

8 *Will You Go with Jesus?*

The Gospel is a love story, a story that has not changed since the beginning of time. The Heavenly Father is drawing a Bride for His Son out of every nation, tongue, and tribe—from the Jew first and also the Gentile. Everything of this present, fallen world will pass away, but the Lord and His Bride, the Church, will remain forever. There is an account in Genesis 24 that beautifully illustrates this reality. In this story, Abraham is a type of God the Father, commanding his faithful servant Eliezer not to “take a wife for my son from the daughters of the Canaanites,” but to “go to my country and to my family, and take a wife for my son Isaac.”

This servant, Eliezer, is a gracious type of the Holy Spirit—doing the Father’s will, seeking a bride for the Son and not for Himself. Like Eliezer, when the Spirit of God calls to the Bride of the Lamb, He does not force her to come but graciously invites her. As Rebekah was asked, “Will you go with this man?”, so the Spirit of God is calling to us today, “Will you go with Jesus? Will you take this Man to be your husband and Lord forever?” Rebekah willingly responded by faith, “I will go,” leaving all that was familiar behind to become part of a family she had never met, and live in a country she had never seen. Will we now

also respond to the call of God's Spirit, "I will go," leaving behind our old lives and ways in order to become part of that which will never pass away? Unlike Rebekah, however, we were all born Canaanites which is why we must first be born again, and then be transformed into the image of God's only Son—becoming like Him so that we will be ready to be one with Him forever.

Jesus will have His church, "a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle or any such thing... holy and without blemish." (Ephesians 5:27) As God declares in Malachi 3:6, "For I am the LORD, I do not change...." If we would be disciples of Jesus Christ and members of His church, it is we who must change because God never will. Numbers 23:19 also states,

God is not a man, that He should lie,
nor a son of man, that He should repent.
Has He said, and will He not do?
Or has He spoken,
and will He not make it good?

We live in a generation in which fashions change constantly, with a rapidity that our ancestors could not have imagined. As the Lord spoke to Daniel about our day, "many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase." (Daniel 12:4) Many do run here and there today, but do they know why they are running, or where they are going, or even why they are alive? Knowledge has increased immensely—yet wisdom and understanding are in short supply. If the entire world seems to be racing forward at a rapid pace, let us never forget that the Bible declares that above all else this world is racing towards judgment.

As John wrote in 1 John 2:16–17, “For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.” One day it will be declared, and sooner than we think, “The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!” (Revelation 11:15)

When all else has been burned to a crisp, what will remain forever? The Lord and His church will tower far above what the old hymn calls the “wrecks of time.” Shall we therefore fear being different from others because we belong to Christ? Shall we fear being out of touch with our generation, or should we instead be afraid of being out of step with our God? As members of a materialistic age, should we not consider the words of Jesus in Matthew 16:26, “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?” No one ever gets the whole world, but many do sell their eternal souls for a little piece of it. Is it worth it? Should I trade an eternity with Jesus for a few moments of pleasure here? Oh yes, there is a cost to giving our all to Jesus, but the cost of not giving our all to Him is infinitely greater!

8.1 ONE PEOPLE

As mentioned before, when it comes to the church, God is looking for the number one—the number of unity. He will never be satisfied with less. The Biblical pattern for the church is very much about community, or digging into the Hebrew origins of the word, about the *congregation* of

the saints. The various Hebrew words that are translated as *congregation* have fewer ecclesiastical overtones today than the word *church* (which comes by many steps from the Latin *ecclesia*, the religiously used borrowing of the Greek *ἐκκλησία*, or *ëkklēsia*).¹ They refer quite simply to the gathering, assembly, multitude, and even family of the people of God.² As members of one family, one body, we were never called to step on one another's toes while exercising our newfound spiritual liberty, but to daily lay down our lives for the brethren. Oswald Chambers wrote about us in *My Utmost for His Highest*,

He wants you to recognize the disposition you were showing—*the disposition of your right to yourself*. The moment you are willing that God should alter your disposition, His recreating forces will begin to work. The moment you realize God's purpose, which is to get you rightly related to Himself *and then to your fellow men*, He will tax the last limit of the universe to help you take the right road.³ (Emphasis added)

We are so used to living in a fallen, self-centered world that we fall into the same old habits, trying to be like everyone else. But God has not called us to be like everyone else, any more than He called Israel to be like other nations. We are called to be nothing less than the very house of God:

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the

apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. (Ephesians 2:19–22)

Our position as disciples is clearly set within the context of becoming *members* of this larger church, the Body of Christ. As 2 Corinthians 6:16 states,

For you are the temple of the living God.
 As God has said:
 “I will dwell in them
 And walk among them.
 I will be their God,
 And they shall be My people.”

