

Misguided Compassion: The Downfall of Half-Filled Lamp Churches

Beware of the natural familiarity of Ichabod churches (where the glory has departed):

“She named the child Ichabod, saying, ‘The glory is departed from Israel,’ because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father-in-law and her husband. She said, ‘The glory is departed from Israel, for the ark of God is taken’” (1 Sam. 4:21-22).

Pastors, are you hearing what I’m hearing?

Most every day, in one venue or another, I’m hearing from disillusioned, frustrated people who cannot find a church that has been overtaken by the Holy Spirit. No extreme revival atmospheres can be found for many. The Upper Room experience that innumerable desperate people are searching for are nowhere to be seen, in some instances, within 500 miles of where they live. They complain of short, ordered, controlled services that, according to them, aren’t worth their time. There’s a measure of spirituality, but they don’t even come close to the explosive, supernatural experiences they are craving.

Pastors, are you hearing what millions are saying? The ark has been captured!

Open up your doors to the manifest presence of the Holy Spirit! The gifts must function. The order of service must be laid down. The crazy, unscripted, unrehearsed, unforeseen collisions that happen when an invisible, all-powerful Creator invades mortal humans must be expected. Every. Single. Sunday.

“Do not quench the Spirit” (1 Thess. 5:19).

Half-filled lamp churches are threatening kingdom advance—and people’s eternities:

“But the foolish said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil, for our lamps have gone out.’ The wise answered, ‘No, lest there not be enough for us and you. Go rather to those who sell it, and buy some for yourselves’” (Matt. 25:8-9).

Misguided compassion is resulting in the wise becoming foolish while eternities are put at great risk.

Churches are filled with people the Bible would call foolish—those who are not spiritually vibrant, personally disciplined and deeply intimate with Jesus. Their lamps are empty.

This begs a question: How is it so many people in this category are so at home in churches all over the world?

If a church is ablaze with the spirit of prayer and alive as the Holy Spirit blows and burns through everyone there, those who are asleep and without any oil will definitely not feel comfortable. There is no way they can integrate in such a place without feeling the pressure to fill their lamps.

So, what do many pastors do to ensure these people feel a part of the family? They share their oil. “Come on in, you take half of my oil, I’ll keep half. We’ll both meet the bridegroom together.” It sounds loving. It feels compassionate. It’s foolishness.

The water level of Holy Spirit activity is brought way down so those who are marginally surrendered can dip their toes in the shallows—and integrate nicely with others who are equally resistant to the deeper things of the Spirit. They are spiritually interested, but not spiritually invested. They have not paid the price and have not bought their own oil.

Human wisdom that argues that it's better for people to be in a moderate spiritual environment is better than the being shut out is actually called foolishness by God. By sharing oil, by toning down the activity of the Holy Spirit, all become foolish, and all are put at risk of hell.

The truth is that oil can't be shared. A price must be paid. Oh, and to take the heat off of pastors for just a moment, for all of you disgruntled experience seekers out there, quit getting so frustrated when your church doesn't move in the gifts the way you'd like. Are you trying to share their oil? Don't you have enough yourself? Is your lamp not full? While I absolutely understand the cry for a supernatural church, I refuse to empower those who refuse to get their own oil. If your lamp is full, you should be overwhelmed by the Holy Spirit and deeply intimate with Jesus. Just exactly how do you want a human pastor to add to that? Go get your own oil. Pay the price. Quit complaining about the church.

A Midnight Cry

Take just a minute and read the entire passage:

Then the kingdom of heaven shall be like ten virgins, who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were wise and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps, but took no oil with them. But the wise took jars of oil with their lamps. While the bridegroom delayed, they all rested and slept.

"But at midnight there was a cry, 'Look, the bridegroom is coming! Come out to meet him!'"

"Then all those virgins rose and trimmed their lamps. ⁸ But the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps have gone out.'"

"The wise answered, 'No, lest there not be enough for us and

you. Go rather to those who sell it, and buy some for yourselves.'

"But while they went to buy some, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

"Afterward, the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open the door for us.'

"But he answered, 'Truly I say to you, I do not know you.'

"Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour in which the Son of Man is coming" (Matt. 25:1-13).

In order to make sure our lamps are full (and that we have extra in our flasks), we must pay the price for the oil and then stay at the ready. In the midst of delay, we all can experience spiritual fatigue, but the wise will rise up when they hear the midnight cry!

The difference between those who have their lamps full and those who don't is stark. Those who are not ready when God suddenly moves will have the door shut to them. God will declare that he does not know them (even if pastors assure them they are part of the family).

I think about the upper room in the Book of Acts. Most didn't respond to the call to wait, to pay the price. The door was shut to them. After a delay of ten long days, there was a midnight cry! The Holy Spirit has come! Those who had their lamps full, those who responded to the command of Jesus to wait and pray, were ready when the wind and the fire came!

A Midnight-Cry Church

Pastors, don't share your oil. Don't let misguided compassion cause you to quench the Spirit. Don't build your local church on those who refuse to pay the price.

Build a midnight-cry church! Build the fire, contend in fervent prayer, expect unusual, otherworldly manifestations of the Holy Spirit and break off any temptation to moderate the service so the sleepy foolish people who are pounding at your door can join in. Love them by modeling a life of fervency, preparation and intimacy with Jesus. Warn them. Contend in prayer for them. Some will join you in your upper room experience, but most will not.

It's time we desire the ark more than people. When we do, the glory will return to the church and that glorious midnight cry will be heard, "Here is the bridegroom! Come out to meet him."