

E books: What's wrong with the Church in Africa?

Prophet Jim Smith. Part 1

Introduction

In 1996, I had already visited over 40 countries as a prophet, and I was preparing to move my work from the North of England to London. I came to a Conference in Benin, expecting this to be my last visit to Africa. When I got up to speak at the Conference, I asked all the prophets to stand, and of the thousands of people there, only a few stood. I was shocked that there were so few. Then I heard the voice of the Lord. "I have a problem here son. I need someone to come to Africa, to begin to raise up prophets - biblical prophets, who will be full of understanding in the Bible, willing to serve the Church and to be balanced in their ministries. I want you to do it for me." At first I found this difficult, but slowly the Lord's will became my will, and I began to serve Africa like so many of my countrymen before me.

Most visitors from other Continents are impressed with the vibrancy of the African Church - with its praise, its passionate desire to meet with God, to know His will and to follow Him in their daily lives. I also enjoyed this, and I still do. In Africa, everything is possible. God's people expect God to move, and he does move. God's people have a hope and a desire to see their Continent filled with the fire of revival, and I share this longing. Slowly, as the years went by, my own heart began to be more open to the African heart. A South African journalist, who had been in Africa all his life wrote this: "Black skin does not make an African. It is an attitude and approach to life which makes an African." I found that I was understanding more and more how God's African people thought, felt and behaved. I began to realise that on the inside I was an African, and this was, and still is a joy to me. I believe that God's African people have the potential to change the world. I believe that through Africa, all the Nations of the world will be blessed. I believe that Africa is God's suffering servant, prepared over the centuries by suffering, blessed twice, and about to be blessed again. I want this, and my prayer is that I shall be alive to see it. I have a deep love for Africa and a burden for God's people.

I write this so that you will understand my heart, and know that as I write, I have been blessed by Africa, and want to be a blessing to Africa. I found writing this material very difficult at first, but the Lord said "If you really want to help, you have got to let me show you the faults in the African Church, and you must expose them." More and more, as I came to understand Africa, I began to be shown what was wrong, and what needed changing. God is totally dedicated to making us his pure bride, and his love is so great that he will stop at nothing to make us see what needs changing, and help us to act so that the changes can come. This activity by God is a blessing, and flows from his love for us.

Seduction:

Why is it that many of God's Western people do not see the faults which I see? The answer is simple. The African Church is a wonderful place to experience, but it seduces

Western Christians. The African Church seduces visitors into seeing what Africa wants them to see. I remember one Western visitor coming back to England full of enthusiasm for African religion. "They have so much to teach us" she said. I suggested that we also have things to teach them, but my remarks were dismissed with "Oh no. They are wonderful. They must be our teachers." This person had been seduced. They had not seen beyond the outward expressions of faith, to the truth underneath.

I'm not suggesting that everything is wrong with the African Church. I too enjoy the praise, the passion for God, and especially the willingness to serve Him and to sacrifice to Him. I enjoy being in Africa much more than being in the West. But I see beyond the seduction, to many serious and fundamental flaws. Have I the right to share these faults? I don't know, but I have a calling to the African Church, and a passion that the Church should be mature, strong, and a pure bride for the Bridegroom. I believe that through this Church, all the Nations of the world will be blessed. So against this background, what do I see in the African Church?

1. Everyone does what is right in his own eyes.

A brother came to see me at one Conference, and said "Prophet Jim, I am in big trouble." I asked him what had happened, and he said "I had a word for a family in the Church, so I went and told it to them. Now they have left the Church, and the Pastor is angry with me. But I was right wasn't I?" I could repeat this story a million times. The brother had no concern for the Church, the authority of the Pastor, or the discipline of the Church. He just did what he thought was right, and it had disastrous consequences.

Everywhere in Africa, the people of God do what they think is right. They do not consult Pastors or leaders, and they do not submit to the discipline and testing of the church. They are concerned with what God is saying to them and then they do whatever they feel is right. This weakens the body of Christ. We do not act like an army, but like a rabble. No wonder the enemy is growing so strong. The people of God in Africa have got to change this attitude. This rebellious attitude must be replaced with a commitment to ONE LOCAL FELLOWSHIP, where they can commit themselves to disciplined response to the word of God, within the framework of one assembly, and one Pastor. But many say to me "Why should we do this?" The answer is simple. First, it is the will of God, and second it turns a rabble into an effective fighting force, which God can use.

