

## **YOUR CALLING IS BOTH INSPIRATION AND PERSPIRATION**

**Today's Text: Matt. Chap. 10**

### **Extracts:**

***And when He had called His twelve disciples to Him, He gave them power over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal all kinds of sickness, and all kinds of disease. ..These twelve Jesus sent out and commanded them, saying, "...Provide neither gold nor silver nor copper in your money belts; nor bags for your journey, nor two tunics, nor sandals, nor staffs; for a worker is worthy of his food" [Matt. 10: 1, 5, 9-10]***

*At the Academy Awards Ceremony held on Sunday, 22 February 2009, an unlikely movie, **Slumdog Millionaire**, stole the show.<sup>1</sup> It was nominated in ten categories and won in eight! Based on a novel, **Q & A** (2005), written by an Indian diplomat, it tells the story of a poor young waiter who becomes the biggest quiz-show winner in history, only to be sent to jail on accusations (without evidence or proof) that he had cheated. The movie was produced on a budget of US\$15 million but by mid-February 2009, it had grossed almost US\$160 million in revenues!*

*Our interest in that story is the movie's Director, Danny Boyle, who was born in Lancashire, England, in 1956. At the age of 14, he applied to transfer from his local school to a seminary to become a priest. A priest warned him against it. Soon after, he started doing drama where he had a natural flair. He worked hard through theatre, television and films, with not much to show for it other than critical acclaim. Then, in 2007, working closely with Simon Beaufoy, the screen writer for **Slumdog**, he directed a winner. At the age of 52 and 39 years after he took to the dramatic arts, he has been rewarded. He won the Oscar and two other major awards (the Golden Globes and Critics' Choice) for Best Director. His hard work (perspiration) has helped his calling (inspiration)*

*Some of us think that once God calls them, they are ready to go, with little or no preparation or human effort. Can inspiration prosper without perspiration? Today's lesson will help us to answer that question.*

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<sup>1</sup> Story is based on the following sources: Slumdog Millionaire, [http://en.wikipedia.org/Slumdog\\_Millionaire#Production](http://en.wikipedia.org/Slumdog_Millionaire#Production) and Danny Boyle, [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Danny\\_Boyle](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Danny_Boyle)

## 1. Do you know your calling?

When Jesus was about to ascend to heaven, He charged His disciples to go and *make disciples* of all the nations of the earth, *baptizing* them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and *teaching* them to observe all that He had commanded them. He assured them that He was with them always even to the end of the age [Matt. 28: 19-20]. That is like an organization's mission statement which guides its strategic focus and activities. Christ's commission is meant to be executed by the labourers in His vineyard whom He had adequately prepared for their work. Believers claim to be the inheritors of Christ's commission. Do you know how much physical effort He put in to complete His earthly work? Do you know what your calling is and how much spiritual and physical effort you need to put in?

No matter what we are doing right now, it is most likely that we got there largely by one of two ways: by choice or by chance.

### a) *By choice*

Right from early age, some of us had figured out what they were going to become. How did they arrive at that? First, it could be due to where you believe that you have *natural* talents. You had music in your blood or you could sketch anything on paper and make it as real as the original. You have a memory for details or you are good with your hands or feet on the playgrounds. Easily, you have a feel of your natural inclinations. Sometimes, you just know that there are certain things that you love doing. For example, you love singing or playing doctor or taking part in public debates. They point to your possible future professions in music, medicine and law or politics respectively.

Sometimes, we are under *family pressure* to pursue interests that run in the family. For example, business executives run in the families of business owners or entrepreneurs. Parents that are politicians tend to have descendants that go into politics. Pastors tend to have pastors among their descendants. Even so, some children have revolted against their parents' choice for their careers to do what they love. In all such cases, what you have become was your choice. Some people have chosen to be lazy or preferred to use their God-given talents for sinful or criminal activities.

### b) *By chance*

Some of us are doing what we now do for a living by chance. We neither expected it nor planned for it. The prophet, Amos, best summarizes it as follows: "I was no prophet, nor was I a son of a prophet; but I was a sheepbreeder and a tender of sycamore fruit. Then the Lord took me as I

followed the flock, and the Lord said to me, ‘Go, prophesy to My people Israel’” [Amos 7: 14-15].

