

# Cornerstone

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A Voice To The End-time Church

## Deaf to the Cry!

by Jim Rector

So many Christians today have allowed themselves to be lulled into spiritual slumber. Their trust is primarily in men, in organizations, in the things of this life. Many churches preach a soft message or they focus only on the doctrinal or prophetic twigs of the tree. It is high time that we all took Jude's sage advice and got back to the faith once delivered unto the saints. The following three articles are aimed at directing out thoughts toward the trunk of the tree, where Christ our Saviour dwells and where we can and should go to receive the strength and sustenance we desperately need to carry on in the service of God.

When the Messiah went to his horrible death on the cross, he did not go as the resigned, tight-lipped martyr, but prayed with all his heart, saying: "O my Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me" (Matt. 26:39). And when he hung helpless on the stake, he hung there alone. His plaintive cry was, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34, Psa. 22:1). At that tragic moment in time, what righteous angel would have not have willingly given his own life that the Son of God, whom they knew so well and loved so much, might not have to suffer? But it could not be done.

On his way to Gethsemane, Christ told his disciples:

"All of you will be offended because of me this night: for it is written, I will smite the shepherd and the sheep shall be scattered" (Mark 14:27).

But Peter, all impetuous and full of bluster, protested, saying: "Although all should be offended, yet will not I" (v. 29). And when Christ predicted that he would subsequently deny him three times that very night, Peter grew angry and "**spoke the more vehemently: If I should DIE WITH YOU, I WILL NOT DENY YOU in any wise**" (v. 31). Imagine, if you will, what great a legacy might have been handed down if only Peter had not denied His Lord and Master, but indeed had actually fulfilled his own promise and followed him, even into death. But it did not happen that way.

And what kind of record do you suppose might have been written for all the succeeding generations, if James or John or Andrew or Philip or Joseph of Arimathaea had stood up for Jesus (Yahshua), had supported their friend and brother in his time of desperate need? But it was not to be. And what of Nicodemus who once said, "**Rabbi, we KNOW you are a teacher come from God**" (John 3:2); or Nathaniel, who said: "**Master, you ARE the Son of God...the King of Israel**" (John 2:49); or perhaps Lazarus, whom the Saviour loved so much that he raised him from the dead? All these, it seems, stood afar off, looking out for themselves. In essence, those who owed Christ the most, who could have cried out at the unspeakable injustice being committed, who might have helped fill the chasm of loneliness, who could perhaps have poured out words of encouragement as he struggled for his life on the cross--all chose instead the safety of distance and anonymity, preferring simply not to get involved!

Who was it then that prayed for Christ when he bore the pain and suffered the ignominy of the world? Who was there to uplift his troubled spirit when his heart beat like a jackhammer and the blood banged in his brain so hard that it nearly blinded him? Who reached out at all to touch the bloody, naked body of the Son of God as it heaved and shook and convulsed in the dance of death?

**THERE WAS NONE!!!** Every single one of them deserted him. The Scriptures state that "**they all forsook him and fled**" (Mark 14:50). In the 69th psalm, we read some of the most powerful, poignant words in all the Bible, describing Christ's very situation and state of mind as he hung dying on the cross. Let this passage impact you fully:

**"Reproach has broken my heart, and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for SOME TO TAKE PITY (Heb. lament with me), but there was NONE: and for COMFORTERS, but I found NONE" (Psa. 69:20).**

And what of us, brethren? We who are so privileged to be called the children of the living God--who are so blessed as to bear the image of the Eternal Creator in this world today? Can we not sense a lesson to be learned? Is there not an illuminating truth to be gleaned from the grim, lonely struggle of our Saviour? That we, who also once denied the Son of God, must **NOW** recognize and be moved by the responsibility to never allow a brother or sister to lack for a comforter--That we, who also once forsook him, must **NOW** by the power of the Holy Spirit make certain that none of us bears his burden alone - that we, who also once stood afar off, must **NOW** arise to the plight of God's afflicted - the sick, the lonely, the weak, the poor, the distraught?

