

THE CALL OF THE APOSTLES AND ITS LESSONS

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Price One Penny

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(MARK iii. 13-30; vi. 7-13, 30-32)

OUR subject is the sending forth of the twelve disciples, who, when sent forth, were called "apostles," because the word, apostle, means one who has been sent out.

"And He goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto Him whom He would." In Luke you find that the Lord spent that night in prayer. Each Gospel looks at a different side of the truth, and gives different views of the Blessed Lord and His actions. In Luke He is the dependent Man, doing nothing without the will of His God and Father, but in Mark we are directed to the truth that He called unto Him whom He would, so that it is here a question of His authority. All service depends first of all upon His will, but, we know, it is also the will of our God and Father.

The Lord Jesus appeared to Paul and gave him the message that he was to take to the Gentiles. As all service depends upon the Lord's will, you will, if you are wise, seek to know His will with regard to any service before you. He will make it plain to you, and guide your thoughts in the direction of His will. It may be that you have no idea where to go, or what service to do. Do what your hand finds to do. Begin by helping in some little way, and gradually others will find out, perhaps before you do, that you really have a gift for the Lord's service. Some people are very often diffident, like Moses; but those who are

slowest in beginning are often the best when once they have started. But all depends upon the Lord and upon His grace. If He gives the calling, He gives the grace for it.

Now another thing comes out here: "And they came unto Him." This is the second thing of great importance, when you go and do a little service. Perhaps the Lord has laid it upon your heart to help in the Sunday School, or in the week-night meetings where your presence may be a help and encouragement to others. Are you sure you have "come to Him" about this?

There will always be difficulties in the way. As soon as the apostles were sent out, immediately His own friends even came against Him. And as soon as the Lord appoints His servants to go out and preach the gospel, the enemy seeks to render their services vain, speaking against even Christ Himself, attributing to Satan the works of the Holy Ghost.

So we must reckon on opposition if we are determined to answer the call of the Lord, to serve Him, or to "go unto Him" to offer our services. The enemy will be sure to place difficulties in our way. The apostle Paul says it is like racing in the (Olympic) games; you have to overcome the difficulties in order to succeed. But if you come to the Lord, He will give grace to overcome them. Only we must come at His call; that is the second point of importance.

As every service depends upon the will of the Lord, you must do what He wishes you to do. One may want to go abroad, when he should stay at home. One may, only with difficulty, be got out of his rut to go abroad. So we must look to the Lord, obey the prompting of His Spirit, and follow according to His word.

How many know what comes after the words, "He ordained twelve"? It is a point often overlooked, "that they should be with Him."

If we cannot be with the Lord in heaven, we can be with Him in spirit. But the Lord does come to us down here, and this is a side of the truth which requires a good deal of consideration. In John xiv. 21, the Lord says, "He that hath My commandments and keepeth them, he it is that loveth Me; and he that loveth Me shall be loved of My Father, and I will love him, and will manifest Myself to him." Thus we can be with the Lord. If we cannot be

with Him bodily as the disciples were, He will come to us. Only we must love Him and keep His word; not only His commandments, as in verse 21, but His word, as in verse 23 (N.T.).

There are some things that are not commanded, but they are His will. For instance, there is no commandment to break bread every Lord's day morning, but there is the word that the disciples came together at Troas to break bread on the first day of the week (Acts xx. 7). The heart that loves the Lord keeps this word of His, and knows that what was the Lord's will for them is also His will for us.

Thus we have noticed three beautiful truths about servants: firstly, the Lord called them; secondly, they came to Him; and thirdly, they were with Him. You will only be able to serve the Lord if you are accustomed to be with Him, in His company, in His presence; He coming to you and making a dwelling in your heart and in your house.

We hear a great deal about John xiv., but almost every time the subject of the discourse is the dwelling up in heaven. This is perhaps the main truth of the chapter, but the other truth is very marvellous. We have to prepare a dwelling for our God and Father and our dear Lord (verse 23) to come and dwell down here, in our hearts and have communion with us. As the Lord called the apostles to be "with Him" before they went out in service, so, unless He has a dwelling-place in our hearts and house, we cannot serve Him acceptably.

If we expect an honoured guest, the ladies put everything in excellent order; all sorts of little things are done. And if you expect the Father and the Son to come and dwell in your heart and house, you must put things in order. You must see that nothing is there that the Lord would not like. We must prepare everything according to His will. How long were the disciples with Him before He sent them out? From chapter iii. 11 to vi. 7 was a long period of preparation.

What sort of men were the twelve whom the Lord ordained? Were they all university men and well-educated? When the educated men in Jerusalem saw them they perceived that they were illiterate, ignorant men (Acts iv. 13). But they had been with the Lord. There they learned everything needful.

