

".... holding forth the word of life "

In the Epistle to the Philippians the Holy Spirit, through Paul, speaks of Jesus' disciples as being the "children of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world, holding forth the word of life" (extracts from Philippians 2.15-16, KJV).

There in a nutshell is a reminder of who we are, and of what we are about! Nothing has changed in these spiritual terms since Paul's day, whichever nation we happen to live in these days. Our salvation in Christ, brought about by our response of faith to God's gracious call, puts us at odds with "the world", and as we seek to serve the Lord faithfully, we will inevitably "shine forth as lights in the world", without even trying to do this.

But we are also to "hold forth the word of life" - a task we tend to be not so good at! Despite many well-meant efforts by the Church across the denominations, the genuine winning of souls for the Lord these days can be very uphill work. We do well to remember what it is that we are to hold forth: the word of life itself - a gift, a tremendous and wonderful gift, the ultimate Good News for any who will humble themselves and receive. Yet strangely, few people are willing to receive it.

When the Lord sent forth His disciples (eg Matthew 10.1-15), who was doing who the favour? The Lord, through His disciples, was doing the favour! - and He still is. He did the offering, the people who heard had the chance to do the receiving. The disciples were to travel light, to accept hospitality if offered, and to shake the dust off their feet if the message of the word of life was spurned - meaning that judgement was to follow on the spurners (vv 14-15).

So in our work of mission we do not have to grovel, to plead, to do silly tricks, to dilute the word of life, trying to make it more palatable for a world that has never liked the "offence of the cross" (Galatians 5.11). For it is a spiritual war that is going on, not some jolly pantomime for the kiddies. The war is focussed on the Person, ministry, death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ, and our downplaying of any of those things for the sake of popularity does no-one any good. Our ministry remains as a shining of light, a holding forth, a sowing of the seed, a labouring in the vineyard, done faithfully, cheerfully and consistently, come what may.

We see all around us that the world loves to blot God right out the picture. So let there be a greater boldness on our part to hold forth the word of life in situations where such talk is wholly unexpected, and probably unwelcome! - the boardroom, the staffroom, the student house, the canteen, the old-folks' home, the TV studio, the pub, the newspaper office, the supermarket checkout, the Mums and Toddlers group. Why not?

And our "word of life" message? - "Jesus is STILL the Way, the Truth and the Life, and as we follow Him in all our decisions, we shall find, and stay, on the right path". And why, our hearers will ask, should we pay heed to such words? "Because Jesus rose from the dead as proof that He is telling the truth, and if you really want to reject Him, you've got to get round that Slight Problem first!".

The Lord and His disciples knew the eternal value of their message about the word of life: they never grovelled or pleaded, and nor should we. They held forth the word of life, and so should we.

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