

GENTLE SHEPHERD MINISTRIES

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CONTENDING FOR THE FAITH ~ MAKING DISCIPLES ~ EQUIPPING THE SAINTS FOR MINISTRY

THE JUDGMENT OF VANITY (The Right Response)

Part Four

By Rayola Kelley

The Christmas season is once again upon us. I am not sure how many Americans are going to be celebrating this season with so many individuals out of work, out of food, living in cars, and living on the streets. As I meditated on this fact, I realized the excessive ways of Americans are often revealed at this season. As we compare this season with last season, I could not help but consider how many people now regard their past excessiveness in their buying habits to be nothing more than vanity, useless and mocking in light of the present crisis. I wonder how many people are beginning to regain their senses as to what is important. Most of what we Americans put value on in the past is now proving to be temporary and insignificant in light of the present crisis. Clearly, Americans are being pulled up short by the present darkness of hopelessness, and sobriety is now beginning to replace the foolishness that reigns in many of our lives.

I have been struggling over the darkness invading this country since the 2008 campaign for president. Recently it came to a head as I realized the tremendous vexation that weighed heavily on my heart. In fact, the weight was so great that it broke both Jeannette and me during our prayer time. Jeannette and I had both come to a place of being utterly broken over the sins of the Church and the nation. We became keenly aware of our own guilt and failure as well.

It is important to point out this breaking was not a sudden occurrence for us. For me, it had been coming to a head for days. Concerning this nation, I felt a terrible hopelessness engulfing me, and when it came to the Church, I felt great sor-

row and disappointment. Once again, I must remind people that the Church in this case is not necessarily represented by the visible or professing church; rather, it is the unseen Body of Christ that consists of living members of believers (*Ephesians 3:11-21; 4:11-20*). To me, the members of the unseen Church are most likely wrestling before God concerning the present state of affairs. No doubt, many of the members feel isolated and uncertain about this situation, but something still compels them to wrestle and stand until they know there is no more hope.

My personal wrestling match before God proved to be intense at different times. In my heart, I could not concede that I was to sit around and either hope for some great deliverance or calmly accept my "fate" as a noble martyr. I concluded that I needed to do whatever I could to resist the evil that was enveloping the nation. Please do not get me wrong, I cannot save this nation, but neither can I sit idly by while the people Jesus died for are led like sheep to the slaughter.

One particular night all of my strength was spent in wrestling with these matters before the Lord. At that point, a Scripture came to me. Before I quote this Scripture to you, let me set up the scene that surrounds this Scripture. Jerusalem was under siege by the Babylonian army for the third time. In the first siege, the young Daniel was taken from the courts of Jerusalem to Babylon, and placed in the courts of its palace to be indoctrinated, trained, and integrated into the ways of Babylon. In the second siege, Ezekiel, the priest and prophet, was taken to Babylon, where he served the people of Judah in this foreign land.

It was the time leading up to the third and final siege that Ezekiel received an indictment from God directed against the people of Judah, mainly the city of Jerusalem. This indictment is found in *Ezekiel 22:23-29*.

As you will see by substituting the leadership of this nation and the visible Church system into these Scriptures, you will discover some very sobering similarities. After all, nothing new happens under the sun where evil or righteousness is concerned.

Let us now honestly consider this indictment. The first thing it mentions is a conspiracy among the prophets. It is easy to recognize that there is a conspiracy as such when it comes to the agendas of those in leadership in both the political and heretical, religious arenas. Clearly, people in these arenas do not care about the people, or the tsunami of destruction their actions are producing.

God compared these leaders to wolves who were preying and devouring people as they robbed them of their treasure (dignity) and that which is precious (rights). They also clearly violated the Law. How many of our political leaders are violating the Constitution, and how many of our religious leaders are actually showing contempt towards the Laws of God by their compromise and attitude towards sin and the world?

It goes on to say they have profaned what is holy. Consider how our nation's systems have thrown out God, prayer and His commandments. Consider the recently exposed fiasco that took place in a public school when the music to a Christian song was used as a means to exalt Obama. Talk about something exhibiting profanity and sacrilege! But, what about the church system? It appears that there is no distinction made between the holy and the unholy.

