

Broomfield



PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

MINISTRY OF THE WORD

Volume 4 Issue 32

August 7, 2005

The Commissioning

The Attributes of a Prophetic Call, Part 3

Beginning Well

Aristotle said, “Well begun is half done.”¹ And Biblically speaking there is something to be said for this. Take the parable of the four soils for example. In this parable found in Matthew 13 of all the seed that was sown, it was the seed which began in the good soil which yielded its fruit.² Paul said of the Galatian believers- after describing their great beginning in Galatians 3, “Ye did run well; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth?” (Galatians 5:7). Truly the Galatians had a good start. All they needed to do was remain — yet they didn't. In Ephesians we read of the good foundation upon which the church was built³ — because of this foundation the church had a solid beginning. Truly it is so important that in running a race you begin well. If you build a house, you start with a good foundation. If you enter the gospel ministry, you do so appropriately!

Yet that raises this question: “What is the appropriate way to begin a ministry?”

This is a very important question. In Christ each and every one of us have been called and set apart unto the ministry of God's kingdom. Paul wrote, “But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal” (1 Corinthians 12:7). Truly our ministry may be the general calling of building up the body of Christ. Regardless, if you are in Christ then you must consider yourself called!

Peter wrote, “As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God” (1 Peter 4:10). If you have received a spiritual gift — and you have — then, you are a steward of God's grace — a minister in His Kingdom.

Paul said, “Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Corinthians 4:1). Paul here is not just talking about himself and his apostolic band. According to the context⁴ Paul is talking about ALL in Christ. Truly each of us here have been given a divine calling, and so a commissioning from the Lord.

¹ Taken from brainy quotes: <http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/a/aristotle.html>

² Compare Matthew 13:23

³ Compare Ephesians 2:20

⁴ Compare 1 Corinthians 3:23

Then, how will I respond to the commission to which I have been appointed in Christ? How will I enter and so fulfill the calling that God has placed on my life?

The answer we provide to these questions could be the difference between a successful ministry and failure.

So again I ask the question, “What is the proper way to begin a ministry?”

The passage at which we are looking addresses these questions. It contains the call of Samuel and his actual commissioning into the Kingdom of God as a prophet. Now while there are specifics about Samuel's commissioning here that will not be relevant to most of our callings (as we'll see next week), nevertheless there is plenty here with which to make application.

Condescension

Let us examine Samuel's Commissioning unto the prophetic office that we might gain insight into our own “setting apart unto ministry.” Accordingly, notice the first element includes condescension.

1 Samuel 3:10, “**And the LORD came, and stood**, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth.”

Prior to this verse, we read that the Lord called to Samuel three times. Yet with each “calling” we do not read of any specifics, until now. Here we read that the Lord “came and stood” before Samuel in a vision.⁵

Now it is easy to read over this verse failing to consider its significance. However to do that would be to miss an incredible truth. Did you know that one of the hallmarks of Christianity — one of the hallmarks of Biblical theism — is the doctrine of the condescension of God!

Genesis 28:10-13, “And Jacob went out from Beersheba, and went toward Haran. And he lighted upon a certain place, and tarried there all night, because the sun was set; and he took of the stones of that place, and put them for his pillows, and lay down in that place to sleep. And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I am the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed.”

This constitutes a call from the Lord to Jacob as he was fleeing for his life from Esau. And in this call a “ladder” appears in Jacob's dream. While this vision could very well have been a one time thing, nevertheless to know the identity of the ladder — this “stairway to heaven” — is to derive quite a few truths as to the nature of communication with the Divine.

If you were to look at the history of the interpretation of this verse, you would discover many suggestions as to what is represented by this ladder. For example, some have suggested that the ladder represents the sacraments — as we partake in the sacraments, we are elevated unto God. Others have suggested personal devotion times with the Lord — as we read our Bibles, we enter into the presence of God. Still others have maintained that it represents prayer in the Spirit. Yet, would you notice that all of these have

⁵ Compare 1 Samuel 3:15

one thing in common: they depict the ladder as acts of **ascension** on the part of the individual whereby he is enabled to commune with God.

