

“4G Network”

Is 40:28-31; 1 Cor. 9:16-18, 22-23; Mk 1:29, 35-39

As I read over today’s passages, there was a common theme in both what our Lord Jesus and the Apostle Paul had to say. They both spoke of their **calling** to **communicate** God’s truths to others. They are both quite clear as to their conviction of the **importance**, and **privilege**, of **proclaiming** the **Gospel**. Both Jesus and Paul consider it their responsibility by **“God’s Grace to Give the Gospel”** to the people.

As I considered their perspective of the **obligation** they had to proclaim the Good News... and how we TOO are to consider it **“God’s Grace to Give the Gospel”**... the alliteration of that statement jumped out at me. Those ‘4 G’s.’ Which reminded me of a popular topic for current cellphone service providers: A ‘4G Network.’ How many of you are familiar with this phrase? OK, so I am certainly NOT very tech savvy, for phones or computers. In my VERY limited understanding, the term ‘4 G’ relates to ‘4th Generation’, as it refers to advancements in cellular network technology. Supposedly 4G is one of the latest developments that is to enhance our ability to **communicate**, and more effectively **gain access** to the internet. It is my understanding that there is some debate as to whether or not those who claim to have such advancements are really being **truthful** or not... that you’re not really **getting** all that they say that they’re **giving** you when you **join** with their company.

But I’m not here to serve as a ‘consumer watchdog!’ What I DO want us to **‘watch’** is what our Lord Jesus, and his servant Paul, are **communicating** to US about the **truth** of what it really MEANS to be a faithful follower of God. Of the **obligation** that we have to help others **gain access** ... NOT to the ‘world-wide web,’ but much more importantly, to the MUCH greater Kingdom of God. That we too have been shown **“God’s Grace to Give the Gospel”**... and are therefore, members of **THE “4G Network.”**

Paul spoke quite clearly that his calling to share the Good News of Jesus Christ was NOT optional: that rather than his faith being something to brag about, to boast of, it was an **‘obligation** laid on him.’ (In the NIV, ***“I am compelled to preach.”***) He would go on to say that ***“I am entrusted with a commission.”*** And just WHERE did this ‘compelling commission’ come from? In another one of his letters, Paul put it this way: ***“God ... set me apart before I was born and called me through***

his grace, (and) was pleased¹⁶ to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him..." (Galatians 1:15-16)

No matter how Paul had misguidedly persecuted those earliest followers of Jesus... not matter how he had denied the divinity of this heretical, no-good Nazarene... he came to understand that God had yet **set him apart** for a **holy purpose** from the very **beginning** of his **life**. That because God had graciously called him, and given him the honor and pleasure of seeing Jesus like few others ever did, it was his **obligation**, his **'compelling commission,'** to in turn share with others how God in Christ had blessed his life. And that failing that 'obligation'... neglecting that 'commission'... had its consequences. In his words, **"Woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel!"**

And in many ways, we are no different than Paul! We too have **failed our Lord** in **denying his presence** in our everyday lives. We too have **disappointed God** in the way we have treated his children. AND YET, you and I have also been called by this all-powerful, yet all-loving God for a sacred mission. BELIEVE IT OR NOT, you TOO have been **set apart** for a **holy purpose** from the very beginning of your life. And that is to 'sing the praises of the One who GAVE you life.' To share with others the blessing of being afforded the honor and pleasure of seeing Jesus at work in your life. Being mindful of the consequences of our failure to do so: **"Woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel!"**

But rather than dwell on the price we pay for 'non-compliance' with the Great Commission of Christ (to go and preach the Gospel), let us remember what Paul said about his **"reward"** for satisfying his 'obligation': to **"make the gospel free of charge."**(1 Cor. 9:18)

Now, when I read this, it hit pretty close to home. Is this saying that I should offer to 'make the gospel free of charge?' I'm sure that our Operations Comm. would be pretty happy about that! (Now my wife and I...? Not so much...) This would be the point where I remind us NOT to take things out of context... ☺ For in v. 14 just before this it says that **"the Lord commanded that those who proclaim the gospel should get their living by the gospel."** (1 Cor 9:14) ... Along with Jesus' words in Luke that **"A laborer deserves his wage."** (Lk. 10:7) WHEW!

