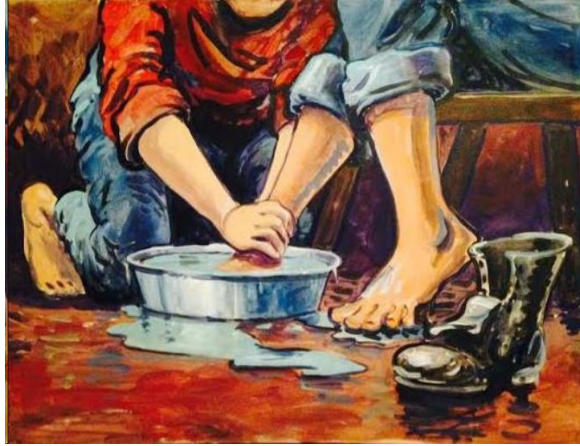


WORTHY OF YOUR CALLING



I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit—just as you were called to the one hope that belongs to your call— one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.

Ephesians 4:1-6

If you make the mistake of reading too many missionary biographies or too many articles about well-known, highly "successful" Christian celebrities, you may get the im-pression that Jesus Christ came to those people with a special call.

- One man is about to give up living, when the Lord speaks to him as he lies on the floor on a Saturday afternoon. "I have a great work for you to perform."
- Another is visited by an angel near the woodshed on his grandfather's farm. "You're going to be a great healer."
- Another is awakened in the middle of the night in his hotel room in Hong Kong. "You shall win a million souls before the end of the year with the help of your prayer partners."

It's true that God calls people.

He called you. He called me.

But God never called anyone to greatness in this world.

When Jesus called Peter He said, "Follow me". If Peter ever thought there was going to be any kind of earthly glory in following Jesus and catching men into the Kingdom, he soon learned otherwise.

Saul of Tarsus was chosen to carry the name of Jesus before the Gentiles and kings — but how did Saul stand before those kings? He was in chains! Jesus made it clear to Saul at the outset that it wasn't going to be a glory ride.



"For I will show him how much he will have to suffer for the sake of my name."

Acts 9:16

If you are a believer, you have been called by God.

And if there is anyone reading this who is not a believer, the fact that you are taking the trouble to read these words may well mean that God is calling you this very hour and making you to know beyond the shadow of a doubt that He is calling you.

But the call is not to be a great missionary, not to be a great healer, not to be an elder or a teacher.

The call is simply to follow Jesus.

The call is....

...to come out of the dominion of the prince of this world and to put your life, body, soul, and spirit under the authority of Jesus Christ.

Paul doesn't have a higher call than yours. Billy Graham wasn't called to something higher than you.

To all of us the call is the same.

Jesus says,

- Come, walk with me!
- Let me be your life!
- Lay your sins at the foot of my cross!
- Let me deliver you from the dominion of darkness and lift you into the Kingdom of Heaven.

And, when a person answers that call of Jesus, he becomes not great, but the least of the least.

He's ruined for the world and the world for him.

His days of greatness and success are over.

"But" you say, "Paul was great. There was never a greater missionary in all history." My friend, in Paul's day, nobody saw him as great. For all the mighty things that happened through his ministry, Paul was to people of his day an odd, unattractive little man. If you want to see what Paul got for answering the call of Jesus, read II Corinthians.

Afflictions, hardships, calamities, beatings, imprisonments, tumults, labors, sleepless nights, hunger.....

And Paul never considered this rough, hard, thankless life a let-down.

"Here I thought I was going to be a great missionary and all I get is trouble!"

"I had always hoped to found a university. I guess I'm just a failure."

Paul rejoiced in his sufferings! He gloried in his weakness!



Paul understood right from the start that following Jesus was never going to get him into the hall of fame.

Once we have received the call from Jesus and answered it, it's up to us to live lives worthy of our calling. And that doesn't mean,

- to maintain our dignity,
- or make sure that people respect us,
- carve a niche for ourselves,
- do something to be remembered by.

I, therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called.

How?

"With all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."

Three things:

- 1. Lowliness and meekness.**
- 2. Patient forbearing love.**
- 3. Unity of the Spirit among brothers and sisters in the bond of peace.**

How come it's all lowliness and meekness and love? Why doesn't Paul say something about having power?

Because the power and the authority and the boldness that we need are given to us by God *without any effort on our part.*

God gives the power, but we have to work on lowliness and meekness and patience, love, unity with brothers.
Your job is to humble yourself and fit in with God's ways.

God's job then is to lift you up into the mighty stream of His redemptive grace.

Your job is to humble yourself under the mighty hand of God.

God's job is to exalt you in due time.

But if you insist on subtly exalting yourself, then God will have to do for you the thing you should have done for yourself — He will have to humble you.

***For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled.
And he who humbles himself will be exalted.***

Luke 14:11

The place of honor at the marriage feast represents a position of spiritual authority and Jesus makes clear that this is a position you are not to strive after.

Now he told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, "When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this person,' and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place, so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted."

Luke 14:7-11

You don't seek it.

You don't climb for it.

You don't compete with other believers.

That place of spiritual authority is for God to lift you to when He is ready.



If you take it upon yourself to go heading for the place of authority and to establish yourself there, God may let

you go for a while, but in time He will come and re-move you — for your own good He will bring you down.

When you are invited into God's marriage feast, you are to head straight for the lowest place. And, by the way, when you get to that lowest place, take your coat off and make yourself at home. Don't be expecting an angel to come in five minutes and order you up to the executive suite. We've got some lessons to learn down here in this lowest place.

