

If there is one complaint I hear consistently from Christians all over the world, it's this: "I can't find a good church anywhere! I need a place where my family can be ministered to - where we can hear a true word from heaven, and where my children can grow up knowing true righteousness. But I just can't find that kind of a church!"

Over the past five years, this single complaint has poured in like a torrent from thousands of readers on our mailing list. Many write, "Everywhere I go, churches are full of hype, foolishness, flag-waving - all kinds of distractions from the gospel. All the preaching I hear is shallow, and the worship is dead. I always leave feeling so empty."

Others complain, "Our pastor is constantly trying out new things in our church - new methods of evangelism, new music, new 'revival' movements of all kinds. Now our church is splitting over his continual search for new gimmicks!"

Of course, there are exceptions to these sad stories. Some readers write, "I thank God for our pastor. He spends time on his knees - and every time he preaches, he brings down fire from heaven. The Lord is blessing our church mightily!"

Tragically, however, few ministers today have the anointing of God's Spirit. They may be able to tell a good story or inject humor into their sermons. But they have no fresh word from heaven, because they don't spend time alone with the Lord. The result is a widespread famine of a true word from God in the land.

If you're having trouble finding a good church, I've got both good news and bad news for you. First, the bad news: You'll never find the

Looking For The Right Church In The Wrong Places!

right church - the righteous, God-blessed church - until you start looking for it in the right place.

Now, here's the good news: God clearly shows us in His Word where to find this holy, blessed church. In fact, I hope to show you in this message specifically where you can go to find it!

Jeremiah Found This Church
"...While He Was Yet in the Court of the Prison..." (JER 33:1)

While the godly prophet Jeremiah sat in prison, Jerusalem lay in ruin. The city represented the center of worship for the Old Testament church. At one time it was a hallowed place - filled with the glory of God, and served by holy prophets and sanctified priests.

But now Jerusalem was full of sickness and death, peopled by false prophets and the spiritually dead. Had you been one of the holy remnant holding out at that time, you wouldn't have been able to find a single righteous house of worship or even a godly shepherd. Everything once holy and blessed had been brought to devastation.

As Jeremiah looked upon this awful scene, his heart was crushed. God had told him in the previous chapter that Jerusalem was so wicked, he now "*hid his face*" from it all. He warned, "I can no longer stand to look at what my church has become. All of the people's idolatry and foolishness - all of their new 'rooftop' movements - are angering me. So, everything that's of flesh and not of me, I'm

going to burn down!" (See Jeremiah 32:29).

Jeremiah himself became so focused on the ruin around him, he lost sight of God's covenant promises to His people. He could have continued in despair, wasting his days brooding and sinking further into hopelessness. He might have thought, "It's no use - God has hidden his face from us. There is no true house of worship left!"

But suddenly, the Lord spoke to the prophet, saying, "Get on your knees, Jeremiah! Set your heart to pray to me. You believe there's nothing left of my church. But I'm going to show you the mighty things I have planned for my people!" (see JER 33:3).

If Christians today want to find the right church, this is the place to begin - with prayer! No one is ever going to find God's true church by jumping on a bus, train or plane and racing around the world in search of it. We simply can't get to His church by any modern conveyance. The only reliable map is our secret closet of prayer!

God Revealed to Jeremiah His Glorious Covenant Promise Regarding a Perpetual Holy Priesthood!

God had already warned the backslidden church in Israel: "*...Thy bruise is incurable, and thy wound is grievous... thou hast no healing medicines... because thy sins were increased, I have done these things*

unto thee." (JER 30:12-15). He was saying, in other words, "My people are in such ruin and death, their condition is incurable!"

Today, the church of Jesus Christ is in just such an awful condition. I've come to this conclusion after viewing videotapes of certain "revivals" and conferences sent to me from righteous believers all over the country. They write, "Brother Dave, you won't believe the blasphemy you'll see on this tape."

