

BACK TO THE FUTURE

The Apostolic Ministry of John G. Lake

by P. Keith Davis

“Remember the days of old, consider the years of all generations” (Deuteronomy 32:7). This admonition, given to Israel through Moses, required the children of Israel to examine their past and gain understanding about the Lord’s ways. This same admonition has even greater value today as we challenge ourselves to understand our Christian heritage and learn about God’s sovereignty and His dealings with man. While we do not want to live in the past, we can examine and extract from the past, nuggets of wisdom concerning God’s ways with His church.

Since the days of the Reformation, the Lord has brought a progressive revelation of Himself to the church. This revelation has been line upon line and precept upon precept continually unfolding fresh revelation of Himself and His Word. This process is for the purpose of restoring the church to her former apostolic authority as realized in the first century church. As we consider the prior generations, we can relish the revelation given to them and also learn from their mistakes in order to avoid those same mistakes in our generation.

True Apostolic Ministry

Apostolic ministry can be defined as Jesus Christ manifested and abiding in His church doing the same works through His church that He did while living on the earth in human form. True apostolic ministry is a fulfillment of John 14:12, with the Holy Spirit performing the same works through the church that He did through the life and ministry of the Lord Jesus Christ.

There is a ministry of perfection coming to the church that will prepare her for the return of the Bridegroom. However, before we can begin to move toward this ministry, we must first “return back to our future” and realize the complete restoration of biblical apostolic ministry. This ministry will call out and separate the church from the world so that she can be prepared in perfection for the Bridegroom.

In Joel 2:25, the Lord makes a wonderful promise to restore all that the palmerworm, cankerworm, caterpillar, and the locust have destroyed (KJV).

These four stages of a maturing locust are used to prophetically symbolize the

way that the spirit of the antichrist would attack the church. The early apostolic church is like a tree that the Lord planted and nurtured to full fruit - bearing maturity. The spirit of the antichrist is compared to a locust which devours first the fruit, then the leaves, the bark and finally gnawing into the very heart of the tree in order to destroy it. In church history, this final stage culminated in the era known as the Dark Ages.

The Lord's promise to restore the apostolic church began through the ministry of Martin Luther and has now matured to a level so that this generation can expect the complete restoration of biblical apostolic ministry. This is our quest: to return back to the future. When our Lord was on the earth, He chose the 12 apostles to groom and prepare for the birth of His apostolic church. For three and one-half years, He planted the seed of the Word of God within their hearts. When the day of Pentecost had fully come, the Holy Spirit descended upon them and watered the seed within their hearts, producing the life of Christ and the apostolic church. This same process must be realized in this church age as well.

Tokens of Apostolic Ministry

Throughout church history, there have been examples of true apostolic ministry raised up by the Lord within the church. These individuals attained a mature stature qualifying them as a dwelling place for the Spirit of God through whom the Lord was able to function and do His works. They were men and women so thoroughly filled with the Holy Spirit that they exercised the Lord's dominion over demons, disease and death. These saints were true expressions of the life of Christ with His divine nature radiating through them—men and women who were crucified with Christ and lived by the faith of the Son of God. Tremendous lessons can be learned by examining the lives of these spiritual champions in order to determine the secrets of their success with God. One example of true apostolic ministry can be found in the life of John Graham Lake.

An Apostle of Faith

By every biblical definition, the life of John G. Lake demonstrated the nature and characteristics of true apostolic ministry. John G. Lake was a man who experienced apostolic ministry according to first century standards and changed the world everywhere he went. He was a vessel yielded to God as a habitation for His manifest presence. Through him, the Holy Spirit was able to heal the sick, cast out demons, save the lost, and manifest the very nature and character of Christ, displaying that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever (Hebrews 13:8). The Great Commission was a reality, not a theory, in Lake's ministry. Careful examination of his life will help the church to prepare for the coming visitation and restoration of the apostolic ministry.

