

Church Triumphant

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“IN THE LAST DAYS PERILOUS TIMES SHALL COME” II Tim. 3:1

It doesn't take more than five minutes of watching the network news on television to realize that we live in a time of crisis in this nation and around the world. What does that mean for us as Believers in Jesus Christ as Lord?

Chinese is a picture language. It uses characters rather than an alphabet to convey ideas in writing. The Chinese character for “crisis” is the character for “danger” combined with the character for “opportunity”. For Christians, this is definitely a time of danger and opportunity here in America and around the world.

This summer as we traveled and ministered in churches across America, we found a growing separation among churches regardless of size. Some churches are becoming more and more self-absorbed, hiding behind the four walls of their buildings afraid of the negative influences of a society that increasingly calls good evil and evil good. They see the danger posed by liberal groups like the ACLU and liberal judges who forbid prayer at graduations while demanding we respect the religious sensibilities and civil rights of Muslim terrorists who are determined to destroy our civilization. Other churches are giving up the battle and closing the doors because the few members who remain are unable to cover the costs of maintaining a church building.

Yet there is another group of churches that look at the same circumstances and see opportunity for God to work in using them to change the world around them. What makes the difference? It does not depend on the size of the churches for all the churches we visited or contacted on this trip were about the same size – less than 100 people. It does not depend on what denomination or fellowship the churches belong to or if they are totally independent. So what makes the difference? It all depends on where you look! In these perilous times, Jesus tells us exactly where we should look.

“Look up and lift up your heads” Lk.21:28

If we look at the circumstances around us, it is easy to become afraid. But Jesus tells us to look up and lift up our heads. The only way to survive and thrive in perilous times is to keep our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith. Churches where the pastor and the people are actively seeking the face of God and are hungering and thirsting for a greater personal intimacy with Him are churches that are thriving. Lives are being touched and transformed. Bondages are being broken and prodigals are coming home. Believers are falling in love with Jesus all over again as God is calling His people to return to their first love (Rev. 2:4). These are not “mega-churches”. They are small country churches that are being set on fire by God's love for them and their love for Him. Looking up is the first step to turning perilous times into times of opportunity. There is also another place Jesus tells us to look.

“Look on the fields for they are white already to harvest” Jn. 4:35

The second characteristic of a thriving church is a pastor and people who have felt God’s heartbeat for the lost. Jesus tells us to look out at the fields full of lost souls who are ready to come to salvation in Him. As Christians, we have someplace where we can turn in times of crisis. We have a shelter and a hiding place under the shadow of His wings. But the unsaved have no refuge. They have no place where they can turn to find peace in times of trouble. For this reason, perilous times are perfect opportunities for us to share the love of Jesus Christ with those around us who don’t know Him. Churches that are thriving are churches that are reaching out to others and bringing the transforming power of God into the needy world outside their doors.

God is not looking for gifted people. He is looking for available people that He can use to communicate His love to those who don’t know Him. You don’t need to know a lot of Scriptures or have a lot of training to be used of God. You only need to be able to listen to the prompting of the Holy Spirit and be willing to share with someone else the difference that Jesus Christ has made in your life and how He has the answer to the challenge he or she is facing.

How the Holy Spirit leads you will be as unique as you are. You don’t have to be afraid He will turn you into some phony cartoon character instead of who you really are. He created you for His glory and He has put within you everything you need to be an effective witness for Him. Just draw near to Him and make yourself available. The Holy Spirit will do the rest. Trust Him and watch Him transform you into the person of God He created you to be. Find true joy in His presence then experience the joy and deep satisfaction of sharing His love with others.

In the Philippines

The work is going forward on Mindanao. We have been able to set up a cooperative for the tribal people that will provide low interest loans to establish small farms. Then the cooperative will be able to provide a market for the produce that the families don’t need for themselves. The government is providing agricultural experts to help the farmers learn how to make the best use of their land and resources. We have been able to set up four demonstration farms and starter herds to help teach the tribal people how to grow their own food and raise farm animals.

New pastors are being trained as Bible school classes are being held in three different locations across Mindanao. Many new churches have been planted especially in the South Cotabato area where 16 new churches have been started by students who have completed their Bible school training.

The ministry suffered a set back in August when our dear friend and brother in Christ, Doug Lemm, went home to be with the Lord after a year long battle with lymphoma. Doug was one of our main speakers at our youth camp both last year and again this year. He will be greatly missed for he had a great love for God and for the young people of Mindanao. Please keep his wife Beth and their three children in your prayers. Pray also for our leadership team on Mindanao that God will enable them to begin to walk in divine health in spite of the heavy physical demands of the ministry in the mountains.

In Romania

God is continuing to move in Romania since our recent visit. We just received an email from one of our young people in Timisoara who is in the process of translating Howard's book "Seven Things God Wants You to Know" into Romanian. Evangelist Reinhard Bonnke from Germany who has been used powerfully across Africa held a one week crusade at the large stadium in Timisoara. Tens of thousands came to hear the Gospel and experienced the power of God at work. The crowds shouted for joy as miraculous healings took place before their eyes. We know this is just the beginning of what God is going to do as Believers begin to walk in the revival that God is pouring out in response to their prayers. Please pray with us that this spark will ignite fires of revival all across Eastern Europe as people are confronted with the reality of God's love and healing power.

In You?

Yes, these are perilous times but they are also awesome times to be alive. God is moving around the world, not just in Romania and the Philippines. He is touching lives in America as well. He is using ordinary people to do extraordinary things as He calls a lost and dying world to repent and come back to Him. God is looking for volunteers, those who will draw near to Him so He can love a hurting world through them. What about you? Will you see the danger or the opportunity? We pray that you will be like the Prophet Isaiah who saw the Lord in all His splendor, heard His heart's cry for the lost, and responded by saying, "Lord, here am I. Send me." God bless you.

Howard & Barbara Gard,
Directors