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A WITNESS TO THE TRUTH

and a warning against the deception in the last days
foretold by Christ

"Take heed that ye be not deceived"

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REPENTANCE - A SPIRITUAL SACRIFICE

We read in Matthew chapter 4 verse 17, that after the Lord Jesus' temptation in the wilderness, He went forth to preach:

“From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

In so few words we have summarized the essence of the work of the Lord Jesus. When we look up the word repent, we find it means to think differently. This is exactly what Jesus tried to evoke from these who would listen, that they should look on their daily lives from the Spirit's focus and not the natural focus of the flesh. He preached the spirit of the law, trying to make them see more than the surface regulations and ordinances which they had observed for years. We today are given that same help through the Scriptures, as we read of the work of the Lord Jesus, that we may perceive the spirit of God's Son and of that word, which spoke of the fulfilment of the kingdom of heaven.

Many wondered at Jesus' words for He spoke of the Spirit which was much different from the teaching of the scribes and Pharisees at that time:

“For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 6:20).

Here was the difference between the spirit and the letter of the law. There was a need to go beyond the righteousness of their elders and teachers who loved the traditions of the law, but were blind to the true meaning of the Spirit. Jesus' message was simple - think differently from what you have heard - repent. Jesus said in the 17th verse of Matthew 5:

“Think not that I am come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil.”

To those scribes and Pharisees who listened, it may have appeared that Jesus' words advocated change. Only by the Spirit could those who “had ears to hear” perceive the need to do things differently from what they had been taught. This is important to us as well, helping us to be more spiritually perceptive, more truly able to repent.

Jesus used the law in his teaching as we read in Matthew 5:21:

“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgement:

But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgement: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire. Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift.”

Here Jesus used the law which said, “thou shall not kill”, combined with the provision of the sacrifices, to enlarge their perception. When they brought a sacrifice what was in their mind? Was their ill in their heart against a brother? If so, the provision of a sacrifice under the law was of no effect—what was in their heart was more important. His words were to be a help to make them think differently as they brought their gift. The Spirit intended that the sacrifices be more than a payment made for offense, but rather a willing offering from a heart in which the love for a brother was sincere and unblemished.

After hearing Jesus preach, one of the scribes said in Mark 12: 32-33:

“Well, Master, thou hast said the truth: for there is one God; and there is none other but he:
And to love him with all the heart, and with all the understanding, and with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love his neighbour as himself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

And Jesus’ answer to this man - verse 34:

“And when Jesus saw that he answered discreetly, he said unto him, Thou art not far from the kingdom of God.”

What was different about this scribe? Did he perceive that the Word of God went beyond the law and the offerings and spoke of fulfilling it in love? How different his thinking was from the vast majority at that time.”

Paul speaks in Romans 12:1 of how we can offer an acceptable sacrifice:

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.”

Here we are told to examine our sacrifice - our living: to yield our natural fleshly thinking to think differently as would the Spirit in order that our bodies be acceptable before God. The Lord Jesus was not conformed to this world, but rather fulfilled the law and the prophets perfectly by submitting His body in obedience as an acceptable sacrifice. Paul speaks further in Hebrews 13 verses 15 of the provision of Christ, the only means by which we can be found acceptable before God.

“By **him** (Christ) therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name”

As the Lord Jesus brought all His living into obedience and became the perfect sacrifice, how pleasing He was to His Father. Likewise, how pleasing we too can be as we look to God for help and strength to overcome. David in Psalm 16 verses 1 and 5, recognised the need to trust in God’s provision as he says:

“Preserve me, O God: for in thee do I put my trust.”
(verse 5).

“The LORD is the portion of mine inheritance and of my cup: thou maintainest my lot.”

We cannot “maintain our lot” on our own, but only as we look to God in trust for the help that He can provide. Everything that we are given is provided by God, our temporal needs are met daily and beyond that is given the hope of eternal salvation. In order to reach that hope, we need to think differently—repent, before we can bring our gift (life) to the altar.

We are required to yield our spirits in submission and obedience, keeping in mind the heritage set aside for those who can overcome. We must remember the sacrifice made by the Lord Jesus, and try to make our living also acceptable, using His life as our example as Peter tells us in I Peter 2:5:

“Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.”

M.C.S.

