

Evaluating 3 Post-Pandemic Predictions One Year Later

“So, Noah knew that the waters had receded from the earth” (Gen. 7:11).

As masks are coming off and COVID restrictions change, let's examine the contents of an article I wrote from a year ago. In the aftermath of the catastrophic events, was there prophetic accuracy in this article recently shared afresh with 300,000 pastors and church members last week? You be the judge.

After the flood, everything changed. After World War II, everything changed. After 9/11, everything changed. It is not an overstatement to say that after the COVID crisis, everything will change.

Our economy. Professional Sports. Health Care. Hollywood. Jobs. School. Travel. Childcare. Shopping. Youth Athletics. Campaigning. Restaurants. Military. Entertainment. Elections. College. Cruises. Funerals. All have been impacted dramatically and permanently.

There's is no going back to Kansas—constant change is here to stay.

We dare not leave out church. Scores sense this season of divine disruption is a “dress rehearsal.” God is purifying, developing endurance and laying out lessons so we're better prepared for the “last days' perilous times” (2 Tim. 3:1). In the meantime, we're reflecting, recalibrating and resetting to not miss this unexpected, unbelievable teachable moment.

Defining Moment

My previous defining moment came during the 1970s Jesus Movement. Teaching at a gathering of 2,000 young people near

the White House, I had a “woke” moment with our team. Would we maintain “business as usual” with the successful weekly teaching service (diluting the New Testament model for church) or make changes to align with Scripture?

We finally embraced the latter as pioneers, not settlers. This eventually birthed a strong church then a movement of over 60 churches in the US and abroad.

In our current watershed moment when so much has been brought to a standstill, many leaders believe the church needs to make radical adjustments. I submit the following three areas.

1. Deconstruction: We need to deconstruct our prevalent gospel presentation to highlight repentance, lordship and the kingdom of God as they are so evident in the Gospels, Acts and epistles. There simply is no biblical basis for a “Jesus as Savior only” message. The content of our message determines the quality of our converts! And if we want New Testament results we have to recover the New Testament pattern.

“These men who have turned the world upside down have come here also... They are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar saying that there is another king, Jesus” (Acts 17:6-7).

2. Distribution: God’s blueprint in Ephesians 4:11-16 reveals: the church is not a building but a body; Christianity is not an auditorium-centered, spectator sport with leaders given only for educating (or entertaining) but “for the equipping of the saints, for the work of service;” the five gift ministries are essential not optional so “every part effectively does its work and grows, building itself up in love.”

Ministry must be distributed throughout the body of believers. Christians, all having God-ordained ministries, must discover and develop their gifts (21 cited in Scripture), then be deployed and distributed outside buildings into life.

3. Decentralization: The church must be decentralized to express the New Testament model that Christianity is not merely a meeting to attend but a life to be shared. The church is not built primarily on services but relationships (Acts 2:42-47). And God is first and foremost concerned with the quality of our work not the quantity, for it will all be tested by fire (1 Cor. 3:10-15).

God's Ways and Means

The major intervention the church has experienced in this pandemic has been this decentralization. Is this God's Ways and Means Committee demonstrating He has ways to show He means business about accomplishing His purposes? This reminds us of the experience of early Christians amidst crisis in Acts 8. Remember, it resulted in expansive evangelism!

This is the two-winged model from Acts. "And continuing daily with one mind in the temple and breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved" (Acts 2:46).

In the early '80s, apostolic evangelist Bob Weiner launched an outreach in Manila later entrusted to Steve Murrell. Today, Murrell oversees the 91,000-member Victory Metro Manila Church, which basically follows this same decentralized approach. They meet weekly in 20-plus locations (no video sermons!) alongside over 10,000 weekly home gatherings.

They followed this same relational and discipling pattern in planting additional churches in over 100 Philippine cities with over 50,000 weekly in attendance and 5,000 small groups.

Restoring Authentic Christianity

Let's say sayonara to compromise and churches offering nothing more than quick In-N-Out Burger, nonoffensive, entertaining

services based more on performance than the presence of God. The same for sermonettes maintaining Christianettes who are focused on creature comforts rather than Christ-centered character.

Also, no more hot-tub religion avoiding sacrifice, suffering and sanctification! Let's end accommodating church growth "experts" telling us about 22-minute attention spans advising we not emphasize holy living or references to cultural issues.

In the post-pandemic era, may we move on boldly with radical followers of Jesus in authentic local churches.

Here are 12 essentials of an authentic New Testament church:

1. Is Jesus Christ exalted as the Son of God, risen from the dead and humankind's only path for forgiveness and redemption (Acts 2:22-24)?
2. Is the Bible honored and taught with authority as God's inerrant and authoritative will for humanity (2 Tim. 3:16)?
3. Is there authenticity, sincerity and vitality in the praise and worship (), contrasted with lifeless liturgy or man-centered performance?
4. Is there genuine love practically expressed by the people (John 13:34 -35)?
5. Do the people build interpersonal relationships among themselves that go beyond merely attending services (Acts 2:42-47, 5:42)?
6. Do the leaders emphasize pastoral care that embraces a person's legitimate needs and do they exercise biblical authority when needed (1Pet. 5:2;)?
7. Is there an emphasis on commitment rather than mere convenience in the life of the church (Acts 2:42-47)?

8. Is there leadership present that exemplifies Christian virtue (integrity, loyalty, humility) and not merely charismatic speaking ability divorced from character (1 Tim. 3:1-13)?

9. Is there acknowledgment of and input from the five gift ministries set in the church for our maturity (apostles, prophets, pastors, evangelists and teachers) (Eph.4:11-15) plus encouragement to function in our individual gift ministries?

10. Is there an evangelistic thrust to intentionally reach others with the gospel and connect with the wider body of Christ in our locality to fulfill the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20)?

11. Is there a sense of reality and relevancy as opposed to religious ritual (2 Tim. 3:5)?

12. Are people's lives being genuinely transformed through their involvement and opportunities for service (-8)?

Here's the Deal: As the waters recede and we transition into the post-pandemic era, may we cast down any idols, including those of religion, traditions and fear of man.

"As Christ also loved the church and gave Himself for it" (Eph. 5:25b), may we do likewise as the bride who "made herself ready" (c). {eoa}

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