

The Great Commission

“Then the LORD put forth his hand, and touched my mouth. And the LORD said unto me, Behold, I have put my words in thy mouth. See, I have this day set thee over the nations and over the kingdoms, to root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant.”
—*Jeremiah 1:9,10*

JEREMIAH THE PROPHET

was commissioned by God to declare a message of truth pertaining to Israel as well as to other nations. The Lord gave the prophet the message he was to preach. In order that he might be properly equipped to carry out the mission to which he was appointed, God told the prophet, “I have put my words in thy mouth.” Jeremiah was not commissioned to proclaim his own opinions or deductions. If he were to be faithful, the only course open to him was that of being a messenger of the Word of the Lord.

This principle has held true with respect to all those who have been divinely appointed to represent God among the people. The only true servants of God have been those who faithfully proclaim the

message he has entrusted to them. Their fidelity to the Lord's cause has called for earnestness in their endeavor to ascertain the message he would have them proclaim. As Paul admonished in his letter to Timothy, "Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth."—II Tim. 2:15

The message Jeremiah was commissioned to proclaim was of a twofold nature. First, he was to call attention to the sins of Israel and the dire consequences of continued disobedience to God's Law. A significant portion of the Book of Jeremiah presents this aspect of the prophet's message from God. Secondly, however, Jeremiah was also to announce the blessings the Lord proposed to bestow upon the nation and upon all the world under the future arrangements of the New Covenant. (Jer. 31:31-34) Included in this feature of God's message given through the prophet was the explanation that these blessings were to be so far-reaching as to include the resurrection of the dead. (vss. 15-17) These two phases of the message are epitomized in our text, for in it, Jeremiah was told that he was "to pull down, and to destroy," and also "to build, and to plant."

Jeremiah himself did not embark upon a work to destroy, and he was powerless to do anything along the line of building or planting. However, from the Lord's standpoint he was reckoned as having a part, both in the work of destruction and in the work of rebuilding, simply by being faithful in declaring to the people what the Lord intended to do along these lines. It is important to recognize this principle in God's dealings with his people, for it will help us to understand more clearly some of the prophecies

pertaining to the position occupied by the people of God at the present time, just prior to the establishment of Christ's kingdom.

In the experience of Jeremiah, while he was commissioned to warn Israel of the impending disaster that was to come upon the nation, the instrumentality actually used by the Lord to overthrow the nation was the king of Babylon and the Babylonian armies. The prophet was given a vision in which he saw outside forces, "a seething pot," that was to come against Jerusalem. (Jer. 1:13-15) Like many other prophecies, while this doubtless had a fulfillment in connection with the overthrow of Israel at that time, it has a larger fulfillment now, as we see all the kingdoms of this world going through a great "time of trouble."—Dan. 12:1

ANOINTED TO PREACH GLAD TIDINGS

In the case of the ancient prophets of Israel, each of them was commissioned by God individually to proclaim a specific message to his people. There was, however, an overall harmony in all these messages, for in a general way they always contained a warning against the results of disobedience, a call to repentance, and promises of blessings which ultimately would come to Israel and the whole world. These promises were later summed up by Peter as pointing forward to "the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began."—Acts 3:21

When Jesus came at his First Advent, he was also given a special commission. At the time of his baptism he was anointed by the Holy Spirit, and shortly thereafter he explained to a group of Jewish

worshippers at a Nazarene synagogue that this anointing constituted his authority to preach glad tidings to the meek, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives and the opening of the prison to those who are bound, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. (Luke 4:17-21) The scriptural proof which the Master used in this connection were the words of the Prophet Isaiah found in Isaiah 61:1-3.

This foretold commission of the Holy Spirit to preach the glad tidings did not end with the Master. The apostle speaks of the anointing which we have received from him, indicating that those who by one spirit are baptized into his body, are partakers of the same anointing which came upon the Head. (I John 2:27) Jesus explained this matter in non-symbolic language, saying to his disciples that just as he had been sent into the world, so he was sending them. Later he told them to go into all the world and preach the Gospel—the glad tidings.—John 20:21; Matt. 28:19,20

The commission we have received to represent the Lord differs from that which was given to the individual prophets in the sense that we share in the one great anointing, or authorization, which came first upon our Head, Christ Jesus, and is participated in by all the members of his body. All footstep followers of Christ are given the same truth, and all are authorized to lay down their lives in service and sacrifice proclaiming it to others.