The indictment continues against the political leaders. It compares them to wolves that are quick to shed the innocent blood of others (abortion) and destroy souls to get gain (Obama's Communistic policies). It goes on to say in the indictment that the so-called "religious prophets" have shored up their personal kingdoms with lies spoken in God's name.

Finally, the indictment declares that the people of the land have oppressed

and exercised robbery. It is true that those in the financial arenas have proved to be carpetbaggers, but consider how our government has become the biggest thief of all, along with the special interest groups that are playing the harlot to get their share. All are bent on oppressing and robbing from those (the baby-boomer generation) who have honestly earned what they have gained by hard work. It goes on to say that they are vexing the poor and needy, and oppressing the stranger wrongfully. Supposedly, the present government is on the side of the poor and needy, but in reality, it simply will bring everyone down to the level of poverty in order to make everyone needy and reliant on the government. And, who is the stranger that the government will wrongfully oppress? The answer lies in such Scriptures as *John 17:12-18*, *Ephesians 3:19* and *1 Peter 2:11*.

How will God act towards such abominations? *Ezekiel 22:31* tells us: *"Therefore have I poured out mine indignation upon them; I have consumed them with the fire of my wrath; their own way have I recompensed upon their heads, saith the Lord GOD."*

We know as believers that we will be spared from the wrath of God to come (*1 Thessalonians 1:10*). However, the people of Judah were greatly suffering because of the leadership. Their leaders were victimizing them while they were painfully aware that Jerusalem would indeed fall to Babylon. They would either die or be taken into bondage.

This brings us to what we should do as believers. The Bible clearly tells us what to do, but it appears as if we are debating our responsibilities based on a few Scriptures that have taken center stage as far as our doctrinal or theological beliefs, rather than coming to terms with what God wants us to do. In fact, He tells us in this indictment against Jerusalem what He wanted the people to do. The Scripture that He reminded me of as I wrestled before Him is *Ezekiel 22:30*. *"And I sought for a man among them, that should make up the hedge, and stand in the gap before me for the land, that I should not destroy it; but*

I found none." To me the last part of this Scripture serves as the greatest indictment against those in Jerusalem.

Now note, God is simply looking for one man to stand in the gap. Abraham stood in the gap for Sodom. God agreed to spare it if ten righteous men were found. We know that only Lot and his family were delivered, but God was willing to stay judgment on behalf of a few, for the sake of one man who believed that the Creator of the Universe could be reasoned with (*Genesis 18:23-33; 19:15-29*). Consider Moses who stood in the gap for Israel. God was ready to destroy all of Israel and raise up Moses' family in the people's place. However, Moses stood boldly in the gap and Israel was spared (*Numbers 14:1-19*). What about Aaron? God was sending a plague through the camp of Israel for their rebellion. He ran to stand in the gap by making atonement for the people, and the plague was stopped as he stood between the dead and the living (*Numbers 16:36-50*). There is also David. He stood in the gap in a couple of ways. First as a young lad he stood in the gap for the Israeli army against a giant's raving against the army and Jehovah God. David simply stood by faith, flinging a stone in the assurance of victory because of God, and the giant fell. He knew who really wrought the victory. It was not him but God (*1 Samuel 17:31-51*). As king, David stood in the gap for Israel when the angel was about to pass judgment on Jerusalem. He obeyed the Lord's instruction, bought a piece of land and offered a sacrifice. The plague was stopped (*2 Samuel 24:14-25*). In almost every case mentioned, one man stood in the gap, sparing the lives of many.

The greatest example of someone standing in the gap is one of the reasons we celebrate Christmas. The Son of God came into the world as a baby, was raised in obscurity, and had a ministry that revolutionized the world. At the end of three years, He allowed Himself to be taken to the cross where He stood in the gap in order to save you and me. The Bible tells us that He continues to stand in the gap as our High Priest in the courts of heaven (*1 Timothy 2:5 Hebrews 7:16-28*).

