

A dirt road stretches from the foreground into the distance, flanked by sparse, dry vegetation. The sky is filled with dramatic, grey clouds, suggesting an overcast or stormy day. The overall scene conveys a sense of a long, arduous journey.

# **GOSPEL EVANGELISM**

**They Went Forth And Preached Everywhere**

**DICKSON**

# Gospel Evangelism

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Scripture quotations from *International King James Version*

Cover theme: *On The Road With Jesus* (Central, Namibia - R.E.D.)

## INTRODUCTION

Every disciple of Jesus should consider himself a John the Baptist to his generation. We are *“the voice of one crying in the wilderness”* (Mt 3:3). We cry out, **“Save yourselves from this perverse generation”** (At 2:40). We, as Peter, proclaim, *“There is salvation in no other, for **there is no other name** [than Jesus] under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”* (At 4:12). We cry out that the world is lost in sin, and thus we announce that our Creator has provided a solution for all sin in the world. We can say the same as the angel who announced the gospel for the first time on earth to some shepherds in a field, **“I bring you good tidings of great joy that will be to all the people”** (Lk 2:10). This is the great news of the incarnational birth of the Son of God: *“For to you a Savior is born this day in the city of David, who is Christ the Lord”* (Lk 2:11).

We live in a generation where the ministry of preaching is too often held up in the confines of four brick walls. We often carry on preaching weekly to the saved and “singing to the choir.” While being held up by an audience that covets our preaching for themselves, a world of unbelievers goes without a messenger to cry out that *“a Savior is born this day in the city*

*of David, who is Christ the Lord.”*

When churches move away from Jesus, the members move away from an offensive voice to the lost. We back off to be a defensive body of those who look after ourselves. Being shut up in the confines of those who are familiar with one another, we become defensive in our efforts to preserve our religiosity through the performance of rites and rituals of a heritage that is far removed from the evangelistic spirit that drove the early disciples into all the world. We turn to “feel good” sermons that offends no one. We thus settle the disciples further into a narcissistic religiosity, thinking that we are the primary focus of the Bible and the preacher.

It is time to broadcast among ourselves a restoration to preach the gospel to the world. It is time to arise from the dead and shine the gospel to the world (See Ep 5:14). We thus call for a restoration, a restoration to the nature of the gospel itself, that it is good news that of necessity must be broadcast to every living soul *“that a Savior is born”* into this world.

We need to be reminded that the church is not a fort. We are not sentinels whose responsibility it is to simply maintain the walls of a religious institution. When we do such, the religious institution often becomes the

subject of our message and not the gospel. We must remember that the church is God's dynamic army of spiritual soldiers who should be continually challenged to leave the barracks in order to engage the enemy. We must remind ourselves that as the church that the unbelievers are not coming to settle comfortably in our pews before pulpits from which come messages that are sterile of the gospel. "Church-house Christianity" will never evangelize the world.

Some assemblies often become dead zones wherein fruitless spectators have gathered to be reassured of their faith by the preacher and the observance of designated rites and rituals. We perform our ceremonies in order to reconfirm that we are "in the right ark." Through the sound of smooth and fair speech, we as contented spectators are often soothed into thinking that we are headed for eternal glory in another "sanctuary" of heaven. As inert monoliths we often become dead men walking in search of something that will keep us motivated to show up next Sunday morning.

We must remember that the church is the pillar and ground of the truth of the gospel (1 Tm 3:15). The church—that's us—is God's medium through which He seeks to proclaim the truth of the gospel to the world. The army of believers assemble to-

gether in order to celebrate the gospel in the Lord's Supper. But after the celebration, it is time to go forth into the field with the gospel message that we celebrated with bread and fruit of the vine.

**The world is the field! And it is into this field that the army of disciples have been sent to preach the gospel!** If there is no proclamation of the truth of the gospel going forth from the church, then the church has lost the meaning of the metaphor "pillar."

We would follow Jesus. On one occasion during His ministry, Jesus "*departed and went into a desert place*" (Lk 4:42). When the people found out where He was, they came to Him. They then did what many churches seek to do with their preachers today, that is, **they steal them away from the lost.** "*And the people sought Him, and came to Him. And they tried to keep Him from leaving them*" (Lk 4:42). Does this sound familiar? Few churches who sign the paycheck of their preacher seek to send their preacher to other cities where the gospel is yet to be preached.

The ministry of Jesus was identified by His coming into this world and going forth to the people. He reminded the people, "*I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also, because for this purpose I was sent*" (Lk 4:43). Jesus would not allow

Himself to be kidnapped by those who loved Him, and thus be detoured from His mission as the Son of God to preach the good news of the kingdom to other people.

Paul imitated this gospel mission of Jesus. In the middle of a context where he exhorted the Corinthians, “*You will not muzzle the ox while he is threshing*” (1 Co 9:9), he gave this inspiring testimony: “*For though I am free from all men, I have made myself a bondservant to all, so that I might gain the more*” (1 Co 9:19).

Paul was free from the burden of being supported by the disciples. He worked with his hands as a tentmaker in order to support himself (At 20:34,35). He wanted to remain free from the confinement of a pay check in order that he “*might gain the more*” through the preaching of the gospel. Pay checks often bring one into the bondage of the contributors, but tentmaking sets one free to go into all the world as his heart moves him.

We have always thought that it was ironic that those who were truly motivated by the gospel to preach the gospel to the world had to go from one supposedly group of gospel-obedient disciples to another in order to convince the supposed supporters of the gospel to send them into all the world to preach the gospel.

Have we digressed from the mind of Christ to the point that we

must be reminded of the work of an evangelist in order to set evangelists free in order to go into all the world to preach the gospel? It is only natural that the church would covet the evangelists, turning them from being evangelists with the message of the gospel to the lost to being pastors of the flock at home. But Jesus did not fall for this detour in His purpose or mission. The last verse of Luke 4 historically reads, “*And He preached in the synagogues of Galilee*” (Lk 4:44).

Jesus would not be turned from His destiny. He came “*to seek and to save that which was lost*” (Lk 19:10). When we lose sight of this mission to the lost, we have forgotten our purpose. We have allowed others to keep us from going into all the world to preach the gospel to the lost. We are no longer disciples of the One who came to seek and to save those who are lost.

When we see how far Jesus came in His search for us, and save us from sin (Ph 2:5-11), then we begin to understand His purpose in calling disciples to come unto Him in order to do the same. The gospel of His incarnation is the power that draws us to believe that Jesus is the Christ and Son of the living God (See Jn 20:30,31). His disciples, therefore, are His continued spiritual incarnation in the world to take the message of the gospel to the lost throughout the

world. As He came into our world, so through living incarnationallly we take the gospel of His coming into all the world (See Ph 2:5-11). Those who are not living incarnationallly will never understand those, who as Paul, seek to live incarnationallly in order to preach the gospel to the world (See Ph 3:7,8).

If this world is to be won for Jesus, then it is as someone said, "Responsibility must be taught ... enthusiasm must be caught ... recruits must be sought." If we would be a true incarnationall disciple of Jesus, then we can never say, "I'm gonna teach the gospel to somebody, someday." "Gonna" is not in the dictionary. "Somebody" is not in the phone book. "Someday" is not on any calendar.

We need disciples who know how to get excited about sowing the seed of the kingdom because they are excited about the need to take the gospel to all the world. We need convictions that lead to conversions. Evangelism is simply one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread. A Christian is a beggar who has found the Bread of Life. Personal evangelism gets "personal" when we find famished souls who are without bread. Personal evangelism is the work of a disciple who has found the Bread of Life, and thus, is telling oth-

ers who are hungering and thirsting after righteousness where to find this Bread.

Too many Christians are like the boy who observed a blind man coming down a pathway. The blind man stumbled over rocks and limbs, and the boy stood by and did nothing. Finally, the blind man stumbled into a ditch, injuring himself grievously. A man rushed up and said to the boy, "Why did you not help the blind man?" The boy responded, "He wasn't my responsibility." Reminds us of what Cain said in response to God asking him where Abel was. "*Am I my brother's keeper?*" (Gn 4:9). Yes we are!

As disciples of Jesus, we must never forget that **every lost person is a mission field and every disciple is a missionary**. We are responsible for this world neighborhood of lost souls. We are our brother's keeper. It is as a poet once wrote:

*Is there anything else that is better worth,  
As along life's way we plod,  
Than to find some wandering soul of earth,  
And bring him home to God?*

*I would rather find a soul that is lost,  
And bring him home again,  
Than to sing what all earth's acres cost,  
Or all the wealth of men.*

*Wouldn't I be glad when the day is done,  
In breathing my last breath,  
To know some word of mine had won,  
And saved a soul from death.*

Once after a dynamic preacher delivered a soul-searching sermon, a young man came up to the preacher immediately after the lesson was over and asked, "What can I do to evangelize the world?" The preacher responded, "Is your best friend a Christian?" When we light a candle in a room or switch on a light, we expect the darkness around us to go away immediately. The less the gospel light is preached in this world, the darker the world will become. This "little gospel light" of ours may seem insignificant, but if we all turn it on at the same time, the world will be a brighter place in which to live.

Therefore, Jesus needs our immediate help. He needs it now, for tomorrow will never do. Another poet wrote,

*Christ has no hands but our hands,  
To do His work today;  
He has no feet but our feet,  
To lead men in His way.*

*He has no tongue but our tongue,  
To tell men how He died.  
He has no help but our help,  
To bring them to His side.*

*We are the only Bible,  
The careless world will read;  
We are the sinner's gospel,  
We are the scoffer's creed.*

*We are the Lord's last message,  
Given in deed and word;  
What if the type is crooked?  
What if the print is blurred?*

*What if our hands are busy,  
With other work than His?  
What if our feet are walking,  
Where sin's allurements is?*

*What if our tongues are speaking,  
Of things that lips should spurn?  
Would we be glad to meet Him?  
Would we welcome His return?*

## Chapter 1

# ISRAEL'S LOST OPPORTUNITY

It was not only because the land of Palestine flowed with milk and honey that God gave the Israelites the promised land. The location of Palestine was strategic to world evangelism, that is, to the preaching of the one true and living God of heaven to the constant flow of world traders who passed through the land. God planted the nation of Israel at the crossroads of world trade in the ancient world. It was a tremendous opportunity.

One of the “travel laws” of the Sinai law referred to one who was traveling through another’s field (See Dt 24:19-22). The traveler could pick and eat grapes until he was full (Dt 23:24). He could pick with his hand and partake of the standing corn (Dt 23:25). However, he could not put a sickle to a crop. This was an interesting law when one considered the strategic location of Palestine. We are sure that the Israelites at the time did not understand fully the worldwide implications of this law of neighborly sharing.

A good look at a map of the area reveals the tremendous opportunity that Israel had in teaching the world about the one true and living God. On the west of Palestine is the Mediterranean Sea. On the east is the Ara-

bian Desert. Land trade between the countries to the north and south of Palestine had to pass through Palestine. We recall the story of Joseph when “*some Midianite traders passed by*” through Palestine on their way to Egypt (Gn 37:28). When these traders passed through Palestine, the incident of Joseph being sold to them happened over four hundred years before Israel possessed the land. Centuries before there were traders passing through Palestine before Abraham and Sarah arrived and settled in the land. Palestine, therefore, was a strategic land through which much of the ancient world depended for trade between nations.

Now we can only imagine the opportunity that God laid at the doorstep of Israel when He gave them this very strategic trading route of the ancient world. Those who sought to trade with the port cities of the Mediterranean could bring their goods to the seaports of Tyre and Sidon, the two port cities that fell within the boundaries of Palestine. From Tyre and Sidon merchandise could be shipped to all the Mediterranean port cities.

So from north to south, east to west, Palestine was the focal point of

trade in the ancient world. Solomon capitalized on this opportunity, making Israel a very wealthy nation during his reign by “charging customs” of those who passed through the land. After Israel dwelt only a few years in the land they surely began to realize that God had given them some very strategic real estate.

Now consider the tremendous responsibility that Israel had in reference to influencing the world for good. The farming Israelites had the opportunity to change a polytheistic world to believe in the one true and living God. But instead of taking ownership of the opportunity to teach passing traders the good news of the God of heaven, they adopted the gods of the nations around them for the sake of business. Solomon began this fall into material prosperity when he signed contracts—he married foreign women—for the sake of money.

From the time of Solomon, Israel started her fall from God. She subsequently forsook her responsibility to seize the opportunity of her strategic location in order to change the world for the better. We often wonder what the world would be like today if Israel had not forsaken the tremendous opportunity that God gave her by giving Israel the hub of the ancient world of trade. As God became frustrated because they forsook Him, we too are frustrated with their

apostasy. We could be living in an entirely different world today if only the Israelites would have remained true to God and His covenant with them.

God had revealed His presence to them, and yet, they forsook Him for gods who were carved by the hands of men. They had all the miracles, the crossing of the Red Sea and the Mount Sinai experiences to pass on to their children, but they did the same as we do today. They threw God away for that which is of this world. Israel could have changed the world. Instead, the world changed her. And because she allowed the world to change her, the world today is a different world religiously.

It cannot be said that in their beginning as a nation God did not forewarn them of this lost opportunity. When he signed off from his leadership of the nation, Moses prophesied in reference to their forsaking of the Lord God. He spoke of the time when they would forsake their covenant with God. Even the nations around them would question why the Israelites would eventually be taken from the land. Centuries before, the Lord said what Israel would do in her latter days of existence as a nation, “*Even all nations will say, ‘Why has the Lord done thus to His land? What caused the heart of this great anger?’*” (Dt 29:24). And then the Lord re-

vealed why they would be driven from the land of opportunity: “*Then men will say, ‘Because they forsook the covenant of the Lord God of their fathers, that He made with them when He brought them forth out of the land of Egypt’*” (Dt 29:25). Even early in their settlement of the land, “*They forsook the Lord and served Baal and Ashtaroth*” (Jg 2:13; see Jg 10:6).

There is an astonishing principle discovered in Israel’s failure to assume her responsibility to reach the world with the opportunity that the Israelites were given with the land of milk and honey. **God took the land away from them when they failed to carry out their assigned responsibility of glorifying God through their blessing of the land.** When they failed to use the opportunity of the land for the glory of God throughout the world, their residence in the land no longer served its purpose.

*Because they forsook the Lord their God who brought forth their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and have*

*adopted other gods and have worshiped them and served them. Therefore the Lord has brought on them all this evil* (1 Kg 9:9).

If we forsake our responsibility to use that which we have been given for the glory of God, then God will take it away. God always moves beyond those who forget their responsibility to serve Him. He moves around those who are content in their “Baal religiosity.” If we are content with a faith that does not move us into action, then God will raise up someone else to proclaim His message to the world. We must not forget the statement of 2 Chronicles 7:22:

*Because they [Israel] forsook the Lord God of their fathers who brought them forth out of the land of Egypt and they laid hold of other gods [religions] and worshiped them and served them. Therefore He has brought all this calamity on them* (See Jr 22:9).

## Chapter 2

### THE RELUCTANT EVANGELIST

Israel had moved so far away from her responsibility to reach the nations, that she was rebellious about doing such even when the opportunity was staring her in the face. This

feeling was harbored even among some of those who were considered prophets. It may be that before his calling Jonah was just an ordinary person of great patriotism in Israel, not

one who was specifically considered to aid in Israel restoring her borders (2 Kg 14:14). Regardless of his prophetic status in Israel after Jeroboam II restored the borders of Israel, God used him to illustrate Israel's patriotic spirit that caused Jonah to withdraw himself as a citizen of Israel from any of Israel's neighbors.

Jonah illustrates the extent to which we can cocoon within ourselves by refusing to reach out to others with the message of the gospel. In fact, we have experienced some churches that have cocooned so deeply into their own shell that they question others about becoming a part of their "membership." Such people first make judgments concerning the physical appearance of possible members, and then they determine how long it will take for such prospects to become "full" members of their church.

The preceding is not something new in reference to the behavior of some Christians. This same social scenario developed in the first century, particularly when national Israel came nigh unto the destruction of Jerusalem and the temple in A.D. 70.

In the middle 60s, the Holy Spirit revealed that some Jewish Christians initially judged others in reference to their physical appearance. The Spirit introduced His judgment of such Christians with the statement, "My

*brethren, do not show favoritism and hold the faith of our glorious Lord Jesus Christ"* (Js 2:1). Those to whom the Spirit referred had forgotten the incarnational behavior of the Lord Jesus Christ, of whom they claimed to be disciples.

The Son of God left His existence in the spirit in order to incarnate into the flesh of man (See Jn 1,2,14; Ph 2:5-8). Therefore, there can never be an attitude of favoritism in the minds of those who seek to live incarnationally after the incarnate Son of God. We simply cannot have the faith of Jesus, and at the same time, harbor only feelings or behavior of favoritism.

But some of the readers to whom James wrote puffed themselves up, and thus showed respect of persons in reference to those who would be a part of their exclusive group. The Spirit judged,

*For if there should come into your assembly a man with a gold ring in fine clothing, and there come in also a poor man in filthy clothes, and you show respect to the one who wears the fine clothing ... **have you not made distinctions among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?*** (Js 2:2-4).

If we ever become as those to whom James wrote, it is almost guaranteed

that our evangelistic outreach will be greatly curtailed. This is what happened in the circumstances that surrounded the commissioning of Jonah to the city of Nineveh.

### A. Obeying the command to go:

Revealed in the case of Jonah is God's central plea from the time of creation to the consummation of all things at the final coming of Jesus: *"The Lord is not slack concerning His promise as some men count slackness. But He is longsuffering toward you, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance"* (2 Pt 3:9). So because God did not want the Ninevites to perish, He sent a preacher with a mandate to repent. He said to Jonah, *"Arise! Go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it"* (Jh 1:2). But it was hard for Jonah to believe that *"God so loved"* the Ninevites as He loved Israel (See Jn 3:16). Jonah was prejudiced, and thus worked against the evangelistic command of God.

God calls on His people to go to those who need to hear His message of repentance in order that they save themselves from the perverse generation in which they are living (See At 2:40). He pleads with us today to go *"make disciples of all nations"* (Mt 28:19), and to *"preach the gospel to every creature"* (Mk 16:15). He calls

on us to *"preach the word [of the gospel]"* (2 Tm 4:2). Jesus commanded His disciples, *"Go your way. Behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves"* (Lk 10:3).

When among the wolves, Jesus continues to reassure us. Paul reassured Titus, that he must teach the message *"confidently so that those who have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works"* (Ti 3:8). But as Jonah, we often shrink back from our responsibility of being a witness for God to the nations around us. We thus "flee" because of our lack of faith, or prejudicial favoritism, to even go forth.

