christ does not save you, you will never be saved. My assurance as I preach to you tonight is to be found in the words of the Lord Jesus in John 6:37:

All that the Father giveth me shall come to me;
and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.

THREE OF GOD'S GREATEST BLESSINGS
Colossians 1:12-14

Intro: My text for tonight is a part of Paul's prayer for the Colossian believers. The prayer began in v. 9, and it is hard to tell where it does end! But as Paul listed his various requests for the people of God in Colosse, this was one of them. He prayed that they would be thankful!

Now there are many things for which we can be thankful. We can be thankful for the Lord's material blessings. We can be thankful for our health. We can be thankful for our families, for our friends--particularly our friends in Christ. We can be thankful for our work. We can be thankful for our country. There are many, many things for which we can give thanks, and we should give thanks for all of them--over and over again!

But Paul did not mention any of those things here. Instead, he expressed his prayer that they would be thankful for their salvation. ISN'T IT STRANGE THAT PAUL SHOULD HAVE TO PRAY THAT THE PEOPLE OF GOD WOULD BE THANKFUL FOR SALVATION--THE GREATEST OF ALL GIFTS? And yet it seems that we will thank the Lord for everything before we get around to this.

Verses 9-11 have to do with requests for their lives as Christians; verses 15-17 have to do with their knowledge of Christ; but verses 12-14 have to do with that which every Christian has, and which he has had ever since he first trusted in Christ. Our works in v. 10 may be different. Our trials in v. 11 may be different. But our blessings in Christ are all the same! What one believer has, every believer has. And so there is not one of us who can say that this does not include us.

In Ephesians 1 which I hope to begin with you a week from next Sunday, Paul mentioned more of our blessings in salvation than he did here. Here he mentioned only three: one in v. 12, one in v. 13, and one in v. 14. I want us to notice what each one of them is. But before I deal with them, I want you to notice three special things about those three requests. And then we will look at the requests.

I. FOUR IMPORTANT OBSERVATIONS.

Remember that this is a part of Paul's prayer. The first observation is this:

A. Paul was praying that they would pray.

Christians pray, but how sad it is that they pray so little. Perhaps I should make it more personal and say, How sad it is that we pray so little! And even

when we do pray, we often pray so half-heartedly. We pray more as a duty than a joy. One of the greatest requests that you can pray for me and I can pray for you is that we will pray!

The second observation is this:

- B. Paul was praying that when they prayed they would be thankful.

This, along with worship, ought to occupy a large part of the time we spend in prayer. If, as Paul told the Thessalonians, we are to give thanks in everything (see 1 Thess. 5:18), then we are never going to run out of things to be thankful for. Every day for us should be Thanksgiving Day.

It is true that we have a lot of needs to bring to the Lord--our own needs, our family's needs, our church's needs, our city's needs, our nation's needs--and it is right that we should. But it will do something to our praying if, along with all of that intercession, we cultivate the habit of giving thanks for the blessings that we have already received. Paul asked the Corinthian believers in 1 Cor. 4:7b),

. . . and what hast thou
that thou didst not receive?
now if thou didst receive it,
why dost thou glory,
as it thou hadst not received it?

We need to be thankful, and we need to be thankful in prayer.

The third observation is this:

- C. We need to be thankful to God.

Or, as our text indicates, we need to be thankful to God as our Father.

Again--isn't it strange that we usually have no trouble saying, "Thank you," to people, but we are all deficient in our thanksgiving to our heavenly Father. Those of you who are fathers ought to realize a little of what this means to God because you certainly know how it touches your heart when one of your children says, "Thank you," to you!

And remember that just as we do not have anything that we have not received, you do not have any blessing but what you have received it from your heavenly Father! Is that not what James 1:17 tells us?

So continue to be thankful to the people through whom your blessings may come to you, but do not forget to thank your Father Who is in heaven from Whom all of your blessings originated!

There is one more observation:

D. We need to be thankful for the Lord Jesus Christ.

I have already pointed out that these are blessings that have to do with our salvation, and I have mentioned Christ, but I want to be sure that you take special note of the place that the Lord has in all of the blessings of our salvation. In this text it becomes especially clear at the end of v. 13 and the beginning of v. 14. The blessings of salvation have come from God, but all of them have come through Christ. If Christ had not come, we would have none of them! And so, while we are being thankful for the blessings of our salvation, always remember that this really means being thankful for our dear Saviour. Salvation requires a Saviour, and Christ alone is that Saviour.

Well, if we had no more than these four observations that I have made, we would all have plenty to work on for this next week, and many weeks after that. Let us pray. Let us be thankful when we pray. Let us be thankful to our heavenly Father. And let us be thankful for Christ.

Now let us look at these THREE OF GOD'S GREATEST BLESSINGS-- and they are among His greatest blessings because they have to do with salvation. God never does anything for any person that is any greater than saving him (or her).

II. THE THREE GREAT BLESSINGS.

We have the first blessing in v. 12, the second blessing in v. 13, and the third blessing in v. 14. And these are only three of those blessings of salvation which we have from our Father through our Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ.

A. The first blessing (Col. 1:12).

I do not have the time to deal with any of these exhaustively. We could easily spend a whole evening on each one. But let me pick up the main idea in each verse, and you can go from there in your own meditation on these great verses with their great blessings.

This verse speaks of the goal of our salvation: our inheritance. It is "in light", i.e., of light, or in the glory, in heaven!

Remember what Peter said about our inheritance in 1 Pet. 1:3-5. The Bible has a lot to say about our inheritance.

What is our inheritance?

1. It is heaven.
2. It is being with Christ.
3. It is being like Christ.
4. It is being without sin.
5. It is having eternal life.
6. It is being without trials, without temptations, without suffering of any kind.

It is all of these things, and many, many more! It is an inheritance that is more wonderful than words can adequately express. There never have been heirs who have received so much as the child of God will receive!

But do you want to know something? YOU DO NOT DESERVE ONE PART OF IT. Do you want to know something else? I DO NOT DESERVE ONE PART OF IT EITHER. Then why do we think that we can get it? There is just one reason, and that is the reason that is stated here. It is bound up in that word, "meet." It means to be made worthy, or to qualify.

How do we qualify? There is only one reason. We are the children of our heavenly Father. We have been born into His family. We are His sons and daughters. And we have become His sons and daughters through Christ. So we can say this: WE QUALIFY IN CHRIST. There is no heavenly inheritance for anyone but a child of God, and no one is a child of God except the person who is "in Christ," who is trusting Christ for his salvation.

B. The second blessing (Col. 1:13).

Where were you and I born when we came into this world? I do not mean city and state, or hospital or home. I mean, what was our spiritual location?

This verse tells us that we were born under "the power of darkness." The word for "power" here is authority. We were all born under the authority of the darkness of Satan and the darkness of this world. It is hard to believe that about a precious little baby, isn't it? But it is true. It was true of us, and it is true of them.

But what has happened to us? Through our Lord Jesus Christ we have been "delivered." The verb means that we have been rescued. We have been snatched from that danger. Who rescued us? Who snatched us from our enemy? The Father did, and He did it through Christ and His work on the Cross. And what did He do with us? He "translated us in the kingdom of his dear Son," lit., the Son of His love. Now we are under the protection, under the authority, of King Jesus! Our greatest joy now is to do His will, and it is our greatest safety. Once we were in bondage to sin; now we have been set free from our sin, from the power of sin, and able to live a life pleasing to God.

There is one more blessing that Paul mentioned here.

C. The third blessing (Col. 1:14).

We have seen that we have been rescued from the power of the Enemy. We have been rescued from the power of our sin. But what has happened to all of that sin?

There is just one very simple, and very wonderful answer. In fact, it is almost too good to be true, and you and I would have no reason to believe what I am about to say if it were not in the Word of God.

HERE IS THE ANSWER ABOUT OUR SINS--REGARDLESS OF WHAT KIND OF SINS THEY WERE, OR HOW MANY--THEY ARE FORGIVEN! They are off of the books. We are cleansed.

I read somewhere years ago that some man said that this is the greatest word in any language: "forgiveness." Well, there are a lot of words that are wonderful to a Christian, and this certainly rates close to the top!

How could our sins be forgiven? Again, there is only one answer. It is because of the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ. This is what He was doing when He died on the Cross. He was satisfying the righteousness of God concerning our sins. And now they will be remembered against us no more! See Heb. 10:17. "We have (present tense) redemption"--meaning that we have

been delivered! Delivered from sin's penalty.
Delivered from sin's power.

Concl: Do you not think that I am justified in using the
subject that I have given to my message tonight?
THREE OF GOD'S GREATEST BLESSINGS. What more could He have
done for us?

Are you thankful for them? Do you tell the Father that you
are thankful? Do you confess your unworthiness? Do you tell
Him how grateful you are for the Lord Jesus?

Perhaps you do not know the Lord as your Saviour, and so you
cannot thank the Father for these blessings because He is not
your Father and Christ is not your Saviour and these blessings
are not yours. Let me tell that you have can more in the way
of material riches and possessions than any other person in
the world, but, if you do not know Christ as your Saviour, you
are among the poorest of the earth. He can be your Saviour.
He will be your Saviour. Come to Him tonight by faith, and
put your trust in Him. He alone can save you.

THE PRIMARY PRAYER

Luke 18:9-14

Intro: When the Lord spoke the words of this parable, He was continuing to speak about prayer. And it is apparent from verse 7 and 8 that the Lord had in mind the prayers of God's elect. Prayer is really a family matter; it is for those who are in the family of God. That was made clear from the model prayer which the Lord gave to His disciples. He said at that time, "When ye pray, say our Father."

It is not right to say that God will not hear and answer the prayers of those who are not His children. He can do whatever He pleases about that. But the Word of God is clear on the point that it is the people of God who can and should pray with the expectation that God will hear and answer their prayers. God does not always answer when and how we would like for Him to answer us, but the fact remains: prayer is for those who know the Lord.

However, the first verse of our text indicates that some who were listening to the Lord were those who "trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others." And it is clear from the parable that, as amazing as it might have seemed to the masses of the people in our Lord's day, the people our Lord had in mind were the Pharisees! They were supposedly the spiritual leaders of the people, and much of their time was given to prayer. In the Sermon on the Mount the Lord had said that

they love to pray standing in the synagogues
and in the corners of the streets,
that they may be seen of men (Matt. 6:6).

Accordingly the Lord said, "They have their reward," i.e., being seen of men and honored by men for their supposed piety would be all of the answer that they would get!

Later the Lord was speaking about the Pharisees again, whom He said, "For a pretense make long prayers" (Matt. 23:14). Not only would their prayers not be answered, but they would "receive the greater condemnation."

So it is a very serious thing to know who should pray, and how to pray. Our Lord did not want anyone to be mistaken on this point, but, on the other hand, He wanted everyone who was listening to Him to know the kind of prayer that would be heard in heaven. And so the Lord told a parable to get the truth across to those who were listening to Him.

The story had to do with:

I. TWO MEN (Luke 18:9, 10)..

One was a Pharisee; the other was a publican.

The Lord could hardly have chosen two men who were farther apart in every way. The only thing they both had in common was that they were both Jews.

A. The Pharisee.

The Pharisee was very religious Jew. He was orthodox. And he was looked up to as a leader of the people in such things as prayer. He was very devout (from all appearances). You would expect to find him at the temple at the hour of prayer.

B. The publican.

The publican was also a Jew, but he was not respected at all. In fact, he was a man who was hated. He was looked upon as a traitor toward his people because his job was to collect the taxes for Rome from the people of Israel. They had so much that they had to collect, and they could keep whatever else they could collect. And so they took advantage of the people in the name of Rome. They robbed others for their own personal gain.

You would usually have been very surprised to see him at the temple at the hour of prayer. If you did see him at the temple, you would immediately brand him as a hypocrite.

But there they go: two men who hated each other (or at least that is the way they usually felt about each other).

The next thing in the parable has to do with:

II. TWO PRAYERS (Luke 18:11-13).

A. The Pharisee's prayer (vv. 11, 12).

Two things we note about the Pharisee's prayer at the outset:

- 1) He was standing, and evidently, from the description about the publican in v. 13, he was standing close to the center of things. He felt right at home. He acted like he owned the place.
- 2) The Lord said that he was talking to himself. He knew that he should thank God, but look at what he was thankful for! He was thankful that he was not as other men, and the men he was thinking about were the men who were extortioners, unjust, and

adulterers--and in particular men like the publican. Obviously he had noted that the publican was there. He fasted twice every week, and faithfully tithed (according to what he said) everything that he possessed.

There is one word that we could use to describe the Pharisees prayer: It was a tremendous demonstration of P-R-I-D-E! While he addressed God, yet you can see from his prayer that he had no understanding of the greatness, the majesty, the exalted glory of God. His prayer made it sound like God should be thankful that he had taken the time to come to the temple to pray.

Now let us look at:

B. The publican's prayer (v. 13).

We get a completely different picture here from the one the Lord gave of the Pharisee.

This man was standing, too, but "standing afar off." The publican and the Pharisee may have gone to the same place at the same time, but they did not stand together when they prayed. If you have been reading Paul's epistle to the Ephesians you should immediately recognize these words, "afar off," as a term which belonged to the Gentiles. See Eph. 2:9-11. Here was a Jew who felt that he was no better than a Gentile. He really did not believe that there was any place for him in the temple. He would not look up at God, but continued to beat upon his chest as he poured out his heart to the Lord.