ISRAEL'S RELATIONS WITH THE AMALEKITES

Soon after Israel's escape from the Egyptians, after crossing the Red Sea, Amalek came and fought with them. Moses sent out Joshua with some men to fight against Amalek; and as long as Moses held up his staff, Joshua and his men prevailed. In the end Joshua and his men "discomfited" Amalek and the Lord pronounced judgment against Amalek:

"And the LORD said unto Moses, Write this for a memorial in a book, and rehearse it in the ears of Joshua: for I will utterly put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven. And Moses built an altar, and called the name of it Jehovah-nissi: For he said, Because the LORD hath sworn that the LORD will have war with Amalek from generation to generation."

Exodus 17:14-16

This is the first recorded conflict between Israel and Amalek, and it is obvious that God intended to baffle the Amalekites from generation to generation until they were no longer remembered. God allowed Israel to prevail even though Israel had just recently murmured against Moses, and tempted God because of the lack of water within the land.

Amalek was the grandson of Esau and obviously a close relation to Israel. Perhaps this is why God proclaimed such a punishment on them:

"And these are the generations of Esau the father of the Edomites in mount Seir:

These are the names of Esau's sons; Eliphaz the son of Adah the wife of Esau, Reuel the son of Bashemath the wife of Esau.

And the sons of Eliphaz were Teman, Omar, Zepho, and Gatam and Kenaz.

And Timna was concubine to Eliphaz Esau's son; and she bare to Eliphaz Amalek: these are the sons of Adah Esau's wife."

Genesis 36:9-12

The next circumstance where we see the Amalekites is after the twelve spies had returned from the promised land and the children of Israel listened to the ten spies that brought back the report that they could not defeat the inhabitants of the land. They rebelled against God and wished to go back to Egypt, and God punished them. Israel would not be allowed to enter into the land at that time, and all of that rebellious generation would die out as they wandered in the wilderness for forty years. We see how the

people did not have God's blessing as He used the Amalekites to prevent them from entering into the land:

“And Moses said, Wherefore now do ye transgress the commandment of the LORD? but it shall not prosper.

Go not up, for the LORD is not among you; that ye be not smitten before your enemies.

For the Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before you, and ye shall fall by the sword: because ye are turned away from the LORD, therefore the LORD will not be with you.

But they presumed to go up unto the hill top: nevertheless the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and Moses, departed not out of the camp.

Then the Amalekites came down, and the Canaanites which dwelt in that hill, and smote them, and discomfited them, even unto Hormah.

Numbers 14:41-45

As Balaam blessed Israel, when Balak wanted him to curse them, he spoke a curse against Amalek:

“And when he looked on Amalek, he took up his parable, and said, Amalek was the first of the nations; but his latter end shall be that he perish for ever.”

Numbers 24:20

In Deuteronomy, which was the giving of the law to Israel a second time before they entered the land, it mentions Amalek in a chapter that deals with family relations:

“Remember what Amalek did unto thee by the way when ye were come forth out of Egypt;

How he met thee by the way, and smote the hindmost of thee, even all that were feeble behind thee, when thou wast faint and weary; and he feared not God. Therefore it shall be, when the LORD thy God hath given thee rest from all thine enemies round about, in the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee for an inheritance to possess it, that thou shalt blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven; thou shalt not forget it.

Deuteronomy 25:17-19

During the time of the Judges God used the Amalekites along with other nations to judge Israel for their evils:

“And the children of Israel did evil again in the sight of the LORD:

and the LORD strengthened Eglon the king of Moab against Israel, because they had done evil in the sight of the LORD. And he gathered unto him the children of Ammon and Amalek, and went and smote Israel, and possessed the city of palm trees.”
Judges 3:12-13

Later, during the time of the judges, Israel sinned, and the Lord used the Amalekites and the Midianites against them:

“And so it was, when Israel had sown, that the Midianites came up, and the Amalekites, and the children of the east, even they came up against them; And they encamped against them, and destroyed the increase of the earth, till thou come unto Gaza, and left no sustenance for Israel, neither sheep, nor ox, nor ass.”
Judges 6:3-4

During Saul’s reign as the first king of Israel, he was told to completely destroy all the people and animals of Amalek:

“Thus saith the LORD of hosts, I remember that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass.” I Samuel 15:2-3

Saul did not utterly destroy the Amalekites, as he was instructed to do, but saved Agag the king and choicest of the cattle. As a result, Samuel told him that God would remove His favor and the kingdom from Saul, and give it to another.