I've usually thought to myself, "Surely it can't be that bad." But when I watch the tapes, the scenes are worse than anything the people described. The services are led by false prophets and moneychangers who spout forth madness and blasphemous mockery. Consider the following scenes from various meetings:

- * One prosperity teacher told the audience it's a waste to give money to the poor. Instead, he said, "Give your money to the blessed. That way you'll be blessed in return!"
- * A man wearing a dog collar crawled around on all fours, barking like a dog, while the choir sang, "Where He Leads Me I Will Follow." The leaders called this demonstration a Spirit-led act of submission!
- * People raced around the auditorium while the worship team sang a tune called "Run for the Money." Apparently, the faster you ran, the more you'd be blessed financially.

As I watched these things, my spirit cried out, "Oh, Lord - this is blasphemy! The shepherds and sheep are totally blind! How could you ever bring healing to such blatant profaning of your work? The wound to your church seems incurable!"

Of course, the Lord does "turn his face" from all such foolishness and mockery. Yet He never hides Himself from those who shut themselves in prayer with Him. And He told the prayerful Jeremiah, "**Behold, I will bring it health and cure, and I will cure them, and will reveal unto them the abundance of peace and truth.**" (JER 33:6).

These were amazing words! God was telling the prophet, "Believe it or not, Jeremiah, I am going to heal my people. In fact, I'm going

to lead them into abundant peace and truth! I'm about to bring a great cleansing, with new mercies. And my church will once again be a place of joy and true praises, where all bondages are broken!"

The Lord then gave this glorious covenant promise: "**Thus saith the LORD of hosts; Again in this place, which is desolate without man and without beast, and in all the cities thereof, shall be an habitation of shepherds causing their flocks to lie down.**" (JER 33:12). He was saying, "I'm going to establish a multitude of godly priests in cities everywhere. And they'll serve me in truth, causing my sheep to lie down in rest!"

In every city and town, whether in the mountains or valleys, the north or south, there would be a "sheep-cote" - a pen for the flock - with a shepherd to watch over it. And "**...the flocks [shall] pass again under the hands of him that telleth them, saith the LORD.**" (JER 33:13). This verse speaks of intimate, personal concern for every sheep. God was saying, "These godly priests will care for my people individually!"

The Lord then summed up His blessing of restoration, saying, "**Behold, the days come... that I will perform that good thing which I have promised unto the house of Israel and to the house of Judah.**" (JER 33:14). This "good thing" sounded almost too good to be true. Not only would God cleanse His church and restore His people - but He would provide them with godly shepherds!

Only the Lord Himself could perform such an amazing work. No evangelist, teacher or new movement could accomplish it. It would happen only by covenant promise!

I Believe God Was Speaking These Promises to Jeremiah About Our Day!

"In those days, and at that time, will I cause the Branch of righteousness to grow up unto David; and he shall execute judgment and righteousness in the land." (JER 33:15). What are the "days" God is talking about here? He's speaking of the time when the vision would be fulfilled. And what is the "righteous branch" He mentions? It is none other than the Lord Jesus Christ!

Beloved, God has fulfilled this vision, through the death and resurrection of His Son, Jesus Christ. He has established His church, and its name is neither Baptist, nor Pentecostal, nor any other name but simply "**The LORD our righteousness.**" (JER 33:16).

Yet here is the most wonderful news of all. God said this church "**...shall be to me a name of joy, a praise and an honor before all the nations of the earth, which shall hear all the good that I do unto them: and they shall fear and tremble for all the goodness and for all the prosperity that I procure unto it.** [make for them]" (JER 33:9).

The literal meaning of this last phrase is, "They shall quiver and be startled, full of the awe and fear of God." God was saying, "I'm going to do something so amazing, so clearly full of my abundant peace and truth, people will tremble with fear!"

Yet, what would cause this fear and trembling? Would it be a harsh message of judgment? The preaching of the law? An expression of God's wrath? No! All fear and trembling would come through a revelation of God's goodness! It would come from an expression of His unmerited blessing, providing His people with an abundance of peace and rest.

Did God's Promise of Healing, Forgiveness and Holy Shepherds Make God's People Careless?

When the Lord promised to be His people's righteousness through faith, did the Israelites suddenly begin to walk carelessly, lowering His standard of holiness? No, not at all. Rather, His promise of peace and rest would cause them to tremble in fear!

We see a picture of this holy trembling in Mark 4. When a storm threatened the disciples' very lives, Jesus rebuked the wind and sea, saying, "**...Peace, be still. And the wind ceased, and there was a great calm.**" (MK 4:39). How did the disciples react to this? Scripture says, "**They feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey him?**" (VERSE 41).

