

The Church's Commission

“Let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.”

—Galatians 6:9,10

WHEN THE RESURRECTED

Jesus appeared to his disciples the last time before his ascension, he outlined for them what their work as his disciples was to be. He said, “Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.”

(Acts 1:8) Years later, when the Apostle John received that marvelous vision on the Isle of Patmos, he wrote, “I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, . . . and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.”—Rev. 20:4

This work of bearing witness to the Truth was to be done under the power and through the authority of the Holy Spirit. Jesus himself received this power and authority at the time of his baptism

when the Holy Spirit came upon him. Later, in a synagogue in Nazareth, Jesus quoted from Isaiah 61:1-3 to show that his authority and work had been foreknown and foretold by his Heavenly Father. We quote verse one: "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound."

Throughout the three and one-half years of his ministry, Jesus was faithful in carrying out this commission of the Holy Spirit. Luke 8:1 reads concerning Jesus, that "he went throughout every city and village, preaching and shewing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God: and the twelve were with him." Jesus not only preached the Gospel by word of mouth, but also illustrated the blessings which would reach the people through the agencies of his kingdom by the many miracles he performed.

Jesus sent his apostles out to do a work similar to his own. After that, he sent out seventy others. This made a total of eighty-two who, under the leadership of Jesus and following his example, went from place to place throughout Palestine to bear witness to the Gospel of the kingdom. (Matt. 10:5-8; Luke 10:1) The apostles and the other seventy were empowered to perform miracles in order to substantiate the message they proclaimed.

NOT SOCIAL WORKERS

While in the course of their ministry these first witnesses bestowed many temporal blessings of healing upon those to whom they proclaimed the

message of the kingdom. This was merely a by-product of their campaign. The miracles were designed simply to make more effective their witness to the fact that the kingdom of heaven was at hand.

We should appreciate and commend those who seek to do good to their fellowmen along material lines. Probably at no time has there been a greater recognized need for assistance throughout the world. However, as followers of the Master our obligations are set forth in his commands and in his example. Those who are acquainted with present Truth have the advantage of knowing that, in the Lord's due time, abundant provisions will be made for all the poor and needy of the world, as well as for the sick and dying, about which we can do very little now in any case.

Jesus said to those he called from their fishing business, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." (Matt. 4:19) He did not say to them that in following him they would be social workers to feed and clothe the needy. When he sent them out into the ministry, he said, "As ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, Nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat."—Matt. 10:7-10

From these detailed instructions, it is clear that the apostles were sent out to preach, and in conjunction with their preaching, to heal the sick and perform other miracles. They were not provided with means to assist the poor. Indeed, they had to

depend upon the generosity of those whom they served for their own material needs.

Later, when opposition toward Jesus and his co-workers had grown to the point that the religious rulers were ready to crucify him, he instructed his apostles that they should now take whatever material means they had with them, because from then on they could not expect much help from their fellow Israelites. "He said unto them, When I sent you without purse, and scrip, and shoes, lacked ye any thing? And they said, Nothing. Then said he unto them, But now, he that hath a purse, let him take it, and likewise his scrip: and he that hath no sword, let him sell his garment, and buy one. For I say unto you, that this that is written must yet be accomplished in me, And he was reckoned among the transgressors: for the things concerning me have an end. And they said, Lord, behold, here are two swords. And he said unto them, It is enough."—Luke 22:35-38

Jesus conducted his ministry along lines similar to the manner he outlined for his representatives, except that his miracles were more outstanding, for on several occasions he awakened the dead from the sleep of death. After Pentecost, Peter also did this. (Acts 9:36-42) Another of Jesus' outstanding miracles was the feeding of the multitude. (Mark 6:38-44) There is no evidence to show that these five thousand people were particularly poor. It was simply that they had been listening so long to Jesus' preaching in a "desert place," far removed from their homes, that he considered it an act of courtesy and hospitality to provide something for them to eat. His disciples advised that they be sent into the villages to buy their own food, indicating

that they had the necessary funds to do this had Jesus permitted it.

