

The Call to Heed the Word of God

Our current series of talks concludes with this short one from a script from a British Christadelphian, who was a well-known speaker / author in the second half of the 20th century. It is an encouragement to respond seriously and correctly to the clear Bible teaching we have considered and to the personal challenge we must face.

What do we mean by ‘the call’?

How do we know when we have received the call? Is it some inner voice, which tells us to change the direction of our life? Or does it come through some vision or dream? Is it a call that comes only to specially selected people? The term is used so loosely these days that we need to turn to the Bible for the correct answer. Let us start with **Mark 16:15,16** – verses we have seen before in this series – Jesus said to the disciples “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation. Whoever believes and is immersed will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.” Here it is quite clear that Jesus was instructing his disciples to go out and preach the gospel to as many, and as widespread people, as possible. Obviously, before a person could act upon the Gospel, he had first to hear it and the hearing came through a preacher. So the calling is not to special individuals, it does not come through a dream or vision, but it comes to all who hear the gospel or who read it for themselves in the Bible.

The apostle Paul had occasion to shame the brothers at Corinth because they had not preached the Gospel widely enough “Awake to righteousness, and do not sin; for some have not the knowledge of God: I speak this to your shame.” (**1 Corinthians 15:34**). The Corinthians had been slow to preach the gospel – hence many were still in darkness. The call is therefore only limited by the spread of God’s Word, either by preaching or through a dispersion of the written word. Again, Paul makes this quite clear when writing to the believers in Rome: “How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher?” (**Romans 10:14**). The call, then, is not some mystical voice speaking to us. It is the gospel, which comes to us through a preacher whose message is based upon God’s word.

In the first century preaching was limited to the spoken word of the preachers, but since the advent of printing and now computers and websites (and smartphones!) the gospel has reached the most remote of places. However, with the knowledge of the gospel comes personal responsibility. The Gospel provides the knowledge of salvation, without which (as Jesus said) man is already ‘condemned’. Bible teaching is, therefore, that salvation can only come through belief in – and action upon – the gospel. This naturally raises the questions: ‘Salvation from what?’ and ‘Why is man ‘condemned’ without belief in the gospel?’.

Salvation or condemnation

By their disobedience, Adam and Eve brought death into the world. Again, we are indebted to the apostle Paul for a clear statement about this – “just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned” (**Romans 5:12**). A thoughtful reading of this verse will teach that, because we are all descended from Adam and Eve, we share the consequences of their sin. Mortal parents can only have mortal children! And mortality means much more than ‘one day we shall die’. It means also that our nature is corrupt; it means that we have wicked thoughts and lust after evil things. This is what the apostle James wrote “But each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire. Then desire, when it has conceived, gives birth to sin, and sin – when it is fully grown – brings forth death.” (**James 1:14,15**). There are, therefore, two reasons why we die: firstly because we have inherited Adam’s nature and secondly, because we have sins of our own “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” (Romans 6:23).

Whichever way we look at it mankind, is ‘condemned’: whilst we live we are shackled by this human nature which leads us into sin and the consequences of our sin is that we reap its wages – death. And even if we were able to live a sinless life, we could not escape death since this is already a consequence of Adam’s sin! We know the truth of these words because wickedness abounds in the world; great statesmen and political leaders struggle endlessly to correct the consequences of human nature. Whilst we may admire their dedication

to their work, we have to admit that the world is plunging headlong to destruction and man has no answer. The Evolutionist will tell us that we are here by chance but he has nothing to offer for the future! The Humanist is doomed to failure because his predictions are based upon human nature! This is why the gospel is so special and appealing, it deals with real truths and because it stems from an ever-living, all-wise God – the One who created this world and also provides the answer for all its problems.

Whilst it is true (as was stated by John in his first epistle) that Jesus died for the sins of the world, the benefit of Jesus' death does not fall automatically upon all people. Jesus' teaching is "he who **believes** and is **immersed** shall be saved." It is essential that we not only hear the Gospel (that we are called), but that we also believe it and as a token of our belief are immersed.

Immersion is an act of faith, in that we believe that our 'old man' dies and is buried in the waters by immersion and that we rise from them to a new life. It is also proof that we believe that there is 'no good thing in man' and that we must be associated with Jesus in this way if we are to experience the new life which he promises – life beyond the resurrection. Furthermore, there is a penalty for those who, having heard the gospel, turn their backs upon it. This we would expect since God has been gracious enough to offer to us a way of escape from our human nature, as Jesus said therefore we "shall be condemned"!

Conclusion

To heed the Gospel is to know that one day, by God's grace, we shall be changed to share His own nature! (Please see 2 Peter 1:4). All our past sins will be forgotten and we shall share in His wondrous kingdom upon this earth, which His Son will establish at his return. Read for yourself now some of the heart-warming descriptions of God's coming kingdom in Isaiah chapters 32 and 35 and then make sure that you heed the call of God's word!