**Restoration, not Amputation: Carrying the Father's Heart**

**“The King will reply, 'Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me’”** (Matthew 25:40).

In a recent vision, I saw a man rushed into the ICU by EMTs. Only moments earlier he was badly injured in a collision with a semi, and not long after the EMTs flashed each other knowing looks, certain that he was a dead man. It was only a matter of time. In the ER, doctors frantically worked on him, trying to stop the bleeding and stabilize his erratic vital signs, while his loved ones sat, terrified, in the waiting room, bracing for bad news. Suddenly, Jesus walked into the ICU and touched the man, instantly restoring him to perfect health. Then I heard the Lord ask, “Is there a place where the spiritually injured can go to heal?”

 What are we to do with these wounded ones? As we approach the end of times, we will see more people enter the church whose lives have been damaged and shipwrecked because of sin. To be honest, the church has not been known for its gentle restoration ministry. Rather we have earned a reputation for killing our own wounded or quickly disassociating from them, amputating the damaged part, removing it from the body. We would prefer to focus on building bigger and better ministries while ignoring the torn and rejected. Now, in the physical sense there are sometimes good reasons for amputation, but in the spiritual there is no excuse because we have a God who wants to save, heal and restore every single wounded part, and who never wants anyone left behind. But do we do that? Sadly, we often do not.

 Is it possible that we can focus so much on equipping the saints that we ignore those who are dying around us? Remember, it only takes a single tragic incident in our own lives to remind us that Christians are not immune from these things. Walking wounded believers are everywhere, as are wounded unbelievers if we have the sensitivity to see them all around us. It's unfortunate, but it's easy to get so caught up in our own little circle of ministry that we lose our empathy and compassion for those outside that circle. It's even easier to step away from the hurt, hoping someone else will address those messy, uncomfortable needs. I would venture to say that this is a perfect barometer by which to measure where our hearts are. Jesus carried a tremendous burden for the poor, the lost, the hurting and the rejected. In fact, if I'm not mistaken, there are more scriptures addressing the poor and the broken than there are on any other subject in the Bible, because it's such clear evidence of where our treasures are.

 When the Lord spoke of the ministry of the church, to feed the hungry and visit those in prison, He mentioned clothing the naked. (Matt. 25:36) If He placed that much emphasis on physical needs, how much more should we endeavor to clothe and minister to those whose bodies and souls have been victimized and left for dead? Tenderly clothe the wounded with love, peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost; enfold the naked in a blanket of God's tender care, and keep them warm under a comforter of forgiveness and loving support.

 God never tells us to amputate a dislocated member who has been wounded and broken, rather He commands us to restore him to his rightful place so he can function as part of a healthy and flourishing body. God's way has always been to remove the sin, not the sinner. We, as believers, must lovingly receive and restore those who run to God in humble repentance for their failures.

 We may not like to hear this, but the condescending attitudes within the church have alienated the very people we are called to restore. Most of the lost are terrified to even darken the door of a church because they have faced rejection and humiliation there. Beloved, the church should be the first place those people go, not the last. It should be a place of love and acceptance, deliverance, and restoration—the first bastion of hope for the desperate. Some churches are afraid to reach out to the fallen lest they appear to approve the sin, and are therefore guilty by association. With that attitude they push away the wounded and leave them shamefully naked and exposed to further injury.

 Those traumatized by their failures should not be amputated to suffer alone by the body of Christ. And they need us to show mercy and compassion, leading them back to their rightful place. I’ve even heard it said that these are simply brothers and sisters, long lost beloved family members, who have yet to be found and restored to the family. Some Christians feel that these people must learn their lessons before being restored. We would never do this in the natural realm; if a man was brought into an ER on a stretcher and needed intensive care, even if caused by his own hand, we would not leave him in the hallway and refuse to help until he learned his lesson. Likewise, in the spiritual sense we should rescue him and then help him renew his mind, so he can live and move and have his being in Christ.