He had no form of prayer. His prayer was not a long one. In the English it is just 7 words; in the Greek there are only 6! By way of contrast the Pharisee's prayer in the English is 34 words; in the Greek, 29! The Pharisee's was at least four times the length of the publican's prayer.

But now look at his prayer. The Pharisee supposedly was the theologian between the two, but there is all kinds of theology in the publican's prayer; none in the Pharisee's prayer.

Let us look at his prayer.

1. The printed page cannot convey to us the sounds with which these words were expressed, but I want to suggest tonight, that when the publican said, "God," it sounded altogether different from what

the Pharisee said. They both started out with, "The God" (in the Greek), but the publican made you feel that he knew Who God is--the exalted God, the mighty God, the holy God, a God which he was not worthy to address.

2. There was one attribute of God which the publican was clinging to. It was God's mercy. The Pharisee did not need the mercy of God because he had a lot of works to lay before the Lord. But the publican had nothing. He came with a crushed and broken heart. God did not owe him anything, and he knew it! We can clearly see that the publican knew that he deserved judgment, but he was pleading for mercy.

However, there is more to this request than we might at first recognize. The verb translated, "be merciful," could also be translated, "be propitious." He was calling for mercy in the form of a substitute. He was praying that someone would atone for his sins. He knew that God could not overlook His sin; God's righteousness had to be satisfied by someone meeting the requirement which sin demanded. "The wages of sin is death." That publican knew that either he had to die, or someone had to take his place.

You see, he was praying for one just like the Lord Jesus Christ. HE is the propitiation for our sins, and only HE! Christ met all of the demands of God, and He did it in mercy.

But there is one other very important point.

3. Notice how he described himself. He not only said, "God be propitious to me a sinner," but he said, "God be propitious, be merciful, to me, THE sinner."

The Pharisee had no consciousness of his own sin, but almost everybody else was a sinner--including "this publican"! If the publican overheard the Pharisees prayer (and he probably did), his response was, "Yes, Lord, I not only am a sinner, but I am THE sinner. My sin is so great that I can't see how anybody could be as bad as I am. I may be the only one who needs to be saved, but please make provision for my salvation."

What was the sequel?

III. TWO RESULTS.

They are stated very simply.

A. The publican was justified.

B. The Pharisee was not justified.

What does it mean to be justified? It means that a sinner is declared to be righteous in God's sight on the basis that His sins have been forgiven through the substitutionary death of a proper sacrifice.

What was that sacrifice? Was it the blood of bulls and goats? No. It was the death of Jesus Christ the Son of God. He is the Redeemer. He took upon Himself to die for all of those whom the Father had given to Him.

Concl: You see, the problem with the Pharisee was that he had never prayed this primary prayer. This is where prayer gets its start, when we recognize that we are under the judgment of God because of our sin, and that unless we have a Substitute, we will suffer forever for our sins against God.

Where do you stand before God, alone, and in your sin, or in Christ, and forgiven and redeemed?

May God in His grace extend His mercy to any of you tonight who are without Christ and without hope.

THE PRIESTHOOD OF CHRIST
Hebrews 5:1-10

Intro: It is not my purpose tonight to try to deal with all that is involved in the priesthood of the Lord Jesus Christ. That is too great a subject for one message. But I do want to show (1) the work of the priesthood, (2) the uniqueness of Christ's priesthood, and (3) at least some of the results of His work.

Anyone who has read the Bible is familiar with the work of the priest. It helps to remember the difference between the prophet and the priest. Both were ministers. Both were ministers of God. And both were ministers on behalf of the people. But there was this difference: (1) the prophet ministered to the people; (2) the priest ministered to God. The prophet was a messenger; the priest was a mediator. The prophet went to the people on behalf of God. The priest went to God on behalf of the people. Both were concerned about sin. Whenever you find a prophet in the OT you know that the spiritual condition of the people has dipped to a very low ebb. The prophet carried a message of warning, of judgment, of God's displeasure with sin, but also a message of hope and forgiveness. But it was the priest who was concerned with the removal of sin, and the restoration of fellowship with God on the part of those who had sinned.

There was one special point on which the work of the prophet and the work of the priest were similar. Both had to be called of God. Any prophet who preached without having been called of God was a false prophet. God had not sent him. Likewise, the priest had to be called of God. The priesthood was limited to one tribe, the tribe of Levi, and the high priesthood to one family in that tribe, the family of Aaron. No one dared to serve as a priest except those who were appointed by God. The writer of Hebrews was speaking specifically about the high priest when he wrote the words of verse 4. The limitation of the old Levitical priesthood is seen in verse 3: the high priest himself needed to be forgiven because he, too, was a sinner!

What is most surprising in our text are the words at the beginning of verse 5:

So also Christ glorified not himself
to be made an high priest . . .

Even our Lord, as great as He was, and is, did not presume to appoint Himself as a High Priest. In the purpose of God that prerogative belongs to the Father alone.

Hebrews 10:4 tells us with reference to all of the OT sacrifices,

For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats

should take away sins.

But it was absolutely necessary that a final sacrifice be made that would "take away sins." The question was, Who would make it?

That question had been answered by the Members of the Godhead even before the foundation of the world. It was determined that the Son of God would become a man so that He could die for sinners. And He would not join the ranks of the priests of Aaron, but He would belong to an order older than that of Aaron: the order of Melchizedek. The Lord would become man without any change in His Deity, and as a sinless Substitute the Father would lay upon His Son the sins of all who, by the grace of God, would believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. His sacrifice would be of infinite value, and would render it unnecessary for another sacrifice ever to be made.

The book of Hebrews was written to tell us about that sacrifice.

So let me re-emphasize:

I. THE WORK OF THE PRIESTHOOD.

It is brought out in verses 1 and 3 of our text. He was concerned about the removal of sins as the barrier which separated sinful men from a holy God.

You see this over and over again throughout the OT. Every Jew understood this. And yet, with the thousands upon thousands of sacrifices that we offered in the OT, the sacrifices continued to be offered because none of them was a permanent answer to the problem of sin. They were types. They were offered in anticipation of that final sacrifice which would be made. But they alone were not the final answer to the sin of man.

I hope that truth is clear to all of us. And I hope that you will see that, if the God-given Levitical order were not the final answer, there is no other solution for sin which can possibly meet the sinner's need either. Their value, as I have stated, was that they were accepted by God because they were all to be validated by the sacrifice of Christ.

Now let me speak for a moment about:

II. THE UNIQUENESS OF CHRIST'S PRIESTHOOD.

Some men and some women have set up their own systems of salvation, and there have been countless numbers of people who have had their own ideas about how they can get right

with God. You can see that they have all done one thing which is really blasphemous. They have taken upon themselves the office of a high priest, SOMETHING WHICH EVEN OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST DID NOT, AND WOULD NOT, DO. No person has the right to teach a different way of salvation unless he can do one thing: prove that he (or she) has been appointed of God!

It is an easy thing for a person to make such a claim, that he or she has such a divine commission, but then they have to show why, after all of these years, God has found some reason for rejecting the sacrifice of Christ.

In addition to that, who in his right mind would claim that he could do something, or get others to do something, that would be an improvement upon the work of Christ? Again I say, it is blasphemy to make such a suggestion, and to claim that salvation is on any other basis than faith in our Lord Jesus Christ.

There is no evidence anywhere that God has ever appointed the work of salvation to any other than His own beloved Son. And when Christ died, the veil in the temple was torn from top to bottom, indicating that there was no longer any need for another sacrifice. The sacrifice of Christ was and is entirely sufficient for all who will call upon the Lord to be saved.

The last thing that I want to do tonight is to consider with you:

III. SOME OF THE RESULTS OF CHRIST'S SACRIFICE.

And I am thinking about the results of our Lord's work with respect to sin. If people can see that the sin question has been settled once and for all, they will not have an ear to listen to any of the false, self-appointed priests that we have in every generation. Whatever they might suggest could never do what our Lord has already done.

Turn back, first of all, to:

A. Hebrews 1:3.

I call your attention to the word, "purged." Our Lord has "purged our sins" ("our sins" because this book of Hebrews was written for believers).

Lit. this is made purification. The Lord Jesus Christ cleansed us from the defilement of sin, that which rendered us unfit for the presence of God, by His

sacrifice, and by that alone. Nothing needed to be added. Anyone who has taken refuge in the death of Christ on the Cross needs nothing else to make himself acceptable to God.

Let us look at another verse:

B. Hebrews 2:17.

Here I call your attention to the words, "to make reconciliation for the sins of the people."

Perhaps you have a marginal reading in your Bible to tell you that a better translation would be, to make propitiation for the sins of the people.

What is one great problem standing in the way of salvation? Why are our works not sufficient? Why were the OT sacrifices not enough? It is because the righteousness of God had to be satisfied concerning our sins. God has never declared Himself satisfied with any other sacrifice except the sacrifice of His Son. If God is satisfied, then that is really all that we need to know. If God is not satisfied, no amount of sincerity, or diligence, or anything else, would make any sacrifice sufficient for our sins.

Let us look at another verse:

C. Hebrews 9:26.

Here the words that I want you to notice are "put away." "He (Christ) appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself."

This means that sin is vanquished, overcome, completely subdued. It goes beyond being redeemed (see Heb. 9:15). Our sins have been set aside. They are no longer a problem in our relationship with God. It would seem that the writer of Hebrews is indicating two things here:

- 1) We will never be called to account for our sins.
- 2) The Lord has made provision, not only for our deliverance from the penalty of sin, but sin, although it still is a possibility with us, yet it no longer can dominate us and enslave us as it once did.

Concl: Obviously much more could be said, but just these three verses give us a good picture of the work of our Great High Priest, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We could not do this for ourselves even through obedience to the Law. If the Law never produced a saint in the OT, why should we think that we could be different? Our works may be sincere, but they do not help. No other sacrifice is sufficient for our salvation but the sacrifice of Christ. And it is more than enough.

The only reason all of those OT sacrifices meant anything at all, and satisfied God for the time being, was because they were offered in anticipation of the sacrifice of Christ. Even Abraham, long before the Law, believed this. In John 8:56 it is recorded that our Lord said,

Your father Abraham rejoiced to see my day:
and saw it, and was glad.

Why did he see it? Because God showed it to him. Why was he glad? Because he knew that that was the answer for his own sin.

Are you looking for God tonight, looking for peace concerning your sin? Let me say, if you are looking, it is only because God has been looking for you. If this is news to you tonight, give God the glory for making you see it. Look no farther. When you have heard about Christ, you have heard about the only One who can take care of your sin. The sufficient sacrifice was offered 2,000 years ago, and there is sufficient value in it to cover the sins of all men if they were to turn to Christ.

Come to Him now. Claim Him as your Saviour. He is all you need.

THE MINISTRY OF THE GOSPEL
2 Corinthians 4:1-7

Intro: The passage before us tonight is one in which Paul was discussing his ministry, or, as he called it in v. 1, "this ministry," which, as the context shows, was THE MINISTRY OF THE GOSPEL. It was "this ministry" into which the Apostle Paul had been called. He wrote about this to Timothy in 1 Tim. 1:12,

And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord,
who hath enabled me,
for that he counted me faithful,
putting me into the ministry.

Paul's ministry as a servant of the Lord Jesus Christ was very different from his work as a Pharisee. He had felt that he was serving the Lord as a Pharisee, but he later found that he was really serving himself, seeking his own advancement and glory. But, as in every other thing, when he became a child of God, he had to "un-learn" and "re-learn" everything that he thought he knew. He wrote in many different places about what it meant to serve the Lord, but none is any clearer than what we have in the first seven verses of 2 Corinthians 4.

To be sure, Paul wrote these things for his fellow-servants of the Lord in that day. And his words have always been of the greatest value for all servants of the Lord from that day until this. A young preacher can find no better pastoral theology than he will find in the epistles of the Apostle Paul.

But they are important for another reason--and this is what I have in mind tonight.

A small minority of us here tonight are in, or soon hope to be in, the ministry. BUT there is another sense in which we are all in "this ministry." We all are responsible for the spread of the Gospel. We are all to be seeking to lead others to the Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, this is a passage for all of us. We can all profit from what Paul said here. He was able to say these things because of what the Lord had taught him. And we know that the Lord had taught him these things so he could help all of the people of God to know more about "this ministry," the ministry which God blesses!

If you were to read 2 Corinthians up to this point, you would realize, as these verses also bring out, that the ministry of the Gospel is not easy. It is hard, extremely hard. It will use up everything you have in you. Obstacles are everywhere. For Paul it meant even physical danger. Humanly speaking, it was honor to be a servant of the Lord. If you need to be reminded of Paul's problems, turn on to the 11th chapter of 2

Corinthians and see how Paul described his work.

And yet, in spite of that, read also 2 Cor. 2:14.

This does not mean that he always saw everybody receiving Christ whenever he preached or whenever he spoke personally with people. Not even our Lord saw that. No, what he meant is brought out in vv. 15, 16 of 2 Cor. 2. It meant that he was able to spread the knowledge of Christ everywhere he went. That is the ministry that we have! We do not save people. We are not able by ourselves to convince anyone to become a Christian. That is not our work. Our work is to present the Gospel; God is the One Who determines how our message will be used. Sometimes Paul saw an awakening; on other occasions he saw a riot. But the message was getting through.