- **We have to learn humility.**
- **We have to learn patient-forbearing love.**
- **We have to learn to live in unity with brothers.**

Interestingly....

We don't have to learn how to cast out demons. Jesus never gave the disciples detailed instructions on how to cast out demons. He told them to do it and they did it.

We don't have to learn to preach and bear witness — that's easy.

We don't have to learn how to heal the sick or prophesy or pray in the Spirit — that comes.

These are God given.

1. But we sure have to learn from Jesus to walk in lowliness and meekness.



Notice how much of Jesus' teaching in the gospels has to do with this:

Blessed are the poor in Spirit. Blessed are the meek.

Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am meek and lowly of heart.

He that would be greatest among you, let him be as the least.

If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet.

"Humble yourself! Come off that pedestal where you sit criticizing everyone else, and get down at the foot of the Cross where you belong.

- It's your vanity, child, that's getting in the way of your faith.
- It's your vanity that's blinding your eyes to your true condition.

Other people may think you're a great Christian — but you know and I know how high your heart is riding beneath that humble mask. Get under the yoke with me, and start learning to be meek and lowly of heart before it's too late."

2. And we have to learn from Jesus how to patiently forbear one another in love.



We can read all the books that have been written about patience and love, and even write a few ourselves, and still fail when it comes to day-in-and-day-out love of brothers and sisters.

Only the Lord Jesus Himself can teach us patient, forbearing love. See how He deals with His disciples.

- He wasn't always climbing into their case.
- He put up with so much — even as He does with us.

How good He is to us! We blow it again and again and He reaches down and says, "Come on, follow me". And He takes us by the hand and lifts us up and gives us a new start. So how can we be so dogmatic, and rigid, and hard with one another? How can we be so right and everyone else so wrong?

Of course there are sins of lust and bigotry and com-promise and deceit that cannot be tolerated in the Body. They have to be dealt with. But even these must never be dealt with without love.

There was a man in the Church at Corinth (2 Corinthians 2:5-11) who, by his open sin, was jeopardizing the whole Body. He had to be dealt with severely. The man repented. But some of those Corinthians didn't know when to quit. Their jaws were still going and their hearts were hard.

"Forgive and comfort him" says Paul. "Reaffirm your love for him, lest he be overwhelmed with excessive sorrow otherwise Satan will gain more ground through your mercilessness than through that man's open sin."

3. And we need to learn from Jesus to maintain the unity of the Spirit among believers in the bond of peace.

God gives us unity. There is only one Body, one Spirit, one Lord. When we are joined to Jesus, we are joined to every man, woman and child on earth and beyond the grave who belongs to Jesus. But it's up to us to maintain that unity.

- To live it.
- To conform our lives to it.



When a man and woman are married, they become one flesh. But, my friend, if that man and woman fail daily to maintain that unity — if they fail to live and think and honor each other as members one of another, they are in for hard times. The marriage ceremony doesn't guarantee them bliss forevermore. And the fact that we meet

in the same room for fellowship does not assure unity in our praises of God, or in our service of God.

We have to be listening to the Spirit of Jesus who will show us when the things we say are jeopardizing unity — when our attitudes are divisive. He will teach us to care about our brothers and sisters the way we should.

And the white believer will start having some insight into what his black brother is going through.

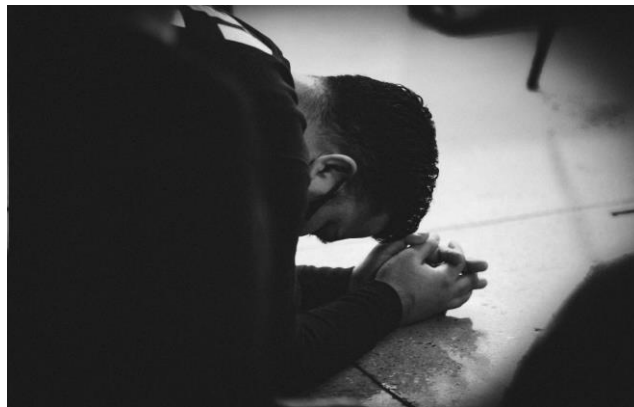
And the young believer will begin to have a glimpse of how her elderly sister feels about things.

And, instead of hard thoughts and indifference, there will be an eagerness to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

To walk worthy of the call of Jesus, we need to spend our days in flesh and blood the way He spent His. We need to go down and meet Jesus in that lowest place and walk with Him there until He sees fit to take us up higher.

If we will do this, we'll never have to worry about having enough power to make the demons flee and the mountains move.

God will pour out His Spirit upon us until the very atmosphere around us trembles with awe.



God help us to live lives that reflect the mind of Him who humbled Himself and became obedient unto death — even the death of the Cross.

Prayer: Yes Lord, help us to reflect your mind, your obedience to death, to self...help us to be worthy of your calling. Your calling, yours...a calling to follow you into meekness, mercy, forbearance, humility, and to love others enough to work to maintain unity with them. May we gladly accept this and not long for more. We do not need special recognition, or special power...we just need to be where you call us...covered in your presence...covered with your redemptive love. It is enough, that we aren't alone... even in the lowest of places, that you will pour your Spirit upon us as we draw close to you in obedience wherever we are. And yes Lord, we desire to tremble with awe as we see your hand at work even in the humblest of interactions. Amen.

Message: Richard E. Bieber 1972

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THE LAMB
WHO WAS SLAIN
HAS BEGUN HIS REIGN