

DIVINE CALL TO MINISTRY AND A DYSFUNCTIONAL CHURCH

As we come to the middle of our current year it is wise to reflect on what we are doing in the work of God. It is also the time to evaluate how we are meeting our objectives and goals. Whilst this happens in the business world on an ongoing basis it is not always seen in the local church and denomination structures in our country. What is more worrying is the fact that we as ministers of the gospel also fail to evaluate how we relate to the model and calling that Jesus gave at the start of his ministry. In this article I do believe that we all need to reexamine this portion in Luke and then ask ourselves what Jesus wanted to do and whether we are carrying on with what He wanted. In other words are we acting out his plan and his purpose. In reading this article I believe we will all be challenged to rethink and evaluate our personal walk with God.

And he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up: and, as his custom was, he went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and stood up for to read. And there was delivered unto him the book of the prophet Esaias. And when he had opened the book, he found the place where it was written, The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised, To preach the acceptable year of the Lord. And he closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears.

(Luk 4:16-21)

The divine call of ministry has a few important building blocks, which serve as the foundation and basis for all evangelism and ministry in the church.

First of all it must be Word based. Nothing that we say or do should deviate from the Word of God. It is our authority and guideline when dealing with people and bringing them to Jesus Christ. I know that there are times when we might try to use attractions such as gospel singers and visiting speakers, but no matter how anointed or blessed these people may be, they can never take the place of the Word. It must be clearly understood, that in the world there are many people who act as motivational speakers appealing to the self-centred area of our lives. They speak, and we go on their courses so that we can feel good about ourselves. We are motivated to build up our self-image and self esteem. The Word on the other hand does not appeal to building us up, but rather building Christ in us, and to us building the kingdom of God as well as conforming to the image of God. So as we read the Word, as well as study it, we are supposed to get a clearer understanding of what God wants for us.

The second building block of the divine call to ministry is in fact the content of message that should be brought. To all intents and purposes we must realise that the gospel is good news. Unfortunately we do not always portray the gospel as the good news that we should bring. Very often we are guilty of using the Word as a tool to further condemn and consign people to a lost eternity. Instead of “thus saith the Lord” we usually have “thus saith the pastor” or the “church.” Most recently I had the personal experience of seeing how people are controlled and feel indebted to a church and pastor. Some folks had moved from Natal to Gauteng and the pastor has continued to send people to minister to people instead of encouraging them to be a part of a local assembly. An effective ministry is determined by how the recipients of the ministry are encouraged to go out and reach others for Christ. We are not called to manipulate people but rather to challenge them with the claims of Christ. After all it is the Holy Spirit who convicts of sin, righteousness, and judgement to come. The very same Holy Spirit regenerates us

because of our personal faith in the completed work of redemption through the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

To my mind the third building block is the people we target for the message of the gospel. Jesus speaks of the poor, the broken-hearted, the captives, the blind and the bruised. Here we are quick to spiritualise and say that we are all poor seeing that we have not experienced the riches of Christ Jesus. Yes we are also all broken hearted because sin and Satan has destroyed our relationship with God. We do not have peace of mind, neither do we have the joy and the love of God shed abroad in our hearts. Ours is a world of pain, suffering, and corruption, and very often we feel that we are the victims, instead of realising that in Christ Jesus we are more than conquerors. What I have found so interesting in the life of Jesus is the fact that He reached out to the poor, and the needy, particularly in the light of the fact that the rich had much possessions, and found it harder to let go of earthly riches in exchange for those heavenly riches that have been prepared by the Father for His children.

It must be stressed that as a Pentecostal denomination we should also take note of the extent of the divine call to ministry. Here I would dare to say that the local church should be reaching out to the local community as a first step. We often read the words of the promise of our Lord in Acts 1:8 and fail to evaluate “Jerusalem”, “Judea”, “Samaria” and “the uttermost parts of the earth.” The local assembly must look at the people in the area it is serving, and also understand the needs and conditions of the people in the area. This is our Jerusalem because it relates to home and the people close to us. Just imagine if the members of a local assembly each reached out to family members and ministered to their needs how we will bless others with the love of God and how easily it will be for us to encourage those who do not know Christ to come to salvation.

Judea is an extension of our local assembly vision to reach those people who may not be a part of our local community. So often as I have meditated on this portion I have come to realise that no assembly can ever say it is doing all that it can do for Jesus. There is always more that we can and should do. Unfortunately many local churches are quite content to function as they are and with no desire to reach out beyond the local community. Maybe this may seem acceptable to an assembly with no vision but if we seek to follow in the steps of the Master how can we close our eyes to the need to reach out to the millions going to a lost eternity.

Just as the Samaritans were a contentious group of people in the time of Jesus, so we must also consider the groups that might be contentious to us and could upset our comfort zone. Whilst the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans it did not stop Jesus from dealing with the woman at the well. We also read how the people came to hear Jesus based on the words of that one woman and the Samaritans came to know Jesus as their Lord and Saviour. Later on in the book of Acts we see how Philip was able to go to that same Samaria and experience a mighty revival. What is our Samaria today? Could it be that the local church should look outside its doors and start a ministry to those who are HIV positive? Or is it possible that the local church could get involved with feeding the thousands of people who have been retrenched and now have no work?

That a local assembly should care for its members is right, but at no time should care and compassion be limited to them. When God said he loved the world he did not limit that love to a certain area or to a certain group of people. His love was given to all men and women.

You may rightly ask how does this all relate to welfare? To be quite honest with you, welfare is not the hand out that we so easily think of when dealing with those in need. Neither is it that attempt to quench the cry of our conscience when we give a few cents to the beggar freezing in the cold. Welfare is the concerted action of compassion where we show by our deeds that we really care about others. Yes it is

that behaviour on our part, where we go beyond the doors of our local church and touch those who are untouchable. Samaria may even speak of those whom we regard as lepers. The people we do not want to associate with, or maybe the people we refuse to associate with. If the love of Christ has been shed abroad in our hearts how can we ignore those who are in need in our land regardless of their culture, race or creed?

Only when we are able to get to grips with the Samaria in our ministry, then only are we ready to reach the uttermost part of the world. Some people see Jerusalem, others see Judea, and many others see Samaria or the uttermost parts of the earth. Whilst there is nothing wrong in this, it does become a major factor of being a dysfunctional church when we see one field at the expense of all others.

The welfare of the local assembly could be interpreted as the condition of the assembly. Believe it or not this then becomes a challenge as to what is taking place in your Sunday School, youth, women's ministry, men's fellowship as well as the corporate fellowship, ministry, and praise that we have in our Sunday services.

Let us, as a denomination, reach out to everyone in our country and as we express the love of Christ to every soul that crosses our path I believe that not only will we see a mighty surge of evangelism but also a new era of true love, compassion, and concern for all the children of God who have chosen to identify with our denomination. A dysfunctional church is a church, which has a limited or selective vision, whilst the ministry that Christ will bless is one that reaches everybody.