What greater privilege can any of us ask than to be part of God’s eternal house? People fight over the privilege of seeing the latest celebrity yet, unlike them, the Lord is no fading star. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end of all things. He will remain forever in all His glory—long after Hollywood’s Walk of Fame is gone.

What blessed people we are! But do we recognize the true worth of God’s invitation? Have we forgotten the parable Jesus told in Matthew 22 of the great heavenly wedding feast? Will we be among those who quickly respond to the Father’s invitation, or will He have to go out into the highways and byways to find others who willingly accept His kindness? If we desire to be members of His church, then we must realize that we are members one of

another, charged to obey the same commands that Paul wrote to the Philippians in chapter 2, verses 3–4:

Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind *let each esteem others better than himself*. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. (Emphasis added)

God has called us to be disciples *together* in Christ, the word *disciple* appearing many more times in the plural than in the singular in the New Testament.

In the Body of Christ, not only are we members one of another, but we are called to *submit* to one another, as well as to the Lord Himself. In the *New International Version*, Ephesians 5:21 commands, “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” The *New King James Version* speaks of, “submitting to one another in the fear of God.” Why is godly submission so critical? Because without it, the Body of Christ cannot work—any more than our physical bodies can. Imagine if every organ in our bodies did its own thing, refusing to listen to the brain, or to coordinate with the other parts of the body. Death would quickly ensue!

8.2 THE TYRANNY OF SELF

Modern culture focuses chiefly on *individuality*, which is why there are so many lonely people in this world. If everyone lives only for him or herself, where is there room for community or charity towards others? *The tyranny of self is the greatest bondage of all.*⁴ This I can testify to personally! I will forever be grateful to Jesus for rescuing me

out of my little self-centered world. There is much left to be done, but I am so glad that He has been delivering me from the narrowness of selfishness and self-seeking, enabling me instead to live in the wideness and liberty of His marvelous love. You see, what God desires in His children is the blossoming of *personality*—the new man in Christ who fits perfectly with the rest of the Body, living stone joined with living stone by the work of the Holy Spirit. When I was a young college student, an elderly missionary strongly admonished my brothers in Christ and me not to live like “ships passing in the night,” full of self-centered ambition. She urged us rather to love and care for one another, sharing both our burdens and our joys in daily, godly fellowship. It is advice that I will never forget, counsel that changed my life. As Romans 12:5 declares, “so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another.”

Oswald Chambers wrote profound words about the difference between individuality and personality,

Individuality is all elbows, it separates and isolates. It is the characteristic of the child and rightly so; but if we mistake individuality for the personal life, we remain isolated. The shell of individuality is God’s created natural covering for the protection of the personal life; but individuality must go in order that the personal life may come out and be brought into fellowship with God God designed human nature for Himself; individuality debases human nature for itself.

The characteristics of individuality are independence and self-assertiveness. It is the continual assertion of individuality that hinders our spiritual life more than anything else.... The thing in you that will not be reconciled to your brother is your individuality. God wants to bring you into union with Himself, but unless you are willing to give up your right to yourself He cannot. "Let him deny himself"—deny his independent right to himself, then the real life has a chance to grow.⁵

Shall we hold tightly onto "our right to ourselves," and remain childish all our days? Or will we say with Paul, "When I was a child, I spoke as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child; but when I became a man, I put away childish things." (1 Corinthians 13:11) "Childish things" include my right to my own life.

In our society, and even in our churches, there is a great deal of childishness, selfishness, immaturity, and inconsiderateness towards others. These attitudes will never fit in the Kingdom of Heaven, or in the Biblical church. They are contrary to God's own nature. In Ephesians 3:10–12, Paul plainly described the critical importance of the church of Jesus Christ in the plan of God. Was it not and is it not the Father's eternal intent to reveal His own nature and purpose not only through the Son, *but through the church itself*? It was the Father's purpose "from the beginning of the ages" that "now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in the heavenly places, according to

the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

As we walk in the sight of men and angels, both faithful and fallen, are we truly reflecting “the manifold wisdom of God” as members of the Body of Christ? Whose image do we bear as we pass through life—our own with all its faults and failings, or that of Jesus Christ? Either we let go of our right to ourselves, and grow up into the likeness of Jesus our Lord—or we grasp our lives in our own hands, remaining trapped in what Oswald Chambers accurately calls the “shell of individuality.” There is only one way to escape the awful bondage of our fallen nature. Religious activity, good deeds, and even good intentions are of no avail. *As Jesus died, so we must die.* The old life has to be “put off” so that the new life can flourish. The hard, unyielding husk of self must be broken and shed. As we deny our “independent right” to ourselves, “then the real life has a chance to grow,” the life that our Heavenly Father has been desiring since before the creation of the world.

