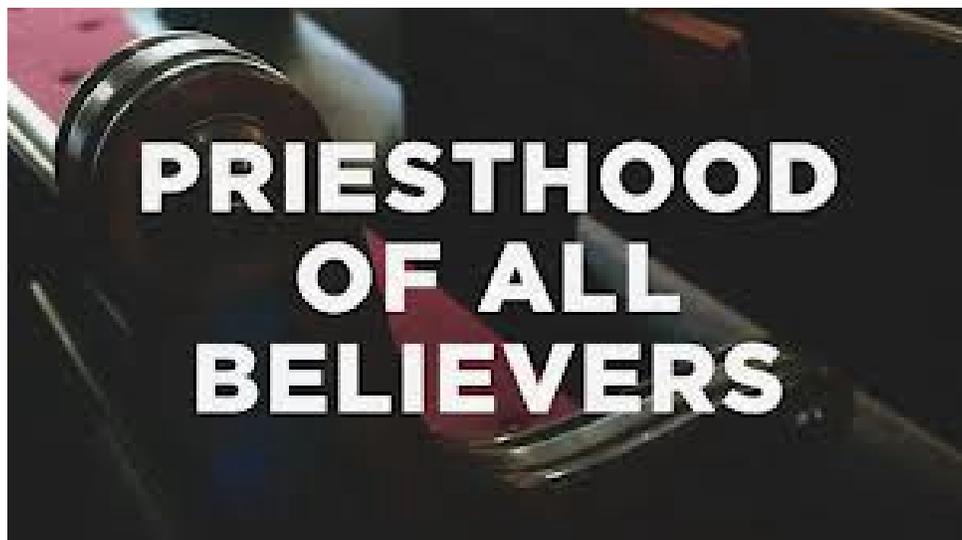




Walking **With Jesus** Ministries

TRANSITION FROM 'THE CHURCH' TO 'THE KINGDOM'



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INTRODUCTION

The more I grow in Jesus, the more I study history, and the more revelation the Lord gives me, the more I see differences between where we are as 'the church' and where we should be as integral members of 'the kingdom' of God.

Surely the two are the same? Yes, they are meant to be. But the reality is that they are not. For over the 2000 odd years since Jesus, the church has become an 'institution', with a life of its own, rather than being an 'instrument' to build God's kingdom.

Please don't get me wrong! The church does many good things. It has spread the Good News of Jesus around most of the earth. It is the leading supplier of social services worldwide. It has influenced society and history over the last 2000 years more than any other institution. One third of the world's population is Christian, or nominally so. Considerable milestones have been achieved.

Yet, is the church today truly ushering in the kingdom of God? Do we really mean, or believe it, when we pray.....

10 your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:10)

Sadly, the reality is, in much of the church, God's kingdom has become man's kingdom, where the protection and promotion of the individual church, denomination or grouping, has become more important in men's minds than building the kingdom of God. We have moved from a single church kingdom in the 1st century to over 30,000 church kingdoms now!

From the death of the Apostle John round AD100, we saw the gradual erosion of the Apostolic foundations of the church. With the conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine, the church became a human based institution furthering

the ends of the state, or the clergy, or both. The Reformation brought some of the foundational truths back into the church which has been built upon over the centuries since. However churches, whether of traditional, evangelical, charismatic or pentecostal hues have created further division, instead of unity, within the body of Christ.

'Why is this?' and 'What are we to do about it?' are at the heart of what we will look at here.

TESTIMONY

When the Lord started speaking to me about the church, approaching 20 years ago now, people were generally not interested in what He was saying to me. It was like hitting your head against a brick wall!

But over the past 10 years there has been a lot more interest and understanding of what the Lord is saying and requiring of us, His people, in these end days. All round the world He is giving a similar kingdom or apostolic message and vision to individuals and groups of people.

None has it all, or gets it all right, for there is a huge change in mindset required for the messengers as well as the people. Yes, we are nearly all imbued in church ways! As well, all are human, able to make mistakes in hearing from God, adding in bits from our own minds and experience. No-one is perfect, least of all, me!

But, in spite of this, there is gradually arising a body of people who are becoming increasingly sold out to Jesus, ones whose desire it is to put His kingdom ahead of their own, both as individuals and as a church, those whose whole desire is to be in the bride for whom Jesus is returning.....

7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has

*come, and his bride has made herself ready. 8 Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)
(Revelation 19:7-8)*

Come Jesus, come.

FROM "HEAD KNOWLEDGE" TO "HEART RELATIONSHIP"

Who has had the most influence on you in your walk with Jesus?

Is it the knowledgeable or the godly?

With me, I can say, without hesitation, the godly! How about you?

I have sat under anointed teachers with amazing spiritual gifts. They have taught me heaps, and I am most grateful for that. I have spoken at numbers of theological colleges and mixed with more than my share of learned Christian scholars.

Yet, it is not these who have had the greatest influence on my life. It is godly men and women from whom the Holy Spirit shines, about whom I could say.....

14 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. (Matthew 5:14)

Mainly they are very ordinary people, generally not in church leadership, although a few are. They know their Saviour and have made Him Lord of their lives. They can speak about Jesus in a personal way, for they know Him so well. They radiate the Holy Spirit. As you look at each one you immediately see something different in them. They are truly children of the kingdom. Who influence others by example, not simply through words.

The story of Mary and Martha illustrates this beautifully.....

At the Home of Martha and Mary `

38 As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman

named Martha opened her home to him. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. 40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" 41 "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:38-42)

Most churches are run by Marthas. That is what makes the church system function. For there is never any shortages of jobs needing to be done round a church! And Martha types get the work done!

Yet Jesus said there was a better way. A way, I would suggest, that is the way of the kingdom. For the kingdom is built upon relationship, relationship with Jesus and with each other, the way of love. As Jesus said.....

The Greatest Commandment

34 Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. 35 One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 36 "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" 37 Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:34-40)

The church builds and perpetuates the church. So ultimately, it is these 'sold out' disciples to whom Jesus is looking to build the kingdom. Ones of whom it can truly be said.....

20 Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, 21 nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within

you.” (Luke 17:20-21)

The kingdom is not a matter of getting things done, but of living a life that reflects the Jesus in you.

8 For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light 9 (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) 10 and find out what pleases the Lord. (Ephesians 4:8-10)

May we become those kingdom people out of whom the light of Jesus shines.

Amen.

FROM "COME IN" TO "GO OUT"

What we now call the 'Great Commission', instructs us

The Great Commission

*16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore **go and make disciples** of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:16-20)*

Unfortunately, since the church became institutionalized, meeting in specialized buildings under a human appointed priesthood, particularly from the time of Emperor Constantine (although it had started before that), our mantra has changed from '*go and make disciples*' to '*come in and be believers with us*'. For we have effectively confined the kingdom to within the walls of our church buildings. People are required to come inside, out of the evil world, in order to enjoy the benefits of Jesus.

Throughout history, and particularly so in recent times with the various House Church groupings, there have been movements that have attempted to remedy this inward looking situation. Sadly though, most have effectively become small churches that meet in homes, with the same inward looking mentality that pervades more formal church congregations, but without the financially draining expense of building and maintenance programmes and the need to pay pastors and administrators.

In the formal church, as there is a need to pay the bills, attention naturally focuses on 'the house', and a theology has grown up to justify this inward

looking necessity. "Come in and meet God." Or, "God is in the house." Of course, if there are true believers there, God is there.....

20 For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them."
(Matthew 18:20)

When we look at this statement from a traditional focus, we interpret it as meaning in a church building. "Come in to meet God". This is a commonly promoted church viewpoint. However, it is not what the Scripture says. The Scripture, in context, is talking about resolving problems amongst fellow believers.....

15 "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. 16 But if he will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' (Matthew 18:15-16)

Jesus was talking about the importance of not acting alone in a disputed situation. Yes, there is wisdom and safety in working with others. And Jesus will be with you. It was only the result of the discussions that needed to be told to the 'church'. (more correctly interpreted as 'assembly of believers' that met, as required, to deal with specific issues).....

17 If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector. (Matthew 18:17)

Jesus was applying kingdom principles. We don't know what the problem was, but the 2 or 3 were to go to him on his home ground, and sort out the problem.

Today, we would call him into the church to appear before the elders. Can you see the difference?

The kingdom is about transforming the world. The kingdom is not found in a denomination or building. Jesus emphasizes this when he says, *nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,'* for it is found in individual believers.....

20 Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, 21 nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20-21)

As instructed in the Great Commission, kingdom people take the Good News of Jesus and His kingdom out into the world. For ultimately, all the world is His kingdom.

15 The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever." (Revelation 11:15)

This is not easy, nor comfortable. It is easier to hide behind the walls of a church building, mixing with those who share our views. But that is not building the kingdom. Yes, if we move out we will have troubles and persecutions, but we will also participate in His glorious kingdom.....

3 We ought always to thank God for you, brothers, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the love every one of you has for each other is increasing. 4 Therefore, among God's churches we boast about your perseverance and faith in all the persecutions and trials you are enduring. 5 All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. 6 God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you 7 and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. 8 He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. 9 They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power 10 on the day he comes to be

*glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed.
(2 Thessalonians 1:3-10a)*

Are you, am I, prepared to take the reality of the kingdom out into the world today?

Jesus was not a religious man! Not in the style of the Rabbis of the time, nor of the religious today. While Jesus occasionally spoke in the local synagogue, this was not His primary way of spreading the Good News of the kingdom. His baptism was in a river. His temptation was on a mountain. His first miracle was at a wedding in a home. Mostly, he spoke to the ordinary people in the open air. His miracles took place at these meetings, or when he was walking through town, on a boat, or at someone's house, etc. Feeding the multitudes is but one example.....

Jesus Feeds the Five Thousand

*13 When Jesus heard what had happened, he withdrew by boat privately to a solitary place. Hearing of this, the crowds followed him on foot from the towns. 14 When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick. 15 As evening approached, the disciples came to him and said, "This is a remote place, and it's already getting late. Send the crowds away, so they can go to the villages and buy themselves some food." 16 Jesus replied, "They do not need to go away. You give them something to eat." 17 "We have here only five loaves of bread and two fish," they answered. 18 "Bring them here to me," he said. 19 And he directed the people to sit down on the grass. Taking the five loaves and the two fish and looking up to heaven, he gave thanks and broke the loaves. Then he gave them to the disciples, and the disciples gave them to the people. 20 They all ate and were satisfied, and the disciples picked up twelve basketfuls of broken pieces that were left over. 21 The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.
(Matthew 14:13-21)*

Jesus was totally involved in interacting with people in the world and He taught

His disciples to do the same.

Jesus Sends Out the Twelve

Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village. 7 Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits. 8 These were his instructions: "Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. 9 Wear sandals but not an extra tunic. 10 Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. 11 And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them." 12 They went out and preached that people should repent. 13 They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.

(Mark 6:6b-12)

And confirmed this principle with the seventy-two.....

Jesus Sends Out the Seventy-two

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. 2 He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. 3 Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves.

(Luke 10:1-3)

Paul continued this principle of going out amongst the people. While, as a trained Pharisee, he often first gravitated to the local synagogue, particularly at the beginning of his ministry, so giving the Jews an opportunity to hear the Good News of their countryman Jesus, he inevitably ended up ministering in other places, for he was sent to minister to the gentiles

16 While Paul was waiting for them in Athens, he was greatly distressed to see that the city was full of idols. 17 So he reasoned in the synagogue with the Jews and the God-fearing Greeks, as well as in the marketplace day by day with those who happened to be there. (Acts 17:16-17)

He also spoke in the meeting of the Areopagus.....

22 Paul then stood up in the meeting of the Areopagus and said: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious. 23 For as I walked around and looked carefully at your objects of worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO AN UNKNOWN GOD. Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you. (Acts 17:22-3)

Interestingly, he then said.....

*24 "The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and **does not live in temples built by hands.** (Acts 17:24)*

"Lord, please help us understand"

I am not an evangelist by nature or gifting. But it is my desire to witness through my life and actions to those with whom I interact, that there is something different about me, that there is Jesus in my life. And to be obedient to what the Lord tells me to do. It gives me much satisfaction when others comment on this.

We do not need to fear the world, but to overcome it, to be witnesses in our day to day living, in order to see the kingdom established upon the earth.....

3 For the [true] love of God is this: that we do His commands [keep His ordinances and are mindful of His precepts and teaching]. And these orders of His are not irksome (burdensome, oppressive, or grievous). 4 For whatever is born of God is victorious over the world; and this is the victory that conquers the world, even our faith. 5 Who is it that is victorious over [that conquers] the world but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God [who adheres to, trusts in, and relies on that fact]?
(1 John 5:3-5 Amplified Version)

Are you, am I, prepared to follow the example of Jesus and the disciples today?

FROM "ME" TO "HIM"

What has been the key result of the Industrial and Knowledge Revolutions over the past 500 years on us as individuals?

Is it an increase in comfort levels, provided by a greater abundance of material goods? Well, many of us have a lot more 'things' than did our forebears. Is it more time? Definitely not that! Is it a better world? Well, yes and no.

I would suggest that the greatest result, one that has affected and influenced all the others, is the societal change from the focus on a group, be it a family or nation, to self-centeredness. For today's world is based round 'what is good for me'. Rooted in Greek philosophy, this concept of 'humanism' has developed most rapidly as material goods and knowledge have expanded, until today, most of us live in humanistic societies of one form or another.