### B. Fleeing from our responsibility:

After considering the command of God to go to the Gentiles, the Jewish Jonah ran in the opposite direction. *"Jonah rose up to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the Lord"* (Jh 1:3). So why would one who knew the one true and living God flee from an opportunity to preach good news to a nation of people who were willing to hear and repent? It is difficult to understand what was going through the mind of Jonah. But one thing we can assume is that **he fled because he knew the possibility that the people of Nineveh would repent at the message of God that he was to preach.**

After he went to Nineveh and preached, and subsequently the people did repent, he was frustrated. His ethnocentric racism had initially motivated him to flee from his responsibilities. But when he returned from his flight, he complained to God about their repentance.

*Please O Lord, was this not what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore, I fled before to Tarshish. For I knew that You are a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness, and One who relents from doing harm (Jh 4:2).*

Jonah fled because he knew that God would forgive the Ninevites if they repented. We might speculate that Jonah presupposed that since the Ninevites were the enemy of Israel, their repentance would move God to spare them from oppressing Israel. But it did not, for God was going to use the Assyrians to remove the northern ten tribes of Israel from Palestine.

Jonah was somewhat correct in his shortsighted presumptions. God would eventually use the Ninevites to carry the northern ten tribes of Israel away into captivity. But Jonah's mission to Nineveh delayed the inevitable. If Nineveh repented—which they did—then it would later be during the captivity of the northern kingdom of Israel that a spiritually pre-

pared society would receive the Israelite captives.

Of course, God revealed none of this to Jonah at the time He commanded him to go preach a message of repentance to the Ninevites. God did not tell Jonah that He was preparing the way for His people to go into captivity years. Only God knew at the time that His people would arrive as captives in Nineveh in 722/21 B.C. This may have been about fifty years after Jonah went to Nineveh to preach God's message of repentance in order to prepare the way for the arrival of His people.

At the time when Jonah finally preached the message of God to the Ninevites, Jonah was angry when God forgave the Ninevites upon their repentance (Jh 4:1). He did not want the Gentile Ninevites to step foot in his "church house." He was frustrated with their repentance because he coveted Israel's special relationship with God.

Jonah's reaction reminds us of our rejection of others when they do things differently than us, and yet seek to do the will of God according to what they know. When others are not cloned according to our religious culture, we seek to reject them by not responding to their repentance with grace and mercy. We sometimes feel that if others do not come over to us in their repentance in order to do

things our way, then they are not truly repentant.

Another problem that Jonah had was that he could not understand God's grace and mercy toward the Gentile Ninevites. In order to illustrate Jonah's spiritual problem on this matter, God caused a gourd to grow and give Jonah a brief moment of shade from the heat of the sun (Jh 4:6-11). But then God caused a worm to smite the gourd so that it died. Again, Jonah complained.

Jonah became so sun-beaten with the east wind, that he fainted. He felt sorry for himself, and complained, "*It is better for me to die than to live*" (Jh 4:8). Jonah complained to God about the death of the gourd. He complained about a dead gourd. At the same time, he could not rejoice over a repentant nation. With such an attitude, he set himself up for a stern rebuke from God. So God rebuked Jonah

*You had pity on the gourd for which you had not labored, neither did you make it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. And should I not spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than 120,000 persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand, and also many animals?* (Jh 4:10,11).

God is not willing that any of His creatures perish (2 Pt 3:9). And if He is not willing that any of His creatures perish, then in order to be a people after God's heart, neither should we. No Christian can be so presumptuous as to claim to be a Christian if he is willing to sit idly by and see God's creatures remain in a state of condemnation and destined for certain destruction (See 2 Th 1:6-9). If Christians do not take ownership of their responsibility to evangelize God's creation, then they will, as Jonah, end up in the belly of an empty "church hall," having forsaken their mission to the world.

We have throughout the years heard almost every excuse that can be made by those who want to flee from their responsibility of going to Nineveh. Some have been as Jonah by saying, "We must build up our own home base first." Others have said, "It is more important to reach those who are of our community, and thus, all our resources must be directed toward our community." If the early church had thought this way, then we would still be in Jerusalem and the gospel would never have been preached to the world. This was certainly the initial behavior of Jonah. If he could only have stayed in Palestine, then everything would have been fine.

If our vision cannot take us be-

yond a driving radius of home, then it is a vision that is too limited. If our evangelists cannot move beyond father, or mother, or brothers and sisters, then they are too immobile. If our arms of love and mercy cannot reach around the world, then they are too short. If our ethnocentric pride will not allow us to embrace those of other cultures, then we are not of the spirit of Jesus who came and identified with us in our earthly existence.

There is a little Jonah in everyone of us. We must not forget that it is Satan's work to bring to the surface our Jonah inclinations in order to keep the gospel from being preached to the world.

### C. Taking ownership of our responsibility:

In the belly of the big fish, Jonah cried out to the Lord.

*When my soul fainted within me I remembered the Lord. And my prayer came in to You, into Your holy temple. **Those who revere useless idols forsake their faithfulness. But I will sacrifice to You with the voice of thanksgiving. I will pay what I have vowed. Salvation is from the Lord** (Jh 2:7-9).*

When we finally understand that salvation is only from the Lord, then

that knowledge should move us into action. When Jonah finally came to his spiritual senses he did what was right. After being vomited up on dry land, God again directed him, "*Arise! Go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you*" (Jh 3:2).

So Jonah relinquished to the will of God. The result was, "***So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh according to the word of the Lord***" (Jh 3:3). Jonah's response was similar to Philip's when God revealed to Philip that there was a lost person reading his Bible in the desert. "*So he arose and went*" (At 8:27). Admittedly, Jonah did not know the gospel, but Philip did. This may be more of a rebuke to us than our judgment of Jonah. Jonah went forth with a message without knowing the gospel, while Philip, after knowing the gospel, went forth immediately. We often behave as Jonah, though we know the gospel. We are thus without excuse.

So if we do not go forth with our knowledge of the gospel, then what does this say of us? If we are content to remain in the belly of churchianity at the bottom of the sea, we will never be faithful in taking the gospel to Nineveh. Jonah was cocooned in the religion of his own people, and thus, he had a difficult time getting to the people who needed God's message.

If we stay cocooned in religion, we at least have discovered that we are stuck in religion and not in gospel living. Anyone who is truly living the gospel is evangelistically oriented. In fact, our evangelistic outreach identi-

fies us as gospel-obedient disciples of Jesus. If we are not evangelistic in some way, then we know we are not a disciple of the One who came to seek and to save the lost (Lk 19:10).

## Chapter 3

### THE WILLING EVANGELIST

The more traditionally religious a group becomes, the less the members of the group are motivated by the gospel to be evangelistic in preaching the gospel. The reason for this is that those who are steeped in religion have a difficult time separating their religious traditions by which they identify their religion. Those who are religious without only traces of the gospel are simply confident that their ceremonial religiosity will appease the god whom they have created after their own imagination.

The more stringent the religionist becomes in his religious performances, the more he becomes defensive in reference to his particular religious group. He becomes defensive in preaching his church or religion, and not the gospel. He does so because he firmly believes that his religion is the means by which one establishes a covenant relationship with God. One can always identify when he is stuck in religion when the sub-

ject of his preaching to the lost is focused primarily on the church, and not the gospel. He makes the gospel only the conclusion to his sermon on the church.

But the religionist is misguided. He is as the scribes and Pharisees who were evangelistic to preach the religion of Judaism. When one was converted to Judaism as a proselyte, he became a twofold son of hell. Jesus said of the efforts of the scribes and Pharisees, *“For you travel sea and land to make one proselyte. And when he is made, you make him twice as much the son of hell as yourselves”* (Mt 23:15).

Jesus’ condemnation of the leaders of the Jews’ religion teaches that one cannot be saved in sin by that which is a deceptive solution for sin, that is, religious self-sanctification. Self-invented religious rites and rituals simply supplant the gospel, and thus save no one through a religious system of self-sanctification.

The religionist will preach church. The disciple of Jesus will preach gospel, understanding that the church—the people who respond to the gospel—is the serendipity of the preaching of the gospel. Paul said that if the religionists preaches gospel, plus his religious rites and rituals that identify his particular religious group, **then he is preaching another gospel** (See Gl 1:6-9). He is doing what some Christian Jews did, that is, bring people from the freedom of the gospel back into the bondage of “another gospel” (religion). This was that about which Paul wrote the exhortation to gospel-obedient Christians in Galatia: “*Stand fast therefore in the liberty by which Christ has made us free, and do not be entangled again with a yoke of bondage*” (Gl 5:1).

The people of Nineveh were certainly religious. The response to Jonah’s simple message of repentance proved this point. Centuries later, Jesus spoke of the affect that the message of Jonah had on the Ninevites. He spoke the following in reference to His rebuke of the Jewish religionists of His generation:

*The men of Nineveh will rise up in judgment with this generation and will condemn it, because they repented unto the preaching of Jonah. And behold, someone greater than Jonah is here* (Mt 12:41)

Because so many today are in the bondage of religion, God calls on His people to preach the freedom of the gospel.

This was also the religious environment during the days of Isaiah. In Israel’s apostasy to religion that was created after the desires of men, the people called evil good and good evil (Is 5:20). They were “*wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight*” (Is 5:21). They justified “*the wicked for reward and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him*” (Is 5:23). The people hated good and loved evil (Mc 3:2). They built Zion with blood and iniquity (Mc 35:10). They were as Paul identified them in Romans 10:3: “*For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God.*”

It was a time in the history of Israel for great social digression and oppression of the poor in the name of a religiosity that justified that which was contrary to the Sinai law. When good men fail to take a stand for that which is right, evil will prevail. Religion always prevails when the gospel of freedom is not preached by those who are free.

God’s call of Isaiah 6:8 was seated in the context of great need. God called out, “*Whom will I send*

and who will go for us?” Because God is not willing that any perish in the bondage of religion, He continually offers this call to those today who have a heart for the people. When those who have a heart for the people hear the call of God to go to the people with a message of freedom, there should be only one response from those who are called. It is the same response that Isaiah gave: **“Here am I. Send me.”**

Isaiah was one who was willing to work and give, to be spent and to be sent. He would rather burn out in service to the Lord, than rust out in idleness. People as Isaiah have faith in God’s call to go, because they have faith in the One who calls.

We live in a world wherein those who are in bondage call out for help. God calls on those who are free to stand up to preach the freedom of the gospel. He is looking for those who will respond to His call, “Here am I. Send me!”

Are there those among God’s people today who will respond in the same manner as Isaiah in order to be messengers to go out and preach the gospel to the world? We will find those who are excited about sowing the seed of hope when we find those who are concerned about those who are hopelessly in the bondage of both sin and religion. Religion is simply a symptom of those who realize that

they are in sin, but are seeking some self-justifying system to deliver themselves from sin. The honest religionists, therefore, will always admit the futility of self-righteous attempts to be justified before God simply because he knows that he cannot keep perfectly his religious rites and rituals.

We must never forget that there are only three ways people can live: (1) People can live like pagans, or those who have no faith or religion at all. (2) People can live religiously after religions of rites and rituals that they have created after either their own attempts to justify themselves or the traditions of their fathers (See Mk 7:1-9). (3) Or, people can live according to the gospel.

**It is only through our living according to the gospel that there is salvation.** Paul reaffirmed this with the Colossians. He wrote, *“If you then were raised with Christ [from obedience to the gospel in baptism], ... set your mind on things above”* (Cl 3:1,2). Gospel living is the only way into heaven. Jesus is the only way into the eternal presence of God through the grace (gospel) of His salvation. Once we understand that religion will not take people to where they want to go, then we should be moved to preach the gospel that frees people from the bondage of religion in order to take them into the glory of God.

## Chapter 4

### OPEN DOORS

There is the old story of two shoe salesmen who went to a large village in a developing country to see what could be done to sell shoes in the village for the parent company in the modernized capital.

One salesman wrote back to the parent company, “No one here in the village wears shoes. The situation is hopeless, for there is no opportunity for selling shoes in this village.”

The other optimistic salesman wrote back to the parent company, “No one here wears shoes. The opportunity to sell shoes is limitless.”

Francis Bacon wisely wrote, “A wise man will make more opportunities than he finds.” Unfortunately, many an opportunity to enter open doors is lost while blinded men bewail the fact that there are no open doors. While some sit comfortably in the chair of idleness, open doors often close in their faces. We see no open doors because we are not looking. And we are often not looking because we are content with where we are.

One thing we have realized about those who are seeking to be disciples of Jesus is that they are never satisfied with two things in their lives. First, they are never satisfied with

their prayer life, and second, they are never satisfied with their evangelistic life. If one is satisfied in these areas of Christian growth and gospel living, then he has grown out of Christ. His discipleship has grown either lukewarm or cold. This is exactly what happened among the disciples in Laodicea. Jesus said to them, “*I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot*” (Rv 3:15). If one does not grow in reaching up and reaching out, he is out of reach with the impact of the gospel in his life.

#### A. Look out for open doors.

The apostle Paul was sensitive to open doors. He wrote to the Corinthians, “*Now when I came to Troas to preach the gospel of Christ, and a door was opened to me by the Lord*” (2 Co 2:12). It is the Lord who opens doors. If we do not pass through them, then we are not following His leadership into opportunity.

The Spirit leads us by opening doors of opportunity for us to preach the gospel. If we cannot see those open doors, then the problem of the Spirit leading us is not with the Spirit, but with our lack of perception of seeing the open doors before us. We can

be sure that the Spirit does not lead us into self-righteousness blindness. He leads in order to cross our paths with those who are seeking the righteousness of God. If we follow the open doors He provides, then we will be led to the saving of souls.

We must think on this point for a moment. If our focus is mostly on our own business—on what we want to do—then our thinking is probably not on discovering opportunities to share the gospel with others. In other words, the less open doors we perceive in our lives for the sharing of the gospel, then we know that we are focused more on our own business than the business of Jesus to have the gospel preached to the world.

Paul's total focus was on finding opportunities to preach the gospel. He seized the opportunity to enter an open door in Troas. His preceding statement of 2 Corinthians 2:12 was made on his second visit to Troas on a trip from Ephesus to Macedonia. When we read Acts 20:7, we discover that the open door led to the establishment of disciples in the city of Troas who met regularly for the love feast and Lord's Supper. Paul seized the opportunity of an open door, and thus souls were saved.

When Paul arrived in Corinth on his second missionary journey, Luke wrote that he **found** two disciples named Aquila and Priscilla (At

18:1,2). When he at one time arrived in the city of Ephesus, he **found** about twelve disciples who had been baptized only into John's baptism (At 19:1-7). Paul was a "finder" of those who were open to Jesus. Because he was always searching, he always found those who were open to the gospel. The following is a statement that reveals something about people that searching disciples must never forget in reference to those who will obey the gospel if only they have the chance to hear:

*Then when the Gentiles [of Antioch] heard this, they were glad and glorified the word of the Lord. **And as many as were disposed unto eternal life believed** (At 13:48).*

We must remember, however, that it is the work of Satan to war against our discovery of those who are "disposed unto eternal life." On his journey to the Corinthian disciples, Paul wrote first to the Corinthians from Ephesus: "*But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost. **For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries***" (1 Co 16:8,9).

We must keep in mind that opportunities for evangelism are not cancelled out by adversaries. On the contrary, for the disciples of Jesus the adversaries are often the indication that

there is an open door to preach the gospel. We must not expect that Satan will sit by idly and allow an open door for the gospel to remain open. It is his business to close the door, or at least discourage us from entering the door.

We know that it is the work of Satan to discourage us from entering open doors. Therefore, when a door seems to be hard to enter because of the work of Satan, then it must be reaffirmed that it is an opportunity for the salvation of souls. The more difficult it is to enter some open doors, the more we perceive that Satan is at work. We know this because of what Paul wrote to the evangelist Timothy. *“Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution”* (2 Tm 3:12). For this reason, therefore, *“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials”* (Js 1:2).

The “persecution” and “trials” are often God’s signal to alert us to the fact that something good for Him is happening. Therefore, before we turn away from an open door, or become discouraged because of persecution or trials, we should take another look at the situation. We must reconsider the situation for we may be turning away from a great open door for the salvation of many souls.

Paul and Barnabas suffered a great deal during their first mission-

ary journey. Their trials became so severe that John Mark turned back from the work (At 15:36-38). On the journey, *“the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles and embittered their minds against”* Paul and Barnabas (At 14:2). There was an attempt in Iconium to stone both Paul and Barnabas (At 14:5). In fact, the opposition by the Jews was so strong against Paul and Barnabas that they eventually stoned Paul in Lystra (At 14:19). This first missionary journey was accomplished with great persecution and hardships on the part of the evangelists. Nevertheless, the determination of both Paul and Barnabas to fulfill their destiny helped them to overcome any opposition that was set in their way by Satan (See At 13:1-3).

We must take another look at the optimistic character of the two evangelists when they returned to Antioch of Syria and the disciples who initially sent them forth.

*Now when they had come and gathered the church together, they reported all that God had done with them and how He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles* (At 14:27).

We must never allow ourselves to be deceived into thinking that hard times and persecution are an indication of a closed door. On the contrary,

we must always assume that hard times and persecution are an indication that a door is wide open for Jesus. Because we know how Satan works, we know that opposition is an opportunity for the preaching of the gospel. We would expect nothing less from Satan than to try to close doors.

## B. Jesus opens doors.

We must never forget what Jesus said to the church in Philadelphia:

*I know your works. Behold, I have set before you an **open door** and **no one can shut it**, for you have a **little strength and have kept My word** and have not denied My name (Rv 3:8).*

The first thing to remember from this statement is that the door remains open and **no one can shut it**. When Jesus opens doors for the gospel, no one can shut them. If there is opposition, then we have to use our ingenuity as to how we will enter the open door.

The second thing to notice in Jesus' statement to the disciples in Philadelphia is that with "little strength" they were promised that no one would shut the open door before them. It would not be shut because they had maintained their faith in the word of the gospel of the Lord. If they had given up the gospel of the Lord,

then surely the door would have been slammed in their faces. Their candlestick would have been removed.

It is imperative, therefore, that in order for an open door to stay open, we must continue to believe in the gospel (See 1 Co 15:1,2). Those who are not living the gospel will shine no light for Jesus. And when leaders presume to be a light to the world through their lack of faith in the gospel, they are blind guides who cannot see open doors. We must remember the following statement from Jesus in reference to those who have moved away from the gospel: "*They are blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both will fall into the ditch*" (Mt 15:14).

## C. Situations produce open doors.

In A.D. 61,62 Paul was in a Roman prison. If we keep in mind that Paul seized every opportunity to look for an open door in order to preach the gospel, then we can understand what he wrote to the Colossian Christians in Colossians 4:3: "*Also continue praying for us so that God may open to us a door for the word [of the gospel], to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains.*"

Under circumstances in which Paul labored, most people would be bewailing their predicament. But not Paul. He was "open-door minded."

In every situation he saw the possibility of an open door for the preaching of the gospel. When men are focused on the things of this world, they are not “open-door minded.” Their concern about worldly things has crowded out their concern for the lost souls in the world (See Mt 6:24).