The Lord Jesus, as well as the saints who have gone before us, serve

as our examples, and as Christians can we do any less? We are considered soldiers, equipped to fight an unseen battle (*2 Timothy 2:3-4; Ephesians 6:10-18*). If we would truly receive and obey our marching orders to stand in the gap, as well as come into a place of agreement, we could make up a powerful hedge as far as this nation is concerned. We also make up a lively priesthood (*1 Peter 2:5, 9*). As priests, we are to stand in the gap. After all, God did not want Judah to be destroyed any more than He wants this nation to be brought down. Granted, the wickedness is great, but God's commitment to souls is greater, but He needs a platform of righteousness established by His people through repentance and humility to stay such judgment. He needs someone to stand in the gap, and that is why His eyes travel to and fro looking for those through whom He can show Himself mighty (*2 Chronicles 16:9*). He is the one who secures the victory on behalf of those who stand in faith, withstand with truth, and when all else has been done remain standing on the Rock of Ages.

This brings me to a very important question. Where are the Christians of this nation standing? Some believe Jesus is coming soon to take us out of here; therefore, we simply have to hunker down to wait. Such an attitude sounds like the one Hezekiah displayed when he first showed all the treasures of Judah to the visitors from Babylon. Isaiah rebuked him for his pride, and pronounced the very judgment that Judah faced in the fulfillment of in *Ezekiel 22*. What was Hezekiah's attitude towards the rebuke? Even though he had been a king that had previously stood in the gap for Judah against the Assyrian Army and witnessed a great victory, did he take the opportunity to once again stand in the gap in humility and repentance (*2 Chronicles 32:20-22, 31; 2 Kings 20:12-19*)? Consider his attitude when confronted by the prophet, Isaiah: *"Then said Hezekiah unto Isaiah, Good is the word of the LORD which thou has spoken. And he said, Is it not good, if peace and truth be in my days?"* Talk about selfishness and indifference!

What does Scripture say about this matter? When I read Scriptures

WHEN HE CAME, WHEN HE COMES

By Jeannette Haley

"For he shall stand at the right hand of the poor, to save him from those that condemn his soul"
Psalm 109:31

How should a king come? The kings (and presidents) of the earth, who make their entrance with much "pomp and circumstance," would say that it should be as grand and glorious as possible. Through the centuries, the appearance of kings has always been an extravagant affair. All except for one King, that is. Slipping silently into this dark world one lonely night, his birth was unannounced to the Roman Empire, or even king Herod. Instead, heavenly angels brought news of His coming to humble shepherds keeping watch over their sheep.

Thus, even though heavenly messengers appeared announcing His birth, their visitation came to the common person—people who were ordinary, unknown, unrecognized, and unnamed in the scheme of things. However, these were the very people whom God had chosen from before the foundations of the world to bring the message of "tidings of great joy."

Even two years after His birth, His whereabouts were unknown to the leaders of Israel when kings from the east inquired about Him in Jerusalem. Again, it was a private occasion. After the wise kings bowed before the King of kings, they quietly vanished into the desert sands, and out of the pages of history.

The earthly environment into which Jesus came was one of great darkness for the people of Israel, both spiritually and nationally. *"The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up"* Matthew 4:16. There had been no prophet or "voice" in Israel for four centuries. But, God's promises and plans never fail, and so *"when the fullness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons"* Galatians 4:4,5.

Israel had not yet regained its

own sovereignty, and remained a puppet state under the dominant power of Rome. However, they did have a king, Herod the Great. This situation was a vexing one for the Israelites, for Herod was a descendant of Esau instead of Jacob. Equally distressing was the fact that the high priests who sat in religious authority were not descendants of Aaron. They were, instead, hired priests to whom the office was sold as political patronage.

The people of that day who had "eyes to see" and "ears to hear" understand that there were three ways of discerning the time in which Jesus was born. These were by prophecies, the angelic announcement from heaven, and the visible sign in heaven (His star.) Together, these produced a powerful witness of the "fullness of the time." Concerning prophecies, the prophet Micah pinpointed the location of the Messiah's birth: *"But, thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall he come forth unto me that is to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth have been from of old, from everlasting"* Micah 5:2. The prophet Daniel prophesied the time of His birth (Daniel 9:25). Isaiah prophesied of His virgin birth in Isaiah 7:14: *"Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign: Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."* Jeremiah prophesied of the massacre of the infants that took place when King Herod sent his soldiers to slaughter the children in his madness to kill the newborn king of the Jews. (See Jeremiah 31:15; Matthew 2:16.) Hosea prophesied of the flight into Egypt. (See Hosea 11:1; Matthew 2:14-23.) These are just a few of the prophecies that Jesus fulfilled. In fact, the entire Old Testament points to Christ.

