

The First Objective: Unity



Facing the Future (Part 17)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again as we continue our exciting theme, "Facing the Future."

Over the past weeks we've been looking together at the picture which the Bible paints of this world of ours as we draw near to the close of the present age. Yesterday I spoke about the restoration of the church. I showed you that it's Christ's predetermined purpose unfolded in Scripture, to come back for a church with certain outstanding characteristics: glorious, without any spot or wrinkle, holy and blameless. Once we understand Christ's purpose for His church, it demands from us our intelligent and whole-hearted cooperation. Both collectively and individually we're obligated to purify ourselves and to perform those acts of righteousness which, taken together, will make up the bride's wedding garment.

For the rest of this week I'm going to speak about the two main objectives which God has in view as He brings about the restoration of the church. I believe these divine objectives for the church can be summed up in two words: unity and outreach.

Today we'll focus on God's purpose to restore unity to the church, or to bring the church into unity. We'll turn, first of all, to the great high priestly prayer of Jesus recorded in John 17. At the close of this chapter Jesus goes to His arrest and to His trial. He's separated from His disciples and not restored to them until after His death and burial and resurrection. So in a sense, these are really the last words that the disciples heard from their Lord before He was separated from them and I believe they are words of special significance. They are the prayer of Jesus to the Father on behalf of His disciples, His believing people. In the first part of the prayer He's praying for the disciples who are then with Him, but in the closing part of the prayer He launches out into a prayer for all future believers of all ages, races, all denominations, all backgrounds. And this glorious close to the prayer indicates the deepest longing and the purpose of Jesus for His church, His people. I'm going to read John 17:20-23:

> "My prayer is not for them alone [that's the disciples who were then present with Him]. I pray also for those

> who will believe in me through their message…"

I understand that to be all true believers of all subsequent ages because ultimately, if you analyze how believers come to faith, it's always through the message of the apostles. That's the message that's recorded in the New Testament and that is the only real basis for the faith of all believers. So Jesus is praying for all believers and He said:

> "I pray… for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one [that's all believers], all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you."

There are some amazing comparisons in the New Testament. Yesterday I spoke about the comparison of the love of Christ for the church to the love of a man for his wife. And today Jesus speaks about the relationship that's to exist between all true believers and He compares it to the same relationship that exists between the Father and the Son:

> "Just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one."

Notice again God's standards never come down. He never comes down to a lower standard than that which is worthy of God Himself. His standard of unity is the standard of the Godhead; the unity that exists between the Father and the Son is the unity that Jesus prays for in the church.

> "I have given them the glory you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

Let me pick out two very significant phrases there in verse 21:

> "May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

And then in verse 23:

> "May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me."

You see, Jesus not only focuses on His own believing people but, as always, He has a deep compassion and concern for the world that doesn't yet know Him. And He sees and explains to us that the ultimate testimony, the only testimony that can reach the whole world is the visible unity of His believing people. He says, "that the world may believe" and that "the world may know" that God sent Jesus to be the Savior.

I believe in many different forms of evangelism and outreach, I'm committed to them with my whole life and being, but I'm realistic enough to know that all of them combined will never reach the whole world. There's only one testimony that will reach the whole world. It's the visible unity of God's believing people. That will cause the world to believe and make the world know that God sent Jesus.

Now, we have to be realistic. It's not just some mystical unity in another realm. It must be the kind of unity that this unbelieving world can apprehend with its senses. It must be a visible demonstrated unity, that's the only kind of unity that could convince the world and that's the kind of unity for which Jesus prayed to the Father. And my conviction is that the Lord Jesus never prayed a prayer that the Father will not answer. I believe God is going to answer that prayer of Jesus for the visible unity of the church, a unity that's of the same type as the unity that exists within the Godhead between the Father and the Son.