There are those who keep with the Lord and seek to be led of the Holy Spirit, and their words, though homely, are home thrusts. They cannot express themselves so well as if they had attended high schools, but it is much more necessary to be able to read the heart than the classics, and to read men than logic. We want to learn the love of God and the word of God, and then to pray for the men we have to be with, and learn their needs and reach their consciences.

After the apostles had been a long time with the Lord, He sent them out. This is most important for us all. We must be near Him, with Him, in communion with our Blessed Lord, in the fellowship of the saints. Then when we are sent; we speak what we know and testify what we have seen. It is a glorious thing to be an out-and-out Christian, and to be occupied with the Lord. Thus we shall be able to serve Him.

It is a grave matter that the enemy in our days is seeking in every possible way to take the edge off the truth and belittle the word of God. The great target of the enemy is the atonement. In so many churches and chapels men stand up and preach beautiful doctrine about the Lord Jesus, but avoid the fact that He had to die for sins and sin, that He had to shed His precious blood to save us from our sins. So many talk beautifully about the Lord, but avoid the main point that He came to seek and to save the lost, and that every hearer is lost until he comes to Jesus. They speak of His death as a martyr, but not as the Lamb of God Who shed His precious blood to cleanse us from our sins.

Now we must be careful in reading the directions (vi. 7-11) given to those in the midst of Israel when He was there and able to feed five thousand at once. We must not apply them literally, but only in principle, to those going to China or Africa to preach the gospel. The Blessed Saviour is not here, and therefore it is well to remember that the apostle Paul, writing later, tells those to whom he writes to take care of the brethren and provide for them (Tit. iii. 13).

We cannot carry out the directions which the Lord gave while here. Then they were not to go among the Gentiles, nor among the Samaritans (*see* Matt. x. 5), but later they were to go to all men.

Titus was to take care of the two brethren Paul mentions, to bring them on their journey, and see that they

wanted nothing. In your service, do not take more than is necessary. Just go forth, trusting in the Lord, and to be helped by those through whom He will help you. Trust, too, in the Lord for His blessing.

“And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear you.” The Lord here makes a distinction. Though some might not receive them, they might hear. In vi. 12, we see that there must be repentance. This is a part of the gospel that men are now trying to do away with. Many are being lulled to sleep by hearing people preach as if repentance were unnecessary. But “repent and believe the gospel” is the solemn truth. Nobody can be really converted unless he repent and acknowledge himself a lost sinner. Paul tells us he preached “repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts xx. 21).

The Just God is a Saviour, but He cannot save those who will not acknowledge their sins. If you want to get to heaven under the guise of a man who is better than others, or who has never done anything wrong, you will never get there. The Pharisee had done many good things, but the Lord said that the publican was justified rather than he. If you are really concerned about your soul, you will not think about any other sinner in London, but you will think, “I am the sinner.” This is what the publican really said (see New T.).

In the account of what happened on Herod's birthday (vi. 14-29) we have a picture of the terrible state of things existing among those of high social standing in that day. What a time that must have been, for they understood luxury in those days! Herod “made a supper to his lords,” inviting the highest of the land, great warriors, and the “chief estates of Galilee.” What preparations for that birthday! What work for the clothiers and seamstresses and jewellers!

But among all the distinguished guests assembled together there was not one who stopped the murder of John the Baptist. That is what the world was then and is to-day. Those who are not converted and repentant of their sins are unchanged. I was lately in Chicago, and murders were rife there. Every day almost there were murders, and educated people were among the murderers. It is terrible to think what the heart of man is capable of when he casts himself loose from God and will not repent of his sins.

We now read that " the apostles gathered themselves together unto Jesus, and told Him all things, both what they had done, and what they had taught " (vi. 30). Do we do this after a gospel meeting, or after other meetings? After all the services, do we go home and tell the Lord all about them? It is a very good habit. It is well to go over what we hear in the meeting, and test it in prayer at home.

We see how careful and thoughtful the disciples were in this respect, and God honours and mentions it. They were with the Lord before they went forth, and then they returned to tell Him all about it. It is a glorious life to be going forth from the Lord Jesus to do His work, and going back to tell Him what has been done, then waiting for His new commands and for His coming from heaven.

May we be more devoted and in earnest in our service. We have to do with a living God Who knows all about us, knows our lives, our efforts, our hopes, and our fears. May we be thoroughly devoted Christians, till the Lord shall come and take us to be with Himself. Oh, if only He could say to us in that day, " Well done, good and faithful servant !"

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