

Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Orcutt Christian Church

A Grace Driven Church for Grace Needing People!

"Come As You Are ... Leave Changed!"

Burning Question #24

What Is The Restoration Movement? (1)

2 Thessalonians 2:13-15

July 2, 2017

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Saturday 7/1 Clean Up: Latonya Evans

1 🎵 **How Majestic [DH 2238]**

2 🎵 225 - Come Christians join to sing [ALL] 225

3 🎵 424 - The servant song [v. 1,2,5,6] 424

4 🎵 **Doxology [DH 1981]**

5 🎵 428 - In Christ there is no east or west [ALL]428

6 🎵 415 - We are called to be God's people [ALL] 415

7 🎵 **Family of God [DH 2357]**

2 Thessalonians 2:13-15 (NASB)

13 But we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because God has chosen you from the beginning for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and

faith in the truth. **14** It was for this He called you through our gospel, that you may gain the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

15 So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word *of mouth* or by letter from us.

1 Corinthians 11:1-2 (NASB)

1 Be imitators of me, just as I also am of Christ. **2** Now I

praise you because you remember me in everything and hold firmly to the traditions, just as I delivered them to you.

1 Thessalonians 4:1-2 (NASB)

1 Finally then, brethren, we request and exhort you in the Lord Jesus, that as you received from us *instruction* as to how you ought to walk and please God (just as you actually do walk), that you excel still more. ² For you know what commandments we gave you by *the authority of* the Lord Jesus.

2 Thessalonians 3:6-7 (NASB)

6 Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from every brother who leads an unruly life and not according to the tradition which you received from us. ⁷ For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example,

One of the hymns we sing from time to time is Timothy Dwight's classic:

*I love thy church. O God; her walls before me stand,
dear as the apple of thine eye, and graven on thy hand.
For her my tears shall fall, for her my prayers ascend;
to her my cares and toils be giv'n till toils and care shall end.*

You are here this morning because you love the Lord and the Lord's church.

Your love for our Lord and His church is seen in your generosity, in your love for each other, and in the way you come to assist in any and every way you can.

And, I'm thankful that someone asked the question, "What is the Restoration Movement?"

This will be the first of a two part sermon to answer that question.

I. What Does It Mean To Restore?

Let me call to your attention the first four scriptures in your sermon notes.

Notice that Paul says **So then, brethren, stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.**

He also used the word *instruction*

The word Paul is using is the noun **παράδοσις** *paradosis*.

In the New Testament the term *paradosis* is used in reference to the transmission of a tradition or doctrine, or of the tradition or doctrine itself.

And, you can see that in the writings of Paul that the apostolic doctrine and instruction is also called *paradosis*.

And, it is clear, is it not, that Paul wants the **brethren, [to] stand firm and hold to the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us.**

What that means for you and I is that there is a body of doctrine that has been given to the Lord's church.

And, it is also clear that the Lord Himself predicted there would be those who departed from His teachings.

This same warning of those who would depart from **the traditions which you were taught, whether by word of mouth or by letter from us**, is repeated by Peter and Jude.

And, that is exactly what happened.

Even before the Apostle John wrote the Book of Revelation, there were departures from the established Apostolic tradition.

At the same time there were those who made strenuous attempts to restore the Apostolic traditions.

When people speak of the "Restoration Movement," they speak and write as if it were only something that happened in the 18th century.

But, from the very beginning there have been individuals who have tried to return the Church to the Apostolic traditions.

So...What does it mean to restore?

"bring back (a previous right, practice, custom, or situation);
reinstate."

"return (someone or something) to a former condition, place, or
position."

"synonyms: reinstate, bring back, reinstitute, reimpose, reinstall,
reestablish."

And attempts to restore the departures from the Apostolic teaching
goes back to the 1st century.

It's not something new.

II. God Had An Organizational Plan For The Church

Would you not agree that when the Godhead, God the Father, God
the Son, and God the Holy Spirit establishes a system of religion it
is to remain unchanged until God Himself provides evidence that is
no longer operative.

Isn't that what He did with the Jewish system of religion?

God gave a New Covenant, a New sacrifice, a New Priesthood, a
New system of Congregational government, a New leadership.

The church began on Pentecost around the year A.D. 30 when the
Holy Spirit came upon the apostles, and Peter preached the first
gospel sermon that Jesus was both Lord and Christ.

In response to Peter's message, the people asked, "**What shall we
do?**"

And "**Peter replied, 'Repent and be baptized, every one of you,
in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins.**

And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit'" (Acts 2:37-38).

Three thousand people repented and were baptized and
subsequently formed the church.

The early church, as revealed throughout the New Testament, met
regularly for preaching and instruction based on Jesus' teachings,
communion together remembering Christ's sacrifice, singing of
psalms, hymns and spiritual songs, for prayer and to collect an

offering for the needs of the body of Christ.

Each local body of believers in the early church had its own leaders, called **Elders** and **Deacons**, as described in I Timothy 3 and Titus 1.

They also enjoyed congregational autonomy which meant that each local church was free to make decisions for their church under the leadership of the **Elders**.

The New Testament evidence favors a plurality of elders as the standard model.