Concerning the angelic announcement of Christ's birth, the fact that the angels announced the *"good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people"* to shepherds, "common working people," rather than to the religious or political leaders is consistent with God's ways. He is no respecter of persons, and He entrusts His holy messages, wisdom, and revelations to the lowliest of men, women, and yes, even children. 1 Corinthians 1:26-29 gives us insight that few heed in this age of self-

aggrandizement and hero worship. It says, *"For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence."*

Can you just imagine what the outcome would have been if God had assigned the angels to announce Christ's birth to the religious leaders? If they were anything like the "big shots" in churchianity today, they would have exploited this glorious event for all it was worth. Big names, big churches, big following, and big bucks. But, not so with the faithful shepherds. Instead of exalting themselves, they believed God, hurried to find the Christ child, and then they *"made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child"* so that those *"that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds"* Luke 2:17, 18. God knows whom He can entrust with the riches of heaven.

We can only imagine how disastrous it would have been if the angels had appeared to wicked King Herod, or the ruling powers of Rome. We already know King Herod's response, two years later, when he heard that a king had been born. Much like the ungodly leaders of today who will stop at nothing to eradicate Christ from everything public and private, he sought to destroy the heavenly king. A host of angels would mean little, if anything, to such a hardened heart. After all, the problem with the corruption in high places these days is not because of disbelief in God, but because of direct, deliberate defiance and rebellion against Him. Psalm 2 sums up our day well. It reads, *"Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed, saying, Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us."*

Take time to read the rest of this *Psalm* (with *Revelation 17:14; 19:22*). It will encourage your heart.

Concerning the star that guided the wise men from the East to the birthplace of the Son of God, we need to distinguish the signs that God gives us in the heavens from the pagan craft of astrology. Christians have become so leery of anything to do with “signs in the sky” (which is most certainly understandable) that they have closed down altogether towards much that is revealed in the Bible concerning such signs. God did not establish the practice of astrology when He spoke these words: “*Let there be lights in the firmament of the heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years*” *Genesis 1:14*. In this verse, the word signs is in the sense of appearing, a signal, as a flag, beacon, monument, omen, prodigy, or evidence. King Darius declared, “*He delivereth and rescueth, and he worketh signs and wonders in heaven and in earth, who hath delivered Daniel from the power of the lions*” *Daniel 6:27*. Jesus, when revealing events to take place in the end days, said, “*And great earthquakes shall be in divers places, and famines, and pestilences; and fearful sights and great signs shall there be from heaven*” *Luke 21:11*. [Emphasis added.] The wise men from the East understood perfectly God’s heavenly sign that He had sent His Son into the world, or they never would have confidently undertaken such an arduous journey.

Thus we see that God chose a humble, obedient virgin and the upright Joseph, hard-working, humble shepherds, as well as wise strangers, albeit kings, from the east to be forever part of the wondrous Christ child’s entrance into this world. Born in a stable instead of a palace, and brought up in the home of a carpenter, the young Jesus, unlike princes and kings of this world, was content with His commonplace life.

God is a God of order. Therefore, it is no surprise that the events surrounding Jesus’ return in power and great glory will not only fulfill hundreds of Scriptures, but also will likewise involve angels and signs in the heavens as *Matthew 24:30* (and other Scriptures, especially the Book of Revela-

tion, declares.) Jesus gave specific details of His return in these end days for those with understanding. Consider *Matthew 24:37-39*, “*But as the days of Noe were, so shall also the coming of the Son of man be. For as in the days that were before the flood they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noe entered into the ark, And knew not until the flood came, and took them all away; so shall also the coming of the Son of man be.*” If we go back to the Book of Genesis, we gain this insight about these ancient times: “*and God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*” *Genesis 6:5*.

