

ROPE HOLDER & WELL DIGGER (03).

June 03, 2007.

Introduction.

Please turn to *Matt.14:22-33*. (read). There is a book on my shelf that I have been planning to read for some time now. The name is, **“If you want to walk on water, you’ve got to get out of the boat.”** On Tuesday morning I sat in my chair with my coffee to begin my early morning reading. I looked across on the shelf next to me and my eyes fell on this book. I pulled it and started reading and right on the very first page the author said things that picked up from where I ended the second sermon in this brief series. Right away I realized that I had a third sermon to bring before you. But first, I want to begin as I have done in the past, with a review and some additions.

In our last study we worked out some of the practical applications of the rope holding ministry in the church and for you as an individual. I stated very clearly that every member of the church, without exception, ought to be a rope holder.

Then I began to look at those whom the Lord calls to the well digging ministry. From what I have been told, I made some points about leadership differences that were a bit jolting. Those are points that are cemented in my mind after much study, discussion and debate in other spheres. So I want you to know that I stand by those points and I am ready and willing to discuss them further with you as a church or as individuals whenever you desire such discussion.

The church is suffering today from what has happened in the world. The world has become feminized and role reversals have become the order of the day. Men are afraid to lead the charge to restore their destroyed masculinity. Sadly and paradoxically, women who understand what has happened are rising up to lead the charge for the restoration of masculinity in their feminized couch-potato men.

The following are a sampling of the book titles that have surfaced in the last few years : **“Backlash; How women have betrayed women; The feminist mistake; The war against boys.”** All these books are written by women. On Friday, June 01, I received an e-mail that was an **Al Mohler** blog. **Al Mohler** is

the president of **Southern Baptist Seminary**. His blog dealt with an article that appeared in London's Guardian newspaper. The article, written by a man this time, dealt with the detrimental effects of the absence of male authority in the lives of boys.

The question I asked when I made the announcement regarding the health fair, "Where are the men?", is the same question that must be asked in the world and in the church. The question is not, "Where are the biological males?" There is a big difference between being a biological male and boasting, "I is man!", and being a man truly defined.

The word man is the Greek word *aner*. From *aner* comes the word *andrizo*. Paul used this word in **1Cor.16:13**. He wrote, "Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong." "Act like men" is *andrizo*. It literally means to conduct yourself as a man. Among the ancients that meant to conduct yourself with wisdom and courage. And so, the ancients believed that the

distinctive qualities that mark a man are wisdom and courage. This belief is also found in your Bible. Let me take a moment to illustrate.

We are told two things about Joshua when he took over from Moses. **Firstly**, Joshua is given the same command three times. Moses told him, “Be strong and courageous.” (*Deut.31:7*). The Lord told him, “Be strong and courageous.” (*Deut.31:23*). And the Lord told him again in *Josh.1:6*, “Be strong and courageous.” In other words, Joshua, as God’s chosen leader over Israel, be a man! **Secondly**, we are told in *Deut.34:9* that Joshua “was filled with the spirit of wisdom.” True Biblically defined manly courage does not say, “*Who me? Talk to your mother. Let your mother deal with that. Talk to the pastor. Let the pastor deal with that.*”

I know I have been described as an arrogant, know-it-all, domineering male chauvinist pig. The truth – I no longer care. Why? The label comes from so-called Christian men who are not Biblical men and from so-called Christian women who are not Biblical women. This Bible I believe in and preach and teach

says men must be men, Biblical men defined and described by the God who made them, and that's what I want to see. This Bible says women must be women, Biblical women defined and described by the God who made them, and that's what I want to see. I will not accept and I will fight against role reversals in the church and in the home. Male and female mindsets colored by culture and race must be resisted and rejected because they are, for the most part, unbiblical.

It is not for men, Christian or otherwise, to formulate their own opinions what men must be like. It is not for women, Christian or otherwise, to formulate their own opinions what women must be like. It is not for men, Christian or otherwise, to formulate their own opinions what women must be like. It is not for women, Christian or otherwise, to formulate their own opinions what men must be like. If your ideas and opinions are not rooted in and derived and formulated from the word of God, then it is worldly, ungodly and atheistic. And such ideas and opinions must not find a place in a Biblical home or in a Biblical church.