The book of Acts tells us that as the apostles planted churches, they appointed “**Elders**” (from the Greek term **πρεσβυτέρος**) to oversee them (Acts 11:30; 14:23; 15:2; 20:17).

Likewise, Titus is told to “**appoint elders in every city**” (Titus 1:5).

A very similar word, **ἐπισκοπος** (“**bishop**” or “**overseer**”), is used in other contexts to describe the same ruling office (Phil 1:1; 1 Tim 3:1-7).

The overlap between these two terms is evident in Acts 20:28 when Paul, while addressing the Ephesian “Elders”

(**πρεσβυτέρους**),

Acts 20:28 (NASB)

28 "Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers (ἐπισκόπους), to shepherd (ποιμαίνω) the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

So, the New Testament has three terms for this one office of the Free Congregation of Saints:

Elders, Shepherds, and Overseers.

or

Elders, Pastors, and Bishops.

Thus, the New Testament writings indicate that the office of elder/bishop/shepherd is functionally one and the same.

A person doesn't need to read Greek or be professionally trained in

theology to understand that the contemporary concept of eldership as practiced today is irreconcilably at odds with the New Testament definition of eldership.

According to the New Testament, Elders lead the church, teach and preach the Word, protect the church from false teachers, exhort and admonish the saints in sound doctrine, visit the sick and pray, and judge doctrinal issues.

In biblical terminology, elders shepherd, oversee, lead, and care for the local church.

A letter known as *1 Clement* (c.96) affirms the testimony of the book of Acts when it tells us that the apostles initially appointed “bishops (ἐπισκόπους) and deacons” in the various churches they visited (42.4).

After the time of the apostles, bishops were appointed “by other reputable men with the entire church giving its approval” (44.3). This is an echo of the Didache which indicated that bishops were elected by the church.

The *Shepherd of Hermas* (c.150) says that the church leadership structure is a plurality of “presbyters” (πρεσβυτέρων) or elders. The author also uses the term “bishop,” but always in the plural and often alongside the office of deacon (Vis. 13.1; Sim. 104.2).

III. Men Changed God's Organizational Plan

But, what about the church after the New Testament?

In the NT texts and texts from the early second century indicate that a plurality of elders was the standard.

But towards the end of the first century and certainly in the second century, the Elders of the local congregation were being replaced by a single Bishop who was over several congregations.

What led to this transition?

Most scholars argue that it was the heretical battles fought by the church in the second century that led them to turn to key leaders to defend and represent the church.

NO!

Unfortunately the church failed to live up to the standard of the church presented in the New Testament and it underwent many changes.

The Church survived the persecutions with one faith, one baptism (Eph 4:5), common traditions, and rituals.

There were no denominations or sects in the Christian church.

VI. The Denominations Arrive

But the concept of the Free Church was displaced, as over time hierarchical structures developed which removed decision-making authority away from the local church.

Ecumenical or universal councils were called to make decisions and fashion creeds that were forced upon all churches in various geographic locations and diverse cultural contexts.

These so called Bishops were centered in Jerusalem, Alexandria, Antioch, and Rome, and they bitterly fought for control over the whole shebang.

Churches at that time were named after a few big cities in the world not because of differences in faith, but merely to make administration of the churches achievable under the non-Biblical Bishop model.

With the collapse of the Roman Empire in the 4th century, the Bishop of Rome held the Roman Empire together by developing a Church Government patterned upon the old Roman government. And the Bishop of Rome became known as the Pope at that time, and he had the clerical hierarchy dress as Roman Senators. That Senatorial dress is still used today by the Roman Catholic church.

The sad division between the churches took place in year 451 AD

in the Chalcedon Council.

In this council, bishops representing churches from all over the former Roman Empire assembled to discuss matters related to the person of Christ.

At the end of the meeting, a sharp division occurred among these churches.

The **Oriental Orthodox Churches** decided on continuing to follow the same faith as it was delivered from Christ and His disciples, and these churches continue to somewhat do that today. These churches are the **Coptic Orthodox Church** (Egypt), the **Syrian Orthodox Church** (Syria), the **Indian Orthodox Church** (India), The **Ethiopian Orthodox Church** (Ethiopia), and The **Armenian Church** (Armenia).

The other churches decided to be in the Western Church, and they changed the Apostolic tradition of which Paul is speaking.

The Western Churches split again in 1054 AD into the '**Roman Catholic Church**' and '**Eastern Orthodox Churches**' because of many heresies that crept into the Roman Catholic Church.

So, now instead of the one, true, Apostolic Church in the Bible, you have splinter groups:

The Oriental Orthodox Churches

The Eastern Orthodox Churches

The Roman Catholic Church.

So, lets recap the departures from the Apostolic model:

Loss of congregational autonomy

Loss of the Eldership

Loss of the Priesthood of all believers

Loss of the Apostolic traditions

V. Early Efforts to Restore the Church

In what is called the Middle Ages (500 AD-1500 AD), church and state (government) entanglements resulted in corruption both for the church and the state.

A number of reformers attempted to correct the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.

John Wycliffe (c. mid-1320s – 31 December 1384) was an English scholastic philosopher, theologian, Biblical translator, reformer, and seminary professor at Oxford.

