

IT IS TIME TO PREPARE

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Preface

These are days of transition. Church can no longer be “business-as-usual.” Change is coming! The Lord is sovereignly arising to restore and prepare His people to gather in a final end-time harvest. The future will be altogether unlike the past; and we must prepare for it.

Days of Decision

Many Christians are simply waiting for the Lord to come and rapture them out of the calamities they see coming upon the earth. This is a very selfish mind-set which misses entirely what is in the Lord’s heart. He is coming for a bride who has prepared and given herself to His purpose in these days. The very darkness and difficulties from which men seek to escape are events intended by God to separate out the tares from His kingdom and prepare the church to gather in the greatest harvest of souls in the history of Christendom. The river of God’s Spirit will sweep over every nation on earth including the nation of Israel. Multitudes will turn to the Lord as His love, mercy and compassion are revealed. The gospel of the kingdom will be preached as a witness to all nations before He returns. No one will remain neutral; everyone will have to decide for or against Him.

It is not a time to fly away and escape, but a time to overcome. It is a day to do battle for the souls of men against the world forces of darkness and spiritual authorities in heavenly places. The consummation of His purpose in this day of trouble will usher in His return.

It is a time of transition. We have entered a new era in the history of the church, one which is intricately woven into God's purpose for this age. All is on schedule! When the Lord initiated His redemptive plan for mankind, He foreknew all things, and where we are today is exactly where He knew we would be. Nothing has occurred that was not foreknown. At no time has the Lord ever reacted to unexpected circumstances. All is in His hands! We who are alive in Christ today were also foreknown; thus, it is not by accident that we have been called into His purpose now and not in some previous generation. We have been brought to the kingdom for just such a time as this!

We dare not simply wait for the climax of this great conflict to come without preparing ourselves for it. The following are some of the major transitions facing us today:

- 1) A final great revelation of God's grace and mercy to a lost world will be attested to with many supernatural signs and wonders. Unity, love and compassion in believers will reflect God's glory on the church. This will be accompanied by a climax in darkness and deception. We must prepare for glory on the church and darkness in the world (Isaiah 60:1-3)
- 2) The church, in her present state, is not ready for the task ahead, either for the glory or the darkness. For that reason, the Lord has been sovereignly arising to renew, prepare and equip His people. The work ahead can only be accomplished by the Holy Spirit. Traditional methods without His anointing would surely fail. A deep work must be done in the hearts of His people.
- 3) The forces that God is mobilizing are not just His armies. His resources include the elements and ecological factors of the world. Earthquakes, famines, hurricanes, droughts, volcanoes, floods, scarcity of commodities, etc. are tools He will use to get man's attention. Such things, including persecution, are not to be seen by the church as enemies but as allies (Romans 8:17-18, 28-29; 2 Timothy 2:11-12). Such things are not sent to destroy us, but to deepen our roots in Him. They serve to prepare us for His glory.
- 4) A reality of the love our Father has for us must be developed in our hearts. He is moving in renewal power, doing heart surgery to remove idols that have taken over His rightful place in our lives. He is calling the church to spend more time in His presence. Our success in the days ahead will largely depend on the love relationship that we have with our Lord.

5) For too long Christians have tried to unite on the basis of doctrine. The trouble is that once we get our doctrine all defined and well supported by scripture, we are then divided from others who have defined things differently. Some compromise and sacrifice truth on the altar of ecumenism. Others become so convinced they are correct that they declare themselves to be the one “true church.” The Lord is grieved over the sin of division in His body.

The one basis He has provided for unity is His glory, His character or nature.

*And the **glory** which Thou has given Me I have given to them; that they may be one, just as we are one; I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected in unity . . . (John 17:22-23)*

Only the love of God can draw us to Him and to one another; only the love of God can bind us together as one body.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another. (John 13:34-35)

We must make transition from correct theology concerning the body of Christ to the reality of walking in that theology.

Prepared for Service

There is but one place where preparation can take place, and that is in His presence. It is not the teaching we hear, or the trials and circumstances we go through, that by themselves, effect change within us. Only to the extent that such things draw us into His presence for more grace, mercy and understanding will we be prepared. At His feet we will learn to distinguish between the strategies of man and the way of the Lord.