Too often we are too mindful of this world. We are of the nature of those about whom James wrote. These world-minded travelers say, “*Today or tomorrow we will go into such a city and continue there a year. And we will buy and sell and make profit*” (Js 4:13). Some travel into all the world in order to make profit. And then there are those disciples of Jesus who travel into all the world in order to profit souls for Jesus. The secret to world evangelism is to travel as Paul. As a tentmaker, he traveled in order to preach. He did not travel in order to make profit in his business corporation to market tents (See At 20:33-35).

In the final years of his ministry, Paul traveled to Rome on the tab of the Roman government—he went as a prisoner of Rome. And while in Rome, he “*dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching those things that concern the Lord Jesus Christ ...*” (At 28:30,31). Paul used his confinement in house arrest as an

opportunity to preach the gospel in Rome. During the same imprisonment, he wrote to the Christians in Philippi, “*All the saints [in Rome] greet you, especially those of Caesar’s household*” (Ph 4:22).

Jesus once gave a parable of a traveler who was accosted on his way from Jerusalem to Jericho (Lk 10:25-37). The priest and Levite who passed by the beaten man saw him as a problem. However, the Samaritan saw the beaten man as an opportunity to serve. After the unfortunate traveler had recovered in the hotel, we wonder what his attitude was toward the Samaritan and what the Samaritan believed. We would correctly assume that a door was opened in his heart to receive whatever the Samaritan had to say.

Peter wrote, “*But sanctify Christ as Lord God in your hearts and be ready always to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you*” (1 Pt 3:15). Sometimes we can create our own open doors by doing that which is right and good to all men (See Gl 6:10).

God does close doors. He closed the door of the ark once the opportunity had been given to the world population to hear the hundred years of preaching by righteous Noah (Gn 6:3). He closed the door on the five

unprepared virgins who did not take seriously the coming of the bridegroom (Mt 25:1-13). In view of the fact that doors do close, we must move out and seize the opportunity while the doors are opened. *“Behold, now is the acceptable time. Behold, now is the day of salvation”* (2 Co 6:2).

Jesus offers His invitation at the door of every man’s heart. *“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him, and he with Me”* (Rv 3:20). **The only way Jesus can stand**

**at the door of any man’s heart and knock is through those whose responsibility it is to preach the good news of Jesus.** If we are not preaching the good news, then Jesus is not standing at the door of some lost soul and knocking in order to enter. Our indifference to preach the gospel, therefore, sometimes keeps more doors closed than any hardships that Satan may put in our way. **We must consider the fact that Satan uses us to close doors.** We should ask ourselves how many doors we have closed because of our lack of concern for lost souls.

## Chapter 5 THE ONLY DOOR

In the context of John 10:6-14 Jesus metaphorically portrays Himself as *“the door of the sheep”* (Jn 10:7). He was speaking to every person on earth when He said, *“I am the door. If anyone enters through Me, he will be saved, and will go in and out and find pasture”* (Jn 10:9). We judge this to be an emphatic statement. **It is emphatic because there are no other doors into salvation than what God offers through Jesus.** Therefore, if anyone would be saved, he must enter through the door of Jesus. **There is no other way.**

In the teachings of His earthly

ministry, Jesus established the generic principles upon which all specifics would later be defined through the inspired teaching of the Holy Spirit. In reference to Jesus being the only door to salvation, there would later come specifics as to how one would enter through the door of Jesus. But at the time of Jesus’ ministry, the primary specific that was announced by Jesus was that all men must believe that He was the Christ and Son of God (See Jn 20:30,31).

We must not assume that this door is broad and generic simply because Jesus did not give the specifics

as to how one would enter through Him. He alerted us to the fact that specifics were coming when He said, ***“Not every one who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven”*** (Mt 7:21). After the earthly ministry of Jesus, it became the tasks of the apostles to reveal what was necessary for salvation beyond a simple “Lord, Lord” faith.

Entrance through the door of Jesus, therefore, is confined only to those who are willing to go beyond simple faith and do *“the will of My Father who is in heaven.”* One cannot enter on the foundation of his own spirituality, or simple confession that Jesus is Lord. He cannot enter on the genuineness of his religiosity. Religion will get one nowhere in reference to entrance into a covenant relationship with God through Jesus. It will not simply because religion is a system of self-sanctification whereby one seeks to establish his own conditions for entrance. One simply cannot construct a legal religious code by which he would demand entrance. Because entrance is based solely on the “will of My Father,” the entrance is narrow. For this reason, Jesus reminded His audience,

***Enter in through the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the***

***way that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it. Because small is the gate and narrow is the way that leads to life, and few there are who find it*** (Mt 7:13,14).

Our task is to preach the narrow way that leads to life. And that narrow gate is through obedience to the gospel. We would be deceitful workers if we were so presumptuous as to make broad the narrow way.

Many are trying to broaden the way by trying to get through on their own terms. This is the heart of religion. Since religion is a system of attempted self-sanctification through meritorious law-keeping, those who would seek to enter into Jesus on their own religious terms are deceived. Unfortunately, at the final judgment there will be many who are surprised. Conditions for entering in through the narrow gate will be a surprise to those who have invented their own systems of religion in order to step through the pearly gates.

Peter revealed the narrow door when he stood up on the Pentecost of A.D. 30 and cried out, *“Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made this same Jesus whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ”* (At 2:36). The salvation for which the people cried out on that day was through Jesus only. He was

the narrow the way. The narrow way was clarified when Peter revealed, *“Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins”* (At 2:38).

Jesus had forewarned those who would seek to be His disciples concerning this “water entrance” into salvation. *“Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and of the Spirit he cannot enter into the kingdom of God”* (Jn 3:5). There is nothing difficult about understanding this statement. One must be born of the water and Spirit through baptism into the name of Jesus for the remission of sins. Those who would broaden the way through “faith only” religion, proclaim that a simple faith alone will bring one into Jesus. But that is not what either Jesus or Peter stated. So in the following statement, Paul questioned those who would assume that they are in Christ solely on the foundation of their faith: *“Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?”* (Rm 6:3).

Jesus is the door to salvation. We must enter this door according to His directions. This is absolutely necessary because of what Peter revealed. *“And there is salvation in no other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”* (At 4:12). Unless one is baptized into the name of Jesus

in obedience to the gospel, there is no entrance into Christ. If one would refuse to be baptized into the name of Jesus, then we would conclude that he cannot be saved. This is the inferred meaning of what Peter said in 1 Peter 4:17 when he asked the following question:

*For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God. And if it first begins with us [the house of God], what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?*

Peter’s statement is a question. And according to what we have just discovered in Peter’s statements to those on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30, the end of those who do not obey the gospel in baptism is their failure to enter into the sheepfold of Jesus.

One of the greatest misconceptions that is promoted today is revealed in the statement, “I am a born again Christian.” This statement is erroneous according to the preceding statements of Jesus and Peter. According to what Jesus and Peter said, **one becomes a Christian because he is born again from the waters of baptism.** One is a Christian because he has been “born again.” He is not a Christian in order to be “born again.”

Baptism for remission of sins in the name of Jesus is the narrow door through which we enter into the body

of Christ. We are not first in the body, and then born again in obedience to the gospel through baptism. We are as Paul revealed, *“For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ”* (Gl 3:26,27). Because we have been baptized into Christ, we are “born again” sons of God. The passage does not say that we are sons of God, and then baptized. It says that we are sons of God because we have been baptized.

We must take this point one step closer to clarity. The name “Christian” means that one is “of Christ.” Everyone understands this. Now we need to read the commentary of 1 Corinthians 1:12-14 very carefully.

The Corinthians were dividing over different personalities after whom they called themselves. Some said, “I am of Paul,” others, “I am of Apollos,” “I am of Cephas,” and then Paul adds, “I am of Christ.” But notice carefully what Paul asked them. *“Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?”* (1 Co 1:13). Therefore, to be “of Christ” (Christian), two things had to have happened: (1) Christ had to have been crucified for the person who would be “of Christ,” or Christian. (2) **The one who would be “of Christ” had to have been baptized into the name of Christ. One is a**

## **Christian when he has been baptized into the name of Christ.**

The reason we must remind ourselves of the preceding thoughts is because of one of the greatest deceptions that Satan is propagating throughout the religious world today. It is the belief that as long as one proclaims Jesus as “Lord, Lord,” then he is saved, regardless of any specifics that the New Testament may give in reference to entering the sheepfold of Jesus.

The spirit of evangelism has been killed by a spirit of universalism. It is assumed that as long as one is not a Muslim, or Hindu, or Buddhist, or one of the other non-Christian religions, then he is fine. As long as one is meeting on Sunday and cries out “Jesus, Jesus,” then he has validated his membership with the sheepfold, regardless of what the word of God might reveal to be defining marks to make the gate very narrow in order to enter into a saved relationship with God. Universalism is a denial of the necessity of obedience to the gospel.

We live in an age of universal salvation. It is a generation of ignorance of the gospel. It is a generation of religious leaders who are very charismatic and have the gift of smooth and fair speech. Religious centers throughout the world are filled with followers who give allegiance to their favorite speakers. Concert assemblies have given adherents a sense of “wor-

ship” that is focused on the attendees, rather than the Door to the sheepfold. We have been deceived into thinking that the more emotionally misbehaved the attendees become in assembly, the supposedly more spiritual they are. But this is a deception that is brought on by the self-delusion of religion.

Such thinking destroys our sense of evangelism. Many have concluded that misguided religious people do not need to be the focus of our evangelistic outreach. They conclude that if folks can be saved on the bases of their experiential emotionalism, then certainly God would allow such people into His fold regardless of their obedience to the gospel. We thus lead ourselves to believe that because some have refined the performances of their religion, then through the meritorious obedience of their religious rites and rituals they must certainly be accepted by God.

**The spirit of universalism has sucked the life out of our evangelistic spirit because we have assumed that religion, apart from obedience to the gospel, will bring one into Christ.** Since everyone is a “Christian,” then we have relegated our missions only to those who do not know the name of Jesus. We have also concluded that if one simply claims that Jesus is his “personal savior,”

then that is as far as he must go in order to come into Christ. This is an unfortunate conclusion since the New Testament teaches that there is more to remission of sins than a simple faith. We must not forget that our mission is not simply to the “unchurched,” it is to those who are churched in religion and not the gospel.

But because so many people are universalists in their theology, we now understand why so many have stopped reading their New Testaments. They are afraid that those they have assumed were Christians, are actually not such according to the definition of a Christian in the New Testament. We must conclude this chapter with what the Holy Spirit said in 2 Thessalonians 2:10-12 in reference to religion:

*... and with all deception of wickedness among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth so that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion so that they should believe a lie, that they all might be condemned who did not believe the truth, but took pleasure in wickedness (See 1 Tm 4:1-3; 2 Tm 4:3,4).*

## Chapter 6

# COMMAND FROM THE KING

Sometimes in the history of the church in different areas around the world we must start over again. We must go back to Jerusalem and sit in the upper room with the 120 disciples at the very beginning. This is necessary because restoration movements sometimes lose their momentum, or at least go astray. They zealously start out to restore the nature of the early church, but then circle around and join the crowd of religions from which they came. They “die on the vine” because they disconnect from Jesus who came to seek and to save those who are lost. We would pray that we do not go to the extent of falling away from our original call for restoration as did those about whom the Hebrew writer wrote in the following statement:

*For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and have become partakes of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, **since they crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame** (Hb 6:4-6).*

When we lose our focus on restoring the gospel of Jesus, it is difficult, if not impossible, to be restored again to the early zeal of the early Christians. It is difficult because a religion of complacency has been established within the movement to which the multitudes conform.

For example, when we move into a philosophy of “Christian universalism,” we are gone forever as a witness to the one gospel for the salvation of a lost world. Our message becomes so vague among an assortment of diverse religions that it cannot be distinguished from those who have long lost their bearings in reference to the gospel. For this reason, it is often necessary sometimes in history for a remnant to pick up the leftovers of a dead or diverted movement and start over again. And in order to do this, we must go back to the last words uttered by our Founder during those last few days with His first disciples before the gospel ascension.

We have discovered that some earnest disciples have a sincere desire to be “pentecostal” in reference to restoring the early church. However, in their struggles to free themselves from the bondage of religion, they inadvertently established a **legal** resto-

ration movement. In their battles with other religions, they seek to establish a legal identity of the church. This was what happened in the first century in reference to some in Galatia (See Gl 1:6-9). It will happen to us today.

Legal restorationists overlook the gospel of grace that freed us from the necessity of perfect law-keeping in order to be saved. In doing so they established a legal identity of the church by which they would separate themselves from those who have also digressed into the legal rites and rituals of religion. By doing this, legal restorationists establish again that from which they fled. A legal restoration movement simply becomes another legal religion.

In a legal restoration, the gospel of freedom from law is forgotten in a maze of “laws” that are meant to identify the “true” church. In this way, evangelism becomes a legal obligation, rather than a motivation by the gospel of the heart of God that was revealed on the cross. Those of this movement may wake up one day and discover that they are following only “laws” of evangelism, and thus the joy of evangelism has vanished from their hearts. The gospel no longer moves them into action.

Matthew 28:18-20 and Mark 16:15,16 were not written as laws for a legal restoration that would inher-

ently go wrong. On the contrary, Jesus’ words of these verses were the initial spark of a **gospel restoration**. We thus look to the guiding principles that Jesus established in Matthew 28 and Mark 16 as the foundation upon which we would restore the zeal of reaching the lost today.

However, we do not view Jesus’ imperatives in these verses as legal obligations by which one would self-justify oneself before God. If we did, then we would be responding to the great commission as law to be obeyed in an effort to justify ourselves through law-keeping. Therefore, we view Jesus’ instructions in these verses as an identity of what gospel-driven men and women would do in response to the resurrected Son of God who said the words. For this reason, we must place Matthew 28:19,20 and Mark 16:15,16 in the historical context of the fulfillment of prophecy concerning the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension and gospel reign of the Son of God.

### **A. The historical setting:**

Jesus’ great commission that He spoke to the disciples on the occasion of both Matthew 28 and Mark 16 finds its setting in the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy. For example, in the visionary message of Daniel in Daniel 7, the prophet was placed in a

heavenly setting. He saw one “*like the Son of man*” who came with the clouds of heaven. “*And He came to the Ancient of Days. And they brought Him near before Him*” (Dn 7:13).

In this prophetic picture of Jesus being brought before God the Father (the Ancient of Days) by the angels after the ascension, He is being brought for His coronation.

*And there was given Him dominion and glory and sovereignty, so that all peoples, nations and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion that will not pass away. And His sovereignty will not be destroyed* (Dn 7:14).

The ascension of Jesus took place in A.D. 30 (At 1:9-11). Many years later, John rehearsed the meaning of Daniel 7 and what took place in A.D. 30. John pictured the redeemed who sang a new song of the ascended and reigning Jesus. “*You [Jesus] are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, for You were slain and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and language and people and nation*” (Rv 5:9).

During His personal ministry, Jesus sent His disciples on limited missions to the tribes of “*the lost sheep of the house of Israel*” (Mt

10:6). But the time would come when they would be commissioned far beyond Israel. What was coming was a worldwide mission. They would be sent on such a mission because of the prophecy of Daniel 7, that Jesus’ sovereignty would extend to all tribes of the world.

## **B. The authority:**

At the time Jesus made the statement of Matthew 28:18, all authority had been given to Him. Jesus said, “*The Father loves the Son and has given all things into His hand*” (Jn 3:35). During His ministry, Jesus knew that the Father had given all things into His hands (Jn 13:3). He knew that He had been given power over all flesh (Jn 17:2). “*All things have been delivered to Me by My Father*” (Mt 11:27). For this reason, Jesus “*taught them as one having authority, and not as their scribes*” (Mt 7:29). He did so in order that we might “*know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins*” (Mt 9:6). If He could forgive sins on earth, then certainly He could forgive sins as King of kings and Lord of lords in heaven.

When the disciples stood with Jesus on the occasion of the pronouncement of Matthew 28, they had to know that what He commissioned them to do came from One who had

the authority to give such a universal directive.

Because all authority had been given to Jesus, He was validated to make a statement that affected the entire world of mankind from the time of the ascension until the time of His final coming. Jesus possessed in prospect at the time He made the statements of Matthew 28 that which would be validated by His gospel coronation at the right hand of the Father as King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tm 6:15).

Not only would Jesus' authority be worldwide, it would be galactic. Jesus is now head over all things. The Father "*put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be **head over all things to the church***" (Ep 1:22; see Cl 1:16,17). Because Jesus now upholds all things by the word of His power (Hb 1:3), He commissions to a global mission all those who would be His disciples.

### C. The commission:

In the Matthew 28:18 statement, the transitional word from the fact of "all authority" to what Jesus enjoined upon His disciples is the word "therefore." Jesus' right to give a worldwide commission was based on His worldwide authority.

Depending on one's translation, the word "go" or "going" is an aorist

participle. The literal translation, therefore, should be "having gone," or "going." The tense of the participle is contingent upon the tense of the main verb, "disciple," which is aorist. Jesus knew that His disciples were going. He did not have to command them to go.

Jesus knew that any true disciple of His would be going forth with the sweet message of the gospel in their hearts. They would be going, and thus, **there needed to be no command to go**. His command was that they disciple others to Him as He disciplined them to Himself. The power of His statement is not in a command to go, but in discipling those of every ethnic group who responded to the message of the gospel.

Jesus assumed that the disciples would go. True disciples disciple others as they are going forth with the message of the gospel. This is only natural for a gospel-obedient disciple of Jesus. If one is motivated by the gospel, then he needs no command to go into all the world. The gospel message he has on his heart is so powerful that he is driven to share the gospel with his neighbor.

For a gospel-driven disciple, there is no need to make a command to go. The command is covered in Mark 16:15. In the context of Matthew 28 Jesus knew that His disciples could not help themselves but to tell

others about the resurrected Christ that they experienced. They were so excited about what had transpired in their lives that they were eager to go and tell others. The gospel is inherently evangelistic in that it is good news that must be proclaimed to others.

In His discipling of these early disciples, Jesus had sent them out on many teaching journeys (See Mt 10:5,16). Because He had found them and sent them out, they understood the principle of finding others in order to send them out.

Going out to teach others is a natural life-style of gospel-obedient disciples. It is not something that must be commanded. It is something that is lived as a disciple of Jesus. One can never understand discipleship unless he is going about preaching the gospel of the One of whom he claims to be a disciple.

We are now beginning to understand the inherent nature of world evangelism. It is not something we do, **but something we are**. Since we are disciples of Jesus, discipling others to Jesus is our life-style. Since we have obeyed the gospel, then it is only natural to tell others about the gospel that we have obeyed. Therefore, evangelism is not a program. It is not a unique ministry assigned to professionals. **Evangelism is the inherent nature of one who is a dis-**

**ciple of Jesus.** It is the natural process of following and being like Jesus. If one is not discipling others to Jesus, then certainly he is not a disciple of Jesus.

