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Prophet Jim Smith. December 2004

The Marks of a Missionary Church. Part 2

4. Obeying the call of God

When the prophet Samuel understood what God was asking of him, he did it. It wasn't easy for him, but he did it. When Isaiah understood what God wanted he accepted the call.

It wasn't going to be easy for him, but he did it. When Paul and Barnabas received the call from God, we read nothing of their reactions. We can only presume that when the leaders came to them with what they had heard, there was no need for any discussion. The call of God had to be obeyed.

In Missionary Churches, this principle of obedience is taken for granted. We assume that God will speak, and we assume they we will obey. There is a process to go through with the leadership, and a lot of discussion and prayer. But we expect to hear, and we expect to obey. I have discovered that God seldom speaks to a Church which has little or no intention of obeying him. When Pastors or Assemblies complain "We don't often hear from God", the implication is that God is to blame. But the Scriptures teach clearly that God wants to speak with us, and he cannot deny his own nature. More often, the fault is in the heart of the leaders of the people, who have no intention of responding to the call from God. In Missionary Churches, God calls, and the people respond, regardless of the cost. If God is not speaking again and again to the people, and calling them to ministry, there are some serious questions to be asked:-

Is the heart of the Pastor open to obeying God, whatever the consequences? It is easy to say "Yes" but beware. God asks everything of us, and his call to obedience might lead to exposing many false things in the heart, in the family, marriage, home and ministry.

Are the hearts of the people open to the call of God? Again the answer "Yes" might lead to the revealing of many false things which have never been confessed – adultery, lust, theft, anger, pride, occult involvement, fraud.

Is the Church willing to do whatever God says, in the way God says, and at the time of God's choosing?

In the Churches where God can expect obedience, there is cause for great rejoicing. He is looking for people who have a heart like David “I have found David, son of Jesse a man after my own heart. He will do everything I want him to do.”
(Acts13:22)

Is your Church an obedient Church? In what ways do you obey God's call -what have you done in the last year as a fellowship and as individuals? What is God asking of you now? Will you do it? If there is a lack of obedience in your Church, why is that? What can be done about it?

5. Order

There can be no question that the Church at Corinth was a Missionary Church. Established by an Apostle, it bubbled over with Missionary zeal. But it was a Church in chaos. Paul had to write to try and correct some of the abuses. This can always be a problem with a Missionary Church. So much is happening, or can happen, that disorder and chaos are only just beneath the surface. This is why God appointed an ordered leadership in his Church:-

“First Apostles, then prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.” (Eph.4:11-13)

Missionary Churches need this five fold ministry pattern. It's the only way that a Church can be confident of it's foundations. It is the only way a fellowship of God's people can be protected, AND released into ministry. Sometimes Pastors ask why they have to bother with this pattern. They say “We are managing well with what we have got.” The answer is simple – this is how God planned it should be, knowing both our great potential as people, and our great ability to spoil and destroy His work. With this ministry pattern in place, all the fuel is present to fire the Church into mission, and to control and develop that patterns of ministry which emerge to make that mission a reality. We must be very clear however about some things:

“Control” in Kingdom terms means to serve. We control the development of God's work from the position of servants, (Phil 2:5-11) who are doing our duty towards the body. Not only does this copy the pattern of Jesus, but it fulfils the commission of Ephesians 4, which is to EQUIP the saints for work of ministry. The job of the ministry is to serve and equip, so that the body can go out and win trophies to present to Jesus. We are not in this calling to do all the work ourselves, or for our own self satisfaction or promotion. We are to serve.

Leadership has to be used by the body. The members of the body may be hearing from God. But God has appointed the leadership to test the voice, and to help in the development of that ministry. Too many people, especially in Africa, think that they can just go off and do their own thing, because “God has spoken to me.” This is nonsense, as

I have told hundreds of Church members. The leadership is there to EQUIP US! That is their responsibility, and we have to allow them to fulfil their calling, do that we can fulfil ours.

This pattern can only work if both leaders and members have servant hearts, and recognise their position under God. Ultimately, if we really love the Church, as Christ loved her, we will make this pattern work. There will be problems, disagreements and mistakes. But – and I would like to write this in the largest letters I can find – there is no alternative pattern. Without it, chaos will break out, and the body will grow weak. With it, there is no limit to what we can achieve for God.

