

JUST HOW WILL GOD CONTINUE CHANGING THE CHURCH?

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As the Body of Christ, we have been given the Spiritual capacity for Divine discernment. We now live with a better Covenant. Under the old, it was enough to know the times and what to do during them (1Chron.12:32). But now in the New, we are to know Christ Himself, *"who searches the hearts and knows what the mind of the Spirit is"* (Ro.8:27).

Many have been proclaiming and praying for a "shift" for some years, but now that it is clearly emerging most are getting so thrown by its arrival they struggle to make any Divine sense of it whatsoever. And in such instances- we Christians- whenever not able to make sense of anything according to our preconceptions, we usually attribute it wrongly- either to the enemy, the economy, politics, or even the end times.

THE PARADOX OF THE KINGDOM TO BE EMBRACED

Here is a promise you can count on: **God the Father is going to be continuing to allow, promote and even instigate continual changes which will confound the religious mind and absolutely and completely require the Church to rise up into her true Nature. This will neither slow nor stop taking place. if anything, it will accelerate and intensify.**

For years, we have been attempting to shape our surroundings to our liking, and conditions to our favor. The reason we have failed is that it is not God's plan. The Lord has allowed us to attempt many false options- all in the hope that we would exhaust them and ultimately turn to Him. The fallacy of fruitless workings have been taken away from many already, but for some they are being knocked out from underneath them at this time. For yet others this will occur at the time the "felt need" is most severe (causing the most disappointment & even disillusion).

What can we do? As we continue through this process of the Lord, the Word of God that lives in us by the Spirit must become more alive to us as Christ's Body than ever before, especially when it comes to the reality of His sufficiency within, for and through us. As it says in II Peter 1:3-4 . . .

"His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust."

We know that it is not enough to declare or decree such a Scripture; it must be entered into by authentically possessing the promises released by the Spirit in the same way that actual faith carries Divine "*substance.*" In other words, something must take place in the inner man which results in the actual mind of Christ being released through the Spirit (1Cor.2:6-16).

It is always true, however (& sadly), that many will neither rightly perceive nor properly respond to the times we are going to be living in. Times which (by the grace & plan of God) are days determined by God to reveal Christ through His Church with greater power, purity and purpose than ever before. Times which- in all honesty- have already begun to unfold without our predictive awareness, expectation, desire or permission.

*"But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumph in Christ, and manifests through us the sweet aroma of the knowledge of Him in every place. For we are a **fragrance of Christ** to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an **aroma from death** to death, to the other an aroma from life to life. And who is adequate for these things? For we are not like many, peddling the word of God, but as from sincerity, but as from God, we speak in Christ in the sight of God" (2Cor.2:14-17).*

To this end the Word will become true for many, but in a different way than God's desired best. Instead, that "*fragrance of life*" that we have designed to become in Christ will instead actually be the "*smell of death*" to many Christians themselves, because they lack the discernment to determine that God will make a way to have his finest hour through them in the season when those operating without His Grace will have their absolute worst.

For years, I have believed that a true understanding of what is ahead in the Kingdom of God cannot be separated from the darkness becoming increasingly dark, and the light becoming increasingly bright. I have held my peace during seasons when "cutting edge" postmillennialists posing as Apostles have misinterpreted affluence and economic expansion as a sign of the Kingdom, waiting instead for the time to "*the present truth*" when it would make the most "sense" to the Body (II Pe.1:12).

Timing IS everything, just ask God. He says "*there is a time for everything, a season for every activity under Heaven*" (Ecc.3:1). And the time is coming when instead of the majority of North American Christians being affluent (or perhaps event solvent), will be changed into a season of becoming strapped like never before. Unfortunately, this is already taking place in many spheres, and I wish it were not the case. But during such seasons, the tares will become more easily seen among the wheat.

But until sifting of this degree takes place, we will neither export the true message, nor impart the true experience of Christ to those who have looked at the American church as their model for what Christianity is supposed to be

(because of our resources). In actuality, we will then have to learn Christianity from those in the world who are far more deeply imbedded in it than we are, from those who have to live obediently to survive and thrive in the midst of lack, persecution, and continual uncertainty of all types.

