

What if an Entire Congregation Came to the Altar to Humbly Repent?

I stood in synagogue on Yom Kippur this week and recited prayers of repentance along with our entire congregation. I joined in praying the Al chet (For the sin of...) and I beat my chest while asking for forgiveness as each sin was spoken aloud.

Afterwards, I listened to a message about repentance which included the narrative we read about in Luke 18:10-14:

“Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘O God, I thank You that I am not like other people—thieving, unjust, adulterers or even like this tax collector. I fast twice a week and tithe on all that I get.’ But the tax collector, standing some distance away, wouldn’t even lift his eyes toward heaven, but beat his chest, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, the sinner!’ I tell you, this man, rather than the other, went down to his home declared righteous. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

As I reread these words, I first wondered if this event that we read about here happened on Yom Kippur. Even if what we read about in Luke didn’t happen on Yom Kippur, the heart of the message surely relates to the day. On Yom Kippur we gather together as a community and pray together for the atonement of Israel.

As the congregation prays the Al chet mentioned above audibly in unison, we ask for forgiveness for a long list of sins. We name sins such as adultery, murder, sexual immorality, theft and the list goes on. Each person asks for forgiveness for

every sin listed even if they individually didn't personally commit that particular sin.

The reason for this is that we understand that while we are each individuals who need personal forgiveness for those sins we commit, we are also part of the greater body known as Israel, and as such we understand that when one part of the body is sick, the whole body is sick.

Get your FREE CHARISMA NEWSLETTERS today! Stay up-to-date with current issues, Holy Spirit news, Christian teachings, Charisma videos & more!

I know that when most people read the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector above, they generally look at the comparison between the way they prayed in this light. The Pharisee stood praying in prideful thankfulness that he was not a sinner like other people, while the tax collector prayed from a place of humility, acknowledging that he was a sinner who needed forgiveness.

However, I think that the lesson goes much deeper than the two individuals standing in the Temple praying on that day. Imagine, if you will, that the Pharisee had come to the Temple that day and stood humbly before G-D and prayed like the tax collector. It may be true that the Pharisee was not a thief, was not unjust, was not an adulterer or even a tax collector.

However, he knew that within Israel, his people, there were those who were. Just think how different this story would have been if the Pharisee had stood together with the tax collector and they both prayed as we do on Yom Kippur, asking for G-D to be merciful and forgiving to Israel, who have sinned against Him.

I listened to the message that was being shared on Yom Kippur and wondered what would have happened that day if these two men had prayed together instead of apart. It made me think about our synagogues and churches today.

What if instead of being divided between the saved and unsaved, the righteous and the unrighteous, we were unified as part of an imperfect community of faith praying for each other with the intensity and fervency of the tax collector?

What if an altar call wasn't just a few people praying for themselves, but rather an entire congregation coming forward with the few and humbly repenting with them? The truth is, they are us.

Join Charisma Magazine Online to follow everything the Holy Spirit is doing around the world!

Eric Tokajer is the author of *Overcoming Fearlessness, What If Everything You Were Taught About the Ten Commandments Was Wrong?, With Me in Paradise, Transient Singularity, OY! How Did I Get Here?: Thirty-One Things I Wish Someone Had Told Me Before Entering Ministry, #ManWisdom: With Eric Tokajer, Jesus Is to Christianity as Pasta Is to Italians and Galatians in Context. Visit his website at .*