The Gospel is a powerful message; there is no question about that. But God has ordained the work of the ministry so that the message would be identified with the messenger. Often the message is hindered because we the messengers are not what we ought to be. We have not learned what Paul had learned. We often look upon our circumstances as our problem when the truth of the matter may be that we are the problem. Let us look carefully at what Paul wrote, and think about what he said in connection with our own lives. Here we have the qualities necessary for a fruitful ministry.

I want to use five words tonight to describe what Paul wrote here. They are the words:

- 1) Continuity.
- 2) Sincerity.
- 3) Difficulty.
- 4) Humility.
- 5) Infirmary.

I. CONTINUITY (2 Cor. 4:1).

I have already mentioned that the work of the Gospel is hard work. It is not easy to speak to people about Christ. There is always the possibility that you will lose friends. You may make enemies among people who paid little attention to you before--maybe they did not even know you before you spoke to them of Christ.

And so the tendency with all of us is to give up. That is what Paul meant by his reference to fainting. Lots and lots of the Lord's people have fainted, have quit, have given up the ministry altogether. They no longer talk to anybody of Christ.

Why was it that Paul did not give up?

Notice those we, "as we have received mercy." He stated that this was the reason he had not fallen by the wayside. Paul was pulling aside the curtains of his inner life, his personal relationship with the Lord. He was telling the Corinthians that it was the Lord, ministering mercy to him day by day, that had kept him persevering in the work of the Gospel ministry.

He wanted the Corinthians to know that he was not some kind of a super-human person. He was just as human as they were, just as weak, just as prone to quit. But his problems had driven him to the Lord, and from his fellowship with the Lord he had received the strengthening mercy of God to continue on in spite of the troubles.

I like what Paul wrote to Timothy in his second epistle to him. He was telling about some of the discouragements that he had had, and then he said this:

Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me,
and strengthened me;
that by me the preaching might be fully known,
and that all the Gentiles might hear:
and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.
And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work,
and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom:
to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.
(2 Tim. 4:17, 18).

You see, Paul wanted the Corinthians to know that the Lord has not given us a job, and then left us to do it the best way possible, with our own resources, but when He told His disciples to go into the all the world, He also told them that He would be with them "unto the end of the age."

The first lesson that we need to learn to keep us from quitting is, as Paul said in 2 Cor. 3:5b, "our sufficiency is of God." (Go on and read v. 6 with it.)

The Lord is the only One Who can keep us from giving up, can keep us pressing on in "this ministry."

II. SINCERITY (2 Cor. 4:2).

If we are going to be effective and fruitful servants of the Lord Jesus Christ, we cannot be one way outwardly, but another inwardly. We cannot be living with a disobedient heart in most things, and yet seeking to present ourselves as servants of the Lord. We cannot be guilty of trying to manipulate people. We are going to be perfectly honest in the way we handle the Word of God.

This was one place where Paul had to make some real changes in his life. The Pharisees were professional hypocrites.

We run into that in the world all of the time. Business people so often don't care how they reach their goal, the main thing is their goal. If they can take you and me to the cleaners on the way, that is our problem, not theirs.

The ministry today has run into massive problems because some men in the ministry have forgotten (if they ever knew) that we need to be able to commend "ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God." Can we do that? We have to do that in "this ministry." We may be able to fool people, but we cannot fool God, and you will note that Paul said here, "in the sight of God."

If we are going to see the blessing of God in the work of the ministry we must be sincere, genuine, real, honest, in our relationships with the Lord, and with each other, and with everybody else.

III. DIFFICULTY (2 Cor. 4:3, 4).

We are to preach the Gospel to people who are "lost." That is, they are people who do not know where they are, and most of the time they do not know that they are "lost."

More than that they are blind. They cannot see. They are blind in their minds, so they cannot make any sense out of the Gospel. And all of this, as Paul spoke of it here, was due to the work of "the god of this world," Satan, the Devil.

This is one reason why you and I find it so tough to talk to people about the Lord. The Devil will do everything that he can to keep them under his power. And the one thing that he does not want them to see is "the light of the glorious gospel of Christ." But that is why we need to be careful not to turn aside to other things instead of standing by the Gospel message. "This ministry" is the ministry of the Gospel, the ministry of Christ--Who He is, His life, His death, His resurrection. People would rather be entertained. They would rather be told how great they are, and what tremendous potential they have. They do not want to hear about sin and salvation. But it is only the message of Christ, the Gospel, which is "the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16).

"This ministry" is a humanly impossible ministry. Nothing is harder. Many false gospels are being preached today, and often in supposedly evangelical churches. But we need to stand by the true Gospel of the grace of God. It is by the preaching of Christ that the difficulties standing in the way of the salvation of sinners will be removed.

The fourth word coming out of our text is:

IV. HUMILITY (2 Cor. 4:5, 6).

I have been editing my messages on Philippians, and not too long ago I went over what I had said about that passage in Phil. 2:5-11. That speaks not only of the humility of our Lord Jesus Christ, but of His humiliation. And Paul began that passage by saying, "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus . . ."

In preaching the Gospel, we need to be careful about preaching ourselves. That is why we have to be careful about personal testimonies. Personal testimonies often replace the preaching of the Gospel in our present-day church services. Most people would rather listen to a human interest story than the Gospel, but testimonies are not "the power of God unto salvation." THE GOSPEL IS!

The testimony that counts is the testimony of a changed life. God has saved us and sent us into the world, not just to give a testimony, but to be a testimony. The people of the world will soon be able to tell from what we are if there is anything to the Gospel. Either "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God" is there, or it is not! But the One we need to preach is CHRIST! If you want to see the blessing of God upon "this ministry," don't waste people's time by telling them about yourself; tell them about "Christ Jesus the Lord." That is where the blessing will come from—when sinners hear about Him. We are only sinners saved by grace, and so let us not pretend before the world that we are more than that.

Finally,

V. INFIRMITY (2 Cor. 4:7).

The ways of God are often very strange to us, are they not?

If you were seeking to guarantee the success of the Gospel, what kind of a person would you choose? You would think that the Lord would have chosen someone who was very popular, someone with a lot of charisma, someone with boundless energy, someone with great speaking ability.

But what do you find when you look at the servants of the Lord? One word will describe all of us: infirmary. Paul said, including himself in what he said, "But we have this treasure in earthen vessels . . ."

We are made out of dust, and we are going to return to

dust if the Lord does not come before we die. Paul was just an earthen vessel. Some of the Lord's most fruitful servants have struggled all of their lives with poor health. We have a powerful message, but we preach that message from weak bodies. The message and the vessel which carries the message do not seem to belong with each other. Was it not that way even with our Lord Jesus Christ during the days of His flesh here on earth?

But this is the way God has ordained that it should be. He would have done better to give the Gospel to angels, and let them proclaim it because angels do not die. Why did the Lord do it this way?

Paul has told us at the end of v. 7:

. . . that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

God has done it so that:

- 1) The messenger would realize that he does not have in himself what it takes to serve the Lord, but would trust the Lord.
- 2) The people who are saved would glorify God for what He has done in their lives.

Concl: Paul did not paint a glamorous picture of what it means to serve the Lord, and neither did the Lord Himself. When Anaias went to tell Paul that he was the Lord's chosen vessel, he did not tell him that he was going to see a lot of people saved. Nor did he tell him that churches would be established all over the Empire through his ministry. No, he told him that he would:

bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings,
and the children of Israel.

But he also said this:

For I will shew him how great things he must suffer
for my name's sake (Acts 9:15b, 16).

It is hard to imagine how things could be worse than they are in our country with respect to sin. We have a lot of problems for which men have no answer. And nobody, except in our churches, seems to think that God has anything to do with all of this, nor that God might have the answer that we need.

But let us not be discouraged. And let us not give up. The Lord has always been sufficient for His people, and He will be sufficient for us today. Let us walk with Him, spend time each day with Him, reading the Word and praying that our lives may be made what the Lord wants them to be. And then let us pray for boldness to make Christ known, spreading the message of the Gospel, trusting the Lord to use His Word, and believing that He will.

THE GOSPEL ACCORDING TO JAMES

James 2:14-26

Intro: It is amazing how inconsistent and unreasonable people can be about the Gospel. It is evidence of their depravity, of their spiritual blindness. We are continually making decisions of all kinds, and most people are careful to make the right decisions. Some people, because of their desire for pleasure, will throw caution to the wind, but often then live to regret their decision because of the unfavorable, and often tragic, effects which they have brought on themselves.

If we are faced with a physical problem, we want to know that we have found the right solution, if there is one. If it is a simple thing like making a trip, we buy maps and ask others to make sure that we get where we want to go. We make our homes as safe as we can so as not to be burglarized, and to avoid the possibility of a fire or some other catastrophe. Most people want to act sincerely in all such matters, but we not only want to be sincere; WE WANT TO BE RIGHT!

But it seems that when it comes to matters of religion, matters having to do with God, we close our minds to the fact that we can be sincere and yet be wrong. People have the idea that if a thing is right for you, then it has to be right. And so many are not even inclined to think that there could be a right and a wrong concerning spiritual matters. However, the fact is that there is a right and a wrong. The Bible is the only place we can go to get the right answer. If a person is wrong concerning what he believes about God and salvation and life after death, it is the most tragic error that he can possibly make.

The wisest man who ever lived (apart from our Lord Jesus Christ) said this,

There is a way which seemeth right unto a man,
but the end thereof are the ways of death.

In fact, we have that twice among Solomon's Proverbs: once in Prov. 14:12, and again in Prov. 16:25.

Man has a strong propensity, a natural inclination, a bent, toward being deceived. Man is more likely to make a wrong choice than he is a right choice. Just because it seems right to him does not make it right. In fact, the very fact that man thinks that something is right is all the more reason to believe that it is wrong. So we need a true guide, a reliable source of information, someone who can point us in the right direction, and keep us from making a wrong choice. The only One Who can do that is God, and that is one major reason why it is important to turn to the Bible. The Bible is God's Word. God will not deceive us, nor will he mislead us. All

eternity is at stake. What does the Bible teach us about the matter of our relationship with God.

Let me mention four things:

I. ONLY ONE WAY.

All of Scripture is united in making this point: There are not many ways to God; there is only one way--AND THAT IS GOD'S WAY. At no point in history has it ever been left up to man to approach God any way that he would choose to come to God. He must come God's way, or not come at all.

Those who know the Bible, know what that one way is. It was stated by our Lord Jesus Christ, and His words are found in John 14:6,

I am the way, the truth, and the life:

no man cometh unto the Father, but by me.

Peter made the same emphasis when, in the early days of the Church, he was surrounded by the religious leaders of Israel, and he said this--a message that was not acceptable to them:

Neither is there salvation in any other;

for there is none other name under heaven

given among men,

whereby we must be saved (Acts 4:12).

The Apostle John, in his old age, was preaching this same message from God. He wrote in 1 John 5:11, 12,

And this is the record,

that God hath given to us eternal life,

and this life is in his Son.

He that hath the Son hath life;

and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

You can always find people who will not agree with these words, but we need to remember that those who differ are setting up their words in opposition to the Word of God, and it is the Word of God that is true. If you follow man's ideas, you will die in your sins, and spend eternity in hell. There is no place for argument in this because the Word of God is clear in stating that we must come to God in His way, and He only has one way. That way is through Christ. Christ is the Way to God. Christ is the only One Who can save us from our sins. He died for sinners, and He was raised from the dead as evidence that God was pleased, was satisfied with the death of His Son. No teacher of any other way of salvation can give you that assurance. If you want to know God, if you want to have the forgiveness of your sins, if you want to have eternal life, you can only have these blessings by coming to Christ.

The second thing that we need to realize is this:

II. BY FAITH.

This is also very clear from Scripture.

The Philippian jailor asked Paul and Silas this question:
"Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" (Acts 16:30).

And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ,
and thou shalt be saved, and thy house (Acts 16:31).

One verse which is among the most familiar verses in all of the Bible says the same thing. These are the words of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself:

For God so loved the world,
that he gave his only begotten Son,
that whosoever believeth in him should not perish,
but have everlasting life.

You recognize these words as John 3:16.

Faith is believing, but it is more than believing certain facts. Faith is putting our trust in someone else to do something for us. In this case, it is trusting God to do for us what we could never do for ourselves, and, as we have already seen, it is trusting God and Christ to do for us what no one else could do for us.

The Bible even teaches us that saving faith does not come from us. It comes from God. Christ is "the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:2). Faith is a gift from God given to us through the Word of God. Paul wrote in Rom. 10:17,

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

Therefore, we are dependent upon God to give us the faith to trust Christ as our Saviour.

But this leads us to a third point:

III. NOT OF WORKS.

Again I can say what I have said about my two previous points: This is very clearly taught in the Word of God.

Salvation cannot be earned. If you were going to do something to earn salvation, how must do you think that you would have to do? You cannot answer that question because the truth is, you would never be able to do enough. That is why people who are trying to earn their salvation can never be certain that they have done enough. They haven't done enough, and never could.

Salvation is by grace. It is a gift of God. Therefore, it is not something that we earn. We cannot earn even part of it. If we could it would not be by grace. The moment you and I contribute to our salvation, if God were to accept what we do (and He will not), it would no longer be purely a gift.

Listen to the clear teaching of Scripture on this subject of works:

- 1) Eph. 2:8, 9.
- 2) 2 Tim. 1:9,
Who hath saved us,
and called us with an holy calling,
not according to our works,
but according to his own purpose and grace,
which was given us in Christ Jesus
before the world began.
- 3) Tit. 3:5.

