

## SEEK NOT BETHEL

We live in a marvelous age. Many of us have had the privilege of witnessing the restoration of God's truth from the Outer Court through the Holy Place, not only in the church at large, but in our personal lives as well. Many generations of the church have passed off the scene during the past long dark night that is giving way to the break of day. Having only the flickering light of the candlestick, it has been a place of many shadows (Holy Place). But a new day is dawning on the horizon. We are seeing the first rays from the Holiest Place. We are entering into that glorious realm where God is being revealed **to us** and shall be revealed **through us.**

## THE OLD IS PASSING AWAY

With the passing of the old comes the new. We must let go of yesterday if we are to walk in this new day, which is called **today**. It's like a man on a trapeze. You see him hanging on his swing high in the air, gliding back and forth. Then a second swing opposite of him is set in motion. At just the right moment he takes hold

of the opposite swing, but he must let go of the first swing in order to complete his journey to the other side. It is the same in our walk with God. We must let go of all those things that God has used in the past to bring us to this new day. They were not the goal, but were merely the vehicles to bring us to the goal. They were only a means to an end.

*Hosea 6:1-3—“Come, and let us return unto the Lord: for He hath torn, and He will heal us; He hath smitten and He will bind us up. After two days will He revive us: in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in His sight. Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord:...”*

I am sure most are aware of the three divisions of the Tabernacle of Moses, and these represent the three days from Calvary. As glorious as the Holy Place has been and the wonderful things that we have experienced in Pentecost, we must remember that Pentecost is the second day. And second day things are not designed for the third day. Things are done differently in the Most Holy Place than they are in the Holy Place. As a matter of fact not everyone who ministers in the Holy Place is qualified to minister in the Holy of Holies.

Here is the dilemma that we find the church system in today. The realm of Pentecost/Holy Place five-fold ministry, gift realm is quickly passing away. Now, I know this statement is shocking to some, and many second day ministries will find it difficult to let go. Just like the trapeze artist many are finding themselves suspended in midair. Many have taken for granted that the five-fold ministry is an everlasting ministry. But, this is not so according to scripture. The only ministry I see that is enduring is the Melchisedec priesthood. The qualification for this priesthood has nothing to do with the second day qualifications for the five-fold ministry. This priesthood ministry has not been designed to minister to the house, but God has reserved this priesthood to minister unto Him.

As the second day realm passes many are desperately trying to pump life into it, but none can save her. She (the church, as we know it) must pass on, as a many membered Son is birthed in the earth. Remember Rachel, who represents the church, died with the birth of Benjamin—Son of the Right Hand. Let's face it, the Holy Place is an imperfect realm—a realm filled with mixture, for an imperfect age. Leaven

was allowed in the Holy Place. The scripture calls it the impart realm, meaning not whole, perfect or complete. It was given to bring us to the perfect (complete).

I hear the cry from every corner of the world from pastors and leaders who are weary and seemingly in despair. Confusion and frustration seems to abound as leadership blames the people for empty seats and few new converts and the people blame the pastors and elders for lack of anointing and serving yesterday's manna. We all know what happened when the children of Israel tried to save yesterday's manna. It bred worms and stank. Many pastors have become disillusioned because they see very little happening in their midst and they grasp at any emotional phenomenon that comes along and call it '*a move of the Spirit*'.

Some feel they must 'fall' under the Spirit every time there is a prayer line, in an attempt to demonstrate that God is in their midst.

Watchman Nee once said, "*Influences that penetrate only to the soul level and do not reach the spirit in **regenerating** power are deceptive, and give that person a form of godliness without the power.*" I have seen many examples of this

in the church today. Statistics tell us that there is very little difference in the lifestyle of those who go to church and claim to be born again and those who do not. The divorce rate is nearly the same. Adultery, fornication, homes that are dysfunctional, incest, and a myriad of ugly things testify that so much of this emotional hoop-lah has only been a good 'feeling' and has not touched the spirit with regenerating (changing) power.

Many are asking, "Where are the greater works that Jesus said we would do? Shouldn't we at least be doing the miracles that the early church did? Shouldn't we be praying more and begging God for revival?" Since the turn of the century when Pentecost was restored to the church, the gifts of the Spirit have been poured out on all flesh. Great revivals of healing and miracles took place. Many times the sick bodies were healed and yet we saw very little evidence of the nature of Christ being formed within. We must remember that seeing miracles does not change the nature of man. Israel saw great miracles and they were not changed because of them, neither did they believe, but died in the wilderness. The scribes and the Pharisees witnessed the miracles that Jesus performed. Did it cause them to forsake their dead religion

and enter the Kingdom of God? No! Healing **is** the children's bread yet, unless we press on unto the perfect realm the sick bodies that are healed today will be sick again tomorrow. We must be changed or healed from the inside out. When that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away with.

