

The Untimeliness of God

Joseph Herrin (6-7-2000)

It has been prophesied by some in recent days that the Father is preparing a group of His children to be able to walk in tremendous callings in the days ahead. This group will be a type of firstfruits. It was common in the land of Judah and Israel for the people to plant an early crop of barley, only to plow it under when it began to reach maturity. This sacrificial crop enriched the soil, preparing the way for an even greater wheat harvest which would follow.

I believe the group God is raising up at this time corresponds to the barley crop. God will use them to prepare the way for a tremendous wheat harvest which will follow. As ministers of God, they will devote themselves to the Lord's purposes in them of ushering in the great last days harvest and in bringing forth beauty in the Bride of Christ.

Part of the preparation of this group is removing all religious thought and reasoning from them. These false thoughts born of man's reasoning and fleshly desire will be replaced with the true knowledge of God. One particular tenet of religious thought that the Father is revealing in my life, and I believe in the lives of many others, is that God's will can be recognized by timeliness and sufficiency of His provision. We are taught that if God's provision for us comes through for us in a timely manner, then it is proof of His will. If His provision tarries past some immovable physical deadline, it is proof that He would have the need met in some other fashion.

My particular crucible of testing involves trusting God for financial resources. Nearly eight months ago God told me to leave my job as a PC Coordinator with a local hospital. He indicated at the time that He would take me into a new realm of ministry involving writing, speaking and whatever else He would bring to me. God confirmed this direction in my life many times over. It was a tremendous step of faith for me, so I asked Him to confirm His will many times. This He very graciously did. After a point, though, He quit reassuring me and left me to exercise faith in the path He had set before me.

During this time I have had no regular financial support. I am not a paid staff member of any church. Being 39 years old, I am much too young to collect retirement. To add to the trial, I am married and have two children, ages 10 and 12, who rely upon my provision for them. My wife does not work outside the home, rather she finds her employment in home schooling our children and fulfilling the other responsibilities of being a wife and a mother.

As I said, it was eight months ago that I left my job at the Father's leading, and during this time we have not lacked for food, clothing, transportation, shelter,

or any other basic need of life. However, God's provision has not always been timely. On occasion my home mortgage and other bills have been in serious arrears before God's provision was manifested. At one point my mortgage payment was 3 months delinquent and I received a notice of pending foreclosure proceedings before God's provision was manifested.

The testimony of nearly one and all, both within the church and without, is that if God had truly led me to walk as I am, His provision would be both timely and amply sufficient. Indeed, many of the churches I have been in have taught that one of the primary ways to discern God's will in the life of the believer is to see if His provision is manifested in a timely and sufficient manner. Is this religious thinking, or does it reflect the true knowledge of God and His dealings with mankind?

It would certainly be nice if this were true. It would mean that those who are walking in obedience to God will never know lack, nor will they ever have to wait an undue amount of time to see God fulfill His word to them. Unfortunately, for those who wish this to be true, the Bible reveals that this is not the case.

One of the clearest examples in scripture is Abraham. God gave him a promise of a son. Abraham waited and waited. He knew at some point that he would pass a line of physical possibility. At some point his body would grow old and no longer be capable of reproduction. Abraham and Sarah waited as long as they could. The deadline was at hand. Sarah, being the dutiful wife, finally suggested that Abraham do something she really wished he would never have to do. Sarah was cutting her own throat. She was suggesting that her husband have a child by another woman. Physically, she could see no other way. Isn't God a timely God? Wouldn't He fulfill His promise to her husband while he was still capable of having children? This must be the only way.

Of course we know the story. Abraham listened to Sarah and had a child by her handmaiden. God then appeared to Abraham again and told him that this child was not the promised one. Whoops! If this wasn't the promised one, where would he arise from. Abraham was now past the point of having children, and so was Sarah.

Romans 4:19

And without becoming weak in faith he contemplated his own body, now as good as dead since he was about a hundred years old, and the deadness of Sarah's womb...

(NAS)

God was very untimely (according to man's expectation) in fulfilling His

promise to Abraham and Sarah. Something must have clicked in Abraham's thinking at this time. He realized he and Sarah were too old to have children, but God was still saying they would. God must not have been limited to perform His word within a time frame of physical possibility. It must have occurred to Abraham that God's word can be accomplished past what we would consider a point of no return.

This sort of messes up the nice religious theory that God's will can be recognized by its timeliness. The scriptures also show that God's will cannot be recognized by its sufficiency. Paul said:

Philippians 4:10-12

10 But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity.

11 Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am.