#### **D. The method:**

The *King James Version* used the word “teach” in Matthew 28:19. This would not be a complete definition of discipleship, but certainly discipleship involves teaching. In the imperative mood, Jesus commanded that His disciples “make disciples.” The word “disciple” in the verb form is also found in Acts 14:21 where we see Paul and Barnabas doing exactly what Jesus commanded that we do. “*And when they [Paul and Barnabas] had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many [discipled], they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch.*” Paul and Barnabas were doing what Jesus had done with Joseph of Arimathea, “*who himself was also discipled to Jesus*” (Mt 27:57).

**We know when one is a disciple of Jesus because he disciples people to Jesus.** Disciples disciple. If they do not, then they are not disciples of Jesus. In his commentary on Matthew, H. Leo Boles stated it correctly:

He [Jesus] has all authority, all power, all wisdom, and He now gives to His disciples an aggressiveness in evan-

gelizing the world for Him. They are to “make disciples of all the nations”; that is, they are to “disciple” “all the nations”; that is, they are to preach the gospel and teach the people. To disciple a person to Christ is to lead that one to become a follower of Christ, to be a learner in His school, to be obedient to His commands, to become a Christian. To “make disciples” means to give all kinds of instruction for entrance into the church of our Lord.

### E. The objective:

It is the nature of the members of the body of Christ to go into all the world because they are gospel-obedient people. Since the first disciples arose out of a distinctive ethnic group, the Jews, Jesus directed the thinking of these early Jews to think about every ethnic group of the world to which they must go. They had to think culturally “outside the box” of their ethnic heritage. The phrase “all nations,” is actually the Greek phrase *ta ethne*. Every ethnic group of the world was to be the focus of the discipling of the disciples of Jesus.

Christianity is never to be ethnically confined or defined. The gospel is not culturally linked. If we would link Christianity to a particular ethnic group, then we have turned it into a religion. One of the first

points that identify a religion as such is that it is culturally linked. In other words, the religion cannot exist without the cultural traits that identify the culture in which it was born.

The prophecy of Daniel 7, and the proclamation of Revelation 5, speak of Jesus having sovereign reign over **every nation of the world**, and thus to Him people would come from every ethnic group of the world. When the gospel is “*preached to every creature that is under heaven*,” then people of every ethnic group come to Jesus (Cl 1:23). The tribes of the Kyak, the Murut, the Dusun and the Bajau, for example, will come to Jesus if the gospel goes to these ethnic groups. The challenge is, therefore, who will go to the Masak in Kisar, or the Masakin Tiwal of the proud Nuba people of Sudan? Who will go to the Abigar tribesmen of Ehtiopia? Who will go to the Ilubabor, the Anuaks and the seventy linguistic tribal groups of Ethiopia? Who will go to the 147 different linguistic groups of Angola? When Jesus used the word “*ta ethne*” to define the target of our evangelistic efforts, He meant that His disciples are responsible for taking the gospel to each of these tribal groups of our world.

One of the deceptions that has plagued us is that we have believed that the world is evangelized because

we have entered the geographical/political nations of the world. But this is not what Jesus was commissioning in Matthew 28:19. We need to erase national borders from our maps in order to see the individual ethnic groups that are scattered throughout the world. There are thousands. Jesus commissioned that every one of them must have the opportunity to hear and obey the gospel.

Unfortunately, those who are asleep with indifference, locked in a cocoon of legalistic religiosity, or deceived into thinking that just being a good person will get one to heaven, will never feel the need to take the gospel to the world. The world will never be evangelized by a narcissistic church that is consumed with itself. Those who are content with being a parallel generation within their own culture will find it very difficult to engage those of other ethnic cultures. The problem with a generation that is raised on entitlement can never say what Paul said in the following testimony:

*I count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things. I count them rubbish so that I may gain Christ (Ph 3:8).*

A generation that is consumed

with materialistic entitlement will often choke on the responsibility to evangelize the world as sacrificial disciples of Jesus. They will do so because they are not willing, as Paul, to live the incarnational life of Jesus. They will speak Jesus. But when it comes to walking the incarnational life of Jesus, they will lead themselves to believe that they have a right to their fine way of life. We will find few disciples of an entitled generation in the jungles of Africa and South America. Therefore, the search for those who “count all things loss” for Christ will be difficult. But when those few are found, it will be these incarnational servants who will preach the gospel to the world.

## F. The relationship with God:

Jesus explained how we can know that we are truly discipled to Him. Those of all ethnic groups who believe are to be baptized into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. **If one does not obey the gospel in baptism, then he or she has not been discipled to Jesus**, for it is the responsibility of a disciple who goes forth with the gospel to baptize those he has discipled. How can one who has not obeyed the gospel claim to be making disciples for the One who commissioned all disciples to baptize?

All people who live by Christian principles are not Christians, but all those who have been baptized “*into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit*” are Christians. The word “into” in the text is from the Greek word *eis*, meaning to come into a relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. The word can be translated unto, as “unto an allegiance with” as Paul used the word in 1 Corinthians 10:2: “*And they were all baptized into (unto) Moses in the cloud and in the sea.*” Paul also used the word in the same manner in Galatians 3:27: “*For as many of you as were baptized into (unto) Christ have put on Christ.*” One has not put on Christ, nor has he come unto any relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, until he has obeyed the gospel in baptism.

In 1 Corinthians 1:13 Paul used a different word in connection with the response of baptism. “*Is Christ divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?*” This is the Greek word *en*. The meaning is to be baptized under the authority of or an allegiance to Christ. According to Paul’s argument in 1 Corinthians 1:12,13, one is not “of Christ” unless he is baptized. He is not “of Christ” unless allegiance has been made to Christ through obedience to the gospel.

When the disciples of Jesus go

forth, they do not go forth to preach baptism, but the gospel (1 Co 1:17). When we preach Jesus and the good news of His incarnational and sacrificial death for our sins, people respond. They respond to God’s instructions on how to take care of their sin problem. This takes place in the cleansing waters of baptism (See At 2:38; 22:16).

When Philip preached Jesus to the eunuch, the eunuch responded by requesting that he be baptized. We learn at least one thing from the encounter of Philip with the eunuch. Unless one preaches enough about Jesus that moves the recipient of the gospel message respond, “*Here is water, what hinders me from being baptized?*,” then we know that we have not preached enough about Jesus (At 8:36). It is the gospel that moves one to inquire what they must do to be saved. If one must be asked to obey the gospel, then the whole gospel was not preached.

If we believe that faith in Jesus alone is sufficient to bring one into a covenant relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, then we have stopped short of the complete message of Jesus’ commission to preach the gospel. If we believe that crying out “Lord, Lord” is sufficient to clothe one with Christ, then one has stopped short of being baptized into the name of Jesus in order to put on Christ.

For those who know their Bibles and the instructions of the great commission of Jesus, it is different. It is different in the sense that they know that Satan has deceived the world of Christendom by leading people to believe that one has a relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit without being born again of the water and the Spirit. Unfortunately, too many have been deceived into thinking that they have put on Christ without having themselves put in the water. They ask Jesus to “come into their heart” without themselves going into the water.

We understand that one must obey the gospel in order to be saved (See 2 Th 1:7-9). And the fact that Christians know this motivates them to disciple all nations. It also motivates them to continue to instruct those who obey the gospel, and thus, the circle of spiritual life continues on to others. It has been this way since Jesus first commissioned His first disciples and it will continue as such until He comes again.

### **G. Gospel living:**

Discipleship includes Bible study because the disciple of Jesus seeks to know as much about the incarnate Son of God as he or she can. We live in a world of experiential religiosity, that is, a world where people

often validate their faith through their emotional experiences. But the deception of this system of validation is that it is based on our experiences and emotions, not on the sanctifying gospel of the cross. When we believe that we must have some emotional experience in order to validate our faith, then our emotional experiences become a self-sanctifying system of religion.

When experiences reign over the word of God, then the word of God has no directive power in the life of the religious, for the religionist is following his or her emotional experiences above the word of God. Jesus knew this would come in the lives of many, and thus, He mandated His disciples to continue to teach those they baptized. This means that we must be teachers of the word of God, as well as preachers of the gospel. Disciples who have been baptized must continue to be taught all those things that Jesus has taught us. This assumes that teachers of the gospel must continue to be students of the word of God. One who is not a student of the word of God too often disciples one to a religion, not to Christ.

The educational aroma of Matthew 28 was revealed also in Paul’s statement of 2 Timothy 2:2: “*And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit to faithful men who will be*

**able to teach others also.”** This is the function of the disciple in reference to his or her continued mission to preach the gospel to the world. The gospel-driven life of the one who proclaims the gospel is characterized by study and sharing with others what he or she has learned.

We have discovered that those who are born out of a knowledge of what the word of God teaches, are continual students of the word of God. This was the message of the words of Peter when he stated, *“having been born again, not by perishable seed, but imperishable, by the word of God that lives and abides”* (1 Pt 1:23).

Those who have studied the word of God, and subsequently responded to its teachings by obedience to the gospel, will continue to study more about the gospel of the incarnate Son of God. On the other hand, those who have validated their relationship with God through an emotional experience will usually not focus on study of the Bible. There are few Bible students among experiential religionists.

From the beginning of the faith of the experiential religionists, their supposed relationship with Christ is based on their personal experiences, not on what they have learned from a study of the Bible. And because they validate their relationship with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit on the foun-

dation of their experiences, they are never motivated by the word of God to learn more. They become spiritually stagnate because they do not source that which produces spiritual growth. Peter identified where there is spiritual growth: *“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”* (2 Pt 3:18).

We have thus discovered that experiential religionists have little regard for the word of God in their religion. It is for this reason that experiential church groups are not known for *“teaching them to observe all things”* (Mt 28:20). They are known only for trying to generate a weekly emotional experience in assemblies among the adherents in order to keep the adherents in attendance the following Sunday. These “Lord, Lord” churches are not seeking to do the will of the Father, and thus have not come to Christ through the road map of Matthew 28:18-20.

Realizing that the incarnate Son of God now has all authority as our King who is reigning in heaven should be enough motivation to go forth with the message of gospel. Rousseau wrote in *Emilius and Sophia*, “Yes, if the life and death of Socrates were those of a sage, the life and death of Jesus are those of a God.” And how right he was. The mandate of Matthew 28 and Mark 16 are the pronouncement of

God. At the conclusion of his literary masterpiece, C. S. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity* the following inspiring words concerning Jesus:

A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic—on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg—or else he would be the Devil of hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse. You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God.

So we would conclude with the words from an old Muslim who said

to a missionary,

How long is it since Jesus died for sinful people? Look at me; I am old. I have prayed, given alms, gone to the holy temple, become as dust from fasting and all this is useless. Where have you been all this time?

If it is as George Herbert wrote in *Jacula Prudentum*, “Hope is the poor man’s bread.” Since this is true, then where are all those who are willing to preach the Bread of Life to the world? We live in a world where all men have a hopeless end, but we as Christians have an endless hope to be offered to the world. What would we think should happen to a person who has all that the hopeless world needs, but is not motivated to share what he has?

## Chapter 7

### WE WOULD BE MILITANT

In today’s radicalism in some religions around the world, the word “militant” has a lot of baggage. It conjures up in our minds all sorts of bad thoughts as terrorism, suicide bombers and senseless conflicts over who is going to control the money and be in power. But keep in mind that the Holy Spirit metaphorically used such words as “war” and “soldier” to de-

fine the Christian’s engagement with the forces of evil in this world.

The dictionary defines “militant” to mean “fighting; engaging in war; serving as a soldier,” being “of a combative or warlike character or disposition; ready and willing to fight.” As disciples of Jesus we must never forget that we are to be militant in our spiritual conflict with the spiritual

forces of Satan. We are engaged in a spiritual war with Satan and his army. It is a spiritually mortal conflict.

If one does not see a raging warfare going on in this present world, then he or she must take another look at 2 Corinthians 10:3-5.

*For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh. For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but powerful through God for the pulling down of strongholds, casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ.*

Paul exhorted Timothy, “**Fight the good fight of the faith**” (1 Tm 6:12). And again, “**You therefore endure hardship as a good soldier of Christ Jesus**” (2 Tm 2:3).

*Put on the whole armor of God so that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, and against the world forces of darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in high places”* (Ep 6:11,12).

If one does not bristle up against Satan when reading these statements

from the Holy Spirit, then something is wrong. These are statements from the Holy Spirit that define the life of one who is seeking to live the gospel of Jesus Christ.

As militant disciples of Jesus who have been mandated by the King to go forth into all the world, we must determine what should characterize our lives as good soldiers who fight the good fight of the faith. Consider the following concepts and characteristics of our militant engagement with the forces of evil:

#### **A. Militant faith from the Commander:**

Our Lord Jesus is “*called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace*” (Is 9:6). He “*is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords*” (1 Tm 6:15). He is the One through whom the worlds were created (Cl 1:16). He is the One who now upholds all things by the word of His power (Hb 1:3). When speaking of being a soldier for King Jesus, we are talking about being a soldier for God. Some have personalized Jesus so much that they have made Him, as the Middle Age sculptors and artists, an effeminate and frail “little Jesus” who is weak and wimpy. **This is a corrupt picture of Jesus!**

We as disciples have a personal

friendship with King Jesus, but this personal friendship is not equal. King Jesus is God reigning in heaven over all things (Hb 8:1). We are on earth as His soldiers who have been commissioned to go forth with the good news of His cross that He offered for the world. We know that in the future He *“will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel”* (2 Th 1:7,8). This is what our “friend” will do when He comes again. Our friendship with Jesus is not as we would be friends with one another. It is better. We are friends with the King of the universe.

Because we know this, we are moved with awesome urgency to take the message of our King into the kingdom of His reign throughout the world. This was what motivated Paul and others in the first century: *“Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord we persuade men”* (2 Co 5:11). If we fail to persuade people in our generation that King Jesus reigns over all things, then it will be the uninformed of this generation who will stand with us in judgment to face our failure of not warning them about the coming vengeance of King Jesus. A poem by Dillard Thurman might be appropriate here.

There was a man I met today,  
 A stranger unto me;  
 Whose path in life thus crossed my way  
 This side of eternity.  
 Our greetings held a friendly tone:  
 We passed the time of day.  
 But after I was left alone  
 I asked, “What did we say?”

We’d talked of politics and sports,  
 Of weather, work and play,  
 Of news events of many sorts;  
 And then he’d gone his way.  
 I watched this chance acquaintance start,  
 Back on the path he’d trod:  
 Then realization pierced my heart –  
 I’d never mentioned God!

Not likely will our paths e’er cross  
 Again upon this earth;  
 Yet I had talked of worldly dross,  
 Ignoring things of worth!  
 When in God’s judgment all men stand,  
 We two shall meet again –  
 Will this man’s blood be on my hand  
 If he has died in sin?

## **B. Militant faith for King Jesus:**

When Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life,”* He did not mean that there were other options into eternal glory. The only way into eternity is through Jesus. Peter was moved by this fact when he pro-

claimed to a crowd of unbelievers, ***“And there is salvation in no other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”*** (At 4:12).

If one believes that there are other options for salvation, then he has lost his motivation for being a militant soldier of the faith. If one believes that one can be saved in ignorance of the gospel, then why would one suffer so much in order to preach the gospel?

The true disciple of Jesus knows that Jesus is coming from heaven to take vengeance on those who do not know God (2 Th 1:7-9). But if one believes that we can be saved by being good people in ignorance of the one true and living God, then we will never be motivated by the militant spirit that drove the early disciples into all the world. Those early Christians firmly believed that one must obey the gospel to be saved (See Mk 16:16).

If it is true that Jesus is one of many options into eternal glory, then He is no option at all. If one can be saved by just being a good person, then the cross was a futile effort of suffering on the part of One who gave up being on an equality with God in order to identify with those for whom He suffered. In other words, if being a good person is sufficient to save one when Jesus comes again, then the

gospel of the incarnation was senseless.

This is a point that we must not pass over lightly in our efforts to justify our evangelistic mediocrity. If goodness is the only requirement for salvation, then why did God go to so much effort with Israel for 1,500 years in order to preserve a segment of humanity through whom He would send His Son into the world? Why would we need a “Savior” if we can save ourselves on the merit of our own goodness? If goodness cancels sin, then why would we need a divine Savior?

If ignorance of the gospel gives one a right to enter the eternal presence of the one true and living God, then why would God even attempt to intervene in His creation through the incarnation? Surely, if there is a plan of salvation through either goodness or ignorance, then God would not be just to send anyone into the condemnation of hell. If ignorance of the gospel will lead one into eternal glory, then why would we even consider suffering for Jesus in order to preach the gospel?

We must ask ourselves if our theology of universalism has led us to be deists. Has our universalism produced a theology that everyone will make it into heaven regardless of one’s beliefs? Did God create the world and man, and then leave His creation untouched? Did He leave us

to our own religious devices? If there is any such thing in the Bible as a “plan of salvation,” then goodness is not good enough, and ignorance on the part of the unbeliever is not a “plan of salvation.” If goodness is sufficient, then there need be no plan. If ignorance of the gospel will lead to eternal salvation, then ignorance of the gospel is a parallel plan of salvation.

Before we allow our evangelistic fire to go out completely, we should think on these things. If we were Satan, then what would we do to convince people to believe in order to fill every burning room of hell?

### C. Militant faith for the gospel:

Militant soldiers of the faith know that there is only one gospel message. It is this gospel that “*is the power of God unto salvation to every one who believes*” (Rm 1:16). The militant soldier believes that if one does not obey this gospel of the death of Jesus for our sins and His resurrection for our hope, then one cannot be saved. **Jesus is coming to take vengeance on those who do not obey the gospel** (2 Th 1:7-9). So Peter asked, “*For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God. And if it first begins with us, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?*” (1 Pt 4:17). Paul

gave us the answer to Peter’s question. “*These will be punished with everlasting destruction away from the presence of the Lord and away from the glory of His power*” (2 Th 1:9).

Because the disciples of Jesus know this information about the end of times, they are motivated to go forth with urgency. They do so in order to offer an opportunity to all people that they may escape through obedience to the gospel the impending judgment to come.

Those who do not believe what the Holy Spirit said in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9, will not be evangelistic. Their unevangelistic spirit, therefore, is either evidence that they do not believe the Holy Spirit, or they believe the Holy Spirit, but are too indifferent to act on their knowledge that one must obey the gospel in order to be saved.