Until this attitude is challenged and rectified, little progress will be made in Africa. Little ministries will grow and then fade. The Church, while outwardly strong will be inwardly weak, and the great blessing will not come.

STUDY: 1 Corinthians 9:27-27

2. My miracle now!

The people of God in Africa are not steadfast. Rather than committing themselves to discipline and support of one fellowship, they are always looking for “My Miracle Now!” I believe that this stems from the basic insecurity which is the lot of the African. Times are not easy in any African country. War, drought, famine, sickness and economic hardship are everywhere. These circumstances call for toughness and determination. But the people of God want some miraculous intervention to solve all their problems, so they are always looking for their miracle answer to their problems. They will always listen to a preacher who offers them this solution. “Come and listen to me, and I will solve all your problems” is the teaching of many miracle preachers. Let me be clear - I love all the miracles which God does for me. I have seen many and experienced many, and I long for many more. But these miracles are not the basis for my faith. I believe because “I have confessed with my lips that Jesus is Lord.” The miracles are great stimulus to my faith, but they are not the basis for it.

So I determine to be tough, and to endure the struggle, whatever happens, that I might gain the prize. But many in Africa want the “my miracle now” solution. So they run from this preacher to that preacher, doing ever more bizarre and unbiblical things to get their miracle. When they don’t get it, they run to the next man, and the next. They don’t spend any time considering what they are doing, nor the biblical or unbiblical nature of what they are being told. Nor do they listen to their Pastors.

This “my miracle now” has a number of consequences:-

- * The people of God are forever being made to look foolish.
- * They are denied the blessings which come with discipline and endurance.
- * The enemy triumphs. While the people of God are looking for their miracle now, they are not able to see the strongholds he is erecting in their countries.
- * The church remains weak, and the Pastors of God are insecure in their ministries. This last is a tragedy. The Pastors, afraid of losing their sheep, fail to command discipline and endurance. They get caught up in the miracle way, and begin to teach the very things which weaken faith. If they teach the disciplined truth, the sheep will leave.

Let them leave Pastors! Better you go hungry, than you give the people what they think they want. You are commanded to give them what God wants. Better they leave, and you only have one sheep who will do the will of God. Better to starve than to surrender. What’s more Pastors, as soon as you challenge the “my miracle now” mentality, your sheep will know that they are being fed better food. Then they will come under the sound of good preaching and what will happen? The signs and miracles will follow the good food! In discipline and endurance, God’s people get not only good teaching, but miracles to build faith and encourage endurance.

People of God in Africa - what has all this “my miracle now” done for you? How many of these miracles have truly changed your life and strengthened the Church, and how many have really been false, and a reflection of your unwillingness to be committed in discipline to one fellowship? These miracle preachers only grow because you want them!

Start seeking the true miracles - endurance and discipline, and I promise you that you will end up with greater works than those you seek after now.

STUDY: Hebrews 12: 1-8

3. Shallow commitment.

Everyone is impressed with the commitment of God's people in Africa, but I think that it is a shallow commitment. God commands us to belong to the family, and by the use the gifts we have to build. Let me say it again - TO BUILD. To build up the body of Christ, that His name may be exalted. But so many of God's people don't have a commitment to building the body, just to fulfilling their own needs. So if they don't like the preaching, they move to another Church. If they don't feel like supporting a project of the Church, they do not support it. If they feel like staying in bed, or mending their car, motor cycle, or house, they do it. They come to Church to dance on a Sunday, but there is little commitment to building.

Before you disagree with this, let me give you some evidence.

* In Cote D'Ivoire, about 200 people from the Church attended the weeknight meetings I held, even though the Pastor told them that this was the most important mission in the life of the Church. 2000 came on Sunday.

* In Benin, 250 people came to hear God's word for the future of their Church - a series of meetings considered by the Pastor as vital to the future of the Church. 3000 came on Sunday.

* In Togo, 300 people came to hear, even though the Pastor was quite clear - this Ministry was " a very different kind of seminar. Here we are meeting with God in a powerful and dynamic way." On Sunday, 6000 people came to the three services.

Other ministries could give similar examples. The people of God are not committed. They do not listen to their God ordained Pastor, or support that which he considers vital to the life of the body. But they will all come to dance on Sunday. This makes me so angry. In one country, I made the people who had come to the midweek meetings stand, and I gave them a special blessing. Those who had to remain seated didn't like this, but they had missed the blessing, and it wasn't going to come again.

