

Series: *God Deals in Remnants*

Title: "What Kind of Remnant?" (Acts 1:12-17, 1 Corinthians 1:26-31)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/22/2011

Page 1 of 13

Continuing Our Last Message: A Brief Review

Friends, today we are continuing a message that I began on our last program. Last time we focused on a very significant fact in Scripture. It is a fact that we find as a repeated theme, over and over again, from the beginning of the Bible all the way to the end. And it is a fact that flies in the face of much of the thinking on church growth in today's postmodern Evangelical church.

Here is what we find. We find, on the authority of God's Word, that God is not at all interested in numbers in the way that fallen man, and much of contemporary church leadership, is interested in numbers. We find, on the authority of Scripture, that this is not the way in which Christ builds His church. In fact, in the pages of the Word of God we find just the opposite. We find that God deals in remnants. Most of the time, God deals in what are, by human estimation, small things.

We looked at two particular passages of Scripture, and as we begin today I want to read them for you again. The first was the account of the faithful remnant in the upper room at Jerusalem in Acts chapter one, beginning at verse twelve. We find that after Jesus had ascended to Heaven, the disciples

returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey. And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James.

Series: *God Deals in Remnants*

Title: "What Kind of Remnant?" (Acts 1:12-17, 1 Corinthians 1:26-31)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/22/2011

Page 2 of 13

These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples (altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty), and said, "Men and brethren, this Scripture had to be fulfilled, which the Holy Spirit spoke before by the mouth of David concerning Judas, who became a guide to those who arrested Jesus; for he was numbered with us and obtained a part in this ministry."

And then we looked at a second passage, and this one is found in First Corinthians chapter one, beginning at verse twenty-six. The Apostle Paul writes this:

For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen [in the original, the small, or lowly, or insignificant things], and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God — and

Series: *God Deals in Remnants*

Title: "What Kind of Remnant?" (Acts 1:12-17, 1 Corinthians 1:26-31)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/22/2011

Page 3 of 13

righteousness and sanctification and redemption — that, as it is written,
“He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.”

Now before we go on today, I want to briefly review the main points we covered.

First, we saw that the 120 in the upper room were a small remnant. The Feast of Pentecost was one of the three times in the year when God commanded that every male Israelite was to come before the Lord at Jerusalem. So archeologists tell us that there were probably more than a million people in Jerusalem for this great religious observance. But only 120 were in the upper room, obeying the command of the Lord Jesus Christ to wait for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

Secondly, we saw that in our day, believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are a minority even among a minority. A small minority of our population is in church on the average Sunday morning. But most of that minority consists of people who are in a church service where they are being led astray from the truth. They're actually being inoculated against the truth. We, and others around the world each Lord's Day who gather to worship God in Spirit and in truth and to be faithful to His Word – we are indeed a small remnant on any given Sunday morning. But our Lord says to us, Luke 12:32 – “Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom.”

Thirdly, we saw that sometimes there are those who are numbered among the remnant, by our own estimation, but in the end, like Judas, they prove not to be believers. The dividing line that inevitably differentiates these people from true

Series: *God Deals in Remnants*

Title: "What Kind of Remnant?" (Acts 1:12-17, 1 Corinthians 1:26-31)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/22/2011

Page 4 of 13

believers is "the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ." In the end, they outright deny Christ, or they insist that it has to be "Christ plus" something else, or God's Word plus something else. They will not abide in the truth.

Fourthly, we took note of the fact that God is the One who adds people to His remnant. And for that reason, it is never too late for God to add someone to His remnant, and who He adds to His remnant may surprise us. We saw two examples last time.

In the account in Acts chapter one, we find that Jesus' brothers are here among the 120 – Jesus' brothers who did not believe on Him before He went to the cross. But now they are believers, and they are here. And two of Jesus' half-brothers, James and Jude, will become leaders in the early church.