### D. Militant faith to preach everywhere:

The militancy of the early church was revealed in the fact that the saints went everywhere preaching the gospel. “*Those who were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word* [of the gospel]” (At 8:4). They challenged philosophers, kings and priests. No one was exempt from their preaching of the gospel. “*And daily in the temple in every house, they did not cease teaching and*

**preaching Jesus as the Christ”** (At 5:42).

Some today say we must always be positive in our message. Generally, this is true. But the militancy of the early disciples drove them to “*reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and teaching*” (2 Tm 4:2). As a result, many rose up against the early disciples. In his “counter-insurgency,” Saul, the military Jew, breathed threats and “*murder against the disciples of the Lord*” (At 9:1). Nevertheless, because of the militancy of the early disciples, “*the word of God grew and multiplied*” (At 12:24). The early disciples believed their message so firmly that they would not let persecution and threats of murder detour them from their mission.

### **E. Militant faith for the one body:**

The early disciples knew that Jesus was coming back for His bride, His body. If one were not a member of that body, then there was no possible way for him to escape the coming vengeance of the Head of the body, who “*is the Savior of the body*” (Ep 5:23). And if anyone would be saved, then he or she must be a part of His body.

The early disciples knew how to become a member of this body. “*For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body*” (1 Co 12:13). It was not

that the body saves, but that the Savior is coming to save the body. It is the Savior who saves. When we realize that there is no salvation outside the body of Christ, then we are driven to preach the message of the gospel in order that people be baptized into the body. When the gospel is received and obeyed, then God adds the obedient to the body (At 2:47).

### **F. Militant faith for the cross:**

If one desires to know the spirit of a militant faith, then he should consider the life of Paul. Paul explained his militant life for Jesus in the following statement:

*I have been crucified with Christ. And it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. And the life that I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me* (Gl 2:20).

This was the same person who said to some brethren who were fearful for his life when he sought to make a final visit to Jerusalem: “*What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus*” (At 21:13). This is discipleship.

Saul transformed in his life from

being the persecuting instrument of Satan against those who named Jesus as their Savior, to being Paul who was willing to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus. Becoming a disciple will cause this awesome transformation in the life of everyone who takes discipleship seriously.

We have found many people who want to study the subject of discipleship. But they often do not realize what they are asking. Discipleship means a cross, and in the first century, bearing a cross meant carrying one's own cross to his own death. So Jesus prepared those who would be His disciples. *"If anyone will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow Me"* (Lk 9:23). Paul knew how to bear the cross as a good soldier in the Lord's army. *"And whoever does not bear his own cross and come after Me,"* Jesus admonished, *"cannot be My disciple"* (Lk 14:27).

We have discovered that the more affluent the economic environment is in which disciples live, the less evangelistic they often become.

When one is trapped in the luxuries of life, it is difficult to *"count all things loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things. I count them rubbish so that I may gain Christ"* (Ph 3:8).

If we want to know how serious Paul was about trashing all those things that would keep one away from total commitment to Jesus, then we need to do a study of the word "rubbish" that the Holy Spirit used in the preceding statement. The *King James Version* made the correct translation. If we do not consider the entrapment of the things of this world as "dung," then we need to take another look at living the incarnational life of the One we refer to as the Lord Jesus Christ. There are few warriors for Christ in white castles. We must not forget that it took the sacrificial John the Baptist to introduce into the world the One who formally existed as God in the spirit, but incarnationally came in the flesh of man for the salvation of the world (See Jn 1:1,2,14; Ph 2:5-11).

## Chapter 8

### WHY DID IT WORK?

We now ask why the early church was so militant, so successful in taking their generation for Christ? In fact, in A.D. 61,62 Paul wrote to the

Colossian disciples and made the following incredible statement:

*Continue in the faith grounded and*

*steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the gospel that you have heard, which was preached to every creature that is under heaven* (Cl 1:23).

The church came into existence on the Pentecost of A.D. 30. Paul made the preceding statement about the preaching of the gospel “to every creature that is under heaven” only 31 or 32 years later. How did the early disciples do this? What moved them into such zealous evangelistic action?

We should introduce this subject by what Paul wrote to the Ephesians. “See then that you walk carefully, not as fools but as wise, **making the most of the time because the days are evil**” (Ep 5:15,16). We live in an evil world. Opposition to preaching the gospel is nothing new. Nevertheless, we have the answer to the evil of opposition. It is the gospel message of Jesus. So we take every advantage to speak to others about Jesus. We thus believe that every moment in our lives is an acceptable time to speak of the gospel of the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, ascension, coronation and final coming of Jesus. “Behold, now is the acceptable time,” wrote Paul. “Behold, now is the day of salvation” to everyone we may encounter every day (2 Co 6:2).

We are debtors who must make payment on our debt. We are in debt

to the One who redeemed us from that which we could not redeem ourselves. Jesus paid our debt for us, and so we are indebted to Him. We are indebted in the sense that we are debtors to preach the “debt relief” of the gospel to others. Paul could not have stated it more clearly than in the words that he wrote to the Roman disciples: “**I am a debtor both to the Greeks and to the Barbarians, both to the wise and to the unwise. So as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you also who are at Rome**” (Rm 1:14,15).

It was certainly with such motivation that the early disciples took the world for Christ. And we have that same motivation today. We go forth with the exhilarating feeling that we have been relieved of the debt of our sins by the atoning blood of the incarnate Son of God. We have been motivated by our “debt relief” in order to preach a message of debt from sin.

### **A. Motivated to glorify God.**

The greatest incentive to be evangelistic is to bring glory to God. The psalmist wrote, “Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to Your name give glory for Your mercy and for the sake of Your truth” (Ps 115:1). The Son of God was incarnate in the flesh of man, “and being found in appearance

*as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Ph 2:8).*

We no longer know Jesus according to His incarnate state. Paul wrote, “*Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no more*” (2 Co 5:16). Our knowledge of Christ has moved beyond Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. We now know Christ according to the gospel of His coronation at the right hand of God. It is there that “*God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow ... and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father*” (Ph 2:9-11).

The early disciples went forth to preach the crowned King Jesus in order that glory be given to God. In the following quotation, the Palmist David lived without any knowledge of the incarnation of the Son of God. He knew nothing of the crucifixion. He knew only that God would sit someone on his throne. But without all the knowledge of the gospel that we now have, the Holy Spirit still allowed him to write the following, possibly in prophecy of what would come about one thousand years later:

*“Restore to me the joy of Your salvation, and uphold me with*

*Your willing Spirit. I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners will be converted to You. Deliver me from the guilt of bloodshed, O God, God of my salvation, and my tongue will sing aloud of Your righteousness. O Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will show forth Your praise” (Ps 51:12-15).*

Because of all that God has done for us through Jesus, we cannot but speak those things we have received from Him. It is as Peter and John said to those who resisted their testimony of the gospel. “*Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak the things that we have seen and heard*” (At 4:19,20).

When one realizes the fullness of what God has done in his life, he cannot but walk in gratitude for the gospel of Jesus. Jesus said, “*Herein is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be My disciples*” (Jn 15:8). We show ourselves as disciples of Jesus when we walk according to His mission to this world, that is, to seek and to save those who are lost (Lk 19:10). We glorify God when we bear fruit through the preaching of Jesus. When we live as the disciples of Jesus, fruit happens. And when fruit comes as a result of our evangelistic walk in

thanksgiving for His payment of our debt, then the name of God is glorified.

## B. Motivated by example and command.

The Son of God came into this world with an evangelistic purpose. ***“For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost”*** (Lk 19:10). David Livingstone said, “God had only one Son and he was a missionary.” Jesus was a missionary from heaven to this world on our behalf (See Ph 2:5-11). He came to find us. Since we have been found, it is our task to find others for Him. The closer we get to Jesus, therefore, the closer we move toward His example of coming for us. Our going forth as His disciples, therefore, is only natural because we are His disciples. Because He found us, we seek and save the lost through the preaching of the gospel.

## C. Motivated by the need.

We live in a world of almost eight billion people, the vast majority of whom are dead in their sins. We live among the walking dead. The world’s population is growing by over one hundred million every year. This is one hundred million dead people in sin that must be reached with the gospel.

We were once among the dead. But we were found by Jesus. And just in case we become indifferent to the stench of the spiritually dead in our world, Paul writes to us today as he wrote to the Ephesians. ***“But God, who is rich in mercy, for His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved”*** (Ep 2:4,5).

What glorious grace we have received! We have been delivered out of our deadness in order to seek the dead. It is His grace that compels us. It is as Paul wrote to some who had been touched by the grace of God: ***“For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace that is reaching many people may cause thanksgiving to abound to the glory of God”*** (2 Co 4:15).

It is this grace that brings glory to God because it causes us to walk in thanksgiving of what Jesus did for us. The more thankful we are for the grace of God, the more evangelistic we become in sharing the gospel with others. **The primary motivation of the early disciples was their tremendous appreciation for the grace of God.** We would correctly conclude that the less we appreciate the grace of God in saving us, the less evangelistic we will be in preaching grace to others. Or it might be that the more we take for granted that which was

done for us through the cross, the less we are driven to take the gospel of the cross to others. We usually share only that for which we are truly thankful.

#### D. Motivated by opportunity.

Paul was sensitive to open doors. He changed his schedules in order to take advantage of opportunities to preach the grace of God. *“But I will tarry in Ephesus until Pentecost. For a great and effective door has been opened to me”* (1 Co 16:8,9).

Every disciple must be perceptive for opportunities to share the sweet grace of God by which we have been saved. To be perceptive for opportunities to share the gospel, one must *“grow in the grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”* (2 Pt 3:18). We have found that the more one grows in his appreciation for his own salvation by the grace of God, the more he is eager to share the grace of God with others. And in order to grow in the grace of God, one must be filled with the knowledge of the gospel that is revealed in the word of God.

It is through God’s word that we understand the tremendous sacrifice that Jesus made on our behalf. When we learn how far He had to come from heaven in order to redeem us from sin, we will go any distance to find others

for Him. Our knowledge of His incarnational sacrifice for us stirs our hearts to the needs of others who need Jesus.

#### E. Motivated by the zeal of Satan.

While living in Sao Paulo, Brazil, we once woke up in the morning and read the local newspaper. On the front page, we were horrified to read the report of some misguided members of a particular cult who had bound their little children and drowned them in the Atlantic Ocean in a religious ritual. The work of Satan among religious people is strong. The horror of his work drives us to preach the gospel that frees people from their own religious inventions. Because God first loved us through Jesus, we are driven to love others in order that Jesus deliver them from the bondage of Satan (1 Jn 4:19).

Paul exhorted, *“Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God so that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil”* (Ep 6:10,11). We are driven into battle against the wiles of the devil because of our love of souls.

The Basel Mission was started in the nineteenth century in Ghana. In the first nine years of the mission, eight of the ten missionaries who went to the mission died. For fear that the

European supporters would discontinue the mission, the remaining two missionaries wrote back home with the words, “Send more missionaries. Though a thousand missionaries die, send more.”

Many of the early missionaries that came to Africa packed their belongings in their coffins, knowing that the continent would soon take them with diseases. We once visited a cemetery in Kuruman, South Africa that was established by the Moffat missionary family in the early nineteenth century. Half of the graves were those of children.

Satan will do his best to discourage the saints of God. But with great zeal and hardship we must be determined to fight back. We must repeat after Paul, ***“For I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of Our Lord Jesus”*** (At 21:13). ***“Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution”*** (2 Tm 3:12).

Churches grow simply because members zealously make telling others about Jesus central to their lives. The more zealous a group of people are, the faster they will grow. Jesus gave ***“Himself for us so that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself a special people who are zealous for good works”*** (Ti 2:14). This is the answer for church growth.

## F. Motivated because of the results of failure.

Sometimes we need to sit back and consider the consequences of our possible failure to evangelize our own generation of this world. If we fail, then the following inheritance will be given to our children:

**1. *The gates of hell will be broken wide open.*** Jesus said, ***“Wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who enter through it”*** (Mt 7:13). We must keep in mind that every person with whom we do not share the gospel will broaden the gates of hell.

**2. *We will leave our children a heritage of indifference toward the lost.*** We are zealous to leave our children a college education or a successful business. But when we leave them an unevangelized world we leave them an unbearable burden. Our fathers left us with this burden, and we often hand it on to the next generation. The problem with the lukewarmness of the disciples in Laodicea was that they passed their lukewarm behavior on to their children (Rv 3:15,16). Their candlestick was removed from Laodicea because their influence for Jesus left town when that generation of lukewarm Christians died.

**3. God's people will not be seen as God's people.** Singing "standing on the promises" when we are sittin' on the premises will never evangelize the world. We are often like two skeletons hanging in a closet. One turned and said to the other, "If we don't get any guts, we'll never get out of here."

Since we know the gospel, we do not have the privilege of sitting in comfort with an indifferent attitude toward an unevangelized world. Sitting tight without sending the light will never take Christ into all the world. If we are truly the disciples of Jesus, then we must be as His disciples of light throughout our communities and throughout the world.

### **G. Motivated because of our joy.**

When Christians are excited about their lives as disciples of Jesus, then they get excited about sharing Jesus. Our excitement leads us to be convicted, and our conviction leads to more conversions.

Paul explained the character of the one who rejoices over his salvation. "***For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge that if one died for all, then all died***" (2 Co 5:14). Christ died for all because of His love for us. We are thus compelled to love in dying to ourselves for others (See 1 Jn 4:19).

In 2 Kings 7:1-9 an event happened in the history of Samaria that truly illustrates our situation as the saved disciples of Jesus. Benhadad of Syria besieged the city of Samaria. The siege continued until those trapped in the city were starving. But there were four lepers at the gate of the city. Because they were lepers, these were four men left untouched by the Syrians at the gate of Samaria. The lepers reasoned among themselves,

*If we say, 'We will enter into the city,' then the famine is in the city and we will die there. And if we sit still here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall to the army of the Syrians. If they save us alive, we will live. And if they kill us, we will but die (2 Kg 7:4).*

What the lepers did not know was that in the middle of the night God caused a great noise of chariots and horses to be heard by the Syrian army. The Syrians thought that the Israelites had hired the Hittites and Egyptians to fight against them. In their fear, they fled for their lives, leaving everything behind in the dark of the night.

Now when the four lepers came upon the camp of the Syrians, they eventually perceived that no one was

around. They were elated about their discovery.

*They went into one tent and ate and drank. And they carried from there silver and gold and clothing. Then they went and hid it. And they came again and entered into another tent and carried from there also (2 Kg 7:8).*

They had discovered good news. But in their joy of having received such great blessings In the bondage of their

materialism, they began to think. They came to the realization that their materialism had diverted their minds away from those who were destitute in the city of Samaria. So they finally confessed to one another:

*“We do not well. This day is a day of good tidings and we hold our peace. If we tarry until the morning light, some mischief will come upon us, Now, therefore, come so that we may go and tell the king’s household” (2 Kg 7:9).*

## Chapter 9

### SEIZING THE OPPORTUNITIES

In the farming of wheat there is a brief window of opportunity for harvesting the grain. The wheat cannot be harvested when it is too green for the grain will rot in the storage bin. If the grain is left unharvested too long in the field, it will dry and be essentially worthless. But when the farmer discovers that the grain is dry enough for harvesting, there is about a two week window when the fields must be harvested. It is then that the combines are fired up and the sickle is laid vigorously to the crop.

Jesus knew this, as well as His disciples. So when He made the following statement to His disciples, they knew exactly what He was say-

ing: *“Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white already for harvest!” (Jn 4:35).* And indeed they were. *“When the fullness of time came, God sent forth His Son”* into the field of the world that was white unto harvest (Gl 4:4). In order that we apply ourselves as laborers to harvest the fields that are white unto harvest, we must do the following:

#### **A. Make a commitment to see and feel the opportunity.**

Those who are deeply involved in being a disciple of Jesus know the meaning of what Jesus requested in

Matthew 9:37,38. Those who are not involved, have little understanding of that for which He asked us to pray. Those who do not pray for laborers often do not realize that there millions of souls who are ripe for harvesting. But if one is a disciple of Jesus, and driven by the gospel, then he or she knows the meaning of Jesus' following request:

***The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore, pray to the Lord of the harvest so that He will send laborers into His harvest.***

This is God's harvest, not ours. The world was created for the specific purpose of harvesting souls for eternal dwelling in the presence of God. And when one is intensely involved in reaping the harvest in his generation, he is intense about his commitment to get the job done while the harvest is ready. We can see this earnest intensity in the following words of Paul:

***Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for them is that they might be saved. For I testify to them that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own righteousness,***

***have not submitted themselves to the righteousness of God*** (Rm 10:1-3).

We live in a world wherein religionists have created their own righteousness after their own desires. The primary theology of religion is universalism, that is, everyone can be saved on the merit of their own terms. Since religion is primarily defined as a meritorious system of self-sanctification, then the religionist believes that he can get to where God wants him to be, but on his own terms. But this righteousness is not according to the complete sanctification that came through Jesus into this world and was accomplished on the cross. And because it is false righteousness to presume that we can save ourselves, Paul was intensely moved to teach the truth of the gospel of the cross. He was so intense, that he said the following words in Romans 9:1-3:

***"I say the truth in Christ, I do not lie, my conscience also bearing witness with me in the Holy Spirit, that I have great sorrow and continual grief in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen [Jews] according to the flesh."***

How intense can a disciple become

in order that the reaping of a ripe harvest be accomplished? The life of Paul is a living testimony.

When Paul came into Corinth, he was faced with great opposition. It was so great that he had decided to leave the city and move on to other fields. But God knew something that he did not. God knew that there were those in the city of Corinth, who, if they had the opportunity to hear the truth of the gospel, they would obey. Therefore, God came to Paul in a special vision in order to keep him in Corinth.

*Then the Lord spoke to Paul in the night by a vision, "Do not be afraid, but speak. And do not hold your peace. For I am with you and no man will attack you to hurt you, **for I have many people in this city**" (At 18:9,10).*

When it seems that things are going bad, we must step back and understand that God has people in every city who need to hear the gospel. When these people hear, they will obey. We must remember that we are seed sowers and those who water. It is God who produces the fruit. But He cannot produce the fruit if we do not sow the seed.

## **B. Have faith that God is working through us.**

At one time during Jesus' ministry, a desperate father brought his son who had a mute spirit to His disciples. The father said to Jesus, "*I spoke to Your disciples that they should cast him out **and they could not***" (Mk 9:18). What Jesus then said surely cut the disciples to the heart, as well as us in our lack of belief in the power of the gospel. "*O faithless generation, how long will I be with you? How long will I bear with you?*" (Mk 9:19).

Those who think and work outside the work of God have a very difficult time walking by faith within the realm of God's work. At this time in their lives, the disciples were still outside, and thus, faithless as to what God could do through them. But in their near future this would change.

Jesus asked the pleading father to bring the son to Him. We can imagine the tears in the father's eyes as he said to Jesus, "*And often it [the mute spirit] has cast him into the fire and into the waters, to destroy him*" (Mk 9:22). But listen to the father's plea. "*If You can do anything, have compassion on us and help us*" (Mk 9:22). We must never forget Jesus' response to this heart-wrenching plea of the father. "*If you can? **All things are possible to him who believes***" (Mk 9:23).

