

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA. 55:10 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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FROM CANA TO CALVARY

"This beginning of miracles did Jesus in Cana of Galilee". (John 2:11). These words point to the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus Christ. **"And when they came to the place which is called Calvary, there they crucified Him"** (Luke 23:33). These words denote the end of what the writer of Hebrews calls "the days of His flesh" (Heb. 5:7). Our study concerns these days, the three years of His earthly ministry.

In his brief introduction to the book of Acts the writer Luke describes his previous writing, the Gospel of Luke, as being an account of what Jesus began both to do and to teach until the day of His ascension (Acts 1: 1, 2). Thus all that the Lord did and all that He said before He ascended to heaven set the stage for all that was done in the Acts period. The thirty-three years that form this period are a continuation of the three years of His earthly ministry; therefore, what He said and did upon the earth demands careful consideration. If the great truths of this short three-year period are hid in our hearts, it will provide a well-prepared piece of ground upon which the seeds of truth of the Acts period can fall and take root. Everyone knows that He "went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil" (Acts 10:38), but beyond this they know very little.

At one point in His ministry the Lord Jesus made certain declarations of truth that caused many of His disciples to turn back and walk no more with Him (John 6:66). Their profession of submission (repentance) came to a sudden end. This defection did not cause the Lord to send someone after them with the promise of a brighter, lighter, happier message the next time

He spoke to them. He simply turned to the twelve disciples and asked, "Will ye also go away?"

In answering Peter became the spokesman for the twelve and said, **"Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life. And we believe and are sure that Thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God"** (John 6:68, 69).

Peter was entirely right in his statement. At the time of this incident there was only One upon the earth who could speak a message which a man by believing could get the guarantee of eternal life. If they turned away from Him there was none other to whom they could go. No one else could make the offer of eternal life. None but the Lord Jesus could utter this salvation-bringing, life-giving message.

Before this time the Lord had commissioned the twelve as heralds. These men were not preachers; they were heralds. They were given authority over "unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all manner of sickness and all manner of disease" (Matt. 10:1). In commissioning them they were barred from taking any road that would lead them to Gentiles, and from entering into any Samaritan city (10: 5). They were directed to go only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (10: 6), and their message was limited to a call to submission (repentance) in view of the fact that God's government was impending (10:7). Thus, under their proclamation any Israelite could take the place of submission, and these men could identify such with the submissive ones. This was only a step toward eternal life, only a start on the road to salvation.

The twelve would not have dared to add to the message the Lord gave to them, even though they probably would very much like to have done so. Certainly they would have preferred to proclaim that they had found One who gave every evidence that He was the long-awaited Messiah, to have recounted the works they had seen Him do, and to have held Him up as an object of faith in the hope of eternal life. But this was not their mission or message at that time. Note carefully His specific instructions to them:

These twelve Jesus sent forth (*apostello*, see Issue No .**SB005**) and commanded them, saying, **Go not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. And as ye go, preach, saying, the kingdom of the**

heavens is at hand. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give. Matt. 10:5-8.

This was their commission. They were heralds. They were told exactly what to say and do. Their instructions amounted to divine directives.

Sir Robert Anderson tells of an incident that happened in the French Chamber concerning trouble which was caused in a certain district through the general in command having communicated a War Office order in his own words. When the Minister of War was challenged in Parliament for punishing him, his answer was, "He committed an offense, and I removed him; he paraphrased an order which it was his duty only to read."

The Lord's directive as to what the heralds should say was explicit. They did not paraphrase the words given them in order to inflate their message and make it more spectacular. They had accepted the call to submission (repentance) with resolute sincerity. Later interpreters would enlarge their commission and have these heralds going forth with the salvation-bringing, life-giving message to all kinds of men in all places. This is a false conception. It was not at that time their privilege to speak the message that would bring forgiveness, redemption, and life to lost men.

As their consciousness grew in regard to Jesus being the Messiah (the Christ) and they confessed to Him that this was their conviction, they were charged that they should tell no man about it (Matt. 16:20). Even after Peter, James, and John saw Him transfigured they were charged to, "Tell the vision to no man until the Son of man be risen again from the dead" (Matt. 17:9). Not until after His death and resurrection, and the pouring out of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, could they speak the words that would bring about theogenic faith in the great truth that Jesus is the Christ the Son of God. Until then the Lord Jesus alone could speak this message. This is in complete harmony with Paul's later declaration:

How shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard Him; God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Spirit, according to His own will. Heb. 2 :3, 4.

Thus, three things need to be firmly fixed in our minds and held as divine truth: (1) Jesus Christ was the first to speak a message that men by believing

could lay hold of God's promise of life through Him; (2) Before His ascension He was the only one who could speak it; (3) He spoke it only to a limited number of the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

During His earthly ministry when a Syrophonecian woman (a Gentile) made an appeal to Him for help in regard to her daughter, He, at first, made no reply at all (Matt. 15:21-23). But she was not easily discouraged, so she troubled the disciples about her need to such an extent that they came to Him with the request, "**Dismiss her, for she is crying after us.**" His answer to the disciples (not the woman) was, "**I am not commissioned (*apostello*) but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel**" (Matt. 15:24).

It seems that they reported His words to the woman for she came to Him again with the almost pitiful plea, "**Lord, help me.**" His answer to this was, "**It is not meet (proper) to take the children's bread, and cast it to the dogs**" (Matt. 15:26).

There are many expositors who seem to wish that these statements would go away and get lost. They do not at all fit in with the popular conception that the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ was to all men without distinction. But they are in the Word and they stand written. They are His own positive statements as to the extent of His commission and the limits set upon it. All who believe in Him should not hesitate to accept His own declarations in regard to this. In His own complete submission to the will of God, He would not be guilty of extending His own personal commission. During His earthly ministry only two Gentiles were touched by Him. The Syrophonecian woman got healing for her daughter, and a Roman centurion got healing for his slave.

On the evening after His resurrection He appeared to His disciples, demonstrating to them the reality of His own restoration to life, saying to them, "**Peace be unto you: as My Father has commissioned (*apostello*) Me, even so send (*pempo*) I you**" (John 20:21).

By these words He limited their future service to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, even as His own commission was also limited. Any change in this would require additional revelations from Him. After He said this, He breathed on them, and said, "**Receive ye the Holy Spirit: Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained**" (John 20:22-23).

By this act and by these words He constituted these eleven men His specially commissioned ones (*apostolos*). They would perform upon the earth the acts that He would decree in heaven, and He would work with them in all they were called to do. Thus it was that for a thirty-three year period these men were the most gifted, able, powerful, dynamic, spiritual, energetic and incredible men that ever operated upon this earth in behalf of God. Later Matthias was added to their number (Acts 1:26) and Paul was personally commissioned and empowered. It was the presence of such men upon the earth that did so much to make the Acts period a unique dispensation in God's dealings with men.

I have piled up adjectives in describing these men, and all of these are true of them, even though very little of their works are recorded. They covered the known world, reaching all Israel, in one generation. They were despised and ignored by the world of their day, and they are misrepresented, stultified, and belittled by the theological world of today. These men were not eleven old fuddyduddies running around in bathrobes, the way they are represented in all religious pageantry of today. They were God's commissioned ones; they were apostles; they had the signs of apostles; they were earthly representatives of the One Who was seated in the heavens.

END Issue SB010