

## **What Is The Missing Link In Cityreaching?**

“If you do these things, your salvation will come like the dawn. Yes, your healing will come quickly. Your godliness will lead you forward, and the glory of the Lord will protect you from behind. Then when you call, the Lord will answer. ‘Yes, I am here,’ he will quickly reply.” Isaiah 58:8-9a  
NLT

In the title of this article, I did not ask if there was a missing link in cityreaching. My question is: “What is it?” We cannot ignore the fact that something is missing!

We have been involved in 30 years of city and statewide prayer ministry! In 1976 we were gathered on the steps of our State Capitol to pray, worship and preach. Our hopes and expectations, along with those of many others in our city, have been ascending to God. The Golden Bowls of the Book of the Revelation (5:8; 8:5) are being filled with the smokey fragrance of the incense of the prayers of God’s faithful ones. There have been many victories, but we are not seeing our city get any better! There is a war yet to be won.

Other leaders on a national scope are also coming to grips with this reality. What we have been doing is not working. It is not accomplishing the desired results. We cannot keep doing what we have been doing and expect different results.

We don’t want to try to conjure God, but what is it that attracts God’s attention—what does He notice? He says He will seek out - He is looking for - those who will worship Him in spirit and in truth. What is this true worship? What will cause the bowls to be finally tipped over and poured out upon our city—the answers to our prayers? Are we just to make more noise—or are we to do something different? Do we continue to pray more -

yes!? But does our praying need to take on more of His nature? He is not only holy, He is also whole. He is not only righteous, He is also just. Is there something else therefore that needs to be added? Is the smoke of the incense too light to tip the bowls? Must there be something weightier added to the balance's bowl that will finally cause it to be tipped toward sustainable transformation? "Woe to you . . . For you . . . have neglected the weightier provisions . . . : justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others." Matthew 23:23

Isaiah tells us plainly that there are things we must do! "...the kind of fasting I want calls you to free those who are wrongly imprisoned and to stop oppressing those who work for you. Treat them fairly and give them what they earn. I want you to share your food with the hungry and to welcome poor wanderers into your homes. Give clothes to those who need them, and do not hide from relatives who need your help." Isaiah 58:6-7  
NLT

The Lord through Isaiah calls His people to give heed to the injustice that surrounds them. It exists when an individual or group profits at the expense of another. "A false balance is an abomination to the Lord, But a just weight is His delight." Proverbs 11:11 Injustice gives our enemy a cause to continue fighting. If we will remove the burden, we will deprive him of his ammunition - his ability to continue to wage war. "If you remove the yoke (of injustice) from your midst . . ." Isaiah 58:9 NASB "Stop oppressing the helpless . . ." NLT.

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<sup>1</sup>Job says of himself: "Let God judge me on the scales of justice, for he knows my integrity." Job 36:1

The pursuit of righteousness alone can result in a smug self-satisfaction which is deadly. It is the exact opposite of humility. How many of our prayer events focus solely on becoming more righteousness without even a nod toward justice? They are often fueled more by human determination than by the Spirit of God. This is what Isaiah was prophesying against—a spirit of religion that was of no value against fleshly indulgence.

“Yet they seek Me day by day and delight to know My ways, As a nation that has done righteousness and has not forsaken the ordinance of their God. They ask Me for just decisions, They delight in the nearness of God.” Isaiah 58:2 NASB What is wrong with this? The Lord says that they expected Him to give just decisions while the Scriptures are abundantly clear that it is our responsibility to do justice! Righteousness is imparted—justice is imputed! Righteousness denotes our relationship with God—while justice is the benchmark of our relationship with our fellow man. Yet the two are inseparable! Together they are the foundational pillars of His throne—His divine authority (Psalms 89:14; 97:2).

The doing of justice must be added to the righteous prayers before the balance is tipped toward transformation. This is what the Father is looking for. This is what will attract His attention!

I believe the decision of the Council at Jerusalem (Acts 15) was the pivotal moment in the life of the early church. Their decision to do justice and righteousness thrust the Church onto the world stage and prevented it from becoming just another isolated enclave within Jewish society. (I have written more on this elsewhere.) It would seem that today the church has slipped back into this morass and has become an isolated enclave within society as a whole. We are maintaining our existence as a subculture rather than as the advancing counterculture we have been commissioned and equipped to be.

