

THE CALL OF GOD
to
CONSECRATION OF SERVICE
Cornerstone, January 2, 2005
1 Kings 19:11-21

INTRO: In January of 2005 I gave this message trusting that there would be some of the folk within the conference who would sense the call of God and take some Bible school in preparation for ministry. That message did produce some fruit but you know the rest of the story. I have had hope that some day the Lord would call someone from our own people who would not ultimately reject what we believe and would become a good theologian. We could use a theologian as a pastor. Listen to 1 Timothy 5:17, "Let the elders (pastors) who rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in the word and doctrine."

Here we are five years later, and today we are beginning the process of finding those whom God has gifted as pastors, and training them for the ministry. The method of the past in the churches we are familiar with is to choose certain candidates and then to cast lots for them. This comes, no doubt from Acts 1:21-26. What they were doing there was not choosing a pastor or a deacon. They were replacing Judas, one of the 12 apostles, one who was chosen by the Lord Himself, but who apostatized by his own choice. We do not know how they came to two but it is possible that they voted and ended up with a tie vote between the two. To determine which of these two it should be, they cast lots. In our constitution, when two candidates have equal votes, our procedure is to make such choices by lot. However, we have no NT examples of casting lots in either choosing deacons or pastors. What is most interesting is that we are given no express information on how pastors and deacons were chosen.

But, there is some question about the choice of this apostle. Later, the Lord Himself chose an apostle. He smote this man on the Damascus road and called him into the ministry. We will see this briefly later. One of the things I want to do when I get to the New Jerusalem is to see which names will be written on the 12 gates that lead into the New Jerusalem. Each gate has a name of one of the 12 tribes of Israel. If you think the answer to that is simple, check all the lists of the 12 tribes of Israel. But one of my biggest questions will be which of these two

names will be on the foundation of this city of this city, Matthias, or Paul? Who was the 12th apostle to replace Judas? If you think that is simple, study this as well.

I. IDENTIFIED

So, our first task this morning is to identify the call of God and then to specify the call I am to speak on this morning. There are two calls between which we make a distinction this morning. There is the call of God to salvation, and then the call of God to specific service. Of the call to salvation, Henry C. Thiessen, in his systematic theology writes that it is, "...that act of grace by which he (God) invites men to accept by faith the salvation provided by Christ." That is God's call to men for salvation. A very large amount of Scripture devoted to that topic.

But the call of God to salvation is not what is on my mind this morning. What is on my mind is the call of God to consecration for service. By consecration to service I mean that act by which a person comes to the conclusion God has called him or her to some specific service. Our topic this morning is the call to the pastorate. So it is that moment in life when a person dedicates or devotes his or her life to Christ for Christian ministry because they have determined that God has called them.

In the OT God consecrated the tribe of Levi to His service. They would not own property or a business as would the other 11 tribes. But not all God's service was done by the Levites. God also called certain individuals to be the king. This also was only to happen within a certain tribe. Then there was God's call of the prophet. A prophet was not called from a specific tribe or family. His call came from God alone.

Throughout the history of man God has called some people to a particular service for Him. The call to salvation is a general call. It comes to all people who get saved and many who don't. But the call to consecration for a specific service, many times a full-time service, does not come to all. God chooses some and calls them to it.

There is a link between the call of God and the will of God. The general will of God for all mankind is first that they get saved and live for Him in obedience to Him. The Bible says it is not God's will that any should perish but that all should come to repentance (2 Pet. 3:9). That is God's will. And He calls as many as He can get men to invite to Him. That is my task and yours. That is part of the general will of God.

But I believe God has a special will for each of us. Some of us He wants to be farmers or any other legitimate work. And He wants us to honor him with our income and the possessions that He gives to us. Sometimes God's special will, will be that we leave our occupation and turn to serve Him full-time. And when He wants us to serve Him full time, He will call us and reveal to us what He wants us to do. It is that call that I am thinking of this morning.