The message the church has been authorized to make known to the world has not been unlike that which each of the prophets declared to Israel. First, it has been a message of repentance. Paul explained to the Athenians on Mars' hill that now God "com-

mandeth all men every where to repent.” (Acts 17:30) This call to repentance has been done by God’s faithful servants, the footstep followers of Jesus. The true church in the flesh has been pictured by Elijah, whose efforts were directed to “turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers.” (Mal. 4:5,6) Elijah’s efforts met with only limited success, just as have the efforts of Jesus’ faithful followers.

In his prophecy of this symbolic work of Elijah, God warned that if repentance was not forthcoming on the part of the world under the influence of the Gospel message, he would “smite the land, with utter destruction.” (vs. 6, *Rotherham Emphasized Bible*) This is, no doubt, a reference to the unprecedented tribulation that would come upon this present evil world order, ruled by Satan, causing its destruction and preparing the way for God’s new world. (II Cor. 4:4; Gal. 1:4; II Pet. 3:9-13) We observe this trouble going on in our day. Jesus prophesied that it would be a time of “great tribulation, such as was not since the beginning of the world to this time, no, nor ever shall be.”—Matt. 24:21

It is not, however, the privilege of the church to merely announce to the world the need for repentance, and to explain the meaning of the present trouble. We are also to assure the people—all who have hearing ears—of the wonderful time of blessing which is so near at hand, and which will follow the “great tribulation.” Like the prophets of old, we, too, are to speak of the “times of restitution of all things,” which are to be ushered in as a result of the establishment of Christ’s kingdom. What a joy it is to sing this sweet theme song of God’s love!

GLAD TIDINGS TO THE MEEK

In the great commission of the Holy Spirit as outlined in Isaiah 61:1-3, the thought is stressed that we are to proclaim the glad tidings to the "meek." These, for the most part, are the only ones whose hearts are prepared to benefit from the message. It is quite beyond our powers, however, to seek out the meek of the earth individually so that we can direct the message exclusively to them. Rather, the method the Lord gives us is that of proclaiming the Truth far and wide by every means possible, with the realization that in his providence it will reach the hearing ears of the meek. We are to sow "beside all waters," for we know not what will "prosper, either this or that."—Isa. 32:20; Eccles. 11:6

Our message is to be that of glad tidings. Even when we explain the meaning of the great time of trouble, our message should always be coupled with that of hope for the future. This is the hope that is based upon the promises of God pertaining to the blessings to be showered upon the people through the instrumentalities of the Messianic kingdom. Such a message will surely encourage and bind up the brokenhearted. It will also assure the earnest seekers after truth that those who are held in captivity to sin and superstition, as well as those who are bound in the great prison house of death, are to be given their liberty. (Isa. 61:1) It is a glorious message, which thrills the hearts of those who know and proclaim it, as well as those who hear and respond to its righteous influence.

Jesus was commissioned also to proclaim the "acceptable year of the LORD," and that privilege has likewise come down to us. (vs. 2) This feature

of the message pertains to the opportunity at the present time to follow in the footsteps of Jesus as joint sacrificers with him. It includes the inspiring hope that if we are faithful unto death we will live and reign with Christ in the spiritual phase of the kingdom.—Rom. 8:16,17; Rev. 20:4,6

This portion of God's message includes a call to repentance, and the invitation to present one's self in full consecration to him. It includes also proper emphasis upon all those features of the Scriptures pertaining to our earthly walk. Having escaped the corruption that is in the world, the Apostle Peter states, we are to encourage one another to lay hold more firmly upon the exceeding great and precious promises, by which we might be made partakers of the divine nature. We are also to add to our faith, the apostle says, the qualities of virtue, knowledge, temperance, patience, godliness, brotherly kindness and love. (II Pet. 1:4-7) We are to continually remind ourselves that it is only if we "give diligence" to do these things that an "entrance shall be ministered" unto us "abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ."—vss. 10,11