This means that we cannot be saved by keeping the Law of Moses. We cannot be saved by going to church, or by reading our Bibles, or by giving our money. We cannot be saved by trying to live according to the golden rule, nor by any charitable acts. All of these things may be commendable, but they are not the way to be saved.

Salvation is a work that God does for us through the sacrificial death of Christ on the Cross. It is all of God. We receive God's mercy, but He does not reward us for what we are, nor for any of the good things that we think that we have done.

But now we come to the Epistle of James which is in this same Bible which teaches that salvation is by grace through faith in Christ, and not a reward for our good works. But this is what James said. James said that salvation is:

IV. BY FAITH AND WORKS.

This is why Martin Luther did not believe that this Epistle belonged in the Scriptures. He called it, "an epistle of straw." And here are some of the statements he objected to:

- 1) Jas. 2:14.
- 2) Jas. 2:17.
- 3) Jas. 2:20.
- 4) Jas. 2:21.
- 5) Jas. 2:22.
- 6) Jas. 2:24.
- 7) Jas. 2:25.
- 8) Jas. 2:26.

Was James teaching something different from what Paul taught, and what John taught, and what our Lord taught? What is the solution to our problem? How can we reconcile the teaching I have just been emphasizing with what James taught? What is the answer?

James was insisting upon a truth which is greatly needed today! One of the key expressions in this section of James is that which is found in Jas. 2:19. He was showing what it means to believe. The demons do not argue about the existence of only one true God, but demons are not saved! They are not justified before God.

It is interesting to see that in the first century the Church was faced with a problem that has become a major problem in our churches today. James was teaching that if faith is true faith, there will be outward, practical evidence in the life of the person who claims to believe in Christ. And if that evidence is not there, then there is no true faith.

Paul agreed with this. Cf. 2 Cor. 5:17. Also see Eph. 2:10 and Tit. 3:8. John believed this. Cf. 1 John 3:14. Listen to the words of 1 Cor. 6:9-11:

Know ye not that the unrighteous
shall not inherit the kingdom of God?
Be not deceived: neither fornicators,
nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate,
nor abusers of themselves with mankind,
Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards,
nor revilers, nor extortioners,
shall inherit the kingdom of God.
And such were some of you:
but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified,
but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus,
and by the Spirit of our God.

Our churches are running over today with people who claim to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, they claim to be Christians, but their lives are not changed. Do not think of "works" as just preaching, or teaching a Sunday School class, or of being a pastor or elder or deacon or some other church officer. "Works" have to do with our lives, the way we live, the way we do the will of God, the way we seek to please God. If these changes are not evident, then, in James' words, faith is dead. It is not true faith. It is not saving faith. The Bible knows nothing about salvation which leaves a person just like he was before.

Concl: If Paul said to the Corinthians, "Examine yourselves,

whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves . . ."
(2 Cor. 13:5a), and if Peter said to the people to whom he was
writing, "Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to
make your calling and election sure" (2 Pet. 1:10), is it out
of place for me to say the same to you tonight?

— What evidence do you have in your life that you know the Lord?
Make sure that you are saved. It is not enough to be sincere;
you must be right. And you can only know that you are right
when Christ has delivered you from your sins as well as from
the penalty of your sins. This was the burden on the heart of
James and of all of the other NT writers.

TWO KINDS OF FISHING
Luke 5:1-11

Intro: There seems to be little doubt but that this event recorded by Luke was the same which Matthew included in his Gospel with the words, first directed to Peter and Andrew, and then to James and John, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men" (Matt. 4:19; cf. vv. 18-22). Mark gives an account that is very similar to Matthew's, only he recorded that the Lord said, "Come ye after me, and I will make you to become fishers of men" (Mark 1:17; cf. vv. 16-20). And so Luke gives us the longer, more detailed account. And it is easier to see all that was involved in the discipleship of Peter and Andrew and James and John when we read the full account in Luke.

The passage makes it very clear that there are TWO KINDS OF FISHING: Fishing for fish, and fishing for men. The words of our Lord which Luke recorded promise a fruitful ministry: "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men" (Luke 5:10b). They were to exchange the work that they had been taught to do from their childhood to accept the special and higher calling of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Nobody who reads the Bible with any degree of understanding can miss the fact that the Lord came to save sinners. He sought to save them by his own preaching, and His work on the Cross was for that specific purpose: the salvation of sinners.

Nor can we miss the fact that the Lord intended to draw others into salvation through the work of His disciples. His last words to this effect are recorded for us in Matthew, Mark, Luke (in his Gospel, and also in the book of Acts), and John. And the NT Epistles indicate that this is one of the main reasons that believers are left in this world. People need to hear of Christ and His redeeming grace. Most people will not read the Bible, and so it is the task of the people of God--all of them--to take the message of the Bible to every person in every land in every generation. It is a task that never will be finished until the new heavens and the new earth are established.

Having noticed all of this in the Bible, we also need to see that this work of fishing for men requires special preparation. The Lord said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Let us see what we can learn from Luke's account that will serve to help us in this work of fishing for men.

There are, it seems to me, three significant things in this passage:

- 1) The ministry of Jesus to the multitudes (vv. 1-3).
- 2) The Lord and fishing for fish (vv. 4-7).
- 3) The astonishment of the disciples (vv. 8-10a).
- 4) The Lord's call to fish for men (vv. 10b,11).

Every part of this passage seems to be significant in that all of it is related to what the Lord was doing with these four fishermen (although Andrew is not mentioned, and we do not know why he is not mentioned).

The first thing that we have is:

I. THE MINISTRY OF JESUS TO THE MULTITUDES (Luke 5:1-3).

What was the Lord Jesus doing? He was not on a fishing trip with Peter and his partners. He was carrying on His ministry. Verses 1 and 3 both tell us that the Lord was "teaching." The people had come together "to hear the word of God."

This is important not only to help us to understand the Lord's ministry, but it is also important in helping us to understand how He was working with His disciples, preparing them for the work He had for them to do. The Lord was teaching the multitudes, but Peter and Andrew and James and John were there listening.

Teaching is not popular today. And so there is not much teaching in or out of our churches. I was told when I was just starting out in the ministry that people would not be saved by teaching the Word of God. And I was told that by a man who had been in the ministry several years.

But the Lord Jesus "taught the people out of the ship." A fishing boat was His pulpit on this occasion.

I would rather follow the example of our Lord Jesus Christ even if all of the preachers in the world told me that it was wrong. The Lord was fishing for me, and He knew that the net to use was the Word of God--not just comments here and there from the Word, but good, solid teaching. People are going to be saved by teaching, the teaching of God's Word.

Notice another thing regarding our Lord's ministry: He, being the Son of God, had the authority and wisdom to use His own words. And He often did. But here, seeking the multitudes and preparing His disciples, He chose to use what had already been written. It would be interesting to know what He taught--was it a Psalm, or a passage from one of the prophets, or something from the lives of the patriarchs? We do not know. But it was, to be sure,

something from Genesis through Malachi. He taught the Word, the written Word of God.

But here is another point: This was a lesson for the disciples to learn. If they were to see the blessing of God in fishing for men, they, too, must teach the Word of God. I mentioned this morning what Peter wrote many years later, that we are "born again . . . by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever" (1 Pet. 1:23). And notice how much of the Word Peter used when he preached in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost! Obviously the lesson was not lost on Peter.

But now let us look at our second point.

II. THE LORD AND FISHING FOR FISH (Luke 5:4-7).

The Lord had been raised as a carpenter, not as a fisherman. But as the Lord of the universe, He was the One Who had put the fish in the Sea of Galilee; in fact, He was the One Who had made the Sea of Galilee. Perhaps those fishermen did not understand all of that, but it was true nevertheless.

They had worked all night, and had not caught a single fish. Note the Lord's word to them in v. 4. (Read.) It seemed like a foolish thing to do to let down their nets again, especially after they had spent some time in cleaning them. But the significant thing was what Peter said: "Nevertheless at thy word I will let down the net." Evidently if anyone else had said that to Peter, especially a non-fisherman, Peter would have told him to jump in the Sea of Galilee!

But what was the Lord teaching these men who were to become His apostles. He was teaching them to act on the Word of God, even when it seems like a foolish thing to do. He was teaching them the importance of obedience. He was teaching them to expect to be successful where previously they had been unsuccessful.

Is the word of the Lord that important to us? You see, the work of the Lord requires not just highly gifted men, nor men who know the latest techniques in handling people. What the work of the Lord requires is men who will walk with the Lord and who will let the Word of God be their rule of life--always, under all conditions.

What happened? Note:

III. THE ASTONISHMENT OF THE FISHERMEN (Luke 5:8-10a).

Who can adequately expound the words that Peter uttered? Did he really want the Lord to go away? Of course not. He could not have lived without the Lord. What was going with him, then?

The same thing happened to him that happened to Isaiah as recorded by Isaiah in Isa. 6. In a different way, and yet with the same result, Peter saw two things:

- 1) The glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- 2) His own sinfulness and unworthiness.

And he fell before the Lord in great humility, taking the place of a lowly servant.

Moses had a similar experience. John the Apostle had this on the Isle of Patmos. To keep us from seeking the same thing, the experience of each man was different, but the result was the same.

We probably will not have a spectacular experience, but in the Lord's dealings with us through His Word we, too, must come to realize the unspeakable glory of the Lord Jesus Christ. We are to be witnesses of Him and of His saving grace. And we need to marvel as that, and to marvel that the Lord would condescend to make us His servants, His messengers, to a lost and dying world. James and John felt the same way that Peter did, and again I say I do not know what Andrew was not mentioned. He must have been there. But do not concentrate on the problem; learn the lesson of the text.

Finally,

IV. THE LORD'S CALL TO FISH FOR MEN (Luke 5:10b, 11).

How reassuring the words of the Lord were! They were not to be afraid of the Lord, nor of His work. Instead, they were to believe that just as they had fished all night, and caught nothing, then the Lord gave them more fish than they could bring to shore, so this was prophetic of the ministry that the Lord had for them.

Was this not a picture of the work of the Lord in Jerusalem? Many of the prophets had died there. The Lord Jesus was to die there. The numbers of disciples which were the result of His ministry are never in Scripture numbered much over 500. But in that fruitless place, the Spirit of God was going to take those lowly fishermen and use them as few men have ever been used. On the day of Pentecost alone 3,000 people were drawn to Christ—and that is God's count, not man's!

Concl: Could I suggest tonight that there may be two

important lessons for us in this passage? I am not going to say these dogmatically because I do not know the mind of the Lord for our work. But think about these, and pray about them.

Could this not mean that the Lord may be pleased to make us fruitful where we have labored long, but have not seen much fruit?

And could it be that the Lord was teaching His disciples on that day, and teaching us as well, that we can expect to see a real outpouring of His blessing in the salvation of many people.

If so, then the lessons that the Lord was teaching Peter and his partners are lessons that we need to learn as well--to act immediately on the Word alone, to pray that we will see more of the glory of the Lord, and our unworthiness, not to be afraid, but to follow the Lord and do the work that He has called us to do, teaching His Word.

May God use us as He sees fit, but perhaps this passage can give us the renewed strength which we need just now.

THE SERVANT AND HIS NEEDS
Proverbs 29:19

Intro: A proverb is a wise saying. It is usually expressed in just a few words. This is a big help in remembering it. Proverbs are axiomatic, that is, they are generally accepted truth which have almost universal acceptance. Proverbs carry real authority with them for that reason. A proverb might have its exceptions, but what they expressed was usually true in the majority of instances.

The man in the Bible who is best-known for his proverbs is Solomon. 1 Kings 4:32 says of Solomon that "he spake three thousand proverbs." In addition he wrote "a thousand and five" songs (Ibid.). People came from everywhere to listen to the wisdom of Solomon, even many and great kings came.

The unique thing about Solomon's proverbs was (and is) that they expressed the wisdom of God. They were not mere expressions of human wisdom, but they were revelations from God. When Solomon became the king of Israel, the Lord came to him in a dream one night and told Solomon to ask for whatever he wanted from the Lord. Solomon's response was this:

Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart
to judge thy people,
that I may discern between good and bad:
for who is able to judge this thy so great a people?
(1 Kings 3:9).

And so most of the proverbs in the book of Proverbs were Solomon's which he received from the Lord. From a practical standpoint I do not know anything that is more profitable for young and old alike than the daily reading of the Proverbs of Solomon. This is an excellent book for parents. It is a tremendous book for young people. Anyone who carefully follows the teaching of the book of Proverbs will be spared many heartaches and regrets. It is a book especially designed to help us in our walk. Like every other part of Scripture, the people who will really profit from it are those who know the Lord. It is unsurpassed in the help that it gives to a child of God of any age.

HE WROTE
FOR
SAINTS
AND
SINNERS

You will not find all of the proverbs that pertain to a certain subject in one place. They are scattered through the book so you will have to read it all to find those that you want on any particular theme. God has been very wise in doing this because, in the process of finding what you are looking for, you will come across others that you may not have been looking for, but which you need to know.

Another characteristic of the proverbs is they often have many ways in which they can be applied. That is true of the proverb I would like for us to consider tonight: Proverbs

29:19. It says this:

A servant will not be corrected by words:
for though he understand he will not answer.

As you can see, it deals with servants. Our first thought might be that it does not have much of an application to us today because we do not live in a culture where people have servants as they had them in Bible times.