Sadly, this unbiblical, humanist perspective has penetrated deep into the culture of the church too. We preach a 'happy chappy' (along with, in Spirit filled churches, a 'happy clappy') gospel. A gospel based on individual happiness and prosperity. This is patently false. If it was true, the whole world would be flocking through our doors! For this is what the world seeks, but not what the Word teaches.

The prime commandment of Jesus says.....

28 One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?" 29 "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one. 30 Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.' 31 The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:28-31)

We are called to substitute the 'me' with 'Him'. And to put 'others' interests on a par with 'our own'. Paul explains, that in reality, this means putting others even ahead of ourselves.....

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. 4 Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. (Philippians 2:3-4)

Paul goes on to reinforce this, by telling us to follow the example of Jesus.....

5 Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: 6 Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7 but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death— even death on a cross! 9 Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. (Philippians 2:5-11)

This is hard for us, brought up in a humanistic world, to understand - and even harder to live! Yet it is what Jesus requires of us to truly be His followers. His sacrifice for us was complete and we are required to sacrifice our lives for Him too.....

7 Get rid of the old yeast that you may be a new batch without yeast—as you really are. For Christ, our Passover lamb, has been sacrificed. (1 Corinthians 5:7)

Jesus reinforced this when He said.....

50 For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother.” (Matthew 12:50)

As Jesus was rejected by His generation.....

25 But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.

(Luke 17:25)

.....so we are likely to be by ours.....

4 As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him (1 Peter 2:4)

....but our rewards are amazing and eternal.....

5 you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

(1 Peter 2:5)

The amazing thing is that as we take our eyes off ourselves and place them onto Him, He really comes alive to us as He prepares us to be a part of the bride for which He is returning.....

29 The bride belongs to the bridegroom. The friend who attends the bridegroom waits and listens for him, and is full of joy when he hears the bridegroom's voice. That joy is mine, and it is now complete. 30 He must become greater; I must become less.

(John 3:29-30)

.....and we enjoy the joy of the Lord.....

17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, (Romans 14:17)

HALLELUJAH!

Amen.

FROM "RELIGION" TO "REVELATION"

There is a pattern that applies to revelation and revivals. God gives a revelation and/or a Spirit awakening, to one or a group of people who seek Him intensely. This is amazing! Fantastic! Things happen! A new facet of God and His power is revealed and experienced! Hallelujah! Praise the Lord!

However, over time, things change. Man formalizes the revelation, turning it into theology. Or man works out how the Spirit is operating in the revival and imitates Him. The Spirit saddened, leaves, and the revival is reduced to form, so losing its substance.

Put simply, religion is man taking the god factor out of God. Of man putting God into a human designed box that can be manipulated in accordance with mans limited understanding. A box of form over substance! A box of intellectual study over faith and willingness to step out into the unknown in obedience to God's will. A box of following rules and regulations, put above seeking the guidance of the Holy Spirit. A box of legalistic limitation rather than the freedom found through spiritual growth.

The whole New Testament is a battleground between religion and revelation. Jesus battled with the Pharisees who could not accept either His miracles or revelatory teaching.....

The Yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees

5 When they went across the lake, the disciples forgot to take bread. 6 "Be careful," Jesus said to them. "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." 7 They discussed this among themselves and said, "It is because we didn't bring any bread." 8 Aware of their discussion, Jesus asked, "You of little faith, why are you talking among yourselves about having no bread? 9 Do you still not understand? Don't you remember the five loaves for the five thousand, and how many basketfuls

you gathered? 10 Or the seven loaves for the four thousand, and how many basketfuls you gathered? 11 How is it you don't understand that I was not talking to you about bread? But be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees." 12 Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees. (Matthew 16:5-12)

Peter was bound by the religious discrimination system of the Jews in regard to dietary requirements, so God gave him a vision. What a huge shock that was for him - and others!

2 So when Peter went up to Jerusalem, the circumcised believers criticized him 3 and said, "You went into the house of uncircumcised men and ate with them." 4 Peter began and explained everything to them precisely as it had happened: 5 "I was in the city of Joppa praying, and in a trance I saw a vision. I saw something like a large sheet being let down from heaven by its four corners, and it came down to where I was. 6 I looked into it and saw four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, reptiles, and birds of the air. 7 Then I heard a voice telling me, 'Get up, Peter. Kill and eat.' 8 "I replied, 'Surely not, Lord! Nothing impure or unclean has ever entered my mouth.'..... 17 So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?" (Acts 11:1-8,)

Yes, when we 'get religious' we surely oppose God, as Peter realized he had done!

17 So if God gave them the same gift as he gave us, who believed in the Lord Jesus Christ, who was I to think that I could oppose God?" (Acts 11:17)

Paul too, had to instruct the people about the deception of religiosity.....

16 Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day. 17 These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. 18 Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you for the prize. Such a person goes into great detail about what he has seen, and his unspiritual

mind puffs him up with idle notions. 19 He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow. (Colossians 2:16-19)

Revelation comes through time spent with Jesus along with obedience to what He shares with you. There is no other way. The more we seek God, the more He finds us!

We need to get the revelation that, at the cross, the curtain to the Holy of Holies was torn for us to enter into the very presence of God.....

51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook and the rocks split. (Matthew 27:31)

We are now priests, the New Testament fulfilment of the Old Testament priesthood, with the Old Testament's High Priest's access to the very throne of God.....

5 and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen. (Revelation 1:5-6)

My friend, I want to speak to the both of us. God is calling you, is calling me, to set aside our religious ways, our conventional ways of doing things, in order to seek Jesus and His will with all our hearts, mind and strength. To accept that His kingdom is within us, so we no longer need to access God through an intermediary.

TO LEADERS: You need to train God's (not your!) people to seek out God's will for their lives from the Lord Himself, and not to rely upon you as a crutch, nor to act as an intermediary on their behalf.

TO PEOPLE: 'Walking with Jesus' cannot be delegated to another on our behalf. We are responsible for the outworking of our own salvation. Others can help show us the way, but only we can walk our walk.

May we walk with Jesus today. For that is the way of the kingdom.

FROM "ACCEPTANCE" TO "OBEDIENCE"

The Great Commission

*16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and **make disciples** of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and **teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you**. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:16-19)*

And what do we do? We go forth and tell people to say a man formulated 'sinner's prayer' and all will be well with you in this life and the next! Okay, this may be an exaggeration in order to make a point but, in reality, it is not too far from the truth.

Most proclaim the greatest day in one's life to be the day on which one was 'saved'. What happens after that seemingly seems to be of lesser importance. Emphasis is placed upon 'the decision' over 'the journey'.

One day, 20 odd years ago now, as a 3 year old baby Christian I was working in the fields tending my flower crops that I was growing for the market. Sounds blissful, but it actually was a lot of hard work! As I worked, weeding if I remember right, the Lord spoke to me and called me to this ministry, to be based upon Revelation 12:11. It was a huge surprise to me!

The next day, not knowing where to start, I went home in the afternoon, sat on the couch and waited upon Him. For I had no idea what to do!

The Lord gave me a story, an allegory, THE TWO MARATHONERS. Now I knew a little about marathons, for I had run a few over earlier years. It is amazing how

the Lord uses your life experience to teach you things!

The story was in 3 parts.

PART 1: The Decision to Race: A picture of making the decision to follow Jesus.

PART 2: The Training: Our journey through life.

PART 3: The Race: Entering the kingdom.

Anyone who has run a marathon will understand that making the decision to enter, while obviously important, and a motivator of the training and race to follow, is worthless in itself. As 'Jeremy Jogger' found out on race day. He lined up for the race but collapsed well before the finish line, due to his lack of training.

'Roger Runner' on the other hand, who trained assiduously, was able to run through 'hitting the wall' at the 20 mile mark, when the body changes from burning calories to consuming body fat (the reason why the marathon retains its mystique over shorter races), going on to receive his medal for finishing the race.

The secret in running a successful marathon is in the training. It is no use convincing people to enter the race (say the sinner's prayer) without providing a training programme (the Bible) to be followed, along with personal encouragement (Holy Spirit guidance and fellow believer support. ie. discipleship) in order that we might run and finish the race (enter the kingdom through obedience to the Father's will).

From experience, I can testify that the better the training, the better the race. The marathon is never without pain (nor is life!) but the greater the adherence to the training regimen the better the race (of life) will be.

Interpreting this allegory in a slightly different way, for the Lord is showing me this as I write (Thank you Lord! It's always exciting when this happens!).....

1. ENTERING THE RACE (saying sinners prayer) Words only, NO MEDAL.
2. DOING THE TRAINING (going to church, reading the Bible) No race yet run, NO MEDAL.
3. RUNNING THE RACE TO THE FINISH (The result of applying the 'training' received in living the kingdom lifestyle) Race run, MEDAL RECEIVED.

I mentioned earlier that in the fields, the Lord gave me Revelation 12:11 as the key verse upon which this ministry is based. Unsurprisingly, it says the same thing! In order to overcome satan, which the passage is talking about....

*11 They overcame him (**satan**)
by the blood of the Lamb (**salvation through Jesus**)
and by the word of their testimony; (**guidance of the Holy Spirit - the source of our testimony**)
they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. (**obedience to the Father's will**) (Revelation 12:11)*

Entering the kingdom is not just a **decision made**, but rather, a **decision applied** to life.

FROM "RECEIVING" TO "GIVING"

During the Christmas season there is a focus on both the giving and receiving of gifts. It is possibly one time of year when we may be motivated to give to others without thought of return to ourselves. Although we would likely be pretty miserable if we didn't receive anything! (Yes, the joys of being a grown man—receiving socks and handkerchiefs aplenty! LOL!)

Joking and Christmas aside, there is a basic principle in Jesus that is generally ignored today, both in the world, and sadly, all too often, in the church.....

***remembering the words the Lord Jesus himself said: 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'* (Acts 20:35b)**

While this focus on receiving is to be expected in a humanist, self-focused world, it should not be the focus of the church! Yet it is, in many ways, not all financial.

How often do we hear people complain of a service, or indeed a church, "I got/get nothing out of it!" The worship was too loud/not loud enough! The sermon was too long/too short! (Not too many complain about the 'too short' option though! LOL!) Nobody spoke to me. Nobody cares about my problems, etc., etc....

The focus of our church attendance then, is upon what we want to receive. Yet we call our services 'Worship Services'? Whom then, are we worshipping? Is it God - or self?

True worship is us giving both the glory and ourselves to our God. This is beautifully illustrated by the angels worshipping before the very throne of God.....

8 Each of the four living creatures had six wings and was covered with eyes all around, even under his wings. Day and night they never stop saying: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come." 9 Whenever the living creatures give glory, honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne and who lives for ever and ever, 10 the twenty-four elders fall down before him who sits on the throne, and worship him who lives for ever and ever. They lay their crowns before the throne and say: 11 "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being." (Revelation 4:8-11)

How might our attitude and services change if we copied the example of the angels!

This brings us back to the primary commandment of God the Father in the physically based Old Testament, to love Him and others.....

These are the commands, decrees and laws the LORD your God directed me to teach you to observe in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to possess, 2 so that you, your children and their children after them may fear the LORD your God as long as you live by keeping all his decrees and commands that I give you, and so that you may enjoy long life. 3 Hear, O Israel, and be careful to obey so that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly in a land flowing with milk and honey, just as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you. 4 Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. 5 Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. (Deuteronomy 6:1-5)

.....and of Jesus in the spiritually based New.....

36 "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" 37 Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' 40 All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:26-9)

Loving God and loving others is a function of 'giving'. It is also what separates the kingdom from the world. For the kingdom is based upon obedience, of giving ourselves completely to the will of God. Again, both in the Old Testament.....

22 But Samuel replied: "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. (1 Samuel 15:22)

.....and in the New.....

5 And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we love one another. 6 And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love. (2 John 4-6)

Yes, the giving of our whole life to our Lord is the very heart of kingdom living.

Are we prepared to make the sacrifice of obedience today?

FROM "SALVATION" TO "HOLINESS"

Sadly, as a church, we are very good at twisting Biblical truth to suit our own ends.

One of the major misinterpretations is that of the 'Great Commission'.

We see it as being a command to preach the word to others, get them to say the so called 'Sinners Prayer', counting them as another soul won to the kingdom.

Our measure of success in church is on numbers of conversions, of 'bums on seats', rather than radical life change.

Let us see what the Great Commission actually says. The highlights are mine.....

The Great Commission

*16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore go and **make disciples** of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and **teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you**. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:16-20)*

The instruction of Jesus is not to make converts, but rather, obedient disciples.

Following Jesus is not easy. Multitudes followed Him early in His ministry, but by the nearly all had fallen by the wayside. The Parable of the Sower explains this graphically.....

3 Then he told them many things in parables, saying: "A farmer went out to sow his seed. 4 As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. 5 Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. 6 But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. 7 Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. (Matthew 13:3-7)

Conversion, sowing the seed, was just to be the first step. Seed grew (sinners prayers said) but soon died through poor husbandry (lack of discipleship). Only some seed grew to maturity and even then, the crops (spiritual fruit) varied tremendously.....

8 Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown. (Matthew 13:8)

The reality is, if our lives displayed the characteristics of Jesus, others would be attracted to Jesus naturally. There is a song we used to sing at school that makes this point. "Give me 10 men who are stout hearted men, and I'll soon give you 10,000 more."

The story of the 'Rich Young Man' illustrates the cost of discipleship.....

16 Now a man came up to Jesus and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" 17 "Why do you ask me about what is good?" Jesus replied. "There is only One who is good. If you want to enter life, obey the commandments." 18 "Which ones?" the man inquired. Jesus replied, "Do not murder, do not commit adultery, do not steal, do not give false testimony, 19 honor your father and mother,' and 'love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Matthew 19:16-19)

Now that would, in itself, require a huge life change for us in today's world! But it is still not enough!