Listen to 2 Timothy 1:1, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus." Paul knew it was God's will that he should be an apostle. In 1 Timothy 1:1 he says, "Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God..." And so at a certain point in Paul's life, God called him to serve Him. And so in Romans 1:1 he writes, "Paul, a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle..." Paul's call was, as we know, a dramatic call. Paul's call also did not come by the choice of people. God called him into service.

LEM writes, "Blinded on the Damascus road by a great light from heaven, Saul of Tarsus fell to the ground and cried: 'Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?' When the words: 'I am Jesus of Nazareth whom thou persecutest' came out of that blazing light, Saul of Tarsus staggered to his doom. From the dust of that Damascus road Paul was resurrected. The weapons of his past warfare perished; his rebellion ceased; Jesus Christ was Lord of all. He was consecrated there and then" (Abandoned to Christ, p. 11).

And so, the call I am speaking about this morning is a call that God gives that is intended to lead to a

consecration to His service. I wonder if there is someone here upon whom the Lord has put His hand. You sense that God possibly wants you to serve Him. But maybe like Samuel of old, you do not recognize it is God speaking to you. You will recall that Samuel served in the temple because his mother had offered him to the Lord. And he was sleeping when he was called and he ran to Eli, the priest, and said, "Here I am." He thought the voice he heard was Eli's. This happened three times but Eli had not called him (Read 1 Sam. 3:9). Maybe like Samuel of old, you need someone to say to you, "The next time you hear this voice say, 'Speak Lord, for Your servant hears.'"

The call of God to some special service usually creates a crisis experience in a person's life. It is a big thing, and not entered lightly. So let us see from some examples in the Bible this morning how the call of God is experienced.

Now let me mention something else here, just briefly. I think we might usefully distinguish between an outer call and an inner call. When a person senses God calling him to the ministry without an election, that is what I call an 'inner call'. When a person is elected to the ministry by a vote of fellow Christians, that is what I call an 'outer call'. He has experienced an external call, but not necessarily an internal call.

In our culture, we are used to electing people and then asking them after the election if they sensed the call of God before they were elected. Sometimes that may have happened. But many times others may have sensed the call as well, but they were not elected. Some are elected and say they sensed no call beforehand. Some do not accept the outer call. Some may not accept the inner call. I do not know of any foolproof method. But I personally believe an inner call is important.

In the method of choosing pastors that we have chosen, there will need to be an inner call before the outer call. This certainly is the riskiest on the part of the one who responds. But when people have responded to the inner call, later will come the outer call. To respond to the inner call before the

outer call takes by far the most faith on the part of the one who responds. It does not take much faith to say, "I sensed the call of God to ministry" if a person has already been elected. It takes a lot of faith to say that before an election.

If we should have more who sense the call of God to some work in His kingdom than we might need as pastors, we would like to see them involved in other teaching ministries in the church. We are in great need of Bible study leaders who know how to dig the truth out of the Word of God. We are in great need of adult Sunday School teachers who know how to handle the Word of God.

Let me add one more point. Though one may have an inner call and an outer call, or only one of those; one can be disqualified for the ministry by not meeting the qualifications set out in Timothy and Titus. That is very important to remember both for those accepting the call and those who will later vote for leaders.

II. EXPERIENCED

A. Abraham

So, let us take a moment to consider some in the Bible who were called by God. One of the significant calls of God to a man for a specific purpose was God's call to Abram. Abram lived in Ur of the Chaldeans (Gen. 11:28). In Genesis 12:1-3 we have God's call to Abraham (read). The writer to the Hebrews in the NT says in 11:8, "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would afterward receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going."

There is an interesting thing about the call of God. When God calls, men have to leave what they are doing and follow Him with no idea what lies ahead. This is probably the most scary thing about the call of God, but there is something good about such a difficult call; it also keeps those who are not called from lightly entering ministry.

A. Elisha

Let's consider the call of Elisha in the OT. Earlier we had 1 Kings 19:11-21 read for us. Elisha likely grew up in a rather well-to-do home. And one day he is out plowing with 12 yoke of oxen. He is the twelfth. He had no idea that his life would drastically change that day, but as he is plowing, the famous prophet Elijah walked by. And as he passed by, he threw his mantle on Elijah and kept right on walking (read 1 Kings 19:19-20).