In examining how this kind of unity that I've been speaking about can be brought about, I want to turn now to a very beautiful picture from the Old Testament, a symbolic picture of the regathering of God's scattered people into a unity. It's found in the prophet Ezekiel, in the 37th chapter and the opening part of the chapter. It's a vision that God gave to Ezekiel. It's usually known as the vision of the valley of dry bones. This is how Ezekiel records the vision:

> "The hand of the Lord was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. [And this was a revelation of God's people; lifeless, scattered, separated.] [God] asked me, 'Son of man, can these bones live?' I said, 'O Sovereign Lord, you alone know.' Then he said to me, 'Prophesy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! This is what the Sovereign Lord says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you

> and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the Lord." So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. Then he said to me, 'Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live." So I prophesied as he commanded me,and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet, a vast army."

What a beautiful picture of God's purpose, to regather His scattered people at the close of this age. Apparently, a totally hopeless task. As Ezekiel walked up and down amongst those dry bones he must have said, "Surely, this is beyond help." And sometimes, we could feel the same about the condition of the church, that it's beyond help, it's divided, it's scattered, it's weak, it's ineffective; but God's purpose stands. And God gave Ezekiel the ministry that brought restoration and reunification to the people of God.

I want to point out two aspects of that ministry which I believe are very significant for us. Each time Ezekiel was told to speak certain words, to prophesy. The first time he prophesied to the bones and when the bones heard this prophetic utterance, they were changed, they were moved, they came together. The second time he was told to prophesy to the breath or to the Spirit of God and then, when he prophesied to the breath, the Spirit of God came into those bones and they "stood up on their feet, a vast army."

I believe that prophesying to the bones represents preaching, but prophesying to the breath represents prayer and intercession and I want to suggest to you that both are desperately needed. The preaching of the Word that will bring life and unity back to God's people and the kind of prayer and intercession that will bring the Holy Spirit back in His fullness into the Body of Christ and raise up what used to be scattered, separated, lifeless bones into a vast army.

I love that phrase. In the Hebrew language it's very, very emphatic, a very, very, great army. This translation says "a vast army." There again we need to see the objective. God's objective here is not portrayed as a bride, but as an army, an army to do battle, an army to assail the strongholds of Satan, to go out and cast down the strongholds of Satan, drive back his wicked forces and usher in the revelation of the glory of God to the whole earth.

Our time is up for today. I'll be back with you again tomorrow at this time. Tomorrow I'll be speaking in greater detail about God's program for restoring the church.

Radio Program

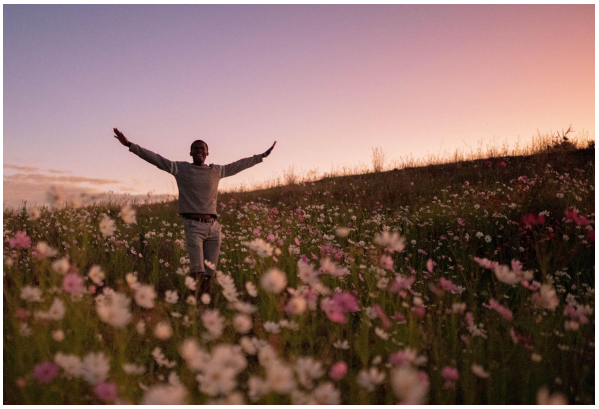
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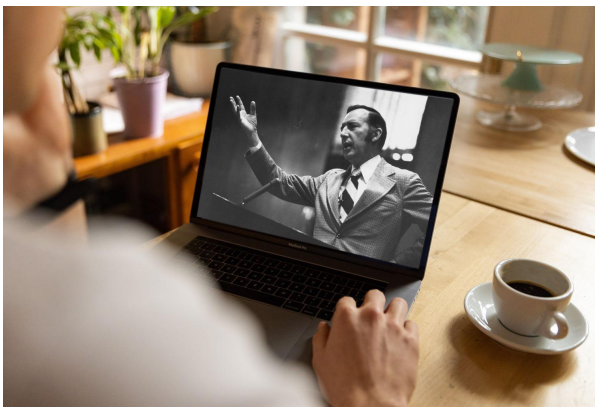
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