

## *Come and Worship, Go and Witness*

DAVE DEUEL

What does it mean to follow Jesus? Usually, we picture His leading in snapshots, like an album of unrelated scenes. But the Prophet Isaiah invites us to watch a video, not just glance at random snaps. Our worship and witness should look like an unbroken process in which we come before God in worship, then go out from His awesome presence in witness to His greatness.

Isaiah, caught up to the heavenly court, overheard the Lord ask, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” (Isa. 6:8). Can you imagine how the prophet felt when he heard the cosmic King call for a messenger? But another question may have immediately crossed his mind: How should he prepare?

Why does God send or commission people from His heavenly court, and how does He prepare them? Rather than speak or act directly in this world, God often dispatches agents to accomplish His missions from heaven. In fact, God sends various kinds of messengers—angels, priests, prophets, kings, apostles, evangelists, and many others—to accomplish many different tasks.

In the Old Testament, God sent His personal representative, the angel of the Lord, to deliver His messages and to accomplish His missions. God’s final and perfect messenger is His own Son, Jesus. But where does God’s mission begin?

God’s mission, in which His agents take part, began with the creation in the Garden of Eden. In administrative council, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit deliberated: “Let us make man in our image” (Gen. 1:26). To say that man is in God’s

image implies that God authorizes man to continue God’s mission. In so doing, man represents God in close relationship with Him. God cares for His creation by giving dominion over it to His appointed agents, man and woman. Yet He remains the Great King.

One day the messengers disobeyed the King. In response, the Trinity conferred once again: “Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil” (Gen. 3:22). Adam and Eve’s disobedience resulted in God sending them forth from the garden to experience suffering and death. The image of God and the mission continued, although significantly changed.

In time, wickedness increased so much that God had to destroy the creation with water. After the Flood, mankind refused to obey the recommission to “be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth” (Gen. 9:1). They gathered themselves into a city. Once again the Members of the Trinity took counsel: “Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language” (11:7). The messengers were muted.

Fast-forward the video to Isaiah’s commission. When God said, in Triune relationship, “Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?” (Isa. 6:8), the Trinity conferred again, as in Genesis, concerning the mission that must continue.

How does God prepare His servant for the mission? Worship must precede witness. The worship message of the seraphim, “Holy, holy, holy,” signaled Isaiah’s need for preparation. God’s messenger had unclean lips, and he had to

*(Continued on page 186)*

---

## EDITORIALS

---

(Continued from page 3)

---

go to people who had unclean lips.

Jesus sends us. Our Lord once said to His disciples, “As my father hath sent me, even so send I you” (John 20:21). On another occasion, He rephrased the commission when He said, “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations” (Matt. 28:19). Although Jesus commissioned the disciples and apostles, He sends us too.

But the mission does not stop there. Jesus added, “Go . . . baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matt. 28:19-20). Accepting the gospel mission is more than telling God’s good news. It includes baptizing—publicly identifying with the risen Christ, His church, and His instruction, including what Paul called “all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27).

The mission is a community effort. No single individual or group can do all that is essential to completing God’s mission plan. It is a task for the new community

of believers, the church. And it extends to “the end of the world” (Matt. 28:20).

In his commission challenge to God’s agents in the church of Ephesus, Paul told believers to suit up for the mission with armor and a weapon, “the word of God” (Eph. 6:10-17). The apostle meant that, like Isaiah, we must go prepared to face resistance and opposition. People are not the enemy, for it is they to whom we go. But Satan and the forces of evil engage us in combat, trying to prevent us from completing our mission. Our tendency to sin also trips us up on our path.

How are you doing in God’s mission? God sends us as His agents to our community to deliver His Word and accomplish His work. Our worship and witness for God, our service, should look like a smooth and unbroken process—coming before God in worship, then going out from His awesome presence prepared to witness to His greatness.

When capturing the reason for the Christian’s special mission, Peter wrote, “That ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (I Pet. 2:9).

## *Listen to the Voice of God*

DAVE DEUEL

Some Christian leaders argue that Scripture reading in church services is dry and unprofitable. How important is the public reading of Scripture to Christ’s followers? At the request of God’s people, Ezra read the Bible publicly. In response, 42,000 people bowed low in heartfelt worship, shouting, “Amen, Amen” (Neh. 8:6). This account reminds us that through the public and private reading of the Bible, people become believers, grow spiritually, and worship.

Hearing Scripture as the voice of God means that God is our Teacher, His Word is our instruction, and reading is our way of listening. This study looks at each of these propositions.

1. What does it mean that God is our Teacher? Pastors preach sermons, and teachers present lessons of all sorts, but God does the instructing (Ps. 51:6-17; Matt. 23:8; I Thess. 4:9). This means that preachers and teachers are most faithful to their task when they

simply make clear what Scripture says, for it is the voice of God.