We sometimes cannot get the job done because we are struggling with

our unbelief. But we forget what God promised: *“He who spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how will He not with Him also freely give us all things”* (Rm 8:32). Therefore, *“in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us”* (Rm 8:37). *“If God is for us, who can be against us”* (Rm 8:31). We must have the confidence of Paul: *“I can do all things through Him who strengthens me”* (Ph 4:13).

We must never forget that *“it is God who works in you both to will and to work for His good pleasure”* (Ph 2:13). Therefore, He *“is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think according to the power that works in us”* (Ep 3:20). Since God is working in us, then it is He who is working to evangelize the world through us. If we refuse to have Him working in our lives, then the problem is not with God, but with us. For this reason, we must not quench the Spirit of power that is working in us to do His will (1 Th 5:19).

When we have the convictions, therefore, we will have the conversions as the Spirit works through us to take the gospel to the world. And when we allow God to do His populating of heaven through us, then we get excited about sowing the seed of the kingdom because we are excited about the spiritual needs of lost men. When Jesus becomes everything to

us, we will speak His name everywhere. We must make sure that we do not show up at the final judgment with no souls we have won for Christ.

### C. Make the commitment to give all to Him who gave all to us.

We must pay our redemption forward. Jesus came and found us, and now we must go and find others for Him. In finding us, He paid our debt, and thus we are debtors to others. Paul said, *“I am a debtor”* (Rm 1:14). We are indebted to Jesus for redeeming us from the curse of our condemnation in sin. Therefore, His sacrifice for us reasonably requires a sacrifice from us. It is as Paul wrote, *“Therefore, I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service”* (Rm 12:1).

When we survey the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, it is only reasonable to conclude that we sacrifice the entirety of our lives for Him.

Evangelism, therefore, is not something we do. It is something we are. It is not something we study in a class on discipleship. If we must enroll in a class on evangelism, then we never really understood discipleship before we were baptized. Jesus commanded His disciples to go and disciple all nations (Mt 28:19). But if

we have to enroll in discipleship classes after baptism, then we got in the water before we understood that there was a cross to bear as a disciple.

We baptize disciples. We do not baptize and then disciple. Practicing the reverse order brings into the fellowship of the organic body all sorts of dysfunctional members. Many unevangelistic members never understood what being a disciple of Jesus meant before they went to the cross and grave with Jesus in baptism. If one learns of Luke 9:23 and similar statements in a discipleship class after baptism, then he was really not disciplined before he was baptized.

We once heard an elder say to the assembly, “We need to pray for the personal evangelists among us.” With such lack of understanding concerning the nature of discipleship among us, we need to look no further to discover why we fail to evangelize our communities. We have no professional evangelists among us because all of us are evangelistic. When we single out those to whom we have relinquished our responsibility to evangelize our communities, then our communities will never be evangelized, much less the world in which we live.

We as disciples of Jesus are all personal and we are all evangelistic. It is the nature of being a disciple of

Jesus. If we feel that evangelism is the responsibility of someone else, then we will never take ownership of evangelism.

The preceding thoughts were in Jesus’ statements of Matthew 10:16-26. In the middle of His exhortations concerning being His disciple, Jesus said, “*It is enough for the disciple that he be like his teacher*” (Mt 10:25). If we would be like our teacher, Jesus, then we too would say that it is our purpose to seek and to save those who are lost (Lk 19:10). We too would go on a mission from our abode to any place where there are those who needed the saving power of the gospel (See Ph 2:5-11). We seek to be disciples of Jesus, and thus, we seek to emulate in our lives His life.

How we are evangelistic will vary from one disciple to another. However, how we work to touch the lives of others for Jesus will be according to how God has gifted us. But we must never come to the erroneous conclusion that God gifted us for ourselves.

There is no such thing as a narcissistic disciple. If we behave as such, then we will introvert within ourselves, seeking in our Christian life those things that please ourselves. We will create a religious way of life wherein we feel good about our exciting assemblies, comfortable in our pews, and satisfied with a good pro-

nouncement from the pulpit. We will feel good while all the time the world is headed for a devil's hell. We will often open up our discipleship on Sunday morning with an "opening prayer," and then close it off after the "hour of worship" with a "closing prayer." We forget that assemblies should be for exhausted disciples, not times when we try to validate our faith by exhausting ourselves in the assembly.

God gifted us, not for ourselves, but for others.

In 1269, Marco Polo reported that Kublai Khan, who at that time ruled over a great deal of present-day China, had requested one hundred missionaries to come to China. He wanted the missionaries to come and

teach his people about Christ and the truths of the word of God. At the time of the request there was a struggle as to who was going to be the pope in Rome. It was not until two years later that the request of Kublai Khan was answered.

Pope Gregory X subsequently answered the plea for one hundred missionaries with two friars. These two emissaries of the Roman church got as far as the frigid Himalayan Mountains and turned back. We wonder what Marco Polo would write of this generation of the church if he were alive today. Has the call of Jesus for thousands been answered with only a few laborers who have turned back?

## Chapter 10 HOW IT IS DONE

Evangelism is embedded in true discipleship. Our personal evangelistic outreach to others is dependent on how we feel a disciple of Jesus lives the gospel that we have obeyed. It is as Jesus said, "*If you continue in My word, then you are truly My disciples*" (Jn 8:31). And the word of Jesus is, "*Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature*" (Mk 16:15).

There is nothing difficult in connecting "*continue in My word*" and "*preach the gospel to every crea-*

*ture.*" If one would be a disciple of Jesus, therefore, he must figure out how he is going to preach the gospel to every creature of the world. It is not a decision if one should, but how one should get the job done.

We determine what discipleship is by considering the example of Jesus. Jesus said, "*For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost*" (Lk 19:10). In His ministry, Jesus set the example of seeking and saving the lost. Now

compare this with 1 Peter 2:21: “*For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example that you should follow His steps.*”

We follow the example of Jesus in suffering. By doing so we follow in His steps of suffering in reaching out to others. This is what John explained in 1 John 2:6: “*He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.*” In other words, if we claim to be a disciple of Jesus, then we must walk as Jesus walked. We must take up our cross of suffering and walk with Him.

Both in teaching and example, the early disciples followed the example of Jesus. Starting on the first day of the existence of the baptized body, and extending through the example of Paul and the apostles, the disciples who “*were scattered abroad*” preached the word of the gospel everywhere (At 8:4). Paul thus exhorted, “*Be imitators of me even as I also am of Christ*” (1 Co 11:1).

The early disciples throughout the world followed the example of the first Christians in Judea. To the Thessalonians, Paul wrote, “*For you, brethren, became imitators of the churches of God in Judea that are in Christ*” (1 Th 2:14). Understanding what the Thessalonians did by imitating the evangelistic Judean disciples, who imitated Paul, who imitated

Christ, explains how the early church was truly evangelistically oriented:

*And you became imitators of us and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction with joy of the Holy Spirit, so that you were examples to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia. For the word of the Lord has sounded forth from you, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith toward God has spread abroad, so that we do not need to speak anything* (1 Th 1:6-8).

People often ask why the early church was so evangelistic. The answer is in that they were true disciples. Christ set the example. The early disciples in Jerusalem followed His example. This example was spread throughout the early world where it was imitated by other disciples, who also set the example for other disciples to follow.

If we would be as the early disciples, therefore, we must continue the example of their evangelistic zeal. There are no magic programs. There are no especially trained men and women whom we can pay to do the job for us. There is no need for training schools in evangelism. All that is involved is to understand what a true disciple of Jesus is. If one is less than

evangelistic in his supposed discipleship, then he is not taking ownership of his or her responsibilities as a disciple of Jesus.

Our task now is to determine how the early Christians behaved as disciples of Jesus. This is an exciting study for it starts right in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost in A.D. 30. As we journey with the early disciples, we discover in Acts 2 that there were at least seven things that caused the tremendous growth of the church. If we focus on these principles today, we will experience the same growth that was experienced in the first century.

### A. Communicate the gospel.

*“But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice and said ...”* (At 2:14). And that started everything. *“Daily in the temple and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ”* (At 5:42). The communication of the gospel continued endlessly and persistently. *“Therefore, those who were scattered abroad went everywhere preaching the word”* (At 8:4). The communication of the gospel was so central to the lives of the early disciples, that Luke turns from counting baptisms to the growth of the word of the Lord that produced the growth. *“The word of God grew and*

*multiplied”* (At 12:24).

There is no secret about this most essential principle for the evangelization of the world. If people do not open their mouths for Jesus, Jesus will never be made known to the masses. It is as simple as what Luke recorded of Philip when he met the Ethiopian eunuch. *“Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this scripture he preached Jesus to him”* (At 8:35).

### B. Focus on receptivity.

*“Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart”* (At 2:37). On the day of Pentecost in Acts 2, Peter and the apostles preached Jesus to a receptive audience. Church growth comes when we find people as Sergius Paulus, a man who *“called for Barnabas and Saul and desired to hear the word of God”* (At 13:7). The early disciples focused on finding those who *“glorified the word of the Lord”* (At 13:48). But if there were those who would not listen, *“they shook off the dust of their feet against them”* and moved on (At 13:51). They moved on to those who *“were more noble-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind and searched the Scriptures daily”* (At 17:11).

The early church grew rapidly

because the disciples did not cast their pearls before the swine. They observed the principle that Jesus spoke. *“Do not give what is holy to the dogs, nor cast your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under their feet and turn and tear you in pieces”* (Mt 7:6). Good advice.

If one would be a productive disciple, then he or she must be able to determine if one is casting the pearl of the gospel before swine. No man has a right to hear the gospel twice when there is one man who has not heard it once. This is especially true in reference to one who resists the gospel. Those who preach the gospel must be able to wipe the dust from their feet when the gospel is resisted. They must be able to move on to those who have never had a chance to hear the gospel.

Satan is very wise. He will hold up disciples who cannot move on. Everyone must have a chance to hear the gospel. But when one determines that his audience is not receptive, **then he must move on**. If he does not, then he has allowed himself to be stolen away from one who will not be given the opportunity to hear the gospel. It is the same principle of life that Jesus illustrated in His life when some *“tried to keep Him from leaving them”* (Lk 4:42). These who sought to hold up Jesus had already heard. Jesus thus reminded them by saying,

*“I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also, because for this purpose I was sent”* (Lk 4:43). Effective evangelism is still based on the principle, *“He who has ears, let him hear”* (Mt 13:9). And when there are listening ears out there, then that is where we must be.

### C. Assisting the obedient.

*“And those who received his word were baptized”* (At 2:41). These were those who *“continued steadfastly in the apostles’ teaching”* (At 2:42). When Jesus is preached, and people are receptive, then obedience to the gospel follows. Obedience follows in the life of those who seek to follow the example of the obedience of Jesus.

*Though He was a Son, He learned obedience by the things that He suffered. And having been made perfect, He became the author of eternal salvation to all those who obey Him* (Hb 5:8,9).

If people will not hear the word of the gospel, then they will not obey the gospel. When they will not hear, it is time to move on to those who will listen. We seek those who want to follow the example of the obedience of Jesus.

## D. Teach the obedient.

*“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship”* (At 2:42). Those who responded on the day of Pentecost continued to be taught by the apostles. Since the apostles knew that many of the 3,000 who obeyed the gospel would be returning to their homes in far away countries, it was necessary that they be grounded in the word of God before they departed from Jerusalem.

Church growth happens when there are those who willingly submit to the teaching of the word of God. A disciple is identified by his willingness to be instructed in the word of God. Paul exhorted the evangelist Timothy, *“These things command and teach”* (1 Tm 4:11). He instructed Timothy to teach other leaders. *“And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, the same commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also”* (2 Tm 2:2).

A leader is identified by his willingness to teach others. These leaders must in turn be willing to be taught by others. Such is exactly what Jesus mandated among His disciples. After a disciple is baptized, Jesus commanded the apostles to teach them *“to observe all things that I have commanded you”* (Mt 28:20). It is in this way that all disciples *“grow in the*

*grace and the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ”* (2 Pt 3:18).

## E. Disciples must fellowship.

*“And they continued steadfastly in ... fellowship in the breaking of bread ...”* (At 2:42). Baptized disciples must seek out the fellowship of others who have also obeyed the gospel. This was the nature of the fellowship of the early disciples. *“Now all who believed were together and had all things in common”* (At 2:44). These early disciples were so bound together in their common obedience to the gospel that they sought out one another for fellowship. *“And continuing daily with one accord in the temple and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and sincerity of heart”* (At 2:46). They continued in their love feasts with one another. As far as our New Testament record of these love feasts reveals, these feasts continued at least until the writing of both Jude and 2 Peter, which letters were written around A.D. 65,66 (See 2 Pt 2:13; Jd 12).

The fellowship of the early disciples was more than meetings for talk and food. Acts 2 states that they *“had all things in common”* (At 2:44). Acts 4:32 explains,

*Now the multitude of those who be-*

*lieved were of one heart and one soul. And no one said that any of the things that he possessed was his own. But they had all things in common.*

Without going into great detail to explain the circumstances that existed on the Pentecost of A.D. 30, consider the fact that there were visiting Jews in Jerusalem who came great distances to this Pentecost and those that followed. The sojourners heard the gospel, and many subsequently obeyed by baptism into Christ (At 2:38).

These obedient disciples stayed on in Jerusalem in order to receive more instruction at the feet of the apostles (At 2:42). Once they had consumed their funds they had for the original journey to Jerusalem for Pentecost, they needed to return to their countries from which they had journeyed. They would return to the synagogues throughout the Roman Empire in order to preach what they heard and saw in Jerusalem (See Is 2:1-3).

What is interesting about this situation is the fact that the resident disciples in Jerusalem saw the return of these visiting Jews as an opportunity to evangelize the world. Therefore, in order to help keep the traveling disciples in town, the local disciples sold their possessions in order that the sojourning disciples might continue in their fellowship and the

apostles' teaching.

## **F. Worship God in spirit and truth.**

*“Those who received his word were baptized ... and they continued steadfastly in ... fellowship in the breaking of bread, and in prayers ... praising God”* (At 2:41,42,47). The early disciples continued after the worship that Jesus explained: *“God is spirit, and those who worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth”* (Jn 4:24). Since they had totally committed themselves to the Lord, they worshiped God in their service to Him (See Rm 12:1,2). They assembled for praise and planning of the work (Hb 10:24,25).

Worshipful disciples continue in their witness that Jesus is their Lord. The effectiveness of their testimony to others that they were the children of God was seen in the worshipful spirit by which they conducted themselves. Those who maintain a daily worshipful spirit are continually reminded in their outreach to others that they are working within the realm of God's work. Those who are not of a worshipful spirit will sometimes develop programs by which they will offer service, but the purpose of the program often becomes the survival of the program itself. Such programs often force that which should only be natural in the spirit of a worshipful

disciple who has obeyed the gospel. In other words, those who have obeyed the gospel of the incarnate Son of God, will naturally live incarnation-ally (See Ph 2:5-8). And living incarnation-ally after our Lord means that we willingly make all sacrifices that are necessary in order to seek and to save the lost.

Disciples are evangelistic, not because they are following the schedule of some program. Disciples are evangelistic by nature because they walk in appreciation of the gospel that they have obeyed (2 Co 4:15). Because they responded to the gospel, they naturally live the gospel that is in their hearts. True worshipers of God, therefore, need no command to be evangelistic. They need no schedule or program to move them into action. They are simply evangelistic because of the One they have obeyed.

### G. Disciples impacted communities.

The enemies of the early disciples accused, ***“These who have turned the world upside down have come here also”*** (At 17:6). And truly, the early Christians did turn the world upside down by their zeal to preach Jesus to the world. On the day of Pentecost when it all began, Luke initially recorded, ***“And the same day there were added to them about three thou-***

***sand souls”*** (At 2:41). From there the growth continued. ***“But many of those who heard the word believed. And the number of the men was about five thousand”*** (At 4:4). ***“And all the more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number”*** (At 5:14). ***“And daily in the temple and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ”*** (At 5:42). ***“So the word of God increased. And the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly. And a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith”*** (At 6:7).

The early disciples went everywhere preaching the word of the gospel (At 8:4). Consequently, the number of disciples ***“were multiplied”*** (At 9:31). ***“Many believed on the Lord”*** (At 9:42). ***“The word of God grew and multiplied”*** (At 12:24). ***“So the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region”*** (At 13:49). God then ***“opened the door of faith to the Gentiles,”*** and thus the disciples took advantage of this great open door (At 14:27). Luke’s climatic statement says it all: ***“So the word of God grew mightily and prevailed”*** (At 19:20).

In the religious world today there is an obsession with “miracles” as a means to grow a particular experiential religion. But when we compare this obsession with what Luke re-

corded concerning what caused the growth of the early church, there is a vast difference of emphasis. Luke witnessed by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit that the church grew because the gospel was preached, not because the disciples overwhelmed the people with miracles every Sunday morning. Little emphasis is placed on the miraculous work of the

Spirit in the early evangelism of the church. It was the preaching of the gospel that produced faith, not the miraculous work of the Spirit. The more the truth of the gospel was preached, the more there were those who believed. Their belief was in the preached message of Jesus, not the miracles that some witnessed.

## Chapter 11

### THE CURSE OF INDIFFERENCE

When the gospel is preached in its pure content, it will prevail over religion. The conquest of the truth of the gospel over the religious inventions of men will cause great growth in the body of Christ. The name of Jesus will be exalted among the nations and God will be glorified.

The gospel was not revealed during the centuries of the existence of national Israel. Nevertheless, the truth of God's word was. This truth was revealed to Israel through the fathers of families, and eventually through the Sinai law (Hb 1:1,2). But because the Israelites rejected the word of truth from God, and did wickedly in their first years in Palestine, the Lord delivered them into the hands of Jabin the king of Canaan (Jg 4:2). The Israelites suffered grievously for twenty years under the control of Jabin (Jg

4:3). But when Israel repentantly cried out to the Lord, Deborah, the prophetess, and Barak, led Israel to freedom from Jabin.

In the freedom call of Deborah and Barak to all Israel to join in the battle against Jabin, the people of Meroz refused to respond. While their fellow brethren went to war against the enemies of God and His people, the residents of Meroz remained in the comfort of their own homes. After the victory, however, God cursed them.

*“Curse you Meroz,” said the angel of the Lord. “Curse utterly its inhabitants, because they did not come to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty” (Jg 5:23).*

The inhabitants of Meroz did absolutely nothing to aid in the deliverance of Israel from the wicked oppression of Jabin. They were indifferent and unconcerned. On all Bible maps today there is usually no indication of the location of Meroz. If it is mentioned, there is usually a question mark beside the assigned location. No one today knows where it was located. It is gone forever. Will the same happen to some churches in any region today if the members fail to rise up and go to war against the mighty enemies of God? When the church in Ephesus lost her first love, the candlestick was removed (See Rv 2:4). The same can be said of thousands of churches throughout history that have lost their first love of the love of souls. When churches lose their evangelistic zeal for the lost, they will eventually be gone.

