

Pastor: I Sense God Is Moving the Church Into a Season of Transitions

Editor's Note: This is part 1 of a three-part series.

Author's Note: For quite some time, I've sensed God is about to do something in a very corporate, significant way. I sense a stirring in the winds, a stirring in the mulberries—a time of change and renewing; a new era, a new beginning and a season of transitions. I was looking back at an article I wrote in November 1995, and it's a message that is even more relevant today than when I first wrote it all those years go. I have updated and re-worked it a bit, but originally it was titled, "If we go ... He will come."

You may get a chuckle from that title if you remember the movie *Field of Dreams* from many years ago, famous for the line, "If you build it, he will come." But in Luke 10:1-2, the Lord promises us that He is sending laborers into every town which He is about to enter. I believe it's time for us to be prepared and ready for the harvest. People are waiting for us—and if we go, He will come.

"After this the Lord appointed seventy others, and sent them two by two ahead of Him into every city and place where He Himself was about to come. He said to them, 'The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Pray therefore the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest. Go your ways. Listen, I am sending you out as lambs among wolves.'"

I believe all true Christians would say they desire to be used by God. I know I've said, since the beginning when I got radically touched by God, "I'll do whatever You want and go wherever You want me to go. I want to be used by You, Lord."

I believe we would also agree that if God speaks something to our hearts that He wants us to do, our desire is to obey Him. Through our obedience, He fulfills the desires of our hearts while doing a work in us and through us. When we are faithful to go where the Lord leads us, He meets us, and souls are added to the kingdom.

Ears to Hear

The question posed to us is this: When we hear God speak something to our hearts, will we obey and be faithful to go where He leads? It's both a question and a promise—because if we do go, He will come.

As a ministry, we are faced with this same question. Will we be faithful to hear what the Lord is speaking and go forward to reach out to this generation? During the past few years, the Lord has been unfolding His word to us through dreams, impressions and words that have come forth through our elders and staff and been confirmed through other friends of the ministry. I will share some of those things with you as this message unfolds, and I pray you will hear the Lord's heartbeat for this generation and His calling on our lives.

Let me preface this with an exhortation. Within some circles, it is common during services for someone to deliver a word from the Lord. But sometimes, it seems, it is not really heard or received in the hearts of the congregation, especially when it happens often.

During some of the services and gatherings we have had throughout the years, we ask anyone with a word or impression to submit it to those in leadership before it is spoken to the congregation. We want to make sure it's in the context of the Holy Spirit speaking to everyone rather than someone just feeling a personal passion about something or an impression only for themselves. We believe this is proper biblical order and prevents confusion during the meetings. However, when a

word is delivered, it is important that we take it seriously as God is trying to convey His heart to us.

This leads me to present a question, "Do we have ears to hear what the Spirit of the Lord would say to us?" Have we begun to take the Lord and His word for granted because we hear it so often? Have we become weary and discouraged in the journey and therefore are not as sensitive to God's voice as we once were? We may initially say, "Of course not!" But when we look at the children of Israel, we can see a similarity between them and the church today.

In Numbers 21:4 we read, "They journeyed from Mount Hor by the way of the Red Sea, to go around the land of Edom, and the soul of the people was very discouraged because of the way." The first three verses of that chapter explain how God fulfilled His promises, and throughout the book of Exodus, we read of the wonderful works God did for His people. Yet the people became discouraged.

"The people spoke against God and against Moses, 'Why have you brought us up from Egypt to die in the wilderness? For there is no bread or water, and our soul loathes this worthless manna'" (Num. 21:5).

Another translation—NKJV—says, "loathes this worthless bread." This "bread" they are talking about is the manna sent from God! They detested the manna God Himself provided during their desert time! Though they received daily provision from the Lord, in a time of weariness they lost focus of God's goodness. Often in times of weariness and discouragement, we too detest the very life-giving things of God. During these times, will we hear what the Lord is saying and then will we obey? We must neither detest nor loathe what God is speaking to us as the church. In order for us to hear what God is saying, our hearts must be open to receive from Him. Simple obedience, to go when God says go, is the highest form of worship.

During one of our Friday Night Alive services that we held in the 1990s and 2000s, one of the leaders brought forth a prophetic word, and a few minutes later, an elder of the ministry came forward and asked us a question. He asked if we really heard what our brother had shared. Did we hear the word of the Lord spoken to us, and did we receive it? We were exhorted not to take God's word lightly nor for granted.

Poverty and Persecution; Peace and Prosperity

It seems that in the midst of God's great provision in our lives we can begin to take Him for granted, including his direction, just like the children of Israel began to loathe and detest God's manna, His provision for them. The people became discouraged and wondered how long they would be in the wilderness. They murmured and complained and failed to give thanks for God's goodness.

Likewise, when we become discouraged, we can lose our vision of hope and destination. Our focus shifts from the Lord and onto our circumstances. These pressures and circumstances should be a catalyst to draw us closer to the Lord, not further away. It is during these intense times that we recognize our total dependence upon Him. When we go through trials, we are very much aware of our desperate need for the Lord's intervention. Yet as God brings the breakthroughs, we can become ungrateful, seeing our lack rather than God's abundant provision and grace in the midst of the circumstances.

Throughout the past 2,000 years, there have been two things the church has consistently overcome: poverty and persecution. God always prospers the church in the midst of poverty so we can continue to bring the gospel of Good News. And in times of persecution, the church increases and grows, and the gospel continues to go forth. Throughout church history, revival occurs in the midst of persecution. Even today, in nations where the church is persecuted—places like Nigeria, Uganda,

Iran, Indonesia, the Middle East and China—the church is flourishing, in spite of adverse circumstances. Church, we will not be stopped if we keep our eyes fixed on the Lord and our hearts and vision focused on our destination.

Conversely, there are two things the church has not handled well: The church fails to grow during long periods of peace and prosperity. God does want His people to be at peace and to prosper but not for self-adulation, self-benefit, self-absorption or self-righteousness. Instead, He gives us peace and prosperity so we can be good stewards, making sure the gospel is going forth and nations are being disciplined.

True Satisfaction

It seems that during seasons of ease and comfort, we get distracted and forget that our total fulfillment is found only in the Lord. We become complacent and dull of hearing, focusing our eyes on the material world. We become self-confident, self-reliant and self-absorbed rather than relying totally on Him. When this happens, we must quickly turn back to the Lord for it is only in that place of intimacy with Him that we find true satisfaction.

Jesus set the example for us, as in Luke 10, and challenges us that we can walk in the fullness of the Godhead bodily when we set our hearts and our focus on God and His purposes. He also set an example in John 4:34: “Jesus said to them, ‘My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work.’” Likewise, if we want true satisfaction for the longing of our souls, we must be willing to do the will of God. He goes on to say in John 4:35b: “I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest.”

Jesus told the disciples to lift up their eyes—which means they must have been looking at something other than the harvest. He is also saying to us, “Look up!” We need to look up from our own two feet, from our circumstances and our

situations, and see the fields are ripe and white for harvest!

When we look up, we see our true satisfaction comes from obeying God, setting our focus back on the harvest and on the Lord of the harvest—not from the things of this world. Souls are crying out for a taste of the Lord's goodness, and we have an obligation to feed them. When we take our eyes off ourselves, begin to look at the needs of others and do the will of the Father, we find great satisfaction and fulfillment. And souls are added to the kingdom.

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