9 *The Blueprint in the Bible*

In his 1890 book, *A Larger Christian Life*, the preacher and evangelist, A.B. Simpson, discussed his vision for the church:

He is showing us the plan for a Christian church that is much more than an association of congenial friends to listen once a week to an intellectual discourse and musical entertainment and carry on by proxy a mechanism of Christian work; but rather a church that can be at once the mother and home of every form of help and blessing which Jesus came to give to lost and suffering men, the birthplace and the home of souls, the fountain of healing and cleansing, the sheltering home for the orphan and distressed, the school for the culture and training of God's children, the armory where they are equipped for the battle of the Lord and the army which fights those battles in His name. Such a centre of life and power Christ wants in every centre of population in this sad and sinful world.¹

Can we agree with the words of A.B. Simpson? Can we ask the Lord to give us again the church as she was in the book of Acts, holy, yielded, sanctified, *active*—and empowered from above? This is the church of whom it was said in Acts 17:6, “These who have turned the world upside down have come here too.” Does not the world in our generation also need to be “turned upside down”? As Elisha cried out so many years ago when beginning his service to God, “Where is the LORD God of Elijah?” (2 Kings 2:14) Will we not also cry out so that God will have His way in our generation? “Not by might nor by power, but by My Spirit,’ says the LORD of hosts.” (Zechariah 4:6)

If we truly want to build the Biblical church of Jesus Christ—in all her beauty and power—then we must daily take up our cross and die to ourselves. We must pray as Jesus did, “not my will, but Yours, be done.” (Luke 22:42) Elisha began his ministry with a sacrifice, burning the plow and oxen that his earthly father had entrusted to him, breaking every connection to his comfortable past on the family farm. He did this so that he would be free to serve his Heavenly Father, letting go of an earthly yoke in order to bear a heavenly one. Will we also allow God to break off our earthly yokes so that we are free to build the Kingdom of God in our time? Great works for God always begin with sacrifice, so that our natural life may be transformed into life that is truly spiritual. As Jesus said in John 6:63, “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.”

If we hold on to our natural life, we will remain children spiritually, thus limiting the power of God to work in us. Only as we die to the all encompassing claims of our natural life do we truly grow up to become the spiritual

men and women of God that Jesus intends us to be. As Ephesians 4:14–16 states, God’s desire for us is

that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, but, speaking the truth in love, *may grow up in all things into Him who is the head*—Christ—from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love. (Emphasis added)

How many winds of doctrine have swept through churches in our day? Yet the Word of God has not changed in the least. Will we remain children in our thinking and theology, carried along by the latest trend, the latest teaching? Or will we die to ourselves in order to grow up into the likeness of Jesus Christ? Will we allow the Lord to make us mature men and women of God, knowing God’s Word, clear in our thinking, holy in our personal lives, and steadfast in our daily walk with Jesus? Such men and women, faithful disciples, are greatly needed in the church today!

Note also that the church is described in Ephesians 4 as a *living organism*—every member having a part in the functioning of the Body. Not every cell in the human body has the same function, so why should it be any different in the Body of Christ? As Isaiah 54:2–3 declares,

Enlarge the place of your tent,
and *let them* stretch out
 the curtains of your dwellings;
do not spare;
lengthen your cords,
and strengthen your stakes.
For you shall expand
 to the right and to the left,
and your descendants
 will inherit the nations,
and make the desolate cities inhabited.

Stretching out to the right and to the left is the work of *every* member of the Body of Christ, not just a handful of leaders. When we believers truly become a company of yielded, engaged disciples of Jesus Christ, each serving in those capacities that the Lord has ordained for us, then we will turn the world upside down.

In light of this, consider another passage about the church from A.B. Simpson,

The figure of enlargement is that of a tent; its curtains are to be stretched forth and its cords are to be lengthened. These curtains are surely the promises and provisions of the Gospel, and they will stretch as wide as the needs of human lives and the multitudes that seek their shelter. The cords are cords of prayer, cords of faith, cords of love, cords of holy effort and service. He bids us lengthen the cords of prayer. Let us ask more, but let the strands of faith be as long and strong. Let

us believe more fully, more firmly, and for a wider circle than we have dared before. Let the cords of love be lengthened until we shall draw men to Christ with the very cords of our hearts. Let our efforts for His kingdom reach a wider circle. *Let each of us make the world our parish*, and as the Bride of the Lamb realize that all that concerns our Lord's kingdom concerns our hearts, "For our Maker is our husband, the LORD of Hosts is His name, the God of the whole earth shall He be called."² (Emphasis added)

Each of us has a place, a role to play in the work our Lord desires to do in this generation. Above all else, it is time to build God's church on her Biblical foundations, according to the pattern that our Lord ordained for His church. We get a clear view of this pattern in passages such as 1 Corinthians 12:27–28 and Ephesians 4:11–13. They mention a variety of functions that God has given to the Church, such as that of apostles, prophets, teachers, and evangelists. It is these roles, and the emerging New Testament pattern of the church, that we will now explore.