Leaders may say “But we don’t have this pattern and we don’t know how to develop it. What should we do?” God has made it clear what he wants. As long as we seek Him for his pattern, he will do it. Start to pray for the development of a truly biblical oversight for your Church. God will do it!

6. Discipline

“My son, do not despise the Lord’s discipline and do not resist his rebuke, because the Lord disciplines those he loves..” (Proverbs 3:11-12)

It is clear from the Scriptures, that the Lord expects discipline in his people. Personal discipline – of prayer, worship and study; life discipline – of behaviour, home and lifestyle, and spiritual discipline in the assembly of God’s people. It is also clear that a lack of personal or communal discipline brings us outside of his will. For a study of the ruin that indiscipline brings, I see the life of King Saul. (1 Samuel chapter 10 to 30) David and Solomon also demonstrate the dangers of poor discipline. (1 Samuel 11 and 1 Kings 11)

A Missionary Church needs to be very aware of the need for discipline. Where the Spirit is very active, discipline is all the more necessary. Some people say that discipline hinders the flow of the Spirit, but such a thing is impossible. It is the Spirit himself who brings order and discipline to our personal and communal lives. So he will not be hindered by godly discipline. The dangers only come when we turn our godly disciplines into Pharisaic rules and regulations. This not the discipline of the Spirit, but the rules of men. What disciplines does a Missionary Church expect to exercise? In Antioch, there were the disciplines of :

Prayer.

Worship.

Fasting.

Leadership.

Giving.

The servant heart.

Godly marriage.

Headship in the home.

Love and discipline of children.

The willingness to serve the Lord and the fellowship.

Endurance, of struggle and suffering.

In the exercise of ministries, of obedience to the leadership, of order in the worshipping times.

Discipline does not come easily to the human Spirit. But it has to be stressed that this discipline releases and frees us for works of service. These positive disciplines are a blessing to the body. The alternative is chaos, and God seldom speaks into chaotic Churches.

Is your Church a disciplined fellowship? Are the members disciplined in their personal and marital lives? Is the Church disciplined the way it organises itself, and uses its gifts? How can your Church become a disciplined assembly, without becoming one that is under the rules of men?

If your Church has poor discipline, then the leadership need to pray and discuss how things are going to be put right.

7. Passion, Commitment & Endurance.

Nothing in the Kingdom of God comes easily. New Christians think that all they have to do is to pray “Jesus do it!” and he will. Of course he will for the new believers, because they need to be encouraged,. They are like children who do pictures which look like scribbles. When a parent sees it he says “What a lovely picture!” The young need encouragement.

But it is not so for the mature believer or the Missionary Church. We know that we are engaged in a struggle. Jesus has won, but still the ground has to be occupied and made part of the Kingdom. The enemy is viscous, violent, and full of deceit. (Acts13: 6-12). We have to be strong, protected and willing to push hard against his battle lines. (Ephesians 6:10-20) This requires that in the heart of the Missionary Church there is to be found:-

A passion for God. The prophet Jeremiah described the word of God in him like a fire burning in his bones.(Jeremiah 20:9) We have to have that passion – that white hot desire to serve him, no matter what the cost.

A commitment to Jesus. Joshua described it like this “as for me and my family, we will serve the Lord .” (Joshua 24:15) There is no other way. Jesus said “I am the way and the truth and the life.” (John 14:6) There is no other name. Paul tell us “At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow.” (Philippians 2:10) Sometimes we are accused of being bigots. This is a lie. We are simply sold out for Jesus.

Endurance. “O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you in this matter. If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it and he will rescue us from your hand O King. But even if he does not, we want you to know O king that we will not serve your gods..” (Daniel3:16-18) Habbakuk put it this way -“Though the fig tree does not bud, and there are no grapes on the vines; though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my saviour.” (Hab.3:17-18) There has to be a toughness in the Missionary Church. A determination to see God’s plans through whatever the consequence. Without it, the Church will be pushed back, to become like 6 of the 7 Churches in the book of Revelation. I suggest that you read about those Churches (Rev 2 & 3 Check) and reflect on your own fellowship.