And then we saw that the Apostle Paul was another surprising addition to Christ's remnant. He calls himself "one born out of due time". A man the Christians least expected to become one of them.

As We Continue...

Well as we continue today, I want to tell you about some other unexpected people who became part of God's remnant. And then I want to point out some occasions in the Word of God where the Lord did mighty things through remnants.

And finally, I want to address this question: As we've looked at all of these examples in Scripture and even some from the history of the church, we have seen

Series: *God Deals in Remnants*

Title: "What Kind of Remnant?" (Acts 1:12-17, 1 Corinthians 1:26-31)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/22/2011

Page 5 of 13

that God truly does deal in remnants. God is not at all concerned about numbers in the way that the postmodern Evangelical church-growth philosophy concerns itself with numbers. And so the final question, then, is this: What kind of a remnant does God work through? And so that is where we shall conclude today.

An Unlikely Saint

First, let me tell you about a man who was, like the Apostle Paul, a very unlikely man to become a member of Christ's remnant. The biography of the great British preacher Martyn Lloyd-Jones gives us the account of a man named William Thomas.

Martyn Lloyd-Jones pastored a church in a Welsh town called Port Talbot, and in that town, William Thomas was known as "Staffordshire Bill." And this wasn't a nice name. It was the kind of a name that people gave to a notoriously bad man. William Thomas was nearly seventy years old. And he was such a notoriously depraved man that even other deep sinners avoided him because of his low morals, his drunken ways, and his filthy conversation.

But God brought Staffordshire Bill into the remnant. His conversion began one night as he settled down in a local barroom to drink himself into unconsciousness. As he sat alone with his glass, he heard bits of conversation at a nearby table, and he soon realized that two of his fellow bar patrons were talking about Martyn Lloyd-Jones and his church.

Series: *God Deals in Remnants*

Title: "What Kind of Remnant?" (Acts 1:12-17, 1 Corinthians 1:26-31)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/22/2011

Page 6 of 13

One man said to the other, "Yes, I was there last Sunday night and that preacher said nobody was hopeless – he said there was hope for everybody." Well, Staffordshire Bill didn't hear the rest of the conversation, but his mind stuck on those words. And he said to himself, "If there's hope for everybody, there's hope for me – I'll go to that church myself and see what that man says."

But it was not easy. On the first two Sunday evenings, Staffordshire Bill went to the doors of the church, but both times he lost his nerve and went home. But as the days wore on, he found that he could no longer turn to alcohol to drown the terrors of his soul. The Spirit of God had already begun His gracious work, and God would see it through.

The next Sunday night, Staffordshire Bill was once again at the church doors. He was nervous, and he was wondering what to do next. But one of the members of the congregation saw him. And he said to him, "Are you coming in Bill? Come and sit with me." That same night, Staffordshire Bill passed from spiritual death to spiritual life. He found that he could understand what the preacher was saying. He believed the Gospel, and his heart was flooded with a great peace. Old things had passed away, all things had become new.

As he left the church that night with the man who had invited him in, the man introduced his new fellow Christian to Martyn Lloyd-Jones' wife. He said, "Mrs. Jones, this is Staffordshire Bill." She later recalled that moment in a book. She said: "I shall never forget the agonized look on his face, for he flinched as though he had

Series: *God Deals in Remnants*

Title: "What Kind of Remnant?" (Acts 1:12-17, 1 Corinthians 1:26-31)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/22/2011

Page 7 of 13

been struck a sudden blow. 'Oh no, oh no,' he said, 'that's a bad old name for a bad old man; I am William Thomas now.'

Staffordshire Bill had died to sin, and William Thomas had risen in Christ, a new creation. The Spirit of God had done His work through "the foolishness of preaching." William Thomas would never again hesitate to enter the doors of that church. He became a fixture in the congregation, and was one of a number of older "babes in Christ" who were lovingly nurtured by their newfound brothers and sisters.

Sometimes God brings people into His remnant late in life, and sometimes He brings people into His remnant who, like William Thomas, seem to be impossible cases, humanly speaking. But with God, all things are possible.