20 "All these I have kept," the young man said. "What do I still lack?" 21 Jesus answered, "If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." (Matthew 19:20-1)

Living a good life is not enough! We must also be prepared to give up the things that are the most precious to us, in order to follow Jesus. In this man's case it was wealth, and he wasn't prepared to make the sacrifice.

22 When the young man heard this, he went away sad, because he had great wealth. (Matthew 19:22)

Jesus stated the cost, the stripping away of our lives, that is required in order to follow Him, in the illustration of the camel and the eye of the needle.

23 Then Jesus said to his disciples, "Truly I tell you, it is hard for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of heaven. 24 Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the kingdom of God." (Matthew 19:23-4)

Yes, conversion is just the first step in our 'walk with Jesus'

The result of conversion is to be continually renewed in an ongoing process of becoming more like Jesus. Paul explained it well.....

9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. (Colossians 3:9-10)

This is called the process of sanctification. It was commanded of His followers by Jesus.....

17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. 19 For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be

truly sanctified. (John 17:17-18)

And reinforced by Paul....

23 May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

24 The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it. (1 Thessalonians 5:23-4)

The end result of sanctification is to be holiness.....

19 I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness. (Romans 6:19)

Holiness, rather than a past memory of conversion, wonderful though that was, is to be the goal of our lives.....

Since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit, perfecting holiness out of reverence for God.

(2 Corinthians 7:1)

So what is holiness?

Firstly, it is important to understand what holiness is NOT. Sadly, man's religious take on holiness is to create a set of rules. e.g. No makeup, no jewellery, wear a hat in church (women) or no hat (men), etc.... It would be so easy if holiness was this simple!

I have related the story before of visiting Holiness Churches in Africa where the people were bound by the many rules imposed on them by their movement. Most graciously, the Holy Spirit came in power and freed them from their religiosity. The change was amazing! The people were now able to smile and

laugh! Religion is restricting, while the Holy Spirit brings liberation! As Paul said.....

17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, (Romans 14:17)

Obedience to manmade laws will not lead to holiness but obedience to God's Word and will for your life, certainly will.....

*16 Don't you know that when you offer yourselves to someone to obey him as slaves, you are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to **obedience, which leads to righteousness**? 17 But thanks be to God that, though you used to be slaves to sin, you wholeheartedly obeyed the form of teaching to which you were entrusted. 18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness. 19 I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to **righteousness leading to holiness**. (Romans 6:16-19)*

The role of the church therefore, is not just to put 'bums on seats' but to encourage and help believers come to maturity, to attain Christ-likeness.

11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-13)

Discipleship, righteousness, holiness, maturity, Christ likeness..... These are the call of the kingdom, through which we will see the fulfilment of the 'Great Commission'.

FROM "FORM" TO (HOLY SPIRIT LED) "SUBSTANCE"

Being totally honest, and so sadly, we have 'organized' God out of our church services. There is so much to do! Planned worship songs! Notices! Prayers! Sermons! And only 60 - 90 - 120 minutes to do it in! Can't be late for dinner or our people won't come back!

Our Sunday services have evolved over the centuries into tradition bound meetings - even in non-traditional churches.

We must have order. This is the passage quoted - or rather, selected parts of it to suit our own theology!.....

Orderly Worship

26 What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church. 27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. 28 If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God. 29 Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. 30 And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. 31 For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. 32 The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. 33 For God is not a God of disorder but of peace. As in all the congregations of the saints, 34 women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. 35 If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. 36 Did the word of God originate with you? Or are you the only people it has reached? 37 If anybody

thinks he is a prophet or spiritually gifted, let him acknowledge that what I am writing to you is the Lord's command. 38 If he ignores this, he himself will be ignored. 39 Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. 40 But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way. (1 Corinthians 14:26-40)

There is no question that the church of today is greatly different to that of the early New Testament. Churches, as we understand them, in terms of ministers, buildings, programmed Sunday services etc., did not really develop until after the conversion of the Roman Emperor Constantine, in the late 300AD's. The Roman Catholic Church provided the basic form that we 'protest'-ants, in spite of our protestations, in essence, follow today. For, at that time, the church became institutionalized, a characteristic that still binds us today. For as we grow in size, so rules, regulations and formalisation automatically follow in order to keep things in order.

The result, stated again, is that God has been organised out of His church.

This is not what Jesus died for.

Jesus died to take mankind away from the bondage of religion and law into an age of grace and personal relationship with Him.

21 But now a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. 22 This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, 23 for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, 24 and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus. (Romans 3:21-4)

Personal relationships only develop when the two parties communicate personally with one another. A lack of communication and understanding is the major reason marriages fail.

We are to be the perfected bride of Christ.....

6 Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns.

7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. 8 Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)

(Revelation 19:6-8)

Just as in our personal lives, so when we gather together, we are to be led by the Holy Spirit, not by 'New Testament priests' becoming an intermediary between ourselves and God. As the Word says (highlighting mine).....

*26 What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, **everyone** has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church. (1 Corinthians 14:26)*

Everyone! For, in the kingdom, we are all priests.....

To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen. (Revelation 1:5b-6)

Obviously this total participation is only practical in smaller gatherings. But if we are to take Paul's guidance at face value, we need to do this in order for all to contribute.

The huge growth of the church in China is a good example.

Personally, we are running a group, aimed at encouraging people to develop the spiritual gifts, especially prophecy, but allowing the Holy Spirit to lead.....

*Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.
(1 Corinthians 14:1)*

To see spiritual growth among people who have, for whatever reason, not been able to develop spiritual gifts in the formal church situation, has been both encouraging and rewarding.

For the participation of all people, led by the Holy Spirit, is the way of the kingdom.

9 And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. 10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." (Revelation 5:9-10)

FROM "POSITION" TO "SERVANTHOOD"

The sad reality is, percentage wise, there are more titles in the church today than in the world. While certain professions eg. medical, law and teaching, embrace titles at the top of their professions, and the army uses titles to define their functional hierarchy, titles are not greatly used in most of society. Joe is described as a manager, builder or plumber, not known as Manager Joe, Builder Joe, or Plumber Joe.

While people say that titles are a sign of respect, which they may be, the primary use of titles is as a form of control. The General's commands are to be obeyed. The Judges decisions enforced. The Professor's teachings are to be believed if we are to pass exams. The Doctors advice is to be followed if we want to be made well.

Titles came into the church with the formation of the Roman Catholic Church under Emperor Constantine. The primary role of the church was to control the people, the peasants. This resulted in the bleak period of history, now remembered as the Dark ages.

Enlightenment came with the Reformation, but Protestantism soon restored the hierarchies and titular system that we see in the church today. The difference now is that it is not the state controlling the people through the church, but the church leaders controlling their own people, which is inexcusable and entirely unbiblical.

In the Old Testament there was a separation of the functions of kings and priests. The kings had a title.....

When King David was old and well advanced in years, he could not keep warm even when they put covers over him. (1 Kings 1:1)

.....but the religious leaders were described by their function.....

8 But Zadok the priest, Benaiah son of Jehoiada, Nathan the prophet, Shimei and Rei and David's special guard did not join Adonijah. (1 Kings 1:8)

When Jesus was questioned by Caiaphas, Caiaphas was known as the high priest, not given the title High Priest Caiaphas.

23 "If I said something wrong," Jesus replied, "testify as to what is wrong. But if I spoke the truth, why did you strike me?" 24 Then Annas sent him, still bound, to Caiaphas the high priest. (John 18:23-4)

As we continue through the New Testament, we will not find anywhere a title was given to a man. To check me out, look at the introductions to all of Paul's writings. For example....

Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, and our brother Sosthenes (1 Corinthians 1:1)

Rather, Paul chose to be known as a servant.....

Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be an apostle and set apart for the gospel of God (Romans 1:1)

The teaching of Jesus is to turn the worldly, pride based, fallen man, human system, upside down!

35 Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all." (Mark 9:35)

Jesus railed against the Pharisees for their pride of position.

43 "Woe to you Pharisees, because you love the most important seats in the

synagogues and greetings in the marketplaces. (Luke 11:43)

Of course, we are not like that, are we! We do not wear clothing different to our people, sit in the front row, or preach from a raised pulpit? Or do we?

Jesus was the ultimate servant. This was prophesied in the Old Testament.....

The Suffering and Glory of the Servant

13 See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted. (Isaiah 52:13)

and lived out by Jesus in the New.....

God's Chosen Servant

15 Aware of this, Jesus withdrew from that place. Many followed him, and he healed all their sick, 16 warning them not to tell who he was. 17 This was to fulfill what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah: 18 "Here is my servant whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will proclaim justice to the nations. 19 He will not quarrel or cry out; no one will hear his voice in the streets. 20 A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out, till he leads justice to victory. 21 In his name the nations will put their hope." ((Matthew 12:15-21)

Jesus sacrificed His life for us, in the ultimate act of servanthood and was glorified for it.....

13 The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. (Acts 3:13a)

And we are called upon to lay down our lives for others.....

16 This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. (1 John 3:16)

Position, titles, and doctrines of submission and obedience, divide and fracture the church.

The walk of servanthood, of love, of humility, of compassion, following the example of Jesus, is the way of the kingdom.

FROM "SIZE" TO "COMMITMENT"

One of the greatest challenges in the church today is the emphasis placed on size over commitment. Almost inevitably, the first question one asks when meeting a new pastor is, "How large is your church?" For the answer to that question largely determines the pastor's perceived 'success' in God and his or her ranking in the hierarchy of the church system. It is a measurable physical criteria related to the spiritual world. Yet the two worlds do not relate in terms of measures of effectiveness.

In a worldly sense, more 'bums on seats' brings greater influence on more people, both inside the church and in the community, along with the prestige that goes with it. More people means more income for the church - more payments to pastors, greater programmes and buildings, etc. People who 'come to church' are generally regarded as Christians, without reference to the lives they may be leading the other 167 hours a week.

This emphasis on numbers has led to the expansion of 'user friendly' churches designed to meet the needs of the people rather than action the purposes of God.

The concentration on numbers is very antithesis of what the Bible teaches. Jesus was not a 'popularity preacher', preaching a heavenly nirvana (with a painless unbiblical 'rapture!') for minimum commitment (saying the unbiblical 'Sinners Prayer!'). Even during His initial ministry period of popularity when thousands came to hear His teachings, Jesus warned.....

13 "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. 14 But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it. (Matthew 7:13-14)

And He continued, watch out for popularity preachers, preaching self-centred,

easy living type messages.....

15 "Watch out for false prophets. They come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ferocious wolves. 16 By their fruit you will recognize them. Do people pick grapes from thornbushes, or figs from thistles? 17 Likewise every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit. 18 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit, and a bad tree cannot bear good fruit. 19 Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire. 20 Thus, by their fruit you will recognize them.

(Matthew 7:15-20)

And there is more! Jesus went on to say that verbal acknowledgement is not enough! True believers must live godly lives and be obedient to the Father's will!

21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers! (Matthew 7:21-3)

Wow! How often is this message preached today? Certainly not one designed to make for a comfortable congregation!

Later in His ministry His teachings were even more urgent and harder to accept.....

53 Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. 54 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. 55 For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. 56 Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in him. 57 Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. (John 6:53-7)

The result was.....

Many Disciples Desert Jesus

60 On hearing it, many of his disciples said, "This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?" 61 Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, "Does this offend you? 62 What if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! 63 The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life. 64 Yet there are some of you who do not believe." For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. 65 He went on to say, "This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled him." 66 From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. (John 6:60-66)

Jesus even challenged the twelve.....

67 "You do not want to leave too, do you?" Jesus asked the Twelve. (John 6:67)

Peter reiterated their commitment to Him.....

68 Simon Peter answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. 69 We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God." (John 6:68-9)

Jesus desires, indeed requires, disciples who will be prepared to give their all to Him at the expense of worldly acceptance.....

The World Hates the Disciples

18 "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. 19 If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you. (John 15:18-19)

The transition from the church to the kingdom is one from membership or attendance to that of discipleship, of laying our lives down for Jesus.....

8 This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples. 9 "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. 10 If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. 11 I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. 12 My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. 13 Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. 14 You are my friends if you do what I command. (John 15:8-14)

This is the way of the kingdom.

FROM "PAID" TO "CALLED"

The question of clergy appointment and remuneration is often one of extreme sensitivity in the church!

It reminds me of another, related question. Do we 'eat to live, or live to eat?' For, in the end, we are talking of a question of motivation, of the calling of God on our lives. For God specifically calls.....

11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, (Ephesians 4:11)

For the purpose of....

12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up (Ephesians 4:12)

To attain a specific result.....

13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:13)

The role of leaders then, is to bring people to spiritual maturity in order that *the body of Christ*, (that includes all of us), will do the work of the church, which is.....

19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. (Matthew 28:19-20a)

How simple, yet how difficult!

Most interestingly, when the Disciples, the first leaders were given the 'Great Commission' as it is known, and in spite of being with the resurrected Jesus, some still had doubts.....

*16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted.
(Matthew 28:16-17)*

He had to motivate and reassure them.....

*18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me..... And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."
(Matthew 28:18, 20b)*

It was not until the Holy Spirit came at Pentecost that the Disciples and others were empowered to overcome all their doubts and proclaim the Word with boldness.....