Having the Lord's Potential

"Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit" (John 12:24). When the time came for the Lord to be glorified through the sacrificial offering of His life, He compared His life with a grain of wheat. When a grain of wheat dies, it is for the purpose of bringing forth multiplied grains of wheat like the original grain. The Bible teaches that when the Lord returns, we will be like Him. The Holy Spirit residing in us will reveal the same attributes through us that He did in the Lord Jesus Christ. This belief formed the cornerstone for John G. Lake's life and ministry. Lake believed that the Lord would not have commissioned us to do the works that He did without adequately equipping us to do those works. Lake commented, "We need to set our sights high and refuse the traditions of men who say that it is impossible to do as Jesus instructed us."

True apostolic ministry is simply the extension of the ministry begun by the Lord, our ultimate example. The power of redemption is so great that sinners saved by grace and filled with the Holy Spirit are given the opportunity of carrying on the very ministry of Christ, doing the works that He did. John G. Lake is a token of this reality given to the twentieth century. Our sights should be set equally high.

His Definition of the Apostolic Church

During the years preceding and following the turn of the twentieth century, John Lake made a notable and revealing observation. There had been a tremendous outpouring of the Holy Spirit with great manifestations of power, signs and wonders. A generation of Christians was given an extraordinary opportunity of witnessing the return of genuine apostolic ministry.

Lake discerned that his generation missed the mark by not realizing the true definition of apostolic ministry. Some attempted to build an apostolic church around the doctrine and manifestation of healing power. Others attempted to establish the apostolic church around the restoration of the gifts and speaking in tongues, while some attempted to create and establish the apostolic order around the doctrine of holiness. All of these qualities are attributes of the Holy Spirit and essential to the church, yet not one singularly sustains apostolic ministry. Lake observed that the people were absorbed in the phenomena of God and not in the person of God.

According to Lake, the truest definition of the apostolic church could be expressed in the awesome and reverential experience known as the baptism of the Holy Spirit. He believed that the church did not regard the baptism of the Holy Spirit with the reverence due an experience so sacred and so terribly costly.

In order to secure this gift for His church, the Lord Jesus lived in the world, bled on the cross, entered into the darkness of death, hell and the grave, grappled with and strangled the accursed powers of darkness, came forth in resurrection life and ascended to heaven. Lake believed apostolic ministry was defined and realized through individuals becoming the habitation of God. The Holy Spirit literally manifested Himself in the spirit, soul and body of the believers, taking total possession of His church and bestowing on her His qualities and attributes. This process was not merely a reformation—it was a renewal. Men and women were renewed by the Spirit of God, indwelt by the Holy Spirit and becoming one Spirit with Him. The baptism of the Holy Spirit was not merely a gift of power, but of God Himself.

Out of necessity, Lake became acquainted with the healing power of God. During the later years of the nineteenth century, he was miraculously healed of a terminal illness, along with his wife, his sister and his brother. This introduction to God's miraculous power caused Lake to begin a quest to not only know the healing of God, but to know the God of healing. His desire was fulfilled, he describes, when he became the habitation of God in a powerful baptism of the Holy Spirit.

His Baptism Experience

At the age of 16, John G. Lake came to know the saving power of Christ. His salvation experience was very real as displayed by his changed life. Many around him observed this change and said, "You are baptized in the Holy Ghost." While friends around him were saying that he had been filled with the Holy Spirit, Lake experienced an almost unbearable hunger in his heart for more of God. He began to pursue God and came to know the sanctifying power of the Holy Spirit through the ministry of a layman named Melvin Pratt. This precious brother introduced Lake to the washing of water by the Word, and this process increased the richness and anointing of Lake's life. Those around him acknowledged that surely he had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Yet, Lake hungered for more.

Several years later, Lake was introduced to the healing power of God through Alexander Dowie. After moving to Zion, Illinois to associate more closely with Dowie, Lake received a tremendous impartation of the healing power of God from the Holy Spirit. Many miracles and manifestations of the Spirit followed. Those around Lake again tried to convince him that he had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit.