When it comes to leadership in the church, you may have your own ideas and opinions. What we want, however, is the kind of leadership that God has defined and described. Leadership in the home and in the church is, without qualification or compromise, male. If you have a problem with that, you have a problem with God. If you are going to be angry about the fact of male leadership, be angry with God. Shake your fist against God. Ask Him, *“Just who do You think You are, God?”*

Brethren, the plain fact is, there is a great scarcity of Biblically described primary male leadership in the church. There is a great scarcity of the kind of men I have described as well diggers in the church, men of courage and boldness, men who are not afraid of challenges and making sacrifices, men who are not afraid to be in the front lines, men who are not afraid to lead the charge, men who are not afraid to make the ultimate sacrifice of putting their lives on the line for the cause of God and truth.

There is a safety in being a rope holder in the church that does not come with being a well digger in the church. Our natural inclination is to choose that which is safe as opposed to that which brings danger. And then we teach our children to choose that which is safe as opposed to that which brings danger. This is why the world cannot solve the terrorist problem. They want to fight a safe war with the terrorist. There is nothing like a safe war. And there is nothing safe about entering Satan's domain and engaging Satan's children with the gospel.

We have to pray for young men with holy courage and boldness to lead the church into the next generation. I have no desire to entrust the next generation of this church to bureaucratic style of leaders. We need young men of God with God-given discernment, insight, vision, passion, boldness, wisdom, and courage. We need young men who are willing to lead and who will actually lead. We need young men who are willing to stand alone when you know what you stand for is right. We need young men who are not afraid to lay down their lives for the cause of God and truth. We need young men who know that meekness is not weakness and humility is not being a door mat.

On the other hand I fear for the next generation of leaders because I believe we are not ready to welcome them and / or give them the reins of leadership. I see the signs in this church of the kinds of resistance I faced in my generation as we began to make our presence felt as rising leaders in the church. I suddenly found myself in a literal war for survival. I am not here today because I was encouraged and given opportunities to develop. I am not here today because men were willing to open doors for me to be trained. In public and in private I was attacked, criticized, put down, called names and dark predictions were made about what I would become. Missionaries and local church leaders living trapped in their beggarly mentality swore to do everything in their power to destroy my life. They tried and they tried real hard. But the Lord thwarted every plan and every action.

I am here today because God called me. I am here today because God protected me. I am here today because God provided for me. I am here today because God opened the doors for me. I am here today because God brought strangers into my life for short periods who did for me what He wanted them to do and then they moved out of my life. I am here today not because it is my choice but because it is

God's choice. My choice was to leave. I began to put plans in place to leave. I had every reason I needed to leave but one. And that one reason was God. And so I embraced God's choice with all my heart, and with all my soul, and with all my mind, and with all my strength. And I have sought to live that choice in the same manner.

When I am protective of and patient with and ready to defend the young, there is a reason for that. When I go out of my way to love them and win them and encourage them, there is a reason for that. When I am always available to sit and listen to their side and empathize with their flowing tears, there is a reason for that. When they disappoint me and I am ready to give them that second and third and fourth and fifth mile chance, there is a reason for that.

The reason is that I have walked their road. No Christian man or Christian woman did these things for me. What they did was try to destroy me. And those who could have helped were too afraid to even try to help. It was God who did these things for me. And I have not forgotten what God has done and the moral

responsibility His care for me has place upon me. I want you to clearly understand today that I do not and will not compromise with the young in their mistakes, their failures and their sins. But at the same time, regardless of whatever criticism I may face, I am not going to discard them and leave them to the wolves.

Whether you agree with me or not, I want you as a church to clearly understand where my mind is. My daily and earnest prayer to God is that I am allowed to see the next generation of leaders in this church firmly in place. My earnest prayer is to see every aspect of the ministry of this church in the hands of godly, capable and visionary leadership. My prayer is not only for theologically trained pastors, preachers and teachers. My prayer is also that those who would lead the music ministry, missions, evangelism, counseling, women's ministry, men's ministry, and youth ministry be theologically trained.

My prayer is for godly young men with a consuming passion and zeal for the glory of God in the church and in the world. The ministry has always been a hideout for

lazy men. By God's grace we must pray and work hard to make sure that the ministry in this church is no hideout for lazy men.

I ask you adults today, what are you doing for the next and coming generations in this church? Are you encouraging them? Are you building them up? Are you strengthening their weak areas? Are you coming alongside them, putting an arm around them and speaking to them a good and seasonable word? Are you loving them? Are you praying for them? When the wolves are drawing near, are you getting in between and protecting them?