It is He Himself, not our ministry, our goals, or our call that must become the desire of our hearts. It is Jesus alone, nothing else! This hunger and desire is best expressed in our priesthood, for intercession and worship will bring us into His presence.

Prepared Hearts

The first and most important issue in preparation is our hearts. We simply do not appreciate how horrible sin is in God’s eyes. In our walk with

Him, He sees us just as we are in our hearts (Proverbs 27:19). Unfortunately, apart from the Holy Spirit, we are unable to see or judge our heart condition as He does, much less the hearts of others.

The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it? (Jeremiah 17:9)

Too many of us who are believers, walk somewhere between the following two verses:

Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. (Matthew 5:8)

Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord. (Proverbs 16:5)

Pride leads to unforgiveness. Our adversary, the accuser of the brethren, uses our transgressions to divide and cripple the body of Christ. Humility must be cultivated so that we can receive the mercy and grace we will need. God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble.

Because our Father in heaven loves us, He is visiting His children today in renewal power to change hearts. Some manifestations may occur in this visitation that offends the rational mind, but such things become unimportant as we see hearts renewed. He is calling us to repentance, humility and intimacy; to receive His love and then give it away to others.

The way of the Lord is prepared in the hearts of His people. The issue is not methods, strategies, or spiritual gifts, it is hearts prepared for Him to reign in. The value of our service is measured in His eyes by the state of our heart. What He sees there determines how He will anoint us. Our responsibility is clear:

Watch over your heart with all diligence, for from it flows the springs of life. (Proverbs 4:23)

Prepared for the Harvest

The fields of the world have been experiencing harvest for two thousand years. However, there will be an ultimate glorious harvest that closes this age of grace (Matthew 13:17-39; Revelation 14:14-16). This particular harvest will be a fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles (or Feast of Ingathering).

Religious Life in Israel during the Old Testament was largely centered around three major feasts, or appointments, each of which pertained to phases of the yearly harvest of the land. These feasts were shadows (or types) of future spiritual harvests that would fulfill them. The first was the

Feast of Passover which was fulfilled in the death and resurrection of Jesus. He was the first fruit of God's spiritual harvest. The second was the Feast of Pentecost which was fulfilled by the first outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:1-21). The spiritual harvest of this feast are all the souls who have been saved since then through the convicting power of the Spirit.

God will conclude the season of harvest with a final great ingathering of souls from all nations that fulfills the Feast of Tabernacles. The Lord will then return to close this age of grace by resurrecting and gathering to Himself all who belong to Him.

I believe the greatest release of divine power in the history of the church lies just ahead, as the gospel of the kingdom is proclaimed and demonstrated to all nations (Matthew 24:14). There is no redemptive power greater than the love of God. When the gospel is proclaimed with mercy, love and compassion, being confirmed by attesting signs and wonders, nations will come to the Lord!

*For thus says the Lord of hosts, "Once more in a little while I am going to shake the heavens and the earth, the sea also and the dry land. And I will shake **all the nations**; and they will come with the **wealth of all nations**; and I will fill this house with glory," says the Lord of host. (Haggai 2:6-7)*

The Hebrew word used in this verse for "wealth" is CHEMDAH. This word does not refer to the wealth of gold, silver or jewels; nor does it refer to wealth of a nation's military might. There are other Hebrew words for these two expressions of wealth. CHEMDAH, which can also be translated as "desire," refers to what is most precious in God's eyes, the *people* of a nation! Nations and their leaders will come to Him when His glory rises on the church (Isaiah 52; 60:3-7).

Prepared for Pain

A woman has travail when her hour for delivery has come. Afterwards, she no longer remembers the anguish for joy that a child has been born. Similarly, there is always pain associated with giving birth to righteousness. The following are some examples:

- The Father experienced pain in His heart when He sent His Son to bear our sins.
- Jesus endured the pain of His cross, despising the shame for the joy that was set before Him (Hebrews 12:2).

- Paul (and others since then) experienced pain and travail in order to see Christ received and formed within those to whom he preached (2 Corinthians 11:24-27; Colossians 1:24; Galatians 4:19).
- Since the sin of Adam, all of creation groans and suffers the pain of childbirth, waiting for its redemption from decay and corruption (Romans 8:21-22).
- Israel will experience the pain of travail until she turns in faith to her Messiah.