14 Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. 15 These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! (Acts 2:14-15)

So, boldly that all, except John, were martyred for their faith! And John was boiled in oil and banished to Patmos! Even 'doubting Thomas' travelled to India, arriving in Kerala State where he converted some Hindu priests through a miracle of throwing water into the air and, defying gravity, having it stay there! I have been to the site, upon which now stands a Roman Catholic Church. The presence of the Holy Spirit was powerful. Thomas travelled across India, spreading the Word, and was finally martyred outside Chennai, where you can visit his grave in a cave to this day.

Paul, of course, was called in a dramatic way, on the road to Damascus.....

3 As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. 4 He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" 5 "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked. "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. 6 "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do." 7 The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone. 8 Saul got up from the ground, but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing. So they led him by the hand into Damascus. 9 For three days he was blind, and did not eat or drink anything. (Acts 9:3-9)

Certainly a dramatic call!

My own call to ministry came as I was tending to our commercial flower crops. The Lord spoke to me personally in an audible voice within my head, explaining how it was to be based on Revelation 12:11.....

11 They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. (Revelation 12:11)

.....and gave me the name 'Walking With Jesus Ministries'. While I did not immediately walk away from the business as the initial disciples did.....

16 As Jesus walked beside the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the lake, for they were fishermen. 17 "Come, follow me," Jesus said, "and I will make you fishers of men." 18 At once they left their nets and followed him. 19 When he had gone a little farther, he saw James son of Zebedee and his brother John in a boat, preparing their nets. 20 Without delay he called them, and they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired men and followed him. (Mark 1:16-20)

.....I did give from that day onwards half of each day to the ministry.

The first requirement then, for specific ministry (of course, we are all to be

ministers - literally, servants!), is a definite call from God through the Holy Spirit.

'The first requirement for specific ministry (of course, we are all to be ministers - literally, servants!), is a definite call from God through the Holy Spirit.'

The second requirement is to be prepared to do what God calls you to, irrespective of the cost.

The one thing I can assure you of is, a true, godly ministry call will require sacrifice on our part! As it did of Jesus, on the cross.....

9 Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. 10 And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (Hebrews 10:9-10)

All believers are called to imitate Christ and to sacrifice our lives through love.....

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children 2 and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Ephesians 5:1-2)

Examples of 'love sacrifice' in the New Testament include Paul who wrote from prison.....

17 But even if I am being poured out like a drink offering on the sacrifice and service coming from your faith, I am glad and rejoice with all of you. (Philippians 2:17)

.....while Stephen was a literal sacrifice....

The Stoning of Stephen

54 When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him. 55 But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, looked up to heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. 56 "Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." 57 At this they covered their ears and, yelling at the top of their voices, they all rushed at him, 58 dragged him out of the city and began to stone him. Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. 59 While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 60 Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep. (Acts 7:54-60)

And the apostles suffered too.....

39 But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God." 40 His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. 41 The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name (Acts 5:39-41)

In the future, as the world continues to ramp up its opposition to the Gospel, these experiences will become more and more frequent, both in the spiritual and the literal!

For me, so far, the cost has been primarily financial. When I was called into full time ministry, I used the money we had acquired from the sale of our mail order business, to undertake a property development. The idea was to build and rent out house to support ourselves, so that we didn't have to rely on others. An excellent idea - in the human! Prices went down, costs went up and we lost it all!

"Now you will be reliant upon me!" said the Lord. A lesson not forgotten and still lived by.

I appreciate this is a hard word for many to accept, but kingdom ministry is

based on trust in God to provide, not a wage. On faith, not security, on being called, not simply applying for a job.

It costs everything but the rewards are eternal.

Are we prepared to pay the price?

'The first requirement for specific ministry (of course, we are all to be ministers - literally, servants!), is a definite call from God through the Holy Spirit.'

The second requirement is to be prepared to do what God calls you to, irrespective of the cost.

Now, thirdly, true, God called ministry, comes without a salary attached! Surely not, David! We have to live! And doesn't the Bible say.....

17 The elders who direct the affairs of the church well are worthy of double honor, especially those whose work is preaching and teaching. 18 For the Scripture says, "Do not muzzle the ox while it is treading out the grain," and "The worker deserves his wages." (1 Timothy 5:17-18)

Yes, it does. But the real question is, "Where is this money for living expenses to come from?" Which comes first? Is it the salary or the calling? For a guaranteed salary transforms a calling into a job, no matter what gloss is put on it. We now we have a church run by professionals, many of whom do an excellent job, but who (and particularly their spouses) are reliant upon man's organisation and goodwill, rather than trusting in God to supply. This is a hard word, I know.

Jesus modelled this when He sent out the 12 and the 72.....

5 These twelve Jesus sent out with the following instructions: "Do not go among the

Gentiles or enter any town of the Samaritans. 6 Go rather to the lost sheep of Israel. 7 As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' 8 Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give. 9 Do not take along any gold or silver or copper in your belts; 10 take no bag for the journey, or extra tunic, or sandals or a staff; for the worker is worth his keep. (Matthew 10:5-10)

I literally experienced this when the Lord sent me on my last trip to Africa. He provided the airfares but no spending money. We had no money other than \$100 in our bank account. I drew out \$30, leaving the rest for Kathy to live on until she was paid again. I spent the \$30 in 5 days in South Africa, before any money started to come in. I finally left Africa 2 months later, having been provided for by the people whom the Lord ministered to through me. This was both testing for me who was used to giving and for the Africans, who are used to receiving from the West.

When Paul wrote the words contained in 1 Timothy, he did not mean to receive a salary, but to be supported by the people being ministered to on a voluntary basis. He preached the gospel free of charge.....

7 Was it a sin for me to lower myself in order to elevate you by preaching the gospel of God to you free of charge? (2 Corinthians 11:7)

He received gifts from people....

8 I robbed other churches by receiving support from them so as to serve you. 9 And when I was with you and needed something, I was not a burden to anyone, for the brothers who came from Macedonia supplied what I needed. I have kept myself from being a burden to you in any way, and will continue to do so. ((2 Corinthians 11:8-9)

..... and carried on with his trade of making tents.

After this, Paul left Athens and went to Corinth. 2 There he met a Jew named Aquila, a

native of Pontus, who had recently come from Italy with his wife Priscilla, because Claudius had ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Paul went to see them, 3 and because he was a tentmaker as they were, he stayed and worked with them.

(Acts 18:1-3)

A number of years ago, I was involved with a Pentecostal denomination, whose initial leaders had joyously shared the revelation of the Lord in house meetings and halls to all who would listen. The church grew rapidly, for the call and blessing of the Lord was upon them. As the group grew, other leaders came in who determined a central organisation was required. A Bible school was set up. Churches built. Ministers offered a salary. Then qualifications became compulsory. Today numerical growth has stalled and spiritually, the denomination has declined dramatically. I was able to speak to some of the original leaders, all of whom desired to go back to the old days of life and vibrancy, even though it was accompanied by financial insecurity. For the initial Holy Spirit led calling had now become a job.

This is a radical word, but its implementation is a key to kingdom growth. For the Western church and its leadership has got too comfortable in its ways. Are we prepared to pay the price?

FROM "REVIVAL" TO "HABITATION"

Over the past century+ now, since the Azusa Street and Welsh Revivals which saw the birth of the Pentecostal streams of churches, there has been a desire for revival in the church. And not only in Spirit filled churches.

I knew a conservative Baptist Church pastor, who was a missionary/Bible teacher in Bangladesh for many years. A godly man, extremely well versed in the Bible. He, and others there, desired and prayed for revival. Revival came. He didn't like it! He continued to minister, but no longer prayed for revival! And the Spirit died in him.

History is littered with revivals that have come and gone. The world's longest revival started in Monrovia in Eastern Europe on August 13th, 1727, bringing with it a continuous 24/7 prayer meeting that lasted 110 years! Many amazing things happened, including the birth of John Wesley's ministry in a storm battered ship in the Atlantic Ocean, when the Monrovia's faith showed this diligent but disappointed Anglican minister that he needed more. A couple of months later, Wesley was 'born again' and the Methodist movement began. The Monrovia's had a huge effect on history in so many ways.

Throughout history, the reality is that revivals come and revivals go. In the past century, this has been particularly evident. But why is this? I would suggest that the primary reason is people working out how the Holy Spirit works and mimicking Him. Man takes over. The Spirit, saddened, departs.

This process is not new! We can go right back to the Jews wandering in the desert, and view the experience of Moses, regarded as the Old Testament picture of Jesus. But Moses was very human, and his humanness cost him the chance to lead the Jews into the Promised Land. Because he pre-empted God. On two occasions, God told Moses to hit a rock with his staff and water poured

out to slake the thirsts of the people. On the third occasion however, God gave a different instruction.....

*7 The LORD said to Moses, 8 "Take the staff, and you and your brother Aaron gather the assembly together. **Speak** to that rock before their eyes and it will pour out its water. You will bring water out of the rock for the community so they and their livestock can drink." (Numbers 20:7-8)*

But Moses, in a fit of anger with his rebellious people, became a rebel himself....

*9 So Moses took the staff from the LORD's presence, just as he commanded him. 10 He and Aaron gathered the assembly together in front of the rock and Moses said to them, "Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?" 11 Then Moses raised his arm and **struck** the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the community and their livestock drank. (Numbers 20:9-11)*

And suffered the consequences.....

12 But the LORD said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them." (Numbers 20:9-11)

Can you imagine how devastated Moses would have been? The culmination of 40 years work and hardship was denied to him and granted to Joshua instead.

While revival is great and exciting, it is not the final aim of God. For God wants something more of us. His ultimate desire is to inhabit you, and inhabit me, with His presence, each and every day of our lives.

The Spirit is not simply to shine from the outside in, as is the case in revival, but is to shine from the inside out - out of us, that is!

Jesus told us this.....

14 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

(Matthew 5:14-16)

Paul put it this way.....

19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

Ever the pragmatist, James, the brother of Jesus, said the same thing differently. While speaking about the 'word' it applies equally to the 'Spirit' for the Word and the Spirit are one.....

22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. 23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like a man who looks at his face in a mirror 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 25 But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does. (James 1:22-5)

I knew another minister, who went all the way from New Zealand to Toronto in Canada, a distance of 13,000km (8,200 miles) to experience the revival there. While he was there, the Lord clearly spoke to him about his behaviour towards his wife. He came back and told the church. We were amazed, for we knew he treated his wife badly. Sadly, he didn't change, and his ministry declined. He experienced revival, but didn't let the Lord's instruction in it and through it, change his life.

If we desire to become overcomers and rule and reign with Christ in His millennial kingdom of 100 years, we have to submit 100% to the Lord's will for our life and reflect His glory in all our actions, to allow Him to inhabit our lives.....

4 I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. 5 (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. 6 Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. (Revelation 20:4-6)

The choice is ours.

FROM "THE MATERIAL" TO "THE SPIRITUAL"

In the natural, the desire of almost everyone is for more material goods, in order to live, supposedly, a better life.

Here's a free tip! If your desire is to build the world's largest religion, promise wealth to your followers - and then deliver on it!

Sadly, too much of the Christian church has gone down this road - at least, the first part of it! The promises of the 'prosperity doctrine' however, have not delivered the goods - other than to the preachers who falsely proclaim them! How sad! No, more than sad! Disgraceful!

So what is the Biblical pattern?

This is where a lot of the confusion comes in. For it depends on whether we look at the New Testament or the Old. There is a key difference between the two.

OLD COVENANT BLESSINGS

Blessings under the Old Covenant (Testament) were physical, applying to the family in the case of the patriarchs, and then to the nation of Israel. Abraham and his descendants were promised material blessings and a long life - and received them.....

12 As the sun was setting, Abram fell into a deep sleep, and a thick and dreadful darkness came over him. 13 Then the LORD said to him, "Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. 14 But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions. 15 You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age. (Genesis 15:12-15)

The high point of God's material blessing to Israel was in the time of Solomon,

conditional upon obedience to the Lord.....

10 The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. 11 So God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, 12 I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. 13 Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both riches and honor—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. 14 And if you walk in my ways and obey my statutes and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life." (1 Kings 3:10-15)

Of course, as we know, Solomon went astray, and the history of Israel was all downhill from there, for the success or failure of the country was determined by the degree of obedience or disobedience of the king to the Lord. The country soon divided into two - Israel and Judah. First Israel disappeared as a nation.....

5 The king of Assyria invaded the entire land, marched against Samaria and laid siege to it for three years. 6 In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria and deported the Israelites to Assyria. He settled them in Halah, in Gozan on the Habor River and in the towns of the Medes. (2 Kings 17:5-6)

.....and then Jerusalem was conquered by the Babylonians.....

The Fall of Jerusalem

Now Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon. 25 So in the ninth year of Zedekiah's reign, on the tenth day of the tenth month, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon marched against Jerusalem with his whole army. He encamped outside the city and built siege works all around it. 2 The city was kept under siege until the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. 3 By the ninth day of the fourth month the famine in the city had become so severe that there was no food for the people to eat. 4 Then the city wall was broken through, and the whole army fled at night through the gate between the two walls near the king's garden, though the Babylonians were surrounding the city. They fled toward the Arabah, 5 but the Babylonian army pursued

the king and overtook him in the plains of Jericho. All his soldiers were separated from him and scattered, 6 and he was captured. He was taken to the king of Babylon at Riblah, where sentence was pronounced on him. 7 They killed the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes. Then they put out his eyes, bound him with bronze shackles and took him to Babylon. (2 kings 24:20b-25:25:7)

The Temple, and city, was destroyed and the majority of the people exiled to Babylon.....