Some may wonder what these verses have to do with the times in which we live. We need to recognize the fact that “eating and drinking” does not refer to the normal, everyday life of people, but to excessive works of the flesh. “*Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness [impurity], lasciviousness [filthy, debauchery], idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance [contention, debate], emulations [envy], wrath, strife, seditions [disunion], heresies [rebellion]. Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revelings [rioting], and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God*” *Galatians 5:19-21*. We also know that God ordained marriage between a man and a woman; therefore, Jesus is not talking about the normal state of marriage that God established. Rather, Jesus was comparing the days prior to His coming with the days that brought down God’s judgment upon the entire earth except for Noah and his family. In those pre-flood days, mankind’s spiritual and moral decline was so great that every imagination and secret thoughts were completely and continually evil. Evil embodies extreme vileness, perversion and rebellion against all that is holy, righteous, upright, pure, godly, honorable, and normal (natural) as created, and established, by God.

We can draw many similarities between the present national and in-

ternational scene and the time when Jesus was born. When He came, in the darkness of night, the whole world lay in great spiritual darkness. (See *Luke 2:79*.) The Roman Empire demanded loyalty to Caesar and their many pagan gods and goddesses. King Herod was merely a territorial king under Roman rule—a puppet king. The current leader with the title of “President” in America is, like Herod, merely a puppet for the globalists. He has yet to prove that he is indeed a true American and not an imposter. He has admitted on more than one occasion that he is a Muslim, and every policy he has put forth is destructive and anti-American. Comparing Herod with our current world scene we see where millions idolize ungodly leaders in both “church and state,” looking to the “arm of flesh” to save or deliver them from their many woes. *Matthew 25:1-13* reveals that it will be “midnight” or a time of great darkness when Christ shall suddenly appear. *Matthew 24:29, 30* also speaks of that time of darkness when He returns. The situation in America alone should provide ample warning to the Laodicean church that our days are numbered in more ways than one. The world is being plunged by Satan into great spiritual darkness through his false prophets, heresies, and lies as he works to deceive the nations into worshipping him through the antichrist’s one-world government while the organized Church sleeps on.

The Bible leaves no doubt as to the many signs that will point to His return as King of kings and Lord of lords. Just as the star shone upon the place where He lived with His earthly parents, so shall His sign appear in heaven just prior to His return. (See *Matthew 24:30*.) As the heavenly host appeared to the shepherds, announcing His birth, so too shall angels be involved in His second coming. (See *Revelation 14:6-20*.) Finally, just as He came to “*preach the gospel to the poor...heal the brokenhearted,*” deliver the captives, recover the sight of the blind, and set at liberty those who were bruised, so shall He “*wipe away all tears from their [the redeemed] eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, nei-*

surrounding Jesus’ coming, I read instructions such as watch, be ready, occupy, and pray that you are worthy to escape (Matthew 24:42-51; Mark 13:32-37; Luke 21:34-36). I do not see where we are to lounge around like sitting ducks until Jesus comes. I personally hope Jesus comes before we have to taste the fullness of this government’s wrath and God’s full judgment upon this nation. However, as history declares, often the government has come in to take people away to interment camps.

There are those who believe they must concede that whatever happens, happens. In their mind this nation is worthy of whatever judgment befalls it. Therefore, they must submit to the government’s tyrannical ways and accept their oppression as graciously as they can. If they are oppressed or led away, they must accept their lot like any committed martyr.

If you have this attitude, let me remind you of the king of Judah who was reigning during the time in which Ezekiel spoke this indictment. King Zedekiah asked for a personal audience with the prophet Jeremiah concerning Babylon. Jeremiah told him what he needed to do to stay the inevitable judgment looming over Judah. Out of fear, he submitted to the foolish leaders around him instead of heeding Jeremiah’s warnings. The last thing he saw before the Babylonian soldiers put out his eyes was His sons being slaughtered (Jeremiah 38:14-39:8).