DAY OF VENGEANCE—ETERNAL BLESSINGS TO FOLLOW

When Jesus quoted the commission of the Holy Spirit as outlined in Isaiah 61:1-3, he stopped just before the reference to the "day of vengeance of our God." The reason is that it was not then God's due time for his "vengeance" to be upon the world. This phase of the divine commission of service has been at this end of the present age. Now, as the prophecies and conditions in the earth so clearly

indicate, we are living in the foretold “day of vengeance,” or as previously referenced, the time of “great tribulation.”

Declaring the day of God’s vengeance, however, does not imply that we are to pronounce vengeance upon the world. This responsibility belongs only to God. “Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.” (Rom. 12:19; Heb. 10:30; Eccl. 12:14) Our declaration, rather, calls only for the explanation of the present trouble, and witnessing to the glorious solution to world distress and perplexity which will be divinely provided through the kingdom of Christ so soon to be established.

A proper testimony concerning the “day of vengeance” implies making known to the people that none of the proposed humanly devised remedies for mankind’s ills now being offered will solve the problems of a dying world. Only Christ’s kingdom will do this. The position of the true Christian in the world is to proclaim boldly and lovingly the glorious fact that soon God will answer the prayer, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven,” and that the manifestation of this kingdom will bring about “the desire of all nations.” —Matt. 6:10; Hag. 2:7

PROCLAIMING THE KINGDOM

Guided by the viewpoint of the Lord as expressed by him to Jeremiah, and set forth in our opening text, we are warranted in concluding that faithfulness in announcing the coming kingdom may properly be considered an important part of our commission. Hence, we today rejoice to proclaim that the present evil world—that is, the present world

order—must come to an end and be replaced by God’s wonderful and righteous kingdom.

Surely the followers of the Master today occupy a blessed position in the divine arrangement. “As a season of beauty upon the mountains, as the feet of one preaching glad tidings of peace,” declares the Prophet Isaiah. Then he outlines the message of glad tidings which we are now commissioned to preach, saying, “As one preaching good news: for I will publish thy salvation, saying, O Sion, thy God shall reign.”—Isa. 52:7, *The Septuagint*

Isaiah declares prophetically that in this time his “watchmen shall lift up the voice” together. (vs. 8) This denotes unity and cooperation in bearing witness to the Truth. It is not possible for imperfect human minds to see every detail of Scripture exactly alike, but it is possible for all who recognize the significance of the times in which we are living to unitedly proclaim the “gospel of the kingdom” to the world. (Matt. 24:14) This is essentially what the watchmen are doing. Think of the measure of cooperation represented in the ability of individuals and small groups to broadcast the Gospel message worldwide by radio, television, and the many forms of electronic media available today. This is a wonderful testimony concerning the determination of the Lord’s people to work together, letting their light shine so they might be like a city set on a hill, which cannot be hid.—Matt. 5:14-16

The proclamation of glad tidings today will not convert the world, nor interest a great many people to the point of dedicating their lives to God in full consecration. Yet, there will still be some drawn to the Lord, one here and one there, for it is his method

of calling the remaining members of his church.

Besides these, there are thousands who are learning the comforting message of God's plan, and the glorious hope that it provides for the future. They are discovering through the message of the kingdom that God is love, that he does not intend to torment his enemies, and that his kingdom of blessing is near. To such as receive this message into good and honest hearts, these words of the prophet may properly be addressed: "Seek righteousness, seek meekness: it may be ye shall be hid in the day of the LORD'S anger."—Zeph. 2:3

The message which God has commissioned us to preach is one which reveals the futility of all human efforts to establish peace, and points to the kingdom of Christ as the world's only hope. As we soon begin another year in the Master's service, let us be loyal and zealous children, gladly laying down our lives as ambassadors of the kingdom. We have a great commission! May we prove to be faithful stewards of the mysteries of God.—I Cor. 4:1 ■