8 On the seventh day of the fifth month, in the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard, an official of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. 9 He set fire to the temple of the LORD, the royal palace and all the houses of Jerusalem. Every important building he burned down. 10 The whole Babylonian army, under the commander of the imperial guard, broke down the walls around Jerusalem. 11 Nebuzaradan the commander of the guard carried into exile the people who remained in the city, along with the rest of the populace and those who had gone over to the king of Babylon. (2 Kings 25:8-11)

.....while a remnant of the people of Judah returned under the leadership of Nehemiah and rebuilt the city walls.....

15 So the wall was completed on the twenty-fifth of Elul, in fifty-two days. (Nehemiah 6:15)

The Temple was rebuilt.....

15 The temple was completed on the third day of the month Adar, in the sixth year of the reign of King Darius. (Ezra 6:15)

but not to its former glory.....

12 But many of the older priests and Levites and family heads, who had seen the former temple, wept aloud when they saw the foundation of this temple being laid,

while many others shouted for joy. (Ezra 3:12)

After the Babylonians, the nation continued to be under the subjugation of Greece and Rome, until it finally ceased to exist in AD70. The Roman historian Josephus described its fate.

The Wars of the Jews, Book 6 Chapter 8

(403) So the Romans being now become masters of the wars, they both placed their ensigns upon the towers, and made joyful acclamations for the victory they had gained, as having found the end of this war much lighter than its beginning; for when they had gotten upon the last was, without any bloodshed, they could hardly believe what they found to be true; but seeing nobody to oppose them, they stood in doubt what such an unusual solitude could mean. (404) But when they went in numbers into the lanes of the city, with their swords drawn, they slew those whom they overtook, without mercy, and set fire to the houses wither the Jews were fled, and burnt every soul in them, and laid waste a great many of the rest; (405) and when they were come to the houses to plunder them, they found in them entire families of dead men, and the upper rooms full of dead corpses, that is of such as died by the famine; they then stood in a horror at this sight, and went out without touching anything. (406) But although they had this commiseration for such as were destroyed in that manner, yet had they not the same for those that were still alive, but they ran every one through whom they met with, and obstructed the very lanes with their dead bodies, and made the whole city run down with blood, to such a degree indeed that the fire of many of the houses was quenched with these men's blood. (407) And truly so it happened, that though the slayers left off at the evening, yet did the fire greatly prevail in the night, and as all was burning, came that eighth day of the month Gorpheus [Elul] upon Jerusalem; (408) a city that had been liable to so many miseries during the siege, that, had it always enjoyed as much happiness from its first foundation, it would certainly have been the envy of the world. Nor did it on any other account so much deserve these sore misfortunes, as by producing such a generation of men as were the occasions of this its overthrow.

The age of material blessings to a nation was finally over, to be replaced by a better way.

NEW COVENANT BLESSINGS

The New Covenant, announced and initiated by Jesus is a personal covenant, applying to the individual, as opposed to the nation. We must enter the kingdom through a personal decision.....

5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. 7 You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.'
(John3:5-7)

As this scripture says, it is an act of 'water'.....

16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned. (Mark 16:16)

.....and of the 'Spirit'....

4 On one occasion, while he was eating with them, he gave them this command: "Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. 5 For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." (Acts 1:4-5)

This follows the established pattern by Jesus himself through the baptism of water and Spirit.....

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to be baptized by John. 14 But John tried to deter him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" 15 Jesus replied, "Let it be so now; it is proper for us to do this to fulfill all righteousness." Then John consented. 16 As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up

out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and lighting on him. 17 And a voice from heaven said, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased." (Matthew 3:13-17)

Unlike Saul, David, Solomon, and the other kings of Israel, Jesus did not, at that time, inherit a physical kingdom, which the Jews were (and still are) expecting of their Messiah. This was illustrated by the people who welcomed Jesus on Palm Sunday.....

8 Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches they had cut in the fields. 9 Those who went ahead and those who followed shouted, "Hosanna!" "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" 10 "Blessed is the coming kingdom of our father David!" "Hosanna in the highest!" (Mark 11:8-10)

.....and then rejected Him, when He didn't 'come up with the goods'!

48 "Am I leading a rebellion," said Jesus, "that you have come out with swords and clubs to capture me? 49 Every day I was with you, teaching in the temple courts, and you did not arrest me. But the Scriptures must be fulfilled." 50 Then everyone deserted him and fled. (Mark 14:48-50)

For the kingdom of God today, first of all, is a spiritual kingdom, found within the individual believer (ie. disciple) of Jesus.....

20 Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, 21 nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17:20-21)

However, the kingdom that is within is to shine without! To shine out of us, that is.....

23 But if your eyes are bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light

within you is darkness, how great is that darkness! (Matthew 6:22-23)

And again.....

14 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. 16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.

(Matthew 5:14-16)

It is through us, as kingdom people, that the promise of the Lord's (Disciples) Prayer will be fulfilled, not only in eternity, but now, upon the earth.....

10 your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6;10)

As the spiritual kingdom develops in our lives, so we will influence our physical surroundings. We do not do this in an earthly way of money and power, but through servanthood and sacrifice.....

33 They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" 34 But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest. 35 Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."

(Mark 9:33-5)

This is difficult for us, with our human mindset to understand and accept, but it is the key to entering and developing the kingdom. Jesus had no wardrobe of designer clothes. He did not even have a *place to lay his head.* (Matthew 8:20)

My friend, we must not be seduced by the Old Covenant blessings of money, power and conquest, which are not promised under the New Covenant.

4 The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the

light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. 5 For we do not preach ourselves, but Jesus Christ as Lord, and ourselves as your servants for Jesus' sake. 6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. (2 Corinthians 4:4-6)

We are to live our lives the way Jesus showed us by personal example.....

9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. 11 Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. 12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. (Colossians 3:9-15)

This is the way of the kingdom.

Amen.

FROM "ORGANIZED" TO "ORGANIC"

This topic is likely to be another area of controversy, one that takes us outside our comfort zone! For, as human beings, particularly in the West, we are so used to organising everything - including God!

Although many will see this as a promotion of the House Church movement, it is not, for house churches generally, have fallen into the same traps as their larger cousins.

So what are we talking about?

Put simply, it is about letting God have His way, in His church. "Of course God has His way in OUR church", I can hear you saying! But does He really?

Who runs your Church? Is it the pastor, minister, eldership, or perhaps, people - or Jesus through the Holy Spirit?

Who writes your Order of Service? Is it the pastor or minister - or Jesus through the Holy Spirit?

Who proposes the building of and administers your buildings, and initiates your programmes? Is it the pastor, minister, eldership or people - or Jesus through the Holy Spirit?

Of course, you are going to say to me that Jesus through the Holy Spirit inspires our leaders to do these things for Him.

While this may be true to an extent, I respectfully suggest to you that, 95% of the time, we humans, no matter how well intentioned, take over and do things our own way in the name of God.

Let us look at church buildings. How many building projects struggle for money? Virtually every day I get requests for money for buildings. God must be a terrible provider! My experience is that churches with wealthy congregations have far less trouble raising money for buildings than those whose congregations are poor. Surely that isn't God's way? But it is human reality, for we all like to build physical structures that we can see and use.

Let us look at our order of service. Is it the same every week? Do we get in everything that needs to be said and done? Everything is done in good and decent order. So much so, that God, through the Holy Spirit, is locked out, or perhaps given a few programmed minutes for His word to come through prophecy. Surely that isn't God's way? But it is the human reality.

Of course we know that there is to be order in the church. As Paul says.....

*39 Therefore, my brothers, be eager to prophesy, and do not forbid speaking in tongues. 40 But everything should be done in a fitting and orderly way.
(1 Corinthians 14:39-40)*

While many churches do not allow either, even those that do, become so ordered that tongues and words are highly restricted and formalized, there being so much else to get through.

Let us look at our church programmes. Do we pick up our programmes from the latest conference, seminar or book, trying to apply that which was successful elsewhere to our own situation, then getting disappointed when it underperforms? Surely that isn't God's way? But it is the human reality.

And we could go on.....

Of course, I understand that there weren't as many Christians in early New

Testament times as there are today. That meeting in houses or other smaller venues was easier because of it. But the result of the increase in size has been that WE AS BELIEVERS, DO NOT GO TO CHURCH TO **PARTICIPATE IN**, BUT TO BE **MINISTERED TO**.

Effectively, what we have done is to recreate the Old Testament Priesthood, where the Priests were appointed by God to convey His wishes to the people.

8 Then the LORD said to Aaron, 9 "You and your sons are not to drink wine or other fermented drink whenever you go into the Tent of Meeting, or you will die. This is a lasting ordinance for the generations to come. 10 You must distinguish between the holy and the common, between the unclean and the clean, 11 and you must teach the Israelites all the decrees the LORD has given them through Moses." (Leviticus 10:8-11)

The High Priest was the only one allowed to enter the Holy of Holies, where the presence of God dwelled, and then only annually, on the Day of Atonement.

The Day of Atonement

The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died when they approached the LORD. 2 The LORD said to Moses: "Tell your brother Aaron not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die, because I appear in the cloud over the atonement cover. (Leviticus 16:1-2)

Therefore, under the Old Covenant there was a separation between the Priests and the people, something which re-entered the Christian church through the Roman Catholics and despite attempts to get rid of it through the Reformation, effectively is still with us today, in so many ways.

Picture of the High Priest (Similar robes to so many today?)



At the time of the death of Jesus, a miracle took place signifying the change from the Old Covenant to the New. It was the direct result of, and response to, what happened when Jesus died on the cross.

*50 And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit.
51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom.
(Matthew 27:50-51a)*

At that key moment in the history of mankind God, through the necessary sacrifice of His son, Jesus, as a restitution for Adam's (and our) sin,

17 "If anyone takes the life of a human being, he must be put to death. 18 Anyone who takes the life of someone's animal must make restitution—life for life. (Leviticus 24:17-18)

..... direct access to God was restored.....

19 Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

(Hebrews 10:19-22)

.....through the New Covenant.....

10 This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. 11 No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. 12 For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." (Hebrews 8:10-12)

.....WHICH HAS REPLACED THE OLD!

13 By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear. (Hebrews 8:13)

This is confirmed again....

15 For this reason Christ is the mediator of a new covenant, that those who are called may receive the promised eternal inheritance—now that he has died as a ransom to set them free from the sins committed under the first covenant. (Hebrews (9:15)

.....and again.....

24 For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. 25 Nor did he enter heaven to offer himself again and again, the way the high priest enters the Most Holy Place every year with blood that is not his own. 26 Then Christ would have had to suffer many times since the creation of the world. But now he has appeared once for all at the end of the ages to do away with sin by the sacrifice of himself. (Hebrews 9:24-6)

.....and again.....

5 Therefore, when Christ came into the world, he said: "Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but a body you prepared for me; 6 with burnt offerings and sin offerings you were not pleased. 7 Then I said, 'Here I am—it is written about me in the scroll— I have come to do your will, O God.'" 8 First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made). 9 Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. 10 And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. (Hebrews 10:5-10)

I know I have been repetitive, but I truly want you to grasp the importance of what Jesus did on the cross that "awe-ful" day at Calvary.

So what then, are the implications of this change in Covenants?

1. WE NOW HAVE A PERMANENT SACRIFICE MADE ON OUR BEHALF

A crucial change between the Covenants (Testaments) is in the form of sacrifice we are so blessed to experience.

The glory of the Lord moved from the Tabernacle in the desert.....

The Glory of the Lord

34 Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. 35 Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting because the cloud had settled upon it, and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle. 36 In all the travels of the Israelites, whenever the cloud lifted from above the tabernacle, they would set out; 37 but if the cloud did not lift, they did not set out—until the day it lifted. 38 So the cloud of the LORD was over the tabernacle by day, and fire was in the cloud by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel during all their travels. (Exodus 40:34-8)

.....to the Temple.....

10 When the priests withdrew from the Holy Place, the cloud filled the temple of the LORD. 11 And the priests could not perform their service because of the cloud, for the glory of the LORD filled his temple. (1 Kings 8:10-11)

.....and as we saw earlier, the Holy of Holies was opened up to you and to me to enter into the very presence of God enjoyed by Adam and Eve before the fall through the perfect sacrifice of Jesus upon the cross....

50 And when Jesus had cried out again in a loud voice, he gave up his spirit. 51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. (Matthew 27:50-51a)

This is an understanding and revelation that most Christians have little understanding of the implications of! We no longer need a human priest to intercede on our behalf.....

18 The former regulation is set aside because it was weak and useless 19 (for the law made nothing perfect), and a better hope is introduced, by which we draw near to God. (Hebrews 7:18-19)

Our covenant with God is now through Jesus.....

20 And it was not without an oath! Others became priests without any oath, 21 but he became a priest with an oath when God said to him: "The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind: 'You are a priest forever.'" 22 Because of this oath, Jesus has become the guarantee of a better covenant. ((Hebrews 7:20-22)

Forever! HALLALUJAH!!!

23 Now there have been many of those priests, since death prevented them from

continuing in office; 24 but because Jesus lives forever, he has a permanent priesthood. 25 Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them. (Hebrews 7:23-5)

He is all we need!

26 Such a high priest meets our need—one who is holy, blameless, pure, set apart from sinners, exalted above the heavens. (Hebrews 7:26)

For He is forever perfect! PRAISE THE LORD!

27 Unlike the other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices day after day, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. He sacrificed for their sins once for all when he offered himself. 28 For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever. (Hebrews 7:27-8)

God first spoke through the prophet Jeremiah (*Jeremiah 31:33-4*) and promised a new, and perfect, covenant, the fulfilment of which was confirmed in Hebrews.....

