

God's Call Out of the Earth

by John Gifford Bellett

The sermon emphasizes the importance of distinguishing between God's call out of the earth and His assertion of title to the earth, and living a life of separation from the world and service to God.

Scripture: Genesis 12:1

Topics: "Separation From World", "Christian Living"

Description

John Gifford Bellett preaches about the distinction between God's assertion of His title to the earth and His call out of the earth, emphasizing the saints' role in being called out of the world while still living in it. The sermon explores historical examples like the family of Seth, Abraham, and the Church, illustrating how they interacted with the earth without contending for it. Bellett highlights the importance of serving Christ as the rejected One, not seeking to assert His title to the earth, and warns against linking the Church with the world or acting on apostate principles.

Transcript

In the midst of the increased and still growing corruption of the whole scene around us, and of the threatened dissolving of all things, it is much laid upon the mind to consider with simplicity and clearness the character of our calling.

The call of God out of the earth, and God's assertion of title to the earth, are things that greatly differ, and should be morally and practically distinguished by the saints.

The call of God proceeds on the principle that God Himself is outside the earth, and that He is not seeking it, but seeking a people to be His in His place outside and above it. The earth, therefore, by this call, is left just as it was. For it is a stranger to the purpose of God.

This call of God out of the earth was exhibited in the family of Seth, before the flood. Cain's house was in possession of the earth, and Seth does not interfere with them. Not at all. All he and his generation have to do with the earth is to call on the name of the Lord while they are on it (not to engrave, like Cain, their own name there -- (Gen. 4: 17), and then to lay their dead bodies in it.

So was it exhibited afterwards in Abraham. He is called of God. But such call leaves the Canaanites without a rival. He does not contend with the potsherd of the earth. He does not dispute their right as lords of the soil. He desires only to pitch his wandering tent upon the face of it, or to lay his bones in the

bowels of it.

And so the Church or heavenly family of this dispensation. Their call leaves the Gentiles in power. The Church has nothing to say to "the powers that be," but either to obey unreluctantly, or to suffer patiently, according as the demand made by the powers be such or not as involves their subjection to Christ.

This determines at once our duties. We render to the powers ordained of God their dues, without in any wise seeking to disturb them, knowing also that even if they behave themselves unrighteously, we are not constituted their judges.

But the character of our service is likewise determined by this call of God. Service to God is wanting in its true character, if it do not intimate that He is not now re-asserting His title to the earth; or, in other words, our service to Christ must be to Him as the rejected Christ. For He is such an One all the time He remains in the "far country." The cry has followed Him there from the earth, "We will not have this man to reign over us." And is that cry to be answered by the servants who occupy their talents during His absence? (See Luke 19) Surely not. They serve Him in the patient sense of His rejection all the time, and "they are not ashamed of his chain."

In like manner, moreover, this determines what our habits should be. Our habits should tell that the earth is not our place, as our services should tell that it is not our Lord's place.

This affords a holy and serious admonition to our souls.

Our call does not connect us with the earth. Our necessities do so, it is true. We need the fruit of the ground, the toil of the hand, and the skill of the heart, to provide things needful for the body. Our necessities, thus, connect us with the earth, and we may attend to it for the supply of such necessities. But our call does not connect us with it, but rather separates us from it.

To link the Church and the earth is acting at once on apostate principles. To aim at changing the character or condition of Christ in the world, or to serve Him save as the rejected One, is not service rendered in spiritual discernment.

These things we may know well and admit easily. But if we refuse to link the Church with the world, are we daily watching to refuse to link the heart with it, the hopes with it, the calculation of the mind with it? If it be easy to see the Church now on the eve of losing the world, and to see this without regret, is it alike easy to see our interests losing it, our name and distinction losing it? Such an one was Paul. He would not reign as a king yet; but he had learnt how to have and how to want, how to abound and how to suffer need.

In God's dealing by Israel, there was an assertion of title to the earth. Joshua went into "the possession of the Gentiles" and took with him "the ark of the Lord of all the earth," that his sword might make it the possession of the Lord and His people. But Paul went into the possessions of Jews and Gentiles, not to disturb their tenure of anything there, but to take out of them a people unto God, to link souls with the disallowed Stone, and to teach them that their blessings were spiritual and heavenly.