Lastly, the church faces the pain of childbirth as she prepares to deliver overcomers for the end-time purposes of God (Obadiah 1:21; Revelation 2:26-27, 3:12, 21). The bride faces pain in preparing herself for the glory of God which will arise upon her in the great conflict and harvest that lies ahead. Believers must be prepared to embrace this redemptive pain, which will come from the following three sources.

- 1) There will be new levels of tribulation, persecution and deception from Satan. This time of trouble is described in scripture as “the beginnings of birth pangs” (Matthew 24:8). Martyrdom will be the way of overcoming for some saints (Revelation 12:11-12).
- 2) Whether we are saved or not, the way of our flesh is always in opposition to the way of the Spirit. How one responds when the anointing of God touches their heart in renewal power cannot be fathomed by rational minds and natural senses. The one and only validity of His anointing is the spiritual fruit that follows. As God renews the church, criticism and opposition will arise from those who judge what is taking place by the theological boundaries of their tradition. Although this will be painful, there must be no retaliation (1 Peter 2:20-23). The pain of accusation is to be covered with a spirit of intercession, love and mercy. This heart attitude will allow the grace of God to open hearts. Groups or individuals that we may have given up on, could become the very ones He uses in the greatest way.
- 3) The third source of pain comes from within us. As the Lord opens our hearts to reveal how much He loves us, something takes place. Sins and idols are surfaced; things that must be acknowledged and put away, for they occupy a place in our hearts that belongs to Jesus. Pride, manipulation, control, elitism, insecurity and unforgiveness are but some of these idols.

It is painful! Habit patterns and lifestyles have allowed these enemies to become woven into our being. They bring a spirit of heaviness and depression that hinder joy and worship. The Lord is anointing His people,

doing heart surgery to remove these things, and give us the oil of gladness and mantle of praise. However, we must embrace the pain of repentance and put away our idols.

Prepared Children

The church will only be ready for the future to the extent that her families are prepared. I believe that youth of the last days are to play an important role in the end-time purpose of God. It is very important for our young people to be anointed by the Lord preparing them for what lies ahead.

Satan seeks to destroy the youth through abortion, drugs, homosexuality, broken homes, rebellion, AIDs, etc. However, as the Lord did through John the Baptist in preparing for the first advent, He has promised to again send the spirit of Elijah to prepare His way in this visitation. His intent is to restore godly relationships between fathers and their children, thereby strengthening families.

Behold, I am going to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord. And he will restore the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers (Malachi 4:5-6)

Cell groups (the church meeting in small groups) are an important part of God's strategy to build strong bonds of relationship in and between families of the church.

David prophesied of the significant place youth will have in the day of the Lord's army.

Your people will offer themselves willingly in the day of Your power, in the beauty of holiness and in holy array out of the womb of the morning; to You will spring froth Your young men who are as the dew. (Psalm 110:3; AMP)

The Lord is preparing mighty warriors for His army from the youth. They will be known for their faith, simplicity and purity.

Conclusion

The church must make transitions to prepare for the glory and darkness that lie ahead. The future is unlike the past. There is no pattern from revivals of yesterday that can depict future events.

Do not call to mind the former things or ponder things of the past. Behold, I will do something new. Now it will spring forth; will you not be aware of it? (Isaiah 43:18-19)

There are many gospel emphases today, such as the social gospel, fundamentalism, the full gospel, reform theology, communalism, faith and prosperity, etc. And souls are being saved. However, the Lord wants to give the church His heart of love and compassion for the poor, crippled, blind and lame; for the dysfunctional and castaways of society. We are to take the gospel of His kingdom out to the streets and lanes of cities, to the highways and hedges of our land where much of this harvest will be found.

Workers who have His vision and burden will labor together in unity; not simply ecumenism, but the unity that Jesus prayed for. To this end, strong apostolic and prophetic ministries will emerge, making the body of Christ more apparent in the earth.

Economic transition will also take place. The “house of cards” built by an accumulation of national, business and personal debts will collapse. To prepare for the future means to be out of debt. Sharing material resources will become much more necessary than it is today. The answer is to become a people whose lives are poured out for Him and for one another. Noah was commanded to prepare for unheard of events that had never been seen or experienced by anyone before. His obedience in building the ark set the example we are to follow.

... build up, build up, prepare the way, remove every obstacle out of the way of My people. (Isaiah 57:14)

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