Now, I hope you've learned enough from this pulpit to know that when we speak of "ascending unto God" most of the time we are using the language of paganism! Truly the goal of all mystery religion, ancient religion, and every cult is the ascending unto the presence of God.

Contrast this pagan world view with the Biblical view of Jacob's ladder. Christ gives us the answer in John 1.

John 1:50-51, "Jesus answered and said unto him, Because I said unto thee, I saw thee under the fig tree, believest thou? thou shalt see greater things than these. And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man."

This verse has an important implication in our understanding of Genesis 28. Christ here is identifying Himself with Jacob's ladder! Thus we must conclude that Jacob's dream was not of a stairway that reached to heaven upon which man may traverse if he only knows the secret BUT of a condescension on the part of God whereby HE — not Jacob — communed with man!

In fact if there was any doubt, listen to how Jacob responded; he understood the implication.

Genesis 28:16-17, "And Jacob awaked out of his sleep, and he said, Surely the LORD is in this place; and I knew it not. And he was afraid, and said, How dreadful is this place! this is none other but the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven."

Now this condescension on the part of God — this humiliation — is depicted in Scripture with a certain phrase, "the Lord came and stood." This Hebraism — as found in our text — is one of many which depict the "comings and goings" of the Lord.

From this we conclude that when we read of the Lord, "coming and standing before Samuel" to send him unto the prophetic ministry that part and parcel of a divine commissioning is a condescension on the part of God whereby He enlists the sinner for His service!

Act of Service

This is the first characteristic of a Commissioning from the Lord! The commissioning each and every one of us has received in view of our calling!

I hope you see therefore the incredible implication that this has on ministry. Ministry is not an act of service that we do for the Lord. It first is an act of service that the Lord does for us! God doesn't need us. He could perform and execute His will without man. Yet, that He chooses to use us testifies to His grace and mercy in that through His calling. He allows us to participate in His kingdom work!

So, put away with any thought that by your service, help, labors or sacrifice you are doing God a great favor! IT IS NO FAVOR; IT IS PRIVILEGE!

Now, how can we hear this message when we are so self-centered?

Many will claim on the great Judgment Day, “Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works?” (Matthew 7:22). Now many of us say, “Such folly, thinking that prophesying, casting out demons, and the like could earn someone salvation!” Or thinking that what I do in some way makes God obligated to give me grace!

And yet, are we not guilty of speaking the same when things don't go our way?

For example, we lose our job, or our health is taken from us, or we are confronted with tragedy and hardship and what thought arises? “Lord, haven't I served you? Lord, haven't I sacrificed for you? Lord, haven't I spent years denying my own wants only to serve Yours? And now this is how you repay me?”

Family of God, listen: Service in the Kingdom of God, prayer, general callings done unto the Lord, special callings offered in the name of Christ, washing the feet of the saints, giving unto the poor, and the many others things to which we are called day in and day out is privilege! And until we recognize this, we always will be guilty of polluting the holy callings of the Lord!

This is the first characteristic of a Divine Commissioning from the Lord. — Condescension! The Lord comes down to our level and blesses us with an invitation to participate in His Kingdom work!

Personal Call

Secondly notice, that the special call of God also includes a personal call.

1 Samuel 3:10, “**And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel.** Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth.”

For the fourth time the Lord stood before Samuel and called him unto the ministry of a prophet. Now of all the things that we might observe here regarding this call, would you notice that it was personal. It wasn't just anyone whom the Lord was calling, it was to Samuel! And it just wasn't to no-name Samuel, but to, “Samuel! Samuel!” — emphasizing the personal nature of God's call.

This is another important characteristics of all callings that we receive from the Lord — the personal setting apart of a person or people unto a specific purpose! Paul spoke of his call to preach the gospel saying “it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace” (Galatians 1:16). Before Paul was born, the Lord had determined to call him! In other words, Paul's calling wasn't because he was at the right place at the right time, God foreknew him and so set him apart unto a holy calling.

Likewise we read this in Amos.

Amos 3:1-2, “Hear this word that the LORD hath spoken against you, O children of Israel, against the whole family which I brought up from the land of Egypt, saying, You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities.”

The intimacy of God's calling was used to shame the Israelites. God set His love only upon them, and yet they turned their backs on him. The elderly man of Psalm 71 took comfort in this knowledge.