This miracle, even as all the others performed by Jesus and his representatives, was designed to impress the message of the kingdom they were preaching. Jesus later admonished his hearers, "Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed." (John 6:27) When the people asked Jesus for a sign, he referred them to the manna which God provided for the Israelites in the wilderness, and reminded them that all those Israelites died. Then he explained that he was the true bread which, when accepted through belief, would give everlasting life.—John 6:30-35

TO FEED THE POOR

A young man went to Jesus and asked him what he could do to acquire eternal life. This man was a Jew, and Jesus reminded him of the Law which promised life to anyone who could and would keep it. When the man told him that he had kept the commandments, Jesus said to him that he should sell all that he had and give the proceeds to the poor, then take up his cross and follow him. (Matt. 19:16-21; Mark 10:17-21) Jesus did not ask this young man to give his wealth to him so that he might feed the poor. What he did ask was that the man divest himself of his riches, dispensing them to the poor, and then become his follower. The simple act of giving his wealth to feed the poor would not have been following Christ, but a demonstration of his commitment in becoming a disciple. The point

is that Jesus' ministry was not one of feeding the poor with material food.

We do not condemn the professed Christian world for devoting so much effort to social and uplift work among the poor and needy. We are merely emphasizing that this is not the sort of work Jesus conducted, nor are his followers commissioned to conduct such efforts. There is nothing in the life and instructions of Jesus to indicate that he concentrated his efforts along this line. He was commissioned by the Holy Spirit to proclaim the glad tidings. As his followers, our great commission also is to preach the Gospel of the kingdom. The apostles understood the matter in this way, and for this reason we find nothing in their writings and sermons to indicate otherwise.

AFTER PENTECOST

After Pentecost, by the authority of Jesus and through the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit, the apostles and other disciples continued the ministry of the Truth, the glorious Gospel message of the kingdom. The apostles were able to perform miracles, as Jesus did, although this aspect of their ministry does not seem to be as prominent as it was in the case of Jesus. When the apostles died, miracles ceased altogether. The simple proclamation of the Truth was then depended upon to give the witness.

In the beginning, this effort was limited almost entirely to what could be accomplished by individual oral presentations of the message to varying sizes of audiences. Copies of the Scriptures themselves were very scarce and expensive. Many centuries later, following the advent of printing, the Lord's witnesses had this *(Continued on page 35)*

(Continued from page 31) additional means of dispensing the message. Coming down to our day, we rejoice in the availability of radio, television, and many forms of electronic media as further means of transmitting the Gospel. There is no change, however, in the commission.

From time to time, there are those of the Lord's people who reach the conclusion that all the efforts to proclaim the Gospel of the kingdom are wasted because, they imagine, there are such meager results. Nowhere in the Bible are we instructed to give up proclaiming the Gospel on the ground that there are no results. The Lord's will in this matter is not determined by the results of the efforts. Quite to the contrary, we are instructed to continue laying down our lives in this service whether the people to whom we witness hear or whether they forbear to hear.

Solomon wrote, "He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap. As thou knowest not what is the way of the spirit, nor how the bones do grow in the womb of her that is with child: even so thou knowest not the works of God who maketh all. In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good."—Eccles. 11:4-6

SEED SOWING

In Jesus' parable of the sower, he taught us what to expect from our efforts to proclaim the Word of God to the people. (Matt. 13:18-23) According to this parable, as the seeds of truth are sown, some fall upon what is illustrated by the "wayside," some fall on "stony places," and still other grains of wheat fall

among “thorns.” Only a small portion, it seems, falls upon the “good ground” of sincere and honest hearts. It is this class, we believe, that eventually prove worthy of joint-heirship with Jesus in his kingdom.

Jesus said, “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom.” (Luke 12:32) It is indeed a little flock—in all, we believe, a mere hundred and forty-four thousand. Essentially two thousand years have elapsed in reaching this small number, which is an average of less than seventy-five for each year, the world over. Of course, there is the great multitude class which is also reached through the witness of the Gospel message. Even so, it must have seemed many times to the Lord’s people that they were obtaining very small results from their self-sacrificing efforts.

The results, though, are not our responsibility. We are to sow the seeds of truth and water them, but it is the Lord who gives the increase. Indeed, the Lord does give an increase. Many times newly interested individuals are reached by the message. There is also a growth of grace in the hearts of those who continue faithfully to tell out the glad tidings of the kingdom.

SERVING THE CONSECRATED

Bearing witness to the Truth does not end with a public proclamation of the message, important though this is as the bulwark of consecrated efforts. Our love for the Lord should reach out especially to our brethren in Christ. Jesus commanded us that we should love one another as he loved us. (John 13:34) The Apostle John wrote that we should lay down our lives for the brethren. (I John 3:16) The

great need of all our brethren is spiritual help and encouragement. We should be on the alert at all times to render this needed assistance.