The Hebrew writer cautioned, *“Take care, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God”* (Hb 3:12). If we fall through unbelief, we too will not be granted the right to enter into eternal existence as those in Israel who did not believe, and were subsequently not allowed to enter into the land of milk and honey. *“And to whom did He swear that they would not enter into His rest, but to those who were disobedient? So we see that they could not enter in because of un-*

*belief”* (Hb 3:18,19). Meroz was taken out of existence because of the inhabitants failure to respond to the need for deliverance from Jabin. Will God take out the church that does not respond to the deliverance of men from the bondage of sin?

The Hebrew Christians were on the verge of neglecting their great salvation. They were considering a turn to their old ways in Judaism. On the verge of apostasy, the Hebrew writer was not vague in his pronouncements concerning such an apostasy. As an example of what would happen to the apostate Jewish Christians, the Hebrew writer referred them to the history of apostate Israel:

*For if the word spoken through angels proved steadfast, and every transgression and disobedience receive a just punishment, how will we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?* (Hb 2:2,3).

Under the Sinai law, transgressions received an immediate and just judgment. The Hebrew writer sought to illustrate the seriousness of the “neglect” of the Jewish Christians to whom he was writing. In Jesus’ parable of the talents, the “one-talent man” was called wicked and slothful because he neglected his responsibility in reference to the opportunity offered to him in his possession of one

talent (Mt 25:26). If we neglect our responsibility to remain faithful to our call through the gospel, then we will suffer the removal of our candlestick.

The same principle of neglect is taught in the parable of the ten minas (Lk 19:11-27). The one who was given one mina, with the responsibility of increasing it for the master, did nothing. He neglected his gift and opportunity. When the nobleman came, the unprofitable servant was judged to be a “wicked bondservant” because he had neglected to increase that which had been entrusted to him (Lk 19:22). Would this fall under the principle about which James wrote? *“Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin”* (Js 4:17).

When we understand our responsibility that has come to us as a gift of opportunity, and we do not take ownership of the opportunity, then we are in trouble. Timothy had such a gift given to him. Because of discouragement, he stopped preaching. It took an inspired letter from the Holy Spirit to get him going again. In the letter, the apostle charged, **“Do not neglect the gift that is in you”** (1 Tm 4:14). We do not know the specific gift to which Paul was referring in this statement. However we do know that at the time Paul wrote 1 Timothy, Timothy was neglecting it. In Paul’s second letter to Timothy, he exhorted

again, **“I remind you that you stir up the gift of God that is in you”** (2 Tm 1:6).

To “stir up” means to rekindle the flame. When we are not engaged in the war against the wiles of the Devil, it is time to stir up our gift of evangelistic outreach. It is time to remember our former days when we were on fire for the Lord.

Gifts were given only for the purpose of reaching out to others. They were not given by God as self-satisfying opportunities to build up one’s self. If we fail to rekindle the gift that is given to us for the sake of others, then because of indifference, laziness, fear, or any other obstacle that Satan has put in our way, we are neglecting our gift. As we rekindle a smoldering ember, sometimes our responsibility must be blown upon by the word of God in order to be ignited for Jesus.

In the parable of the talents an interesting statement was made in reference to the bondservant to whom was given one talent. This was the bondservant who said to the master upon the master’s return, **“I was afraid and went and hid your talent in the earth. See, here you have what is yours”** (Mt 25:25).

The fear of the one-talent person led him to be inactive and indifferent over that which was entrusted to him. He was given the opportunity, but because of fear, he did not perform ac-

cording to the will of the master. We are reminded of the following statement in Revelation 21:8: “***But the cowardly and unbelieving ... will have their part in the lake that burns with fire and brimstone***” Is this not what Jesus meant when He said of the one-talent bondservant? “***Cast the unprofitable bondservant into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth***” (Mt 25:30).

There will be a tragic end to those who are unprofitable in the evangelistic work of kingdom business. Regardless of what one’s gift is in reference to the benefit of the work of Jesus on earth through us personally, if we are not profitable in His work, then we will eventually be cast into the outer darkness. And now we know the motivation of Paul when he revealed to the Corinthians, “***Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord we persuade men***” (2 Co 5:11). We should add, “***It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God***” (Hb 10:31).

We must not let our fear of anything detour us from assuming our responsibility to evangelize our communities. The only one we should fear is the One who has the authority to cast our souls into the outer darkness because we feared men more than we feared Him. “***But I will forewarn you whom you should fear. Fear Him who, after He has killed, has author-***

***ity to cast into hell. Yes, I say to you, fear Him***” (Lk 12:5; see Mt 10:32).

In Jesus’ judgment of the seven churches of Asia, six of the churches were commended for some good because of the circumstances in which they lived. But there was one church that received absolutely no praise. It was the church of Laodicea (Rv 3:14-22). This church was stricken with a deadly malady that would take it away forever. It was stricken with a spirit of lukewarmness because of their indifference to those of Laodicea. And because the members were not serious about their faith, Jesus pronounced condemnation upon them.

*I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew you out of My mouth* (Rv 3:15,16).

This very judgment could be spoken to a great number of people who pose to be true disciples of Jesus. We must remember that Jesus will spew out those who are lukewarm in reference to His kingdom business.

We may have buried our gift, neglecting the purpose for which it was given. We may have lost our first love as the Ephesians (Rv 2:4). Or, we may have become lukewarm as the Laodiceans (Rv 3:15). Nevertheless,

it is never too late to rekindle the fire of evangelism that is to be in our bones. Paul exhorted, ***“Awake you who sleep and arise from the dead, and Christ will give you light”*** (Ep 5:14). He exhorted the Corinthians, ***“Awake to righteousness and do not sin”*** (1 Co 15:34).

The simple reason to awake in order to assume our responsibility of evangelism is that ***“some have no knowledge of God”*** (1 Co 15:34). The only way they will receive a knowledge of God is through us. This is exactly what Paul meant when he

wrote to the Ephesians that ***“the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known through the church”*** (Ep 3:10). Any church that fails to take ownership of this responsibility is not functioning according to the Christ-given mission of the church. Paul rebuked the Corinthians for their laziness and indifference in these matters by saying, ***“I speak this to your shame”*** (1 Co 15:34). If we believe Paul would write the same exhortation concerning our lack of evangelistic spirit, then it is time for repentance.

## Chapter 12

### WRONG MAN'S JOB

It is interesting to note what Luke recorded concerning the results of the first missionary journey of Paul and Barnabas upon their return to Antioch of Syria. Paul and Barnabas ***“reported all that God had done with them and how He had opened the door of faith to the Gentiles”*** (At 14:27). It is God who uses us and it is God who opens doors for us. It is our responsibility to be perceptive to the open doors that God opens for us individually.

We live in an era where evangelists are sent out to do the work of evangelizing the world. And rightly so, for how ...

*... will they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how will they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how will they hear without a preacher? **And how will they preach unless they are sent?*** (Rm 10:14,15).

We send out the preacher to proclaim the good news. This is God's work through us in order to bring many residents into eternal dwelling. It is God working through us as senders in order that the evangelist can enter the doors that He is opening.

Now we often encounter some difficulty when it comes to reporting

what God is doing among the nations for His glory. It is not our purpose in reporting on God's work to bring glory to the ones who are sent or the ones who are sending. Those who are sent often make the mistake of being intimidated to take credit for what God has done. It is often similar to some in Corinth who took credit for other men's work.

We must consider God's work through ourselves in reference to Paul's obsession to preach the gospel. *"For if I preach the gospel, I have nothing to boast about, for necessity is laid upon me. For woe is me if I do not preach the gospel"* (1 Co 9:16). Paul was compelled to preach because of his debt that he owed for his own salvation (Rm 1:14). However, he would not boast in repaying his debt. The exhortation would be, *"He who boasts, let him boast in the Lord"* (2 Co 10:17). Paul would boast in what the Lord does for us, not in what we do for Him. Though the Corinthians were his boast in the Lord, **it was the Lord who produced the Christians in Corinth through the preaching of the gospel by Paul.** And above all, Paul would never boast in the labors of others who had preached the gospel. *"We are not boasting of things beyond our measure, that is, of other men's labors"* (2 Co 10:15). He would not boast *"in another man's realm of accomplish-*

*ment"* (2 Co 10:16). If he had done such, then he would have been stealing away some of God's glory.

Now listen specifically to what Paul said in 2 Corinthians 10:12:

*For we dare not class or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.*

Sometimes the reports of evangelists digress to the unwise practices of some in Corinth. (1) We often take credit for God's work. (2) We often boast in our own accomplishments by bowing to the demands of supporters who seek a "baptism report." (3) The supporters often compare our reports with the work of other evangelists. (4) Evangelists often measure their own accomplishments by the accomplishments of others, feeling that they are either competing or guaranteeing their own support. (5) Sometimes, we are simply self-oriented and seeking glory for ourselves. In doing all such things, **we are not wise.** We are bowing down to the intimidation of those who sign our pay checks. And thus, we end up boasting about the wrong man's job.

We sometimes need to refocus on our job as disciples of Jesus. If our focus is correct, then our emphasis in

preaching the gospel will be productive.

### A. Our job is to plant.

Our focus is 1 Corinthians 3:1-9, specifically verses 6-9. In his message to the disciples throughout the province of Achaia who were dividing over personalities, Paul stated that he had planted the seed of the gospel in Corinth (1 Co 3:6). Luke recorded this planting in Acts 18:1-11. On his initial visit to the city of Corinth, *“Paul was compelled in the spirit and testified to the Jews that Jesus was the Christ”* (At 18:5). *“Many of the Corinthians hearing, believed, and were baptized”* (At 18:8). *“So he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them”* (At 18:11).

Paul was their father in the faith, *“for in Christ Jesus I [Paul] have brought you forth through the gospel”* (1 Co 4:15; see 15:1,2). In recounting his trip to Corinth, Paul reminded the disciples that he came from a great distance in order to preach the gospel to them (2 Co 10:14).

This is our job. We must go the distance for Jesus. If we are not willing to leave fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, lands and houses for Jesus, then we will not get the job done (See Lk 14:26; see Mt 10:37). It is our job to plant the seed of the gospel. As

long as one is preaching the gospel to the lost, then he is doing his job (See Mt 28:19, Mk 16:15). This is exactly what the early church did as it went forth into all the world (At 8:4,12).

If Paul were like some notable religious leaders since the first century, we would have the “Paulite Church” today. We have Lutherans and Calvinists and Anglicans, and a host of others that are named either after some religious leader or peculiar teaching. We even have churches that are named after Jewish feasts days, that is, “Pentecostals.” But we have not encountered a Paulistian church.

While some men have craved to have their disciples focus on them as the leaders, Paul would only say, *“Be imitators of me even as I also am of Christ”* (1 Co 11:1). One could not focus on Paul without focusing on Christ. And if one focused on the incarnation of the Son of God, then there would be no room to be puffed up in having people focus on anyone other than Christ. We are thus the people (church) of Christ (See Ph 2:5-8).

Paul knew how to keep the glory focused on Christ. He also knew how people like their heroes. They have a thirst to have a “king over them as the nations around them.” Paul wrote, therefore, to keep the people focused on King Jesus as their only hero. He,

as the rest of the apostles, clearly reminded the people that they were only servants through whom the seed of the kingdom of Christ was planted in the hearts of men. *“Who then is Paul and who is Apollos, but servants by whom you believed”* (1 Co 3:5). The fact that we have no Cephites or Paulites, or Apollosites today is evidence that these men did their jobs well by keeping the peoples’ minds focused on Jesus Christ.

## B. Our job is to water.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians that *“Apollos watered”* (1 Co 3:6). This too is our job. Men are God’s instruments to water the seed of the kingdom that is planted by someone else. Apollos came along after Paul left Corinth (At 19:1). While in Corinth, Apollos used his gift of exhortation to build up the body of disciples. Luke wrote of Apollos’ arrival and ministry in Corinth, *“He greatly helped those who had believed through grace”* (At 18:27).

Apollos may have been as the teacher who stood before the assembly of disciples and said, *“We ain’t what we oughta be, and we ain’t what we’re gonna be, but thanks be to the Lord that we ain’t what we used to be.”*

It is our business to water the seed of the gospel in order that men

and women live lives that are worthy of the gospel (See Ph 1:27). It is our job to use our gifts to edify the body of Christ, . . .

*. . . from whom the whole body being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working of each part, causes growth of the body to the edifying of itself in love* (Ep 4:16).

## C. God’s job is to bear the fruit.

When we do our job of planting and watering, then God takes it from there. Paul reminded the Corinthians, *“God gave the increase”* (1 Co 3:6). Therefore, we must remember this point: *“So then neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase”* (1 Co 3:7).

Those who plant and water are the organic body of Christ at work (1 Co 3:8). But we must remember that *“we are laborers together with God”* (1 Co 3:9). God gave us the message. God is opening the doors. God is using our gifts to His glory. And when we report, **we can only report on what God is doing among the nations.**

We can take no glory in the fruit bearing business. We may plant and water, but years later the fruit may come forth. If we glory in the fruit,

not only are we boasting in God's business, but we may be taking credit for another person's planting and watering that took place many years before we arrived on the scene. When we report on the fruit, therefore, we must be cautious that we are not taking credit for another man's labors, and thus be as the arrogant folks in Corinth who compared their works with one another, and then took credit for Paul's labors.

If we would be concerned about the results of our evangelistic outreach, then we must be concerned about our planting and watering. If we do our job, God has promised that His word will do its work and bring forth fruit. It is our business to "*go out into the highways and hedges and*

*compel them to come in so that my house may be filled*" (Lk 14:23). Someone challenged all of us with the lyrics of the following song:

Some people want to live within  
The sound of church or chapel bell;

I want to run a rescue shop  
Within a yard of hell.

Within a yard of hell I went  
To tell of life above,

And from the slums of sin I saw  
Hearts now full of love.

Lives were changed and hope was given,

What wonders I could tell;

Will you not go with me, my friends,  
Within a yard of hell?

## Chapter 13

### BEING FAITHFUL

Paul made an interesting statement when he wrote to the Roman disciples something that should make many of us stand up and take notice of our responsibilities, both toward the disciples, as well as toward the lost. He wrote,

*I do not want you to be unaware, brethren, that I often planned to come to you. But I was hindered until the present, so that I might have some fruit among you also, even as I have among the*

*other Gentiles* (Rm 1:13).

Now in view of the above statement to the Roman disciples, it is good to read again what Jesus said to His disciples: "*Herein is My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be My disciples*" (Jn 15:8). Regardless of how we would define the "fruit" about which both Paul and Jesus spoke, one thing is clear. If one does not bear

fruit, **then he is not a disciple of Jesus.** Our fruit bearing validates our discipleship.

Jesus warned and exhorted, “*I Am the true vine and My Father is the vinedresser. **Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away. And every branch that bears fruit, He prunes it so that it may bring forth more fruit***” (Jn 15:1,2). Those who bear fruit, therefore, are connected to Jesus. But if one does not bear fruit, then God takes that unproductive branch away.

One is determined to be connected to Jesus by his fruit bearing. Jesus continued, “*Abide in Me and I in you. **As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in Me***” (Jn 15:4). The signal that one is abiding in Jesus is by his fruit bearing. If there is no fruit, then there is no abiding in Jesus. “*He who abides in Me and I in him, the same brings forth much fruit, for without Me you can do nothing*” (Jn 15:5).

Our discipleship depends on whether we are bearing fruit. Those who seek to be disciples, seek to abide in Jesus in order that they bear fruit. And since they are abiding in Jesus, then they are bearing fruit. The signal that one is not abiding in Jesus is that he is not bearing fruit. By our fruit bearing, we bring glory to God. We prove that we are the disciples of Jesus.

In His personal message to the twelve disciples, Jesus made a qualifying condition for the disciples’ prayers to be answered: “*I appointed you so you should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain so that whatever you ask of the Father in My name, He may give it to you*” (Jn 15:16). Unproductive disciples will certainly have unproductive prayers. No fruit, not answered prayer.

Fruit bearing can be accomplished personally, and indirectly through another person. We must personally be involved in fruit bearing in our own lives through spiritual growth and evangelism. In the context of this discussion, bringing forth fruit through the preaching of the gospel is paramount to being a disciple of Jesus. In fact, as stated in the preceding mandates of Jesus, one is not a disciple unless he is bearing fruit. We can personally bear fruit, but we can also bear fruit by supporting those who go forth to preach the gospel. This was revealed in the early discipleship of both the Philippian jailor and Lydia.

Paul had stayed in Philippi on his first visit only a few days (At 16:12). From Philippi, he, Timothy and Silas went on to Thessalonica (At 17:1). Luke stayed in Philippi. When Paul wrote to the disciples in Philippi many years later, he reminded them of their early desires to bear fruit in other ar-

eas through the support of Paul, Timothy and Silas.

*Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel when I departed from Macedonia, **no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only** (Ph 4:15).*

We wonder why the jailor and Lydia, who were only a few days old as disciples, did what Paul wrote, “*For even in Thessalonica you sent **once and again for my needs***” (Ph 4:16). The answer is simple. Paul reminded them of what he had taught them. “*I desire the fruit that abounds to your account*” (Ph 4:17). **The Philippians received the fruit of the converted souls in Thessalonica because they financially supported Paul, Timothy and Silas who preached the gospel to the Thessalonians.**

One is a disciple by personally bearing fruit in his own life. But one is also considered a disciple by bearing fruit through the support of those who go forth to preach the gospel in other areas. Paul asked, “*And how will they preach unless they are sent?*” (Rm 10:15). When Jesus said, “*Follow Me and I will make you fishers of men,*” He meant that we must fish local waters, as well as waters in foreign areas (Mt 4:19).

The apostle John commended Gaius for what he was doing in evan-

gelizing the world through those he personally supported. There were evangelists at the time who were coming through town. Gaius supported these evangelists (missionaries) on their journey. In supporting these traveling evangelists, John reminded Gaius that he was doing something faithful in supporting these missionaries in their efforts to preach the gospel to the world (3 Jn 5). He commended Gaius, “*You will do well to support them on their journey*” (3 Jn 6). And then John added that local Christians as Gaius should support traveling evangelists because the evangelists (1) “*went forth for the sake of the Name*” of Jesus, (2) they took no contributions from the unbelievers, and (3) we should support them in order “*that we might be fellow workers for the truth*” of the gospel (3 Jn 7,8).

