

LIFT UP YOUR EYES

“Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.” (John 4:35)

Jesus never makes mistakes and certainly He did not make a mistake when He selected twelve unlettered men to be His Apostles. The Scriptures inform us that they were chosen after an entire night of prayer (Lk. 6:12 - 16). Nothing could have been more deliberate. These men without money, fame, or formal education were selected by God to be the foundation of His coming kingdom. We should not be surprised, however, that they needed divine guidance to escape the narrow confines of their limited perspective. Jesus was going to take these local men and give them a world vision. He would take this group of men who had never been a hundred miles away from home and send them into all the world. Yes! He promised to be with them, but it is also obvious that they needed to ‘lift up their eyes’ and take a new and different look at the world.

FIRST, THEY NEEDED TO LOOK BEYOND THEMSELVES

Children at birth are totally self centered. A new born infant is the very personification of selfishness. Little babies do not think about the needs of mother, father, or anyone else. They think only about themselves. With maturity little children grow up and learn to think of others. The apostles also needed to grow up and learn to think of others. Notice how many times they initially focused on themselves. Here are a few examples:

- Early in his ministry Peter was concerned about his own reward and reminded Jesus: “Lo, we have left all, and have followed thee.” (Mark 10:28)
- In a similar frame of mind James and John came to Jesus asking Him to do whatever they wanted. (Mark 10:35)
- In those early days the disciples were not planning to evangelize the world, they were disputed among themselves about who was the greatest. (Mark 9:34)
- In the same chapter we read that the disciples failed to cast out a demon and then became jealous of someone who did. (Mark 9:18, 38)
- The mother of Zebedee's children came to Jesus wanting one of her sons to sit on His right hand and the other on the left (Matt 20:20-21).
- This immaturity was a serious problem. Nobody can be a disciple of Jesus without self denial. Not only must we deny ourselves, we must also take up a cross in order to follow Jesus (Matt. 16:24).
- Christ further warned everyone to count the cost before becoming His disciple. Before building a tower we should make sure that we can finish the job. Before following Christ we need to do the same.
- Jesus actually discouraged those from following Him who were not committed (Lk. 9:57 - 62). God is a jealous God and insists that we love Him more than family, friends, or even our own life (Lk. 14:26).
- Scriptures warn that a man should not think more highly of himself than he ought to think (Rom. 12:3). At some point we need to discover that “it’s not about us”.
- Obviously, the disciples needed to lift up their eyes and gain a new perspective. They needed to be more interested in the needs of others than in themselves.
- So do we!

THEY ALSO NEEDED TO THINK BEYOND THEIR NATION

When God chose the children of Israel they were the “fewest of all people” (Deut. 7:7). The Law built a hedge around them and forbade them contact with their pagan neighbors. Since the apostles of Jesus were part of this tiny nation He had to give them a new perspective. He offered them new wine and gave them new thoughts. He had to train them to think differently from others in their nation. Their journey through Samaria provided an excellent opportunity for such a lesson.

You know the story! Jesus sent His disciples into town to buy food, and sat down to rest at Jacob’s well. Then He asked a woman of Samaria for something to drink. This is absolutely remarkable, for the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans (John 4:9). The Samaritans were corrupt both racially and religiously and this woman epitomized the problems of her people. Not only was she involved in false worship, she had been married five times and was living with a man to whom she was not married. The fact that this sinful foreigner came to believe, and was accepted by Jesus, must have sent theological shock waves through the minds of the apostles.

The historical roots of the Samaritans go back to Jeroboam the son of Nebat. After the kingdom was divided this rebel feared for his followers to worship in Jerusalem, and so deliberately concocted a counterfeit religion to keep them from doing so. He made two calves of gold and put one in Bethel and the other in Dan. He also made priests of men who were not the sons of Levi and ordained a feast similar to the one that God had commanded (1 Ki. 12:25 - 33). There is no question that they were wrong. This false religion was not only condemned by Old Testament prophets but also by Jesus. Jesus said to the Samaritan woman: “Ye worship ye know not what: we know what we worship: for salvation is of the Jews” (John 4:22).

J. W. McGarvey in *The Fourfold Gospel* lists the following Samaritan traditions:

- Paradise was on the summit of Mt. Gerizim.
- Adam was formed of the dust of Mt. Gerizim.
- Adam built his first altar on Mt. Gerizim.
- Seth reared his first altar on Mt. Gerizim.
- Mt. Gerizim was the Ararat on which the ark rested.
- Noah built his altar on Mt. Gerizim.
- Abraham attempted to offer Isaac on Mt. Gerizim.
- Abraham met Melchizedek on Mt. Gerizim.
- Here was the real Bethel where Jacob received his vision.