Let's take a look into the Old Testament where some of the most significant Divine teaching on this vital responsibility is contained; and at the same time, we will learn a great deal about how much God really cares for His people.

### **A PASSIONATE GOD**

The testimony of Scripture reveals that over the centuries God has emphatically **NOT** gone off somewhere and divorced Himself from the affairs of His own people. On the contrary, the record shows that He has become intimately familiar with the plight and suffering of mankind. The Bible clearly expresses His overwhelming passion toward humanity. In fact, from the Garden of Eden onward, God places Himself in the position of an anxious Father who has let His children go free!

When ancient Israel labored in bondage under Pharaoh, God said: "I have surely seen the affliction of My people which are in Egypt, and have heard their cry by reason of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows" (Ex. 3:7). Later, He even went so far as to actually dwell with His people, pitching His tent, as it were, in the wilderness, joining the Israelites in their punishment! The prophet Isaiah wrote: "**In all their affliction, HE TOO WAS AFFLICTED...and He bore them and carried them all the days of old**" (Isa. 63:9).

God has always been particularly sensitive to the less fortunate among His children. He, in fact, made a law in ancient Israel, saying:

**"You shall not pervert the judgment of the stranger, nor of the fatherless; nor take a widow's raiment to pledge; but you shall remember that you were a bondman in Egypt, and the Lord (Yahweh) your God redeemed you thence; therefore I command you to do this thing" (Deut. 24:17-18).**

On another occasion, God stated:

**"If there be among you a poor man of one of your brethren...you shall not harden your heart...but you shall open your hand wide**

unto him...for the poor shall never cease out of the land" (Deut. 15:7-11).

And once again, He commanded:

"For Yahweh your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, a great and a terrible, which regards not persons, nor takes rewards: He does execute the judgment of the fatherless and widow, and loves the stranger, in giving him food and raiment. Love you therefore the stranger; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt" (Deut. 10:17-19).

Indeed, the penalty for neglecting the poor, the oppressed, the afflicted or those less fortunate was DEATH (Ex. 22:22-24)!!!

These special provisions in the Law were the direct expression of God's own profound concern for the weak and the needy. Notice how aptly the psalmist puts it when he says:

"Happy is he that has the God of Jacob...who executes judgment for the oppressed; who gives food to the hungry. The Eternal looses the prisoners...opens the eyes of the blind...raises them that are bowed down...The Lord preserves the stranger; He relieves the fatherless and the widow" (Psa. 146:5-9).

And King David exhorts us to:

"Sing unto God, sing praises to His name: extol Him that rides upon the heavens by His name YAH, and rejoice before Him. A father of the fatherless; and a judge of the widows is God in His habitation. God sets the solitary (lonely) in families (houses): He brings out those which are bound with chains" (Psa. 68:4-6).

In subsequent passages of Scripture, God discloses His intense emotions for Israel. He asks: "Is not Ephraim my dear son, the child in whom I delight?...Therefore My HEART IS BROKEN for him" (Jer. 31:20). And He laments: "How can I give you up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver you, Israel?...My heart is changed within Me; all my compassion is aroused" (Hos. 11:8).

In one of the most graphic descriptions of God's passion for His troubled people, He cries: "My bowels, My bowels! I am pained at My very heart; My heart makes a noise within Me; I cannot hold My peace" (Jer. 4:19, 22). He even weeps for the plight of Moab, often an enemy of Israel, saying: "Therefore will I howl for Moab, and I will cry...My heart shall mourn for the men of Kir-heres" (Jer. 48:31).

God suffered right along with His people. The pain of His children indeed became His own. And He clearly took careful measures to instill within each citizen of ancient Israel the immense importance of the responsibility they bore toward their afflicted brethren. But it was not until God took on the form of a man with the soft tissue of flesh, subject to the same abuse as our own, that He was finally able to actually taste of human suffering. By sending His Son to the earth, God the Father learned to feel pain in the same way we feel it.

## GOD IN US

When Jesus walked the dusty roads of ancient Judea, he lived by the power of God in heaven. The words he spoke, the miracles he performed, the example he set, he did through God in him. Paul wrote that: "God was in Christ, reconciling the world to Himself" (II Cor. 5:19). Even the Messiah Himself admitted: "The words I speak unto you I speak not of myself; but the Father that dwells in me, He does the works" (John 14:10).