But if you will think a little harder and a little longer you may realize that there is a sense in which we are all servants! A servant is someone who is under someone else's authority. He is responsible to be submissive to and to obey someone else. A servant is one who renders service to others. It does not have to be servile, humiliating, degrading kind of work. It actually can be a very honored place. In one way or another, every person is a servant.

The Bible does have a lot to say about masters and servants, but also says that children are to obey their parents, a wife is to be submissive to her husband, the husband is to render good service to his employer, and the employer is to remember that he has a master in heaven to which he is to be obedient. All of us serve our government. Men in the military serve the orders of their superiors. There has to be order and responsibility in all relationships. A man can be very high up in a large company with hundreds of people under him, but he still is not free to do anything that he wants to do. He is under his boss, and the boss himself is responsible to the stock holders to make sure that the company continues to make money.

So if you are looking for the kind of a person who is absolutely free to do whatever he wants to do, you will never find him. A person may think that he has that kind of freedom, but if he lives long enough he will get himself into deep trouble with an attitude like that.

When you bring that term, "servant," over into spiritual matters, every person alive, whether he knows it or not, is under the authority of God, and is responsible to do the will of God. The Christian takes great delight in calling himself "a servant of God," as Paul did in writing to Titus. Cf. Tit. 1:1. Paul was writing to tell Titus how to carry on the work of the Lord, making Titus his servant, and yet he had to acknowledge that at the same time he was doing it as "a servant of God."

We can carry the idea even farther.

When Paul wrote to the Roman church, he said that the believers in Rome, like believers in Portland or Vancouver or any other place, had been "servants of sin," but the Lord had

delivered them from that servitude, and they had become "the servants of righteousness." Cf. Rom. 6:17, 18.

Now I want to speak tonight about those who are "the servants of sin," but, as I do, perhaps you will see the application that can be made to those of us who have come to know the Lord and are the servants of God.

Our text actually contains two proverbs, and I would like to consider them as separate proverbs. Remember, this is what Solomon taught as the wisdom of God. They apply to all servants in varying degrees, but they apply absolutely to those who are "the servants of sin." Let us consider them.

I. THE FIRST PROVERB: "A servant will not be corrected by words" (Prov. 29:19a).

The day I read this proverb I had also be reading in the Gospel of Luke. Perhaps that is the reason the Lord impressed it upon my mind. In Luke 11 the Lord was speaking the Pharisees and to the lawyers, all of whom would have declared without hesitation that they were servants of the God of Israel. But, while they were doing religious work, and sought to live (at least outwardly) lives that would cause people to recognize them as religious men, yet the Lord knew their hearts, that things were not right with God in their hearts.

And so the Lord gave them His words. He showed them their hypocrisy, their pride, their lack of true righteousness and true love. All of the words the Lord spoke to these men were warnings. They and their ancestors had done more to hinder people from hearing the truth, and from entering into a true relationship with God--more than they had ever helped anyone to know the Lord and to walk in His way.

We still have people like that today--men who profess to know God, but who in their teaching are keeping people away from God.

Did they learn anything from what the Lord said?

Read Luke 11: 53, 54.

Here we have an illustration which proves our text. "A servant will not be corrected by words." The human heart is so perverse, and so blinded as to the reality of things, that just words, even the words of the Saviour, will not change them! Take the case of any servant. He will not really change just by the words of his superior unless it is to his advantage--either his pay, or the possibility of advancement, or some other personal advan-

tage. But in spiritual matters it is even worse. People can be exposed to the Word of God. You can tell them the truth of God over and over, but they will not change. We have all seen that.

But what about the second part of the verse?

II. THE SECOND PARABLE: "For though he understand he will not answer."

He may know what you are talking about. He may see the evidence of it in his own life. He may even feel in his heart that you are right. I am speaking about witnessing concerning the Gospel of Christ. He knows that he has no answer. But rather than submit to the truth, he will keep silent in his rebellion against the Lord.

Is this not what the Pharisees and lawyers did? Read Luke 11:53, 54. Men do not always go to the extreme that these religious men went to, but their hearts are full of resentment toward God and toward the truth. We all have an aversion to being told what to do, but it is never stronger than when we are confronted with the Word of God.

Solomon gave us an important truth in capsule form here, teaching us that man needs more than simply to be told what he must do if he is to be corrected and changed. He did not give the solution here. He simply showed us the problem that all servants have.

Concl: What can we learn from this verse, and what answers for this problem can we find in the Word of God?

I have already spent enough time showing that we are all servants in one way or another. Even the President of the United States is, as Paul said in Romans 13, "the minister of God"--another way of saying that he is the servant of God. But we are thinking especially about man as a servant of sin. What of Gospel importance is there in this verse?

- 1) The first is that man needs to be changed. This is the purpose of the correcting. A human master does not expect to spend all of his time correcting; he wants to see his servant changed.
- 2) The correcting words are important. Do not gather from this verse that the words of correction should not have been spoken. They are very important. The Lord was not doing a foolish thing when He gave the Pharisees and lawyers His Word. If people are going to be changed it will be through the Word. But we do not always see what we would like to see when we give people the Word. But

the Word will be a major factor in their change if they are to be changed.

- 3) And in connection with those words, we need to do everything that we can to make sure that people understand what we are talking about, or what the Word is talking about. This is why we teach, why we answer questions, and why we give the Gospel over and over again. Anybody can understand the facts of the Gospel, but getting the kind of an understanding that will lead to a change requires more than you and I can do.

What else is needed?

Here we must go beyond our text. Remember that Solomon was just presenting the problem. He does not give the answer here. But we have the answer in the Word.

- 4) A work of God is needed. God is the One Who determines the effectiveness of His Word. Cf. Isa. 55:10, 11. Only God can get through to the hearts of those who are the bondslaves of sin. It is God's purpose that is going to be accomplished. We must give the Word. The Word of God is indispensable in the salvation of sinners. It is only as they know the truth that they will be set free. It is our job to spread the Word, but it is God's place to use the Word as He pleases--and He uses it to accomplish what He purposed to do before the foundation of the world.

How does God accomplish that work? What kind of a change is going to be made?

- 5) We have been learning about this in our Sunday School lessons, and we have been learning about this in our study of the book of Ephesians.

When God corrects the sinner, He does not just change him on the outside. He changes him within, in his heart. He makes him a new creature. It is just as much an act of creation as anything that God did "in the beginning." God does not re-work the old man; he creates life that was not there before, life that loves God, life that is responsive to His will, life that is capable of pleasing God.

How are we changed?

It required the death of God's dear Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. And no one but the Holy Spirit can really bring the truth of God to bear upon our hearts so that we will be receptive to the change that God makes in the hearts of men to deliver them from sin, and to make they delight in doing the will of God.

Paul showed how the change takes place when he wrote to Titus and said that our Lord Jesus Christ

. . . gave himself for us,
that he might redeem us from all iniquity,
and purify unto himself a peculiar people,
zealous of good works (Tit. 2:14).

And so we cannot trust alone in what we do to spread the message of Christ. That is important, and it is only the Lord Who can keep us faithful in doing that. But all of our preaching and teaching and explaining will not be enough. God must work. The Holy Spirit must use the Word. He must bring conviction. And He will! But He does not always use the Word as we would like to see Him use it. That is His work, and He always does the will of God.

AN EXTRAORDINARY QUESTION

Luke 18:1-8

Intro: Matthew Henry said of this parable, "This parable has its key hanging at the door" (V, 772). It is to teach that "men ought always to pray, and not to faint." It is to teach two things:

- 1) The importance of prayer.
- 2) The importance of continuing in prayer.

The words, "unto them," in Luke 18:1 indicate that the Lord was speaking to His disciples because they are the ones He was speaking to in chapter 17.

So we must assume that He was speaking about the praying of believing men. This is brought out, too, by the reference the Lord made to "his own elect" in Luke 18:7.

Behind the parable is that which has been a problem to the Lord's people from the very beginning: the problem of unanswered prayer. Rarely does God answer prayer immediately after it is prayed.

Many of the Psalms deal with this question. E.g., in Psalm 13 David blurted out at the very beginning of the Psalm, all formalities were set aside:

How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? for ever?

how long wilt thou hide thy face from me?

All Christians should pray. All Christians need to pray. Perhaps we could say that most Christians do pray (even though their prayers may be very brief, and often without much fervency). But there probably never has been a child of God who has not struggled with the silence of God, or we might say, the apparent reluctance of God to answer prayer. I can tell you that that has at times been a great problem to me. The Lord's purpose in dealing with this problem was to help us through the difficulty.

What does the parable teach us?

Obviously the judge, who seems most unjust, represents, of all people, God, our heavenly Father! The people of God are represented by the widow. She represents you and me. The adversary is not clearly identified, but it can represent the Devil, who is our greatest enemy, or it can represent any human being who is causing us trouble. The adversary was causing some kind of a problem which had greatly distressed the widow, and her only hope was to be found in the prospect that the judge would treat her right.

Since the Lord began with the judge, let's begin there also.

I. THE JUDGE.

The judge is represented here as God often appears to be. There are times when God seems to disregard his own Word, when He is siding with our enemy, and has forgotten His own promises. He disregarded the widow's plea, and this went on, as verse 4 says, "for a while." That may not have been a very long time, but some times it is, and it always seems long when you are in trouble and no help is coming.

The judge is responsible by His position to do the right thing, not the wrong thing. This was Abraham's comfort when he was praying for Lot and Sodom: "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" (Gen. 18:25). Even though all men will do wrong, we should always expect that the Lord will do the right thing.

And, since the judge was a judge, he was vested with the authority to act, with the power to act, as he would choose to act. Thus, the sovereignty of the Lord is in view here. Nobody can stand against God. Even though all men and angels were to band together against God, they could not prevail over Him. That is one thing which makes unanswered prayer such a mystery to us.

But now let us look at

II. THE WIDOW.

She represents us.

In one sense, she is nothing—living in a man's world, as it certainly was in that day. But in another sense she was very important. As a widow, the Mosaic Law of God required that she be honored and relieved when necessary. Exodus 22:22 says,

Thou shalt not afflict any widow,
or fatherless child.

The judge was undoubtedly a Jewish judge, and the widow a Jewish woman. Therefore, the judge was himself in violation of the Law if he did not help the widow.

We can also say that this widow had no one else to help her. She had exhausted every other line of help, and now it was up to the judge. She had no other hope beyond him. This undoubtedly was the reason that she refused to take "no" for an answer.

Next let us consider

III. THE WIDOW'S PERSISTENCE.

We see this in two expressions in this parable:

- 1) "Her continual coming," in v. 5.
- 2) The Lord's statement in v. 7 about those who "cry day and night unto him," i.e., unto God.

Whatever business the judge might have in any day, he knew from the first day that this widow came to him, that she would always be back the next day. She really hoped that ultimately she would prevail, and see justice done in her case.

And then we have

IV. THE OUTCOME.

The widow prevailed and won her case by her importunity. She kept troubling him, pressuring him, urgently appealing for help. And the judge finally gave in, not so much for her sake, as for his own.

Concl: As Matthew Henry said that the key was at the door of the parable, so we can say that the application is also. The Lord has provided it for us in verses 6-8.

The Lord called special attention in v. 6 to the judge's words. From that point on it is an application drawn by way of contrast with the people in the parable.

Now we are dealing with God, who is holy in all that He does. And He is dealing, not with a strange widow, but with "his own elect"—those whom He has chosen from before the foundation of the world, those who are His for all eternity, those who are very, very precious to Him, those for whom the Lord Jesus Christ died. He always has His purposes for waiting, but it is incredible to think that He would let them pray in vain, especially when He ordained prayer for them, and has given so many promises assuring them that He will always help them. He still is delighted with our coming and coming again and again. This may be one reason for the delays—because if He answered right away, we would go away, and not come back until another crisis would arise.

Will the Lord avenge His people, His very own dear people? To avenge them means to defend them, to work justly for them. The Lord has given His word: "I tell you that he will avenge them speedily." God's delays never look as long to us as we look back on them.

This is the testimony of Scripture—not only by the promises of our great God, but by the record of His dealings with His people all through the Scriptures. Think about Joseph, about Moses, about David, about Daniel, about Peter, about Paul, and

many, many others! God has never failed. Sometimes He may take His people to heaven in delivering them, but His record is clear.

I announced that I would speak on AN EXTRAORDINARY QUESTION. You undoubtedly have noticed that there are two questions in this passage: the first in v. 7; the second in v. 8. Both are questions that the Lord Jesus asked. Perhaps in a sense both are extraordinary, but the second is more extraordinary than the first. The first speaks of God; the second speaks of man. It is amazing that the Lord would have to defend Himself to us, but He does! Not only can we say that He will not fail, but we can say that He cannot fail! Let us pray that we may never again, either by our words or our actions, throw doubt upon the faithfulness of God.

But the second question is really the EXTRAORDINARY QUESTION!

It is beyond what you would think would ever need to be asked. And it means this: In view of Who God is and how God has dealt with His people in the past, and in view of His promises, what would you expect would be the resultant effect upon the hearts of men?

How would you answer that question?

Let me try to answer for you. In view of our needs, and God's power, His righteousness, and His record, I would think that from that standpoint alone you would think that everyone would want to trust Him. Think not only of how He has forgiven His elect of their sins, but how He has delivered His elect from the power of sin. Think of how Christians are able to face death with perfect peace--and the people of the world see this!

But the Lord asked this question: "Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?"

What makes this question particularly extraordinary is that it is asked in such a way that it expects a negative answer: No, He will not find faith on the earth!