Clearly, God is humbling this nation. He is shaking it to try to wake up the sleeping giant that understands that the godly principles that made this nation great must be reestablished to bring it back to center. He is sounding the alarm from every direction to gather His army to push back the advancement of the enemy into our homes, schools, churches, and local governments. He is calling for His people to prepare themselves to stand, and fight the good fight of faith and truth in spite of the indictment and circumstances that surround them. Clearly, we need to respond. We need to stand as a hedge and stand in the gap in order to with-

stand the advancement of evil. And, in so doing, with humble urgency and sobriety, may we be assured that it will never be said of His Church in America: “In God’s attempt to save this land by looking for the one person who would make up a hedge and stand in the gap, it ultimately proved useless, because **none could be found.**” †

THE GREAT COMMISSION

By Skip Moen

“and I also say to you that you are Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; . . .” Matthew 16:18

I – We need a new Bible, the Word of God according to evangelical interpreters. Of course, you might argue that we already have such a book. I had two men show up at my door this morning who wanted to share the “good news.” I think they were a little dismayed when I began to explain Scriptures to them in Hebrew terms. One man vociferously defended the fact that we are born sinners by consistently pointing to the verse in Romans – “as by one man sin entered into the world”- arguing that this means we all have a sinful nature. He refused to acknowledge that the verse doesn’t actually say this. It didn’t matter what the verse *said*. It only mattered what he *believed it said*.

Yeshua tells us something about the great commission in this verse in Matthew. He says that He will build His church. I don’t think we actually hear what He says. We think He says, “You will build My church by proselytizing, recruiting, programming, planting or otherwise making members.” Our great commission is church planting. Yeshua’s great commission is quite different – disciple! Yeshua is most concerned with pouring life into other lives so that others will experience first-hand the presence of God in their midst. Yeshua makes us responsible for attaching ourselves to others in life-to-life involvement. He rejects all of the disconnected, passive, hierarchical systems of the world. He pleads for unity.

But we build. We build organizations, programs, processes, campaigns, schools and missions. We construct edifices that absorb funds, time and people without creating community. We make the “Church” the head

ther shall there be any more pain...” (See Luke 4:18; Revelation 21:4.)

As we celebrate and remember His first coming, may we also look up, and rejoice in His soon return for us who love Him and His appearing! “*Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus*” Revelation 22:20. †



of the organization and we become its CEO’s. No wonder the “church” is a mess, emulating the behavior of the world, driven by the same systems and goals. This is a variation on an old, old theme – taking God’s goals into my hand so that I can control the outcome. . . . We are still attempting to make it work today. We call it “partnership” with the Lord . . . but the truth is that we only want the Lord to assist us, not to run the show.

Today the “church” loves control. In spite of the rhetoric, it endorses a passive Body, a professional hierarchy and a financial model that spends but doesn’t produce. It seems to reflect one of those basic patterns of the world. Heaven forbid we actually empowered believers in the Body to do what God has equipped them to do. That would threaten the staff’s control. If we allowed (notice the word) such a thing, it would be *His* church, not ours.

The great commission isn’t about bringing in the *un-churched*. What kind of word is that? What does it imply about our focus? Most of us seem to attend the “church” . . . a church that thinks it is the general partner [in] a joint venture. Maybe it’s time to stop trying to do God’s work for Him. “Disciples, wanted, not decisions.”

“I have always looked upon the great work of the ministry to consist in two things: first, in making unholy men holy; and, secondly, in making those who are already holy to be more and more holy. First to beget holiness, and then to nurse up holiness. First to bring souls to Christ, and then to build up souls in Christ, is without all question the greatest work which should be most in every minister’s eye, and which should always lie nearest and warmest upon every minister’s heart.”

— Thomas Brooks, 1662

RAYOLA'S Q & A CORNER

WHO IS THE BRIDE OF CHRIST?

Q: *There is a debate about who really is the bride of Christ: the Church or the nation of Israel. Could you please help clear up this confusion? There seems to be so much emphasis put on Jesus and His bride that is both questionable and confusing.*

A: I am aware of this debate about the bride of Christ. I can see how people can get confused, especially since there are those who believe in Replacement Theology, where the Church supposedly has replaced natural Israel.

According to my studies concerning this subject, I do not believe the Church has replaced national Israel, but I do believe it is the bride of Christ. These are the reasons I maintain this particular stand.