Because God actually lived in His Son, He was uniquely able to experience the feelings, the needs, the trials and tests of a human being. Since we began this discussion with Christ's suffering on Golgotha, an interesting question arises in this regard: Did God the Father really abandon His Son during the terrible time of his crucifixion? As we have seen, it is indisputable that He permitted him to endure the shame and agony of the cross. He refused to intervene and deliver him. His inexpressible pain and loneliness was as stark and real and distressing as any you or I could possibly ever bear. But did God simply allow His Son to suffer for us all, or WAS HE NOT ALSO THERE - on the tree? Did He Himself not also silently suffer in Christ on our behalf?

In like manner, Jesus (Yahshua) not only bore the slash of the dreaded Roman scourge as it sliced his back to ribbons, or the pain of the crude, rusty nails that pierced his hands and feet; he also, by virtue of his living in us today (John 17:23, 26), is able to sense deeply the suffering of each of his brothers and sisters, so that in our most dire sickness, our most excruciating pain, our greatest fear, our worst rejection, in life and in death, Christ experiences all things in and through us!

In Paul's marvelous use of the human body as an analogy of the Church, we learn some incredible lessons. We know that when, for instance, a finger is cut or a knee is twisted, the pain is registered in the brain. Therefore the risen Christ as the Head now receives the messages of suffering from all over His Body, the Church. He has, in fact, placed Himself at the receiving end of our pain, with actual consciousness of the agony we all endure in this life and calling.

And so, perhaps, we can better understand how Christ could say of Saul, who caused untold hundreds of true Christians to suffer grievously: "Saul, Saul, why do you PERSECUTE ME" (Acts 9:4). And maybe it now becomes a little more clear why Jesus can say that when we visit the sick or help the needy or comfort the lonely or strengthen the weak, we really are doing it unto Him!!

## CHRISTIAN RESPONSIBILITY

The New Testament teaching on this subject, particularly the writings of the apostles Paul and James, continues the same themes expressed by God in His dealings with the nation of Israel. It is Paul, in fact, who gives us that definitive description of the Body of Christ in II Corinthians 12 by saying:

"But now God has set the members every one of them in the body, as it has pleased Him...that there should be no schism

(division) in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffers, all the members suffer with it" (vs. 25-26).

The more we read Paul, the more clear it becomes that there exists a profound obligation upon the members of the Body to be continually concerned about the welfare of God's afflicted. Was it not Paul himself who said: "Who is weak and I am not weak or who is offended, and I burn not? (II Cor. 11:29). And was it not this very same apostle who also taught: "Blessed be God...the Father of mercies...who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may comfort them which are in any trouble" (II Cor. 1:3-4)?

We are admonished to love one another, to give to the poor, to weep with those who are distressed and brokenhearted (Rom. 12:10-15); to encourage the downcast, to support the weak and be patient with all people (I Thess. 5:14). In his letter to the Galatians, Paul specifically instructs Christians in this matter by saying:

"Brethren...bear you one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ...and let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season, we shall reap if we faint not. As we therefore have the opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them that are of the HOUSEHOLD OF FAITH" (Gal. 6:1-2, 9-10).

Paul even brings Christ into the picture in this regard by comparing Christians with our Saviour, saying:

"We then who are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification. For EVEN CHRIST pleased not himself" (Rom. 15:1).

Paul was not alone in his detailed teaching concerning our moral duty to take care of one another. James, the bishop of Jerusalem and a brother of Christ, underscores this crucial relationship that should be present among the members of the Body when he asks:

"Hearken, my beloved brethren, has not God chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs to the Kingdom which He has promised to them that love Him? But you have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you?...If you fulfil the royal law...you do well. But if you have respect to persons (show favoritism), you commit sin" (James 2:5-9).

And please remember that it was this same James who records two of the truly classic passages on the Christian obligation toward those who suffer. First, we read in chapter 5 the following familiar quotation:

"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that you might be healed. The effectual, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much" (James 5:16).