Based on this outrageous ignorance, the Samaritans built a temple on Mt. Gerizim and worshiped there. As we have reminded you before, Jesus said they were wrong. Remarkably, however, even the wayward and ignorant Samaritans were not beyond the reach of Christ’s redeeming love. Jesus said: **“Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest? behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes, and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest.” (John 4:35).** It was not necessary to get to Galilee in order to preach. It was not necessary to have a Jewish audience in order to preach. Jesus wanted to preach to the Samaritans. This must have been a momentous experience for the apostles. The Scriptures state explicitly that many of the Samaritans from that town believed in Him (John 4:39). At their invitation Jesus stayed two days with them and many more Samaritans came to be believers (John 4:41).

Try and see this event through the eyes of the apostles. The Jews in Jerusalem were trying to kill Jesus so He journeyed through Samaria, probably to avoid an ambush. Instead of merely hurrying through this corrupt community, Jesus stayed there to preach. The harvest was not four months in the future, it was “now”. The disciples were receiving an important new perspective about evangelism.

WHAT ABOUT US?

While the following thoughts are directed at those who are associated with the Restoration Movement, perhaps, they may also have meaning for others as well. The Restoration Movement manifested itself in America about 200 years ago and was at one time the fastest growing movement to ever have its beginning on American soil. These godly pioneers dreamed of restoring primitive Christianity and uniting all the Christians in the sects. Unfortunately, this movement itself became divided. Adding up all the factions the movement numbers just over 3 million. "Loyal" brethren, of course, are defined in different ways by the various groups within the movement. To some "loyalty" is defined by views on mechanical instruments of music, to others it relates to missionary societies, etc. Unfortunately, a great deal of energy is expended within the movement, not to evangelize the world, but to argue among ourselves about who is the greatest. Perhaps, like the apostles of old, we also need to lift up our eyes and look beyond ourselves.

To drive home this point, let us consider evangelism taking place around the world with which "we" in the "Restoration Movement" have had no part. Jim Rutz, in his book *Megashift*, states that every 24 hours there are 175,000 new believers scattered in 238 different nations of the world. He points out that the largest evangelistic campaign in history took place in Lagos, Nigeria in November 2000. It was attended by almost six million people, and 3,400,000 people registered decisions for Christ. One congregation there grew from 8 to 250,000 in only seven years. Hard core members of the Restoration Movement have been trained to believe that we are the Israel of God and are His exclusive representatives on earth. It is therefore difficult for us to believe that God is going to do anything truly significant without involving us. Consequently we have a tendency to discount evangelism that takes place outside the sphere of our influence. Many would prefer to forget that these converts even exist. Therefore we first need to grapple with the question of whether these new believers can be true Christians without knowing about "us"? We also need to determine in our own minds whether God will add them to His Body if we do not approve of their doctrine? It would have been much easier for the apostles if Jesus had never taken them to Samaria. It would also be much easier for us if we didn't have to know about or deal with millions of believers who are different. Can we, however, honor Christ by closing our eyes and pretending that they do not exist?

The greatest number of new believers, however, is not in Africa, but in China. Rutz states that the Chinese Church has seven main strands, each led by a man who has done hard time in prison because of his faith (typically about 20 years). The numerical strength of the Chinese Church is estimated to be between 115 million and 120 million. Again, we will probably feel as uncomfortable with these Chinese brethren as the apostles did in Samaria. Since they have never heard of "us", or been taught by "us" they will probably not think the way we think about such important issues as mechanical instruments of music or missionary societies. In fact, as you know, we Americans don't even think alike on such important issues. That's why we are divided! It is doubtful therefore that we will want to associate with Chinese brethren who are "doctrinally inferior" any more than we want to associate with our American brethren whom we consider to be "doctrinally inferior". Our discomfort will probably be increased by learning that many in China come to believe in Christ through the witness of women. Rutz cites an example, from Open Doors' Pierre Tschanz, that two sisters in central China, Lily and Zhang, started 29 churches. The smallest had 300 who came for prayer and the largest had no more than 5,000. He said these sisters seemed embarrassed that their efforts for Christ had been so meager.

IT ALL TAKES TIME

It would be nice if one lesson in Samaria was all that it took to bring the apostles up to speed. Unfortunately, such is not the case. Chronologically, this event took place in the first year of our Lord's public ministry. More than two years later, on the night before Christ was crucified,

the apostles were still arguing about which of them was the greatest. Even more incredible is the fact that years after the church was started the apostles were still preaching only to the Jews (Acts 11:19). Please consider:

- Jesus commanded His apostles to make disciples of “all nations” (Matt. 28:18 - 20). The word translated “nations” is “ethnos” which is translated as “gentile” 93 times in the KJV of the Bible. Even though Christ specifically commanded them to preach to the gentiles not one of the apostles did so for years.
- Peter on Pentecost said that the promise was not just for those Jews present, but also for their children and all that were far off (Acts 2:39). Apparently, at that time, he did not understand or put into practice what he was preaching.
- When Steven was stoned those who were scattered by this persecution continued to preach to none but Jews only (Acts 11:19).
- It took a series of miracles and visions before Peter was willing to preach to a gentile centurion named Cornelius (Acts 10:1 - 48).
- Even after Peter preached to Cornelius he wanted Paul to preach to the heathen while he continued to focus his ministry on those who had been circumcised (Gal. 2:7).