Or are you exasperating them, frustrating them and setting standards for them that you have never been able to attain? Paul warned, "Fathers, do not exasperate your children." (*Eph.6:4*). Are we guilty of exasperating the young people? Are we guilty of repeating the mistake that was being made in the early church and that caused Peter to ask, "who do you put God to the test by placing upon the neck of the disciples a yoke which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?" (*Acts 15:10*). Are you giving the youth room to grow and

mature? The young people are neither blind nor dumb nor mindless. When there are contradictions in our lives they see them. And they struggle to reconcile those contradictions with the standards we demand of them. What are you doing for the next and coming generations in this church? That's my question to your conscience this morning.

The Well Diggers (contd).

We come now to continue the study of the third major point I entitled “**The Well Diggers.**” I made the point that well diggers do not choose the ministry. The ministry chooses them. And in closing I made the point that if the ministry chooses you, do not run from it. That would be a terrible mistake. This is where I want to pick up our study today.

The first point I want you to note is **the fact of the call**. When the Lord Jesus walked this earth, He called people. When Jesus said to the rich young ruler, “come, follow Me” (*Matt.19:21*) or to His disciples, “follow Me” (*Matt.9:9*;

Jn.1:43), that was a call to discipleship. But when Jesus said to Peter and Andrew, “Follow Me, and I will make you become fishers of men” (*Mk.1:17*), they did not understand at that point that they were being called to become ministers of the gospel.

We saw in our last study from the life of Paul that there is a sense in which some men are peculiarly called to the ministry. In the O.T., for example, this was true of Moses. (*Exod.3*). This was true of Samuel. (*1Sam.3*). This was true of Isaiah. (*Isa.6*). This was true of Jeremiah. (*Jer.1:5*). This was true of Amos. (*Amos 7:14-15*).

When God’s call comes to men, it usually comes to ordinary men and calls them to live an extraordinary life. God’s call calls them to engage in extraordinary tasks with acts of extraordinary trust. In a real sense this call is akin to Jesus’ command to Peter. This is a call to step out of the boat and to walk on the water. The Lord’s call to step out of the boat and walk on the water is not the rope holder’s call. This is the kind of call that goes out to the well diggers.

When God's call came to me, I was in the safety of the comfortable boat of my job that presented to me various options. I accepted that call but stayed in the boat. Like I said, the boat was safe. And serving God from the safety of the boat was satisfying. But then, one day, not long after I ceased being temporary and received my job appointment, the Lord said, "*get out of the boat.*"

For most men who believe they are sensing God's call, getting out of the boat is embracing full-time ministry and a pastor's salary. The insecurities that are attached to being paid by a church are often too much for some men to bear. You are always in a no-win non-negotiable position. I have known men, gifted preachers, who have refused full-time ministry because they were unable to entrust themselves to a church for a living.

On the other hand, a truly Biblical full-time ministry is an occupation with the highest risk in the world. It is akin to Peter getting out of the boat to walk on the water with a storm raging around him. It is a job that is unsparing in its rules. Note, I didn't say unforgiving. You can be forgiven but forgiveness has nothing to

do with the loss of moral and spiritual qualifications. When you are in the ministry, you are walking on the water and the storm is constantly raging about you, constantly threatening you. Very sadly, sometimes that raging threatening storm is the very people you are serving. Make one mistake and the storm will engulf you and drown you. Make one mistake and you would be looking for another job. Hence my insistence that young men aspiring to the ministry must get a secular first degree.

Secondly, God's call always brings fear. One man wrote, "*God has the inextinguishable habit of asking people to do things that are scary to them.*"

I get appointed in my job. It was a traveling post so I got a car that I had to pay for. And then the Lord said, "*get out of the boat.*" Was I scared? I prayed, I cried, I resisted, I pleaded, "*surely there is another way to do this.*" But the answer was always the same, "*get out of the boat.*" And the answer to every question was, "*trust Me.*" So one day, in January, **1972**, by God's grace I got out the boat and have been walking on the water ever since. Did the fear go away? It never goes away. It's always near, ready to surface when you least expect it.

When the Lord called Moses, he was scared and he began to come up with excuses. Moses' first excuse had two points. Firstly, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh?" Secondly, "Who am I that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?" (*Exod.3:11*). Moses' second excuse was, "Please, Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither recently nor in time past, nor since You have spoken to Your servant; for I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." (*Exod.4:10*). I am insignificant. I am inadequate. I am not qualified for that kind of work. The Lord's first answer was, "I will be with you." (*Exod.3:12*). And His second answer was a little more emphatic, "I, even I, will be with your mouth." (*Exod.4:12*).