You may have stumbled into it by chance only to discover that is where your heart is. That is where all your previous work and life experiences may find their best expression. On the other hand, you may find that it was a wrong move that you may regret for life if you do not get out.

When God calls you to be a labourer in His vineyard, it may be what you love (by choice) or what you never expected (by chance). As we saw in last week’s study, labour in the Lord’s vineyard is summarized in the five-fold ministry, namely, apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher [Eph. 4: 11]. It is God Himself who chooses the labourers [Jn 15: 16]. That is why every such calling is by inspiration. For example, it was God who revealed Himself to Moses in the burning bush and commissioned him to lead the children of Israel out of bondage in Egypt [Ex. 3: 2-10]. It was Jesus that dazzled Paul (while he was on his way to persecute Christians in Damascus) and turned him into His apostle to the Gentiles [Acts 9: 1-16].

But is inspiration enough? If God calls you to do His work, do you have to do anything? Of course, a labourer works! Therefore, you have to sweat (perspiration) because God will not do for you what you can do for yourself. For example, if Jesus could raise Lazarus from the dead, He could loose the ropes with which the people had tied him for burial. That was why Jesus told them to loose him and let him go [Jn 11: 43-44]! So, inspiration and perspiration go together. In today’s study, we shall learn how Jesus demonstrated their relationships during His earthly ministry.

## 2. Jesus calls His disciples

This week’s study is based on the 10<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of Matthew, supplemented with materials from the 6<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> chapters of the Gospel of Luke. Matthew discusses the calling of the twelve apostles while Luke adds the calling of seventy other disciples. We shall pay attention to the following key developments:

- Christ as the Lord of the harvest
- Jesus calls His disciples
- The disciples perspire!

### a) *The Lord of the harvest*

Before the age of 30, there was no record of Christ’s miracles even when He was known to be the Son of God before birth [Lk 1: 35]. At age 12, He was caught in a profound discussion with the teachers in the temple in Jerusalem, telling His perplexed earthly parents that He was about His

Father's business [Lk 2: 41-49]. His foster father, Joseph, was a carpenter by trade and Jesus trained as a carpenter, not a teacher of the law [Mk 6: 3].

At the age of 30, when Jesus came to John to be baptized in the River Jordan, the Baptist saw a man, his cousin (since John's mother, Elizabeth, was Mary's cousin). You can be sure that they had played together as kids (John was six months older) and grown up together. John did not know Him as the Son of God but God that sent John to baptize told him in Spirit, "Upon whom you see the Spirit descending and remaining on Him, this is He who baptizes with the Holy Spirit." Immediately, John testified, "This is the Son of God!" The following day, John introduced Jesus to two of his disciples by saying, "Behold the Lamb of God!" [Jn 1: 29-35]. Soon after, the Spirit led Jesus into the wilderness where He fasted for forty days and nights and fought off the devil's temptations [Matt. 4: 1-11]. That was already hard work! When last could you fast for a few days?

We learn from that story that your calling can remain latent (it is there) *until* it is made manifest by God Himself. The manifestation comes when you are ready, that is, when God decides that you are equipped enough to begin. When His time came, Jesus was revealed as the Messiah. There was a sense of urgency in His earthly ministry because He had just three years to build a human organization, the church, to take up the challenge of His great commission. As His fame spread throughout Israel, many people flocked to Him either for material and physical blessings [Jn 6: 26] or to become His disciples (such as some of the former followers of John the Baptist). As He saw the masses of the sick and hungry milling around Him, He told His disciples, "The harvest truly is plentiful, but the labourers are few. Therefore, pray the Lord of the harvest to send out labourers into His harvest" [Matt. 9: 37-38].

b) *Jesus calls His Apostles*

To demonstrate to us that our calling is a spiritual matter, Jesus spent the night before He chose the 12 apostles in the mountain in prayer "and continued *all night in prayer* to God." In the morning, He called all His disciples out of whom He chose 12 that He named apostles [Lk 6: 12-13]. An apostle is a person given direct commission to represent Christ.

