

# The Blessing in Doing what we hear

There is great blessing in being practical Christians. No one can deny the fact that doing what one hears or learns from the Bible uplifts the character of the individual, earns him the admiration and respect of godly people and above all, leads to salvation by the grace of God. These facts are embodied in the statement of our Lord Jesus Christ when, as he was preaching, “a certain woman of the company lifted up her voice, and said unto him, Blessed is the womb that bare thee, and the paps which thou hast sucked.” Replying, Jesus Christ said, “Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it”. – Luke 11:27,28.

What Jesus Christ was saying in effect was that although the woman who gave birth to him was blessed, those who keep the words of God would receive greater blessings from Him. On another occasion when Christ was told that his mother and his brethren were standing without desiring to speak with him, he, among other things, said: “My mother and my brethren are these which hear the word of God, and do it.” Luke 8:19-21; Matthew 12:46-50.

It should be noted that St. Paul commended the believers at Thessalonica because they were practical Christians in that they received “the word of God... not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God” as a result of which the word was working “effectually” among them. – 1 Thessalonians 2:13-15.

When people are given to keeping the laws of God, their standard of morality will be far higher than that of other nations and relative peace, progress and happiness will come to them as a matter of course. God Almighty told the natural Jews: “Keep therefore and do them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.” (Deuteronomy 4:6) The prophet Solomon declared: “Righteousness exalteth a nation: but sin is a reproach to any people.” (Proverbs 14:34) Every country that wants to enjoy a respectable position in the comity of nations must be disposed to orderly and decent behaviour based on the knowledge of God. It was Thomas Jefferson, a former American president, who declared: “I have always said and always will say that the studious perusal of the Sacred Volume (the Holy Bible) will make us better citizens, better fathers, and better husbands”. (Parenthesis ours)

It is a great irony however that so many people, both in high and low places across the world, make a show of religion and devotion, yet their day-to-day conduct comes far short of what is required of the true worshippers of God. For instance, Nigerians had in a World Values Survey been rated the most religious people on earth. (Daily Sun October 21, 2003, page 7) Yet that has not prevented the country from occupying the unenviable position of being the sixth most corrupt country on earth. (Thisday February 13, 2006, page 4) An article carried in The Guardian of March 10, 2004 at page 51 quoted a BBC documentary as having given Nigeria 91% in Church attendance, compared to 21% in Britain, 54% in the United States of America and 7% in Russia.

It was for this attitude of showing off with flourish their piety or devoutness and yet failing to practise or keep the tenets of the faith that our Lord Jesus Christ indicted the Pharisees, who were the religious leaders in those days. He said: “The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses’ seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not ye after their works: for they say, and do not.” (Matthew 23:2,3) The counterparts of these religious leaders, who say one thing and do another, abound today. Jesus Christ warned: “Ye hypocrites, well did Esaias prophesy of you, saying, This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men”. (Matthew 15:7-9) Again he said: “For I say unto you, That except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.” – Matthew 5:20.

Indeed, it is only by practising the truth which we hear from time to time that we can attract the favour of God. Even in day-to-day life, people see the cultivation and practise of truthfulness or honesty as the mark of good character. An insightful editorial in The Guardian, a Nigerian newspaper, stated: "Good character cannot be decreed, nor is it attained by mere wish; it comes from painstaking nurture over time, it is best taught by example..." (The Guardian April 15, 2005, page 12) Apostle James declared: "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed." James 1:22-25.

#### Call To Hear

The Bible shows that it is a Christian virtue for one to be ready to hear the word of God. Some people close their ears to any kind of knowledge other than the one they know. This is not good: for, it is only by comparing what one has heard with what one knows that one can judge whether he is on the right side or not. It was because they were ready to hear that the people of Berea were able to appreciate the truth preached by St. Paul "in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so" and so many of them joined the faith. (Acts 17:10-12) On this score Apostle James exhorted: "Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear..." (James 1:19) Those who are eager to hear the word of God will be glad to go to places of worship where the truth about God and His Kingdom is preached. The Prophet David wrote: "I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the LORD". (Psalm 122:1) St. Paul even lays it down as a rule that we, as true Christians, should not forsake "the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching" (Hebrew 10:25) The worshipper must hallow the place of worship and comport himself in a sober manner. He must be attentive to what is being said and not allow himself to be distracted in any way. "Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God" exhorted the prophet Solomon "and be more ready to hear, than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil." – Ecclesiastes 5:1

#### Woman of Zarephath

Practical Christianity is evidence of faith on the part of the believer and makes one to have the mercy of God and ultimately justification by His grace. In the words of St. Paul it is "not the hearers of the law" that are just before God, "but the doers of the law shall be justified". Romans 2:13

The woman of Zarephath is a shining example of those who heard the word of God and by keeping to it were helped tremendously by Him. In 1 Kings 17: 8-16 there is the story of the widow of Zarephath, who obeyed the word of the prophet Elijah to give him "a little water in a vessel ...a morsel of bread ...a little cake ...until the day that the LORD sendeth rain upon the earth."