THE INFLUENCE OF PAUL

Our Sovereign God remembers our frame and knows that we are dust. He understands us far better than we even understand ourselves. Perhaps this is why He set apart a little baby from his mother’s womb to be an apostle to the gentiles (Gal. 1:15). He knew the original 12 apostles would have trouble grasping a world vision. That little baby, named Saul, was born in Tarsus of Cilicia and educated at the feet of the famed Jewish teacher Gamaliel. Saul was an outstanding student and advanced in his Jewish studies beyond those of his own age (Gal. 1:14). Jesus appeared to him on the Damascus road with a special commission to preach to the gentiles (see Acts 9:15; 22:21; 26:17 - 13). Saul, later known as Paul, was not disobedient to that heavenly vision (Acts 26:19). He labored more abundantly than all of the apostles (1 Cor. 15:10), and seemed able to understand the commission of Christ more accurately than the others.

William Steuart McBirnie, in his book *The Search for the Twelve Apostles*, suggests the possibility that the work of Paul among the gentiles may well have been the catalyst that helped the other apostles to obey Christ. Certainly, he notes, the efforts of Paul would not have been unnoticed or ignored. On page 43 of his book he quotes Eusebius that later in the Apostolic Age the apostles divided the inhabited world into zones, assigning Thomas to the region of the Parthians, John in Asia, Peter in Pontus and Rome, and Andrew in Scythia. Be that as it may, Jesus promised to His Spirit would guide these men into all truth and we know that Jesus keeps His promises (John 16:13).

LIFT UP YOUR EYES!

This is not the time to measure ourselves by ourselves, or compare ourselves among ourselves (2 Cor. 10:12). This is a time to get our heads out of the sand and catch a vision of what God is doing.

Greatness and grandeur are certainly relative expressions, and are totally different in the Kingdom of Christ than in earthly kingdoms. It is easy, when we measure ourselves by ourselves, to take pride in something we ought to be ashamed of.

Consider, for example, the three Cayman Islands that are located about 150 miles south of Cuba. The smallest is called Little Cayman and is about 10 miles long and averages just over a mile wide. Next is Cayman Brac about 12 miles long with an average width of 1 1/4 miles. Finally

we have Grand Cayman. Hold on to your hats, GRAND Cayman it is approximately 22 miles long and averages 4 miles in width. Moreover, Grand Cayman has a “mountain” that rises 60 feet above sea level. If your frame of reference is only on the Cayman Islands you will be proud to be a part of the “Grand” Cayman.

There are many in the Caribbean who have lived and died on small islands. Often they have no interest or knowledge in others outside of their tiny world. Harvey Bacus tells of such a woman who was born on Grand Cayman. When she was over 50 years old she got sick and was taken by plane to a hospital in Jamaica. This was the first time she had ever been off Grand Cayman. Jamaica, is huge by comparison with Grand Cayman. It is 146 miles long and 51 miles wide. Moreover, there are mountains in Jamaica over 7,000 feet high.

Harvey, who was living in Jamaica at the time, met this dear woman at the Kingston Airport. It was at night and she was amazed to see lights “up in the sky”. Harvey explained to her that they were houses, and that they were not “up in the sky”, but were built on mountains. This was almost more than she could comprehend. As we have said before the highest place on Grand Cayman is only 60 feet above sea level. Don’t you see how relative a mountain top experience can be?

The people of Colorado, by comparison, think nothing of being 7,000 feet above sea level. Colorado Springs, for example, is 7,000 feet above sea level and the people there don’t even consider it a mountain. Mountains to them are like Pike’s Peak that is 14,110 feet high and easily visible from their city. Pike’s Peak, as you know, is tiny by comparison with Mt. Everest which is over 29,000 feet high. Even the view from Mt. Everest pales into insignificance when compared with those who have orbited the earth or walked on the moon.

This is not meant to belittle that dear woman who through no fault of her own had never seen a 7,000 foot mountain, it is rather to give a new perspective to our own vision of the world. It is rather to put our own perspective on trial before Christ. Before we brag about being part of a movement that is 3 million strong we need to remember that more people than that confessed Christ in a single week in Lagos, Nigeria. We need to be humbled by the fact that more than 100 million believers in China suffer for their faith at the hands of their Communist Government. We need to face the hard reality that it’s not about us. No matter how hard we work or how many souls we win to Christ we are still unprofitable servants who have only done our duty (Luke 17:10). Someone plants, and someone else waters, but it is God who gives the increase. Unto Him be glory in the church throughout all ages (Eph. 3:21).

Jesus said it best - let’s lift up our eyes!

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