

## **THE CHURCH OF MY HEART'S DESIRE**

"to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen" Ephesians 3:21

As I am quickly approaching the sunset of my life and ministry I find myself more easily discouraged with the state of affairs in the organized church and I find it even more difficult to find the "remnant church" where Christ is truly glorified as King, Lord and Head of His body. For years I have dreamed of a church that would experience and share the fullness of the Living Lord Jesus Christ. I have yet to find it in its entirety although I have had glimpses from time to time.

Let me be quick to say that:

I believe the church, as Christ envisioned it, is truly a part of God's plan and holds a place of great importance to Him. For this reason, I cannot abandon my pursuit. It is near to the heart of God.

I believe the church, as Christ envisioned it, can be a powerful force in spreading the kingdom of His dear Son. I see His church as being a kingdom outpost to His glory wherever it is faithfully operative.

I believe the institutional church, as it exists today, in most part, is a far cry from that which He purchased with His blood. (Acts. 20: 28) I'm not sure He would recognize His fingerprints on what we call the organized Christian church. Neither am I sure that we would recognize Him if He physically manifested Himself in our midst.

I believe Christ has one church on earth and everyone who has bowed his heart to Christ, by faith, is a member of that body. His people can be found in many denominations and "non-denominations." I believe the Bible teaches that Christ saves individuals not church bodies although the church constitutes the saved from every tribe and kindred. I believe that no one church or denomination has all of the truth nor does it have a monopoly on the one true church. I'm confident that there is not any one group to whom the Lord can entrust the whole truth. I believe that is why we need each other.

Personally, I can worship and benefit from almost any church gathering where Christ is revered as Savior and Lord and where the Word of God is the sole authority. Anne and I frequently worship with "high" and "low" churches, charismatic and non-charismatic, denominational and non-denominational. We find His presence and His people in many diverse places.

## **THE CHURCH THAT I LONG FOR**

Over the years I have developed my own mental checklist of what I am looking for and what I most desire to be present in His people. Of course I realize that the call is not mine to make and it's not my preferences that really matter. These are the things that matter to me and I believe them to coincide with His plan, purpose and destiny for His church.

I am looking for a church where the Lordship of Jesus is a living reality. Oh I know that we confess Him as Lord in our creeds and congregations. We sing "Jesus is Lord" and "All Hail the Power of Jesus' Name" but isn't there more to it than that? Does He not want to be Lord of every aspect of church life? Is He really consulted as the living Lord on every decision? Should we not wait on Him and His word before taking any step? (2 Corinthians 4:5, Philippians 2:11)

I am looking for a church where the government of God is fully embraced. Many of us have been guilty of choosing the parts we like and disregarding the parts that make us uncomfortable. I am convinced that the church will not experience the fullness of Christ until she embraces the five "offices" Christ set in the church. (Ephesians 4:11,12). I want to be a part of a body where I am exposed to the apostolic and the prophetic as well as the pastors, teachers and evangelists. The input of all of these greatly contribute toward the building of a healthy body.

I am looking for a church where the focus is on relationships rather than rituals, programs and buildings. We are created for relationships. He has said that this is number one priority with Him. (Matthew 22:37,38) Next in His order is our relationships, one with another. Walking out these truths, especially the "one anothering" is all but impossible in large churches that do not incorporate small groups into their church life. We always seem to wind up "majoring in the minors" and "minoring in the majors." We're looking for a church that focuses on building people rather than the oft obsession with building bigger and better buildings. I am looking for a church with a harvest focus. (Matthew 9: 37, John 4:35) The Lord said to one set of leaders I worked with, "Do all you do in the light of the harvest." Can you imagine how much could be eliminated and how many resources could be reinvested in "the kingdom's spread" if we measured everything we do by the harvest standard?

I am looking for a church where body life is fully embraced and practiced. I am aware that most of us subscribe to the teaching of body life, but there is much more "talk than walk" in this regard. I've been a part of more than one congregation where a single pastor preaches four or five times in the same place in any given week. The rest of the congregation, full of gifted people, is relegated to the pew. The Scripture is clear that the saints are equipped for the work of the ministry. (Ephesians 4:12) Why is the average pastor so reluctant in releasing the ministry to the people? I think I know.