Gaius never forgot his responsibility to the world. Paul reminded the Colossians, “*Even in all the world **this gospel is bringing forth fruit**, just as it does also in you since the day you heard and knew the grace of God in truth*” (Cl 1:6). If we deny the world the gospel by failing to support those who go into all the world, then we will have no fruit from the evangelists who go into all the world. As the gospel brought us forth as a disciple, it is only natural that a true disciple will seek to preach the gospel to

others through those he supports to go forth and preach the good news. This is the marvelous truth the Philippian jailor and Lydia realized even when they were only a few days old as disciples. It is a truth that was illustrated in the life of Gaius as he lived the gospel in his own life. Unfortunately, there are some who claim to be disciples of Jesus but have never understood this principle of gospel living.

Someone well wrote,

*You must save another's soul  
If you would save your own,  
The door of heaven is closed  
To him who comes alone.*

And therefore, we would add these inspiring words. **“He who wins souls is wise”** (Pv 11:30).

## Epilogue

**When we have no mission outreach to the lost, we have lost our purpose as a church of Christ. We are thus dead to the purpose for which the church exists in a world of sin.**

The Ephesian and Sardis churches are the New Testament examples of this fact. The Ephesian disciples started off with a blast in Acts 19. But a little over thirty years later the members had lost their first love. The members of the Sardis church had a great reputation in their city for their good works. But they were dead. Because of where both churches were at the time the message of Revelation was written, they had incurred the negative judgment of Jesus in reference to their function as the universal body of Christ.

We have found that dead churches often do not realize that they are dead. The reason for this is that

Satan generates too much religious behavior in the lives of those whom he wants to feel good while in a state of death. When the church goes down, he makes the members think that all is well in a sinking ship. Keep in mind that until Jesus showed up, the Ephesian disciples probably did not realize that they had lost their first love. Churches that have no mission outreach, but are involved in a great number of good works, usually do not realize that Satan has sent them off course. This seems to have been the situation with the Sardis Christians who felt good about themselves, but they were dead to the function for which Christ died.

### Love lost:

Notice the truth of this point in reference to what Jesus said to the Ephesian disciples over three decades

after their beginning in Acts 19: “*I know your works and your labor and your patience, and how you cannot bear those who are evil*” (Rv 2:2). The complements continued in order to notify them that their “church” activity and involvement was by the time Revelation was written, was only self-deception. They had digressed into systematic religion from which they needed to repent: “*You have labored for My name’s sake and have not become weary*” (Rv 2:3). That was their past. Their present was not so.

If we stopped here we might conclude that these disciples throughout the city of Ephesus were doing quite well. They felt secure in the deception of their church involvement. The members were an active group who were busy as bees doing this or that program in order to present a front that they were a church that was on fire for the Lord. But there was something tragically wrong. Something was so wrong that Jesus called on them to repent.

We might assume that the Ephesian disciples had involvement programs that focused on their own needs. There was probably even a committee that sat as judges who “*tested those who say they are apostles, and are not, and have found them liars*” (Rv 2:2). They surely had a benevolent program, a Bible school

department, a roster of those who were to be the participants in the Sunday morning performance. They possibly had a disaster relief program where members involved themselves in helping those who suffered from earthquakes or volcanic eruptions. But something was tragically wrong. Their first love was gone.

In their euphoria of activity, Jesus dropped in with a pronouncement that shock them to their inner soul. “*I have this against you, that you have left your first love*” (Rv 2:4). They had left their purpose for being disciples of the One who came into this world to seek and to save those who are lost (Lk 19:10). They turned into a religious social club who catered to those needs that were not focused on eternal consequences.

The first love that originally led to their birth as a church and initial rapid growth in their beginning. But now it was gone. Their activity of how they loved one another was going great. But their loving function with one another to the exclusion of loving the lost, led to their need to repent.

### **The walking dead:**

The danger that always faces activity-oriented churches is what Jesus said of the church in Sardis: “*I know your works, that you have a name that*

*you live, but you are dead*" (Rv 3:1). The disciples in Sardis took pride in their notoriety. They certainly had a good reputation in the community of Sardis. But they were dead to the reason for which the church is to function in a lost world. They too, as the Ephesian Christians, had forgotten the purpose of the body of Christ.

Because the Ephesians had lost their purpose, they were called on to "**remember from where you have fallen, and repent**" (Ep 2:5). Though others spoke well of the disciples in Sardis, in reference to what they were to be as the church of Christ, they were dead. Churches that have lost their purpose to save the lost have simply forgotten the reason for their existence as the church of God in a world of lost sinners. If we lose our love for lost souls, and thus our purpose as the church, then we are dead!

We have found that when there is a group of disciples who have lost their purpose for being evangelistic disciples for Jesus, they will continue to assemble with one another. In fact, they will often obsess with one another in relational activities to the point that they forsake to establish relationships with the lost, or even consider everyone who believes in Jesus to be saved regardless of their obedience to the gospel. In their absent-minded evangelistic outreach, the entire group carries on in a survival

mode with exciting assemblies in order to convince themselves that they are still disciples of the One who came to seek and to save those who are lost. A few members may smell the stench of death, but they are so outnumbered that their voices are no longer heard.

When we lose our love for lost souls, and still seek to be religious, we will fall in love with ourselves. We will focus on ourselves in order to convince ourselves that we are all OK. Our Sunday assemblies will thus become experiential events wherein we seek to remind ourselves that we are still the right church. We will refer to our heritage as the authority for our continuation. We will convince ourselves that if we progress through a legal system of ceremonies every Sunday that are opened and closed with a prayer, then we have assured ourselves that we right. As long as we maintain the heritage of our fathers, then certainly, we assume, we cannot be wrong.

A local church that has been in existence for decades is composed of members who have a strong relationship with one another. The members often become protective of these relationships. They assume that the majority of their group of gray-headed members is not dead because they still show up on Sunday.

The church is indeed about relationships with one another. It is about

taking care of one another until each one of us step into a grave. However, our obsession with our relationships sometimes turns the church into a clique that inherently is exclusive. In our exclusiveness we feel uncomfortable about sitting down with a lost soul. We even feel uncomfortable about sharing the gospel with our lost neighbors. And when we do, our mission is to convert the lost to our social religious club of relationships is gone.

**We must never forget that obedience to the gospel for the remission of sins has priority over all relationships between ourselves.** Top priority is that the sinner must establish a covenant relationship with God. Our relationships with one another are only the serendipity of our common obedience to the gospel. The disciples of Christ are to be known for their love of one another (Jn 13:34,35). But our love for one another is validated as true love when we reach out with love to bring the lost into the sheep fold of God.

### **Identity of the lost love:**

The following are very important realities of a dead church that has lost its first love: **When a group of disciples no longer generates a mission environment that naturally produces evangelists who go out with**

**the message of the gospel, then the group has lost its first love.**

If the local church is no longer supporting missions, then the members have become introverted. In such situations, their local budget is usually reserved for the support of works that are only within driving distance. They focus on programs and buildings for themselves. They have lost the flavor of the gospel, and thus they no longer have a gospel environment among the members that naturally produces those who will go forth with the gospel. When we cease living in gratitude of the gospel, we cease sending the gospel to all the world.

We have found that introverted churches become quite narcissistic, that is, they focus on themselves in order to survive the spirit-stifling effects of their own death. Exciting assemblies of dead churches are like flowers at a funeral. Death is all around, but the beauty of the assembly and the smell of the music drowns out the reality of having died to our first love.

When a church starts focusing on making their assemblies a Hollywood production in order to keep the attendees coming back, then the reality of death has already set in. Death has set in because the attendees are focusing on what they can get out of the assembly, that is, what they can get out of one another. On the other hand,

those who attend gospel assemblies cannot wait to get out and go into all the world.

When those of the religious world lose sight of the power of the gospel, they usually turn up the volume on the amplifiers. The attendees at the concert show up for themselves. They confuse mesmerized experientialism with gospel evangelism. The mission of the church, therefore, becomes a series of Sunday performances that are inward focused and experiential. Hollywood assemblies are often the result of a church that has lost its mission. The mission of the Sunday performers is often to inspire the attendees to return next Sunday.

Dead disciples become religious, and thus are not drawn together in assembly because of their gratitude for the gospel of the incarnate Son of God. They are drawn together primarily to get something for themselves or a leading spot in the Sunday morning performance. In the assembly, some churches seek to fill a vacuum in the inner soul of the attendees who have lost their aroma for Christ.

This is particularly revealed in those religious assemblies on Sunday where the attendees feel no need to celebrate the gospel through the Lord's Supper. There are those churches that have digressed to a legal celebration of the Supper. However, we are certain that the Lord re-

spects even a legal communion with Him on a simple legal basis, rather than ignore the gospel of Jesus until "Easter Sunday." Those religious groups who have only "Easter Sundays" wherein the Supper is observed have forgotten the purpose for the assembly of the blood-bought saints. Satan has changed their focus for assembly from Jesus to themselves. They calibrate themselves, but have forgotten to celebrate through the Supper the reason why we come together. When Jesus said of the Supper, "*This do in remembrance of Me*" (Lk 22:19), they have changed the "**Me**" (Jesus) to "**me**" (myself and I).

The reader might think that we are somewhat obsessed with the digression of the dead church into an assembly-oriented religion. But consider something that we recently read in reference to church growth studies in America. A survey was completed that focused on the decline of the "conservative" churches in America. The figures that were given were quite startling. Several church-growth studies have been conducted over the last three decades in America. But recent studies were quite revealing.

The particular writer who introduced us to the most current church-growth statistics informed us that the decline of the conservative church of America was the result of two problems. After calculating the diminish-

ing numbers of both attendance and the number of church assemblies, the problem for the decline was focused on the following: (1) Declining churches that traditionally use no instruments in their assemblies are falling in numbers of both attendees and the number of local assemblies. (2) Declining churches are those who do not incorporate women into their Sunday assemblies.

What is surprising about the two reasons for the decline was that **nothing was mentioned about the decline in the evangelistic outreach of churches. The decline was focused on assembly performances and participation, not on missions.** This is the conclusion of church growth religionists who judge the body of Christ by the rules of what happens in the assembly. But is the church about what happens between an opening and closing prayer on Sunday morning?

### **“Connective disconnection”:**

If we learn anything from the disciples in Ephesus and Sardis, it is the fact that dead churches—those who have lost their first love—organize to find purpose through their local programs of involvement that are focused on themselves. Or, as we have witnessed in these modern times, the production of Sunday morning experiences appeal to narcissistic attendees

who are made to think that they are alive.

Christianity is not defined by assemblies, but by the gospel working in the hearts of those who seek to preach the grace of God to a lost world. It is not the purpose of the gospel to produce an exciting assembly, but to celebrate the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. Satan would have us become concerned about theatrical performances on Sunday morning that appeal to ourselves, and thus distract us from the lost souls of men who are destined to hell. Instead of opportunities to come together for reproving, rebuking and exhortation *“with all longsuffering and teaching”* (2 Tm 4:2), we come together to ignore our loss of love for the lost by celebrating ourselves. When was the last time you heard a sermon on hell?

We see a worldwide rise of connective disconnection among those of this generation of the world. The rise of the celebration assembly that focuses exclusively on the narcissistic individual is evidence of this disconnectivity. In fact, the self-centered celebration of the Sunday assembly among churches may be the last effort of many churches to call their members together in assembly. Bringing this generation and the next generations together in assembly is a problem that will face the church of the future.

We live in an Internet world of “connective disconnectivity.” Social online networks as Facebook, Whatsapp and whatever connect people with one another outside any personal encounter in a face-to-face relationship. There is thus little need for a personal face-to-face relationship when our smartphones will satisfy our desire to have “electronic friends.” In these days electronic connections have replaced personal connections. If we discover that one of our “electronic friends” disagrees with us on a particular point, we can simply “unfriend” the friend.

In the area of “Christianity,” add to this the opportunity of individuals online to access video preachers from around the world who preach every sort of feel-good doctrine that is sterile of the gospel. Sermons that make us psychologically feel good in a harsh world have replaced expository lessons of the word of God in an assembly. The most downloaded sermons from the Internet are those that are presented by dynamic speakers who know little or nothing about “preaching the word,” but a great deal in how to tickle ears in order to encourage the listener to download the next message (See 2 Tm 4:1,2).

The ease by which a preached lesson can be accessed through the Internet is quite phenomenal. Therefore, if someone concludes in their

personal disconnectivity with others that they can access all the “spiritual” information that they need by streaming some “psychology preacher” on the other side of the world, then why would one take the initiative or trouble themselves with going to some “church assembly”? Why would one take the risk of showing up at an assembly where he or she might hear something that is negative from a preacher of the word of God? Why would an “Internet attendee” listen to a speaker with whom he or she may disagree on a particular point, but is not able to immediately post a negative “comment” on the speaker’s timeline?

Our disconnection with one another has often evolved to the point that if an assembly does not incorporate the participation of as many as possible of those who attend, or offer the most exciting and dynamic speaker that is surrounded by a “worshipful experience,” then it is not worth attending. If the “smartphone generation” would attend, they will simply gravitate to an assembly that offers the most fulfilling experience that they desire from an assembly event. If no such assembly can be found, then the Facebook generation would just as well stay at home and download a positive speech that is sterile of the word of God.

**Search for Jesus, not assemblies:**

If one feels fulfilled in being the center of attention on his or her Facebook site, Youtube broadcast, or Podcast, then there is no longer any driving force to seek out a personal face-to-face relationship with someone at an assembly of peers.

If you doubt this, then the next time you encounter several young people together, notice how many of them are focusing on what is transpiring on their cellphones. Ask these slaves to their smartphones how often they check the number of “likes” or “views” of something that they have just posted. Even worse, if they come to an assembly, notice how many will not turn off their cellphones just in case some “important” message comes their way. We were even in a prayer group where one attendee refused to turn off his cellphone.

It is difficult to assemble narcissists together in an assembly that does not appeal to the narcissistic obsessions of each individual. It was in times of the past that the “pastor” wanted to be the center of attention when the saints came together. It is now, and will be in the future, that all the attendees, if they show up, will want to be the center of attention of the assembly.

At this time in history, the celebration assembly is often focused on

those who have come “to get something out of the assembly.” And if the attendees do not get what they want out of the assembly, they are on their way to the next assembly. They will go from one assembly to another until they get what they want. But in all their search, they have forgotten that they, as a part of any gathering of the saints, must be as Jesus. And Jesus came to give, not to get. It is the nature of any assembly of gospel-obedient slaves of Jesus to give. They give their voices in singing. They give their gratitude in the Supper. They give their ears to the teaching of the word of God. They give their money as their time in thanksgiving for all that God has given to them. If all this is reversed to receiving, then a narcissistic religion has been born.

We continually need a reality check on these matters. If we wake up and find ourselves to have lost our first love, or smell the stench of dead in the air, then it is time to realize that we have lost our way and need to repent. Dead churches that present themselves to be alive send forth no campaigners to mission areas. Dead churches support no mission efforts. Dead churches produce no evangelists who will go forth with the gospel. Therefore, if we are neither sending nor being sent, then we have lost our first love. We are dead to the purpose for which the Son of God was incar-

nate into the flesh of man for our salvation.

Dead churches usually have no idea that they are dead, simply because they present the ruse that they are alive. Death becomes so gradual in our excitement that it is not detected. The church in Sardis did not know that they were dead until Jesus showed up and wrote their name in the obituary of Revelation. The church in Ephesus did not know that they had lost their first love until the

One who came to seek and save the lost pronounced that their first love was gone.

Once we realize that our love for the lost is lost, we lose our drive to go into all the world and preach the gospel to those who are lost. If we surround ourselves with those who have likewise lost their purpose, then King Jesus offers only one recourse: REPENT! Resurrection is the only answer for death!

## MY FRIEND

My friend, I stand in the judgment now,  
And feel that you're to blame somehow.  
On earth, I walked with you day by day,  
And never did you point the way.

You knew the Lord in truth and glory,  
But never did you tell me the story.  
My knowledge then was very dim,  
You could have led the way to Him.

Though we lived together on the earth,  
You never told me of the second birth,  
And now I stand here, condemned,  
Because you failed to mention Him.

You taught me many things, that's true;  
I called you "friend" and trusted you,  
But now I learn, when it's too late —  
You could have saved me from this fate.

We walked and talked by dawn and night,  
And yet, you showed me not His light.  
You let me live and love and die,  
You knew I'd never live on high.

Yes, I called you "friend" in life,  
And trusted you through joy and strife,  
And yet on coming to this end —  
I cannot now call you "my friend."

(Unknown author)

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*Making Disciples In A Global Community*  
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*Perceptions And Postulations*  
*Our Faith – Our Salvation*  
*His Grace – Our Faith*  
*The Living Sacrifice*  
*Committed To World Evangelism*  
*Organic Function Of The Body Of Christ*  
*The World As It Is*  
*The Godly Giver*  
*Thirsting For Word From God*  
*Following Jesus Into Glory*  
*The Seven Flickering Flames Of Asia*  
*The Giants Among Us*  
*Dead Preachers*  
*New Creation*  
*Character For Christ*  
*The Power Of Many As One*  
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## ABBREVIATIONS

### OLD TESTAMENT

Genesis - **Gn**, Exodus - **Ex**, Leviticus - **Lv**, Numbers - **Nm**, Deuteronomy - **Dt**, Joshua - **Ja**, Judges - **Jg**, Ruth - **Rt**, 1 Samuel - **1 Sm**, 2 Samuel - **2 Sm**, 1 Kings - **1 Kg**, 2 Kings - **2 Kg**, 1 Chronicles - **1 Ch**, 2 Chronicles - **2 Ch**, Ezra - **Er**, Nehemiah - **Ne**, Esther - **Et**, Job - **Jb**, Psalms - **Ps**, Proverbs - **Pv**, Ecclesiastes - **Ec**, Song of Solomon - **Ss**, Isaiah - **Is**, Jeremiah - **Jr**, Lamentations - **Lm**, Ezekiel - **Ez**, Daniel - **Dn**, Hosea - **Hs**, Joel - **Jl**, Amos - **Am**, Obadiah - **Ob**, Jonah - **Jh**, Micah - **Mc**, Nahum - **Nh**, Habakkuk - **Hk**, Zephaniah - **Zp**, Haggai - **Hg**, Zechariah - **Zc**, Malachi - **Ml**

### NEW TESTAMENT

Matthew - **Mt**, Mark - **Mk**, Luke - **Lk**, John - **Jn**, Acts - **At**, Romans - **Rm**, 1 Corinthians - **1 Co**, 2 Corinthians - **2 Co**, Galatians - **Gl**, Ephesians - **Ep**, Philippians - **Ph**, Colossians - **Cl**, 1 Thessalonians - **1 Th**, 2 Thessalonians - **2 Th**, 1 Timothy - **1 Tm**, 2 Timothy - **2 Tm**, Titus - **Ti**, Philemon - **Pi**, Hebrews - **Hb**, James - **Js**, 1 Peter - **1 Pt**, 2 Peter - **2 Pt**, 1 John - **1 Jn**, 2 John - **2 Jn**, 3 John - **3 Jn**, Jude - **Jd**, Revelation - **Rv**