The widow in a great show of faith went and "did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat many days" for "the barrel of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by Elijah."

Stressing that her noble faith in God is worthy of everlasting remembrance and universal imitation, our Lord Jesus Christ used her case to rebuke the Jews for their stubbornness. He said: "But I tell you of a truth, many widows were in Israel in the days of Elias, when the heaven was shut up three years and six months, when great famine was throughout all the land; But unto none of them was Elias sent, save unto Sarepta, a city of Sidon, unto a woman that was a widow." Luke 4:24-26

From the story of the widow of Zarephath, we also learn that it is important to obey the

voice of the servants of God as stated in 2 Chronicles 20:20 to wit: "...Believe in the LORD your God, so shall ye be established; believe his prophets, so shall ye prosper." See also Hebrews 13:7,17; 1 Peter 2:13.

All those who show like measure of faith in God, like the widow of Zarephath in obeying the word of God to the letter even in the most trying circumstances will be helped and saved by Him in the end. See also 1 Samuel 15:22,23; Job 36:10-12; 1 Samuel 1:16-20.

The last days

The Bible says that the last days will witness a level of godlessness unprecedented in human history. The devil, knowing that his time is short will be doing everything in his power to lure people away from God into lawlessness and carnality. Even many of those who profess to serve God will be mired in the pool of hypocrisy. In the words of St. Paul such people "have a form of godliness, but they deny the power thereof". The learned apostle advised true worshippers to avoid such people. – 2 Timothy 3:5.

This prophecy is fulfilling to the letter. Some attend services merely to keep up with social expectations. Even some of those who claim to be "anointed men of God" are actually pretenders and impostors. There was a publication in a Nigerian newspaper with a banner headline "Robbers disguise as gospel preachers". According to the report carried in the Nigerian Tribune of February 18, 2003 "Traders on a business trip to Lagos at the weekend lost over N8.5 million to armed robbers in the guise of gospel preachers in a bus." The robbers, consisted of four men, clutching Bibles, and one woman "who tied her head gear like the contemporary born again Christians". As the bus took off, the four bandits were said to be singing, praying and quoting chapters and verses of the Bible, "which held the passengers spell bound." At midnight, the robbers abruptly stopped singing, praying and clapping. They shot the police escort dead, ordered the driver at gun point to stop and forced everybody to lie face down after which they dispossessed the passengers of their money and valuables. Though the robbers may think they had succeeded in their mission, we must stress that they will surely face the judgement of God, unless they repent. (Psalm 7:11-16; Proverbs 11:19,21; Isaiah 3:10,11; etc). The American magazine Newsweek observed in a shocking cover story entitled "Is God dead?" that people in Europe go to Church services "for reasons of culture, not faith". The story quoted a Yugoslav who confessed that he attends services only because it is a family tradition. -Newsweek, July 12, 1999.

Writing on what he called "Rampant Supernaturalism", Professor Sola Adeyeye, a former member of the Federal House of Representatives, lamented: "under the guise of religious fervour, we have imbibed the arrant falsehood and silly superstition that God will heal Nigeria via endless night vigils and religious jamborees. We must wake up to the truth that faith without works is metaphysical hogwash and silly hocus-pocus!" – The Guardian December 17, 2003, page 65. Please see Jeremiah 7:16,17; 16:7

If people had been doing what God says, the level of social vices would certainly not be as high as it is today. It is these vices which create disorder and distress in the society. (Compare Romans 6:16; Jeremiah 2:19) Even the HIV/AIDS pandemic, which led to the death of an estimated 3 million people in 2005 and other Sexually Transmitted Diseases would not be taking so many lives as they do today.

In this age when knowledge has increased tremendously, (Daniel 12:4) people have greater opportunity than ever before to know the word of God through books, or by audio or video equipment or the internet so as to know how to conduct themselves. The Bible says "Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand." – Revelation 1:3.

Blessing

Those who keep the word of God will be blessed not only in this world but in the world to come. The Prophet David wrote that those who keep the law of God will have "great

reward".(Psalm 19:7-11) He also stated: "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away. Therefore the ungodly shall not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous. For the LORD knoweth the way of the righteous: but the way of the ungodly shall perish." Psalm 1:1-6

Such ones shall never be moved but will enjoy the blessing of God at all times no matter the tribulations the devil will bring. "Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine," said Jesus Christ, "and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it." (Matthew 7:24-27) Jesus Christ asked the unbelieving Jews: "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46). Those who keep the word of God become models of positive values and are great assets to society.

The most important blessing in keeping the word of God is that it will enable one to get life in God's Kingdom fully established. God Almighty had earlier declared through Moses that any man who keeps the law, "he shall live in them" (Leviticus 18: 1-5) And St. Paul stated: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." Romans 1:16.

To get life one must continue in doing what he has heard until the end. (Matthew 24:12,13; 1 Corinthians 15:58) It is to this end Jesus Christ told his disciples: "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." (John 8:31,32) And in John 13:17 he said : "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."

What is more in Revelation 22: 14 Jesus Christ stated: "Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city (God's Kingdom fully established).