I want to be a member of a church that has a kingdom focus and a kingdom agenda. A church that sees itself as a part of the city church and is committed to become, along with other kingdom churches, a transforming force in their city. I know that this will stir things with some, but I believe there is entirely too much emphasis placed on the local congregation in Christianity today. The New Testament's emphasis is on the whole church in a city. Check me out. (I Corinthians 1:2, Galatians 1:2, Ephesians 1:1, etc. etc.)

I want to be a member of a church that operates in the power of God in touching broken, hurting and lost people. Power evangelism and power ministry should be the "order of the day" and seen as normal church life, unfortunately it is the abnormal. Someone has accused the contemporary church as being a "talking cult." There may be some truth to this. We are certainly more talk than demonstration of power although the emphasis of New Testament ministry is on both proclamation and demonstration. (I Corinthians 2:4, I Thessalonians 1:5)

I want to be a member of a church that embraces all of the streams of the river of God. Psalm 46:4 says "There is a river whose streams shall make glad the city of God." Anne and I have been made glad by what we have experience in the Contemplative stream, the Evangelical stream, the Holiness stream, the Social Justice stream and the Charismatic stream. We find in each of them a "deposit" that we need, and the whole body needs, to fully mature in Him. What a tragedy to close the door to what God is doing in other streams? What an even greater tragedy to believe that "our stream" is the river rather than a stream in the river.

I want to be part of a church that is multi-racial and receives ALL of the people of God regardless of color, class, nationality or gender. We believe the Bible teaches that He has placed a unique deposit in each of the people groups. We want to grow from being a part of God's "blended" people. The saints of God are described as having come from "every tribe and tongue and people and nation." (Revelation 5:9) Why not enjoy and benefit from "a little bit of heaven on earth" since that is what the Lord prayed (Matthew 6:10) and what it will be like in heaven.

I want to be a part of a church where one's spirituality is measured by what he or she is, measured by the stature of Christ, rather than how many times he or she has attended church in a given week. I am aware of Hebrews 10:25, and I am in church weekly, but God did not intend that the focus of one's Christian life should be on the weekly gathering of the saved. It seems to me that the focus should be on the extended church rather than the nuclear church. It seems that the real walk and work is to be in the world and not in the church building. Is it possible that we have gotten things "out of order?" Is there really any biblical evidence that says one's usefulness in the kingdom work should be measured by how many times he has shown up and gotten his attendance checked?

Last, but really first, I long for a church where there is Life. Before I pass on I want to be a part of a life-giving church. There is so much death in religion. We have done to Christianity what even His enemies could not do. We have made it, in many places, the most boring hour of the week. The life I'm looking for is not produced by hype, noise or solemnity. It is the life of the living Lord Jesus Christ. He came to bring life. His church is characterized by life, His life and I believe that people will come for miles around to experience that life.

I could go on and on describing the church I desire, but hopefully this is enough to get us to think. If not, how about:

A church where there is great grace shown toward all

A church where worshipping God is central

A church where the gospel of the kingdom is reached

A church that is inclusive rather than exclusive

A church that is an organism rather than an organization

A church where all of the fullness of Christ is embraced

A church where there is loving authority and accountability

## **RESOLVING THE DILEMMA**

I have pretty much concluded that I will not find a single congregation or denomination that has all of these components to the degree that I feel they should be present. Ideally, I would like to be part of a "Fullness Church" that embraces all of the fullness of Christ, but I can't find it. At least I haven't as yet. (If you know where it is, let me know.)

I believe that one of the primary responsibilities of the pastor/shepherd is to see that the flock is fed a balanced meal. If some of the "offices" of Ephesians four are not resident in the church then the pastor should make provisions for his flock to feed from the various offices, streams and components comprising the fullness of the church of Jesus Christ, as He envisioned it.

In the meantime, Anne and I will continue to "cross pollinate" across the width and breadth of the Body of Christ in an attempt to bless and encourage as well as to benefit from the multi-faceted nature of His Body.

Surely we recognize that if we found the perfect church on earth our presence would probably mess it up. So we will keep searching. Keep hoping. Keep praying that His kingdom will come and His will be done on earth as in heaven.

Jim Bevis