People of God - where is your commitment to build? If God's people could match their commitment to worship with their commitment to build, all of Africa would belong to Jesus. But clearly it does not - most of the North is lost, Western Africa is under threat from Islam, and much of Africa is at war with itself. Why? Partly because the people of God have not learnt how to BUILD. This shallow commitment has left the enemy with too much room. This shallow commitment has got to be broken. The people of God have got to learn to commit themselves to building, to establishing and upholding their own

fellowship, their Pastor, and to being committed to other fellowships, that the whole body “knit together might grow up into the fullness of God.”

STUDY: 1 Corinthians 12: 1-20

4. Division.

I went to one city, and was preaching in a very big Church about the state of the Nation. One morning I went to see a Pastor at another Church. “You know” he said, “what we really need is someone to come and speak about the state of the Nation.” “But I’m doing that” I replied. “Oh, where?” he said. I took him outside, and pointed to the tower of the big Church, which we could see in the distance .”There” I replied. Then I went to another Church in the town, and the Pastor said to me “What we need is someone to come and talk to us about the spiritual state of the Nation.” I took him outside, and we could also see the big Church in the distance. “Do you know that a Western speaker is in that Church this week, speaking about your Nation.” “Oh really” he said “who is he?” I couldn’t believe this. “Me!” I exclaimed. “But we need you to come to our Church to speak, not go there” he replied.

This is not confined to one Nation. All over Africa, the Church of God is divided. Pastors and people look only to the things which are happening in their own fellowships. They do not look to share with other fellowships, to support and encourage other pastors, to work and witness together. Every man seems concerned only with his own piece of the garden. This division is not only a denial of the scriptures, and an insult to the death of Jesus. It also bears a terrible testimony to the world, and encourages other false religions to claim “Don’t join those Christians. They only squabble like children. Come to us. We are one people, one faith.” Yet no matter how many times I speak about this, it seems that God’s people are so often concerned only with themselves. This attitude has to be challenged. We are one body, and that has to express itself not only in visible signs of unity, but in the desire, created by the Holy Spirit, for unity in the body. We have got to stop criticising each other, insulting each other, pulling each other down, and start exalting the good things in each other, emphasising the unity of the body, and of the fellowship between brothers and sisters. There has to be a heart change.

If we ignore this, our enemies prosper. Already I hear often from the Muslims that they are united as we are not. That is a lie of course, but we do not see through it. Their accusation is often valid. We are made one body. We act like millions of different bodies.

STUDY: John 17:20-25

Pastors

God bless the Pastors of Africa. They often have little formal training, no books or recourses, and yet they have built the Church to what it is today. But I have noticed many issues which they need to think and pray about.

1. Leadership not dictatorship

Many Pastors have a wrong biblical model for their ministries. We may be the leaders, but we do not have the right of a dictator. Some Pastors so dominate their sheep, that the members have no room left for creative thinking, for sharing in the ministry, and for developing their own gifts. Some Pastors seem afraid of letting their members develop ministries. Why? Because these people might go off and start a Church, stealing their sheep. This is foolishness. Our responsibility is to equip the saints the work of Ministry. We are to so enable them that we are virtually redundant. If we adopt this attitude, we will NEVER be redundant. If we allow ministries to develop, then ours too will develop.

2. A team not a one man army.

Our task is to draw others into leadership with us, so that the burden of leadership can be shared, and other men can learn how to lead. How will they learn if we keep all the leadership to ourselves? Perhaps we fear the gifts of others. But Jesus shared his leadership, and so must we. Of course we will make mistakes, but shared leadership always leads to mistakes. What is so wrong with mistakes? They are not negative, just opportunities to learn.

Perhaps we fear that in sharing, others will see our weaknesses. But we all have weaknesses. As others see and share them, they can uphold us, and we can uphold them. Too many Pastors are trapped with the image of perfection. Let me confess to you - I am not perfect. I have weaknesses. I often find it difficult to work with others who want to go slower than me. I want to do things my way, and when I cannot, I sometimes get angry. I sometimes lose my temper, and get angry with those who want to work with me. I can be very quiet, and others sometimes mistake this for sulking. I get things wrong - wrong decisions, wrong messages, wrong behaviour. I hope this releases many from the bondage of perfection. And how do I prevent these negative things destroying me? I share them with those who work with me, so that they can help me when things are not so good.