All that has now already begun to take place to shake apart all the false foundations, will be continued and intensified by the kindness of God (Ro.2:4). This, in order that we, the church, will receive "*the whole counsel of God.*" Only then will we be able to model the life God intended and extend the life Jesus came to give. This, so that we authentically release it to mankind. But as this takes place, many will soon discover their Christianity has not been much more than an eternal fire insurance, or attempt to perhaps have a better life, or even the means to escape social and psychological isolation and alienation through peer grouping which brings an externally fickle sense of belonging.

"At that time many will fall away and will betray one another and hate one another. Many false prophets will arise and will mislead many. Because lawlessness is increased, most people's love will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, he will be saved. This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all the nations, and then the end will come" (Mt.24:10-14).

THE SHORT TERM SHIFT THAT WILL BE FELT IN THE CHURCH

In years past, small ministries have looked to larger ministries in many ways. Even now, many smaller ministries want to emulate and draw from larger ones. This is understandable. Smaller churches have "needed" larger, more visible and significant ones for identity, resources, assistance, expertise, accountability and even fellowship. But this will begin shifting at a rapid pace that will not be able to be prevented, until many larger ministries will have to turn to the smaller ones for their own survival.

How could this be? In the reasoning of our experience, this looks impossible, but remember: God the Father is going to be continuing to allow, promote and even instigate ongoing changes which will confound the religious mind and require the Church to rise up in her true Nature. For years, we have been attempting to shape our surroundings to our liking, and the conditions to our favor. That option has been taken away from many already, but for some it is being knocked out from under them at this time. For others it will become impossible at the time the "felt need" for it is most severe.

By looking at the common way that ministries are structured, we can more easily understand how this can be. It is common for us to understand that most larger ministries (let's say: churches of 600 attenders or more, maybe less) are most heavily attended (supported) by the tithes and offerings of the people who stand to continually be those most financially affected in the days to come.

For example: Those impacted the most by what will be taking place in our society will (continue to be) those most heavily invested in stocks, holdings, and even real estate ventures. We do not even need to comment on just how many local churches of size and influence are heavily endowed by a single or a small handful of such persons. This does not even yet take account the debt load of many ministries. As these "patron's" (let's call them) ability to contribute is continually adversely impacted, a process will unfold (that many already find themselves in the midst of):

- 1. Ministry Mission has to take a back seat to debt servicing, then*
- 2. Debt servicing becomes the focal point of the congregation's radar screen, meaning: nothing can be seen on the horizon of vision without first and foremost being filtered through debt and its threat, and*
- 3. The ministry goes and stays in "crises mode" and the continual scenario is one of refinancing, begging, delaying, and defaulting.*

Impossible, you say?

The second most affected group of congregants will also be impacted by what will continue to take place in our society. And that is this: 401K investments which will have shrunk, and corporate pensions that may become defaulted on- to the point even the government cannot pay them. This may very well continue for a while. These 2 groups are part and parcel of the majority of significant members of church churches of practically any size. Decreased access to money, coupled with job loss, foreclosure (some have already faced all 3 of these maladies, even now, and others are currently, and still yet others will), and you have the vast constituency of tithes and offerings in any and almost every ministry being brought to a very low level. The result being a church that may not shrink in size, but will have only a fraction of its previous operating capital available to them. Impossible?

Remember: God the Father is going to be continuing to allow, promote and even instigate ongoing changes which will confound the religious mind and require the Church to rise up in her true Nature. For years, we have been attempting to shape our surroundings to our liking, and the conditions to our favor. That crutch is being taken away.

Many corporate leaders of larger ministries will not be able to make the shift, because they will not see the changes for what they truly are and their personal wineskin and organizational structures will not allow them to move into the new with God. The New? It will feature smaller ministries coming together to function more fruitfully than many larger ones, true unity due to authentic function prevailing over organizational emphases, and an increased recognition of true apostolic authority and cooperation because of

more authentic relationships that will keep ministry properties from being lost to abandonment through secular capture or financial failure.

