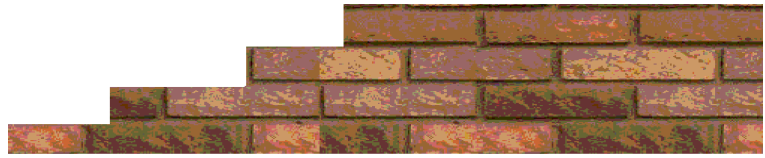


Rebuild



Then they will rebuild the ancient ruins, They will raise up the former devastations, And they will repair the ruined cities, The desolations of many generations. (Isaiah 61:4)

The Angel and Rev. Meijers

Pastor Meijers was so happy he could not contain himself. Right at the sink, with mouth full of toothpaste foam, he gurgled, "Thank you, Lord!" Elm Street Church of the Apostles had just received 20 new families from its membership class! He continued to dribble, "God, you are so good!"

The happy pastor jumped into bed, gave his wife an affectionate peck on the cheek, and then turned to snuggle in his pillow for a good sleep. "What a great day this has been," he thought to himself as he began to drift. And with that last thought, the happy pastor fell into a deep sleep.

But his sleep was not for long. A strong, hard tug on his blanket jarred him to a weary consciousness. He smiled, thinking it was his wife. "She can be quite the cover hog", he mused. But then it struck him. "That tug came from the *foot* of the bed." The pastor sat up in bed to see the cause of his interrupted sleep, and his discovery sent a jolt of shock through his chest, and froze him motionless. He was quite awake and alert now. The fiery brilliance of the angel jarred away his sleepiness.

"Who are you? Why are you here?!" the terrified pastor blurted.

"I am an angel sent from God. I am here to speak to you about the church you shepherd."

Relieved by the reply, the pastor's body relaxed a bit. He began to marvel at his fortune. "How wonderful. Growth in membership, active

ministries, a new educational wing, and now this - an angelic visitation! I can just see the congregation's eyes bulge out when I tell them about this!"

The angel quickly put a halt to the pastor's mid-night "day-dream." "I have come to tell you of the judgment that is upon your church, and its need for repentance."

Pastor Meijers was awestruck. Repentance?! How could this be? The senior pastor remarked in disbelief, "I am sure you know what we have been doing here for the Lord. Our attendance is up 200%. We have more ministries in place than ever! I just don't understand."

With calm conviction, and measured words, the angelic messenger continued to deliver God's word. "You are a people of sincerity and zeal, but you judge yourselves and your achievements by the world's standards, and not the Kingdom's."

Although it seemed irrational to question the judgment of an angelic messenger, Pastor Meijers seemed to have no choice but to challenge the evaluation. "Your presence makes it clear that I am missing something, but I am indeed in need of a word from God if you say our ministry is off! I mean, with all reverence, I must ask, what is wrong with success?" Then the pastor began listing some of his achievements. "Before, people hardly gave anything at all; now they give 10% of what they earn. We had little ministry two years ago; now we

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have small group ministry, Bible study groups, home visitation teams, men's groups, woman's groups, an active youth ministry, a well-attended mid-week service, and this is just the beginning. I could on and on."

"Yes, I know these things," the angel responded, "but you..."

"And what about our focus on the lost?" the increasingly defensive pastor continued. "Yes, we could do more here, and I would like to see an even greater response to our preaching, but we have more people receiving Christ than ever before. Just six months ago we began a campus outreach and, three months before that, we had a marriage seminar aimed toward non-believers. In both of these outreaches we are seeing a good response."

"Yes, I also know this," the angel assured, "but this is not what..."

"And what about our worship services?" Pastor Meijers was now full-upright in bed, and his "preaching finger" began to point. "Many come just to hear our anointed music, and if I may dare say so, they come to hear

some anointed preaching too. Do not misunderstand. I do not take credit for this, but certainly if we were so far off the mark these things would not be. And what about the miracles?" the pastor continued. "In these last few months we have seen people healed of cancer, diabetes, and, in one case, a person was even healed of glaucoma. Certainly these miracles must be a sign that we are in the Father's will."

With calm, and unmoved resolve, the angel responded to the challenge. "Did not our Lord say that on the Last Day there would be many who would protest Christ's evaluation with the defense that they performed miracles, and spoke God's anointed word?" (Matthew 7:22).

"Yes," the pastor affirmed, "but you are not saying that we are like such people, are you? We are certainly not perfect - not even close to it - but this judgment is directed against the lawless unbeliever. Whatever our failings, we are not unbelievers."

"No," the angel spoke firmly, "you are not lawless unbelievers."

The pastor sighed and leaned back against the headboard. But the angel had more to say. Words that would again tense him into upright position.

The angel continued, "If you see miracles, prophesy, growing numbers, increasing financial resources, and other such things as proof of faithfulness, you are mistaken about the nature of God's Kingdom in a way

these unbelievers misunderstand it."

"Well, then, please," the pastor pleaded, "tell me about how we have misunderstood God's Kingdom, and how we as a church fail to reflect that Kingdom. Tell me how we are not the church God would want us to be. Please tell me, where and how do the things I have shared with you reveal a misunderstanding?"

The angel raised his noble face upward, shut his eyes, waited a moment as if to pray, and then directed his penetrating gaze once again toward the apprehensive pastor. "Ask yourself this question, and the questions that flow from it, and you will have your answer to your question: '**Do your people love one another?**'"

"Do your people freely extend forgiveness to those who have offended them? Do they pursue forgiveness from those *they* have sinned against? Do they love one another only when they agree, or is their love stronger than their disagreements? Do they speak with honor about one another even when there are disputes? Are your people primarily united by what they do - such as a ministry, or a specific cause- or are their relationships founded in the Covenant of God in Christ? Do your people love one another enough to speak the truth in gentleness to each other, out of concern for the other's best, or does each shy away from speaking because they would rather get one another's

approval?"

"And how open are your people to share their resources with those in need? And what of the quality of their relationships? Do they love one another enough to open their lives to each other, or does the extent of their relationships rarely go further than a once or twice a week event? Do they truly know one another? Do they genuinely trust each other?"

"As you ask yourself these questions, you will learn where your congregation fails to reveal the Kingdom. For by the degree that your people *love* - by *this* measure - the Kingdom is in your midst."

The pastor's eyes stayed open wide, staring at nothing. The truth of the angel's words touched a hidden place in his soul that commanded stillness. "How could I have missed something so obvious?" he whispered to himself. "Of course, without love one cannot be a follower of Christ (John 13:33,34). The Lord Himself said that the Greatest Commandment is *love* (Mark 12:31). What was I thinking?"

Refocusing on the angelic visitor, the pastor ventured again to speak. This time he spoke with a more fitting reverence, and was more ready to listen than to continue a defense...

(to be continued)

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