So, according to the Lord's teaching. See the two parables in Luke 19, 20. In settling Israel, the Lord gave them a vineyard, a portion of the earth, and told them to till it for Him, rendering Him dues as the Lord of the soil. In settling the saints of this age, He gave them talents, such gifts and opportunities of service as were suited to the fact of His absence and rejection by the world, having no estate or kingdom here till He should return.,

Practically to forget such distinctions, or to act on the principle that the Church is God's instrument for asserting His claim to the earth, is apostasy from her calling of God.

In His ministry the Lord was judging Satan, but refusing to judge the sinner. And, according to this, at the end of His ministry, He tells Peter to put up the sword, and Pilate, that His servants could not fight.

The way of His saints is to be according to all this. They are to judge morally or spiritually (i.e., defilements within themselves), but not contend about the interests of the world. The apostle condemns them for not doing the one and for doing the other (see 1 Cor. 5, 6), with this difference however -- their duty in the first matter is peremptory (1 Cor. 5), their way in the second is left more and more to their measure of grace (1 Cor. 6). And according to this also the apostle tells us that our weapons are not carnal but spiritual, our warfare not with flesh and blood, but with spiritual wickedness (2 Cor. 10, Eph. 6). We are really or spiritually defeated, when we fight carnally: for the devil has raised in us that temper which has sent us forth to the carnal fight.

GOD'S CLAIM OF THE EARTH.

GOD'S assertion of His title to the earth is one thing, as I have observed in the preceding paper, and God's call out of the earth is another. Both have been again and again exhibited in the progress of the divine dispensations.

Our history, I may say, began with the first of these. Adam in the garden was required to own the rights and sovereignty of God, by constant obedience, touching the Tree of Knowledge.

Again, this was exhibited, in Noah. In him the Lord was re-asserting His own rights and inheritance in the earth, and taking up the earth again, as He had done at creation, as the scene of blessing.

And, again, in further process of time, this was exhibited in Israel. The Lord was then becoming the sovereign of the soil again, and in His elect nation witnessing His claims to the earth.

And the same will He do by Israel the second time, when, in millennial days, as the prophet speaks, the king of Israel will be the God of the whole earth. "Then the earth recommences anew, under the authority of God delegated to Jesus," as another has strikingly expressed it.

In one sense, of course, God has ever asserted His sovereignty in the earth, because it is always true: "The powers that be are ordained of God." But at times, His assertion of His place and title in the earth forms the character of the dispensation, and at other times His call of His people out of it forms the character of the dispensation. This is what I mean: -- the sword went to the Gentiles, when Israel lost themselves; but the glory did not go with it.

Now we may observe, that whenever God arises, as in a form of dispensational action. to assert title to the earth, He begins by judging the scene. This, of course; because the place of His purposed power and glory having corrupted itself, He must take the offence away and purify it. His presence could not brook iniquity. His call is not accompanied by such judgments; because all the connection which it takes with the earth, or the scene here, is to draw the elect out of it.

Noah's lordship of the earth was accordingly preceded by the flood, which carried away the world of the ungodly. -- Israel's inheritance of Canaan was attended by the judgment of the Amorites, and the sword of Joshua executed the commission of the Lord. The coming kingdom of the Lord and His Christ will be

prepared, as all Scripture verifies, with a like clearing out of all that offends.

Beside, however, this prefatory or cleansing judgment, there has a law been delivered, suited to this assertion of God's title to the earth and to the maintenance of His name and right in it.

When Noah was set up, like Adam, as the representative of God's claim and power on the earth a law was given to him, as to Adam, for his guidance in his place: more complex, necessarily; because the condition of things had become so. Sin had entered, and sin had to be restrained or punished; as redemption, which had become God's principle, or the principle of divine religion among men, had to be testified and celebrated. With Adam all that was needful was the one command, just sufficient to maintain the witness of God's supremacy in the midst of man's lordship and enjoyment of the garden and the creatures, that all might be in right moral order. But in Noah, when God's rights in the earth come again to be asserted, sin having entered, other things were required, and laws for the government of such a place, as well as ordinances for the maintenance of religion in so changed a scene, have to be instituted. These we accordingly find in Genesis 9: 1-6.

The pursuit of this line of thought I feel has its interest for us.

In the progress of the ages, I will, therefore, go on to observe, when Israel becomes God's witness on the earth, as I have already noticed, an economy of laws, statutes, and ordinances, both civil and religious, is established. A nation had now been taken up. The legislator had to contemplate manifold relationships, and as manifold contingencies, with all the variety of private and public rights and injuries, together with the maintenance of divine religion and worship. It had been a much simpler thing, as Noah came forth from the ark with his family, and a much simpler thing still, when Adam was set alone in Eden, than now it could be, when the host of Israel (say 600,000 strong) crossed the Jordan into their inheritance.