10 This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. 11 No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or a man his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' because they will all know me, from the least of them to the greatest. 12 For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." 13 By calling this covenant "new," he has made the first one obsolete; and what is obsolete and aging will soon disappear. (Hebrews 8:10-13)

Jesus, the Christ, is now in heaven interceding on behalf of you, and of me.....

24 For Christ did not enter a man-made sanctuary that was only a copy of the true one; he entered heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence. (Hebrews 8:24)

Amen.

2. SALVATION HAS BECOME A PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

In the first instance, God revealed himself through a **FAMILY**, the line of Abraham. Normally the godly line would pass through the eldest son, but interestingly, there were two important exceptions. Abraham, with Ishmael rejected and Isaac anointed, and the same in Isaac's family, where Jacob took precedence over Esau.

As a result of this single line inheritance, by the time it came for the chosen line of Jacob to go to Egypt, there were but 70 in the godly line family.

27 With the two sons who had been born to Joseph in Egypt, the members of Jacob's family, which went to Egypt, were seventy in all. (Genesis 46:27)

After that, God revealed himself to the **NATION** of Israel as He had promised Abraham 700 years earlier.....

The LORD had said to Abram, "Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you. 2 "I will make you into a great nation and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing. 3 I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse; and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you." (Genesis 12:1-3)

The nation state rejected God and effectively was destroyed. However God was not finished, for Jesus came to offer salvation to the **INDIVIDUAL**.....

6 Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. 7 If you really knew me, you would know my Father as well. From now on, you do know him and have seen him." (John 14:6-7)

and again.....

3 In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." 4 "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" 5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. 6 Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit. (John 3:3-6)

How do we know that we have had a true conversion?

13 And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, 14 who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory. (Ephesians 1:13-14)

In a human sense, I believe you can tell a genuine new Christian by whether they seek forgiveness from those they have previously wronged, and by what they do with their wallet!

The Holy Spirit teaches and guides us individually, in the ways of the Lord.....

6 But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you. (John 14:26)

True salvation can only be obtained through following Jesus.....

35 The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. 36 Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him." (John 3:35-6)

It cannot come through belonging to the 'right' church, indeed any church,

through living a good life, or any of a myriad of other ways - only through Jesus.

As a response to His personal love for us, we are required, on an individual basis, in return, to love Him and others.....

34 Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. 35 One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: 36 "Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?" 37 Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' 38 This is the first and greatest commandment. 39 And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' (Matthew 22:34-39)

While most of the church recognises this individual commitment in theory, the reality is much more emphasis is placed upon church membership, working for the church, implementing the pastors/ministers vision, etc., etc., etc., than on developing our personal relationship with Jesus.

As more and more believers receive a greater understanding of this personal relationship revelation, the church will have to change its emphasis, or become redundant in the kingdom age.

3. THE KINGDOM IS FOUND WITHIN US

As salvation is now a personal experience, so it is logical that God resides in those who have made this individual decision to follow Him.

This was, and remains, a huge change from the original 'family salvation' of the Patriarchs, followed by the 'national salvation' of Israel from Moses until Jesus. The Pharisees and religious leaders of the time could not grasp this concept of the kingdom being inherited on the basis of an individual's decision.....

Now there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish ruling council. 2 He came to Jesus at night and said, "Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God. For no one could perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him." 3 In reply Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again." 4 "How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born!" 5 Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit. (John 3:1-5)

And the teaching of the 'New Covenant' taken one step further, when the Pharisees were looking the kingdom to come to the nation state of Israel, to set them free from Roman domination.....

The Coming of the Kingdom of God

*20 Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, 21 nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because **the kingdom of God is within you.**" (Luke 17:20-21)*

What an amazing truth! For it sets us free! No longer do we have to have the right relatives or belong to a specific race of people! For all can come enter the kingdom by being *born again*! Hallelujah!

Jesus was, and remains, a revolutionary! He turned the world upside down! Religious thinking, then and now, is turned on its head! No longer do we need to belong to a group to inherit God's kingdom. Not a family. Not a nation. Not a denomination. Not a church. For our salvation is a personal gift from God (not bestowed by a minister, pastor or priest) for belief in Jesus.....

22 But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves to God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life. 23 For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 6:22-3)

Money will not buy you the kingdom.....

20 Peter answered: "May your money perish with you, because you thought you could buy the gift of God with money! (Acts 8:20)

Nor will religious behaviour, of following the rules, regulations or practices of your church grouping.....

39 Then the Lord said to him, "Now then, you Pharisees clean the outside of the cup and dish, but inside you are full of greed and wickedness. 40 You foolish people! Did not the one who made the outside make the inside also? 41 But give what is inside the dish to the poor, and everything will be clean for you. 42 "Woe to you Pharisees, because you give God a tenth of your mint, rue and all other kinds of garden herbs, but you neglect justice and the love of God. You should have practiced the latter without leaving the former undone. (Luke 11:39-42)

As the kingdom is within, we no longer need the services of any intermediary other than the Holy Spirit.....

We do not know what we ought to pray for, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express. 27 And he who searches our hearts knows the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints in accordance with God's will. (Romans 8:26b-27)

.....through Jesus.....

34 Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. (Romans 8:34)

4. IMPLICATIONS OF THE KINGDOM WITHIN

The question to be asked is, 'who represents the kingdom of God now?'

Is it the Pope as the head of the Roman Catholic Church?

Is it the head of any other denomination or grouping?

Is it the pastor, or elders, of your church?

Is it a cathedral, or any church building?

Is it an evangelist or television ministry?

These would be some of the answers of the Pharisees of Jesus' time, if they were being asked this question today, for they were looking for physical manifestations of the kingdom. Jesus replied.....

The Coming of the Kingdom of God

*20 Once, having been asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "The kingdom of God does not come with your careful observation, 21 nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because **the kingdom of God is within you.**" (Luke 17:20-21)*

The kingdom is spiritual and it resides in you and in me, when we are genuine followers of Jesus!

This is a radical change from the past where the kingdom was centred upon the Tabernacle, then the Temple, and in the Pharisees eyes, to be finally fulfilled in the nation state of Israel.

It is easy to understand the Pharisees confusion, but the terrible part is, we have not learned, and are still of the same way of thinking today! We continue to look to some physical object, or person, to represent God and His kingdom! But we are not alone. It has always been the way since early New Testament days. Listen to Paul.....

12 What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ." 13 Is Christ divided? Was

Paul crucified for you? Were you baptized into the name of Paul? 14 I am thankful that I did not baptize any of you except Crispus and Gaius, 15 so no one can say that you were baptized into my name. 16 (Yes, I also baptized the household of Stephanas; beyond that, I don't remember if I baptized anyone else.) 17 For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach the gospel—not with words of human wisdom, lest the cross of Christ be emptied of its power. (1 Corinthians 1:12-15)

Following an object or a person leads to division in the church, both then and now.....

5 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, 6 so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. (Romans 15:5)

I CAN UNEQUIVOCALLY SAY THAT THE GREATEST CHALLENGE TO THE GROWTH OF GOD'S KINGDOM UPON THE EARTH IS MANKIND'S CONTINUED 'OLD COVENANT-LIKE' ATTEMPTS TO 'HUMANIZE' IT.

Jesus came with a radical new approach of a spiritual kingdom, one sadly, we fail to understand - or live.....

*36 Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."
(John 18:36)*

We cannot look to a building.....

24 If a kingdom is divided against itself, that kingdom cannot stand. 25 If a house is divided against itself, that house cannot stand. (Mark 3:24-5)

.....or a man.....

23 At that time if anyone says to you, 'Look, here is the Christ!' or, 'There he is!' do

not believe it. 24 For false Christs and false prophets will appear and perform great signs and miracles to deceive even the elect—if that were possible. 25 See, I have told you ahead of time. (Matthew 24:23-5)

We have now moved from the physical to the spiritual.....

13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. 14 He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. 15 All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you. (John 16:13-15)

The manifestation of the Holy Spirit is to be reflected in our behaviour.....

The Beatitudes

Now when he saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, 2 and he began to teach them, saying: 3 "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 4 Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. 5 Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. 6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. 7 Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. 8 Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God. 9 Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God. 10 Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. 12 Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Matthew 5:1-12)

It is a kingdom based on personal holiness and righteousness.....

For I tell you that unless your righteousness surpasses that of the Pharisees and the teachers of the law, you will certainly not enter the kingdom of heaven.

(Matthew 5:20)

Unless we display spiritual fruit in our lives eg. Galatians 5 (*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness and self-control.*) we will not be a part of the kingdom!

43 "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. (Matthew 21:43)

I constantly get requests to join WWJ Ministries organisation. You can't! For there is not one! I relate to people on a personal and spiritual kingdom basis, for we are all individual members of the kingdom. I can learn something from what God is doing in your life, just as well as you can hopefully learn from what God has revealed to me. As sold out disciples of Christ, the kingdom resides in the both of us.

Kingdom membership is determined by our willingness to obey God's will for our lives.....

21 "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. 22 Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' 23 Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Matthew 7:21-3)

.....not by following a man or attending a church. It is inherited by those willing to walk a godly lifestyle....

32 "Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the kingdom. 33 Sell your possessions and give to the poor. Provide purses for yourselves that will not wear out, a treasure in heaven that will not be exhausted, where no thief comes near and no moth destroys. 34 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Luke 12:32-4)

The presence of the kingdom within is to be reflected in our personal day to day actions and reactions. Is the kingdom truly found within you - and me? A sobering question isn't it!

5. IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHURCH

a. THE CHURCH IS NOT THE FOCUS OF ATTENTION

Jesus came to release all who believe into a personal relationship with God through Him. This was done by becoming the final sacrifice for sin, thus reopening the way for you and for me to communicate directly with God, as Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden before they sinned.

8 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. (Genesis 3:8)

We were dead to sin, but through His death, we are now restored to God's family as brothers with Jesus.....

9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, now crowned with glory and honor because he suffered death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. 10 In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God, for whom and through whom everything exists, should make the author of their salvation perfect through suffering. 11 Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. (Hebrews 2:9-11)

In the natural, this was confirmed when the curtain in the Temple was supernaturally torn into two, from top to bottom - by/from God (top) to man (bottom).

51 At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. (Matthew 27:51a)

We still do not really understand the full implications of what happened at that moment in time. RELIGION (primarily the need for priests to intercede on behalf of man) was replaced by RELATIONSHIP (the ability of mankind to personally communicate with God), through Jesus.

Every high priest is selected from among men and is appointed to represent them in matters related to God, to offer gifts and sacrifices for sins. 2 He is able to deal gently with those who are ignorant and are going astray, since he himself is subject to weakness. 3 This is why he has to offer sacrifices for his own sins, as well as for the sins of the people. 4 No one takes this honor upon himself; he must be called by God, just as Aaron was. 5 So Christ also did not take upon himself the glory of becoming a high priest. But God said to him, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father." 6 And he says in another place, "You are a priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek." 7 During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. 8 Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered 9 and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him 10 and was designated by God to be high priest in the order of Melchizedek. (Hebrews 5:1-10)

So what have we done? We have set up another religious organisation and structure that we call 'the church'. We have built buildings (temples) and appointed pastors and ministers, who have effectively become de facto, pseudo priests. People now look to the church for their salvation and not to Jesus. We have not learned the lesson of the cross.

This is not the way of the early New Testament, where gatherings were small and based on intimate personal relationship with God and with each other. Could Jesus say what He said to the church in Philadelphia to your church?

Jesus knew these people, this 'church' (gathering of believers) intimately, and likewise, they knew Him.....

*7 "To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write: These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. 8 I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. 9 I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. 10 Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth.
(Revelation 3:7-10)*

My friend (if you still are!), I was brought up in a Baptist Church, have worshipped in Pentecostal churches and so I know, and have been ingrained in, church ways as much as many of you. I know so many wonderful people whose lives are focused upon the church. People, who faithfully attend, give to and work for their church. Their relationship with God is through their church. They do not know Jesus personally.

Over the years, as I have studied the Bible and listened to God talking to me, I have come to understand that we have simply replaced one religion with another. One set of priests with another. One set of buildings with another. All in the name of God, but having become another religion, centred round the pride of man.

The greatest anger Jesus demonstrated was directed towards the religious establishment of His day. Just one example.....

15 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are. (Matthew 23:15)

Today, not a lot has changed. For we talk a lot about God, yet our lives, so often, do not reflect our words, our focus being on the institution of the church with its rules and regulations, rather than upon the person of Jesus.

This is not a criticism of, or promotion for any type or form of church. That misses the point. There is a church in a town near us that has the slogan, "Making the church to be the greatest attraction". Every time I pass it, it makes me so sad. However well-intentioned the people may be, their focus is 100% wrong. For we are to make God, to make Jesus, not the church, the main attraction!

As will see next week, we all need to radically change our focus to be upon God, through Jesus, and be guided by the Holy Spirit.

We are to implement the revolution which Jesus paid for with His life!

b. GOD'S CALL IS TO 'GO OUT', NOT TO 'COME IN'

The prime, most ungodly, result of the creation of a church structure based upon buildings, paid clergy and programmes has been that the church has developed, over nearly two millennia now, an inward focus rather than outward action.

From the majestic Cathedrals of earlier times, designed to represent man's idea of heaven to the people, to present sanctuaries into which we are invited, in order to experience God and escape the evil world, the church has developed an inward focused mentality.

Why is this? Put simply, the church would otherwise go 'without'! Without congregations the buildings would be empty! Without congregations to give, the clergy would not be paid! Without congregations, the programmes would be

unattended! So there is a strong, even magnetic establishment force, aimed at getting people into churches and to retain them once they have come in. This has led to a territorial battle, not between street gangs, but between churches, together with the world and its enticements, to desperately hold on to congregants, so that they may continue to operate!

