

HTPC Adult Sunday School
Prophetic Call Narratives – Week 9
The Retrospective Communion of the Saints

Opening Hymn – Holy God, We Praise Your Name

*1. Holy God, we praise your name;
Lord of all, we bow before you;
all on earth your scepter claim,
all in heav'n above adore you.
Infinite your vast domain,
everlasting is your reign.*

*2. Hark, the glad celestial hymn
angel choirs above are raising;
cherubim and seraphim
in unceasing chorus praising,
fill the heav'ns with sweet accord:
"Holy, holy, holy Lord."*

*3. Lo! the apostolic train
join your sacred name to hallow;
prophets swell the glad refrain,
and the white-robed martyrs follow;
and from morn to set of sun,
through the church the song goes on.*

*4. Holy Father, Holy Son,
Holy Spirit, Three we name you;
while in essence only One,
undivided God we claim you,
and adoring bend the knee,
while we sing this mystery.*

I. “Spiritual Continuity”

A. The great cloud of witnesses ...

32 And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel **and the prophets**— 33 who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, 34 quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. 35 Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. 36 Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. 37 They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— 38 **of whom the world was not worthy**—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

39 And all these, though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, 40 since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

12:1 Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and the sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race set before us, 2 looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 11:32-12:3)

- What accounts for the “spiritual continuity” of the Church?
- Why is it important for us to not only consider but embrace this spiritual continuity?

B. “Retrospective” Communion of the Saints – Geerhardus Vos

“I do not know whether we always make enough of this **retrospective communion of the saints**, of this spiritual continuity with the church of the past.

“In **natural relations** we are not slow to take pride in our descent from those who have left an honorable record behind them in the annals of history, and we feel the obligations which such a connection imposes upon us. Why should it be different in the religious sphere?”

- Why is it so often “different in the religious sphere”?

“In the exercise of faith as well as in that of the natural virtues, we ought to feel the force of the principle: *noblesse oblige*¹. Sometimes we are all too concerned with what the present world will say about us- whether it will regard us as progressive, enlightened and liberal; while too seldom considering what would be **the historic judgment passed upon us by the church of the former ages if its great figures could gather around us and review the part we take in the making of the history of the present- whether they would be shamed or gladdened by our doings.**

- How is the modern church more privileged than those of whom the author of Hebrews speaks?

¹ The responsibility of the privileged to act with generosity and nobility toward the less privileged.

- Are we consistently aware that we are living within the unfolding of redemptive history in our day? What difference would it make if we possessed such an awareness in our lives and ministry together?

“So let us, sometimes at least, endeavor to view our condition and performance in this light, and **ask ourselves whether we can without shame and self-reproach allow the soundness of our faith, the purity of our life and the consecration of our service to fall below the attainments of any earlier generation of the church of God.**

“And on the other hand, though the world may look down upon us as reactionaries and antiquated people, if we can **conscientiously say that we have remained faithful to the principles which God himself stamped with his historic approval in the past, let us derive comfort from the thought that we do not walk alone**, but are encompassed about on every side by an innumerable host of friends who will honor us as God as honored them.” – Geerhardus Vos

II. The Prophets and Spiritual Continuity

A. God-Centered Worship

1 The word that came to Jeremiah from the LORD: 2 “Stand in the gate of the LORD’s house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the LORD, all you men of Judah who enter these gates to worship the LORD. 3 Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place. 4 Do not trust in these deceptive words: ‘This is the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD, the temple of the LORD.’

5 “For if you truly amend your ways and your deeds, if you truly execute justice one with another, 6 if you do not oppress the sojourner, the fatherless, or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own harm, 7 then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers forever.

8 “Behold, you trust in deceptive words to no avail. 9 Will you steal, murder, commit adultery, swear falsely, make offerings to Baal, and go after other gods that you have not known, 10 and then come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, ‘We are delivered!’—only to go on doing all these abominations? 11 Has this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, declares the LORD. (Jeremiah 7:1-11)

B. Zeal for the Word of God

9 If I say, “I will not mention him, or speak any more in his name,” there is in my heart as it were a burning fire shut up in my bones, and I am weary with holding it in, and I cannot. (Jeremiah 20:7-9)

C. The Transcendent Concreteness of Gospel Ministry

15 The word of the LORD came to me: 16 “Son of man, behold, I am about to take the delight of your eyes away from you at a stroke; yet you shall not mourn or weep, nor shall your tears run down. 17 Sigh, but not aloud; make no mourning for the dead. Bind on your turban, and put your shoes on your feet; do not cover your lips, nor eat the bread of men.” 18 So I spoke to the people in the morning, and at evening my wife died. And on the next morning I did as I was commanded. (Ezekiel 24:15-18)

D. Suffering and Patience for the Sake of the Gospel

*1 Now Shephatiah the son of Mattan, Gedaliah the son of Pashhur, Jucal the son of Shelemiah, and Pashhur the son of Malchiah heard the words that Jeremiah was saying to all the people: 2 “Thus says the LORD: He who stays in this city shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence, but he who goes out to the Chaldeans shall live. He shall have his life as a prize of war, and live. 3 Thus says the LORD: This city shall surely be given into the hand of the army of the king of Babylon and be taken.” 4 Then the officials said to the king, “Let this man be put to death, for he is weakening the hands of the soldiers who are left in this city, and the hands of all the people, by speaking such words to them. **For this man is not seeking the welfare of this people, but their harm.**” 5 King Zedekiah said, “Behold, he is in your hands, for the king can do nothing against you.” 6 So they took Jeremiah and cast him into the cistern of Malchiah, the king’s son, which was in the court of the guard, letting Jeremiah down by ropes. And there was no water in the cistern, but only mud, and **Jeremiah sank in the mud.** (Jeremiah 38:1-6)*