By the turn of the century, John G. Lake had undergone a powerful salvation experience, an even more powerful sanctification experience, and an impartation of the gift of healing. At each juncture, those around Lake tried to convince him

that he had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit, yet his heart burned for more of God than ever before.

Searching for that which would satisfy the longing of his heart, he began to fast, pray and wait upon the Lord for nine months. At the end of this period of prayer and fasting, Lake had an awesome experience with the Lord. He knew then that he had been immersed in the Holy Spirit and had finally become a dwelling place of God. His heart and soul were now satisfied that the Holy Spirit was residing in him, speaking through him, and saturating every fiber of his being. Finally his heart was content that he had received the baptism of the Holy Spirit which would produce the nature and character of Christ within him. Lake believed, as the Scriptures taught, that this indwelling experience now equipped him to carry on the ministry of Christ as did the early apostles.

Triune Salvation

During the winter of 1913, Lake presented a teaching to the Church of England entitled, "Triune Salvation." This teaching revealed a key secret to his power and intimacy with God. So significant was its content that the Bishop of London wrote about this message, "It contains the spirit of primitive Christianity and reveals the distinction between the Christian soul of the first and twentieth century, the Spirit of Christ's domain, by which Christianity attained its spiritual supremacy...It is one of the greatest sermons I have ever heard and I recommend its careful study by every priest."

In this study, Lake revealed the important significance of our complete redemption on all three levels of human life—spirit, soul (mind) and body. I Thessalonians 5:23 declares, "Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." Lake taught that it was the tendency of the average Christian to stop at the redemption of their spirit. He believed that it was equally as important for the believer to allow the Holy Spirit to sanctify the soul and the body in order for the individual to become the habitation of God. The sanctification of the soul literally involves the impartation of the mind of Christ. John Wesley defined sanctification as "possessing the mind of Christ and all the mind of Christ." This level of consecration is essential for the believer's thoughts to be perfectly in tune with the Lord's thoughts and the Christian's ways consistent with His ways.

Complete sanctification of soul and mind also involves the renewal of the emotions. Many believers are trapped in the tyranny of grief over the past, not realizing that they are a new creation and that all things have become new (II Corinthians 5:17), past failures erased by the blood of Christ. Grief ultimately

leads to bitterness, and bitterness will defile many (Hebrews 12:15). Consequently, it is essential that the Holy Spirit be allowed to thoroughly consecrate and sanctify the mind, and the emotions in order for Christians to become the tabernacle of the Holy Spirit.

This triune salvation also involves the separation of the believer from all that would defile, recognizing that the body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and should be consecrated accordingly. Romans 8:11 states, "The Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who indwells you." This imparted life granted through the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit will provide divine health and freedom from the lusts that are a result of man's fallen condition. Lake taught that the genuine Christian is a separated person—separated forever to God in all the departments of life: body, soul and spirit are forever committed to God. This absolute consecration to God, or "triune salvation," is the real secret to the successful Christian life and essential to becoming the habitation of God. According to John G. Lake, this complete consecration to God makes the Christian a "Christ-man" and reveals the secret of life and communion with God received into the entire being through the Holy Spirit.

Not Without Holiness

"Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14). Without holiness, the complete purposes of the church cannot be fulfilled. A Holy God can only dwell in a holy vessel. Lake said, "Think not that thou shalt attain the highest in God until within thine own soul a heavenly longing to be like Him who gave His life for us possesses our own heart." A holy and sanctified condition can only be realized when the fleshly nature is revealed. Once the tares of the human soul are revealed, Christians then can call upon the grace of God to separate from them all that is ungodly, thereby purging the spirit, soul and body from every worldly tendency. As Lake once put it, "There arises in the heart the desire and prayer for the Spirit of God to eject, crucify and destroy every tendency of the opposition of the Holy Spirit."

