

"WHOSOEVER WILL"

or

THE GENERAL CALL

Revelation 22:17

— Intro: Those who believe in the doctrines of grace are frequently asked if they can sincerely preach the Gospel to every creature. I don't know how other people answer that question, but I know that we can't afford to set aside anything in Scripture. It is just as clear in Scripture that we are to preach the Gospel to every creature as it is that God has an elect people whom He will most certainly save. And so a child of God does not have any right to say that he will accept the one and reject the other. We accept both. We believe both. And we act upon both.

Perhaps the Apostle John had this either/or idea in mind when he wrote the two statements in the following verses, especially the latter. (Read vv. 18, 19.) What John wrote here, while it was written about this particular book of the Bible, it applies to all of the Word of God. We find this warning as far back as the books of Moses. Cf. Deut. 4:2; 12:32. God never contradicts Himself, and the truth that He has given us is never contradictory. The Bible has been preserved for us exactly as God gave it, and we are to accept it as it is.

— If we choose to ignore certain teachings, that is just like taking a pair of scissors and cutting it out of our Bibles. And both those who believe in election as well as those who do not believe in election are guilty of doing this very thing. There are many people today who believe in the sovereignty of God in salvation, that God has an elect people whom He intends to save, and they are content to keep their mouths shut about the Gospel believing that it is not necessary for us to preach the Gospel. This is just as wrong as for those who do not like the doctrine of election to ignore it, and to act as though it did not exist. They usually believe that a person's destiny is in his own hands, and they spend their time trying to convince people that they need to accept Christ, refusing to think that God has chosen those who are going to be saved.

— The truth is not to be found in one OR the other, or somewhere between the two, but both are true. God has an elect people whom He intends to save, and whom He will save, but He also has ordained that the Gospel be preached unto them. Nobody is going to be saved who does not believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. But how they come to faith in Christ is clearly in the hands of the Lord. We have seen in the doctrines of grace that man is so deaf that he cannot hear, and so dead

that he cannot believe, so dead that he cannot come to Christ. Nevertheless, we still have the Lord's command to be His witnesses (Acts 1:8), and to go into all the world to make disciples of all nations (Matt. 28:18-20). We don't know who the elect are. We don't know who is going to believe, and who is not going to believe. We preach the Gospel with all of our hearts, beseeching people to be reconciled to God, but we know that our preaching without the sovereign work of the Spirit of God in the hearts of sinners, will not amount to anything.

I said this morning that there probably never has been a person who hated the Lord Jesus Christ more than Saul of Tarsus hated Him. But I also said that there never has been a person who, after he was saved, loved the Lord Jesus Christ more than Saul as the Apostle Paul did. Let me make two other statements about the great apostle of the NT. You can see from his writings that no one believed more strongly than he did that God has chosen His elect from the foundation of the world. On the other hand, where in all of church history, or in the OT history of the world, can you find anyone who surpassed him in the preaching of the Gospel?

In 2 Timothy 2 Paul was writing to Timothy about some of the problems he had faced in preaching the Gospel. Listen to what he said:

Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer,
even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound.
**Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes,
that they may also obtain salvation
which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.**

You will find these words in 2 Timothy 2:9, 10.

This does not sound like a man who thought that the preaching of the Gospel was unimportant in the light of the doctrine of election. The doctrine of election was one of the great motivating factors in his life which urged him on in the preaching of the Gospel. Preaching the Gospel of Christ was so risky to Paul that he told the Corinthian church, "I die daily" (1 Cor. 15:31). He faced death every day. It would have been so easy for him to feel that God could reach the world without him. And there is no question that God could do just that. But Paul knew because the Lord sent Ananias to tell him right after he met the Lord on the road to Damascus, that Paul was "a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel" (Acts 9:15). And at the same time, in the next verse, Paul was told that he was going to have to suffer great things in accomplishing what the Lord wanted him to do.

Paul must have learned about the doctrine of election after-

wards, but that did not change anything for him. Perhaps I ought to revise that statement. It did change things for him. It made him more zealous about reaching the lost because he told the church at Rome that he would gladly give up his own salvation if God would only save his Jewish brethren. And he said this in the context of what he was teaching about election. See Romans 9, 10, and 11. Paul knew from his own experience that people were not looking for the Lord, anymore than he was. But he also knew that he was to preach the Gospel, and that as the Gospel went forth, the Lord would use His Word to reach His elect just as he had been reached.

So let us be careful not to add to the Word, nor to subtract from the Word, nor to ignore any part of the Word. We need to preach the Word. We need to witness to others about Christ. But the doctrine of election teaches us that as we obey God in preaching His Word, He will see to it that those whom He has chosen who are spiritually deaf, will hear, that those who are spiritually blind will see, that those who are spiritually unable to walk, will stand, and come to Christ, that those who do not believe will believe when God calls them through the Gospel.

I repeat what I have said many times before: If God did not use His Word to reach His elect, there would be no point at all in preaching the Gospel. But since He does use His Word, the Gospel, to reach them, we can be assured that our faithful preaching will not be in vain.

Let us not follow those today who foolishly appeal to what they call man's free will. There is no such thing. Man's will is in bondage. Only Christ can set any sinner free. When anybody believes in Christ, it is because God has given life, and made them willing to come to Christ and to believe in Him.

But now let us look at this last Gospel invitation in Scripture. There are many before this, but this is the last one. This is one reason it is so important. And it is interesting that John began with God, God, the Holy Spirit.