Such is the sinfulness, the blindness, the hardness, the self-sufficiency of man's heart, that he will not believe even with the impeccable record of our God and of the Lord Jesus Christ!

Is it not interesting that it is "faith" that the Lord will be looking for? He is not looking for a lot of works. He will not be looking for big churches? He will be looking for "faith."

What is faith?

Faith is believing God and believing in God. Faith is trusting Him to do what He has promised to do. Faith is acting upon what God has had to say about Himself. Faith is resting in the Lord when we may be baffled and confused by what is going on in our lives. Faith is the certainty that "when the Son of man cometh," everything will turn out to be right--just like God wants it to be, and what we with our perfected understanding will want it to be, too.

Is this an encouragement for you to pray? That is what the Lord intended it to be. It might seem that the Lord really does not have time for you, or that you have been so bad that you really do not deserve an answer from the Lord. But remember: You are His elect. You are His because He wanted you. He will never let you go. He will not even you take yourself out of His hand. He looks with great delight upon you and says what He said about Israel: "Thou art mine."

It may be—let me repeat, it may be—that when the Lord comes by way of comparison with those who do not believe, the numbers of the saints will be insignificant. I am not going to say for sure. If left to himself, no man would ever profit from what the Lord has done in the past, and turn to Him. But the Lord is claiming His elect. That is what He has always been doing. And He has them in this generation. But let us not depend upon circumstances, or even what people have been exposed to, to convince them of their need of Christ. When the Lord comes, His record will be what it is today: **PERFECT!** And yet it is only by the convicting work of the Spirit of God that anybody will ever be brought to faith in Christ. So let us not look to men, but to God. Let us not hope that men will be able to figure things out. Let us pray and pray and pray that those we love will be so powerfully convicted by the Holy Spirit that they will have no rest in their souls until they turn to Christ, and are saved!

TWO MEN, TWO PRAYERS, TWO RESULTS

Luke 18:9-14

Intro: Luke identifies this account of the Pharisee and the publican as "a parable." This does not mean that it was a fable, something altogether removed from reality. It probably had actual people behind it, and the Lord knew that this had happened many times. And, as the word "parable" indicates, it was placed side by side with spiritual truth that the Lord wanted to get to certain people then present who "trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others." The object that both men had in view was justification, as the Lord indicated in the last verse of the parable. See v. 14.

And so this is a parable that has to do with salvation.

We are immediately introduced to:

I. TWO MEN.

One was a Pharisee; the other was a publican.

Any one who has read the Gospel is familiar with what these men were. They were both Jews, but that is about all of the similarity there was between them.

We would expect to see the Pharisee going up to the temple, and going there to pray. That was a sight that you could see any day in the week.

But it was quite unusual to see a publican going up to the temple for any reason.

The Pharisee was a very religious man. In fact, he was a leader in the religion of the Jews. That is what his title suggests. He was recognized as a man of God in the eyes of his fellow-countrymen.

We could say that in most respects they were orthodox in what they believed. They believed in a future life. They looked for the Messiah. But their chief error was that they prided themselves on their good works. And, in most cases, they were no more than hypocrites. They expected to be praised for their piety, and so the Pharisee would have wanted to make sure that people saw him as he was going to the temple to pray.

The publican, on the other hand, was a tax-collector. He was considered to be a traitor who had sold out to the Roman government. He was responsible to collect taxes from the people, all that Rome required, and whatever else

he could collect was his. And so the publicans were a despised group, classed with Gentiles and "sinners." They were despised by their fellow-countrymen. People would have been amazed to see him where he was, and perhaps he was uncomfortable with knowing that others saw him going to the temple, and might have done all that he could to keep from being noticed--much in contrast with the Pharisee.

However, they both got to the temple, and at approximately the same time, and the Lord told in his parable, in the second place, about their . . .

II. TWO PRAYERS.

The Pharisee was probably the only one who could be heard, and yet not every one, except those close around him would have been able to hear his prayer.

But the Lord knew even though no one else knew. He, like our heavenly Father, does not look on the outward appearance, but on the heart! And He hears words though the words are never uttered in an audible manner.

The Lord mentioned the Pharisee first because the Pharisee would have been in a place where you could not help but notice him. The publican was standing afar off, perhaps if not in, certainly near, the court of the Gentiles--reserved for Gentile proselytes! There was an attitude of uneasiness about him, whereas the Pharisee exuded confidence.

The Lord said that he was praying with himself. There were two things that were prominent about his prayer:

- 1) He was thankful that he was not like other men, and that he had not done what they had done. He was especially thankful that he had not done what the publican had done, and he said so.
- 2) He took pride in what he had done--fasting and tithing.

Both of these are commendable. Any person should be thankful if there are some sins that he has not committed. All of the sins he mentioned were prohibited by the Law of Moses, which was the Word of God. And fasting and tithing were both a part of what was expected from devout Jews, according to the OT Law.

But now let us look at the publican's prayer.

It has become a famous prayer. There is nothing in the Bible to teach that this is the prayer that people need to

pray if they want to be saved, but I believe I am safe in saying that this prayer must have been used millions of times since the publican first prayed this prayer.

What brought the publican there, we do not know. But we can tell that something was going on in his heart that no one knew but he himself. It is significant that he went to the temple, but he showed no interest in going to the Pharisee. He knew that the Pharisee would have nothing but scorn for him because, in the Pharisee's thinking, if you had done bad things, such as extortion, and not good things, there was really no hope for you.

The publican's prayer was not as long as the Pharisee's prayer. He could only call himself, not only, "a sinner," but the Greek says, the sinner! The publican looked upon himself as in a class by himself. In his sight no one was as bad as he was, in contrast with the Pharisee who felt that there were at least very few who were as good as he was.

The publican could not claim any merit. He knew that He had none. His only hope was in the very nature of God. Perhaps as a young man growing up in the synagogue he had learned that one of the attributes of God is that he is propitious and merciful. His only hope for relief for his soul was in God, and so with very few words he cast himself upon God. Smiting his breast was evidence of great remorse, deep repentance, the feeling that he wished he had never sinned, had never done anything that was displeasing to God. He could not even look up to heaven as though he were expecting God to look upon him with favor. It is certain that God was working in his heart, and he had come to the temple seeking relief for his soul.

What happened?

III. TWO RESULTS.

The Lord then spoke for Himself: "I tell you."

You see, the important thing is not the great claims that we might make for ourselves, or that others might make for us. The important thing is what God says, what the Lord Jesus says.

The Pharisee felt that, with his record, he could certainly count on God's approval. And perhaps he was a good man. Paul was a Pharisee before he was saved, and as far as the Jewish people were concerned, he was good. He could even say that outwardly, where the observances of the Law were concerned, he was "blameless." He always did

everything at the right time and in the right way.

The publican could only hope that God would have mercy on him.

What did the Lord say?

Here is our answer: verse 14. (Read.)

What was the difference between the two men in the Lord's eyes? Was it that one was a Pharisee and the other was a publican? No. God is no respecter of persons. Was it that one had done a lot of good works, and the other had done none? No. We are not saved by our works. What was the difference, then? It was that one came as a sinner, as the sinner; the other came in his self-righteousness. The Pharisee wanted a reward; the publican wanted mercy. The Pharisee felt that God was indebted to him; the publican knew that he deserved nothing but the wrath of God. The Pharisee felt no need for God. In fact, he probably felt that God needed a man like he was. The publican, on the other hand, felt a deep need for God. His only hope for peace in his troubled soul was in the one possibility that God would not give him what he deserved, but what he did not deserve. The Pharisee was a works man; the publican's only hope was in the grace of God.

And so the publican went home "justified" before God. His sins were cleansed. His soul was saved.

Concl: Now it is very clear to those of us who know the Gospel, that the whole Gospel is not here. That was not the Lord's intention. His intention was to show several things:

- 1) God is most concerned about the condition of our heart as we come to Him. Do we come in pride because we feel that we are better than other man, and good enough for God, or do we come with a sense of our unworthiness to be in the presence of God—because that is what the temple represented to the Jews in that day.
- 2) Is there any consciousness of sin?
- 3) Is there any repentance? No man can undo his sins. We often wish that we could. But we can regret our sins. We can recognize that in God's sight there is only one word that can properly described us, and that word was a word which was a synonym for "a publican": THE sinner!

The Pharisee needed to know Isaac Watts wonderful hymn which is #176 in our hymnal. Let me read those words for you in closing. (Read.)

Not all the blood of beasts
On Jewish altars slain,
Could give the guilty conscience peace,
Or wash away the stain:

But Christ, the heav'nly Lamb
Takes all our sins away,
A sacrifice of nobler name
And richer blood than they.

My faith would lay her hand
On that dear head of thine,
While like a penitent I stand,
And there confess my sin.

My soul looks back to see
The burdens thou didst bear,
When hanging on the curs-ed tree,
And knows her guilt was there.

Believing, we rejoice
To see the curse removed;
We bless the Lamb with cheerful voice,
And sing his bleeding love.

-- Isaac Watts, 1709
Trinity Hymnal #176

The best man who ever lived would need the mercy of God if he were to be saved. And the chief of sinners can come because God is propitious, is merciful, regardless of our sins.

CHILD-LIKE FAITH

Luke 18:15-17

Intro: If you read Luke 17 and 18 you will realize that this was a very busy time in the life of our Lord. He was busy with many people, busy teaching. Therefore, when people began to bring their infants, lit., their newborn babies, to the Lord, it seemed to the disciples like an intrusion which the Lord did not need. And so the disciples rebuked the parents. Matthew and Mark, as well as Luke, all record this incident. Matthew says they were "little children"; Mark used Matthew's word. We can assume that there were little children of all ages, infants, as well as those who could walk.

And so, the first thing that all three Gospel writers wanted their readers to notice was . . .

I. THE ATTITUDE OF THE DISCIPLES (Luke 18:15).

Twice in this chapter Luke used the word "rebuked": here, and in v. 39. In the first instance it was the disciples; in the second it seems to have been the crowd.

The word is a word used of judges when they assess blame. It means that in the eyes of the disciples (and later, the crowd) that the parents (and the blind man) were doing something that was wrong. They should not have been doing what they were doing, and so were strongly reprimanded. It was like a first warning. It was not that they should have waited until later, but they should not have done it at all!

In the case of the disciples, these were the men who were to become trustees of the Gospel. These were the men to whom the Lord would say "that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke 24:47). At this time the Lord was on His way to Jerusalem. And He would never leave that vicinity until He had suffered and died on the Cross. It was from that area that He would ascend back to heaven. How important it was, therefore, that the disciples have a clear understanding of their mission!

Perhaps it would be well for us to ask ourselves how we feel concerning preaching the Gospel to children. Do we feel that it is important for us to bring our children to Jesus? Do we even believe that there might be an urgency to reaching our children, and reaching other people's children? If so, what are we doing about it? Luke tells us about those thieves on the Cross. You wonder if the penitent thief had parents who cared about his salvation. Obviously this was very important to our Lord from what He

said in response to what the disciples were doing. Luke does not say that just one or two of the disciples felt this way, but he seems to indicate that this was the way they all felt about the children.

This was followed by . . .

II. THE LORD'S REBUKE (Luke 18:16).

In the Lord's sight, it was not the parents who were wrong, but the disciples! The Lord wanted the parents to come, and He wanted them to bring their children--all of them!

This ought to be a great encouragement to every parent that the Lord wants us to pray for our children. He wants us to teach our children. He wants us to bring our children to church where they will hear the Word of God. Tell them about Jesus. Their response will be positive. Faith will come to them as they hear the Word of God.

The parent who does nothing about the salvation of his (or her) children is guilty of a most grievous crime in the eyes of the Lord. He says, "Let them come," but so often it is the parents who stand in the way.

The same is true of church leaders. They can become so anxious about filling their churches, or paying their bills, that they really have no time to make sure that little children are hearing the Gospel.

As we remember the Lord Jesus tonight in taking communion let us remember that He loved children, and wanted children to be brought to Him.

But then we have . . .

III. THE LORD'S INSTRUCTION FOR HIS DISCIPLES (Luke 18:16b, 17).

When the Lord said, "For of such is the kingdom of God," He did not mean that children are already saved." That which happens to children in they die in infancy is in the Lord's hand. Personally I believe that this would mean that they are of the elect--and not just of Christian parents either. But we can be sure that the Judge of all the earth will do right. He has never been unrighteous in what He does, and He never will. But the question about children who die before they are able to understand the Gospel is not the question here. The question before the disciples is, Should we bring our children to Christ? And the answer is, YES!

But the Lord took this occasion to move one step farther. And this is what He meant by the statement, "For of such is the kingdom of heaven." He was not saying that, if children want to be saved, they have to wait until they become adults, but He was saying that if adults want to be saved, they have to become like little children. This is clear from v. 17.

If you want to see examples of what the Lord was saying, look at the parable which preceded this event, and then look at the attitude of the rich ruler in the passage which follows. Their problem was that they were not child-like in their faith.

The Pharisee was a teacher, and he was beyond the place where you could teach him anything. Do you remember when the man who was born blind tried to tell the Pharisees that Jesus was of God or He would have been able to give him his sight. The Jews (including the Pharisees) said to him,

Thou wast altogether born in sin,
and dost thou teach us?

And they cast him out (John 9:34).

They were not teachable. The blind man had laid hold of some truth that the Jews needed to know, but they would not listen to him. The Pharisees did not need a Saviour. They believed that God was obligated to save them.