3. The one man five fold Ministry

Some Pastors are truly amazing. They are Apostle, Prophet, Evangelist, Pastor and Teacher all in one person. They are preacher, counsellor, administrator, and even put out the chairs! They can do all things. Such men are, in my experience, quickly destroyed. They are living in an unreal and non biblical world. Only one man could combine all these gifts - Jesus - and he did so to demonstrate them all to us.

Pastors - know your gifts and know your limitations. Know what you can do, and what others can do better than you. Let the body live and breath. Don't try to be everything. You will only destroy yourself, hinder the body from growing, and build work which will crumble away. I know it is hard to do this in Africa. Everyone wants to speak to the big man! But after meetings, when people come up ask me to pray for them, I always say

“Go and see your Pastor. He will pray for you.” They are astonished at this, and so are the Pastors. But I am definitely not a one man ministry. I know what I can do, what I should do, and what I must leave to others. If I can do this, then so can you. It takes courage to recognise our limitations, and the strengths of others. But if Jesus could do it, then so can we.

4. Can't see the good from the poor.

African Pastors seem to believe that unless every minute is filled with activity, they are failing in their work. So they rush round at high speed, from this meeting to that. This has a fatal consequence. I was ministering in one Church, when the Pastor said “I won't be with you tonight. I have another meeting.” “But Pastor” I replied “you asked me here to speak God's word to your people. If you are not here, what will they think?” “Yes, but I have another meeting.” “OK Pastor” I replied. “So do I.” He looked at me in astonishment. “Yes” I said “I have a meeting with my bed. Tonight while you are somewhere else, I am going to sleep.” “But who will speak” he asked. “I have no idea.” I replied. He got the message and came to the meeting, and so did I. His problem was that in his hectic schedule, he could not spot the important from the trivial. Many Pastors are like him. In this hectic whirlwind of activity, they do not have the time to pray, and to see what is really important from what is unimportant. The consequences of this attitude are fatal. Good seed dies, while Pastors rush off to care for the weeds. And the sheep, taking their lead from their Pastors, do exactly the same.

Pastors - I encourage you with all heart, stop this frantic activity. God is looking for quality, not quantity. Better one thing, prayed over, prepared for and done well than a dozen things done badly.

5. Cannot trust, cannot forgive.

I was once at a meeting with about 50 African Pastors. “Prophet Jim” they asked “how can we be better Pastors?” “Start off by being friends with each other” I replied. I could see from their faces that this was not an idea they wanted to put into practice. Yet if we cannot be friends with each other, how are we going to move from friendship to trusting each other? There is a lack of trust between Pastors. Each Pastor is very jealous for his own flock, and fears that the Pastor with the Church down the road will steal the sheep. But there is a deeper fear, and this is found also in the Western Church. If we start trusting each other, being together, praying and sharing, then other Pastors will see my weaknesses. I don't want anyone else to know my weaknesses, because they might use them against me, so to protect myself, I keep away from other Pastors. Not only is this unbiblical, it denies our basic human need of friendship. Within a good friendship there can be a sharing of weaknesses, which strengthens both friendships.

Close to this lack of trust is a deeper issue - the inability to forgive past wrongs. I remember introducing two Pastors in one country, because I was sure that each could help the other. Here was the opening of the conversation:

Me: “Ah, Pastor Kofi, this is Pastor Kwesi. I think you two Pastors could have much in common.

Kofi: “ Ah yes Pastor Kwesi. I phoned and asked you to come and speak at my meeting, but you never returned my call. I’m really angry about that.”

Kwesi: “What call? I didn’t speak to you. If you expect me to leave my large ministry to speak at your small Church, you could at least have had the decency to put your request in writing.”

Both men stood glaring at each other. Their friendship never grew because they couldn’t forgive each other for an administrative slip up by one or the other. I find this all the time. Past hurts and past mistakes are allowed to destroy good friendships. Why do African Pastors behave like this? Perhaps it is something in the culture that I do not understand. Or perhaps I understand it all too well. It’s a selective theology, which chooses which bits of the Bible will be followed, and which not. Jesus made it clear what he expected in forgiving each other, but many African Pastors have chosen not to remember this. Does it matter? Anything which divides the leadership is a disaster, damaging the body, limiting effective joint action, and giving the enemy more and more room to manoeuvre.