If God allowed this gift realm to continue unabated with more of the miraculous, who would let go of it? Why should we reach out for something greater if this realm works so well? We would certainly set up camp in this realm on this side of Jordan, coming short of our inheritance. So, God in His wisdom causes it to dry up. It is God who creates the famine. It is not a famine of bread or of thirst, but it is hearing the word of the Lord. It is also not a famine of preaching. There are more preachers than you could shake a stick at. There are lots of words being spoken, but where is the word of the Lord? Not yesterday's manna that has bred worms, not the old tradition that is twice dead and plucked up by the roots, but **the fresh freedom begetting word of life**. It is nigh thee in thy mouth and in thy heart (Romans 10:8). Our young men and fair young virgins are running to and fro seeking to hear the fresh word of life and cannot find it. They are directed

here and yonder, but are **not** taught that it is within them.

## BETHEL

*Amos 5:4-6—“For thus saith the Lord unto the house of Israel, Seek ye me, and ye shall live: But seek not Bethel, nor enter into Gilgal, and pass not to Beersheba: for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity, and Bethel shall come to nought. Seek the Lord, and ye shall live;...”*

This scripture so completely depicts the modern day church, as we know it. “*Seek not Bethel.*” Most of us understand that Bethel means ‘House of God’. The word ‘seek’ used here means, “to inquire for and of, and to require”. The Lord says, “**Not to seek Bethel**”.

Pastors and elders constantly tell ‘their’ people that they should be in the ‘house of God’ whenever the doors are open and in most churches that’s anywhere from three to five times a week. They are told that this is **required** in your relationship with God. This is where you come to **inquire of God** (through them, of course) and have all your questions answered. If a meeting or two is missed, one is

made to feel condemnation and must give account of why he wasn't present. To respond, "I felt to stay home," is not acceptable, so one is forced to be less than forthright.

People are systematically programmed to depend on ministry for their spiritual needs. This mindset keeps God's people immature and spiritually impotent. This is not a conscious effort on the part of leaders, yet with this mindset there is a complete operation to reinforce this error.

I have heard much about the need for a covering. I challenge anyone to search the scriptures and find a shred of evidence supporting that doctrine. How can man cover man? The scriptures declare that the head of every man is Christ (I Cor. 11:3), and if you have taken any man as a covering, whether it be a pastor, elder, denomination, or organization, you are dishonoring your head, which is Christ. Isaiah 30:1—*"Woe to the rebellious children, saith the Lord, that take counsel, but not of me; and that cover with a covering, but not of my Spirit, that they may add sin to sin:"*

If you are a pastor, elder, or leader of any people, in the name of God, check the motives

of your heart to see if you may desire vain glory of the forefront to have the preeminence over others. Do you feel that the title of pastor, elder, doctor, evangelist, reverend, etc., should set you apart from the rest of the church? Do you point men to Bethel for their life and strength rather than the Kingdom of God that is within them? Do you encourage them to draw from the river of living water within their own belly? As a leader do you feel that you must always be in control and that everything concerning the church must come under your auspices? If so, my friend, you may be one of those who find it difficult to let go of that which is passing away.

I once heard someone singing this little chorus: *"A man is no fool to give what he cannot keep, in order to gain what he cannot lose."* This second day church age is passing with or without our approval. There is nothing anyone can do to prevent it. But why should we want to prevent it? God has something better for us. The glory of the second day pales in comparison to the glory of this new day.

Every time an exhortation is given from the pulpit, or anywhere else for that matter, that scolds the people for missing meetings, or

implies that faithfulness to the church is the same as faithfulness to God, it turns the people's hearts to Bethel. This causes a total dependence on the 'House of God' and it becomes their artificial life support system. It's like a dying person hooked up to a machine for his very food and oxygen. Unwittingly, there is a message being conveyed that one cannot survive in their walk with God without their pastor and their church.

God's people have gotten the message well. Most Christians today have a difficult time taking their relationship with God home where it belongs. Too many can hardly make it between meetings. They must come back soon for their 'spiritual narcotics' to make it through the week. O Lord cause us to see, open our eyes to the fountain of living water within us.

There is a Bethel (church) on nearly every corner in the U.S. and God's people are still starving for present truth. That should tell us something. Isaiah 28:7-8—"*...the priest and the prophet...they err in vision, they stumble in judgment. For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness, so that there is no place clean.*" Vomit is something that was once good food that has been taken in and mixed with man, then

regurgitated and placed on the table. Most of the time that is all there is for people to eat. Sounds repulsive? Well, what is happening in our churches is repulsive. That is why many are coming outside the camp (church), unto Jesus, bearing the reproach.