I. "THE SPIRIT" SAYS, "COME."

Now if we have any questions about the necessity of preaching the Gospel, this ought to settle it for us. "The Spirit" says, "Come." The general call is sent out throughout the world in every generation because the Holy Spirit is saying, "Come." He is calling all people everywhere to come to Christ, to believe in Christ, to forsake their sins and to trust the Lord Jesus Christ for forgiveness and cleansing. Back of all Gospel preaching is the Holy Spirit saying,

"Come." And we know that if it were the will of the Spirit to save everyone, when He says, "Come," all men would come. But there are those times when the message gets through, and guilty sinners like you and I are, have heard, and by the grace of God we have come. But when people are exposed to the preaching of the Gospel, they are responsible to God for their response. This is where you see the will of man in action. The Lord Jesus said it Himself when He was speaking to the Jews, men who had been exposed to the teaching of Scripture. Listen to His words found in John 5:39, 40:

Search the scriptures;
for in them ye think ye have eternal life:
and they are they will testify of me.

And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life.
Nevertheless, the Spirit continues to say, "Come."

But notice a second thing:

II. "THE BRIDE" SAYS, "COME."

Who is the Bride? The Bride is the Church, Christ's Bride. But the Bride is not yet complete. Even in that title for the Church there is the idea of an election. A man does not choose every woman for his bride; he chooses one. So if a lady is a bride, it means that she has been chosen by a man. And while the Lord ordains this for us even on the human level, yet I hope you can see the suggestion of an election here.

We are the chosen Bride of Christ, and John says that "the Bride is saying, "Come." We who make up the Bride of Christ are, or should be, anxious to see that Bride completed. And so we say, "Come."

In chapters 2 and 3 of this book of prophecy you can see that the Spirit is speaking to the churches, giving them the words of our Lord, to prepare them for this task of saying to people everywhere, "Come." In every generation it has been a major problem to get the Church to say, "Come," but, to the glory of God, even though the voice is weak at times, the Church of the twentieth century is still saying to the world, "Come."

But notice something which is easy to miss.

John did not say, "The Spirit says, 'Come,'" and "the Bride says, 'Come,'" but he put the Spirit and the Bride together and said, "The Spirit and the bride say, Come." The Spirit could work independently of the Bride, and sometimes He does. But God's appointed way is for the Spirit to speak through the Bride. And the message finds its greatest power when the

Bride is the instrument through whom the Spirit is speaking. One way we can tell that we are filled with the Spirit is that we will find ourselves saying to the world, "Come." In times of revival, the Spirit and the Bride are united in a mighty testimony pointing the people of the world to Christ.

But our text tells us a third thing:

III. "AND LET HIM THAT HEARETH SAY, 'COME.'"

When a person hears, hears the Spirit, genuinely hears the message of the church, he, or she, too, is responsible to say, "Come." Oh, what a wonderful day it is when those who are spiritually deaf are made to hear, to hear the voice of the Spirit, as He says to them, "Come." This is an example of a general call which has become an effectual call. We don't know where we are going to find those who will hear, but God knows where they are. The Holy Spirit knows where they are. And so does the Lord Jesus! We are like fishermen, to use an example which the Lord used; we throw in the net, or the bait, and the Lord is the One Who puts the fish in the net or on the line.

But lest we think that this God-given responsibility is only for the corporate Church, John said here, "And let him that heareth say, "Come." One mark of true salvation is that a saved person is going to find in his heart a desire to tell others to come to the Savior, to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ so that they can be saved.

But there is a fourth point in this text.

IV. "AND LET HIM THAT IS ATHIRST COME."

Salvation is portrayed here as water, "the water of life." And the thirsty person is one who has been made thirsty by the Spirit of God. All people should be thirsty, but all are not. But this is the wonderful thing about preaching the Gospel, even when we are only speaking to a single person. We meet with those who are thirsty. They are not ready to say, "Come." What they need to do is to come!

Probably the Apostle John, and certainly the Holy Spirit, want us to think of the Samaritan woman which the Apostle John wrote about in chapter 4 of his Gospel. When the Lord began to speak to the woman, there was no evidence that she was thirsty for salvation, or even that she could become thirsty. But the Lord spoke to her, and they continued to talk, and her interest became apparent, and she was soon saying, "Sir, give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come hither to draw" (John 4:15).

What was the result? Not only did she believe, but when she went into the city to say to the men, "Come," not only did "many" believe (v. 39), but a little later "many more believed" (v. 41). The Lord found many thirsty people who came to Him and were saved. Now we can understand why John said at the beginning of this account, "And he must needs go through Samaria." He knew that there were elect people there. We never know that, but we can be sure that in saying for people to come to Christ, the Lord will sovereignly lead us to those who will come.

One more word:

V. THE FULL INVITATION: "AND WHOSOEVER WILL, LET HIM TAKE OF THE WATER OF LIFE FREELY."

The invitation is to come to take of the water of life. But only those who are willing, will come. How are they made willing if their wills are in bondage to sin? Both before we are saved, and afterwards, "it is God Who worketh in us both to will and to do of His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). We come, and we believe; we drink of the water of life, but only because it is God Who has made us willing, who has set us free, who has given us life, and so we come to Christ.

Don't miss the word, "freely." This means it is a gift. It comes to us at no cost to us although it cost our Lord His own precious blood. It is "by grace." Cf. Isa. 55:1. We invite people everywhere to come to receive a priceless gift FREE! So people don't have to have a lot of money to be saved; all they have to do is to come.

Concl: It is our responsibility, but also our privilege, an unspeakable privilege, to call people to come to Christ. It is the work of the Holy Spirit to make people hear, and then to bring them to the Savior.

In these evil days in which we live, let us make sure that by our lives and by our lips we are working with the Holy Spirit, calling upon people to come to Christ for a free drink of water so that they may be saved.