During the time when David and his men lived in the land of the Philistines, in the city of Ziklag, the Amalekites attacked the city while David and the men were away. The Amalekites burned the city and took the women as captives. David inquired of God as to whether he should pursue the Amalekites and was told to go and he would recover all:

“And David smote them from the twilight even unto the evening of the next day: and there escaped not a man of them, save four hundred young men, which rode upon camels, and fled. And David recovered all that the Amalekites had carried away: and David rescued his two wives.” I Samuel 30:17-18

When we look at the relationship between the Amalekites and the Israelites we can understand why there was conflict between them: Israel is of the seed of the woman, and Amalek is the seed of the serpent (seed of the flesh). There will always be enmity between the two classes of people until that day when all flesh is destroyed, at the time of God's kingdom.

Another way to look at the conflict is on a more personal level. Every person who seeks to worship God has the conflict of the two seeds represented within themselves. We have the seed of the woman that wishes to do God's will; we also have the seed of the flesh fighting against those good intentions. As we focus our lives on seeking God we represent the Israelite, but when we backslide from God the Amalekite takes over within us. This struggle will be ongoing as the Lord said "from generation to generation" until Israel has peace. Israel will not have true peace until God's kingdom is established and the flesh is destroyed. That is our struggle; to strive to be of spiritual Israel rather than of the fleshly Amalekite.

E.J.M.

THE RESTORATION

Our portion in Zechariah recorded over 2500 years ago, foresaw the coming of Christ, the restoration of Israel and the establishment of Jerusalem as the capital of God's kingdom. We must remember that God had spoken through His prophets to influence those who would read these words with understanding. To recognise what God requires is one thing - to respond rightly is another. In chapter 8 we read God's words to Zechariah in verses 2-5:

“Thus saith the LORD of hosts: I was jealous for Zion with great jealousy, and I was jealous for her with great fury.

Thus saith the LORD; I am returned unto Zion, and will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; and Jerusalem shall be called a city of truth, and the mountain of the LORD of hosts, the holy mountain.

Thus saith the LORD of hosts: There shall yet old men and old women dwell in the streets of Jerusalem; and every man with his staff in his hand for very age. And the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets of it.”

Here we see a picture of old men and women living in peace and safety and boys and girls playing in the streets of Jerusalem, speaking of the restoration at that time, but more importantly, also speaking of the greater restoration to take place in the kingdom age.

As our thinking must be upon the establishment of the Kingdom of God and the purpose to be accomplished then, we are reminded of the specific instructions given to attain unto that hope as outlined in chapter 8:16-17:

“These are the things that ye shall do: Speak every man the truth to his neighbour; execute the judgment of truth and peace in your gates.

And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath; for all these are things that I hate, saith the LORD.”

God had said this is what you must do to keep alive the hope of a covenant relationship with Him. Let us look at these aspects and see the help in them for us today.

The first was, “speak every man the truth to his neighbour”. What is truth? The ultimate truth of course is the Word of God, which speaks of His purpose with this earth and to all those who are His. David perceived this as we look in Psalm 51:6 where he says:

“Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts, and in the hidden part thou shalt make me know wisdom.”

David knew that truth must be part of ones living and he was one who could speak as a man after God’s own heart. We think of the heart as the generator of the actions of a man. If truth is in the heart, then all that should be spoken will be at one with God and His ways. As truth grows, so does wisdom. Is truth then the seed, that once planted grows, allowing one to go from strength to strength in the Lord? It is as David asks in Psalm 15:1, “Who shall dwell in thy holy hill?” and the answer is given in verses 2-3:

“He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and **speaketh the truth** in his heart.

He that backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour.”

Both David and Zechariah wanted to be a part of that holy hill, new Jerusalem in the kingdom age. They both knew that those allowed to be inhabitants there would only be those who had worked righteousness and had spoken truth from their heart. So much emphasis in this 15th Psalm is placed on one’s neighbour and one’s conduct towards him. Doesn’t this all really speak of love—loving your neighbour as yourself, as Jesus said? If we perfectly follow after that teaching and love our neighbour as Jesus did, how could we possibly do anything hurtful to another?