6. Division

The source of division rests in many places, but one in particular brings deep grief to the Spirit. So many Pastors want to be number one, and are not prepared work with others. The servant heart is missing, and everyone wants to be king. Into this polluted soil, the enemy is planting many weeds. Of course it is much easier to be king in our own land, than work with others, accepting the gifts and strengths in others. Yet this was the way of Jesus, and it must be our way. The result of this divisive attitude is that too many Churches are divided, as Pastors leave to form their own Churches. There is nothing wrong with planting Churches. Let’s have ten million of them! But they cannot be brought to birth in division, in one man, unable to accept discipline, leaves in anger to begin his own work. Bringing Churches to birth in this way leads ultimately to more division, and a weak body. The purity of the birth of a Church is so important. If there are cracks in the foundation at the beginning, ultimately these cracks will bring the building down.

7. The Holy Spirit is not enough!

Is this heresy? Have I lost my biblical foundations? No - I am completely dependent on the work of the Holy Spirit in my life, but I do not insult the Spirit, or presume on His goodness. To His dwelling I add discipline, prayer and study. Many Pastors do not so this. They tell me “I am waiting on the Spirit. He will do His work.” They use this as an excuse not to pray, not to get the training they need, not to prepare their word, not to be disciplined. Yet the Bible tells us that the good soldier is one who does train and discipline himself, so that he can endure the battle. Often the cry “The Holy Spirit will do it” is used as a mask to hide the lack of discipline and study which is needed for every soldier, and especially for every leader of God’s people.

This “Holy Spirit will do it” attitude leads to the formation of many ministries which quickly disappear. I was preaching on one land, where I challenged the people to hear God's call to service. I said “If you think God is calling you to serve, first you must pray for one month, then see your Pastor, then get the training you need, and then begin.” The next day a woman came to me and said “I have prayed all night, and I believe God is calling me to work with children.” “Sister” I replied “I said pray one month, then see your Pastor, then get your training.” “I know” she said “but the Holy Spirit is guiding me!” I am certain that she never started any work with children, and if she did, it soon floundered. Ministries which are born without prayer and training quickly fall to the ground. But African Christians respond so quickly to God's call that they don't stop to pray, to seek advice, and to get trained and properly equipped. I am convinced that the Holy Spirit does not bring visions to birth so that they can die. But in Africa they do die, because the people of God have this “The Holy Spirit can do it so I don't need to seek advice and training” attitude.

8. Lack of strategy.

I was in one Church, and the Pastor announced the aim of the Church. “We are going to convert the world!” Everybody cheered. “Very good” I replied, “but how are you going to convert the streets around the building?” Silence!

This is very common in the African Church. The great mission statements are cheered, but when it comes to putting them into practice in the local area, there is very little thinking or strategy. Yet very little is achieved in the world without planning and strategy. Every Pastor must consider exactly what God wants of his Church, and then evaluate that task in the light of the resources he has, and the leadership at his disposal, either currently, or in the future. He must not underestimate the power of God, but he must not over extend his people, or push them into unrealistic goals. This only generates despair and defeatism.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

I have written all these things because I want to encourage God's people in Africa. I really do believe that a great blessing is in store for Africa, and through Africa for the world. To find and receive this, we must be prepared to put things right.

What must the leadership of Africa do? We must look to Jesus, who said “If any man wants to follow me, he must deny himself, take up the cross and follow me.” Let us look at what this means for us as leaders and God's people in Africa.

1. The wrong heart.

The Bible tells this story:-

“Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a Tax Collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: “God thank you that I am not like other men- robbers, evil doers, adulterers – or even like this Tax Collector. I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.” But the Tax Collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said “God have mercy on me a sinner.” (Luke 18:10 –13)

The Pharisee had suffered a great robbery, although he did not know it. He thought that his heart was in good condition, and that all was well before God. But for all his study of the Bible, he had overlooked one key verse - “The human heart is deceitful.” (Jeremiah 17:9) He had been deceived, and had suffered a great robbery. What was this robbery? What had been stolen? He had lost his servant heart. This was not the heart which God intended for him, but foolishly he had not guarded this most precious possession. So the enemy, a thief and a liar (John 10:10) had come quietly to him, and had whispered “Brother, how good your heart is. Look at all the good works you have done. You should proclaim these.” And this foolish man had done just that. The Bible says that God does not like pride (Luke 1:51) but this Pharisee had listened to the whispers.