As we will see next week, the Lord will, the rich ruler was also a works man. He wanted to "do" something so as to become an heir of eternal life. He had done a lot of "doing," but he did not have the assurance in his heart that he had done enough.

You see, one thing about a child is this: You do not have to spend a lot of time convincing him that he needs help. A babies cry is a cry for help. He (or she) is the very essence of dependence, of trust, of implicit faith. But the older we get, the more oriented we are to the idea that we can do things for ourselves.

There are always exceptions to the general rule, but all of us know the sweetness of a child who manifests trust.

The Lord said,

Whoever shall not receive the kingdom of God
as a little child
shall in no wise enter therein.

You see, being saved is not a matter of doing, but of receiving. It is not a reward, but a gift. God does not want us to help Him, but He wants to do the work of salva-

tion all by Himself because there is no other ways for us to be saved. Receiving the kingdom of God is the same as entering the kingdom of God. And they both indicate what it means to be saved. The Apostle John wrote in John 1:11-13,

He came unto his own, and his own received him not.
But as many as received him,
to them gave he power to become the sons of God,
even to them that believe on his name:
Which were born, not of blood,
nor of the will of the flesh,
nor of the will of man, but of God.

Concl: You do not usually have to argue with children about whether or not they are sinners. Nor do you usually have to prove to them that God exists, or that Jesus Christ came in the flesh, or that He died on the Cross, or that He arose from the dead, or that He is coming again. Neither do you have to argue with them about trusting the Lord.

But we get older, we get more sophisticated.

Do you know what sophisticated means?

The dictionary says that a sophisticated person is one who is "deprived of original simplicity" (Webster's Collegiate, p. 949). He may be more refined and worldly-wise, but inclined to be artificial and so complicated that he has no place for the Gospel of the grace of God. As people get older, it is harder and harder to reach them with the Gospel. They are more established in works, and refuse to come to the Lord as a little child, trusting Him to save them, believing that our Lord did everything necessary for our salvation. The Cross, the blood, the broken body of our Lord, the tomb, all witness to the utter hopelessness and helplessness of man. If we are to be saved, we must come as little children, not to give the Lord anything, but receiving from Him the gift of salvation which He purchased with His precious blood.

Tonight let us remember tonight that the Lord not only loves children, and wants children to be brought to Him, because they need to be saved, too, but He delights in adults who come to Him with the faith of little children, believing that He can save us by Himself. His death is sufficient for the worst of sinners.

We are coming to the Lord's Table again tonight, and we come to remember Him. We are here to remember and to show forth His death, to proclaim His death. The preaching does not stop when I sit down; it goes right on to the end of the service, and hopefully it will continue after that in the lives that we live throughout the week.

THE GOD OF THE IMPOSSIBLE
Luke 18:18-30

Intro: As we come to the record of this event in the life of our Lord, Luke was dealing with the same subject: the Gospel and salvation.

In the case of the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, the Lord was emphasizing the need for humility in seeking salvation. In the account of the children, the Lord taught simplicity. Now we are ready for a third lesson.

First of all, we have . . .

I. THE MAN AND HIS QUESTION (Luke 18:18, 19).

Matthew called him a "young man" (Matt. 19:20). Luke says that he was a "ruler." This is why he has been called, the rich young ruler. While some think that he was a ruler of the synagogue, it is more likely that he was a wealthy merchant or landowner who had servants, and who, as the account brings out, had a great deal of wealth.

His approach to the Lord was very interesting because he not only called the Lord a "Master," or Teacher, but he called Him, "Good Master." The Lord picked up on this because it was a law among the Jews, one that they had made themselves, that no rabbi was ever to be called good for the very reason that the Lord brought out. "Good" is an attribute of God, and God is the only One Who, without any qualification, can be called "good." Whether or not this man was declaring his faith in the Deity of Christ, we cannot say. But the Lord took advantage of the situation to raise the question: "Why callest thou me good? none is good, save one, that is, God."

If the man were not acknowledging the Deity of the Lord, could it have been that he was saying that our Lord's teaching was from God? Again, we do not know. But in addressing the Lord in this way he was speaking truthfully whether he knew it or not. Jesus Christ is "good." His teaching is "good." And, as the word indicates, He was One Who was completely pleasing and acceptable to God.

His question also is very interesting.

Not many people in his day were talking about "eternal life." The Lord had had a great deal to say about it, but not many were interested in it. He was apparently thinking about what would happen to him after he died.

And he spoke of it as an inheritance. Probably he used the word as it was sometimes used, of that which one comes to possess for himself, "to receive as one's own, to obtain" (Vine, Exp. Dict., II, p. 258). Note that by his question, he knew that he did not have it at that time.

He felt that "eternal life" was a reward for doing something. And he wanted to know what he should do. He was a true legalist. He had not yet discovered the grace of God. He wanted to do something that would forever obligate God to give him "eternal life."

So there is a lot to be learned about this young ruler by the very way he expressed himself to the Lord. There certainly is a clear possibility that the Lord had been working in his heart. The Lord did not deal with him as with a hypocrite. He seems to have been perfectly sincere in what he wanted the Lord to tell him. And he came, like Nicodemus, because he had been attracted to the Lord, either by the Lord's miracles, or by His teaching, or both.

II. THE LORD'S ANSWER AND THEIR ENSUING CONVERSATION (Luke 18:20-23).

In his answer, the Lord brought him immediately to the Law. See v. 20. This means that he was Jewish, and especially because the Lord said to him, "Thou knowest the commandments."

This young man did not know that, for the Jew, as Paul said, "the law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith" (Gal. 3:24). Nor did he know that "by the law is the knowledge of sin" (Rom. 3:20b). He had looked upon the Law as the way to eternal life, and yet his heart had told him that that was not the way. Undoubtedly the Spirit of God was showing him. But he could say, "All of these I have kept from my youth up."

How amazing it is that the Lord did not contradict him. In fact, the Lord went on to say, "One thing thou lackest."

Now let us just take it this far, and see what else we can learn about this young man. He certainly was exceptional.

We can say:

- 1) That he was a moral man.
- 2) That he was a religious man.
- 3) That he was an honest man.

4) That he was a sincere man.

And yet he did not have peace in his heart concerning his relationship with God.

The one thing that he lacked was spelled out to him in v. 22.

But instead of being happy to hear this, he was sorrowful, "very sorrowful." He was wholly grieved, overwhelmed with disappointment. He had expected that the Lord would tell him something more to do, not that he had to sell all that he had and give to the poor.

What did the Lord mean by this? Can we be saved by good works to the poor? Is it impossible for a man to keep his money, and be saved? How are we to handle this? Is this not a contradiction of the teaching regarding the grace of God.

Well, there are a couple of answers to these questions:

- 1) The Lord was showing this young man that at that very moment he was breaking one of the commandments: #10.
- 2) The Lord was actually teaching him the meaning of faith.

If we are to be saved, as we have learned from this chapter, there must be (1) humility and (2) simplicity. Now the Lord was adding a third thing: utter dependency. We must come to the Lord not to do anything for Him, nor to give anything to Him, but to depend upon Him to do all that is necessary to save us, and to keep us! If this young man were to forsake his wealth, give it to the poor, and follow the Lord, it would mean giving up his position and putting himself in a position where he would have to trust the Lord alone. And he was not ready to do this.

You see, faith means trusting in Christ alone. Of course rich people can be saved. There is no sin to being rich if those riches have been gained honestly and are being in a worthwhile way, especially for God's glory. But riches often represent where a man's heart is.

The Lord took this opportunity to minister to His disciples. See vv. 24, 25. (Read.) "Hardly" means that it is difficult to please them with the Gospel. How easy is it for a camel to go through the eye of a needle--not some special door in the wall of Jerusalem, but in an actual needle--as big a needle as you can find? It is not easy, not even difficult; IT IS IMPOSSIBLE! That is what the Lord was seeking to teach all of them. Man cannot save himself. He has to throw away every prop as far as his dependency is concerned, and come to the Lord

to save him. This rich young ruler needed to become in heart like the publican. He needed to become like a little child. But he could not do that, trusting in the mercy of God for eternal life.

Both Matthew and Mark tell us that it was the Lord's disciples who asked the question in v. 26. At this point even they evidently felt that God was a respecter of persons. If a rich man cannot be saved, who can?

Concl: Let me suggest that there is possibly a very wonderful sequel to this story. And I am taking this from a suggestion that Lewis Johnson made about this rich young ruler.

He took it from a statement which only Mark made. It is found in Mark 10:21a. There we read this: "Then Jesus beholding him loved him."

As I remember what Dr. Johnson said, it went something like this: "That statement possibly indicates that the rich young ruler was one of the elect, and that the time came when he did come to the Lord with all of his heart, trusting the Lord to save Him." And Dr. Johnson in his characteristic way said, "At least that is what I like to think happened."

What a wealth of truth there is in those words of the Apostle Paul in Rom. 10:9, 10,

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus,
and shalt believe in thine heart
 that God hath raised him from the dead,
 thou shalt be saved.
For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness;
 and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Who does the work of salvation? Do we? No! Do we work with God in our salvation? No! Salvation is by God alone through the Lord Jesus Christ. Is it difficult? Yes! It is impossible for us, just as impossible as getting a camel through the eye of a needle. But not with God. A man may be a terrible rebel like Saul of Tarsus, but when the Lord worked on his heart, he was humbled and he was saved.

May God enable all of us to see that faith means trusting in the Lord alone, trusting in Him with our hearts. And it is God Who even gives us the faith.

A MISSING ELEMENT

Acts 4:1-31, 33

Intro: The book of Acts is concerned with the spread of the Gospel in the first century. Those early Christians obviously took their commission from the Lord seriously. In Acts 1:8 we have the Lord's words in which He told them to begin in Jerusalem, and go to "the uttermost part of the earth." The NT Church from that day until this has taken this as God's plan for the spread of the Gospel. We are to begin where we are, and reach out in every generation as far as the Lord enables us to go.

The world into which we go is not now, nor has it ever been, friendly toward the preaching of the Gospel. Many people are not interested and do not want to be bothered. To them the Gospel is unimportant. Others believe another way, and refuse to believe that there is only one way to God. Often the spread of the Gospel has been met with violence, as it was in the first century. If there is no violence, the Christian who speaks of Christ can be the object of ridicule, and very often it means the loss of friends. Therefore, it seems that Christians have always been on the lookout for some means of telling people about Christ which will avoid the difficulties, and be more successful in getting people to listen favorably to the testimony of the Gospel.

As a result, the Gospel message is often watered down, or even changed. Christians have tried to show the benefits of the Gospel (and some are of their own making) rather than making people see that the issue is that we are dealing with a holy God, that He is the God with Whom we have to do, and He is too holy to be able to tolerate, in the long run, anything that is contrary to Himself and to His will. People do not like to be told that they are sinners, that Christ came to die for sinners because there is no other way that man can have forgiveness and eternal life. If man is interested in God, he usually, like the rich young ruler, is looking for something that he can do to contribute to salvation. But man does not like to be in a position where he is entirely dependent upon the grace and mercy of God.

And so we as Christians are caught in a dilemma. We cannot change the will of God regarding our mission in the world. We cannot change the Gospel. Nor can we change the natural attitude of man toward God and the Gospel. Man is a rebel against God. He is not seeking God. We are in the position of offering him something that he does not want. And yet we know that God's purposes will be accomplished, that He will save those whom He has appointed for salvation. But we also know that He has ordained that we who know the Lord are responsible to Him to tell others about Christ. We are not

to be obnoxious and overbearing, but we are to be faithful-- faithful in our lives, and faithful in speaking to others about Christ and salvation.

What are we to do? It is apparent that most people who profess to know Christ fail at this important work, and so in this regard are disobedient to the Lord. What do we need?

It seems that we are inclined to forget the first part of Acts 1:8. Before the Lord said what those early Christians were **to be and do**, He said that there was something that they were **to receive**. He said, "But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit has come upon you, **and** ye shall be witnesses unto me . . ." What they needed was power, Holy Spirit power, divine power! It would be a power which would strengthen them within. It would enable them to overcome their fears of the consequences of witnessing. In fact, it was a power that would cause them to rejoice if witnessing for Christ meant that they would have to suffer for Christ. We see all of this demonstrated in the book of Acts. This would be power within them, because the Holy Spirit was within them, power sufficient for whatever it might take to make Christ known.

The need for that power was expressed in different ways, and we have one instance in Acts 4.

The religious rulers of the Jews were still reeling from the effect of the healing of the man in Acts 3 who had been crippled and unable to walk from the time of his birth. They could not deny but that a mighty miracle had been performed. See Acts 4:14. But the most disturbing things about the miraculous healing were:

- 1) Peter insisted that it was "by the name of Jesus Christ" that his man had been healed.
- 2) Peter took this as evidence of our Lord's Deity, and insisted that there was salvation in none other than in Him. See Acts 4:12.

But there was one thing that seems to have impressed those religious men as much as the healing. And that was "the boldness of Peter and John." See Acts 4:13.

Let me try to describe that word "boldness" to you.

I. THE WORD, "BOLDNESS."

It does not mean to be brazen, or harsh, or loud, or discourteous, or overbearing. It does not describe the person who claims to have all of the answers, who is cocky and proud. He will not take undue liberties with people. He will not want to take on the role of a

militant radical.