Bethel **has** surely come to nought. The Amplified Bible (Amos 5:5) puts it this way: *"...and Bethel [house of God] shall become Beth-aven [house of vanity, emptiness, falsity, and futility] and come to nothing."* In II Kings 10:29, Jereboam set up golden calves in Bethel. It had become a place of idols. Today it is no different. We have made the church itself an idol. We have set up ministries as intermediaries between God and us. Most people in the church are kept so busy with meetings and activities they don't have time for God. But then, most people think God and the church are the same. Yes, there is vanity, emptiness, falsity, and futility in the church system. That's why there is such deep discontentment within its walls.

## GILGAL

*"Enter not into Gilgal, for Gilgal shall surely go into captivity."* The word Gilgal means 'wheel.' The well-oiled rolling wheel speaks of

the operation of the system. The wheel of “this is the way we have done it, the way we are doing it, and the way we shall do it.” If one sees things any other way, he becomes a clog in that wheel. God has led my wife and me through many different churches and groups. We have been on both ends, in the ministry and under the ministry. We have felt the groaning of the bondage and captivity at Gilgal.

This is not a popular message and I may touch your sacred cow (golden calf?), but it is time for some to rise up in holy boldness and sound the trumpet. Yes, Bethel **has** come to nought and Gilgal **has** gone into captivity.

## BEERSHEBA

*“Pass not to Beersheba.”* Beersheba means ‘well of an oath.’ Beersheba was a place where Abraham dug a well. After the Philistines (which means- to wallow in self) filled it in, his son Isaac dug it again. Even though the well of Beersheba had become an important water source of the past, God is saying not to depend on it. It is a source of water that was obtained by the efforts of man. That source of water will

not last. Our forefathers have dug many wells along the way and the church has camped at those wells. They have set up altars of worship at the wells of the past. Jeremiah 2:13—*“For my people have committed two evils; they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed them out cisterns, broken cisterns, that can hold no water.”* Too many times the ministry minister out their reserves instead of the fresh stream of the river of life. The water that comes forth is stale and stagnant. They have come to depend on the ‘wells of the past’ instead of the fresh flow. In John 4:20-21, Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well He would give her water that would be **in her** a well of water springing up into everlasting life. She said to Jesus, *“Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, and you say, that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship.”* *“Jesus said unto her, Woman believe me, the hour cometh and **now is** when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship Him.”*

Each time a new convert comes to the Lord, the first thing he is told is “You must find a **place** to worship (your local Bethel) this mountain or the synagogue nearest you (Jerusalem). He has been pointed to a visible

kingdom and taught to rely on that which comes with observation. Yet Jesus said that His kingdom comes not with observation (anything that can be seen) for it is within us.

Is it any wonder that people sit in church pews for twenty or thirty years and have not developed past the stage of spiritual children? If our lame are to walk and the feeble knees are to be strengthened, men must see and learn of that inner kingdom where King Jesus sits on the throne of their heart and governs from **within** not from without. God's people must learn to inquire of the Lord within **the temple**, which we are. They must learn to 'Seek the Lord' and not the pastor that they may live.

I pray that you will hear my heart. My desire is not to attack any man, but only the mindset and system that brings so great a bondage. God cares not for the system, but greatly cares for His people within its walls.

We can easily see this word when applied to the denominations that we came out of. However, to be perfectly honest, we would have to admit that 'Sonship' and 'Kingdom' churches operate no differently.

This message of 'Seek Not Bethel' is not about reforming the old church system, or shifting around different programs to make it work. After two thousand years the church is heavily bogged down in religion, and has had minimal effect on the world; the 'salt has lost its savor'. However, God is raising up a new generation who understands that the way we have operated for so long hasn't worked. As I heard someone say, "If God is done with it we might as well let go of it, because it will do us no good." It is evident that God has moved on.

God is drawing together a few here and a few there from time to time and the river of life is flowing out of each one. They are being weaned from the mother and are getting to know their Heavenly Father. He's training and maturing them. They are taking on their Father's nature. They are learning that the source of God's power is in His nature. It's a new day and a new way, not a rehearsal of the past.

Isn't it high time to 'Seek' (require, inquire of) the Lord that we may live? The weaning process is not without a price, but our life depends on it. The Holy Spirit is a faithful

teacher who will lead us into **all** truth as we trust in Him. Amen.

*F. Lee Houk*