But he had suffered an even greater robbery than he knew. For not only did he exalt his good works, but he measured himself against the lives of others, and despised them. The enemy had whispered again “Look over there. Look at that filthy thing grovelling in God’s house. He shouldn’t even be here. What is he compared to you!” The Pharisee agreed, and proved too all the world that he had been robbed, and was now a prisoner of another power. Satan has a plan. It is to rob you and me of the heart God intended for us, and make us take on a heart fashioned by him. What are the marks of a heart fashioned in the image of the enemy? They are pride; selfishness; greed; arrogance; demanding ones rights; no compassion; confident in self.

Why does Satan do this?

First, he wants to prevent God’s people having the heart which God wants for them. If he can achieve this, then he can distort and spoil God’s plans in his people. For God cannot work with people who have the heart of the enemy. Some have said to me “But Jim, how can this be possible? After all, I have surrendered my heart to Jesus.” But this is childish thinking. It is just because we have surrendered to Jesus that Satan wants to pollute our hearts. Our committed heart doubles his attack on us. We have to guard the heart of Jesus in us, or else the thief will steal it from us.

Second, he wants to prevent us being disciples. One of Satan’s great tricks is to bar the way to discipleship to us. Jesus says “If any man wants to come after me..” But there is more to “coming after” than just following. We have to move from followers to disciples. This involves the surrender of our heart to Jesus, the maintenance of the purity of that heart, and the willingness to suffer and sacrifice. Jesus is looking for disciples. The polluted heart is one of the great barriers to discipleship service. Satan fears disciples. He knows that disciples are tough warriors, hard fighters, do not give up easily, and believe

in the victory of Jesus. So naturally, he tries to prevent us entering through the door of discipleship. One of his ways - steal our disciple heart.

Third, he wants to hurt God, and rule us. In Revelation 13, Satan lays out his plan for conquest. (See the book in this series "Fallen is Babylon.") Part of that plan is to harm God's plans and to hurt God. One of the ways of doing this is to pollute the human heart.

The wrong heart is the proud and selfish human heart which we had before we came to Jesus, and which can so easily stay with us as we serve Jesus. It destroys good work, and leads the people of God far away from the path Jesus intended. As a consequence, we may achieve some works for Jesus, but never the great works - the salvation of Africa, the rescue of the world - which God intends for us. Many of God's people in Africa have lost a great treasure, and have substituted pure gold for rubbish, without knowing it. This I believe is the greatest fault in the African Church and the greatest hindrance to fulfilling the purposes of God.

2. Jesus reveals the treasure.

"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, take up his cross and follow me."
(Mark 8:34)

Jesus makes it quite plain what sort of heart we must have in order to follow him:-

"deny"

There can only be one king on a throne at any one time. Two kings cannot occupy one throne - it just doesn't work that way. King Jesus wants to sit on our throne, and we agreed to that, when we accepted our salvation. But unfortunately there is another king - King Self - and he wants to rule as well. We are very self centred people, and we do, by nature, want our own way. So we think like this:-

"King Jesus AND King Self can both sit on the throne of my life. There is no problem there. The two kings can rule together!" But it doesn't work like this. The Bible says "You shall have no other gods but me." (Exodus 20:3) King Jesus wants and has the right to reign alone. So we say "I acknowledge King Jesus." But at the same time, we never really demote self to the position of servant. Secretly we are still thinking that the two Kings can reign together. This cannot work. As Elijah said "If the Lord is God, follow him, but if Baal is god, follow him." (1 Kings 17:21)

Jesus is jealous for his position as ruler of your life. He paid a very high price to have this right, and he has the right to it. Those who cannot accept this have had their hearts stolen by Satan. Just in case you are tempted to think that this is unfair, read these words:- "Jesus humbled himself." (Philippians 2:8) Jesus accepted the position of servant, and in that position he was able to fulfil his Father's will. Do you want to fulfil the Father's will, for yourself and for Africa? Then you must deny your own self, and let Jesus reign in your heart. It looks easy to read, but it is hard to do. It's not easy to deny yourself

position, glory, personal satisfaction or promotion above others. It's not easy to put others first, to serve others, to take the humble path. But this is the only way to have the heart of Jesus. It's not forced on you. It is your decision.