In fact, a bold person will be very gentle, and gracious, and kind, and loving. He will be strong, but not hateful. He will be confident and assured that his message is true, but will not become belligerent if his message is rejected. He will be fearless, and yet humble. The Biblical word for boldness describes a person who is frank in the sense that he will not hold back any part of his message. Paul was describing himself as a bold person when he spoke to the Ephesian elders about his ministry among them. He used these words found in Acts 20:18-21:

Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia,
after what manner I have been with you
at all seasons,
Serving the Lord with all humility of mind,
and many tears, and temptations,
which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews:
And how I kept back nothing
that was profitable unto you,
but have shewed you, and taught you publickly,
and from house to house,
Testifying both to the Jews,
and also to the Greeks,
repentance toward God,
and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

This was what the enemies of the Gospel saw in Peter and John, "boldness," and the only way that they knew how to handle it was with threats if they continued to speak in Jerusalem about Jesus Christ.

But look at further evidence of the boldness of Peter and John in Acts 4:19, 20.

This made them sound like they were so strong that they could never again be intimidated by any opposition to the Gospel.

But now I want to call your attention to . . .

II. THE PRAYER OF THE CHURCH (Acts 4:23-30).

The work of the Lord had been threatened. The Lord had told them to witness; the Jewish authorities had told them that they were not to witness. The one thing that they all knew that they had to do was to engage the help of the Lord on their side.

They encouraged themselves by recognizing the greatness of their God. See vv. 24-26.

They reminded the Lord that this very thing had been done in the case of God's holy servant, Jesus. But it had all worked out according to God's will. See vv. 27, 28.

Then they came to their petition. See vv. 29, 30.

What did they pray for? "Boldness." I thought they had it. They did, but they needed to have a fresh supply. This proves that the boldness that we read about was not natural with them. It had come from God, and they needed to have it continue.

But what was the "boldness" for? "That they may speak thy word." They did not want to back down in the least from telling the whole story of salvation. They were not looking for a revision. They were not looking for a reprieve from their God-given task. They wanted "boldness" to be able to continue, leaving the consequences with the Lord, but trusting Him to work as they proclaimed the Word.

They did not pray for fruit; they prayed for "boldness."

What happened?

III. GOD'S ANSWER (Acts 4:31, 33).

First, notice that God answered. This has to mean that they were praying according to His will! Cf. 1 John 5:14, 15.

Second, notice how He answered. "They were all filled with the Holy Spirit." But that was not what they had asked for. They asked for "boldness." Yes, but that was their answer. It was power that they needed, power to be bold when everything was against them, and only the Holy Spirit could give them that power.

See v. 33. "Great power . . . great grace."

You can read the rest of the results in this chapter and on into chapter 5.

Concl: I think that when we teach from the book of Acts we need to recognize that we cannot duplicate the conditions that prevailed in those early days. God does not always work in such a great way as He did then. There have been more times in the history of the Church when things have been like they are today than like they were then. We never know when God is going to see fit to bring an awakening. But awakening or not, our task is to carry on with the work that the Lord has given us to do. And, regardless of the times,

in the work of the Lord we need "boldness." We need power to obey God. And God's provision of power is always through the Holy Spirit. The power of the Holy Spirit does not guarantee results; the power of the Holy Spirit strengthens the workers who, without that power, would give up because of the greatness of the difficulties.

It is not our job to produce fruit. We bear fruit, but we do not produce it. It is our job to spread the Word--boldly, which means courageously, faithfully, patiently, lovingly, and with joy in our hearts. God provides this, and so He gets the glory if we happen to be the ones He uses to draw some sinner to Himself.

This is not the day of miracles as it was in the days spoken of in the book of Acts. But God is at work, nevertheless. And He works through His Word. It will not return to Him empty. We may not see the fruit immediately, but we can be sure that a bold testimony will be used by God for the accomplishment of His purposes, and all to His glory.

Are you afraid to testify for the Lord?

Let me make three suggestions in closing:

- 1) Make sure you know the Gospel so that you can tell people why they need to be saved, and how they can be saved.
- 2) When you have an opportunity to witness, concentrate on making the message clear, not on getting a result. If you are seeking results, you are intruding into God's work, and probably neglecting your own.
- 3) Remember that "boldness" is what you need. It is not given once-for-all. God gives it in answer to prayer by filling us again with the Holy Spirit. We need to be trusting the Lord to keep us faithful in spreading the message of salvation.

"Boldness" is A MISSING ELEMENT today. There are certainly others such as doctrinal purity and holiness of life among the Lord's people, but "boldness" is certainly one of the main ones. Do you know how the dictionary defines an element? It says this: It is something which is an essential part of anything. "Boldness" is an essential part of our lives. We need it. We cannot live without it. It comes from God, and with it we will be faithful and diligent and zealous. Without it we will fail to do what God has called us to do.

WHY DID CHRIST COME?

John 6:37-40

Intro: We have been learning much from Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1 concerning the sovereignty of God, and today, the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus Christ. God has power that is uniquely His own, a power greater than any created power, and a power that is greater than all other powers combined. Even if all of the combined forces of the heavens and earth were united in their opposition to God, they would be no match for God. He laughs at their attempts to set aside His will.

The same is true of the Lord Jesus Christ. The truth of His sovereignty has been unchanged even by the incarnation. As the God-man He was raised from the dead; He has been seated at the right hand of the Father. His position and power are greater than all other powers, and, like the power of the Father, His power is greater than all other powers put together. All authority in heaven and earth has been given to Him by the Father. So the incarnation did not lessen His authority; if anything, it strengthened it in the light of His death, resurrection, and ascension.

Most Christians have no difficulty with that truth when speaking of world affairs, about politics, or even about the circumstances of their lives over which they obviously have no control. The sovereignty of God is, in such cases, a source of great comfort to the people of God. But, when it comes to the subject of salvation, that for many well-meaning Christians is another thing! They seem to feel that in that area God has relinquished His sovereignty, and that He has left the question of who is going to be saved, and who is not going to be saved up to man.

Two things are wrong with those ideas:

- 1) It underestimates the sovereignty of God.
- 2) It overestimates the will of man.

God cannot be God if He is not sovereign. That is vital to the divine nature. To hear some people talk you would think that God does not even know who is going to be saved, that that is as much of a surprise to Him as it is to us. But how can God be omniscient if He does not know? And, if He knows, can He be mistaken? If not His knowledge about who is going to be saved the result of what He has determined, or, to state it another way, is it not resting upon what He has decreed to be His will?

And what about the will of man? If man is left to himself, will he even seek the Lord? The Bible says, "No!" Psalms 14 and 53 both teach that no man seeks God. In fact, the

foolish heart of man is portrayed in both of those Psalms as saying, in effect, "No God for me!" Man is not seeking God. He is in rebellion against God. So that if the human race were left alone, even though Christ died and rose again, the whole human race would be lost because there is not one person now, nor has there ever been, nor will there ever be, who has sought God "on his own."

Therefore, God must take action if anyone is to be saved, and action beyond the death of Christ. The death of Christ is sufficient for the salvation of every person who ever lived, but what if no one will come? What then?

The very foundation of our text is the sovereignty of God! And that is seen in the first point that I want to make. And it is absolutely clear in what our Lord said here—and remember that every word in these four verses has come to us from the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Notice what he said about:

I. THE WILL OF THE FATHER.

The will of the Father is mentioned in vv. 38, 39, 40.

In answer to the question, WHY DID CHRIST COME?, the answer is, He came to do the will of His Father! He did not come in response to the will of man, but the will of the Father. The Father had a work for Him to do, and Jesus Christ came to do that work.

And, as the context shows, the will of God here has to do with His will in salvation.

Salvation was God's idea, not man's. Salvation originated with God. If God had waited for an invitation from man before sending His Son, He never would have sent Him. This was determined by God before the foundation of the world. It was an act of sovereign grace. Man did not want to be saved, but God determined that there would be salvation. But it never would have been possible apart from the death and resurrection of Christ. All of this was according to the divine plan. And the Lord came to accomplish that which was the Father's will.

If, when we are talking about salvation, we would start with God, and not with man, we would not have strayed so far from what the Word of God teaches about salvation.

But now let me go on to a second point. The Lord spoke about:

II. THOSE WHO HAD BEEN GIVEN TO HIM BY THE FATHER.

Will you notice this in vv. 37, 39.

This was not the only time that the Lord spoke this way. We have it all through His prayer in John 17. Look at vv. 2, 6 (with vv. 7, 8), 9, 11, 12, 24. Our Lord's prayer in this chapter was for those whom the Father had given to Him.

In the Lord's prayer He made it clear that not all men have been given to Him by the Father. The Father had made a sovereign choice to save some, but not to save all. Do not ask me for the reason why. The only thing that I can say is that this was His will and it was for the glory of His Name that it be so.

This, dear people, is the doctrine of divine election. When God made a choice of those who were going to be saved, it meant that He was giving them to His Son. They would be saved by His Son. The work of Christ would not then be in vain. If you are a Christian, then you can praise God with the Apostle Paul that you are because, if the Father had not chosen you and given you to Christ, you would still be lost in your sins, and there would be no hope that you would ever be saved.

Now I come to my third point. Let me call it . . .

III. THE WILL OF THE FATHER IN THE COMING OF CHRIST.

We have already seen that Christ came to do the will of the Father. He came to provide salvation for sinners. But what specifically was His purpose in dying? Did Christ die to save all men while we must admit that it was not the Father's will to save all men? If so, then the purpose of His death went beyond the will of the Father, in which case He could not have said,

For I came down from heaven,
not to do mine own will,
but the will of him that sent me.

Christ could only say that He came to do the will of the Father if He came to die specifically for those whom the Father had chosen. And this is what He did. This is why we speak of Particular Redemption. The death of Christ was, of course, of infinite value, and He could have saved all men by His death. But He paid the penalty of sin for those whom the Father had given to Him. An atonement was made. The work was finished, and the salvation of the elect was made absolutely certain.

But this gets me into the last point that I want to make from our text:

IV. THE CERTAINTY OF THE SALVATION OF THE ELECT.

Notice what the Lord said in v. 37. Who will be saved? All who come to Christ. Who will come to Christ? The Lord said, "All that the Father giveth me shall come unto me." They "all" will come. Not one will be missing. Our sovereign God is going to see to it that He is 100% successful. He will not fail in a single instance.

But why do the elect come? Are their hearts not the same as those who do not come? Exactly alike! Then why do they come.

They come because they are called by God.

Now this is where God has seen fit to use us, and yet we always need to remember that we are God's instruments. We are not determining anyone's salvation, not even our own. That is in the hands of our sovereign God where it has always been.

There are two kinds of calls to salvation that are taught in Scripture. When we preach, we issue a general call to all to be saved. We do not know who will respond, and so that is the reason we issue the general call. "Whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

However, as we preach, it is up to God as to where and how and with whom the message will be effective. And so the call that God is pleased to issue through us at times is an effectual call--an effective call, a call that results in some sinner coming to Christ and being saved. God leads in this. God sovereignly directs our steps, and continues to use His people, stirring their hearts to witness, because He has determined that "all" whom He has given to Christ will come to Christ.

Paul was speaking of this wonderful work of God in 2 Thess. 2:13, 14:

But we are bound to give thanks alway to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth:

Whereunto he called you by our gospel,
to the obtaining of the glory
of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The prophet of Isaiah was speaking of this effectual call in Isa. 55:11. The Lord was speaking:

So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth:

it shall not return unto me void,
 but it shall accomplish that which I please,
 and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.

We are called to preach the Gospel, not to determine who is going to be saved. God uses His Word to impart faith to the hearts of those He will save. "Faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Rom. 10:17). We must preach. And, as we do, we pray that God will use us to accomplish His will for His own glory.

But this is not all. The Lord said three other things which I just have time to mention:

- 1) That those who come will never, under any circumstances, be cast out from the Lord. Cf. v. 37. Those whom the Lord saves, He keeps. The certainty of this is brought out by the repetition in v. 39.
- 2) That everyone who sees the Son, and believes on him, will have everlasting life. Cf. v. 40a. We do not wait until we die to have everlasting life; we have it right now--the moment we believe!
- 3) Two times, once in v. 39, and again in v. 40, the Lord gave an unqualified promise that those who are saved will finally be raised, glorified. This is when the work of salvation will be completed. Then even our bodies will be like the Lord's body.

Concl: If you understand these grand truths, can you find anything but the greatest of praise in your heart for the Lord? How marvelous is God's work in salvation! And two reasons I know that what we have I have taught tonight is true are:

- 1) The Lord taught it, and it is in the Word.
- 2) It gives all of the glory for our salvation to God where it belongs. If you and I get the glory for "deciding for Christ," then we share the glory--and that can never be!

We do not know who wrote these familiar words, but, whoever he or she was, the truth was clear to him. Our hymnal says that these words appeared at the first of our century. Here they are:

I sought the Lord, and afterward I knew
 He moved my heart to seek him, seeking me;
 It was not I that found, O Saviour true,
 No, I was found of thee.

A few years ago we had a city-wide evangelistic effort here in Portland and in many large cities in our country. It was called, "the 'I found it' campaign." That is wrong on at least two counts, isn't it? In the first place, salvation is not an "it"; it is coming to a Person. In the second place,

if anyone was saved at that time, it was not because they found the Lord, but because the Lord found them.

Let us continue to pray that the Lord will give us boldness to tell people about the Lord Jesus Christ. But remember that people are not saved by our boldness; they are saved by the Lord who gives us boldness to spread the message He uses to bring His own elect to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.