He was an influential dissident within the Roman Catholic priesthood during the 14th century.

Wycliffe's writings in Latin greatly influenced the philosophy and teaching of Czech reformer Jan Hus, whose execution in 1415 sparked a revolt and led to the Hussite Wars.

The Roman Catholic Church declared Wycliffe a heretic on 4 May 1415, and banned his writings, effectively both excommunicating him retroactively and making him an early forerunner of Protestantism.

They decreed that Wycliffe's works should be burned and his remains removed from consecrated ground.

This order, confirmed by Pope Martin V, was carried out in 1428.

Wycliffe's corpse was exhumed and burned and the ashes cast into the River Swift, which flows through Lutterworth.

Jan Hus (Czech: c. 1369 – 6 July 1415), often referred to in English as John Hus or John Huss, was a Czech priest, philosopher, Master, dean and rector at Charles University in Prague, church reformer, founder of Hussitism, a seminal figure in the Bohemian Reformation and a key predecessor to Protestantism. After John Wycliffe, the theorist of ecclesiastical Reformation, Hus is considered the first Church reformer, as he lived before Luther, Calvin, and Zwingli.

His teachings had a strong influence on the states of Western Europe, most immediately in the approval of a reformist Bohemian religious denomination, and, more than a century later, on Martin Luther himself.

He was burned at the stake for heresy against the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church, including those on ecclesiology, the Eucharist, and other theological topics.

Jerome of Prague (Jeroným Pražský in Czech, 1379 – 30 May 1416) was a Czech scholastic philosopher, theologian, reformer, and professor. Jerome was one of the chief followers of Jan Hus and was burned for heresy at the Council of Constance. He is often called Hieronymus the Latin form of his first name.

And, then there are several others who preceded Martin Luther, like Savonarola, Peter Waldo, and Wessel Harmenz of Gansfort

VI. The Protestant Reformation

Building on the foundation of these early reformers of the 14th and 15th centuries, in the mid 16th century Martin Luther began a reform which would later be known as the Protestant Reformation.

The goal of the Protestant Reformation was to free the church to follow the scripture alone and yet, many of the Protestant theologians simply formed new creeds to enforce their theological ideas.

This led to a splintering of the church as many new reform efforts formed their own denominations based on specific creedal statements.

In Europe, there were numerous splinter groups who called themselves Baptist, and the same thing was happening among those who called themselves Presbyterians.

For example: The Irish & Scottish Presbyterians were simply known as the Presbyterian Church.

However, in 1712 division took place, and the Presbyterian Church of Ireland and Scotland divided into what became known as Seceder & Non-Seceder churches.

The Seceder Presbyterians selected their own ministers.

The Anti-Seceder Presbyterians Ministers were selected by high-church counsel.

And, these in turn splintered into even more denominations.

Two Scottish Presbyterians, Robert and James Haldane, led in an

effort to restore the church of the Bible, and heal the division of the Christian world.

Taking the Bible and the Bible alone as their rule of faith and practice, the Haldanes and their associates eventually broke away from the Church of Scotland in an attempt to restore the church in the Bible.

Their influence would soon spread to the Americas.

In the early American frontier, around the year 1800, a number of Christian leaders desired to solely get back to the practices and identity of the original apostolic church found in the book of Acts. Their desire was to restore the church back to the original model found in the New Testament.

VII. What Is The Church

Out of curiosity, have you ever looked up the word "church" in a dictionary?

Webster's New Universal Unabridged, 1983, p. 324, says the English word church means: "the Lord's house" or "an edifice consecrated for public worship, especially Christian worship."

From this definition, it is not uncommon for people to think that the emphasis of the New Testament is on some building or edifice.

What is the "Church?"

The emphasis is not on "the place," but "the people."

The word "church" occurs over 100 times in the New Testament.

The Greek word commonly translated "church" is *ἐκκλησία*,

Ekklesia means: "assembly, assemblage, gathering, meeting, congregation, church, congregation, or the church or congregation as the totality of Christians living in one place" (Bauer, A Greek-English Lexicon Of The New Testament, p. 240).

The ekklēsia at Troas worshipped in an upper room (Acts 20:7, 8),

while the ekklēsia at Corinth seemed to center on the houses of Justus (Acts 18:7) and Crispus (Acts 18:8).

Paul commonly went to the synagogues and preached Christ (Acts 19:8).

The ekklēsia at Colossae met in the home of Philemon (Phm. 1-2).

Paul tells the Corinthians

1 Corinthians 4:16-17 (NASB)

16 Therefore I exhort you, be imitators of me. 17 For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, who is my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, and he will remind you of my ways which are in Christ, just as I teach everywhere in every church.

Please note two things from this passage:

First, once again we see there is a common core of tradition which is being taught.

And, second, it is being taught in every church.

The ekklēsia at Corinth is not an emphasis of the meeting place, but the people.

The ekklēsia (congregation, assembly) is people.

In fact, a closer examination of ekklēsia is revealing.

ekklēsia comes from "ek," which means "**out of**," and "klēsia," which means "**a calling**" (An Expository Dictionary Of Biblical Words, p.75-N.T.).