An Unlikely Sinner

God may also surprise us with who He adds to the remnant in another way. Sometimes He adds someone who we thought was already a Christian. One such case, in Martyn Lloyd-Jones' first church, was Martyn Lloyd-Jones' own wife. Yes, the pastor's wife, who everybody thought was already a Christian, was not saved.

Now, Mrs. Lloyd-Jones had grown up in the Evangelical church. And like her husband, she was also a qualified medical doctor. But she gave up her medical career to marry the man she knew would soon leave medicine for the ministry, and he took up his charge at the church in Wales right after their honeymoon.

Series: *God Deals in Remnants*

Title: "What Kind of Remnant?" (Acts 1:12-17, 1 Corinthians 1:26-31)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/22/2011

Page 8 of 13

Mrs. Lloyd-Jones had heard her future husband preach for the first time only a few months earlier. On that occasion, he preached on the account of Zacchaeus in Luke chapter 19, and the point of his message was that all men in all circumstances are equally in need of salvation from sin. She later said that the message actually frightened her. She resented the idea that she was in the same category as someone who was not religious at all. Her state of unrest went on for many months.

She later wrote this: "I was for two years under Martyn's ministry before I really understood what the Gospel was. I used to listen to him on Sunday morning and I used to feel, Well, if this is Christianity I really don't know anything about it. On Sunday night I used to pray that somebody would be converted; I thought you had to be a drunkard or a prostitute to be converted. I remember how I used to rejoice to see drunkards become Christians and envy them with all my heart, because here they were, full of joy, and free, and here I was in such a different condition."

During this time, she felt a growing conviction of sin, and she wondered if her sin could be greater than the merit of the blood of Christ. But through the patient counsel of her husband, she at last came to understand the Gospel. She came to understand that Christ's atonement alone, as she put it, "was well able to clear my sins away." The pastor's own wife came to the place of personal repentance from sin, and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ as her Savior from God's wrath, and she too was added to God's remnant.

Series: *God Deals in Remnants*

Title: "What Kind of Remnant?" (Acts 1:12-17, 1 Corinthians 1:26-31)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/22/2011

Page 9 of 13

God's Mighty Works Through Remnants

God deals in remnants. Dear friends, true believers in the Lord Jesus Christ are indeed a small remnant today. But that should not give us an inferiority complex – because God always deals in remnants. And God does great things through remnants.

In the book of Judges chapter seven, we read that God pared Gideon's army from 32,000 men down to 300 before He used them to defeat the Midianites. He said, "Gideon, you've got too many men. I'm going to whittle you down to just a few, so that when you win the victory you will know that you didn't do it by your own power, but you will know that I was the One who gave these people into your hands."

We read in First Samuel chapter fourteen of Jonathan and his armor-bearer. Jonathan said to him, "Come on, let's just the two of us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised Philistines. It may be that the Lord will work for us. Because nothing restrains God from saving by many or by few." And God gave them a great victory over the Philistines that day.

In 1st Kings chapter 19, Elijah said to the Lord, "Lord, they've killed all the prophets and I'm the only one left who still stands for You, and they're out to kill me too." And God said, "Elijah, don't think you're alone. I have yet reserved seven thousand in Israel who have not bowed the knee to Baal, seven thousand who are still true to me." I still have My remnant, and I am going to defeat Israel's enemies.

Series: *God Deals in Remnants*

Title: "What Kind of Remnant?" (Acts 1:12-17, 1 Corinthians 1:26-31)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/22/2011

Page 10 of 13

And Paul quotes that passage in Romans chapter 11. And then he writes this: "Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace."

God deals in remnants. That is His way. Three hundred against the army of Midian. Two against the Philistine army. One hundred and twenty on the Day of Pentecost. A handful of Puritans coming to America 400 years ago. People who are faithful to Christ in our day. In our time, many faithful men and women have left apostate churches to meet in tents, in homes, in schools, in firehouses, in storefronts, and other places, because they understand that it is not numbers or a building that matter, but the truth as it is found only in Christ and His Word. It is "not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord."

