

LESSON 200

THE CHURCH'S MISSION

Related Scripture: John 15:9-27

KEY VERSE: "Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you."—John 20:21.

Lesson Scripture: Luke 24:44-49;
John 17:18-21; Acts 13:1-5

Introduction:

Genuine churches of the kind that Jesus organized during His personal ministry have a definite mission to carry out in this world until He comes again. His true churches hold to His truth in doctrine and practice and have the assurance of His spiritual presence to the end of the age. (Mat. 28:18-20.)

Our lesson this week includes a passage from Luke in which Jesus was instructing His church after His resurrection, a selection from our Lord's prayer for His people as recorded by John, and the inspired account of the call and ordination of what we may safely describe as the first foreign missionaries officially sent forth by a New Testament church.

For an outline, we may note:

1. Word in Writing, Luke 24:44-47
 - a. Utterance, 44
 - b. Understanding, 45
 - c. Urgency, 46, 47
2. Word in Witnessing, Luke 24:48, 49
 - a. Personality, 48
 - b. Power, 49
3. Word in the World, John 17:18-21
 - a. Commission, 18
 - b. Consecration, 19
 - c. Comprehension, 20
 - d. Conclusion, 21
4. Word at Work, Acts 13:1-5
 - a. Open ministry, 1
 - b. Ordained ministry, 2, 3
 - c. Official ministry, 4
 - d. Operating ministry, 5

Notes on the Printed Text:

Word in Writing, Luke 24:44-47.

Hyperdispensational fantasies to the contrary notwithstanding, God has never changed His plans or purposes or His prescribed provision for the salvation of sinners. Unlike human authorities, He does not need to rewrite His textbook every few years. The first book of the Bible harmonizes perfectly with the last one, and with all the perfectly inspired books between them. Jesus was rejected by the religious leaders of His day for the very reason that He rejected their human traditions and called upon men to believe and submit to the written word of God.

Utterance, 44.

The words which Jesus spoke in His personal ministry in the flesh were in perfect accord with the Old Testament scriptures, calling for the fulfillment of divine prophecy even when that fulfillment meant His own suffering and death. Likewise today, we can be sure that the Holy Spirit will give no utterance contrary to His written word.

Understanding, 45.

Spiritual truth must be spiritually discerned. (I Cor. 2:9-16.) Only the divine Author is competent to give us an understanding of His word.

Urgency, 46, 47.

"It behoved" can be translated "it was necessary." As expressed in the Greek by three aorist infinitives, it was necessary for three things to be done in the way that it stands written: First, it was necessary for Christ to suffer. So He did. Second, it was necessary for Christ to rise from the dead on the third day. So He did. Third, it was necessary for repentance and remission of sins to be preached in His name to all nations, this preaching having begun from Jerusalem. So it has been and must be until He comes again.

Word in Witnessing, Luke 24:48, 49.

Examination of examples of witnessing recorded in the Bible reveals a liberal use of quotations from or references to the written word of God. Our own words may serve to explain or illustrate, but no words of ours can compare in power with that living and powerful word of God. (He. 4:12.)

Personality, 48.

Along with His written word, God is pleased to use human witnesses in making Himself known to the lost. We do not need to copy one another's words, methods, or mannerisms. God can make good use of any personality that is honestly surrendered to Him. Of course, if we really love Him, we will want to improve our personality for His glory.

Power, 49.

But at best the witness is only an instrument in the hand of God. His saving power in bringing the sinner to Christ for salvation is in His written word and His personal Spirit. The Spirit will not work without the word; the word cannot work without the Spirit. The Spirit came upon the church on the day of Pentecost to endue it "with power from on high." We are in continual need of renewed infusions and refillings of the Holy Spirit.

Word in the World, John 17:18-21.

"I pray not for the world," said Jesus in verse 9 of this glorious chapter, "but for them which thou hast given me; for they are thine." In verse 17 He prayed, "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."

Commission, 18.

If we are true followers of Christ, the world will be no more receptive to us than it was to Him. But there were some souls that believed Him, and there are some that will believe us.

Consecration, 19.

Jesus gives us a perfect example of sanctification or consecration to our divine mission. The preposition "through," both here and in verse 17, is more properly rendered "in." Our consecration to the assigned task is accomplished in the truth of God's word by virtue of the fact that Christ first sanctified Himself in behalf of us.

Comprehension, 20.

Jesus' prayer concerned not only the disciples then present, but was comprehensive enough to include all who should ever believe in Him because of their word; which is to say all true believers of later generations, since we have all received the testimony of the apostles. Jesus prayed for us.

Conclusion, 21.

The oneness or unity here prayed for is not a unity of personality or organization, but a oneness of holy character, a unity of mind and will. While God's people contradict His word and quarrel among themselves, they cannot hope to convert the world. Sinners of the world come to believe in the Christ of God in proportion as His followers come to agreement with their Lord and so—and only so—with one another.

Word at Work, Acts 13:1-5.

Even true churches under the headship of Christ are limited in the effectiveness of their mission by the human limitations of their members. So the church at Jerusalem, with its strongly Jewish prejudices, was rather reluctant to obey the commands of Jesus or to hear the call of the Spirit to undertake and promote "foreign missions." The church at Antioch was more spiritually sensitive to the Lord's leading in this matter.

Open Ministry, 1.

New Testament churches should not have the cleavage between "clergy" and "laity" that bedevils most false churches. Certainly there are "differences of administrations" (I Cor. 12:5), but the orderly exercise of genuine spiritual gifts should be open to all the members of a church. So in the church at Antioch there were some "prophets and teachers," so gifted of God, but evidently not formally ordained.

Ordained Ministry, 2, 3.

This is the scriptural order. Men are not to be ordained to the ministry in the hope that they may be called and qualified to serve, but because they have already given evidence of a divine calling and the possession of spiritual qualifications. (I Tim. 3:1-7.)

Official Ministry, 4.

Too many "preachers" and "missionaries" pretend to have been sent forth by the Holy Spirit, but without church sanction, while they clearly demonstrate in doctrine and practice that they are not led by the same Spirit that gave us the Bible. Barnabas and Saul were sent forth by the Holy Ghost through the official action of their church.

Operating Ministry, 5.

These men worked at their job. Any honest workman ought to do the work he is supposed to do, but above all a servant of God ought to be faithful in service. Perhaps there would be less unscriptural confusion of the Christian message if scriptural churches and their ministers were more faithful in their operation.

Key Verse:

"Then said Jesus to them again, Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you."—John 20:21.

We need the peace of God in our hearts to face a hostile world. Our mission is to warn a wicked world of coming judgment and to hold forth the promise of present pardon to all who believe. All men have sinned, and all must repent or perish. The Christ Who came once to save sinners is coming again to destroy with everlasting punishment all who continue in sin.