It is of interest to note the sense of insignificance and inadequacy that grip men who are truly called by God. It is also an insignificance and inadequacy that never leave. Let us note a few more examples. We saw already that Joshua was told three times, once by Moses and twice by the Lord, "Be strong and courageous." Why? The answer is in *Josh.1:9*. The Lord said a fourth time to Joshua, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not

tremble or be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” In *vs.5* the promise is, “Just as I have been with Moses, I will be with you.” Was Joshua experiencing fear? Yes! Was Joshua feeling inadequate? Yes!

When the Lord called Gideon, his response was, “Behold, my family is the least in Manasseh, and I am the youngest in my father’s house.” In other words, who am I? I am a nobody. I am insignificant. I am inadequate. And the Lord’s response was, “Surely, I will be with you.” (*Judges 6:15-16*). In *2Sam.7:18* David began his prayer as follows, “Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house, that You have brought me this far?” (*2Sam.7:18*). Note that David was already king when he was asking, why me, Lord? Why me? When the Lord called Jeremiah, his response was, “Alas, Lord God! Behold, I do not know how to speak, because I am a youth.” And the Lord’s response was, “I am with you.” (*Jer.1:5-8*).

In the mid-years of his ministry Paul asked as he contemplated the eternal life and eternal death issues involved in preaching the gospel, “Who is adequate for

these things?" (*2Cor.2:16*). In *1Cor.15:10* Paul wrote concerning his ministry, "by the grace of God I am what I am." When Paul was in Corinth, he began to experience great fear. And the Lord stepped in and said, "Do not be afraid ... I am with you." (*Acts 18:9-10*).

Paul's general principle for the church finds peculiar application in the lives of those who are called to the ministry. Paul wrote in *1Cor.1:26-29*, "For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God." There is nothing special about the men God calls to the ministry. He calls ordinary, insignificant and inadequate men to an extraordinary life and to carry out an extraordinary task.

There is one negative example I want to show you. The story begins in *Numbers chap.13*. Twelve spies are selected to go and spy out Canaan. They came back with a good report concerning the fruitfulness of the land and a bad report concerning the people living in the land. Ten of the spies maintained the Canaanites were too strong. They said, when we saw the people, “we became like grasshoppers in our own sight.” Two men, Joshua and Caleb, insisted the Israelites could conquer the Canaanites.

Their expression of inadequacy caused them and the people to become gripped with fear. That inadequacy and fear should have driven them to turn to the Lord and cry to Him for help. Instead they rebelled. Then they got ready to stone Moses, Aaron, Joshua and Caleb. And finally, they began to make plans to return to Egypt. God’s call and command was clear. Go into the land and conquer it. God’s promise was clear, “I will be with you.” (*Exod.6:6-8*). God had already and repeatedly proven to them that He would be faithful to His promise. This time, in their inadequacy and fear they went too far. And God passed sentence on

them : forty years of wandering in the wilderness until the entire adult generations died out. Only Joshua and Caleb were exempted from the judgment.

There is a warning principle here that must be taken seriously. When God calls you to the extraordinary life and task of the ministry, do not let your inadequacy and fear get the better of you and cause you to rebel against God's call. For that matter, do not let anything get the better of you and cause you to rebel against God's call.

I speak from experience. One day I got tired of these church leaders and their supporters who were waging war against me. And so, I decided I would leave the ministry. But every plan I made to leave, the Lord frustrated and stopped. When I gave up and stopped making plans to leave, then He banished me to a spiritual wilderness. I would spend approximately two years in that spiritual wilderness. I want to assure you of two things if you are running from God. Firstly, you do not want to discover what it means to live surrounded by walls with no doors. Secondly, you do not want to know what it means to be in the wilderness and live

with what King Saul experienced, “God has departed from me and no longer answers me.” (*1Sam.28:15*). Sometimes, God is gracious and gives you a second chance. Sometimes, there is no second chance. Be very careful.

If you know you are running from God, I say to you with all the love and concern in my heart for you, “please stop.” David asked, “Where can I go from Your Spirit? Or where can I flee from Your presence?” (*Psa.139:7*). The detailed answers he gave from *vss.8-12* can be summed up in one word, “**nowhere.**” To run from God is bondage. To obey God and walk with God is liberty.