What Kind of a Remnant?

This brings us to our final question. As we've looked at all of these examples in Scripture, and even some from the history of the church, we have seen that God truly does deal in remnants. God is not at all concerned about numbers in the way that the postmodern Evangelical church-growth philosophy concerns itself with numbers. And so the final question, then, is this: What kind of a remnant does God work through?

First of all, the people of God's remnant are saved people. God is very much concerned with individuals. God saves individuals. There are no unsaved individuals in the true remnant, the true Church of Jesus Christ. There may be

Series: *God Deals in Remnants*

Title: "What Kind of Remnant?" (Acts 1:12-17, 1 Corinthians 1:26-31)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/22/2011

Page 11 of 13

people who are unsaved hangers-on within the visible church. But God's true remnant is made up only of those who will rule and reign with Christ for eternity.

Secondly, the people of God's remnant are to be sanctified people. The most important thing, the most vital thing, for any group of people who gather as the local assembly of the remnant of Jesus Christ, is for the pastor and the people to walk worthy of the Lord.

What does this involve? It involves personal sanctification, and growth in that sanctification. And how does that come about? Sanctification means becoming more and more like Christ. And how does a Christian become more and more like Christ? That comes only through personal knowledge of Christ through the study of the Word of God. No other way. This is the only place you will find out about Christ. The only true Christ is the Christ of the Bible. Any other "Christ" is a counterfeit.

And this leads me to point out something else that is vital. Becoming more like the Lord Jesus Christ is not a function of the physical or the numerical size of the church. It is a function of the condition of the temple of God the Holy Spirit. And the New Testament teaches us that the church building is not the temple of the Holy Spirit. You, dear friend – if you are a member of the remnant, a saint of God, born again in Christ – *you* are the temple of the Holy Spirit of God.

And this brings us to the final thing that I want to emphasize today. That sanctified life, that Christ-like life, must be true of the preacher, and it must be true

Series: *God Deals in Remnants*

Title: "What Kind of Remnant?" (Acts 1:12-17, 1 Corinthians 1:26-31)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/22/2011

Page 12 of 13

of the people. The preacher's preaching must be the overflow of a sanctified life. The people's witness to the world must be the overflow of a sanctified life. A life in the Word of God.

Here is why this is so important. Back in the 1700s, an American pastor named Gilbert Tennant preached a famous sermon on the danger of unconverted pastors in the Evangelical church. It was a shocking sermon at the time. Many people refused to believe that there were unconverted men, unsaved men, standing in the pulpits of Evangelical churches.

But dear friends, I believe we have the same problem, to a far greater extent, in our day. I believe that the evidence of the state of the church in our day tells us that many pastors, Evangelical pastors, need to examine their own hearts on this question. I am afraid, as Gilbert Tennant was in his day, that we have many unsaved men standing in Evangelical pulpits today.

And this of course leads to a second danger, the danger of an unsaved congregation. This is why Gospel preaching is vital. This is why instruction in sound doctrine is vital. The dividing line between the saved and the lost – between the members of God's true remnant and those outside of it – that dividing line is the Word of God and the testimony of Jesus Christ.

Dear friend, perhaps you are listening today and you are a member of a congregation, or even a pastor, and you realize that you are not truly saved, you are not truly part of Christ's remnant today. I urge you to call upon the name of the

Series: *God Deals in Remnants*

Title: "What Kind of Remnant?" (Acts 1:12-17, 1 Corinthians 1:26-31)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 5/22/2011

Page 13 of 13

Lord in repentance and faith today, to turn from your sins, and to receive Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. And if you are taking that step today, or you would like to take that step, and you need additional help or counsel, we would consider it a great privilege to communicate with you. Listen for our contact information in just a few moments.

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