Psalm 71:6, “By thee have I been holden up from the womb: thou art he that took me out of my

mother's bowels: my praise shall be continually of thee.”⁶

I appreciate how Dr. Machen put it — speaking of the beauty of the Reformed faith:

“Thank God we can say every one, as we contemplate Christ upon the Cross, not just: “He died for the mass of humanity, and how glad I am that I am amid that mass,” but: “He loved me and gave Himself for me; my name was written from all eternity upon His heart, and when He hung and suffered there on the Cross He thought of me, even me, as one for whom in His grace He was willing to die.”⁷

Truly, every commissioning of the Lord unto salvation and service in the Kingdom of God is personal-involving the setting apart of each and every one of us before time began! And so it was in the life of Samuel. This priest did not happen onto the work of a prophet. NO! He was summoned, called, and commissioned by name, “Samuel! Samuel!”

Such is the second characteristic of a commissioning from the Lord, it is personal. There is no such thing as an impersonal calling in Scripture. Every commissioning comes to the individual!

From this we see not only the privilege that service and the Kingdom of God is, but also the importance of every gift and calling. To a church making distinctions amongst themselves on account of their gifts and callings the apostle Paul said, “If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him” (1 Corinthians 12:17-18).

Every gift and calling in the Kingdom of God is important! In fact let me show you this in another way.

In theological studies we distinguish between the Covenant of Redemption and the Covenant of Grace. The Covenant of Grace references that gracious act whereby the Father sent the Son into this world,⁸ the Son died on behalf of His people⁹, and the Spirit applies this judicial act to those whom God saves.¹⁰ In essence, the Covenant of Grace is the gospel!

But then there is the Covenant of Redemption. This references a time in eternity past wherein the members of the Godhead covenanted together to save a people unto themselves. After referencing the gospel Paul said that this was “According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Ephesians 3:11). Ephesians 3:11 implies that the plan of redemption was conceived before time began! Accordingly we understand that sometime in eternity past the members of the Godhead covenanted together to save us!

Speaking of God the Father, Paul wrote “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” (2 Timothy 1:9).

Now in light of the Covenant of Redemption do you understand therefore that in eternity past before this world was created that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Spirit had a conversation regarding

⁶ Compare also Judges 16:16b and Luke 1:15b

⁷ *God Transcendent and Other Sermons* [ed., Ned. B. Stonehouse; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1949], p. 136.

⁸ Compare John 3:16

⁹ Compare 2 Corinthians 5:21 and 1 Timothy 1:15

¹⁰ Compare Titus 3:5-7

their redemptive plan and ... your name was mentioned! In other words, before time began you were in the heart of God and God knew you by name and by name determined to save you!

Isaiah 43:1, “But now thus saith the LORD that created thee, O Jacob, and he that formed thee, O Israel, Fear not: for I have redeemed thee, I have called thee by thy name; thou art mine.”

When it comes to salvation and thus our communion with Christ, we have an individual relationship with God.¹¹ In light of this truth, Edmund Clowney wrote these words:

“Have you ever lost interest in Bible reading when you came to the endless names of the Book of Numbers, or the genealogies of Genesis or Chronicles? ... The very writing of the names is a memorial of the faithfulness of God. As the names of the tribes of Israel were written upon the precious stones in the breastplate of the high priest when he stood before the Lord to pray, so the names of the true people of God in all their generations are written in God's book (Exodus 28:9-12, 17-21; 32:32; Psalm 56:8; 69:28).”¹²

Now if this is true regarding salvation, doesn't it stand to reason that it also must be true of our calling?

He who knows the end from the beginning¹³ does He not also know the specificities of your calling? Does not He also know you by name? Isn't it He who commissioned you unto a special calling?

He called Samuel in this way and this is how He commissioned you!

Oh I hope you see therefore the incredible implications of this truth! Put away with discontentment. Be done with envying the life and labor of another. Cast off all jealousy. Who you are and what you have been called to do is according to the Divine appointment of your Lord!

Submission

Notice also that the Divine commissioning also includes a third element: Submission.