These are people who have been called out of the world and into Christ by the gospel.

Hence, ekklēsia refers to "**the called-out ones.**"

Christians are called out of the world and into Christ by the gospel.

The building at 204 Patterson Road is where the Orcutt Christian Church meets.

The people who meet there are the church ("the called-out ones"), not the building itself.

The English word "church," as currently defined ("the Lord's House"), does not convey the first century meaning of ekklesia.

The term ekklesia occurs in the Greek New Testament over 100 times!

This shows it is of great importance to our Lord and the Holy Spirit.

The very respected Church historian, **John Lawrence Mosheim**, says

"Christian churches had scarcely been gathered and organized, when here and there men rose up who not being contented with the simplicity and purity of that religion which the apostles taught, attempted innovations, and fashioned religion according to their own notions. This appears from various passages in the epistles left us by the apostles, and particularly from those of Paul. For in these there is frequent mention of persons, who either endeavoured to mould the Christian doctrines into conformity with that philosophy or γνῶσις (1 Tim. vi. 20; Tit. iii. 9 ; Colos. ii. 8) to which they were addicted; or who were disposed to combine with Christianity Jewish opinions, customs, and institutions. Several of these corrupters of religion are likewise expressly named, as Hymenaeus and Alexander, Philetus, Hermogenes, Phygellus, Demas, and Diotrephes. If however from this list, Alexander, Hymenaeus, and Philetus be excepted, the others appear to be rather apostates from the practice of religion, than corrupters of its principles.

So long as the greater part of the personal disciples of the Saviour were alive, these innovators were not very successful, and seem to have had no great number of followers. But gradually they acquired more influence; and before the decease of all those whom Christ had himself instructed, they laid the foundations of those sects which afterwards exceedingly disturbed the Christian community,

and gave rise to so many controversies."
(J. L. von Mosheim, Institutes of Ecclesiastical History, Ancient and Modern, 1869, Vol.1)

VIII. Some Elements In Restoration

Jeremiah 6:16 (NASB)

16 Thus says the LORD, "Stand by the ways and see and ask for the ancient paths, Where the good way is, and walk in it; And you will find rest for your souls. But they said, 'We will not walk *in it.*'"

When one speaks of a "restoration" plea, several things are implied.

First, there is the suggestion that there **is** a divine pattern for human conduct.

Second, God expects **conformity** to that pattern.

Third, in the nature of things, rebellious and frail men will **digress** from that heavenly way.

Fourth, it is the responsibility of those who revere the Lord's will to **restore** the primitive order and call their fellows back to the "**the ancient paths.**"

There are numerous New Testament passages which stress these truths.

Let us consider a few:

1. The early church is clearly a model for us in that it

Acts 2:42 (NASB)

42 They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Why was that an important point for Luke to make if the pattern of the "apostles' teaching" is irrelevant?

Moreover, the multitude of believers

Acts 4:32 (NASB)

32 And the congregation of those who believed were of one

heart and soul;

Does than not suggest a unity of practice in their Christian decorum.

2. Paul reminded the saints in Rome that they had a pattern Romans 6:17 (NASB)

17 But thanks be to God that though you were slaves of sin, you became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching to which you were committed,

*The Greek word **tupos** exhibits a strange dual meaning: on the one hand it denotes an “original, model, pattern”; on the other hand, it indicates a “copy.”*

Thus it can describe a model as well as a copy.

They had been made free from sin due to the fact that they had been obedient to a certain “form” (pattern) of teaching.

Can such a passage yield any sense if there is no pattern?

3. The Christians in Rome were admonished to turn away from those who were causing divisions Romans 16:17-18 (NASB)

17 Now I urge you, brethren, keep your eye on those who cause dissensions and hindrances contrary to the teaching which you learned, and turn away from them. 18 For such men are slaves, not of our Lord Christ but of their own appetites; and by their smooth and flattering speech they deceive the hearts of the unsuspecting.

If there is no pattern of New Testament doctrine, how could one ever be required to “**turn away**” from those who do not conform to it?

4. The inspired Paul instructed the brethren in Corinth 1 Corinthians 4:6 (NASB)

6 Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively applied to myself and Apollos for your sakes, so that in us you may learn not to exceed what is written, so that no one of you will become arrogant in behalf of one against the other.

not to exceed what is written

This clearly demonstrates that spiritual activity is regulated by the Scriptures.

5. The First generation Christians were encouraged to
Colossians 1:23 (NASB)

23 continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard

1 Timothy 4:1 (NASB)

1 But the Spirit explicitly says that in later times some will fall away from the faith

2 Timothy 4:2-4 (NASB)

2 preach the word; be ready in season *and* out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort, with great patience and instruction. **3** For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but *wanting* to have their ears tickled, they will accumulate for themselves teachers in accordance to their own desires, **4** and will turn away their ears from the truth and will turn aside to myths.

The expression “the faith” has to do with a body of doctrinal truth. If there is no doctrinal pattern, how could one ever “fall away” from the faith?

6. Paul urges Timothy to
2 Timothy 1:13-14 (NASB)

13 Retain the standard of sound words which you have heard

from me, in the faith and love which are in Christ Jesus. ¹⁴

Guard, through the Holy Spirit who dwells in us, the treasure which has been entrusted to *you*.

the standard of sound words were to be passed on to others

2 Timothy 2:2 (NASB)

² The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.