As a class, the Lord's consecrated people are the prospective "bride" of Christ and should be energetic in making herself ready for union with her Lord. (Rev. 19:7; 21:2,9) First, the members of this class are reached through the witness work and the examples of the consecrated. Second, together they then assist one another in the development of Christian character, in putting on the fruits and graces of the Spirit, and in being built up more and more in our most holy faith. This all comes within our commission.

Nor can we turn our backs upon the material needs of our brethren in Christ. When there was a famine in the Jerusalem area and the brethren there were in desperate need, Paul raised funds from among the brethren of many ecclesias to help supply their needs. We believe that the Lord's people in every part of the age have similarly been awake to their privileges along this line. Those in need may not be in some far off country. They might be right in our own ecclesia. It might be only a single individual of whose needs we are aware. What a privilege it is to render what assistance we can to all such. It is one of the Lord's ways of giving us an opportunity of demonstrating our love for him.

In this connection, we think back several decades to the opportunities which presented themselves at the close of the second World War. Brethren in a number of European countries were in dire need of food and clothing, and it was a heart-cheering experience to observe the extent to which the

brethren in America and elsewhere came to their assistance. This is the privilege which, as the Lord's consecrated people, we all have of helping to take care of our own. If our love does not include this type of service for our brethren it is a shallow love indeed.

UNSELFISHNESS

The motive in all that we do as followers of the Master should be love. We should have no selfish desire to please self or to be honored of men in anything we do. The course of selfishness is described by the Apostle Paul as sowing to the flesh and the course of love as sowing to the Spirit. Our text is the climax to Paul's lesson on these points: "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting. And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith."—Gal. 6:7-10

God has called us and is preparing us to be members of "The Christ" and to bless all the families of the earth under Christ's future kingdom. He wants us to keep our hearts sympathetic toward these "families" and to rejoice in the prospect of soon having the privilege of assisting in their blessing. How great, indeed, are the needs of the poor groaning creation! They are sick and dying. Millions are crippled and filled with pain. Millions are without homes and hungry. Millions live in fear of terrorism

by neighboring nations and even nations that are afar off. Millions also live in constant fear of revolution and internal warfare within their own borders.

The Lord knows all about these conditions and could remedy them very quickly if it were his will to do so. However, he has a due time in his plan for this work. He is now preparing the personnel for this great project. He wants us who hope to be a part of that group in the heavenly phase of the kingdom, to love those whom we expect to bless, even as he loved the whole world in giving his Son to be the Redeemer and Savior.

One of the greatest blights upon the suffering world is ignorance of the true and loving God. Indeed, for the most part the people are without God, and therefore, have no hope. We know the plan of God and are in a position to speak a word of comfort to those we can reach. Thus, in a small way we can bind up the brokenhearted with the good tidings of the kingdom. What a privilege this is! How better could we do good than to do for as many as possible what only we can do, namely, impart to them the comforting message of God's plan.

This does not mean that if we are aware of specially needy cases along other lines among those with whom we come in contact, we should turn a deaf ear to them. We are to be helpful in all ways that we can, but our primary commission is to proclaim glad tidings to all who will hear. The Lord is still calling out a people for his name from the world and preparing them to live and reign with Christ. We do not now know when the Lord may give the increase to our feeble efforts.

However, as Paul declares, in our work of sowing to the Spirit, we are to do good especially to other members of the household of faith. This household are those who are already in the family of God, his children. These are to be our special care, both along spiritual, as well as material lines, when needed. Paul says that we should not be “weary in well doing.” There would not be much danger of becoming weary if we could see outstanding results from our efforts. It is because we frequently do not see results that we become weary. When we do, sometimes there is a tendency to question whether or not we are doing the proper thing.

Paul reminds us that we shall “reap, if we faint not.” Here he is not speaking of present visible results from our efforts, but to reaping life everlasting in the kingdom. The Lord does not want us to depend upon present results for courage and strength to continue in the narrow way of sacrifice and service, although we are all greatly encouraged when he permits us to see some small results from our labors. He wants us to walk by faith and to rejoice in the hope set before us of reaping “glory and honor and immortality” beyond the veil, and of sharing with Jesus in causing the knowledge of the Lord to fill the earth as the waters cover the sea.—Rom. 2:7; Isa. 11:9; Hab. 2:14

What a glorious prospect! May it give us strength to continue faithful to our commission to bear the glad tidings to all as we have, and can make, opportunities, remembering that those who will live and reign with Christ are those who are “beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God.”—Rev. 20:4 ■