The hearts of men and women must be purged by the fire of the Holy Spirit and washed from every stain by the cleansing blood of Christ. Those who desire to be partakers of the nature of Christ must always feel the purging power of Christ within. Once the Holy Spirit takes up residence, there is a release of power through the indwelling Spirit to lift the believer above the lusts and desires of this world in order to live a holy and consecrated life. This desire for the purity of God's nature reveals a vital ingredient in the life and ministry of John G. Lake. As he stated in 1916, "Holiness is the character of God. The very substance of His being and the essence of His nature is purity." The purpose of God in the

salvation of mankind is to produce in man a kindred holiness, a radiant purity like that of God Himself.

Clothed in a Spirit of Humility

Another important attribute in Lake's ministry was his commitment to living in a spirit of humility. Lake often quoted I Peter 5:5: "You younger men, likewise, be subject to your elders; and all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble." If the church is to "return back to the future" to her true apostolic heritage, Christians must adhere to the qualities demonstrated by the apostolic fathers.

In Acts 20:19, the Apostle Paul acknowledges his commitment to humility in his service to the Lord. That commitment to humility by the first century apostle burned equally as bright in the heart of John G. Lake, a twentieth century apostle. Lake desired to follow the example set by Moses and sought to be the meekest man in the land. By virtue of this commitment to humility, he was able to say, "the Spirit of God ran through my person like a river of heavenly fluid. Cancers withered under my touch, cripples of every type were instantly restored and works of creation in the bodies of men took place as a result of humbling myself under the mighty hand of God." Like Moses, he desired to not only see the acts of an awesome God, but also to understand His ways. As a result, he discovered that the Lord's way was through servanthood and a spirit of humility clothing the believer. It is only through amazing grace that the nature and works of Christ can be exhibited through believers. God gives His grace to the humble. Humility is truly a key ingredient to the restoration of true apostolic ministry and the return of the Shekinah glory to the church.

The Empowering Presence

As with the first century apostles, John G. Lake did not attempt full time ministry until he was endued with power from on high. Even though the early apostles had received an anointing from the Lord for casting out evil spirits and healing the sick, they did not become the dwelling place of God until the day of Pentecost. It is one thing to receive anointings or gifts from the Lord; it is altogether another to become the literal dwelling place of the manifest presence of God.

Lake knew the reality of the empowering presence of God abiding within him. He was anointed and equipped not only for ministering healing and salvation to a lost world, but also for expressing the radiant presence of a Holy God, or, as he explained it for, "becoming a Christ-man having all the potentials through the Holy Spirit that resided in Christ Himself." Lake spent a season of prayer and

fasting specifically seeking a special anointing for casting out demons. The Lord graciously responded to the request of His servant by imparting a powerful anointing and the boldness necessary for dealing with evil spirits. As a result, people came from all over the world to be delivered and set free from demonic opposition. Tremendous testimonies are on record as evidence of this ministry.

This empowering presence also carried Lake to a new level of understanding Scripture. Powerful and revelatory sermons emerged from this apostle of faith as he allowed the Holy Spirit to unfold the mysteries of the kingdom. He had the capacity to inspire faith in the hearts of those who heard him. A man without compromise when it involved the Spirit's revelation of the Word, Lake utterly refused to compromise the true revelation of the Word for a false unity which he believed resulted in spiritual weakness. He believed that principle is better than unity, and the ultimate end of right principles would be true unity of the faith as described in Ephesians 4:13. Lake believed the secret to Christianity was not in doing but in being. It is in possessing the divine nature of Christ and His empowering presence that we become the reflection of Christ's character and our message will then be characterized by the demonstration of the Spirit's power. It is by becoming one with the Father that we can know peace in the midst of storms. It is through the Lord's abiding presence that we find the secret place of the most High and abide under the shadow of the Almighty.

We should earnestly contend for the apostolic principles found in the first church and demonstrated in the life of John G. Lake. This generation has the opportunity to experience the return of our faith to the apostolic pattern. As we consider the days of old and the generations of long ago, we can see firsthand the application of true apostolic ministry available in the days to come.

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