How in the name of common sense can men read these passages and not know that there is a body of sacred truth with which we must not tamper?

7. Paul tells us that Moses had a pattern to follow in constructing the tabernacle.

Paul affirmed that Moses,

Hebrews 8:5 (NASB)

⁵ was warned *by God* when he was about to erect the tabernacle; for, "SEE," He says, "THAT YOU MAKE all things ACCORDING TO THE PATTERN WHICH WAS SHOWN YOU ON THE MOUNTAIN."

Would you not agree that when the Godhead, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit establishes a system of religion it is to remain unchanged until God Himself provides evidence that is no longer operative.

Isn't that what He did with the Jewish system of religion?

God gave a New Covenant, a New sacrifice, a New Priesthood, a New system of Congregational government, a New leadership.

Paul affirms that Christ

Hebrews 9:15 (NASB)

¹⁵ is the mediator of a new covenant,

Hebrews 7:22 (NASB)

²² a better covenant.

of which the tabernacle was but an inferior type.

8. The Apostle John unequivocally states

2 John 1:9 (NASB)

9 Anyone who ... does not abide in the teaching of Christ, does not have God; the one who abides in the teaching, he has both the Father and the Son.

We can only conclude from these Scriptures that there is a divine standard to which we are accountable.

1 Peter 1:22-25 (CEV)

22 You obeyed the truth, and your souls were made pure. Now you sincerely love each other. But you must keep on loving with all your heart. 23 Do this because God has given you new birth by his message that lives on forever. 24 The Scriptures say, "Humans wither like grass, and their glory fades like wild flowers. Grass dries up, and flowers fall to the ground. 25 But what the Lord has said will stand forever."

Our good news to you is what the Lord has said.

Much more could be said!

It is hoped that this brief introduction about the New Testament church will be helpful, though it is by no means exhaustive.

Jesus does not want any to perish, but all to come to repentance

2 Peter 3:9 (CEV)

9 The Lord isn't slow about keeping his promises, as some people think he is. In fact, God is patient, because he wants everyone to turn from sin and no one to be lost.

The church is His means to call people out of the world unto Him!

Oh, yes, you hear people say "I'll follow Jesus, but I'll not have any

part of the church."

However, the church is "the called-out ones."

The church, then, are the saved, and the saved are the church!

I beg you!

Won't you be a part of His church?

Revelation 22:6-7 (CEV)

6 Then I was told: These words are true and can be trusted. The Lord God controls the spirits of his prophets, and he is the one who sent his angel to show his servants what must happen right away. ⁷ Remember, I am coming soon! God will bless everyone who pays attention to the message of this book.

Prayer and Invitation

July 2 Lesson 5

Moses

Devotional Reading: [2 Chronicles 19:4-7](#)

Background Scripture: [Exodus 3](#)

EXODUS 3:1-12

1 Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God. **2** There the angel of the LORD appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on fire it did not burn up. **3** So Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.”

4 When the LORD saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!”

And Moses said, “Here I am.”

5 “Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.” **6** Then he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.” At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

7 The LORD said, “I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering. **8** So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. **9** And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. **10** So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”

11 But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

12 And God said, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.”

KEY VERSES

“Now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I

have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them. So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”—[Exodus 3:9, 10](#)

Introduction

A. Agony or Victory?

Years before ESPN became the primary sports network, there was ABC’s *Wide World of Sports*. On Saturday afternoon one could tune in as announcer Jim McKay introduced this sports anthology. McKay would remind viewers that attempting to achieve greatness in sporting events led to both “the thrill of victory and the agony of defeat.”

Such a phrase aptly describes the experience of the Lord’s servants throughout the years. Serving the Lord in a broken, sin-cursed world can be the source of some of life’s greatest joys, but it can also produce some agonizing moments. Perhaps no group of individuals in Scripture exemplifies this battle better than the Old Testament prophets, who are the focus of our next unit of studies. The first of this group to be considered is Moses.

B. Lesson Background

One could use the letters in the word *prophet* in an acrostic to define the Old Testament prophets as *passionate representatives obediently proclaiming heaven’s eternal truth*. The prophets were God’s spokespersons who proclaimed his message (usually but not always) fearlessly.

Some people view a prophet as one who predicts the future. That is certainly part of what the Old Testament prophets did, but their task was by no means limited to that. It is helpful to see the prophets as both *foretellers* (those who predicted the future accurately) and *forth-tellers* (those who declared God’s truth). Prophets were often subject to verbal and/or physical abuse because they spoke unpleasant truth boldly and plainly. They often did so without regard for the consequences.

Some look at Moses’ role as that of a lawgiver more than a

prophet. But the Scriptures clearly refer to him as a prophet ([Deuteronomy 18:15](#)). The same book concludes with these words of tribute to Moses: “Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face” ([34:10](#)).

Moses began his service to the Lord in need of his own prophet or spokesman, his brother Aaron ([Exodus 4:14-16](#); [7:1, 2](#)). But in time Moses would learn an important lesson: the key to answering God’s call is found not in who the human servant is but in who God is. That principle still holds true.