Does your fellowship have a passion for Jesus? Does this passion bring the fruit of endurance, or do you give up when the going gets tough?

8. Sacrifice.

One day, in the Nazi death camp of Auschwitz, a man was to be thrown into a cell, where he was to be starved to death. Just as this was about to happen, another man, a priest, stepped forward and said “Put me there instead of this man.” It was done. The man was returned to the camp, and the priest locked in the cell, where he starved to death. One man sacrificed that another might have a chance of life. In a Missionary Church, sacrificing for each other, so that God’s work can go forward should be a natural occurrence. We should be seen to be sacrificing in these ways:-

Sacrificing our money and possessions, so that those more needy can have them, or so that they can be used to forward the work of God. So often, especially in the West, this sacrifice is missing. We hold on to what we have, and as a consequence, the work of God founders, and the fruits of God’s work rot on the vine. In the West we have a mean spirit. We take, we keep, we use for ourselves. Often I am told “But I give ten percent of what I earn to God. Isn’t that enough?” No! It all belongs to God, and we should be willing to sacrifice all so that the work may go forward. Do we think that God will leave us without what we need? If we give to him, we will never be the losers. God is no man’s debtor.

Sacrificing our gifts. Often, when two people have the same gift, they become competitive. Each wants to use his gift, and pushes the other away. But we should be willing to sacrifice our opportunities for ministry, so that others might have the opportunity to serve. Our attitude should be that of Jesus, who never pushed his ministry forward, but let the Father lead the way. Our attitude should be “I know I have the right to do this ministry, and I can do it. But perhaps my brother can do it better. He should have the opportunity. I sacrifice my gift so that his might bring blessing to God.” This unusual attitude brings its own blessing. If I sacrifice my gift for another, then I share in the fruits of the blessing he brings. No one ever loses out as they sacrifice.

Sacrificing our time. In cold or lukewarm Churches, I often hear people say “Well, I will do it, but not at this moment.”

(Parable of the servant Matthew 21:28-31) But our time is not our own. It has been given to us by God, and it is His to call on when he needs it. Pastors of Missionary Churches should have to spend their time holding back their members from doing the works of God! There should be such an urgency and desire to serve, that again and again the Pastors should be saying “yes, but let’s wait a while to pray!”

Sacrificing our homes. The Missionary Churches of the New Testament grew because the members were willing to use their homes as places of study, growth and Missionary outreach into the surrounding areas. In these days, there is a great need for the rediscovery of this principle. Meeting in a home gives great opportunity for fellowship, for relationships to grow, needs to be met, God to be honoured and neighbours introduced to faith. Each home should be a Missionary Church itself - a place where God is able to work for the blessing of His Creation. This may not be possible for everyone, but many more than at present need to sacrifice their homes to the work of God.

Is your Church a sacrificial place? Ask the Holy Spirit to answer this question for you, and obey what he says. If your Church is not a sacrificing place, you will never develop as a Missionary base. Ask God to show you why you are not a sacrificing Church, and repent before him.

9. Support.

“They placed their hands on them and sent them off..”

When people are called into service, as Paul and Barnabas were, so often in the Church, that is the beginning and the end of the support they receive. The Church is very bad at supporting the work of its workers. But a Missionary Church should follow the example of Antioch. Having set Paul and Barnabas aside for their work, they continued in their support and interest. Paul was very aware of this, and was quick to return to Antioch to give a report of his journey. (Acts 14:26) This should be a mark of our fellowship life. We set people aside for ministry, and then continue to love, pray and support them as they grow into that work.

Does your fellowship care for its workers? Do you pray and support those who have been sent out, and care for them? Do you retain an interest in what they are doing? If you do not, then you are failing in your Missionary task. It’s so easy to send out and forget. It’s so much harder to stand by those sent out, but so much more rewarding. We share their joys, and their rewards, and we see our Church growing as a consequence.