Although there will be exceptions, it will be mostly through the smaller ministries that true "Apostles of the City" and "Territorial Sphere's of Influence" will be emerging. We will discover what has been there all along, that (for the most part) larger ministries are not really focused on community, they are geared toward gathering and exporting. This does mean, however, that survival may become so important to some that they will release their pride long enough to suspend their "need to lead." This, so that the church truly move into the realm with God that was seen in its beginning. Why will smaller ministries be more conducive to walking with God?

Smaller ministries and their leaders (who have been walking in God's wisdom) will not be faced with as much debt. Moreover, some of those leading smaller ministries will have been better prepared for such a season, having already had to make more crucial survival decisions over the years. As a result, they are more acquainted with parking the ego, trimming the fluff, and not allowing pride and need for reputation and status influence the way they allow themselves to be known and seen. Get ready.

After all, it was under the absolute worst possible conditions that the Acts Church of Jerusalem manifested such a great move of the Spirit. But instead of our extremes and false understandings of "wealth transfer" and "blessing" as either a substitute or prerequisite for that, it will (thank God) again become more now as it was then:

"They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing them with all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved" (Acts 2:42-47).

A CALL TO EVERY LEADER: HOME, MINISTRY & MARKETPLACE

My writing today is not intended to judge those whose ministries are large and unduly elevate those whose are not. It's entirely possible for those with little or no sphere of influence to be bound up in their ego, sense of self, etc. Conversely, many who are numerically fruitful may very well be so because they have submitted themselves to an extremely high degree, allowing God to give them increasing responsibility.

What I am suggesting, however, is that whatever has happened to this point will not be enough to secure this new season. Neither will God feel any sort of obligation to either loose people into greater ministry or sustain any existing ministry because of a need for the fabric of either of these to remain untorn. As the Holy Spirit says through Paul:

"Whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ, and may be found in Him . . . the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith, that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death; in order that I may attain to the resurrection from the dead."

"Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. Let us therefore, as many as are perfect, have this attitude; and if in anything you have a different attitude, God will reveal that also to you" (Php.3:7-15).

The Church is being called into the Kingdom like never before. We must enter into That Reign which is larger than our own, which is greater than our reputation and influence (whether these be large or small). The Church Christ is calling us to be is bigger than our congregations, affiliations, networks, denominations and present cooperative ventures.

The following can (& should, I believe) be applied not only to churches, but also families, individuals and marketplace operations as well. The response I believe the Lord would have us make is:

- 1. Begin to see everything that the church has possessed as belonging to the King and available to His Kingdom** (Psa.24:1f; Lk.12:35-44; Tit.1:7).
- 2. By the Spirit, pray in the Kingdom for your city and area, for your group, network or affiliations** (Lk.10:1-2; 1Tim.2:1-4; Eph.6:18).
- 3. Be ready when called upon to release what you have for the sake of God saturating your area with His presence and purpose** (Mt.25:1-13; 2Tim.4:2).
- 4. Hold on loosely to current understandings of how things should be, what way they should go, etc: holding on tightly to the Lord who holds your destiny in His hand** (Isa.55:6-11; 1Cor.1:21-31).

NO QUICK FIX OR EASY WAY OUT SOLUTIONS ARE BEING OFFERED

I realize that this message is more concerned with exposing and surveying issues than presenting solutions or ways to rectify dilemmas. God is calling people everywhere to adjustments that will streamline the carrying of loads, and maximize ability to adapt to continual change. There is a need to soberly embrace present realities and possible future processes so that adjustments can be made, expectations can be released and received afresh from the Lord, and that overt spiritualizing or misdirecting of responsibility will be forsaken.

The Lord can and will use this time to make us better than ever before, but we must respond to Him. If we will daily seek to enter the narrow door, we will be positioned for His "more" (Lk.13:24).