

A CHURCH TO ADMIRE

(What can we learn from the Persecuted Church?)

We live in an age when every church is interested in growth. Instead of turning to the Scriptures, however, we will travel across the country to learn from a church that has been experiencing enormous growth.

The Bible has always challenged us to follow the example of the New Testament church. Ironically, the churches that fit the closest description are the churches in countries suffering religious persecution.

For example, consider the church in China. Most of their clergy are not professionals but are lay people who feel called by God to do ministry.

- They have no elaborate meeting places, but wherever they meet, they experience the presence of the Lord.
- For them, being a Christian means to be willing to suffer for their faith. For many of us, it is the benefits we seek in following Christ.
- They have no denominational headquarters or a statement of faith as a basis of gathering, but they have only a desire to worship and follow Jesus.
- Being known as a pastor is not for human exultation; rather pastoral service brings a higher risk for more government condemnation and imprisonment.

A Costly Faith

Living under these circumstances makes Jesus real to believers. His presence and protection is what they constantly experience. The book, *The Heavenly Man*, is like reading the book of Acts in today's setting.

While many of us often struggle with the spirit of materialism, those in China have few possessions and their faith is their greatest treasure.

For them, being a believer is having experienced the loss of fear of men by having been transformed by the Spirit of God.

Have we ever realized that by praying for church restoration or for spiritual renewal that religious persecution might be the answer?

Why is it that we are so afraid of persecution and insist that there will be no tribulation for the church but an early rapture? If persecution is what will prepare the church for her Lord's return, should we not be willing to be open to this and seek to be inwardly prepared?

A Need for Repentance?

Let's face it. Many of us have two masters. We have made a hireling system out of ministry. We have been storing up riches on earth. We have turned our back upon the ministry for all believers, the making of disciples, and seeking first the kingdom of God.

Why is it that we do not dare to list these sins, confess them, and seek to come before the Lord in a sincere admission of guilt and repentance?

Trust and Obey

Jesus asks of us, whether as individuals or as churches, that we be obedient to His Word. While living in the age of grace, I believe that it is God, in His love and patience, who offers us a voluntary—if not a compulsory—method of bringing us to repentance.

Jesus is coming for a purified church, and this may cause a testing that we have not experienced before. It is His desire to wash us from a commercialized religion and the sins that so easily beset us.

The basic requirement Jesus has for His followers is obedience, and this requirement includes a church of which Jesus, and Jesus only, is the Founder and Controller; a church that is a supernatural organism where miracles are a norm; a church that has the Presence of Christ and is made of Christ followers, not of spectators meeting under Jesus' Name.

All Things Possible with God

Is such a church possible? If so, in other parts of the world, why not here? Are we waiting for God to push us to that point or will we freely seek to move in that direction?

The church in China, as well as in other parts of the world, is a proof that Christianity can flourish without being an organized religion.

Jesus is most eager to be once again the Head as well as the Builder of each church (Matthew 16:18). His desire is to be in our midst when we meet in His Name (Matthew 18:20). He warned us against religious hierarchy (Matthew 23:9-11) and against making a business out of His church (II Corinthians 2:17; John 2:16).

The Church God Desires

Jesus wants to equip every church leader with spiritual giftedness to be pastors, healers, teachers, evangelists, prophets, and to bless them with many other functions. Today, most churches have only pastors, but Jesus never meant it to be that way (Romans 12; I Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4).

The church that Jesus intends for us as believers to form is to be a supernatural formation, not one built by an earthly design, but by God's design. Jesus desires a church that will strengthen us to stand up against worldly conformity or tribulation because she is made up of transformed people. Such a church is still available to us if only we will come together in Jesus' way!

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