Rather than speaking strictly to pastors, I think that Paul is talking to **"the priesthood of ALL believers."** That in a culture where everything has its price... like, say, a 30-sec. Super Bowl commercial for \$5.1MILLION!... God's love and protection has NO price tag! **Eternal life ... earthly peace...** cannot be bought or earned. **"We are saved by grace, through faith. Not of works, lest**

anyone should boast." (Eph. 2:8-9) (Remember Paul's words earlier about 'boasting?') In a society where the prevalent attitude is 'what have you done for me lately'... where relationships are so 'conditional' and 'performance-based'... we need to bear witness to, in word and deed, the Unconditional love of Christ. A love we are to show to EVERYONE. UN-Conditionally! No matter their age, gender, color, socio-economic status, political party. ☺ Jesus crosses every barrier. Yes, even that 'barrier' of an aisle in our Congress. (and State legislature, for that matter...) As Paul also strived to do. **"I have become all things to all people, so that I might by all means save some."** (1 Cor. 9:22) Like Paul, we must consider it **"God's Grace to Give the Gospel."** Free of charge...

Which brings us to Christ's example in Mark's Gospel. The One who paid the ultimate price so that God's Grace might remain 'free of charge.' GRACE. **'God's Riches At Christ's Expense.'** Last week, when we left our Lord, he was in the synagogue... the church... where he taught from the Scriptures, and cleansed a worshipper from an unclean, evil spirit. Bearing witness to God's truth both in **word** and **deed**. This passage begins with Jesus and His disciples *leaving* the synagogue. The next morning, Jesus goes out early for a time of prayer in preparation for His day. (Hmmm... not a bad idea, eh?) We are then told that the disciples **"hunted for him"**... and that **"when they found him, they said to him, 'Everyone is searching for you.'** (Mark 1:36-37)

Note the use of the word 'hunted.' A word that is, in the Greek, associated with a *hostile* intent. Link that with the statement, 'everyone is searching for you,' we might get the impression that the disciples are a little outdone with Jesus. 'What are you doing out here, Lord?! Don't you *know* that everyone back in town is waiting for you? Your peeps want to see you! C'mon, let's go back there and take care of those folks!'

And what does Jesus tell them? **"Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do."**(Mark 1:38) 'My friends, I know that YOU have in mind what needs to be done, but we must continue on in what MY purpose is: to reach as many people possible with the Good News of salvation. Good News that comes both in **word** and **deed**.'

Our passage ends with Jesus and his disciples going out into the surrounding area, **"proclaiming the message... and casting out demons."** (Mk. 1:39) Bearing a tangible witness to God 'in **word** and **deed**.' **Faith in action.** Jesus didn't just TELL His followers what to do. He SHOWED them. As much as Paul spoke of an obligation to proclaim the Gospel, Jesus even moreso

communicates to us the ‘compelling commission’ we are to have. Living out ‘**God’s Grace to Give the Gospel**’... for we too are a very important part of that ‘4G Network’...

Now you may be wondering, ‘OK, enough with this punny use of the whole ‘4G’ thing! Why is he so pre-occupied with this expression?’ Well, aside from my ‘annoying’ habit of alliteration, when the idea of using the term ‘4G’ popped into my head, it was a memorable conversation with our son Chandler that helped ‘cement’ it there. During our most recent trip to BR, He was trying to convince us as to why we needed to change cell service providers. That even though the one we all share as a **family plan** *claims* to have this 4G level of **advanced communication**, the practical matter is that it often **fails to perform as advertised**. And in some very ‘colorful’ ways he spoke to how unhappy he was with its performance, & his firm conviction of what we *should* be doing instead.

In a much more important way, both Paul and Jesus speak to our need to more effectively **communicate**. That too often we **fail to perform** as God would have us to do. Others may come to us, as the disciples did with Jesus, with their **own opinions** of what we SHOULD do, but the voice that we MUST hear above all >>others is God’s. *Although* those disciples did get it partly right: **“Everyone is searching.”** Searching for something. (NO, not just for the best cell service!) Something of a much more LASTING ‘signal’. Maybe like those Greeks at Mars Hill that Joey reminded us of earlier. Searching for an ‘**unknown God.**’ It is up to US to help them... by our **words** and our **actions**...find the God WE have come to **know**. Jesus Christ. The One who shows us like no other **“God’s Grace to Give the Gospel”**...

CHARGE

Earlier we heard Paul’s statement to the Galatians concerning his calling to share the Good News of the Gospel. I would invite you to repeat his words with me, as our own personal pledge: **“God ... set me apart before I was born and called me through his grace, (and) was pleased¹⁶ to reveal his Son to me, so that I might proclaim him...”** (Galatians 1:15-16) You and I have also been, by God’s grace, called to proclaim Jesus to others... by our words and our actions. The good thing is, we do NOT do it alone. For as we go out through that door, and into the world, We know that the “Spirit of the living God is above us...”