

THE MINISTERING BODY OF CHRIST: A Call To Action

Exorbitant medical and housing costs - Downsizing and job insecurity - Social Security uncertainty - Limited welfare, unemployment, and Medicare benefits - Worldwide political, economic, and social instability - Terrorism - Drugs out of control - Floods - Blizzards - Storms - Volcanoes - Hurricanes - Forest fires - Crop damage - Widespread famines - Bankruptcies - WHAT IN THE WORLD IS GOING ON?

In 1982, while I was living in Raleigh, North Carolina, I got the impression one day of Jesus standing off to my right, hands outstretched before him. The thought came, "The Ministering Body of Christ". Jesus Christ, the Lord of heaven and earth, has been warning us of the above events for several years in order to prepare us to be the Ministering Body of Christ in our time.

The Lord says, "I raise my voice, but who listens to me? I cry out, but who hears my word? This is a time of building up and of washing away. This is a time when I establish my Kingdom, and every other kingdom collapses. I raise my voice to warn my people, and who takes heed? A cloud hangs over you, a shadow envelopes you. Do you not hear my voice? There is darkness around you.

"Anything that is not built by my hands will be washed away. Anything that does not come from me will not survive. I cry out to you. Do you hear my voice? I raise my voice to save my people, and they don't listen. This is a time of building up and of tearing down. I have to strengthen my people. I have to prevent my people from being torn down. This is an important time for my people. This is a day of decision that cannot be passed by. I raise my voice. I call forth my people. Who will listen to me? Who will respond to my call?

"I shall renew my Church. I shall renew my people. I shall make my people one. I am calling you to turn away from the desires of the world in your lives. I want to transform your lives. My beloved, you my people who stand before me now, hear my word. I shall set my house in order. I shall purify my people. I shall purify my Church. I shall set aside the deceiver, the false prophet, and the false teacher. I shall set aside anything and anyone who stands in the way of my Kingdom (1).

"I am going to restore my people and reunite them. I am going to restore to my people the glory that is mine so that the world will not mock or scorn them, but so that the world may know that I am God and King and that I have come to redeem and to save this earth" (2).

Jesus is the head of the Church, which is his body. What Jesus is calling forth is nothing less than for the Church to be the Ministering Body of Christ in our day in a way that it has not been. The world is desperately looking in these increasingly dark days for some place or someone to turn to - some alternative that offers life and security.

Before he returned to the Father, Jesus commissioned and empowered the Body of Christ, the Church, to be this alternative. The Body of Christ was to continue his ministry, to take care of the weak ones, to heal the ones that are sick, to bandage the ones that are hurt, to bring back the ones who wander off, and to look for the ones that are lost.

It was his plan that within his body there should be no one who was needy; nor should anyone have to go to the world's systems to get his or her needs met. The Church was to be the Ministering Body of Christ in and to the world, first to her own and then to the unbeliever. The Church was to be the sign and the prophetic witness to the world of the continuing presence and work of Christ in the world. The Church was gifted with the gifts and ministries of the holy Spirit to accomplish this work. And now once again Jesus is calling his Church to become, and to be, his ministering Body. **THIS IS NOT THE WORK OF OUR GOVERNMENT OR OF ANY GOVERNMENT.**

The Book of Acts shows us a pattern that the early Church established as an alternative to the world of its day. It offers us today the pattern for becoming the ministering Body that Jesus is calling for. Here it is in capsule form:

THE MINISTERING BODY OF CHRIST SHARES ITS RESOURCES

The believers spent their time learning from the apostles, and were like family to each other (3). All the Lord's followers often met together and shared everything they had (4). The group of followers all felt the same way about everything. None of them claimed their possessions as their own but shared everything with others (5), and no one went in need of anything. Those who owned land or houses would sell them and bring the money to the apostles, who would give the money to anyone who needed it (6). People would sell their property and possessions and give the money to whoever needed it (7). You may never have to do this, but would you be willing to do so if the Lord asked you to? Are you listening to his voice?

Jesus said, "*When people ask you for something, give it to them. When they want to borrow money, lend it to them (8). Give to everyone who asks and don't ask people to return what they have taken from you. Treat others just as you want to be treated (9). St. John said, "If we have all we need and see one of our own people in need, we must have pity on that person or else we cannot say we love God. Children, you show love for others by truly helping them and not merely by talking about it" (10). Wouldn't it be marvelous if you responded to someone's need before he or she had to ask for help? Would that people who might be embarrassed to ask for help could receive it without having to ask! Are you that sensitive to the needs of others? To know Christ is to see him in the joys and in the sufferings of another. Are you holding all of your possessions loosely as a good steward, recognizing that it is God who has provided them to you? You may not think you have much yourself, but are you thankful for his provision to you?*