Why did these men "fear exceedingly"? It wasn't because of some

harsh rebuke from their master. No - it was because He settled the storm, bringing about peace and calm. In short, they trembled at the goodness Christ showed His faithless, undeserving followers!

So, how will God cause fear and trembling in His last-days church? Will it come through a thunderous message of condemnation, or some new form of legalism? No, never! God's people are going to tremble at the glorious revelation of His New Covenant promises!

We'll tremble when we realize His Spirit lives and works in us, undeserving as we are, to prepare us as Christ's bride. We'll cry, "What? The Lord is at work in me, with all my problems, failures and quirks? He's causing me to do His will making me holy, blameless, His shining light to the world?" We'll be humbled with a holy fear!

Isn't this what you are looking for in the church?

What About All the Godly Shepherds and Flocks Who Will Populate Every City?

You may be wondering, "Are you saying God will purge the church of all false prosperity doctrines and phony hireling shepherds?" No, I'm not saying that at all. In fact, according to an Old Testament prophecy, there will always be a lazy, compromising Eli ministry in the church. It's called the Abiathar ministry, named after the priest who forsook David - and it's a ministry totally of the flesh!

You may also wonder, "Where are all these godly shepherds the Lord promised us? Where are they pastoring? Are you saying we can find their righteous churches in any city, town or village?"

"I don't see how God could ever find enough holy, separated ministers to 'make them a habitation' in every place. There aren't enough Bible schools and seminaries in the world to even begin to fulfill this incredible prophecy. I know the Lord is raising up a host of godly young ministers. But surely they're few and far between. So, where is this numerous priesthood?"

We find the answer to this question in the rest of the story from Jeremiah. God told the prophet, *"As the host of heaven cannot be numbered, neither the sand of the sea measured: so will I multiply the seed*

of David my servant, and the Levites that minister unto me." (JER 33:22). He was saying, "I give you this covenant promise. I'm going to increase the holy priesthood who'll shepherd my multiplying flocks!"

How will God do this? We find the answer in the book of Revelation: *"Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father..."* (REV 1:5-6). **God has made us all His priests! Everyone who has been washed in the Blood of Jesus is a member of His royal priesthood.**

The apostle Peter echoes this in 1. Peter 2:5: *"Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ."* (1.PET 2:5). God has called us to be priests who minister to Him!

You see, **the Lord's concept of "church" is much different from ours.** We think of church as being a ministry to people. It's a place where all of God's people's spiritual, physical and emotional needs are met. Of course, that is all part of what makes up a church. But the true church, according to scripture, begins with ministry to Jesus Christ. His concept of church is any place there is ministry to the Lord!

We see this distinction illustrated in Ezekiel 44. In the following passage, the Lord describes man-centered ministry:

"They shall be ministers in my sanctuary, having charge at the gates of the house, and ministering to the house: they shall slay the burnt offering and the sacrifice for the people, and they shall stand before them to minister unto them... I will make them keepers of the charge of the house, for all the service thereof, and for all that shall be done therein." (EZEK 44:11,14).

According to this passage, the priests were doing everything a pastor should do. They were preaching, counseling, ministering to the people's needs. In fact, to unspiritual eyes, their ministry probably looked as if it made up a good, solid church.

But in reality, these ministers were giving the people what their flesh

wanted: *"They ministered unto them before their idols, and caused the house of Israel to fall into iniquity; therefore have I lifted up mine hand against them, saith the Lord God, and they shall bear their iniquity."* (EZEK 44:12).

These false shepherds had no word from God. In fact, God said he was their enemy! *"They shall not come near unto me, nor to come near to any of my holy things, in the most holy place: but they shall bear their shame, and their abominations which they have committed."* (EZEK 44:13).

Simply put God is telling us, "My people desire false shepherds! They don't want to sit under a searing gospel message and have their sins exposed. So, I'm going to give them the kind of shepherds they want. I'll appoint pastors who'll minister to their idolatrous desires and lusts!"

I Ask You - What Are You Looking for in a Church?

Maybe you're looking for a church that will disciple your children on Sunday mornings. Or, perhaps you're looking for true fellowship. Maybe you're hungry for good praise and worship. Or you're trying to meet some other deep need in your life.