What criteria did Jesus use? Certainly, family connection was out of it because He did not choose any of His earthly brothers, James, Joses or Jude [Mk 6: 3]. Peter and his brother Andrew, and the sons of Zebedee, James and John, were local fishermen around the Sea of Galilee. Matthew was a tax collector and Judas Iscariot was a thief [Jn 12: 6]! God does not see as man sees. Jesus saw their preparation in relation to the harvest of souls *as He was led by the Spirit*. But were they yet ready? Could Peter

use the tricks for catching fish to catch men? Were Matthew's bookkeeping skills enough for recording the sayings of Jesus? Was their calling by inspiration enough to prepare them for the harvest? No! Jesus still had to work on them.

c) *The disciples perspire!*

When an organization hires new employees, it takes time to prepare them to understand their new work environment and its culture. They will, among other things, be taught to appreciate what constitutes success and how it will be rewarded. Soon enough, they will discover that the prerequisite (work) for the perquisites (pay and benefits) will make them perspire a great deal! In the words of Jesus, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God" [Lk 10: 62].

The first thing that Jesus did after selecting the 12 (and later the 70) was to instruct them in the new doctrine (remember the Sermon on the Mount?) before sending them on a test run of their future work. He sent the apostles out to preach, heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, and cast out demons. They were to take nothing (money or clothes) with them "for a worker is worthy of his hire" [Matt. 10: 5-10]. They would face hostility and persecution. They would be hated by family and friends. But if they were not ready to take the cross and follow Him, they would not be worthy of Him [vv. 16-38]. The seventy disciples also received similar instructions [Lk 10: 1-16].

What does that suggest? It tells us that training (both basic and continuing) is very crucial for any successful ministry. The disciples were going to be supervised by Jesus Himself because He merely sent them ahead of His coming, to give them a learning opportunity [Lk 10: 1]. It is not enough to be called; your talents need to be harnessed for effective results. That you can teach does not automatically mean that you can teach the word of God if you do not have it! That you can sing does not mean that you can win a Grammy without serious training and practice! Therefore, your calling is both by inspiration and perspiration.

From the forgoing, we learn that Jesus was an effective manager of His calling. He selected and trained a team of followers that would continue His work after His resurrection and ascension. In addition, He had a team of devoted women [Lk 8: 2-3] without whose tenacity the cowed disciples that deserted Him during His trial might never have known where He was buried! Even more remarkable, He befriended highly-placed people, Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathaea (both His secret disciples) who secured all the legal permits from Pilate and provided the grave for the Lord's burial [Jn 19: 38-40]. Without such effective planning and implementation, the story of Jesus could have been buried in a few lines of a page

in Roman history. Inspiration from God takes the credit but Christ's human perspiration must be commended.

### 3. Conclusion: The effective management of your calling

The following general principles should be noted for your own calling:

- *Your calling has to be inspired (i.e., come from the Holy Spirit) to begin with.* When Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews, came to Jesus by night, he admitted, "We know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him" [**Jn 3: 1-2**]. Paul the apostle of the Gentiles says, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" [**Phil. 4: 13**], and "No one can say that Jesus is Lord except by the Holy Spirit" [**1 Cor. 12: 3**].
- *Only God knows when you were called but you know it when God manifests it to you.* For example, Jeremiah was called to be a prophet even before he was conceived in his mother's womb but it was only revealed to him in his youth [**Jer. 1: 5-7**]. Moses was a prince of Egypt in exile before God revealed to him that he would be the Lord's instrument for delivering the children of Israel out of Egyptian bondage. Therefore, you should not worry about the manifestation of God's calling in your life. You just keep working as a "general labourer" until God assigns you to special duties!
- *Your calling must be properly managed for it to be productive.* Even if you have received specific instructions to start a church or ministry, there are human steps you need to take. It is possible that your past experience has given you a good start. Otherwise, you need to go and learn about how to run an effective organization. You need to know how to motivate subordinates, how to keep accounting records, what laws and regulations govern your line of interest, and so on. You will recall that the apostles had to appoint seven deacons to take over administrative duties from them [**Acts 6: 1-4**]. Moses had to learn the principles of delegation from his father-in-law, Jethro, the priest of Midian [**Ex. 18: 13-27**].
- *Inspiration without perspiration cannot last or be productive.* Can you imagine what Christ's work on earth would have become if He had not adequately prepared His disciples to run the show in His absence? How many churches or ministries do you know that are in disarray today because of poor management or lack of accountability?

God will not do for you what you can do for yourself. That is perspiration!