

Can You Adapt to Heavenly Victory?

The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) released its January Employment Report. The national unemployment rate remained at a 17-year low of 4.1 percent. Non-farm employment increased a robust 200,000 for the month, compared to 160,000 in December (revised upward from 148,000) and pre-report expectations of 180,000. Private employment increased 196,000 during January, nearly 25,000 above forecasts and 30,000 above the upwardly revised December estimate. In short, the employment report showed a strong and strengthening labor market.

The stronger U. S. economy is starting to be reflected in higher wages. Average hourly earnings increased 2.9 percent from a year ago, which was 0.3 percent higher than pre-report forecasts and the largest since 2009. The December year-ago estimate was increased from 2.5 percent to 2.7 percent. In January. Average hourly earnings were \$.

Other positive news included decreasing jobless claims and increasing factory orders, construction spending, consumer confidence and PMI's manufacturing index (near three-year highs). Negatives included the highest 30-year mortgage rates in 10 months and a related drop in mortgage applications.

The U. S. stock market responded to the strong employment report by dropping sharply. The S&P 500 stock index dropped 2.1 percent, the Dow Jones Industrial Index fell 2.5 percent and the NASDAQ fell percent for the day. For the week, U. S. stocks fell the most in two years. But longer term, the S&P 500 is up 3.3 percent this year and 21.1 percent from a year-ago; the DJIA is up 3.2 percent this year and 28.3 percent from a year-ago; and, the NASDAQ is up 4.9 percent this year and 28.5 percent from a year-ago.

The markets were concerned last week about higher wages, inflation, higher interest rates and potential actions by the Federal Reserve to the challenges ahead. Many have become accustomed to the abnormally low wages, inflation and interest rates of a weak economy. As the economy strengthens, expect these metrics to increase, hopefully in a measured manner.

In response to the stronger economy, many are expecting the Fed to increase interest rates four times during 2018. As long as interest rate increases remain orderly and moderate, the economy and markets should be able to absorb them in stride. A greater demand for capital investments and labor will require businesses to compete more for loanable funds and workers. A strong economy will require adjustment and adaption.

The church must also adjust and adapt as the Lord moves us from glory to glory and from victory to victory. After the Lord's ascension, 120 believers were waiting in Jerusalem, in obedience, for the promise of the Father. The Scriptures say that they were of one mind and continually devoting themselves to prayer. These disciples knew that they would receive power from above and that they were called to witness to the world, but they probably did not understand the full significance of what would shortly occur. The transpiring events would turn them and the world upside down. Much adjustment and adaption would be required.

"Being assembled with them, He commanded them, "Do not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, of which you have heard from Me" (Acts 1:4).

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you shall be My witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

"These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication" (Acts 1:14a).

The early believers at Pentecost had done their due diligence.

They were willing to accept the call (witnesses), they were in obedience (waited in Jerusalem), they were in unity (of one mind), and they prayed (continually). While not knowing the future exactly, they had done their part. The Lord would provide the rest.

When the tongues of fire rested on each of them, they were changed forever. They were now filled with the Holy Spirit and were empowered to do anything the Lord asked them to do. They had the full power of the Trinity backing them up. They could reasonably be expected to witness to the world. And witness they did.

“There appeared to them tongues as of fire, being distributed and resting on each of them, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to speak” (Acts 2:3-4).

Jerusalem was amazed and perplexed. Some accused the believers of drinking too much. In response, Peter got up to speak. His first sermon resulted in new believers, and the first church was born. These new believers were promised that if they repented and were baptized, they and their families would also receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. Logistics might require adjustment and adaption, but everyone was now empowered to do all, if they were willing.

“Peter said to them, Peter said to them, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all who are far away, as many as the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:38-39).

After Pentecost, these believers:

- were devoting themselves to the apostles teaching, fellowship and prayer (Acts 2:42),

- kept feeling a sense of awe with many wonders and signs (Acts 2:43),
- had all things in common by selling property and giving to those who had need (Acts 2:44-45),
- met together with unity in the temple and ate together with gladness in their homes (Acts 2:46) and
- praised God (Acts 2:47).

These Spirit empowered believers had favor with all the people. The Lord was adding to their numbers daily (Acts 2:47).

The accomplishments of these early saints were supernatural. Adjustments and adaptations required and made were supernatural. Without the power of God, the fledgling church would have probably failed. But these early saints did their part. They were willing to allow the Holy Spirit to use them in any way He chose. Perhaps we should do likewise.