In order to reveal that God’s truth has made an impression, it must be used. When looking at a matter or circumstance, or while in trial and testing do we ask what should God’s wisdom reveal in us? As the 7th chapter of Zechariah the 9th verse says:

“Thus speaketh ‘the LORD of hosts, saying, Execute true judgment, and show mercy and compassions, every man to his brother.”

Again here we see the need to exercise or execute judgment, looking on our brother as God looks upon us - in compassion. As often as we fail and sin before God, we know that if we repent, God will forgive us. Do we show the same forgiveness and love to one another as God has done countless times for us? Jesus said in Matthew 25:40 “Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me.”

Going back to God’s special instruction through Zechariah, verses 16 and 17, the second aspect to consider is “imagine no evil”. We go to Zechariah 7:10 and read:

“And oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless, the stranger, nor the poor; and let none of you imagine evil against his brother in your heart.”

The meaning of the word imagine is rendered as “to fabricate or invent”. How prone the nature of man is to harshly judge the motive’s of another. Whether from reasons of jealousy or from simple misunderstanding, the innocent actions of a brother or sister can be twisted in our own minds. Is this how we can “imagine evil” against another? If there is evil in our heart towards another, we must come to God to ask forgiveness and purge it from us. How did Israel respond to these words of rebuke from Zechariah? Verses 11 and 12 go on to tell us:

“But they refused to hearken, and pulled away the shoulder, and stopped their ears, that they should not hear. Yea, they made their hearts as an adamant stone, lest they should hear the law, and the words which the LORD of hosts hath sent in his Spirit by the former prophets; therefore came a great wrath from the LORD of host.”

Due to the hardness of their heart, there was a breach in the covenant relationship with God as verse 13 says:

“Therefore it is come to pass, that as he cried, and they would not hear; so they cried and I would not hear, saith the LORD of hosts.”

The danger of impending evil can lead to a loss of eternal life. Jesus’ words in Matthew 5 verses 21 and 22 convey this same message:

“Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of the judgment:
But I say unto you, that whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment: and whosoever shall say to his brother, Raca, shall be in danger of the council: but whosoever shall say, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire.”

We must absorb the understanding given here by the Spirit, imagine no evil against another but rather let love rule in our living crushing the subtlety of the flesh.

Lastly, we are told to “love no false oath”. What exactly does this mean? If we go to Zechariah 5:1 we are helped to understand as we read of his vision:

“Then I turned, and lifted up mine eyes, and looked, and behold a flying roll. And he said unto me, What seest thou? And I answered, I see a flying roll; its length is twenty cubits and its breadth ten cubits.

Then said he unto me, This is the curse that goeth forth over the face of the whole earth, for every one that stealeth shall be cut off as on this side according to it; and every one that sweareth shall be cut off as on that side according to it.

I will bring it forth, saith the LORD of hosts, and it shall enter into the house of the thief, and unto the house of him that **sweareth falsely by my name**; and it shall remain in the midst of his house, and shall consume it with its timber and its stones.”

The word falsely, as used above, means to cheat. How can we swear falsely, or love a false oath? By being a hearer of the word and not a doer. It is easy to be taken in by our own fleshly reasoning and fail to do all we know is right. We cannot cheat or be false before God because He knows our hearts and minds. Are our hearts toward God in truth or are they backsliding towards the ways of the flesh? When we read in Mark 12:28 we are helped to see what our living now must be like:

“And one of the scribes came, and having heard them reasoning together and perceiving that he had answered them well, asked him, Which is the first commandment of all?

And Jesus answered him. The first of all the commandments is: Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God is one Lord; And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment.

And the second is this: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is no other commandment greater than these.”

Jesus answered by telling them of the same things Zechariah spoke of. To vow to serve the Father as our only God and to prove this love of God by showing love and compassion one to another. These two commandments go hand in hand, they cannot be separated.

We see the perfection of these two thoughts in the Lord Jesus who never imagined evil or loved a false oath, and who always spoke truth to His neighbour. As we are privileged to know this truth, we must allow it to permeate our living and value its promise held out for the future, as spoken of in Zechariah 8:22-23:

“Yea, many peoples and strong nations shall come to seek the LORD of hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the LORD. Thus saith the LORD of hosts: In those days it shall come to pass that ten men shall take hold out of all languages of the nations, even shall take hold of the skirt of him that is a Jew, saying, We will go with you; for we have heard that God is with you.”