10. Passion and compassion for the Nation.

“If my people, who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and forgive their sin and heal their land.” (2 Chronicles 7: 14)

When God answered Solomon’s prayer of dedication, His commitment was not to evangelise the land, to plant Churches in the land, or to raise up ministries. It was to HEAL THE LAND. God’s mission to the Church is not to “save souls” but to heal the land. Our mission is to take the Christian principles into every part of our National life - Politics, economics, education, medicine, business, media - and there live out Christian principles, be salt and light, and to direct the Nation into the paths of righteousness laid down by God. Some people say to me that we have no right to speak and be involved in these parts of our National life. But God is Lord of all his creation. These “secular” institutions are existing under the umbrella of God’s protection, not the other way around. As God is Lord of all, then I have to be involved in all, and have right to be involved, and to influence the National life into the ways of God.

One of the things which worries me so much about Churches all over the world is their apparent lack of interest in their Nation. Pastors, leaders and people want to build their Churches, evangelise, and lead godly family lives, but that is often as far as it goes. Some Churches have never thought of their responsibility to their Nation, while others see it as far too big a thing to worry about. The end result is that many Churches just concern themselves with what is near and easy. But this only results in a flawed ministry. If we do not have a passion and commitment to our Nation we:-

Fail to fulfil the mission of the Church, which is to touch and change the society in which we live at every level.

Fail to exercise the fullness of what God wants to do - because he has a passion and a commitment to the whole of his creation.

Leave the enemy territory to which he has no right, but in which he finds no threat from the people of God.

Antioch was a powerhouse of the Holy Spirit’s working, and their desire reached beyond just evangelism for Asia. They wanted to see Kingdom principles established throughout Asia. Paul’s writings show again and again our need to challenge evil, and to encourage good in the societies in which we find ourselves. He reminds us powerfully that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself. He was reconciling, not just evangelising. As Antioch began to understand and accept its responsibility, so must we. We must understand;

That we have been set in the Nations, to encourage good, to challenge evil, and to demonstrate God’s ways and laws to the people.

That we have failed many times in this task requires much repentance on our part. Our lands have fallen under the sway of the enemy, and if godly things are being trampled down, we have to accept that we are responsible. Why us? Because we have been given the responsibility of being the light, the salt and the hope to our lands. **We have been**

given the responsibility to warm against evil to challenge and destroy evil, so that good can flourish

We have to start taking responsibility for our Nations. To pray for the National life, the politic, the economics, the education, the business and commerce, the medical and social fabric of our land. We have to start sending people into the different parts of our National life - politicians, economists, teachers, businessmen. These people are missionaries to the Nation - to take the light of Christian principles to the land. We have to make spiritual warfare for our land - to bring down the strongholds, and to reclaim the land for Jesus. It is going to be hard, but my conviction is that a Church which does not take this seriously does not have the right to be called a Missionary Church. Everything God has given us is for this task - to bring the Nations back to him, so that he may return.

I plead with you as an Ambassador of Christ - bring your National life under the authority of Jesus. Do not rest until this task is finished.

When a Missionary Church has things in order, what does it do?

I have already made many suggestions and comments which need thought and prayer. But in this section, I want to offer some more detailed thoughts which might make the basis for study and prayer in your fellowship.

1. It builds the life of it's members.

Growth in the lives of members is a vital test of the Missionary Church- indeed any Church.

We are expected to be producing the fruits of the spirit. (Galatians 5:22)

We are expected to be moving towards maturity. (Eph.4:13)

We are expected to be growing in love. (1 Corinthians 13)

We are expected to care for the poor (Matthew 19:21)

We are expected to have personal lives which are in line with the teachings of Jesus. (Matthew 7:24-27)

We are expected to have marriages and homes which reflect the light and grace of Jesus. (Ephesians 5 - whole chapter.)

We are expected to be bringing up our children in the love and knowledge of the Lord. (Ephesians 5 - whole chapter.)

We are expected to be living in peace with all men.

2.Ceaseless prayer.

When Peter was in prison (Acts 12:1-18) the Bible tells us that “the Church was earnestly praying to God for him.” This type of prayer is vital to the life of a Missionary Church. So many barriers have to be overcome; so many strong places torn down; so much resource is needed; so great will be the attacks of the enemy. Only with a deep commitment to prayer, and a belief in the power of prayer can a Missionary Church hope to carry through its task.