This decision by the Council at Jerusalem was precipitated when God's attention was attracted by a God-fearing Gentile and He sent His angelic messenger to the House of Cornelius. "And fixing his gaze on him and being much alarmed, he said, 'What is it, Lord?' And he said to him, 'Your prayers and alms have ascended as a memorial before God.'" Acts 10:4 NASB (The purpose of alms is to correct injustice.) And from another translation: "Cornelius stared at him in terror. 'What is it, sir?' he asked the angel. And the angel replied, 'Your prayers and gifts to the poor have not gone unnoticed by God!'" Acts 10:4 NLT

The Lord took notice of Cornelius the Centurion because he was a God-fearer and his prayers (righteous acts) and alms (doing of justice) ascended to heaven as a lasting memorial—that is, their efficacy is enduring and continual. We have done many things on a citywide basis that have emphasized the principle of righteousness, but we have not yet done anything on a citywide basis to rectify injustice. We believe that this is the missing ingredient which will cause those Golden Bowls filled with the hopes, dreams, visions and petitions of His saints in this city to be finally poured out as citywide transformation!

The doing of justice on a citywide basis - calling all of the resources of the church in the city together - is cityreaching's missing link!<sup>2</sup> I am not talking here of isolated events which may be nothing more than guilt assuagement, but a systematic ongoing process that gathers momentum as it rolls along. "Take away from Me the noise of your songs; I will not even listen to the sound of your harps. But let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." Amos 5:23-24 NASB

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<sup>2</sup>Spiritual mapping is part of this process - not just so we can pray more, but so we can act wisely!

“Away with your hymns of praise! They are only noise to my ears. I will not listen to your music, no matter how lovely it is. Instead, I want to see a mighty flood of justice, a river of righteous living that will never run dry.”  
NLT

We have many wonderful justice ministries in our city. One dates to 1911 and another is celebrating its 80th birthday—others have just come on the scene within the past few years. All are doing a great work, but there is no whole-church citywide coordination. As a result, the resources with which our Lord has blessed our community are not being as effectively administered as they could be. God will release further resources - tip the balance - when He sees that they will be wisely stewarded.

Where is injustice the most glaring? What must we do to confront it in wholeness? What are the trust levels that must be attained—the friendships that must be cultured? Our journey in cityreaching is to discover the answers to these questions.

In the process of writing this I visited a meeting called by some of our local African-American pastors—my friends. As a community they are seeking to address unrighteousness and correct injustice. This is especially true where the disintegration of the family is concerned. What is happening within the African-American Community is not atypical to society as a whole. It, unfortunately, is leading the way. This is where it must be stopped!

Driving home in a dark, cold rain two disturbing observations clouded my mind. 1) How can an institution that is capable of commanding such a vast array of resources be so totally unable to check this alarming slide? 2) “We are fiddling while Rome is burning!”

There has been some concern expressed that our African-American brothers are trying to go it alone. My response has been, “Why should they expect otherwise?” Historically the majority community church which represents a society that has reaped benefit from harsh injustice has been strangely silent. Restitution is a component of justice and without it the process will be incomplete. Once again, we may find ourselves only bandaging the wound while the bitter bullet remains inside continuing to fester its deadly poison.

I implore you, my dear friends of the African-American Community, will you dare to trust the majority community just one more time? You have been tragically disappointed again and again, but one more time I plead. May we march forward joined together hand in hand and heart to heart fighting together for the faith—the whole church taking the whole Gospel to the whole community!

We believe the John 17:21-23 prayer is a Mandate, not an option. God cannot, and indeed will not bless, in a substantive manner, anything which is other than in absolute harmony with this entreaty of the Son to the Father—prayed on our behalf. Jealousy, strife, discord, et al must be addressed first/simultaneously inside the minority and majority communities as these communities come together to identify the causes and consequences of past injustices and unite as one to end injustice in the Church and the city of the future.

