

“Here am I; send me”

We are all preachers

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The apostles of the first century had a clear commission to preach the gospel from their Lord. Can we, living two thousand years later, apply the same commission from our Lord to ourselves? To what extent should the principles that guided them direct us?

PERHAPS, WE could argue, it was different for Isaiah. He had seen a vision of glory: “I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up” (6:1). He was cleansed and purified. Perhaps, then, when the call came, it was natural that he should feel a responsibility to speak: “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me” (v. 8). Jeremiah and Daniel were both similarly purged and strengthened for their task.

What of us? Do we think, ‘Here am I: send him’? But we have seen a vision of the time when Divine glory will fill the earth. Has not our sin been purged and our iniquity cleansed? Have we not heard the voice of the Son of God?

From the very beginning, God spoke: “And God said, Let there be light” (Gen. 1:3). The Word of God gives light. As the psalmist wrote: “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (119:105). “And there was light”; God’s Word spoken is seen in action. The God Who had worked for six days to complete His creation rested from His work on the seventh.

For a time there was perfect communion between the Almighty and His creation. But sin disrupted that union. And the God Who had rested when creation was complete started work again—to bring man back to him. As Jesus said: “My Father has been working until now” (Jno. 5:17, NKJV).

He worked with Israel, calling out of the Gentiles a people for His Name. He spoke at different times and in various ways, rising early and sending his prophets, because He had compassion on His people and His dwelling place.

But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth His Son and spoke to us in him.

No man has seen God at any time. But Jesus declared, ‘unfolded’ (‘to tell aloud’) His character. As “the Word . . . made flesh” he was a living embodiment of the Father’s character, full of grace and truth (Jno. 1:14,18).

He was a witness to what he had seen and heard with his Father (3:32; 8:38). He came to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom to captives in the prison house of death (Isa. 61:1). He was to finish the work his Father had begun (Jno. 4:34; 6:38; 17:4). And “this is the work of God”, Jesus said, “that ye believe on him whom He hath sent” (6:29).

Through the years of Jesus’ ministry the disciples were by his side. They became apostles, that is, those sent with a message, for Jesus sent them forth to preach (Mt. 10:5,7). Theirs would become the first of many ‘beautiful feet’ that would spread abroad the good news of the Kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ (Rom. 10:15).¹

After the Lord ascended to heaven his apostles spread the gospel net wider and wider, as “witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8). They were actively to ‘bear record’ of their Lord’s ministry. As Jesus had commanded them: “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mk. 16:15). And they did it. Mark concludes: “they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord working with them, and confirming the word with signs following” (v. 20). Paul wrote that the gospel was “preached to every creature which is under heaven” (Col. 1:23). The gifts of the Spirit revealed “in part” was done away as the ecclesia reached a state of Spiritual maturity.²

So is that it? Was there to be no more preaching of the good news of the Kingdom of Jesus

1. See [“What is Preaching?”](#), Nigel Bernard, p. 120.
2. Compare 1 Corinthians 13:10 with 14:27, where “course” = “part”.

Christ and the Kingdom of God after the end of the first century A.D.—at least until the dawn of that Kingdom? If we consider Mark 16:15 fulfilled, do we have no commission to preach?

Seen and heard—the work of witnesses

Reflect on the reality of the transformation the apostles underwent. Within a short time they were openly defying the same Jewish authorities from whom they previously fled. They had seen the risen Lord, and that changed everything. And the result?—"we cannot but speak the things we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). As witnesses they felt compelled to reveal the wonderful hope they had been given.

It was not only a solemn responsibility. It was an inevitability that the stream of living waters from which they had drunk should flow forth from them that others might drink of it too. A witness must speak of what he has witnessed. Jesus spoke of what he had "seen and heard", but "no man receiveth his testimony" (Jno. 3:32). Startled shepherds watching over their flocks by night saw a vision they could not keep to themselves. They glorified God for the things they had "seen and heard", and told others (Lk. 2:17-19). The Apostle John himself said, "that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us" (1 Jno. 1:3). Our sight is by the eye of faith, but we believe and love him. Should not we feel the same desire to tell others of our hope?

Light in darkness

We saw how the Word of God gives light. God separates light from darkness, life from death. Naturally, humanity is in the darkness of death. Thus the plague on Egypt immediately before the death of the first-born was the plague of thick darkness, emphasising their true spiritual state. But "all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings" (Ex. 10:23), just as through the angel 'passing over' they were spared the death of the first-born. So God's Word brings life as well as light.

The same picture is painted through all of Scripture. "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light: they that dwell in the land of the shadow of death, upon them hath the light shined" (Isa. 9:2; cf. Mt. 4:16). Darkness is paralleled with death, and the coming of Christ brings "great light". Aged Simeon recognised in Jesus one who would be "a light to lighten the Gentiles" (Lk. 2:32). The Lord said, "I am the

light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (Jno. 8:12).