1 Samuel 3:10, “And the LORD came, and stood, and called as at other times, Samuel, Samuel. **Then Samuel answered, Speak; for thy servant heareth.**”

At first glance it is tempting to think that Samuel here is simply parroting the words of Eli — as if he were reading a script with no feeling or intention on his part. Yet that would be to confuse Samuel with Hophni and Phinehas. With them we might expect heartless words uttered from memory (like a mantra) — but not with Samuel. Clearly if there is anything revealed about Samuel in this book it is this: He was a man of integrity who did things zealously from the heart. For example after Samuel rebuked Saul for his disobedience, we read this:

1 Samuel 15:32-33, “Then said Samuel, Bring ye hither to me Agag the king of the Amalekites. And Agag came unto him delicately. And Agag said, Surely the bitterness of death is past. And Samuel said, As thy sword hath made women childless, so shall thy mother be childless among women. And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the LORD in Gilgal.”

¹¹ This is not to imply that there also is not a corporate relationship that also exists between God and His people, cf. Acts 20:28

¹² *Called to the Ministry*, pp. 8-9.

¹³ Compare Isaiah 46:10

I don't suppose there were very many speaking or laughing after this. All mouths would be opened in shock as this prophet performed the work assigned to Saul. Truly, Samuel was a man who took seriously the things of the Lord — there is no question.

And so though Samuel here quotes the words that Eli gave him, we conclude that it would have been from the heart. This being the case, notice what he says: “Speak, for thy servant heareth.”

This demonstrates the third characteristic regarding the Call/Commissioning of the Lord: It is received in a spirit of Submissiveness! Such must be the attitude and commitment of God's servants as they consider the will of God for their life. So many there are in the Kingdom who willingly say, “Speak Lord!” But then they add — “BUT. . . make it a good one! Or Don't call me to suffer! Or Let it not be to do this or that!”

Such conditions, footnotes, exceptions, and addendums we add to our calling. Listen! The heart of a servant is the heart of humility and submission — a heart which says Lord, use me as You will. Commission me with that which brings most honor to You.

Accordingly, the attitude that must pervade our lives as God's servants must NOT be, “Lord these are my plans; now bless them.” BUT “Lord, lead me in the path that you are blessing!” Or to use the words of Samuel, “Speak, for Thy servant is listening.” May this be the attitude we cultivate as we consider our calling unto the Kingdom of God.

Christ's Attitude

This was the attitude that Christ exhibited.¹⁴ In John 13 we read of this attitude.

John 13:1-4, “Now before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world unto the Father, having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end. And supper being ended, the devil having now put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him; Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God; He riseth from supper, and laid aside his garments; and took a towel, and girded himself.”

This is quite the amazing passage on account of the culture of Christ's day. In that day the lowliest servant was the one who was responsible for washing the feet of those present for a meal. And here we find the disciples, no doubt inspired by this culture, arguing about who was the greatest in the Kingdom.¹⁵

Brothers and sisters, this service on the part of Christ shames me. By now I would have been so tired of the disciples' petty sinfulness, arguments, arrogance, and pride. And yet we see a picture of the incarnation of Christ before our eyes. Jesus, in the context of open sin, laid aside His garments/glory, took the towel and washed the feet of the His disciples!

Listen! If Christ gave us so much in order to serve me, ought I not to be willing to give up whatever the Lord requires in order to serve Christ?

¹⁴ Compare Philippians 2:5

¹⁵ Compare Luke 22:24

And yet with Paul at this point I ask, “Who is adequate for these things?” (2 Corinthians. 2:16b). See, so often I fail to view ministry as privilege. And personally speaking, my hands are all over my ministry! I twist it this way. I hold back a little here. I am unwilling to yield a little there.

Indeed! I fall so short of Christ and His example. So again I ask with Paul, “Who is adequate for these things?”

And yet I am comforted by Paul's response.

2 Corinthians 3:4-6, “And such trust have we through Christ to God—ward: Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God; Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.”

Do you understand that though we might fight and wrestle when it comes to the callings of the Lord, ultimately God will not allow our sin to mess up His calling!

Now, this doesn't make me look with levity upon obedience. It is just the opposite: Because of God's grace, I all the more diligently want to serve Him.

Amen!

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About the Preacher

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