THE MINISTERING BODY OF CHRIST PRAYS AND WORSHIPS TOGETHER

The believers also broke bread and prayed together (11). They ate together and

celebrated the Lord's Supper, (called the Agape). Day after day they met together in the temple. They broke bread together in different homes and shared their food happily and freely, while praising God. Everyone liked them (12). Do your prayer and worship translate into a life that wins the admiration and approval of the people out in your community who see you? Jesus said, "You are like salt for everyone on earth. But if salt no longer tastes like salt, how can it make food salty? All it is good for is to be thrown out and walked on. You are like a light for the whole world. A city built on top of a hill cannot be hidden. Make your light shine so that others will see the good that you do and will praise your Father in heaven (13). Do you bear the family resemblance of your Father and your Brother, Jesus? Are you letting him transform you into his image by the renewing of your mind?

THE MINISTERING BODY OF CHRIST MINISTERS EFFECTIVELY

The apostles worked many miracles and wonders among the people (14). Everyone was amazed by the many miracles and wonders that the apostles worked (15). Sick people were brought out to the road and placed on cots and mats. A lot of people brought those who were sick or troubled by evil spirits, and they were healed (16). Is the reason we are not seeing this in our cities due to the lack of unity among the leaders and the people of God? Are we too comfortable with the disunity within the Body of Christ? Are we ourselves even contributing to disunity by our attitude toward our fellow Christians and toward those of other faiths who don't believe as we do? An un-Christlike attitude hinders the work of Jesus in our world. John 3:16 is inadequately quoted because it leaves off verse 17, which says, "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn its people. He sent Jesus to save them." And he sends us for the same purpose, so that everyone who has faith in him will have eternal life and never really die. The only love of Jesus that most people will experience for the first time is his love in us that you and I give to them. But we cannot give what we do not have.

GOD INCREASES HIS FAMILY

Each day the Lord added to their group others who were being saved (17). Many men and women started having faith in the Lord (18). Note: it says "in the Lord", not "in my church" nor "in my church doctrine". We need to be very careful that we are bringing new believers into a personal relationship with the personal God with whom they will spend eternity, not merely into a system of doctrines and traditions. Doctrines and traditions and rituals are not wrong in themselves. God himself established them for his people after he freed them from the bondage of Egypt to give them a way to establish a personal relationship with him. Those that do not encourage and develop a personal relationship between the believer and his or her God need to be questioned and, perhaps, discarded lest we be like the Pharisees and the Sadducees.

People, especially young people, are increasingly disillusioned and skeptical. Fewer than 40% of people recently surveyed attend church, and many of them do not attend on a regular basis at that. Is the Ministering Body of Christ not an alternative that they might be looking for? It is, if we will but accept and follow the call of Jesus. It is a radical alternative because it is so contrary to the world's, and even the Church's, present

systems. But is there any better alternative available in our day.

Jesus knows how radical, how counter cultural, it is and how difficult it will be to respond. He says to us, "I tell you, my people, that there are some who need to understand this: ways you have responded to me in the past, that have seen you through and brought you this far, will no longer see you through. What I call you to is something new, something totally new, and where there is resistance in your hearts and in your groups, lay down that resistance that I might bring you further along.

"I see each of you where you are: I know where it is hard for you to change and cannot promise you that change will be easy or that it will come immediately. I cannot promise you that it won't be painful for indeed it will cost you, but I promise you this: I shall be with you always, and the pain is nothing compared with what I shall give you in return. What you need to lay down, and what you will give up, and what you think it will cost you is nothing compared with the strength you will have when I am finished with you.

"I have looked into your hearts and I have seen my image there. Therefore I declare you a spiritual sacrifice fitting unto me and accept you and welcome you more deeply than ever into my heart. I see your will. I see your willingness to serve me and rejoice as I show you to my Father. As you yourself, in your own heart, say 'yes' to every word that I have spoken to you here and to every sign I have shown to you of my plan and of my will -- as you say 'yes', so now do I anoint you with the precious oil of my Spirit and send you forth armed, equipped, strong to serve me in the days to come. Therefore cast off every gloom and fear and rejoice for I, the Lord, am leading you against the foe. I am with you. You belong to me. Therefore, rejoice, even in the darkness" (19).

(1) Notre Dame - 1976

(2) Kansas City - 1979

(3) Acts 2:42a

(4) Acts 2:44

(5) Acts 4:32

(6) Acts 4:34 & 35

(7) Acts 2:45

(8) Matthew 5:52

(9) Luke 6:30

(10) 1 John 3:17-18

(11) Acts 2:42a

(12) Acts 2:46-47a

(13) Matthew 5:13-16

(14) Acts 5:12a

(15) Acts 3:43

(16) Acts 5:15a, 16

(17) Acts 2:47b

(18) Acts 5:14

(19) Notre Dame - 1976