The pattern we have seen so far is that when God calls, fear steps in. Fear steps in for a variety of reasons. In each example I have mentioned, the primary reason is that each man knew he was being called to an extraordinary task that was really an impossible task. This reality is infinitely truer today than it was for Moses. Moses was sent to Pharaoh. The gospel minister is being sent into Satan’s kingdom. But God never leaves us alone. He goes with us in this gospel warfare. He fights with us. He defends us. His promise is our lifeline : I am with you. I will be with

you. I will never leave you nor forsake you. Lo, I am with you, even to the end of the age. (*Matt.28:20; Heb.13:5*).

There is the call. There is the fear. There is the promise. But then, there is always **the decision to be made**. When the Lord said, “get out of the boat”, I was faced with a choice. The choice called for a kind of trust I had never experienced before. Will the Lord keep His promise? Am I making a mistake? Am I following some kind of foolish religious impulse? Is this an emotional religious fantasy that I have misconstrued? Or was I discerning in my heart an authentic call from God? I was **21**. I had no counselors I could trust. I was not trained for the ministry. And I was facing a life-changing choice. I knew the Lord was saying, “get out of the boat.”

Face to face with God, Moses finally made the right choice. It didn't make his life perfect and put him on easy street. But his choice changed his life and the life of a nation. Obedience to God's will is no guarantee that you will be spared adversity. More than often obedience to God's will brings adversity into your life. For Paul,

there was the promise of adversity. The Lord said, “I will show him how much he must suffer for My name’s sake.” (*Acts 9:16*).

The right choice changes your life in ways you will never be able to anticipate. One man put it this way, “*when you say yes to God’s call, it sets in motion a divine dynamic far beyond merely human power.*” But each day you live conscious of one very important reality, and that is, “I am what I am by the grace of God.” It’s a reality that gradually intensifies with each passing day. It’s a reality that makes you increasingly awed with the grace of God. I live the reality of David’s question : Who am I, Lord, that you have brought me this far?

Choose wrong and it also changes your life. There is a hardness that sets in. There is a quiet resistance to God and His ways that begins to mark you. There forms in your heart and dark opposition to those who made the right choice because they are a constant reminder to you of what you did wrong. And there is always the danger of apostasy because like Esau, you live with the constant danger

of bitterness taking root in your soul. (*Heb.12:16-17*). Bear in mind that when the moment of truth confronted Esau, he made the wrong choice. (*Gen.25:27-34*).

In closing now : there are many things that I have said and that can be said about the ministry that would frighten strong men with strong hearts. And you may be asking yourself : why would anyone in their right minds want to get involved in the gospel ministry? Why would I want to get involved in the gospel ministry? I would have to be out of my mind to do so. Paul would agree with you. He wrote in *2Cor.5:13*, “if we are beside ourselves, it is for God.” Literally, if we are mad men, it is for God.

There is, however, one final point you must know. Ask any man who has walked with God in the gospel ministry : if you had to do it again, would you do it? And I assure you that the answer you would receive is an emphatic “**yes**”. Thirty-five plus years later after his conversion and entrance into the ministry, Paul was sitting in a Roman maximum security cell awaiting Nero’s order for his execution. He sat there more than half-blind with a battle-scarred body, a body that had endured

39 lashes from the Jewish scourge on five occasions. Three times he was beaten with rods by the Roman authorities. The Romans didn't count. Paul told the Galatians, "I bear in my body the brand-marks of Jesus." (*Gal.6:17*). His body also endured imprisonments, stoning, shipwrecks, hardships, sleepless nights, hunger, thirst, cold and exposure. (*2Cor.11:22-33*).

After all of these physical hardships, his final reward is the executioner's blade. As Paul sat in contemplation of his life as a minister of the gospel, he wrote, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith." (*2Tim.4:7*). In other words, no regrets, no regrets, no regrets.

There is a wide gap that separates the man holding the rope and the man descending into the well to do the digging. There is a wide gap between the man sitting in the boat and the man getting out of the boat to walk on the water. That gap has to do with the call of God. That gap has to do with the nature of the work that must be done. That gap has to do with the peculiar dangers that must be faced. But that gap also has to do with the knowledge and presence of Christ that

is experienced. It is this final point that draws from the well digger the declaration, no regrets, no regrets, no regrets.

For Jim Elliot and his friends in the Amazon jungle, the rope snapped very early and they died as martyrs. The world's press screamed with its headlines, "What a waste of young lives!" Standing in the presence of Christ Jim Elliot and his friends would be saying, no regrets, no regrets, no regrets.

Isaiah said, "Here am I, Lord, send me." (*Isa.6:8*). The question is : What are you saying?