If any segment of the Church attempts to address injustice on its own, when there are others in the Body that want to engage with them but are either intentionally left out or not given the instruction they want and seek (albeit very belatedly) to be able to also be agents of change, God cannot bless the effort supernaturally, which ultimately is our only hope. Working in a segregated manner may indeed produce an isolated 'effect', much like the Good Samaritan did . . . real, tangible, but having no significant impact

on reducing the continuing magnitude of other kinds of future injustices. If, however, our intent is to 'affect' and continue to change the culture on an ongoing basis, as 'The True Fast' of Isaiah 58 cries resoundingly for, it is going to take the supernatural enabling of the Lord. That is just what Isaiah 58 promises and we so desperately need!

So what will be our operating system for such a process? I suggest 'DOS' or even 'Windows Vista' is insufficient to encompass all the complicated operating dynamics of any new (as in new to us, but not new to God) process. May I suggest we install the original version of 'Philippians 2: 1-16' per the manufacturers original design and intent. Also, because of the contaminated carnality of all variations of the human animal (challenges with pride, power, ownership, who is in charge, etc.), we also make sure that an ongoing active anti-virus scan as per '1 Corinthians 13: 1-8', be made operative.

As we look at the desperate brokenness, pain, and vice in our city and state, if we keep doing what we have always done the way we have always done it, we will get what we have always got. If we want to see our Lord do what only he can do to bring His healing, we have got to do our part HIS WAY!

Where do we go from here? "Is there not a cause?" 1 Samuel 17:29b These words were uttered in frustration by the young David, the emerging leader of the people of God. Today, we are being opposed by the uncircumcised Philistine, the giant, who is taunting the army of God. And the army is cowering in fear and confusion.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>The elder brother would rather see the army defeated than to see his younger brother succeed. See also Meade and Grant at Cold Harbor, Virginia - June 3, 1864: General Grant was new to command of all of the Union Armies as well as to the war in the East. General Meade who was the victor at Gettysburg was jealous and as a result

I believe that this giant represents the gentile spirit of which Jesus spoke: “You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. It is not this way among you . . .” Matthew 20:25b-26a Our Lord in the Book of the Revelation warns the Churches against the teaching of the Nicolaitans—the etymology of this word is “those who lord it over (oppress) the people.” The Lord was warning His Church not to be influenced by the ways of the world—instead of being overcomers, they were in danger of being overcome. (If we don’t lift oppression, we will become oppressed ourselves.)

Each day the Israelite army would sally forth with much bravado shouting forth their battle cries, but when Goliath appeared to challenge them they cringed in fear and turned their back on the battle running to the false security of their flimsy encampment. Even the great reward promised by the king was not enough motivation to keep them on the battlefield. (Think about that for a moment?) They never once actually engaged the enemy! It was all a shadow with no substance.

After rejecting the armor of Saul - who having rejected the Godly counsel of Samuel became in effect a Gentile - David chose five smooth stones with which he would face the giant who was defiling the army of Israel. These stones represent the completeness and sufficiency of all that God has provided for the equipping and the victory of the Church in the City (Ephesians 4:11-13). With that adequacy, David ran toward the battle!

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failed to adequately prepare for the battle at Cold Harbor. The result was a loss of cohesion between the various units of the Union Army allowing the Confederate Army of Northern Virginia under General Lee to inflict a terrible bloodletting in a very short space of time and to prolong the war into 1865 with many more lives being lost.

F.B. Meyer writes, “If our faith can but make Him a passage, along which He shall come, there is no Goliath He will not quell; no question He will not answer; no need He will not meet.” This is the question with which we are faced, “Are we creating a passage along which He shall come to our communities, or we are only erecting further hindrances?”

As a ministry we return<sup>4</sup> to our original prophetic commissioning: Surely thou shall put on the armor and not the armor of Saul, but thou shall take the five smooth stones and go forth to destroy this uncircumcised philistine that has held the army and the saints of the Most High in bondage and in fear and in service. November 26, 1983

This battle requires the Whole Church to demonstrate the Whole Gospel to the Whole Community!

Psalm 99:4 “Mighty king, lover of justice, you have established fairness. You have acted with justice and righteousness throughout Israel. Exalt the Lord our God! Bow low before his feet, for he is holy!” NLT.

“Yes, Lord, we bow before You! Do what You love in our city is our plea!”

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<sup>4</sup>I am adding these words on November 26, 2006 - exactly twenty three years later!