Of course there are many, many sincere and wonderful people within churches round the world, with a real heart for the Lord. But sadly, the basic foundation upon which the church is currently based is not Jesus, but structures, both physical and human based.

What then did Jesus command us to do in order to advance the kingdom.....

The Great Commission

*16 Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. 17 When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. 18 Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. 19 Therefore **go and make disciples of all nations**, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matthew 28:16-20)*

First of all he commanded us to **GO**.....

Jesus Sends Out the Seventy-two

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. 2 He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field. 3 Go! I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. 4 Do not take a purse or bag or sandals; and do not greet anyone on the road.

(Luke 10:1-3)

He trained the twelve disciples in the same manner.....

Jesus Sends Out the Twelve

Then Jesus went around teaching from village to village. 7 Calling the Twelve to him, he sent them out two by two and gave them authority over evil spirits. 8 These were his instructions: "Take nothing for the journey except a staff—no bread, no bag, no money in your belts. 9 Wear sandals but not an extra tunic. 10 Whenever you enter a house, stay there until you leave that town. 11 And if any place will not welcome you or listen to you, shake the dust off your feet when you leave, as a testimony against them." (Mark6:6b-11)

What to do? To **MAKE DISCIPLES**. What is a disciple? One who is committed 100% to their Lord.....

The Cost of Being a Disciple

25 Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: 26 "If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters—yes, even his own life—he cannot be my disciple. 27 And anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple. 28 "Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Will he not first sit down and estimate the cost to see if he has enough money to complete it? 29 For if he lays the foundation and is not able to finish it, everyone who sees it will ridicule him, 30 saying, 'This fellow began to build and was not able to finish.' 31 "Or suppose a king is about to go to war against another king. Will he not first sit down and consider whether he is able with ten thousand men to oppose the one coming against him with twenty thousand? 32 If he is not able, he will send a delegation while the other is still a long way off and will ask for terms of peace. 33 In the same way, any of you who does not give up everything he has cannot be my disciple. 34 "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? 35 It is fit neither for the soil nor for the manure pile; it is thrown out. "He who has ears to hear, let him hear." (Luke 14:25-35)

Making disciples is what Paul did.....

The Return to Antioch in Syria

21 They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, 22 strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. (Acts 14:21-22b)

And where to? To **ALL NATIONS**. Initially the disciples were in Jerusalem.....

7 So the word of God spread. The number of disciples in Jerusalem increased rapidly, and a large number of priests became obedient to the faith. (Acts 6:7)

Finally, Paul got to Rome.....

Arrival at Rome

11 After three months we put out to sea in a ship that had wintered in the island. It was an Alexandrian ship with the figurehead of the twin gods Castor and Pollux. 12 We put in at Syracuse and stayed there three days. 13 From there we set sail and arrived at Rhegium. The next day the south wind came up, and on the following day we reached Puteoli. 14 There we found some brothers who invited us to spend a week with them. And so we came to Rome. (Acts 28:11-14)

Other of the disciples went even further afield. 'Doubting' Thomas no longer doubted His Saviour and Lord, eventually being martyred in India!

Of course, I am not saying that everyone has to go to Africa or India as a missionary and build churches there. That is the 'organised' way of church thinking, not the 'organic' kingdom way. The church desires to replicate itself in its own image, to set up branches of the particular denomination or grouping, in another place.

The spreading of the kingdom comes individually, from one person to another, through personal example, by conviction of the Holy Spirit to the one ministered to, and followed by personal discipleship. Their relationship is to be a personal one with Jesus, not through a church or person. Yes, where possible, we are to gather together to encourage and support each other, but our primary focus is always to be on Jesus, our Saviour and Lord. We can all be kingdom disciples where we live. The harvest field is everywhere around us.

An example - particularly for ministers! We have many requests to become associated with, members or representatives of, Walking With Jesus Ministries. All are declined. Yes, we associate with many people around the world. Hopefully, we can learn from and support each other. We do not have a ministry. The ministry belongs to Jesus. We endeavour to be led by, and obedient to, Him. Of course, we have others whom we trust who are welcome to advise us and correct us when we go astray, for none of us hears 100% from the Lord all the time. Again, we look to Jesus for our guidance and provision. We would encourage you to, as well. He will guide and lead you too, if you allow Him.

This is the way of the kingdom.

c. CHURCH IS PEOPLE, FIRST AND LAST

Under the Old Covenant (Testament) the Tabernacle, then the Temple, was the place where the presence of God primarily dwelled, and to which the people were called to worship Him a minimum of 3 times a year.....

The Three Annual Festivals

14 "Three times a year you are to celebrate a festival to me. 15 "Celebrate the Feast of Unleavened Bread; for seven days eat bread made without yeast, as I commanded

you. Do this at the appointed time in the month of Abib, for in that month you came out of Egypt. "No one is to appear before me empty-handed. 16 "Celebrate the Feast of Harvest with the firstfruits of the crops you sow in your field. "Celebrate the Feast of Ingathering at the end of the year, when you gather in your crops from the field. 17 "Three times a year all the men are to appear before the Sovereign LORD. 18 "Do not offer the blood of a sacrifice to me along with anything containing yeast. "The fat of my festival offerings must not be kept until morning. 19 "Bring the best of the firstfruits of your soil to the house of the LORD your God. "Do not cook a young goat in its mother's milk. (Exodus 23:19)

Jesus came to replace the temple with Himself! He predicted the destruction of the physical temple, (which happened in the physical too, in AD70).....

Jesus left the temple and was walking away when his disciples came up to him to call his attention to its buildings. 2 "Do you see all these things?" he asked. "I tell you the truth, not one stone here will be left on another; every one will be thrown down." (Matthew 24:1-2)

The people, then and now, cannot understand the revolution that would take place with the death and resurrection of Jesus. They, and we, continue to look for a 'place' to worship God, when we should instead, be looking to a 'person'. For the new 'temple' referred to, is to be the resurrected body of Jesus, as He had predicted.....

Jesus Again Predicts His Death

17 Now as Jesus was going up to Jerusalem, he took the twelve disciples aside and said to them, 18 "We are going up to Jerusalem, and the Son of Man will be betrayed to the chief priests and the teachers of the law. They will condemn him to death 19 and will turn him over to the Gentiles to be mocked and flogged and crucified. On the third day he will be raised to life!" (Matthew 20:17-19)

When He was crucified the people mocked Him.....

39 Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads 40 and saying, "You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God!" (Matthew 27:39-40)

And as indeed happened, for Jesus explained after His resurrection.....

45 Then he opened their minds so they could understand the Scriptures. 46 He told them, "This is what is written: The Christ will suffer and rise from the dead on the third day, 47 and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48 You are witnesses of these things. (Luke 24:45-8)

He told them to wait for an incredible personal experience.....

49 I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high." (Luke 24:49)

.....when through the anointing of the Holy Spirit, 40 days later at Pentecost, the temple would also become you and me!.....

16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple. (1 Corinthians 3:16-17)

We have to live our lives in a holy way, in order to honour the temple within.....

19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; 20 you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

Paul again, puts it very strongly!.....

18 You have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness.

(Romans 6:18)

Having established that we are indeed God's living temples, we will next week, investigate the implications of this revolutionary change, for the church.

Having established that we are indeed God's living temples, we will now investigate the implications of this revolutionary change, for the church.

Jesus spoke about the change that He had brought with Him.....

16 "The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it. (Luke 16:16)

Sadly, our church system has been set up on the Old Covenant basis that the church is the residence of God rather than His temple being His people, which is the change under the New Covenant. The signature, sign, or seal of the New Covenant is the promise of the Holy Spirit to live within you and me, the individual believer.....

26 "When the Counselor comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth who goes out from the Father, he will testify about me. (John 15:26)

This actually first happened at the time of the Feast of Pentecost (Shavuot) 50 days after Passover (where Jesus was sacrificed as the 'Passover Lamb', at the time the lambs were being slaughtered for the feast, the next day!).....

*When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. 2 Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. **3 They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them.** 4 All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. (Acts 2:1-4)*

Please note that the Holy Spirit did not simply come to the house, but entered each individual there. At that time, each individual became the residence of the Holy Spirit; each one was now the temple of God.

On that amazing day, 3,000 individuals were baptised (to replace the 3,000 killed for disobedience to God at the first Pentecost at Mount Sinai).....

28 The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of the people died. (Exodus 32:28).....

41 Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. (Acts 2:41)

Please note that it does not say, 'the church increased by 3,000 that day', but that the number of believers, i.e. 'individual temples of the Holy Spirit, increased by 3,000'.

The word translated as 'church' in the New Testament is an incorrect translation. The true word is the Greek 'ekklesia' which means 'assembly', or a 'congregation' of people, temporarily gathering together to discuss an issue. It had political and employment connotations.

The word 'church' comes from the Greek 'kyridakon' which is not found in the New Testament at all!

Why did this change arise? Put simply, through the politicization of the church. Starting with Emperor Constantine's conversion, and continuing through King James's headship of the Church of England, the church was used as a means of controlling the people. The presence of God was therefore invested in the church and its formal organisation, in order to enable human control to be exerted. This tradition has continued, in more subtle ways, right down to today.

Under the New Covenant, those called to ministry were not called to control, but to serve and equip the saints, who were, and are, the true inheritors of the kingdom of God.....

11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up (Ephesians 4:11-12)

Where this occurs, the body of believers will come into unity, for the splits, divisions and agendas of the denominational church system will no longer be an issue, no longer be of relevance.....

*13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.
(Ephesians 4:13)*

It is not 'power to the people', as promoted by the Baptist Church and some others, but rather, power to God, as he builds His kingdom in you and in me. Our focus and leading is to be from God, not humans, however well-intentioned they may be.....

*36 Jesus said, "My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews. But now my kingdom is from another place."
(John 18:36)*

And again, being confirmed by Paul.....

17 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating and drinking, but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit, (Romans 14:17)

We are, therefore, to move from a worldly based church system to developing the spiritual kingdom within all genuine believers.

If you are waiting for an A-Z of changing the current church to a kingdom church, you will be disappointed, for there is no way of doing this in a programmed way. Rather, whether inside or outside a formal church, we need to look at the ways in which Jesus said we, as individuals, are to enter the kingdom, and teach and encourage each other to live them out in our lives.

1. LIVE A RIGHTEOUS LIFE

43 Then the righteous will shine like the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear. (Matthew 13:43)

2. BE HUMBLE

4 Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 18:4)

3. DEVELOP SPIRITUAL FRUIT IN OUR LIVES

42 Jesus said to them, "Have you never read in the Scriptures: "The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone; the Lord has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes"? 43 "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. 44 He who falls on this stone will be broken to pieces, but he on whom it falls will be crushed." (Matthew 21:42-4)

4. LIVE OUT IN OUR LIVES WHAT WE SPEAK FROM OUR MOUTH

*13 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to.
(Matthew 23:13)*

5. SHARE THE MESSAGE OF THE GOSPEL OF THE KINGDOM WITH OTHERS

14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. (Matthew 24:14)

6. LOOK AFTER THE POOR AND NEEDY

34 "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, 36 I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me. (Matthew 25:34-6)

7. BE PREPARED TO ENDURE HARDSHIP AND REJECTION

21 They preached the good news in that city and won a large number of disciples. Then they returned to Lystra, Iconium and Antioch, 22 strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said. (Acts 14:21-2)

8. LIVE FRUITFUL LIVES

10 And we pray this in order that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and may please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, 11 being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience, and joyfully 12 giving thanks to the Father, who has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. 13 For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14 in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. (Colossians 1:10-14)

9. LIVE HOLY AND RIGHTEOUS LIVES WORTHY OF OUR HEAVENLY FATHER

10 You are witnesses, and so is God, of how holy, righteous and blameless we were among you who believed. 11 For you know that we dealt with each of you as a father

deals with his own children, 12 encouraging, comforting and urging you to live lives worthy of God, who calls you into his kingdom and glory. (1 Thessalonians 2:10-12)

10. WORSHIP GOD WITH ALL OUR BEINGS

28 Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, 29 for our "God is a consuming fire." (Hebrews 12:28)

11. SEEK SPIRITUAL RATHER THAN MATERIAL WEALTH

5 Listen, my dear brothers: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? (James 2:5)

12. DEVELOP BOTH FAITH AND WORKS IN OUR LIFE

5 For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; 6 and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, Perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; 7 and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. 8 For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9 But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins. 10 Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall, 11 and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. (2 Peter 1:5-11)

13. DEVELOP ENDURANCE WHEN SUFFERING FOR JESUS

9 I, John, your brother and companion in the suffering and kingdom and patient endurance that are ours in Jesus, was on the island of Patmos because of the word of God and the testimony of Jesus. (Revelation 1:9)

14. WE ARE TO COMMUNICATE DIRECTLY WITH GOD - THROUGH JESUS, NOT A MAN

5 and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, 6 and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.

(Revelation 1:5-6)

15. KNOWING THAT THROUGH JESUS WE ARE A KINGDOM AND PRIESTS WHO WILL REIGN UPON THE EARTH!

9 And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. 10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth."

(Revelation 5:9-10)

16. BELIEVING THAT SATAN IS DEFEATED THROUGH US SACRIFICING OUR LIVES TO AND FOR JESUS!

10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Christ. For the accuser of our brothers, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. 11 They overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. (Revelation 12:10-11)

17. HAVING THE CERTAINTY THAT JESUS IS RETURNING TO REIGN OVER HIS KINGDOM ON THE EARTH!

15 The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his

Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever.” (Revelation 11:15)

AMEN.

d. THE KINGDOM 'CHURCH' IS PEOPLE BUILDING PEOPLE'S RELATIONSHIPS WITH JESUS AND OTHERS.