The same principle underlies Paul's magnificent description of the change effected in our lives by the gospel: "if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing" (2 Cor. 4:3, NKJV). The apostle is referring back to the previous chapter, where he discussed Moses veiling his face from the children of Israel. But we are not to do that. We are pictured gazing at the image of Christ as in a mirror. We see the glory of his character. And this is not a quick glance, but a careful scrutiny, bending down if necessary to get a better view, that we might not be a forgetful hearer but a doer of the word.³

For we preach not ourselves, but Jesus Christ. Paul teaches a similar lesson to that which his Lord taught: "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father Which is in heaven" (Mt. 5:16). Just as the light of God's Word shone in darkness at the beginning, so He has shined in our heart. We started in the darkness of death, but now we are light in the Lord. Moses had been with the Almighty in the holy mount. And we have been staring intently at the character of Christ in the Bible mirror. Just as his face reflected the glory of God, so our faces should reflect the glory we have seen in Christ.

The human face is remarkable. Apes have fewer than thirty facial muscles. By contrast, the human face has about fifty separate muscles, resulting in our ability to make around 10,000 different expressions.⁴ Thus the face here represents communication. If we truly caught a glimpse of that glory in Christ, it should be reflected from us just as Moses' face reflected the glory of God. It is inevitable that we should bring the light of that knowledge to others. As Peter expresses it: ". . . so that you may openly speak of the virtues of the One Who has called you out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Pet. 2:9, Green).⁵

If we are not 'openly speaking' of the excellencies of our Lord, is it because we have not stared carefully enough at him in the mirror? Of

3. In James 1:25 the word translated "looketh" is the same used in John 20:5, where John is pictured "stooping down" to look carefully into the empty tomb.
4. Burgess, S. (2008), *In God's image*, Day One Publications, p. 11.
5. Green Sr., J. P. (1985), *A Literal Translation of the Bible*, Hendrickson.

course, the Scriptural mirror shows not only his perfection, but also “what manner of man” we are, with all our defects and blemishes—in contrast to our Lord. And the more we recognise our own need, the more we rejoice in the way our Saviour meets it. And do we not feel moved to share that glorious salvation with others who are perishing in darkness?

In the ecclesia

The congregations of individuals bearing the light of Divine truth are characterised by the Lord Jesus in a comparable way: “the seven lamp-stands that thou hast seen are seven assemblies” (Rev. 1:20, Young’s Literal Translation). The ecclesia has a responsibility to shine brightly in the darkness of a Gentile world.

The Almighty Creator knows the needs of His creation and has more than met them: “Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters . . . Wherefore do ye spend money for that which is not bread? and your labour for that which satisfieth not?” (Isa. 55:1,2). Yet how are men and women who do not know of the living water offered in Christ to find it? The Lord himself tells us: “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come” (Rev. 22:17).

In daily life

Our responsibility to preach starts at home. The family circle is an important training ground for the development of character. Our behaviour with an unbelieving spouse must be designed to win them over by our conduct without a word spoken (1 Pet. 3:1,2). Regularly attending the meetings and a daily devotion to Bible reading and family prayer helps to nourish young minds and promote a spiritual atmosphere. Equally important are the lessons we teach without even realising it. How do we spend our free time? Do we show care for the members of the ecclesia or openly carp and complain? Is our speech always with grace, seasoned with salt, or rubbing salt in the very wounds we have created? Inconsistency between our professed ideals and our actual behaviour can sow seeds of doubt and undo much good work.

Our work colleagues should know of our professed allegiance to Christ and will be quick

to notice any departure from the standards they expect. We are to show our faith by our obedience and singleness of heart, “fearing God” like Joseph of old. Sanctifying God in our hearts will affect our behaviour and may provoke further questioning as to what our beliefs are. We should be ready to seize the opportunity to “give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you” (1 Pet. 3:15). The word translated “answer” here is a plea or a defence.⁶ Whatever the circumstances, our response to any such question must be “with meekness and fear”. There is no room for smug superiority.

Why not preach?

Who does not bear a responsibility to tell others of the saving truth we have heard? We are not all platform preachers. But we have all seen and heard. Others should take knowledge of us that we have been with Jesus. If we have truly seen him and understood his Father, and the brightness of his glory, we should reflect his glory in some way. If we are part of his prospective Bride, our voice should be heard inviting others to come to the living waters. Freely we have received, freely we should give. And our manner of life should be in keeping with the truth we proclaim, that the name of God and His doctrine be not blasphemed.

Do we feel unworthy? We preach not ourselves, but our Lord. Our righteousness is in him, and obedience to him compels us to speak.

Do we feel weak? Let us remember he is always with us, and that his strength is made perfect in weakness.

And we have to face up to our Lord’s words: “whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father’s, and of the holy angels” (Lk. 9:26). But, “Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God” (12:8).

May we find ourselves with him in that Day, to our eternal blessing and the glory of our God and His Son.

6. As used in Acts 22:1; 25:16.

The Christadelphian prepared only to give dollars to preaching work, but not his heart and soul, is like Eliashib prepared to work, but not to grow spiritually.

Ron Abel, *Let Us Arise and Build*, p. 13