In his defense before the Sanhedrin, Stephen related that Moses had killed an Egyptian whom he saw beating one of “his own people, the Israelites” ([Acts 7:23, 24](#); compare [Exodus 2:11, 12](#)). According to Stephen, Moses assumed that his fellow Israelites would acknowledge him as their deliverer and rally around his efforts; “but they did not” ([Acts 7:25](#)). When Moses realized that his murderous act was known by others and that he had been rejected as a deliverer, he fled Egypt. He ended up in Midian, where he married Zipporah, one of seven daughters of Jethro. We find Moses in that situation as today’s text opens.

I. Incredible Meeting

([Exodus 3:1-5](#))

A. Fire on the Mountain ([vv. 1-3](#))

1. Now Moses was tending the flock of Jethro his father-in-law, the priest of Midian, and he led the flock to the far side of the wilderness and came to Horeb, the mountain of God.

Jethro is first introduced in [Exodus 2:18](#) as Reuel. Some suggest that Reuel (meaning “friend of God”) is this man’s given name, while Jethro (meaning something like “his excellency”) is a title. The verse before us describes him as *the priest of Midian*. The nature of Jethro’s priesthood is a bit uncertain, since the Bible does not specifically say that he is a priest of the Lord. Originally Midian was one of the sons of Abraham born to him through Keturah, whom he married following Sarah’s death ([Genesis 25:1, 2](#)). Whether Abraham’s faith in the true God was eventually passed on to the Midianites or how many of them embraced it is difficult

to know.

How to Say It

Aaron *Air-un*.

Amorites *Am-uh-rites*.

Amram *Am-ram*.

Aqaba *Ock-uh-buh*.

Canaanites *Kay-nun-ites*.

Damascus *Duh-mass-kus*.

Gideon *Gid-e-un* (*G* as in *get*).

Hittites *Hit-ites* or *Hit-tites*.

Hivites *Hi-vites*.

Horeb *Ho-reb*.

Immanuel *Ih-man-you-el*.

In Jethro's case, he may have at one time worshipped the true God alongside other gods. This theory is supported by Jethro's declaration "Now I know that the Lord is greater than all gods" ([Exodus 18:11](#)) after learning what the Lord had done for the Israelites.

Midianite territory includes a vast desert area. As Moses tends *the flock of Jethro*, he leads it (perhaps in an effort to find sufficient grazing) *to the far side of the wilderness* (the more distant side). This area around Horeb likely includes the land west of what is known today as the Gulf of Aqaba. Such land is part of the Sinai Peninsula. The traditional site of Horeb is at the peninsula's southern end.

The term *Horeb* is generally believed to be either (1) another name for Mount Sinai, (2) another peak in the region of the Sinai Peninsula, or (3) the entire range of mountains, with the word *Sinai* designating a specific mountain in that range. (Compare [Exodus 33:6](#); [Deuteronomy 1:6](#).) Horeb may be called *the mountain of God* because here is where he speaks to Moses and later gives his law. Or perhaps the Midianites have already given the mountain that name for reasons unknown to us.

2. There the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from within a bush. Moses saw that though the bush was on

fire it did not burn up.

The angel of the Lord coming to Moses in flames of fire is echoed in [Psalm 104:4](#). That verse tells us that the Lord “makes winds his messengers, flames of fire his servants.” Such a fiery manifestation may point to the later association of God’s presence and fire on this same mountain in the sight of the Israelites. At that time the fire will be much more intense ([Exodus 19:18](#)).

3. So Moses thought, “I will go over and see this strange sight—why the bush does not burn up.”

Moses is captivated by a bush aflame yet not consumed. Clearly something out of the ordinary is happening before his very eyes—it is a *strange sight*. Who wouldn’t *go over* to take a closer look?

What Do You Think?

What are some ways to turn our church into a “burning bush” that draws people to Jesus?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding how mutual love is demonstrated

Regarding building and grounds appearance

Regarding the nature of preached and taught messages

Other

B. Voice from the Flames ([vv. 4, 5](#))

4. When the Lord saw that he had gone over to look, God called to him from within the bush, “Moses! Moses!”

And Moses said, “Here I am.”

[Verse 2](#) of our text speaks of “the angel of the Lord,” but the verse before us speaks of the presence of the Lord himself *from within the bush*. Some believe the angel of the Lord to be a preincarnate appearance of Jesus.

Moses’ sight has been captured by the burning bush; now his ears hear a voice. His name is called twice, which occurs on other notable occasions in Scripture: with Abraham just before he offers up Isaac as a sacrifice ([Genesis 22:11](#)), Jacob ([Genesis 46:1-4](#)), young Samuel ([1 Samuel 3:10](#)), and Saul of Tarsus on the road to Damascus ([Acts 9:4](#)). Moses responds with a simple *Here I am*, even though he does not yet know who is calling to him.

How to Say It

Jebusites *Jeb-yuh-sites*.

Jethro *Jeth-ro*.

Keturah *Keh-too-ruh*.

Levi *Lee-vye*.

Midian *Mid-ee-un*.

Midianites *Mid-ee-un-ites*.