Accordingly, the statute-book is longer. Fitting it is that we should find it so. And so we do. Exodus 21, 22, 23, gives us the statutes which, at the beginning, and before they entered on their possession, had been decreed for the ruling of this elect and redeemed nation, in their civil relationships, and in their national religion. Ordinances of divine service pointing to "good things to come" accompany this economy or covenant. But these chapters are the statutebook, the book that was sprinkled with blood in the day of the covenant between the God of Israel and His people. (Exodus 24: 7.)

Between this day and the day of Deuteronomy, Moses had had all the experience of the wilderness. We may well expect him to give a parting word after such experience. He does so. But the book of Deuteronomy is not to be read, as a second or enlarged edition of the statute-book. It may rehearse, in its own style, many of the earlier provisions, and give new enactments and ordinances. But still it is not, merely or properly, an enlarged edition of the former book. It is rather a discourse by the legislator, in the assembly and audience of the nation, as well as upon their past history, such as their travels, fortunes, and conduct, as upon their laws, ordinances, and hopes -- a word full of affectionate appeal, of earnest encouragement, and of holy, serious admonition; the father rather than the law-giver being heard to speak, soliciting as well as directing the people in the way of obedience and blessing.

Thus was it as with Moses and Israel.

Between the times of Moses and Solomon, many changes had passed. As to my present purpose, I may say that the principal of them was this that the nation had become a kingdom. The promised land had been gained -- reached and conquered. The Lord had been found faithful to all His covenant

engagements, and Israel rebellious again and again. Terrible evils had been committed, and sorrowful discipline endured under the judges and King Saul. But in season the Lord arose, in the riches of His grace and the might of His Spirit, and in David righteousness prevails, and in Solomon peace follows it.

The book of the law goes up to the throne with Solomon, according to the ordinance (Deut. 17); and necessarily so. For the throne in Israel being for the Lord, the law of the Lord must be owned there. The sceptre rules in His name, and must, therefore, rule according to His mind. Solomon, therefore, is not a lawgiver. He is not a second Moses, though he is "king in Jeshurun." In the throne God is greater than he. God's law was to go up to the throne with him, that he, even there, might be God's liege subject. And the law with him on the throne was like the command to Adam in the garden. Each of these ordinances spake this word or uttered this voice, that there was One higher than the highest; and any attempt to give the law a lower place than the throne itself would have been, in its way, a taking again of that tree, of the which the Lord God had said, "Thou shalt not eat."

Solomon, therefore, was properly no law-giver like Moses in the book of Exodus. Neither does he discourse on the laws, enlarging them or their sanctions, like Moses in the book of Deuteronomy. He does not, after such manners, "sit in Moses' seat." But he may, like him, be the father of his people. He is their teacher in the rules of wisdom. He has them before him, that he may discourse to them on the conditions of the earth, where they had their citizenship or conversation. He tells them of human life, its duties, trials, labours, and vicissitudes in its manifold enjoyments and connections. He unfolds to them the springs of human action, the thoughts and tempers of men; and warns against the snares and principles of the world. After such an order as this, is the wisdom which King Solomon delivers to his people who stand before him. The same Spirit, who, in Moses, dictated the, rules of civil life, and gave laws to a nation, with statutes, judgments, and ordinances, through Solomon, can comment on the whole scene around, that they who have their citizenship in the earth may be ordered there in righteousness, equity, and truth. The law of God is with him and over him on the throne, but he comes down from thence into the midst of his people and their ten thousand relationships on the footstool, and there, in the Spirit of God, reads lessons of righteousness and instructions of wisdom touching all that he surveys.*

*The warrantableness and even fitness of the saints acquainting themselves with botany and such things has been often insisted on the authority of Solomon's knowledge of the cedar and the hyssop. But this shows ignorance of the call and purpose of God. Would Paul, I ask, have acquainted himself with the cedar and the hyssop? Surely not. He had his knowledge of heavenly mysteries through that same Spirit which acquainted Solomon with the secrets of the earth; because the Spirit acted in company with the call or dispensation of God. Let saints, if they can with an approving mind, study botany and visit scenery; but do not let them vindicate such ways on the authority of Solomon's acquaintance with nature from the cedar and the hyssop.

Such I believe to be the book of Proverbs.

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