

13050 Outreach Culture

The morning after my very tentative acceptance of a God I was not sure existed, I was shocked to find myself having compassion for one who everyone else was laughing at. The day before I would have been laughing at her like everybody else. To me, this miracle of love in my heart confirmed that God indeed existed and was at work in my soul. Years later God surrounded me in a group of loving Jesus people who breathed life into my own solitary and withdrawn soul.

Since then compassion, catastrophes, and technical abilities have led me to pursue solutions to the most desperate needs in life itself. The challenge now includes the means to deploy them in ways that will minimize notice or complaint. This could empower destitute people to live in comfortable lifestyles without requiring taxpayer dollars, or the elimination of freedom.

In the Old Testament, ideal conditions of society tells of people enjoying the private ownership of their own vines, fig trees, and cisterns. Later, in the more complex times of greater populations, we continue to see private enterprises, Such as Paul and Aquila as tent makers, and Lydia in the fabric business.

Individuality can only flourish within an environment of empowerment, so we need a little caution: The Bible is to be taken quite literally, but parables and analogies that teach truths have sometimes themselves been replicated as liturgies. But beyond religious structures, secular structures of control are the greatest threat to individuality, and the sharing of the gospel.

In Genesis eleven, mankind did not want to obey God's command to spread throughout the world, so a man named Nimrod proposed a centralized structure to hold them together. Quite appropriately, they chose uniform manmade bricks for their structural material, rather than unique natural stones.

The more totalitarian governments of today assign regulations upon work quotas, housing, travel, and even family size. Much can also be complained about the rampant censorship in avenues of social media, and in major news networks. Such measures remove all incentive for creative work that is not essential to life itself.

There are cases even in America, where we may have to negotiate – or even defy government edicts. I recall a situation in the eighties when federal funding was being used to murder unborn children. I had a good job that was adequate to support my wife and four children. But rather than pay for abortions, I quit and got a lesser job so we could receive earned income credit each year, and take money out of the federal coffers instead of contributing.

Because of the chronic corruption in Israel, Ezekiel saw the Spirit of God departing from the temple, and then from Jerusalem. With God's protection removed, Nebuchadnezzar and his army were free to level Jerusalem and the temple, extracting anything of value. Even the ark of the covenant would never be seen again. With the destruction of the temple and the second wave of exiles being hauled off to Babylon, spiritual guidance would no longer be provided through Israel.

But the Spirit of God does not go away; it continually sifts through humanity to anoint those who yearn for God's righteousness and purpose in their lives.

Among the spoils of Jerusalem were intelligent young men who could be trained to serve the king as administrators and advisors. But some of the captured slaves had already pledged in their hearts to

serve the God of Abraham. Could there have been less likely heroes than neutered teenage slave boys from a culture that had been obliterated by conquest?

This was a pivotal point in history, in which God would ordain a series of global empires to reduce international conflicts, as the population density continued to rise. For instance: Even while under the heel of Rome, historians call the era “Pax Romana,” because of the global peace afforded by the central government.

During the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, the kingdom of God would begin to separate from the main mountain of global government. It is described there as a stone cut without hands, and it would become a mountain that would eventually replace human control over the earth. The first conflict came when a teenage slave and his friends objected to defiling themselves with the king’s delicacies. But they were soon granted this departure from the Babylonian culture. Since then, the kingdom of God has continued to grow as a separate entity within the world

In the second chapter of Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar is given a prophetic dream in which he is seen as the first of a series of five global empires that would serve humanity until the close of the age. When God empowered Daniel to interpret the dream, the king bowed before his slave and acknowledged the growing kingdom of God. Another phase of growth was recognized in the next chapter when three of Daniel’s friends conscientiously defied the Emperor, and yet received protection from God.

With the birth of the Church, the knowledge of salvation through Jesus spread throughout the world. This eternal gospel had been received in centuries past through the symbology of animal sacrifices, but was then freed from this tradition by the sacrifice of Jesus Himself. This gospel now became available to anybody who was willing to repent of their sins, and embrace salvation through Jesus.

This repenting clause results in a different attitude toward past behavior, and is an alteration in the mores of one’s previous culture. This salvation creates a new identity and outlook on life. It is loving and accepting, forgiving and reconciling, helping and giving, moral and wholesome. It puts us on a different track and purpose in life than those who remain in the cultures of the world around us.

The New Testament refers to this kingdom of God with phrases such as “We are in the world but not of it...” During the mock trial of Jesus, he declared: “My kingdom is not of this world.”

While having adventures in Guatemala as a young man, I felt it important to visit the embassy with regards to my military status. American laws and culture ruled within this small enclave of embassy grounds, and the laws of Guatemala no longer applied. As believers, we are called to be at peace with the surrounding world as much as possible. But ultimately we serve God’s kingdom rather than the world in which it grows.

So while we live our lives as believers in a hostile world, we need to be alert to the threats and opportunities in the world around us. Wisely lived, we should minimize dependencies and entanglements by which we could be controlled. This would optimize resources and opportunities to minister to others.

On the day of Pentecost, the church exploded into evangelism and benevolence. As thousands of pilgrims from all over the world became believers, converts among the native Jews began inviting the pilgrims into their homes. The joy of fellowship and sharing was contagious. Besides the miracles of love and conversions, other miraculous signs and wonder were a daily occurrence.

As the pilgrims returned to their respective native lands, they carried the gospel and the warmth of Christian love with them throughout the world. A little later, when persecution scattered the believers in Jerusalem across the planet, their former guests were available to provide refuge and assimilation to their previous hosts.

Today we have opportunity to extend Christian hospitality and culture to the destitute among us. Even as the generosity of the of the believers in Jerusalem returned to them when they were scattered by persecution, providing low cost living solutions to the poor will help us to adapt as the economy and order of our society continues to decline. Involvement in providing alternative means of meeting the necessities of life for others, will refine our own abilities to provide when the needs strike us. In living our faith to the greatest level possible then, we should optimize the efficiency, economy, and local sustainability of our own lives so that we can better serve others.

Early in our marriage my wife and I hung out with a communal household of Jesus people. They survived on various construction related and handy man contracts. They witnessed constantly, and held regular fellowship meetings in their home and in nearby parks.

There was also a period when my wife and I fellowshipped with an order of the Anglican church called The Mustard Tree. They had communal buildings and gardens, and likewise received income through various cottage industries.

These types of operations could begin to navigate between homelessness and mainstream society. They could also enhance the options and survivability of us all, in the midst of increasing economic and political turmoil.

In a world of increasing persecution and chaos, local food production and other technologies can empower individuals and households to reduce control by political and financial entities. These will better postured us to serve others and provide light under darkening clouds. The church was never intended to be a corporation, but rather a living breathing household of God.