“Take up”

The heart which Satan has tried to give us not only wants to sit on the throne, it wants to sit in comfort and ease. Yet the heart which Jesus offers us is one of struggle, of walking in his footsteps, of taking up the pain and cost of following him. We are to take up the cross, with all its joy and with all its suffering. Those who do this need have no doubt about what will happen. See John 17:13, where Jesus warns us that the world will hate us.

“Follow”

Then we have to walk behind him, to whatever destination he chooses. Our selfish heart will want to tell him where to take us. Our servant heart will accept that He knows best, and that he will lead us safely, however hard the way may seem to us. In the end, let us remember this – it is us who have to walk his way, not him walking ours.

This is the heart of Jesus – the servant heart – which is our priceless treasure. As we take on this heart, so we are able to follow Him, to serve Him, and to be with him. What more can we ask? This heart, deeply embedded in the people of God will destroy all falsehood, and lead us in the right pathways, whatever mistakes we make on the way. This heart leads to Calvary, and to Easter day, and the glorious victory of Jesus. This is the heart which must be in the people and especially in the leaders of God's people.

I challenge you to look at your heart. Is it the precious servant heart of Jesus? I challenge you to look at all the faults I have described. If the servant heart had been at the heart of God's people, would we still be facing them? I challenge you to feel the heart of God for Africa, and to see what plans he has for us, if only we can find the treasure the servant heart. I challenge you to come again to the cross of Jesus, and to seek the servant heart.

A way ahead

If, as you have read this, you feel that you want to seek the servant heart, here are some suggestions for you to think and over.

1. Read Philippians 2: 1-11. Think especially about these verses in that passage: “Jesus, being in nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing..”
2. Read and think about Mark chapter 15. This is the account of the death of Jesus. This was Jesus, suffering, being obedient, serving, that we might know what he wants of us.

3. Think about repentance. King David has laid out the path of repentance quite clearly in Psalm 51. Consider these steps:-

Step 1: “Against you, you only have I sinned” (v4)

Spend some time thinking about this truth. The lost son, (Luke15:11-32) had to come to the same point: “Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.”

Step 2. “Wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow” (v 7)

Once we know our sin, we need the cleansing of God, which comes through the blood of Jesus - “The blood of Jesus purifies us from all sin” (John I :7) This is also the step that many want to avoid, or make easy. To know the true nature of our sin is a painful and even frightening experience, but without it, we can never know true repentance.

Step 3: “You desire truth in the inner parts.” (v6)

As we are praying and thinking about these things, the enemy will do all he can to spoil our repentance. He knows he must, because this is such a powerful and life giving moment for us. (See I Samuel 7:7) These are the things he will say to us:-

Your repentance won't change anything.
You're making a fool of yourself by doing this.
Your Nation/Church has gone too far from God.
You don't have the power to change anything.
You've done this before, and it didn't work then.

God's reply:-

“The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit.
A broken and contrite heart God you will
not despise.” (Psalm 51:17)

“Cleanse me with hyssop and I shall be clean;
wash me and I shall be whiter than snow.” (Ps. 51:7)

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and forgives all
unrighteousness.” (1 John 1: 9)

“Therefore if anyone is in Christ, he is a new
creation, the old has gone, the new has come.”
(2 Corinthians I:17)

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened,
and I will give you rest.” (Matthew 12:28)

Step 4. “Create in me a pure heart” (v10)

What areas of our lives will God need to touch with His repenting spirit as He creates a new heart? Repentance is not a quick prayer, and then carry on as before. Repentance has to lead to a completely new way of living. This is where repentance begins to move.

4. Begin again, with a new attitude. keep these words in your mind:-

I am not worthy to serve God.

I will be honoured to serve him in any way.

I can only do this if he upholds me.

If God works through me, it is a miracle, and only he could do it.

All that God does through me is for his glory, and a sign of his goodness towards me.

Final thought.

It is easy to be angry and frustrated when we read material like this. It is easy to say “That’s wrong. That’s not us.” But if we really love Africa, then instead of being moved to anger, we will be moved to prayer. In this prayer, God will reveal whether these things come from him or not.

How we react to these words will determine how much we love Africa, and how much we want Africa to be blessed so the world can be blessed.