In Hosea, Israel was referred to as an adulterous wife that was always straying after other lovers (idols). You can see where the Lord is trying to lure this wayward wife back to Himself. According to the parable of the prodigal son in Luke 15, Israel represents the lost son who has squandered its spiritual inheritance, but who will one day return to Jehovah God as a servant. Upon Israel's return, it will be restored to its original position and will be able to reclaim in full the inheritance promised to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and David.

Meanwhile, there are Jewish people who are discovering that Jesus is indeed their Messiah. We are told in Ephesians 2:13-16 that the middle wall of partition that existed between the Jews and Gentiles was torn down by Jesus for the purpose of making each of us one body. Galatians 3:28 tells us that there is no distinction in His Body based on race, gender, or status. All those who belong to the Body of Christ are one in Him; therefore, standing equally important to the whole function of the Church.

In John 14:1-3, Jesus told His disciples that He was going to prepare a place for them. He also commanded the disciples to go out and make other disciples, or followers, of Him. Those

who understand the culture of that time explain that the Jewish tradition required the espoused man to first prepare a place for his bride before the marriage could be consummated. Since Jesus was talking to His disciples, no doubt this was in relationship to the Church or the Body of Christ.

This brings us to Ephesians 5, which unveils the mystery hidden in marriage. It is to serve as an example of Christ's relationship with the Church. Eve was taken from the side of Adam, and the blood came out of the side of Jesus that would be used to redeem a bride for Him. Until the marriage feast of the Lamb takes place in Revelation 19, the Church remains espoused to Christ, waiting for the completion of the place He is now preparing for her. Once it is properly prepared, the Bridegroom will return to be united with His Bride forever.

In the meantime, the Holy Spirit is the One who searches for those who are part of the Bride through the conviction of sin, bringing the contrast of righteousness, and reproof of the judgment to come. We also know the invitations are going forth to be part of this wedding feast. The Father draws potential heirs to His Son, and Jesus invites them to come to Him (John 6:44; 7:37-39; 16:7-13). Clearly, man does not have a part in establishing his position or place in the Bride other than accepting the invitation by faith to simply come to share in the blessings (Revelation 22:16-19). †

TRUTHS FROM TOZER

"Today Christianity in the Western world is what its leaders were in the recent past and is becoming what its present leaders are. The local church soon becomes like its pastor, and this is true even of those groups who do not believe in pastors. The true pastor of such a group is not hard to identify; he is usually the one who can present the strongest argument against any church having a pastor. The strong-minded leader of the local group who succeeds in influencing the flock through Bible teaching or frequent impromptu talks in the public gatherings is the pastor, no matter how earnestly he may deny it.

"The poor condition of the churches today may be traced straight to their leaders. When, as sometimes happens, the members of a local church rise up and turn their pastor out for preaching the truth, they are still following a leader. Behind their act is sure to be found a carnal (and often well-to-do) deacon or elder who usurps the right to determine who the pastor shall be and what he shall say twice each Sunday. In such cases the pastor is unable to lead the flock. He merely *works* for the leader; a pitiful situation indeed.

"A number of factors contribute to bad spiritual leadership. Here are a few:

1. *Fear.* The wish to be liked and admired is strong even among the clergy. . . .

2. *The economic squeeze.* . . . The ability of the congregation to turn off the flow of money to the church when the man in the pulpit gets on their toes is well-known. . . . To give vigorous moral leadership in the church is often to invite economic strangulation, so such leadership is withheld.

3. *Ambition.* When Christ is not all in all to the minister he is tempted to seek a place for himself, and pleasing the crowds is a time-proved way to get on in church circles. Instead of leading his people where they ought to go, he skillfully leads them where he knows they *want* to go.

4. *Intellectual pride.* Unfortunately there is in religious circles a cult of the intelligentsia which, in my opinion, is merely beatnikism turned wrong side out.

5. *Absence of true spiritual experience.* No one can lead another farther than he himself has gone. For many ministers this explains their failure to lead. They simply do not know where to go.

6. *Inadequate preparation.* The church is cluttered with religious amateurs culturally unfit to minister at the altar, and the people suffer as a consequence. They are led astray. . . .

7. The rewards of godly leadership are so great and the responsibilities of the leader so heavy that no one can afford to take the matter lightly."

— "God Tells the Man Who Cares"