Here was the call of God to Elisha. God does not choose all men in the same way. The call of God to Elisha came through Elijah. Now Elijah is a famous prophet. Everyone in Israel knew him. Elijah did not just lightly throw his mantle on another person. As a matter of fact, he had never done this before. Elisha knew immediately what this meant. So he asked Elijah only to go home and say good bye.

Well, Elisha did just that, but he did something else significant. He took a yoke of oxen, slaughtered them and cooked them, using the equipment for fuel for the fire. This is very significant. I think this spells the end of his business experience and the beginning of spiritual service. Today's saying would be that he burned his bridges behind him. He said good bye to one way of life and said hello to a completely new and unknown and different way of life for him.

No man lightly took the office of prophet. It was a dangerous work. It was a thankless work. It was the work of often standing alone and standing between God the holy, righteous and upset God of the universe and His rebellious people. This made the office of the prophet a very undesirable position and very often he was lost his life in service for God.

B. The NT disciples

Turn with me to Matthew 4:18-22 (read). Now notice what happened here. Jesus called these men to follow Him. What did they understand that to mean? They understood that to mean that they must leave their present work and change occupation entirely. Notice again verse 20, "And immediately they left their nets and followed Him." As I view things, here is probably

the hardest thing among our Mennonite people. To leave our work and not know how we will take care of our families is just too much. We are bound to possessions and money more than many other cultures.

In the NT, when Jesus called the disciples, they left their business and followed Him. Jesus called fishermen and those of other occupations. Turn to Luke 5 (read 27-29). Here is Matthew, a tax collector. Matthew did one of the most despised jobs in Israel, although if one was shrewd enough it paid well. Israel was under Roman rule. Tax collectors collected for Rome and for themselves. Therefore they were highly disliked.

Now let me tell you about the genuine call of God. It is not irrational nor is it for lunatics. It is for people who have their senses under control. I do not believe that Matthew had not heard about Jesus before. As a matter of fact, I have no doubt that Matthew had watched Jesus. He had heard him teach. He had seen Him perform miracles or heard of them at least. He had pondered His messages. He had reviewed His works. He had double checked the OT prophecies, as is clear from the Gospel of Matthew. I believe, with all the evidence before his rational mind, He had already come to the conviction the Jesus was truly the Messiah, the long promised Redeemer.

And now as Matthew sits at his tax office, Jesus comes along. And Jesus looks at Matthew and says, "Follow Me." Now look at Luke 5:28, "And he left all..." Then Levi, or Matthew, made a great feast for Jesus, invited his tax collector buddies and said good-bye to the business world. Elijah never returned to his former way of life. Matthew never returned to his former way of life. They burned their bridges and followed Christ.

I wonder if there are those here this morning who too have sensed the call of God. Maybe you have sat through church elections and you were not elected and so you feel God has not called you. I may have a word for you. I think the majority of spiritual work today is done, not by people elected to certain tasks, but by people who have sensed the call of God on their

lives and sell what they have to follow a path they do not know where it will lead.

C. Timothy

Let's consider Timothy for a moment. We have already seen what a dramatic call to service the apostle Paul had. Notice how different his call is from Paul's. In some ways the call of God is like fingerprints. I doubt if there are two identical calls. From those we have looked at already it is clear that God does not call everyone in the same way. As a matter of fact, some of these calls are very different. Take Timothy for example. It is believed that Timothy's grandmother Lois and mother Eunice were converted under Paul's ministry. Timothy was diligently instructed in the faith by his mother. It would appear that God's call to Timothy came through Paul, but Paul's call came directly from the Lord Jesus Himself.

III. ACCEPTED

So, what happens when one senses the call of God and accepts that call? What is it like to devote one's life to God, not knowing what that acceptance will lead to? What does a person go through who is called of God? Well, when a person is elected by a church, say to be a full-time pastor, that is one thing. When one senses the call of God and there is no election, how is it then? I add again that many who are called into Christian ministry are called without an election. So it was with our missions speakers last weekend. What is that like? Well, it is consecration to Christ without knowing what He will ask of us.