Perizzites *Pair-ih-zites*.

Pharaoh *Fair-o* or *Fay-roe*.

Reuel *Roo-el*.

Sanhedrin *San-huh-drun* or *San-heed-run*.

Sinai *Sigh-nye* or *Sigh-nay-eye*.

Zipporah *Zih-po-ruh*.

5. “Do not come any closer,” God said. “Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground.”

The order to remove *sandals* because of *holy ground* is not unique to this verse. A similar command will be given to Joshua when the Lord prepares him for the task of conquering the promised land ([Joshua 5:13-15](#)).

What Do You Think?

What actions on our part can acknowledge our awareness of being in the presence of the God of all holiness ([1 Peter 1:15, 16](#))?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Within the context of marriage and family

During worship on the Lord’s Day

During private devotions

Other

II. Divine Awareness

([Exodus 3:6-10](#))

A. Who God Is ([v. 6](#))

6a. Then he said, “I am the God of your father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob.”

Moses learns the reason why the ground on which he stands is holy: it is God who is speaking to him. In so doing, God first identifies himself with Moses’ father, Amram, of the tribe of Levi

([Exodus 2:1](#); [6:20](#)). Of even greater significance is God's lordship with regard to Moses' ancestors. We refer to *Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob* as *the patriarchs*. It is the covenant that God made with them that now moves him to come to the rescue of his enslaved people ([Exodus 2:24](#)).

6b. At this, Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God.

Moses' reaction of fear is immediate. He had been eager to "see this strange sight" before him ([v. 3](#)); now he shields *his face* from it as he learns who is speaking to him. Moses may well recall his ancestor Jacob's surprise at being still alive after he "saw God face to face" on a particular occasion ([Genesis 32:30](#)).

B. What God Knows ([v. 7](#))

7. The Lord said, "I have indeed seen the misery of my people in Egypt. I have heard them crying out because of their slave drivers, and I am concerned about their suffering."

God's people—the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—have been in bondage *in Egypt* some 400 years at this point in time ([Genesis 15:13](#); [Acts 7:6](#)). That God knows the sorrows of his people provides consolation for us today. We know that in Jesus we see a "man of suffering" who "bore our sorrows" at the cross ([Isaiah 53:3, 4](#)).

Even so, for God to note at this point that he knows of the suffering of his people in Egypt raises an immediate and obvious question: Why has he waited so long to come to their aid? Questions concerning God's timetable or scheduling of events are not addressed in most cases in Scripture. Rather, the Scripture's focus is more on learning to trust that the Lord will keep the promises he has made—and leaving the timing up to him.

Centuries later, Jesus' inquisitive disciples will ask, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" ([Acts 1:6](#)). His blunt response at that time will serve as something of a thump on the head: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority" ([1:7](#)). God's servants are to focus on

their duties, and predicting dates of the Lord's return, etc., is not one of them ([1 Thessalonians 5:1, 2](#); [1 Timothy 6:14, 15](#)).

What Do You Think?

How do we eliminate hindrances that cause us to neglect relieving the suffering of others?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding emotional suffering

Regarding physical suffering

Regarding spiritual suffering

C. What God Intends ([vv. 8-10](#))

8a. “So I have come down to rescue them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey—

The Lord is moving from awareness to action. He is committed to delivering his people from Egyptian servitude. God is pictured as doing that by means of his own “mighty hand” in [Exodus 13:9](#); [Deuteronomy 4:34](#); [5:15](#); [6:21](#).

But the pending deliverance is not just *from* something but *to* something. God intends to bring his people to much different surroundings: *a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey*. This is a fulfillment of God's earlier promise to Abraham in [Genesis 15:13, 14](#). The metaphor *milk and honey* speaks to the productivity and abundance awaiting the Israelites when they arrive in the new land. It will be a striking contrast to what came to be called the “iron-smelting furnace” known as Egypt ([Deuteronomy 4:20](#); [1 Kings 8:51](#)).

8b. “the home of the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites.

The most comprehensive list of the promised land's inhabitants is found in [Genesis 15:19-21](#). The presence of these competing people groups in an area about the size of the state of Vermont highlights both the instability of the area and the challenge the Israelites have ahead of them. These are peoples whom God will want the Israelites to eliminate. In so doing, the Israelites will be

carrying out his judgment against them because of their extreme depravity ([Deuteronomy 7:1, 2](#)).

9. “And now the cry of the Israelites has reached me, and I have seen the way the Egyptians are oppressing them.

The Lord repeats the fact of his awareness. The all-knowing God is about to teach both his people and the Egyptians that he is no mere tribal or territorial deity. *The Israelites* will eventually learn that their God is the God of all nations; the oppressive wickedness of Egypt draws God’s attention just as much as the well-being of Israel does.

WHAT GOD STILL SEES

A wave of fear cascaded across America on December 7, 1941. Two months after the attack on Pearl Harbor, President Roosevelt signed Executive Order 9066, which authorized his Secretary of War to designate areas as “military zones.” One result was the forcible relocation of more than 100,000 people of Japanese ancestry living on the West Coast. Of the internees, 62 percent were American citizens.