As those striving to be spiritual Israel today, how important our witness is before God and men. Let us renew our determination to live the Truth, making these spiritual qualities part of our living as we look in hope to that final restoration to come.

A BIBLE CLASS

“MY STEPS HAD WELL NIGH SLIPPED”

(Psalm 73:2)

The 73rd Psalm is entitled “A Psalm of Asaph”, or a song of the Gatherer. Immediately thoughts go to the gathering that has been promised in God’s purpose to those found acceptable at the judgement seat of the Lord Jesus. Those responsible, who have faithfully struggled to overcome their flesh during their lifetime, will be granted the blessing of life eternal, while those who have succumbed to the power of the flesh will be sentenced to destruction.

This psalm was written by David, a man who knew only too well the struggle that the flesh creates. He failed grievously during his lifetime and knew suffering because of it. This psalm then is David’s very human cry, as he momentarily envied those in the world who knew not the suffering required to overcome the flesh as verses 3-5 and 13-14 relate:

Verse 3-5:

“For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no bands in their death: but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men; neither are they plagued like other men.”

Verses 13-14;

“Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency. For all the day long have I been plagued, and chastened every morning.”

In the midst of trial and testing the flesh can taunt with this kind of thinking. Envy can grow when looking at those in the world who are not bound by restrictions on their flesh, but live only unto themselves. Their lot seems easier than the struggle which those hoping to be God’s children must endure.

David’s right spirit taking over, puts this kind of thinking to an end when: he says in verse 17 and 18:

“Until I went into the sanctuary of God; then understood I their end. Surely thou didst set them in slippery places: thou castedst them down into destruction.”

Their life may seem to prosper as they enjoy the riches and entertainments of this world, but what of their end? Those of the world

have no hope, they meet their end in the grave. David realized that only those covered by the protection of the sanctuary have the hope of resurrection and eternal life, but only as they struggle against their flesh in this life.

Many times David failed, slipped and lost his footing, was close to losing the hope of God. We can see his mind as he must have thought of these failings and realized how merciful God had been to him as we read on in verses 22-24:

“So foolish was I, and ignorant: I was as a beast before thee. Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou has holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory.”

Indeed, as David in verse 2 says:

“But as for me, my feet were almost gone; my steps had well nigh slipped.”

Where would David have been without the strength of God to hold him up? The flesh fails, it has no real strength. Only in God is there the strength to lean on to see one through trials and testing.

In Psalm 94:17-18 David again praises God as the source of his strength saying:

“Unless the LORD had been my help, my soul had almost dwelt in silence. When I said, My foot slippeth; thy mercy, O LORD, held me up.”

How easy it is to fall into the train of complaining or comparing one's lot with others. Any can look enviously as David did, on those of the world who do not trouble themselves to control their flesh. It is true they do not struggle, but it is also true they have no hope of sharing in the blessing God has held out for those who will be His at that gathering, a time when struggles will cease and the glory of God will fill the earth.

“... FREELY YE HAVE RECEIVED, FREELY GIVE”

There is much recorded concerning the apostles of the Lord Jesus which can strengthen our desire to more closely and faithfully follow Him. These apostles, as their title indicates, were men **sent forth** by Jesus to do the work of the gospel. Jesus carefully instructed them so they could carry on this work after His death in the way He would have it done.

It may help us to look more closely at the spirits and experiences of those twelve sent forth. We are specifically shown who they were:

“... The first, Simon, who is called Peter, and Andrew his brother; James the son of Zebedee, and John his brother; Philip, and Bartholomew; Thomas, and Matthew the publican; James the son of Alphaeus and Lebbaeus, whose surname was Thaddaeus; Simon the Canaanite, and Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him.”
Matthew 10:2-4.

Most of these are very familiar names, but of some not much is recorded. Peter we know, but of his brother Andrew we know little. We are told that he heard Jesus speak and immediately looked for his brother, Peter, saying:

“... We have found the Messiah, which is, being interpreted, the Christ.”
John 1:41.

revealing his sure belief in Jesus as God’s anointed Saviour.

Next we have another two brothers, James and John. Of John much is given, but of James few details are revealed. He was on the mount when Jesus was transfigured. He was also in the garden as Jesus agonized; and along with Peter and John, slept when Jesus’ need was for them to watch with Him. We are told of James’ death:

“Herod the king stretched forth his hands ... And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.”
Acts 12:1-2.

