

19.10.2019 GOD'S CALL

“Blessed be the LORD God of our fathers, who has put such a thing as this in the king’s heart, to beautify the house of the LORD which is in Jerusalem” Ezra 7:27

The Bible tells us that God calls all men to be saved – the call is universal, but since man has free-will, he can choose to accept or reject the gift of salvation.

Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began 2 Timothy 1:9

Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. Romans 8:30

The God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus 1 Peter 5:10

His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue. 2 Peter 1:3

In addition to this universal call, throughout history God has called men and women to specific tasks. Examples abound in the Bible – Noah, Abraham, Moses, and the Prophets.

The purpose of such specific calling is to fulfil the will of God and to be a blessing to the people they are called to serve. One faithful servant is a blessing to the many he touches during his ministry.

The Call of Ezra and Nehemiah

Ezra and Nehemiah were two men who received a specific task from God. Ezra came with the 2nd group of Jews returning to Jerusalem in 457 BC, approximately 60 years after the proclamation of Cyrus and the first return of the Jews. Nehemiah came 16 years after Ezra in 445 BC.

Ezra was a priest, a descendant of Aaron. Nehemiah was a civil servant in court of the Persian King.

Both men were deeply concerned for the cause of God and His people. They were men of prayer and intercession and knew the law and the covenants of God. Last week we studied in detail the call of Nehemiah.

Ezra came up from Babylon; and he was a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses, which the Lord God of Israel had given...On the first day of the first month he began his journey from Babylon, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, according to the good hand of his God upon him. For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek (study) the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel. Ezra 7:6, 9-10

‘Nehemiah and Ezra are men of opportunity. The Lord had a special work for them to do. They were to call upon the people to consider their ways, and to see where they had made their mistake; for the Lord had not suffered His people to become powerless and confused and to be taken into captivity without a cause. The Lord especially blessed these men for standing up for the right. Nehemiah was not set apart as a priest or a prophet, but the Lord used him to do a special work. He was chosen as a leader of the people. But his fidelity to God did not depend upon his position.’ *SDA Bible Commentary Vol. 3: EGW comments*

Sacred work or Secular work? Is there a Divide?

The temple might seem to be a religious institution, while the walls are a secular one. But God led Nehemiah to work on the walls, no less than he led Ezra to work on the temple. Both the sacred and the secular were necessary to fulfil God’s plan to restore the nation of Israel. If the walls were unfinished, the temple was

unfinished too, for there was no protective wall around the city. And while worship and sacrifice occurred at the Temple, justice was dispensed at the city walls and gates (Deuteronomy 21:19, Isaiah 29:21).

There is no sacred/secular divide present here. As a Church, we have mistakenly decided that real work for God happens in the church or through missionary efforts accomplished by full-time clergy. This fallacy is quite harmful. It convinces believers that their marketplace work (where they spend the majority of their time) is somehow less important in God's Kingdom. They compartmentalize by separating their money-making enterprise from their faith. They do not live in the consciousness that **everything** they do, whether in the church or outside it, must be done to the glory of God. The church operates in its fullness when its mechanics, lawyers, stay-at-home parents, accountants, doctors and teachers work diligently to the glory of God every day in every sphere of society. *Steven W Smith.*

"In our work, we can become the hands of God. When we ask for daily bread, God gives it to us through farmer, bakers, and grocers. So let us discern God's presence in and through our work." *D Doriani.*

Prophetic Timing

God keeps His promises and is faithful to the covenants He makes with His people. He had told the prophet Jeremiah that after 70 years of Babylonian captivity, Cyrus the Persian king would allow the Jews to return to Jerusalem. This happened in 538 BC. Then in the seventh year of his reign (Ezra 7:8) King Artaxerxes of Persia commanded that Jerusalem be rebuilt – this was 457 BC. This would be a date of great significance, for Daniel the prophet had been told in vision, "*Know therefore and understand, that from the going forth of the command to restore and build Jerusalem until Messiah the Prince, there shall be seven weeks and sixty-two weeks.*" *Daniel 9:25*

This prophecy foretold the time of the coming of Messiah what He would accomplish during His ministry on earth. 70 weeks (490 years in prophetic time) started in 457 BC and ended in 34 BC. In the middle of the last week (7 years) Messiah was crucified; He was 'cut off, but not for Himself', but for the sin of the world.

"And after the sixty-two weeks, Messiah shall be cut off, but not for Himself... Then he shall confirm a covenant with many for one week; but in the middle of the week He shall bring an end to sacrifice and offering." *Daniel 9:26, 27*

"Seventy weeks are determined for your people and for your holy city, to finish the transgression, to make an end of sins, to make reconciliation for iniquity, to bring in everlasting righteousness, to seal up vision and prophecy, and to anoint the Most Holy. Daniel 9:24

Messiah put an end to sin, iniquity and transgression at the Cross. He brought in everlasting righteousness, the righteousness of God. All vision and prophecy finds its fulfilment in Christ and at His ascension, He anointed the Heavenly Sanctuary and inaugurated its ministry.

The 2300 'days' Prophecy

And he said to me, "For two thousand three hundred days; then the sanctuary shall be cleansed." *Daniel 8:14*

The 70 week prophecy is the beginning of the longer 2300 days (year) prophecy. 2300 years from 457 BC brings us to 1844. In addition to the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary, God intended that His people would in repentance and consecration, surrender to the Holy Spirit for cleansing of the soul temple. This would be accompanied by a restoration of the true gospel to the world; a gospel that had been contaminated by human ideas since the Renaissance and the French Revolution.

'Christ is cleansing the heavenly sanctuary from the sins of the people, and it is the work of all who are labourers together with God to be cleansing the sanctuary of the soul from everything that is offensive to Him.'
Manuscript Releases Vol.11:p 55

God's Election

In the Bible, election is defined as:

1. The act of picking out, choosing

- a) the act of God's free will by which before the foundation of the world He decreed His blessings to certain persons
- b) the decree made from choice by which He determined to bless mankind through Christ by grace alone

2. A thing or person chosen

- a) of persons: God's elect

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover whom He predestined, these He also called; whom He called, these He also justified; and whom He justified, these He also glorified. Romans 8:29-30

In this great passage, Paul describes the election of grace – that God has desired and called all men to experience full salvation in Christ.

God has chosen all mankind for salvation. However, not all will respond to His calling.

Likewise, in the history of mankind, God has at times chosen particular people or groups to do a work for Him. Whether they fulfil His purpose for them is conditional on their obedience to His calling. Ezra and Nehemiah were faithful to their calling.

The Purpose of Election is Blessing...‘The election of one for the blessing of many...’

e.g. Abraham → Isaac → Israel → Messiah → All Nations

Our Response

Our response to God's call must be the same as that of Christ and the saints throughout the ages – we obey His call, recognising our sinfulness and trusting wholly in God... ‘who God calls, He qualifies and provides for the task’.

Messiah: *For the Lord GOD will help me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set my face like a flint, and I know that I shall not be ashamed. Isaiah 50:7*

Isaiah: *“Here am I! Send me.” Isaiah 6:8*

Noah: *being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith. Hebrews 11: 7*

Abraham: *obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. Hebrews 11:8*

Paul: *“I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision” Acts 26:19*