We have seen that the church is people. Unfortunately, our human religious natures have made it an institution. When we think of church, we automatically think of 'structure', be it of buildings, of theology, of ministerial hierarchy or of programmes. Sadly, man has organised God out of the church!

The kingdom of God is a marriage relationship between individual believers and Jesus.

31 "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh." 32 This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. (Ephesians 5:31-2)

As we have seen earlier, in the Greek, *the church* does not mean church as we know it. Charles Spurgeon explains the true meaning of the verse very well.....

Unity, mark you, for that is the essence of the marriage-bond. We are one with Christ, who made himself one with his people.

The spiritual marriage will be fulfilled in the natural, at the time of the return of Jesus.....

6 Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. 7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. 8 Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.)

(Revelation 19:6-8)

A truly successful marriage is based upon relationship, of love between one another. God showed His love for us.....

16 "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

..... and we are required to return this love, both to Him and to others.....

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Ephesians 5:1-2)

Love is not found in religion with its rules, regulations, (both formal and informal), and its demands upon its followers.....

13 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You shut the kingdom of heaven in men's faces. You yourselves do not enter, nor will you let those enter who are trying to. 15 "Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell as you are. (Matthew 23:13-15)

Kingdom growth then, comes not through manmade church systems, but through personal servanthood.....

25 Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 26 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Matthew 20:25-8)

Leaders too, are charged to equip and serve others, not to bring them into a church or denomination, but rather, into unity of the faith and Christ-likeness.....

11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, 12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. (Ephesians 4:11-13)

As we conclude this section on IMPLICATIONS FOR THE CHURCH I ask you to review these 4 principles to see how your church (as leaders or followers) matches up to the principles laid out by Jesus and other New Testament writers.

There needs to be a revolution within the current way we 'do church', for the kingdom of God to grow and truly become the perfect bride for whom Jesus is to return.

Sound impossible and idealistic? I know it does! Certainly, to our limited human understanding and ability it is. It is not my place to tell you what to do or how to change. That is between you and God. My plea to you today is for you to search out the truth that God wishes to reveal to you through His precious Holy Spirit.....

13 But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears, and he will tell you what is yet to come. 14 He will bring glory to me by taking from what is mine and making it known to you. 15 All that belongs to the Father is mine. That is why I said the Spirit will take from what is mine and make it known to you. (John 16:13-15)

AMEN.

e. TESTIMONY

I am sure there will be readers who are thinking, "It's all very well David, but what are the practical realities for today's world and church?"

As I said, I cannot tell you what your response should or should not be, for that is between you and the Holy Spirit to work out.

However, I would like to share with you 3 experiences I have had over the past week, which may help you.

1. TRAVELLING WITH A MAN FROM A TRADITIONAL CHURCH BACKGROUND

I spent several hours travelling with a gentleman in his 60's on a business trip. I found out he was a Christian, at one time an undertaker who, in that role, had had a lot of experience in dealing with churches, pastors and ministers. His observation was, that in strongly evangelical (primarily meaning Pentecostal churches, I would suggest) he had observed that the church attendees were followers of their charismatic personality leaders, and had little opportunity or encouragement to develop their God-given gifts within the structure of the church. He observed that the people's spiritual growth over the years was virtually at a standstill for they seemed to be going round in circles spiritually. He also observed that many were leaving these churches, disillusioned with their lack of spiritual development.

All this was completely unsolicited by me! He did agree that this was happening in the more traditional churches too.

2. A PENTECOSTAL LADY MET AT A PARTY!

On Saturday evening, Kathy and I attended a party for a friend who is shifting to Australia, as many New Zealanders have done over many years. A lot do

come back in due course!

While there, I talked to a lady, whom I didn't know, and she shared with me the story of a humble, very talented worship leader, who was frozen out of the worship team of her local church as she represented a threat to the established leadership. (Her words not mine.) She persevered for several years in this church, but eventually was called out to a church in Australia where she now leads a large congregation. This lady also indicated, as did the previous gentleman, that there were many others within the church who were leaving because of dissatisfaction with the church system.

3. EQUIPPING STATION

Through my friend Rodney Francis (THE GOSPEL FAITH MESSENGER), who operates a ministry training people in the use of spiritual gifts, particularly the gift of prophecy.....

*Follow the way of love and eagerly desire spiritual gifts, especially the gift of prophecy.
(1 Corinthians 14:1)*

.....Kathy and I started a group here in Napier to help people who want more of God to develop their gifts. People have been encouraged to step out in a safe and friendly environment to further develop gifts they know they have but have not been able to exercise within their church environment. We firmly emphasize that we are not interested in setting up yet another church but are here to help people take their newly developed gifts into the community and apply them in their day to day lives.

Interestingly, the result of this, over time, has been that we have grown into an 'assembly' very much like what we understand of early New Testament church meetings. For example.....

26 What then shall we say, brothers? When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation. All of these must be done for the strengthening of the church. 27 If anyone speaks in a tongue, two—or at the most three—should speak, one at a time, and someone must interpret. 28 If there is no interpreter, the speaker should keep quiet in the church and speak to himself and God. 29 Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said. 30 And if a revelation comes to someone who is sitting down, the first speaker should stop. 31 For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged. 32 The spirits of prophets are subject to the control of prophets. (1 Corinthians 14:26-31)

These meetings are truly led by the Holy Spirit, and His palpable presence is there. No one person dominates. And it works! Everybody now shares and ministers to others. People are participators, not spectators. We do not know where the Spirit will take us, and He takes us to places we have no conception of beforehand. We are learning to pray as true intercessors, praying God's prayers, not our own desires. Every second meeting we eat together and share communion. That is the greatest level of organisation we have! We meet in a cafe belonging to a local church. Interestingly, this church is pleased to have the Spirit present in their premises, on the 2nd and 4th Tuesday evenings of the month!

These meetings are very different to traditional 'Home Groups' (often promoting a 'church line'), or even 'Home churches', where a person or persons 'leads' (dominates) the meeting rather than the Holy Spirit being allowed to have His way.

Practical experience is showing us that once the group consistently reaches 25-30 attendees, it needs to be split, in order to ensure that all can participate.

I trust that these testimonies may be of value to you in considering the future direction of your fellowship. We don't pretend to have all, or even many, of the answers. What we do know though, is that the Lord is building His kingdom in

ways that are beyond our human ability to organise. He is moving from an 'organised' religious monolith to a united, 'organic' kingdom body which we are now beginning to see and experience, in preparation for His return for His perfect bride.....

6 Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: "Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. 7 Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready. 8 Fine linen, bright and clean, was given her to wear." (Fine linen stands for the righteous acts of the saints.) 9 Then the angel said to me, "Write: 'Blessed are those who are invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb!'" And he added, "These are the true words of God." (Revelation 19:6-9)

FROM "MUSICAL" TO "HEART WORSHIP"

After spending time looking at the 'organic' nature of the kingdom church, we will now consider one of the most contentious areas of 'organised' church life, the area of worship.

Ask any pastor, priest or minister what causes the most ructions within their church and you can virtually guarantee that the form of worship will be near or the top of their list! Why is this? Simply because we take a group of individuals, each with their own level and way of interacting with their God, and try to unite them as one in the tradition of the church in they are worshipping. Impossible!

You see, as God intended it, worship is an ongoing personal experience between us and our Lord, not a 10, 20, 40, or 60 minute experience, on the 1 or more times a week we gather together. **We relate worship to singing, God relates worship to living. Worship is more than a song, it is a lifestyle.**

I love worship! I love singing (even dancing at times!) and worshipping my God in a group situation. I can adapt to many different worship styles, for I have learned to through visiting different types of churches in many varied cultures.

Within the Pentecostal tradition, a 'formula' (yes, even in worship!) has been developed to bring the people into the presence of God. You start with songs of THANKSGIVING.....

10 When the builders laid the foundation of the temple of the LORD, the priests in their vestments and with trumpets, and the Levites (the sons of Asaph) with cymbals, took their places to praise the LORD, as prescribed by David king of Israel. 11 With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the LORD: "He is good; his love to Israel endures forever." (Ezra 3:10-11a)

.....which are followed by PRAISE songs.....

11 With praise and thanksgiving they sang to the LORD: "He is good; his love to Israel endures forever." (Ezra 3:11)

.....to lead into WORSHIP.....

4 Sing to God, sing praise to his name, extol him who rides on the clouds— his name is the LORD— and rejoice before him. (Psalm 68:4)

Interestingly, I could not find a single verse, directly relating song to worship - as opposed to thanksgiving and praise. 'Extolling', as used here, is probably a better description of what we do during our worship times!

Worship through song and dance, in the Old Testament, is epitomized by King David dancing in his underwear, in front of the Ark, as he took it from Obed-Edom to Jerusalem.....

14 David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the LORD with all his might, 15 while he and the entire house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouts and the sound of trumpets. (2 Samuel 6:14-15)

This was hated by the 'religionists', symbolized by his wife Michal.....

16 As the ark of the LORD was entering the City of David, Michal daughter of Saul watched from a window. And when she saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD, she despised him in her heart. (2 Samuel 6:16)

Nothing has changed today. Try exuberantly dancing and shouting with unbridled enthusiasm, in your underwear, during worship today, and see what reaction you get!

However, David's motivation came not from voyeurism, but from a heart sold

out to God. That is why God chose him to replace the 'people's choice' King Saul (Michal's father), as king.....

14 But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the LORD's command." (1 Samuel 13:14)

The worshipful heart of David is shown throughout the Psalms he wrote. Just one example.....

2 Test me, O LORD, and try me, examine my heart and my mind; 3 for your love is ever before me, and I walk continually in your truth. (Psalm 26:2-3)

At the exact time of the death of Jesus, the curtain in the Temple was supernaturally ripped open from top to bottom, and we were given access to the very throne of God, 24/7.....

44 It was now about the sixth hour, and darkness came over the whole land until the ninth hour, 45 for the sun stopped shining. And the curtain of the temple was torn in two. 46 Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last. (Luke 23:44-6)

In the words of Jesus, that 'summarise' the New Commandment.....

27 He answered: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind"; and, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.'" (Luke 10:27)

.....we are to worship our Lord with our entire being, all day, every day of our life.....

23 Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. 24 God

is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth.” (John 4:23-4)

This, total worship, is the way of the kingdom.

FROM "PRIESTHOOD" TO "PERSONAL" MINISTRY

As we conclude, it is appropriate that we should finish with a discussion on 'WHO IS THE KINGDOM MINISTER TO BE?'

The current situation of a separated clergy and laity has come about through two primary reasons.

1. *Through the Roman Catholic Church:* Put simply, Emperor Constantine and his successors used the church to control their subjects. To do this, those in charge had to be vested with 'priestly' authority, so that the people would do as they were told. The Emperors instituted a hybrid version of the Old Testament priesthood, combined with elements of the Jewish secular kingly function as well. This new priesthood, sadly, was very effective in controlling the peasants', right through until the end of the Dark Ages.

2. *The Industrial Revolution:* While the Reformation brought about some dilution of priestly power, (although not as much as one would have expected) the revolutionary principles of division of labour developed at that time, were soon applied to the church to ensure the continuation of the priesthood under a different guise. For as people absorbed the concept of splitting and specializing work into its component parts, for monetary wages rather than barter, so conveniently for both people and clergy, the responsibility for people's spiritual condition was again delegated to a paid priesthood, now generally known as ministers or pastors.

This separated system of people from clergy forms the foundation upon which the church is still based today. However, it is not the way of the kingdom. Paul faced the early manifestations of this 'person power' in dealing with division in the Corinthian church.....

*10 By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. **11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.** (1 Corinthians 3:10-11)*

For a revolutionary change has now taken place, as Paul goes on to explain.....

16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? (1 Corinthians 3:16)

In kingdom living we, individually, are to be the 'ministers' to others.

Salt and Light

*13 "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. 14 "You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden. 15 Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. **16 In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven.** (Matthew 5:13-16)*

We have taken the verb 'minister' meaning "attend to the needs of" and converted it into a noun! This is not what was meant to be! Of course, some are given special ministry gifts, but these are to be used to train others to 'minister', to serve.....

*11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, **12 to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up** (Ephesians 4:11-12)*

Please note, there are no capitals! These are functions, not positions.

Ironically, the way to kingdom unity is through seemingly godly disorder, led by

the Holy Spirit, rather than man's organised order, which has led to the creation of 30,000+ denominations and movements. Ephesians continues.....

13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

(Ephesians 4:13)

As we minister (serve) others, so we all become brothers and sisters with Christ, a brotherhood replacing a hierarchy.....

11 Both the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers. 12 He says, "I will declare your name to my brothers; in the presence of the congregation I will sing your praises."

(Hebrews 2:11-12)

Jesus came to minister (serve) and we are called to do the same.....

25 Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 26 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 27 and whoever wants to be first must be your slave— 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."

(Matthew 20:25-8)

Ministry is not the responsibility of man appointed clergy, but the responsibility of us all, as disciples of Christ. That is the call of the 'Great Commission'.....

19 Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, 20 and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

(Matthew 28:19-20)

As we conform to and implement the kingdom way of personal ministry so the words of the Lord's Prayer we are called upon to pray will come to fulfilment.....

9 "This, then, is how you should pray: "Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,10 your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. (Matthew 6:9-10)

AMEN.