No doubt this happened ‘because of his faithful witness, and it occurred about nine years after Jesus was crucified.

The Apostle Philip also was called by Jesus:

“... Jesus ... findeth Philip, and saith unto him, Follow me.”
John 1:43.

Philip’s response and faith is shown by his words to Nathanael:

“... We have found him, of whom Moses ... and the prophets, did write, Jesus of Nazareth.” Verse 45.

Thomas, also called Didymus, is known as the doubter, since he questioned the risen Christ. Even so, his loyalty and devotion is clear. He spoke to his fellow apostles as Jesus prepared to go to Bethany:

“... Let us also go, that we may die with him.” John 11:16.

Another whose response is exemplary to us is Matthew the publican. When Jesus called him at the receipt of custom:

“... he arose, and followed him.” Matthew 9:9.

Now publicans were detested by the Jews, being appointed by the Roman conquerors to collect tribute and taxes. The office of a publican was much sought after by many - the highest bidder usually being appointed. They were entitled to exact a fee for collecting taxes, and often abused the privilege to enrich themselves. Naturally they were ill thought of by their countrymen. Yet Jesus chose this man, and he responded without hesitation or question.

Concerning James, the son of Alphaeus, we are told that he along with Peter and John “seemed to be pillars” in the ecclesia. (Galatians 2:9) Also, when the question of circumcision and keeping the law arose, Paul and Barnabas went to Jerusalem for counsel. It was James who helped greatly to resolve their questions:

“After they had held their peace, James answered, saying,
Men and brethren, hearken unto me:” Acts 15:13.

After hearkening, we are told it pleased the brethren to follow his counsel.

Another mentioned is Simon the Canaanite, so identified in Luke 6:15 as “Simon called Zellotes.” “Zelotes” designated those who were Zealots - a “patriotic” sect of Jews - who zealously upheld the Law, and later were instrumental in a revolt against the Romans. Such in their zeal would be inclined toward rigid observance of the law and traditions of the elders.

Going on, of course almost all of mankind know of Judas Iscariot, the betrayer. Of him Jesus said:

“... Have not I chosen you twelve, and one of you is a devil? He spake of Judas Iscariot ...” John 6:70.

A devil is a false accuser, a slanderer. Also of Judas we are shown in John 12:4-6 that:

“... he was a thief, and had the bag, and bare what was put therein.”

Briefly these were some of the twelve apostles sent forth by Jesus, to do the work of the gospel, having been given a measure of the Spirit. They were a diverse group, of many backgrounds: Matthew a publican; Simon a Zealot; Peter was impetuous; two sets of brothers, tied together by family bonds. Each was called to be an apostle, to be “sent forth” in a great work. In this calling, there would be a need for adjustment, a “submitting one to another in the fear of God.” There would be the need to put aside an inclination to despise Matthew, a publican. Simon Zelotes perhaps would be over-anxious, moved by orthodox rules - the law being ingrained in him. Thomas at times given to doubting, might hold back. Peter and Andrew, James and John being brothers, could be inclined to overly support each other. Judas Iscariot was a thief and a betrayer; he would not evoke trust in his brethren. But Jesus, who by power of the Spirit, knew their differing characteristics, called them and sent them forth. No doubt there was conflict of natural thinking, taking a lot of patience to sort out. What enabled these diverse personalities to blend, to be united in their work? Was it a recognition that Jesus required them to be witnesses for Him and His Father - not just by words, but by actions - by their living? Can this not be a help to us, Brethren and Sisters, as we are given an insight into the minds, the spirits of our brethren, as we also are called upon, in a measure, to be His witnesses? It does require adjustment, submitting, helping, counselling - a blending and a supporting as part of being one body, engaged in God’s work. How great also must be our efforts to show courage and love for each other.

When Jesus sent them forth, He gave them counsel:

“... As ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand.”

Matthew 10:7.

To **preach** is to proclaim, to publish. What were they to proclaim? The gospel concerning the kingdom of God and the Name of Jesus Christ. Also He said:

“Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils:...”

Verse 8.

They were enabled of God to do these miracles to glorify Him. And then Jesus added:

“... freely ye have received, freely give.”

Verse 8.

What was it that these chosen ones had received? It was the power of the Spirit, blessing from God, fellowship with Jesus - and through Him, with their Father.

On a later occasion when Jesus sent forth the seventy disciples, we are told:

“... the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through thy name.” Luke 10:17.