LE Maxwell writes in his book *Abandoned to Christ* in a chapter on consecration: "Launch forth with the Captain of your salvation on unchartered sea. Those who have sailed the high seas in recent treacherous times have committed themselves to His Majesty the King: 'At your service, Sir, with sealed orders.' Once they were out on the high seas subject to the will of their government and wholly at its disposal, there they received specific directions as to what to do."

Let me tell you what I think is the biggest fear for people called with orders sealed. The biggest fear of such a call is the fear of failure. How many do not heed the call of God because of this fear? How will I face people when I felt I was called of God and then I fail?

When Elijah slaughtered his oxen and burned his bridges, did he know what lay before him? Answer: No. He sailed with orders sealed, only to be revealed step by step or day by day. When Paul was struck down on the Damascus road, did he know what lay ahead of him? Did he know that he would later write these words, "...in labors more abundant, in stripes above measure, in deaths often. From the Jews five times I received forty stripes minus one. Three times I was beaten with rods; once I was stoned; three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been in the deep; in journeys often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils of my own countrymen, in perils of the Gentiles, in perils in the city, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren; in weariness and toil, in sleeplessness often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness - besides the other things, what comes upon me daily: my deep concern for all the churches." When Paul signed on with Jesus Christ on the Damascus road, did he know he would pen those words? No. He set sail with orders sealed.

I am told that Charles Haddon Spurgeon would tell people how they might know if they were called to the Lord's work. He said, if you can be happy doing anything else, do it rather. On the other hand, you may have a good job, but you are unfulfilled. You sense an emptiness. You feel there is more. And it may be that what you are sensing is the call of God.

CONCL: So in conclusion, let me give a few illustrations from the life of Sir Ernest Shackleton. This did not have to do with Christian ministry, but the principles here have much in common. Early in the 1900's he planned an expedition to be the first one to reach the South Pole. It was an extremely dangerous journey. When he was looking for a crew he put an add in the newspaper. It read as follows: "Men wanted for hazardous journey, small wages, bitter cold, long months of complete darkness, constant danger,

safe return doubtful. Honor and recognition in case of success." Over 5000 responded to this call, including several women. Of those, Shackleton chose 27 men.

I might rewrite this call like this: Men and women wanted in slave service to Jesus Christ; service, unknown; wages, to be revealed later; rights, none; death, possible; misunderstood often; wrongly blamed many times; requirements at times almost beyond endurance; recognition, seldom received; family requirements, exceptionally high; opposition, constant; loss of rewards possible at any moment of failure; in case of faithful endurance to the end, these words of honor by the King of Kings and the Lord of Lords; "Well done good and faithful servant, you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your Lord."

Paul Lee Tan writes in his book of illustrations, about Shackleton's expedition this account. Apparently Shackleton was not given much to publicity. But when he wanted to set out to the South Pole, he highly publicized his trip. He was taken to task about this by another friend and here is Shackleton's reason. "There is one man, a Mr. Wild, a friend and colleague that I want to have along. However, Mr. Wild is in Africa and I have no way of contacting him. If I highly publicize this trip and Mr. Wild should get to hear of it, I have no doubt he would come along."

When Shackleton's words were finished, they heard someone at the door. They both turned and there stood Mr. Wild. Here is what Tan writes, "It was a dramatic moment as Wild and Shackleton shook hands - the handshake of loyalty. 'I heard you were going,' said Wild; 'the news found its way into the heart of Africa, and when I knew, I dropped my gun, picked up a bit of baggage, and made straight for home, and here I am. What are your orders?'"

Here is the question: If you heard the call of God, would you do the same? That is what the Apostle Paul did. He said, "Lord, what do You want me to do?"

This morning we have focused on ministerial candidates. But for a moment we want to focus on the responsibility of the members of this church. We are not going to leave everything to those who may sense the call of God. We are going to ask you, the members, to fast and pray for such as are wrestling with such life-changing questions, and ask

God to guide these people and the church in this process. We are going to ask God to let anyone who thinks they may be called whether they have truly heard from God. Then we are going to ask God to reveal to the members whom He would to have serve as pastor in this church.