

What Does God Want to Do in 2018?

Editor's note: This is part 1 in a two-part series.

What does God want to do in 2018? What is fresh in the Spirit? How should we set our expectations, study and prayer life on Him in the new year?

At the turn of each calendar year many people's hearts are renewed with fresh hope and vision for their lives and future. A new year presents an opportunity to start over, to refocus and to prioritize our goals and objectives for the fulfillment of our vision and dreams. Many churches take advantage of this time of year to do the same as they give themselves to prayer and fasting. Some will pray into the new year and receive direction or a word from God concerning the church and the nation. These things are all commendable, and worthy of our time and attention, but could there be a word from the Lord we are not hearing?

In the days of Samuel the prophet, the true word of the Lord was rare (1 Sam. 3:1), and after a terrible defeat at the hands of the Philistines, the elders of Israel decided to return the ark of the covenant from Shiloh in order to save them from their enemies. When the ark came into the camp, there was great shouting and rejoicing (1 Sam. 4:1-5). Amidst all of the shouting and celebration, however, the Philistines attacked Israel again, and there was a great slaughter of death and destruction among them. Israel learned that having the ark of God in the camp, in and of itself, did not guarantee victory. We can have God's Spirit living in us and yet not be seeing the manifestation of His presence and glory that gives us resounding victory over our enemies.

At some point we need to be honest with ourselves and ask the

tough questions.

Why are we being defeated? Why doesn't the world respect us? Why aren't we impacting our culture and our spheres of influence? Where is the power of God? Why aren't we seeing the glory of God that we see in the early church?

We are missing something in this generation. A carnality, a casualness and a complacency have left us void of the reality of God's mighty power and holy presence. A party spirit, a prayer-less posture, pomp and pride has hindered the Spirit's manifestations.

The church has created a smokescreen that has hidden her true spiritual condition. Our big, ornate buildings, our popular conventions and conferences, the Hollywood glare that so many of today's ministers bask in and the noise of our promotions and advertisements make it painfully clear that the fame of men is greater than the fame of the Master.

Can we honestly admit that in spite of our mega churches, our state-of-the-art buildings, our celebrity preachers, an abundance of gospel resources, our in-vogue programs, our professional productions, we are still falling short of the New Testament standard? Can we honestly admit that a large segment of the church is dead and in need of a resurrection? Can we admit that the real glory of the Lord has departed?

Leaders must recognize the difference between *kabod* (means "heavy glory" in Hebrew), and *Ichabod* ("the glory has departed"). Either God is with us or He's not.

Eli's sons were killed in the battle with the Philistines, and Eli and his daughter-in-law also died tragically when they heard the news of their death and of the capturing of the Ark of God (1 Sam. 4:19-22). In her dying moments, Eli's daughter-in-law gave birth to a child and named him Ichabod, which means the glory of the Lord has departed from Israel.

This is where we are in a majority of the Western church. The genuine glory of the Lord has departed, and godly leaders must arise, as Samuel arose in his day to judge Israel. It was when he called them to repentance, confession and contrition that the tide began to turn in Israel (1 Sam. 7), and the people began to desire and lament after the Lord again (v. 2). It took a series of crisis to cause Israel to turn to the Lord. We are at that point right now.

It is time for the sleeping saints to awaken. The world is not going to get any better but will only get darker. God is endeavoring to get the church to judge herself, so that His glory can shine in us, among us, and through us to a lost and dying world.

“For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?” (1 Pet. 4:17).

The context of this verse is the glory of God. God wants to reveal His glory to us and through us, for His purpose has always been for the church to reflect His glory. He will do what He can to prepare us for His glory and to spare us from being judged. We must understand that His judgment is always in proportion to the manifestation of His glory. Always. The judgment that fell on Ananias and Sapphira was equal to the pure glory of God that was manifesting in the early church (Acts 5). The judgment was severe because the glory was heavy. The Lord is zealous to restore His glory again among His people.

Goodness and severity is the two-edged sword of the Lord. If we don't judge ourselves, we will be judged by the Lord.

“For if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened by the Lord, that we may not be condemned with the world” (1 Cor. 11:31-32).

The Lord will awaken us and get our attention through His

goodness or through His severity. The sleeper can be awakened with a kiss of kindness or a severe shaking. We choose.

“Therefore consider the goodness and severity of God—severity toward those who fell, but goodness toward you, if you continue in His goodness. Otherwise, you also will be cut off” (Rom. 11:22).