No ‘doubt they were highly elated - perhaps even feeling a bit exalted! Jesus quickly replied:

“Behold, I give unto you power ... over all the power of the enemy:...
Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven.” Luke 10:19-20.

This is the blessing, this is the gift freely given - the divine help, the mercy provided to allow the witnessing to be faithfully done to God’s glory; and along with this work, the opportunity to be counted among His people. Does this help us, Brethren and Sisters, to more freely give of ourselves because of that which has been so unstintingly given to us? In this connection Paul reminds us:

“He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?”
Romans 8:32.

The Father does bountifully bestow all needed things upon His children - gifts to strengthen our spirits; and also for our temporal needs He has given in abundance. The question is - Do we in response use these blessings and goods to glorify Him, to help and serve those who are His, our brethren and sisters? As we ponder this question, it brings to mind Jesus words of wondrous promise and hope - words we long to hear:

“... Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:” Matthew 25:34.

Why are these to be so blessed? Jesus speaks:

“For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.”
Verses 35-36.

When His brethren asked, How could this be? - He explained that if any of these things were done to any of His brethren, it was the same as doing it to Him. How sobering and how wonderful that we are permitted to show our love to Him so tangibly. It is in this way that we can freely give, filling the needs of our brethren and sisters, even as our needs are filled by our Heavenly Father. It must be done in the same spirit as we are given - spontaneously, generously, and in love. We need perception in seeing needs, and a willingness to fill them. To do so will take of our time, which may already be full; it may take extra effort; it may mean putting aside something we would prefer or even need to do. But if there is an awareness of how much is done for us, there will be a readiness, a desire - indeed an urgency to give of ourselves in this way. Indeed if done for our brethren and sisters in love and gratitude, we may not even have an awareness, as we have seen in those whom Jesus blessed:

“... Lord, when saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink ...?”
Matthew 25:37-39.

Let us clearly examine our spirits Brethren and Sisters, for we have been given so much. Do we give willingly of ourselves - whether in the effort's to keep close and communicate (without which we cannot know needs), in our readiness to lay aside hoped-for respites or diversions, putting away individual needs for another's hunger or thirst, or loneliness, or stumbling? Could it be that Jesus is pleased and rejoicing with what He sees? How we hope this is true.

Going on - here is what Jesus gave in additional instruction to those whom he sent forth:

“Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, Nor scrip (a bag for food) for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat.”
Matthew 10:9-10.

On the surface, this may seem lacking in care, impractical; but we remember these men were sent forth by Jesus in the work of the gospel, and as He reminded them, “the workman is worthy of his meat.” God would provide for their needs. It is easy to over-worry, to over-care about temporal needs; but if the work is uppermost in our minds, will not God provide? This was Jesus' counsel, and it is a help for us, as it was for those early brethren who were such examples.

God's provision for Israel in the wilderness also gives us further reassurance along these lines:

“... I have led you forty years in the wilderness: your clothes are not waxen old upon you, and thy shoe is not waxen old upon your foot ... that ye might know that I am the Lord your God.”

Deuteronomy 29:5-6.

Israel must have marvelled as years went by, and their clothing and shoes endured the difficult terrain and atmosphere of the wilderness - as every need was met. But in time, the wonder may have grown dim as they became accustomed to God's care. A warning to us to be on guard, lest we take for granted that which “freely we have received” and become slothful as to whether we “freely give.”

As our brethren, the apostles, were sent forth, how they would rejoice at the privilege, determining to be faithful witnesses, to uphold the honor of Him who had sent them. They came from diverse backgrounds, possessed different personalities, their natural thinking would be individualistic. As they went out, they would resolve to put differences away, to blend together. They would be inspired by Jesus example, and His words knowing and rejoicing that their names were written even now in heaven, and buoyed up by the hope of being eternally written there among His people.

Cannot the experiences, the spirits of our brethren of old help us to go forth to put our lives in the hand of the One who sends us, to freely give, having freely received? One of these brethren - John - was later granted the vision of the holy city, new Jerusalem, the Lamb's wife:

“... The wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.” Revelation 21:14.

How inspiring to John, what an uplift and reward after so many years of being sent forth - years of great suffering. We're privileged to share that same hope, Brethren and Sisters, if we can go forth in faith and selflessness - keeping first in our minds to freely give of that which we have so freely received.

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