If any of these concerns apply to you, I have a very hard question for you: To meet these needs, would you put yourself and your family under the care of an Abiathar priesthood - a ministry God has rejected? Would you subject yourself to the preaching of a shepherd "appointed" by God to minister to people's idolatry?

Let me give you this word about God's true church: The Bible says you have been appointed as a royal priest unto the Lord! That's right - you are to be a shepherd, a minister, a priest. And **the true church is to originate in your home!**

The Bible says every believer has been called to a godly Zadok priesthood:

"But the priests the Levites, the sons of Zadok, that kept the charge of my sanctuary when the children of Israel went astray from me, they shall come near to me to minister unto me, and they shall stand before me to offer unto me the fat and the blood, saith

the Lord GOD; they shall enter into my sanctuary, and they shall come near to my table, to minister unto me, and they shall keep my charge." (EZEK 44:15-16).

You don't have to go to Bible school to be part of God's royal priesthood. You don't have to have an ordination paper hanging on your wall. Everyone who's been washed in the Blood of Jesus has been raised up as a priest unto the Lord!

I grew up in a family that observed what used to be called "family altar". My father believed that the verse in Hebrews commanding Christians not to forsake corporate assembly was meant for families as well. Therefore, we were not to miss the family altar.

Every day, when the time came for family altar in our home, my siblings and I might have been out playing with our friends. But when our parents called out, "Prayer time!", everyone in the neighborhood knew the Wilkersons were going to the altar.

My father happily took on the role of priest and shepherd in our home. But what about you? Have you searched your heart about being a priest to your family? You claim you can't find a good church - one that stirs and provokes you, one that ministers to your children. But have you done the priestly work of mediating for your loved ones before the Lord?

We've already seen in scripture that God's true church is wherever believers minister to the Lord. And that ought to be happening in your home. The apostle Paul tells us of Priscilla and Aquila, "...*the church... is in their house.*" (ROM 16:5).

Yet, many Christians come home to a blaring TV. They shop till they drop. And they give little, if any, time to minister to Christ. They never pray. They never shut themselves into their secret closet to seek the Lord or intercede for their spouses and children. Yet they complain that they can't find a church!

It doesn't matter if there is no husband or father in your home to act as priest. You may be a single mother, or a single man or woman. Yet no matter who you are, God says you're a royal priest - and you're called to minister to Him!

Perhaps you're able to say, "But I've already found the right church. I meet the Lord there every week. I hear godly preaching, and I enter into wonderful worship. I'm satisfied with my church."

I rejoice with you over that. But if you see church as being just your local fellowship, then you still haven't found the true church. The God-blessed, righteous church is where you live - at home, on the job, on your way to work. It's any-where you seek Him, worship Him, minister to Him!

If you aren't ministering to the Lord in your home, then you've become an Abiathar priest. You're focused only on your own personal needs. And you won't find the right church until you go to your secret prayer chamber. You find it by giving Jesus quality time - by serving His desire for communion with you!

When your home becomes a church, all your deepest needs will be met - not by human means, but supernaturally by your father in heaven. And your children's needs will be met as well - all because

the Holy Spirit communes with you in the closet of prayer!

Then you can go to any church, no matter how dead it may seem. Why? You do it so that you can connect with other Zadok seekers there! He has hungry servants everywhere - and He will supernaturally bring you to those who share your hunger to minister to the Lord.

Recently I was privileged to minister to pastors in several eastern European countries. During the years of communist rule, their churches were forbidden to meet. So, often small groups of believers would walk some ten miles into the woods just to have fellowship together. There were no official pastors or elders in these groups. They knew that they all were priests unto the Lord.

I also heard stories of imprisoned believers whose only fellowship was with the Lord, sometimes for years at a stretch. One Christian man spent twenty-five years without contact with another believer. But his every waking hour was spent in church, because he ministered to Jesus' desire for communion with him.

Beloved, the priesthood that Jeremiah prophesied is everywhere. It's made up of multitudes of God-hungry people who believe the Father's covenant promises to them. Those promises have settled them in abundant peace and truth. And they respond by being faithful to minister to the Lord themselves - beginning in their own homes!

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