Those held captive were released after the war, but it took decades for America to admit the injustice. In 1988, President Reagan signed a reparations act that acknowledged that “race prejudice, war hysteria, and a failure of political leadership” all played a role in what had been done.

Jacob’s family had gone willingly to Egypt to escape a famine. But 400 years later, they had become the victims of racial prejudice. The Egyptians feared that so many Israelites were a threat. So they enslaved the Hebrews to keep them under control ([Exodus 1](#)). These two episodes of history, separated by millennia, witness to the evil result of ungodly fear. But God is watching. —C. R. B.

10. “So now, go. I am sending you to Pharaoh to bring my people the Israelites out of Egypt.”

No doubt Moses is grateful to hear about the Lord’s concern for his people in bondage. Now, however, God is recruiting Moses to implement the plan!

III. Supernatural Provision

([Exodus 3:11, 12](#))

A. Moses' Reluctance ([v. 11](#))

11. But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the Israelites out of Egypt?”

Moses may have been more than willing to lead the people out of Egypt when he killed the Egyptian ([Exodus 2:11-15](#)). But that was 40 years ago, when he held some clout as the son of Pharaoh's daughter ([Acts 7:21-29](#); [Hebrews 11:24](#)). Now at age 80 ([Exodus 7:7](#)), he is but a lowly shepherd. Given his present status and age, surely he is not the kind of man whom God will send to confront the mighty Pharaoh and lead the Israelites to freedom, is he?

ANSWERING THE CALL

The vast majority of those who run for elected office do so quite willingly. But that was not the case for Dwight D. Eisenhower following his success as Supreme Commander of Allied forces in Europe in World War II.

Before the 1948 presidential election, both major parties mounted “draft Eisenhower” movements, trying to persuade him to run. President Truman even offered to serve as vice president if Eisenhower would accept the Democratic nomination for president.

What convinced Eisenhower that he should run was the announcement by Senator Robert A. Taft of his own candidacy. Taft was an isolationist, but Eisenhower believed America needed to combat communism actively. Eisenhower finally affirmed, “I do not believe that you or I or anyone else has the right to state, categorically, that he will not perform any duty that his country might demand of him.”

Moses was also reluctant: he tried to fend off God's “draft Moses” call by focusing on his own lack of ability, even disability (see [Exodus 3:13-4:13](#)). But God would not take *no* for an answer. He still doesn't. —C. R. B.

What Do You Think?

How do we recognize the difference between humble,

honest self-doubt and mere lack of desire to “get involved”—or worse?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

In circumstances that cry out for a leader

In circumstances that desperately need more follower-participants

B. God’s Reassurance ([v. 12](#))

12. And God said, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.”

Like many people in the pages of Scripture (including individuals we are studying this quarter such as Gideon and Jeremiah), Moses comes to learn that his sense of unworthiness does not disqualify him from the Lord’s service; if anything, it makes him just right for God’s holy purpose. Moses asks, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?” Therein lies the basis of Moses’ state of readiness. The key to delivering the Israelites from their bondage is not in who Moses is but in who God is and the certainty of his promise to be with Moses.

Gideon ([Judges 6:16](#)) and Jeremiah ([Jeremiah 1:8](#)) both receive similar assurances from God before they embark on their respective ministries. The promise of God to be with his people is one of the most significant in all of Scripture. It reminds us that our God is not a far-removed, unfeeling, fickle deity who leaves his people to fend for themselves in a world suffering from the ravages of sin.

Ultimately this is demonstrated most powerfully in the birth of Jesus, who is Immanuel, meaning “God with us” ([Matthew 1:23](#)). This same Jesus will, by his own suffering at the cross, deliver humanity from the ravages of sin to allow us to enter the ultimate “promised land” of Heaven. There God will declare, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God” ([Revelation 21:3](#)).

God also provides Moses with a *sign* as part of his assurance: *When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.* Indeed, Horeb (or Mount Sinai) will be the place where God assembles his people to establish his covenant with them and give them his laws ([Exodus 19:2-6](#)).

What Do You Think?

How do we know when we should actively seek out service opportunities vs. letting others seek us to serve in those ministries?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Regarding potential dangers of each approach

Regarding potential benefits of each approach

Regarding our motives

Considering the nature of the opportunity

Other

Conclusion

A. The With-ness in Our Witness

When God chose Moses for leadership, did Moses anticipate the thrill of victory or the agony of defeat? Confronting the leader of a great empire was quite a task! Like Moses, we too can be intimidated by the seeming impossibility of our tasks. We can be intimidated into silence by peer pressure, social media, our workplace atmosphere, and other sources of opposition. But before we ask *Who am I?* let us remember who God is.

Jesus concluded his commission to his disciples with these words:

“Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age”

([Matthew 28:20](#)). Moses was called to lead Israel from physical bondage to freedom. The church is called to lead people from spiritual bondage to eternal life. The God who assured Moses of his presence with him assures us of the same thing now. Jesus has done the hardest work; we point others to him.

B. Prayer

Father, let us take courage from knowing that your presence sustains us. May we never be so intimidated by troubled times that

we lose sight of the one who is above us. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

C. Thought to Remember

God's promise to be with us still applies!

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