 Never before in recent history has there been a greater need for the ministry of restoration. These days, we know the devil is busier than ever, knowing his time is short. His goal is to drag to hell with him every single soul he can take captive, so we dare not let it happen without stepping in to intervene.

 The prostitute is looking for a church that will open its doors with a message of rescue instead of an attitude of disgust; the pregnant teenager is looking for a church that will open its arms with compassion instead of humiliation; those ravaged by adultery are looking for a church that will open its heart with forgiveness and healing instead of disdain. The sanctuary must become a place where people can come as they are and be loved and restored. It must become a place where we can be real and forgiven, no matter how wretched the sin.

 Wounded ones everywhere are looking for churches that offer compassion, deliverance, and healing. I firmly believe that people really don't care how much we know until they know how much we care. We can preach the most anointed messages in the world from the pulpit, but if we blow off needy people they will leave just as desperate as when they came in. People are not naïve; they can tell whether or not we care. Much as it is with a bad waitress, we just sense when they don't want to wait on us. People can also sense whether or not we have compassion. God gives us godly compassion again.

 I’m not suggesting that those in leadership wear themselves out in the trenches, but it doesn’t have to be a big deal or a heavy load—even a warm and compassionate smile or a kind word can be a soothing balm to one who is hurting, making an inroad into a heart that might then be willing to hear about Jesus. Ask the Lord how you can minister to someone today, how to be Jesus with skin on, even in passing, to someone who needs it. Over the years, I've heard some leaders say they were called to preach, and not to minister to the needs of the masses. I would respond that we are all called to do what Jesus did, loving and serving others, so we must simply be available to do what He tells us in the moment, in any situation. The sad truth is that those who live only to build up their own reputations will be forgotten but those who live for others will always be remembered with great affection and receive great rewards in heaven.

 In my own life, those who have had the most impact were not those who preached the most gifted sermons but those who cared enough to spend one-on-one time, ministering to me when I felt alone and worthless.

 I also believe that if everyone in the body of Christ would reach out to even one then the body would be covered. The pastor can't do it all, or surely he would end up burned out. It will take the combined efforts of the entire body, moving in the Holy Spirit, to restore the wounded to health.

 Do we care enough to stop for the one? Will we take a few minutes to hug a neck, encourage with a word or perhaps even weep with those whose lives are shipwrecked? I think of the beautiful ministry of Jesus Christ, who not only equipped the disciples but rescued the hopeless and healed those who needed His loving touch. I am amazed by Jesus! Even now, He is always that kind of faithful friend. He took stones away from the hands of the angry mob. He touched and healed lepers. He threw homecoming parties for prodigals. He granted thieves paradise and brought encouragement and strength to those who were weary and in despair.

 The Bible teaches us to live in harmony with each other—to be empathetic and sensitive to one another’s needs, to walk in humility and compassion. We should love others enough to show them we care the way Jesus did. We need to take time from our busy lives to see if we can help those in need. Maybe it’s just a smile or a simple hello or a prayer. Maybe it means buying someone a cup of coffee or just giving them a listening ear. We should make ourselves available for God to use us every day to show someone true compassion with no motive other than to love and serve, especially the wounded ones who need the Jesus we carry. Ask Him how He wants to use you then step out in faith and touch someone’s life.

 We as the body of Christ—the church—are the place the injured are supposed to go to heal. We are the ones He has anointed to share the good news of the gospel, to encourage, to touch and love back to health and strength—to empower. We are His hands extended. We are to be whatever God calls us to be in the moment as we listen for His voice and simply obey, saying only what He wants us to say, just as Jesus did. We are to be the hospital, the place of hope, so let’s lay aside the distractions, and live out our destiny—to cast out demons, to heal the sick, to raise the dead, and show people that Jesus is alive and well and loves them more than they could ever dream. If we don’t, who will?

 Do we have the Father's heart—like the prodigal father who embraced his son who returned home in spite of his sin and wretchedly filthy condition—or will we be like his elder brother who refused to forgive and be restored to his brother? Is anyone too far gone for the Father to reach?

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