12 I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need.

(NAS)

Paul said that he at times knew humble or lean times. He experienced going hungry and suffering need. Those who support the theory that provision indicates whether one is in God's will would have to conclude that Paul was outside of the will of God. "Why Paul, don't you know that if you were really doing what God called you to do that God's provision would be present in your life?"

Those who preach a prosperity gospel have somehow overlooked much of the testimony of scripture. We don't like to wait upon God. We don't like to think that at some point we might endure lack or hunger. It is easier on our flesh to teach that God will always bless us with an on-time abundance of the things we need. By teaching this we are justified to go out and obtain what we need after our own fashion when we perceive that God hasn't met our need, or satisfied our longing, to the degree, or with the expedience we expected.

We may ask, "What could it hurt to try to help God out some if we perceive a real need and God's provision is absent?" The account of King Saul's failure to wait for God's provision should provide us reason to hesitate to "help God out." The story of King Saul's failure to wait upon God is familiar to most saints. I have heard it frequently taught on. I think most saints are much too hard on Saul. I know few who would not cave in to the same pressure.

Saul's son Jonathan had just gone and raided a Philistine garrison and had

achieved a decent victory. This angered the Philistines. They called their whole army together. Their numbers were tremendous. "Now the Philistines assembled to fight with Israel, 30,000 chariots and 6,000 horsemen, and people like the sand which is on the seashore in abundance... (1 Samuel 13:5).

How many people did Saul have. We are told that there were 2,000 men with Saul and 1,000 with Jonathan. King Saul was vastly outnumbered. The people with him saw this and it is said that those following him "trembled." They were scared to death. Things then began to deteriorate. Saul's army began to slip off and disappear.

1 Samuel 13:6-7

When the men of Israel saw that their situation was critical and that their army was hard pressed, they hid in caves and thickets, among the rocks, and in pits and cisterns. Some Hebrews even crossed the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. Saul remained at Gilgal, and all the troops with him were quaking with fear. (NIV)

Now, it is bad enough to be outnumbered and to have the numbers get worse and worse (it got to the point that Saul only had 600 men left, 4 out of 5 of his soldiers deserted), but to have the ones who remained "quaking with fear" made it even worse. Who was there to encourage and embolden Saul? Who was there to tell him to stand fast and trust in the Lord? Few of God's saints today have ever been put in such dire straits.

Saul rightly knew that only God could deliver Israel in such a situation. It was customary to entreat the Lord's favor before entering a battle. The king, however, was not to offer the burnt offering. It was pre-arranged that the prophet Samuel would show up and make the offering and entreat the Lord's favor. Saul waited seven days, the days agreed upon for Samuel to arrive. When Samuel didn't show up on time, Saul could endure the wait no longer.

It must be said that it was a tremendous test for Saul to wait even seven days. Each day he received reports of more Philistines gathering and more of his army fleeing. Saul was surrounded by terrified men. A seven day wait had to have been agonizing, but Saul waited these seven days. However, Saul had a point past which he could wait no longer. His endurance had limits to it.

1 Samuel 13:11-12

Saul replied, "When I saw that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time, and that the Philistines were assembling at Micmash, I thought, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the LORD's favor.' So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering."

(NIV)

In actuality, Saul seems to have done the prudent thing. Certainly, he felt justified in his own eyes. Things started out bad and they were falling apart. In very little time Saul anticipated having no men left at all. The Philistines could come against him at any moment. In offering up the burnt offering he was seeking the Lord's favor. There was only one thing wrong, Saul was not permitted to perform the sacrifice.

It is apparent here that in God's sight, the end does not justify the means. Samuel told Saul,

1 Samuel 13:13-14

"You acted foolishly," Samuel said. "You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the LORD's command."

(NIV)

It is interesting to note that if Samuel had shown up at the appointed time that Saul would have appeared to be the most godly of men. He had faithfully waited seven days under the most trying conditions when all were deserting him. How many of us appear godly when God is on-time? How many of us look like heroes when God meets us according to our expectation? But what if God's answer is delayed; what will be revealed to be in our heart? Will we also feel "compelled" to do that which we know in our heart is wrong? Selah.

Prayer:

Father, give your servants the strength and confidence in you to wait upon your provision. Keep us from presumption. Father, protect us from the terror that comes upon us suddenly. May we not be moved, but may we find peace attending our way as we fix our eyes upon you.

Father, instruct us that we might acquire the same peace that Your Son had, sleeping in the bow of the boat while the storm raged and others' hearts were filled with fear. As the popular song of one of your handmaidens says, "You have been my Lord and Savior; won't you be my Prince of Peace."

Father, we ask for your peace that we might persevere in the storms and trials of life. Out of our confidence in You, may we be preserved in the day of testing.

Amen