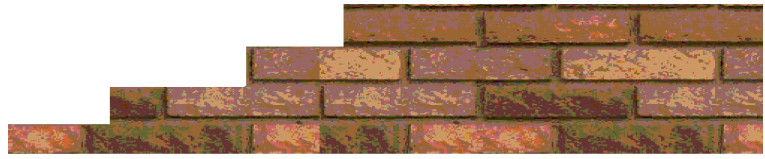


Rebuild



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

(Part 2, and Conclusion)

Pastor Meijers saw his ministry as a success, but then an angel appeared to him in his bedroom. The angel did not commend the pastor, but rather condemned his ministry as a betrayal of God's Kingdom. The angel explained that increased attendance, expanded ministry, generous financial giving, evangelistic outreach, and even the occurrence of miracles were nothing if placed before love. It was for this failure the angel had been sent to Pastor Meijers.

"Tell me," the shocked pastor questioned, "how can we become the loving people God wants us to be? What should we do? What should I do?"

The angel made no response. He stood silent.

"Why are you not answering me?"

Still no answer.

The pastor began to challenge the angel for his silence. "Do you come only to deliver a word of judgment? Don't you have anything to say as to *how* I should repent? What kind of angel are you?!"

The angel only looked ahead. He looked through the pastor, but not at him.

The pastor spoke with more agitation. "I do not understand it! You awaken me in the night. You tell me our church betrays God's kingdom. But when it comes to offering a word of help, you say nothing. If that is the way that it is, I give up."

On the heels of those words, the angel spoke. "That is the root of your sin."

"What? What is the root of my sin?" the pastor asked excitedly. "That I

am ready to give up? Is this my sin?"

"No," the angel said with directness. "If you were to give up, I would know that you were ready to hear my words. But because you believe the purposes of God are achieved by your efforts, I know you cannot hear my words."

"I guess you are right about that," the confused pastor said with exasperation. "I don't understand what you are getting at, or what you mean."

"The reason I do not answer your question, 'What should I do?' is because you believe *you* can *do* something to make things right. You think mere reorganization, or presenting teachings, or starting other programs will heal your church. You are wrong. Your problem does not lie in what you do or do not do, but the attitudes *within* you."

"I don't understand what you are saying," the pastor exhaled out with a frustrated sigh.

"You relate to the Church of God as an organization, rather than Family. You administer it by providing ministries, dispensing sacraments, or putting on worship displays, but you do not see it as the Household of God."

A thin, quick thread of light had touched a gray part of the pastor's soul. "Those are strong words," Pastor Meijers said thoughtfully. "I wish it were not so, but I must admit, I see some truth in them." The pastor continued, "Oftentimes I look out over the congregation during Sunday services, and wonder why

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these people are here. Do these people love each other? Do they even know each other? I am uncomfortable with some of the answers I think to myself."

As the pastor mused on his own words, a flash of divine warmth enveloped his heart. He felt both at peace, and disturbed, by the sensation. "What is this?" the pastor prayed within himself. "What does this mean?" Then turning his eyes to the angel, Pastor Meijers once again made his request. This time he spoke with greater awareness of his frailty. "Please, holy angel, tell me what I should do. I truly am at a loss."

The angel answered the gaze of the contrite pastor and spoke in measured tones, "The Church is not something you do. It is not something you present as if it were a performance. The Church of God is something you are."

"What do you mean?" the pastor asked. "I think I get some of this, but please tell me more."

The angel continued, "The Church is your very life, not a service. The Church is lifestyle, not merely something God's people are to attend."

"Do you mean I must call the people to get more involved with things in the church?" the pastor asked.

"No," the angel answered. "God's people must surrender their entire lives to the Father, and share their lives with one another. It is not a matter of increased involvement, but of giving over one's whole existence to Christ, and His Body."

Beginning to understand, the pastor began to complete the thoughts of the angel. "God wants us not to do church things but to be His People, to be Church, that is, relate as brothers and sisters in Christ *all* the time, not just on Sundays. Is this right?"

"Yes," the angel answered, "and for this reason, you, as Christ's shepherd, are not called to get people to do things, but to call the brethren to share their lives, to commit themselves to one another, and follow Christ as His People."

The revelation was becoming increasingly clear. "Yes, oh yes," the minister said with quiet resignation, "I think I do get it now, and a part of me almost regrets that I understand it." Then with a deep breath, Pastor Meijers breathed out the conclusion. "You are saying that to be a successful Church – to be God's Church – is not about doing anything. It is about living, it is about living in love with one another as God's Family. This is not a part time thing, or a matter of becoming involved. It is everything."

"Yes," the angel affirmed solemnly.

Apprehension began to set in. Pastor Meijers started to put the pieces together. He now saw the effect that this

new approach to Church would have on his pastoral ministry. It would require a deeper surrender to the will of God. A demand to get more "personal." He began to make excuses. "I agree that this is all good," the pastor began his objection, "but surely you know to live this way is not practical today. Besides, for me to pastor a Church that affects people's lifestyles in this way is too much for either them or me. Spouses have a hard time having good relationships just within their marriages; are you asking me to call the entire church to work on their relationships within the congregation as well?"

Pastor Meijers was really not objecting to the truth of the revelation as much as he was pleading for a way out. He continued, "Tell me, dear angel, how can I - how can *anyone* - possibly be so involved with the people of one's congregation? Why if I were to take your word, I would have to exhort people to work out conflicts. Do you know how many unresolved conflicts exist in our congregation? And what about the commitment you are asking me to call them to? To call them to make commitments to ministry, attendance, and even tithing, I can see. But for me to ask people to commit their entire lives to one another – over career, over personal ambitions – this is too much. The people won't go for it."

The pastor began to speak more rapidly. His anxiety was increasing by the moment. "And do you know what it would practically require for me to call people to love one another like this?" the pastor challenged. "It would mean I would have to ask people to reconsider

how they spend their time. And their money! Money! People don't like to discuss how they spend their money, that is for sure. But how can I avoid addressing these things, and more, if I honestly want to pastor them in learning to love?"

"Oh no," the pastor protested. "The people will not go for it. They are too busy. This is too much. This would require too much time. They want to be members of a church, but not like this. This is too much church, more than what they are expecting."

At that instant, at that very moment the phrase "too much church" fell from the pastor's lips, the angel vanished. The pastor was left to contemplate the divine encounter in the darkness.

With one last appeal, Pastor Meijers whispered a pleading prayer, "Lord, you must understand. - to pastor a church into *family* is to ask people to commit to too much."

Silence. And then more silence. Finally, a quiet, gentle voice, "No, it is *you* who must understand. My Church is family. My family is not too much for those whom I love. It is not too much for those who love Me."

The pastor contemplated the words. No more pleading. Pastor Meijers surrendered in silence.

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