And, of course, there is the oft-quoted and just as oft-forgotten passage from the first chapter of his book that says:

"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this:  
To visit the fatherless and the widows in their affliction, and to  
keep himself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27).

### BECOMING INVOLVED

It is so easy to deny that God's afflicted cry out to us for help. Like Peter and the others long ago, it is still such a simple matter to seek the safety of non-involvement. It is truly the hallmark of our age. It is admittedly only natural to occasionally succumb to fear or feelings of inadequacy in the face of human suffering--or simply to allow our precious time to be consumed with mere personal matters. But the hard truth is that when a brother or sister cries out in anguish, it blasts like a trumpet in the ears of God--and when a member of the Body struggles in loneliness, Jesus Christ remembers a day of darkness on a forlorn hill when he suffered for a sinful world and there was NONE TO HELP--and when we permit the sick and poor and tormented of the Church to go un comforted and unencouraged, it breaks the heart of the One who sacrificed everything for us!

Let us therefore, as the people of God today, determine that from this moment forward we will never be deaf to the cries or oblivious to the needs of those who suffer in the Body of Christ. Rather, let us resolve that when one hurts, we all feel the pain; and when one is afflicted, we all indeed share in the agony. Let us bear one another's burdens, as the Scriptures command, and fill the void of loneliness, uncertainty and fear. When the Bible states that "perfect love casts out fear" (I John 4:18), have you ever considered that it may be the love of God in you that helps put down the fear in someone else?

Let us reach out and encourage the downhearted and visit the sick and help the poor - allowing the light of Christ to burn brightly through us and the love of God to flow freely from us as a healing balm--that in all things our Father may be glorified and the Body clothed in strength.

The inspired practice of this kind of responsibility toward all people, especially those who are in the Church, reinforces the full spiritual significance of such outward actions. We must remember just how high and precious our calling really is. We are not here to merely be helping hands physically. Our calling is primarily spiritual in nature. We are destined to help bring ultimate, eternal salvation to the entire world. Our lives now must therefore reflect such a magnificent calling. Our obedience to the instructions of Christ and Paul and James in our relationship one with another is only a type of the spiritual responsibilities that we must increasingly be taking upon ourselves, as Christ's very mind and character is forged within us. I urge you to seriously meditate on this fact. Compare and contrast the physical helps and aids that we are able to bring to those who suffer with the spiritual abilities we can be given to serve others on this difficult journey into the Kingdom of God.

We know that it is God's good pleasure to make us a part of His own divine Family. An awesome future indeed awaits us. But for now, we all have a job and a responsibility to accomplish. Almighty God is now surely awakening His true, submitted believers out of spiritual sleep and issuing a call to action--a call to SEEK the opportunity, to RECOGNIZE the responsibility, and to SEIZE the opportunity to GET INVOLVED!!! Our Father wants fruitful,

active, concerned DOERS who are stretching themselves and their gifts to the limit, who are sacrificing their time, their energies and their abilities for others - especially each other.

We were not present when Christ suffered the most on our behalf. We could not stand there and encourage him or strengthen him or pray for him in his hour of greatest need. But brethren, God teaches us that through Christ in us today, we can and indeed we must be sensitive to the cries of pain, suffering, affliction, loneliness, depression, fear and uncertainty that exist in the Church. Because of our Saviour's unspeakable agony and torment, He is able to relate to each of us in our suffering and He is able to intervene and succor us and lift us up and deliver us. I believe that we should begin to seriously consider just how much of that help, that outreach, that healing touch that Christ brings to His office of High Priest is intended to be accomplished through each of us as we relate to and express His very life outwardly toward others.

From all over the Body, people are beginning to sense the powerful hand of the Messiah in their lives; are beginning to burn hot with the fire of zeal for the needs of both the Church and the work of God; are beginning to catch, ever more clearly, that vision of our immensely great calling. And we must all remember that as long as God gives us breath, it is never too late to start --reaching out more, serving more, visiting more, encouraging more, caring more, loving more. But the time for action is NOW!!!!