

UPWARD CALL

Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but this is my one aim: to forget everything that's behind, and to strain every nerve to go after what lies ahead. I press on toward the finish line, where the prize waiting for me is the upward call of God

IN KING JESUS.

(Philippians 3:13-14)

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No Word from God Shall Be Void of Power

For with God nothing shall be impossible. (Luke 1:37 KJV)

Contextually, the angel Gabriel spoke these words to Mary after she was told that both she and Elizabeth would conceive sons in miraculous ways. Elizabeth would conceive although she was barren in her old age. Mary would conceive by being overshadowed by the holy spirit. It is in this context that Gabriel declared that nothing is impossible with God, meaning He can do all things, without exception.

I think most of us would agree with Gabriel's declaration, but why was it necessary to state the obvious? Reversing the thought—if some things are not possible with God, then would He truly be the God of creation? Are God's hands tied regarding some things so that He cannot act? Actually, I have heard preachers state this, especially in regard to prayer. Have you heard the declaration from the pulpit that God cannot do anything unless His people pray? If this were so, then I doubt He would ever reach His ultimate purpose. Where were the prayers of the saints when the Lamb was slain before the foundation of the world? Where were the prayers when—by the predetermined plan and foreknowledge of God the Father—He allowed His Son to be nailed to a cross so that through the spirit of holiness He would be raised from the dead (Acts 2:23-24; Romans 1:4)?

I suppose one could say that Mary needed to be assured that God could do this amazing thing in her womb. After all, this had never been done before in the recorded history of man, so it was in a realm of the miraculous all by itself. Elizabeth's conception was a miraculous act of God, but she wasn't the first in history to be given this blessed joy. Sarah was the prototype.

This leads to a question: Is this really what Gabriel declared or meant to declare? Or, have most of the translators missed the point? A study of the many English translations indicates that most word Luke 1:37 the same way the *King James* and the *New American Standard* versions word it. Does this mean they are correct as if they have a lock on how to translate the Greek in this verse? Perhaps not. Consider these four translations (combined).

For no word [declaration] from God shall be void of power. (Luke 1:37 ASV, RV, Numeric, [Rotherham])

Take special notice that it is a word (*rhema*) from God; it is not a word of God but one that is from Him. These translations are more accurate for they are based on the actual Greek root words contained in this verse—namely, the words *rheo* (G4483), meaning to *speak, say, command*, and *dunamai* (G1410) from which the word *power* is derived. The key is the word *rhema* which appears in this verse and comes from the word *rheo*. *Rhema* appears in the Greek scriptures some 70 times and is always translated as *word* or *saying*. So, to ignore the word *rhema* entirely and simply present a negative (i.e., *nothing*) misses the mark, for it leaves God's spoken word out of the equation altogether. It is God's word that has power.

Now, this shines light on Gabriel's announcement and, frankly, makes sense. Simply, if God speaks, His words have power. They are not idle or meaningless or false or lacking or minced or any such thing. His word is backed up by His very character and His word goes forth with purpose. This is reinforced through Isaiah.

"Declare and set forth your case; indeed, let them consult together. Who has announced this from of old? Who has long since declared it? Is it not I, the LORD? And there is no other God besides Me, a righteous God and a Savior; there is none except Me. I have sworn by Myself; the word has gone forth from My mouth in

righteousness and will not turn back, that to Me every knee will bow, every tongue will swear allegiance. (Isaiah 45:21, 23 NASB)

"Remember the former things long past, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things which have not been done, Saying, 'My purpose will be established, and I will accomplish all My good pleasure'; calling a bird of prey from the east, the man of My purpose from a far country. Truly I have spoken; truly I will bring it to pass. I have planned it, surely, I will do it. (Isaiah 46:9-11 NASB)

These words had specific application in the ancient days; but they also point to a far-reaching application that reaches all the way to the consummation of the ages. Paul makes the point by quoting Isaiah 45:23 in Philippians. Thus, God's declaration that His word shall not return void is universal and inclusive. When God declares He is going to do something, He means it and it will come to pass. His righteousness demands it; His love ensures it.

It is not uncommon to hear and read of the expression *word of God* referring to the Bible and every printed word contained therein, as if it all came directly from the mouth of God. Logic would tell us that this is not so, for there are many voices (words from men) recorded in the Bible. Others would say that the expression means that the entire Bible is inspired by God, thus it is His word, even if not spoken directly from Him. They have support for such thinking based on Paul's letter to Timothy: *All scripture is inspired by God* (2 Timothy 3:16). Some make the point that Paul was only referring to most of the old testament, and not to the new. Others claim that all scripture is not necessarily inspired—only that which is inspired (or, divinely breathed into us) is profitable. This is based on translations that read: *All scripture inspired by God is profitable*, implying scripture must be inspired before it is profitable.

To this last point, it could be argued that mere words printed on a piece of paper—words that have been translated, not from the original documents, but from copies of copies (add multiple copies) of the originals that long ago vanished—are not necessarily inspired. What we hold as the inspired word of God today comes from translations of God's original words and the words of men transferred and re-translated down through many centuries. Let's face it; all translations have the bias of men built into them, so where is the inspiration in these biases, especially when translations conflict with one another based on these biases? Where is the inerrant, infallible word of God in the numerous translations that the preachers read from and boldly claim are without error or bias?

Dear people of God, the Lord's people have been fed for far too long now on the word of men and their biases. We can parse the printed words; cut them up and paste them into a systematic theology, a doctrinal template that we then call "truth" or "God's inspired word"; even make a whole ministry of them, and still come up empty in relation to God's heart, His plan and purpose accomplished through, in, and by His Son. In the end, all we have is an organized way to explain the words printed on paper, into which we then insert our own biases or the biases of the pulpit. **But do we have LIFE? Do we have a relational revelation of the living, vibrant, victorious LORD?** Or, do we simply have words? In my own life, I can testify that there have been many times when all I have had are words. To this, I agree with Solomon: *Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.*

What we need is *rhema* from God; we need to hear directly in our hearts and our spirits what the spirit of the Lord is saying in these days. To do this, we need to get alone with the Lord and shut out all other voices. As for the Bible, the printed words need to become *rhema* to us. Only the spirit of God is able to breathe on the printed word and make it life to us, life that has power; only Jesus' spirit can cut through the errors and the biases and the religion. When God speaks into our hearts, we know that, whatever the word is, it is one that has power and will not return to Him void—it (He) will accomplish all that has been spoken.

Surely, scripture, with its many interesting and vital subjects, is fascinating to study, but let us not lose sight of the fact that within it all is a revelation of God's Son, our Lord Jesus, and God's ultimate purpose accomplished through Him. Behind every word from God is LIFE and LOVE. These will never return to Him void, for these speak of His Son, the deliverer of the world, and the Father's ultimate purpose to be All in All. **All in LIFE, all in LOVE, and All NEW!** We desperately need *rhema* in this day!