2. In what ways is Scripture our instruction? The Word of God is the only message that leads to faith and growth. A sermon is only biblical to the extent that it helps our understanding of Scripture. No wonder many church services conclude the Scripture reading by saying, “This is the Word of the Lord”! In so doing, they distinguish the sermon from the reading.

Throughout history, many churches have had two pulpits, one higher than the other. The lower pulpit was sometimes just a desk behind which the preacher sat; the higher pulpit was where the reader of Scripture stood. It was higher primarily because the Word of God itself is the message.

3. How is reading our way of listening and responding to God? Following the scriptural practice Moses established, Ezra read Scripture and then explained it where necessary (Ezra 7:10; Neh. 8:1-13). But how did this practice begin?

Ezra drew on the practice of reading Scripture that Moses had established. In Deuteronomy, Moses addressed a problem. The people would not listen to the voice of God. Through Moses, God responded by prescribing an instructional pattern, a recurring thematic argument rooted in sequential activities. Occurring regularly throughout the book in clusters, the steps, in order, are assemble to God, read, hear, learn, fear, worship, obey, and teach. Each of these activities requires a brief overview.

*Assemble to God.* When God’s people gather to hear the Word of God, they demonstrate spiritual commitment—a desire to hear the voice of God and to worship Him only. In fact, God commanded Moses to gather the people to Himself: “Gather . . . the people together” (Deut. 4:10; 31:11).

*Read.* Reading Scripture, as Moses and Ezra did, includes interpreting it. In

fact, no sooner had God given the law than Moses read it to Israel, for they were sinning in ignorance and suffering for it. The people responded, “All that the Lord hath said will we do, and be obedient” (Exod. 24:7). We learn from Nehemiah 8:8 that reading Scripture in public requires explanation of what is unclear. Today we call this Bible exposition.

*Hear.* Hearing is not only opening the ear gate but also desiring to receive God’s message. Hearing begins in response to the voice of God. The Holy Spirit then takes the sacred text and illuminates our understanding so that we can comprehend it and apply it to our lives (1 Cor. 2:12).

*Learn.* Learning that leads to growth is a spiritual process. The Deuteronomy pattern admonishes us to learn to fear God. It is in learning about God’s character and works—for example, the accounts of His mighty acts—that we learn to fear God. Although Bible exposition aids understanding, the content of learning is Scripture read aloud in public.

*Fear.* The theme of fearing God reoccurs throughout Deuteronomy. Although the word “fear” in Scripture has a range of meanings, two give a crucial distinction in meaning. As an illustration, Jonah claimed to fear God but disobeyed by running from God’s mission to Nineveh. The Canaanite sailors truly feared God, for they prayed, sacrificed, and made vows to Him—as Jonah should have done (Jonah 1). The sailors obeyed.

*Worship.* Although the theme of worship is prominent in Deuteronomy, the actual term occurs only five times. Three out of the five occurrences refer to avoiding false gods. One crucial aspect of worship is taking what God says seriously. Although worship has a corporate expression, individuals should live in continuous worship through all circumstances of life. Worship occurs in response to reading God’s Word.

*Obey.* To obey is to do the will of another. In Deuteronomy the meaning is very specific: to submit to God's will as expressed in His commands is to obey His voice. This takes us to the heart of the matter. Hearers of the Word must also be doers of the Word, to use James's biblical logic (Jas. 1:22-24).

*Teach.* Teaching others comes at the end of this spiritual growth process as a new beginning. This reminds us that

God prepares the teacher and that each generation of teachers entrusts the heavenly treasure to the next (II Tim. 2:2).

God is our Teacher, Scripture is our instruction, and reading is our method. No wonder Paul said to Timothy, a young pastor, "Give attendance to reading" (I Tim. 4:13), meaning "Devote yourself to the reading." Are you devoted to hearing God's voice?

## TOPICS FOR NEXT QUARTER

September 1

### **God Created All**

Psalm 104:5-9, 24-30

September 8

### **Created Male and Female**

Genesis 2:18-25

September 15

### **Knowledge of Good and Evil**

Genesis 3:8-17, 22-23

September 22

### **An Everlasting Covenant**

Genesis 9:8-17

September 29

### **Scattering the Nations**

Genesis 11:1-9

October 6

### **A Promise of Land**

Genesis 15:7-21

October 13

### **A Promise to Sarah**

Genesis 17:15-17; 18:9-15; 21:1-7

October 20

### **A Blessing for Ishmael and Isaac**

Genesis 21:12-14, 17-21;  
26:2-5, 12-13

October 27

### **The Blessing Conveyed to Jacob**

Genesis 28:10-22

November 3

### **Preparation for Deliverance**

Exodus 3:7-17

November 10

### **Beginning of Passover**

Exodus 12:1-14

November 17

### **Beginning of Freedom**

Exodus 14:21-30

November 24

### **Beginning of the Tabernacle**

Exodus 40:16-21, 29-30, 34, 38