

Kingdom Report

Week of 30 March 2019

History Repeats: The Two End Times of the Early Church....and our future.

Twice in the history of the early church their prophetic world view collapsed. How the Lord rebuilt the church is how He will rebuild the church in our future...because we face the same crisis of failed expectations.

I need to give you some context here in the middle of my economic series of Kingdom economics. For me this is not a theoretical exercise of thought experiments. I have seen two "end of the world as we know it" catastrophes in the early church....and both being repeated in our generation. From that historical perspectives I get a new understanding of what I believe to be the next great move of God...which I call the Second reformation. A new way to express the church. A new Apostolic vision of what the church will look like in a collapsing world order.

I refer you to two the collapse of two cities...Jerusalem and Rome. With the demise of these two cities there disappeared the vision, the hope the prophetic expectation of the early church. By early church I mean the period from 33 AD to about 420 AD.

In both cases the church was heading in the wrong direction under a false vision of what how the Kingdom of God is to be established in the world. A false prophetic vision of what the Lord was saying to the church.

The aftermath of the fall of both Jerusalem and Rome led to the restoration of the true apostolic mission of the church with a world changing strategy of rebuilding the waste places and ,making the world anew in the midst of universal chaos.

I see in both these tragedies the same tragedy that our evangelical charismatic church is facing in this generation. What took 400 years through the slow movement of history, communications, travel etc to develop has been speeded up in our time to take place in a generation...of which we are now seeing unfolding...except that the broad leadership of the church does not see it. Neither did the leadership of the church in the period from 33 AD to 420 AD. But Paul saw it and John saw it in his Revelation.

The aftermath of this collapse saw the emergence of a new type of apostolic power and ministry. A new vision of what the role of the church is a new vision of how to express the life of the church and it was accompanied by signs and wonders and miracles but also accompanied by work, literature, law, technology, food production, healing the sick, teaching the uneducated, establishing law and order....for a thousand years they rebuilt the waste places of paganism, ignorance and superstition and warrior cultures and looting and laid the foundation for Western Civilization, the Renaissance, the Reformation and the Elightenment.

Again to such a time has the church come.....and for the aftermath of the coming chaos and economic and political collapse I predict and am preparing for a new apostolic expression of how we do church and how we create the future of "they Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven".

The two cities...Jerusalem and Rome
the two visions of the church...the Jerusalem church, the Roman church.
the two end times....the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD, the fall of Rome in 420 AD.

The Jerusalem Church

What almost all commentators of the book of Acts will not really want to comment on is the fact there were really call it two denominations in the early church. You had what Paul called the "judaizers" under the leadership of James and the elders of the Jerusalem church and you had Paul and his theology, what he called "my gospel". It was radically different to Jerusalem's "gospel".

You can clearly see this in a major dispute Paul had with Peter that he talks about in the book of Galatians....he came to the church in Antioch and found out that Peter was first eating and fellowshiping with the gentile believers but when the Jerusalem elders heard about this they sent a deputation to get Peter in line, Jews don't eat with gentiles, you get defiled that way. To get undefiled or what we call "sanctified" they required Paul on his visit to Jerusalem to go to the temple and go through the rite of purification from all his contacts with gentile believers. Try teaching that today as your doctrine of Sanctification which we get form Paul.

The eschatological vision of the Jerusalem church we now know from ancient writings of early church fathers and a lot from the writings of Josephus the Jewish leader of the rebellion against Rome who switched sides and lived to tell the story of those critical days of the fall of Jerusalem...in fact Josephus wrote a lot about James the brother of Jesus so we know what James's position was as the first Bishop of the church of Jerusalem.

They taught and believed that the Kingdom of God on earth was essentially a restored nation of Israel with the Messiah, Jesus Christ as a direct descendant of David to be the King of Israel...hence the reason they crucified Him with a sign on the cross..."The King of the Jews". Although gentiles can be saved they were in essence second class citizens in this coming Jewish world empire. Jerusalem was to be the capital of Messiah's Kingdom, the temple true worship was to be restored. And by the way an early church father Heggisippus wrote that James was allowed to put on the vestments of the High Priest and acted as a second high priest in the Temple as the new spiritual movement known not as "Christians" (that is what they were called in Antioch and Paul's followers) but they were called 'Nazoreans', people who had taken the Nazerite vow of obedience to the law of God.

Paul fought this lot in church after church, he wrote constantly in his epistles to Galatians, Romans, Ephesians about these Judaizers who wanted to re-establish the old covenant in order to bring about the promised Jewish kingdom with the Messiah soon to return and deliver Israel from her enemy, Rome!. This false vision of the nature of the Kingdom of God became a mighty encouragement to the zealots to start

their armed rebellion against Rome. The result was the disaster of 70 AD...a million people perished in Jerusalem huddled in masses there expecting that the Messiah would come out of the heavens to rescue them and defeat Rome. That is why you read in your New Testament do many references to "the last days", "the end times" etc...they believed they were in the end times.

When Jerusalem fell it was a mighty blow to the church and its confidence in its leaders and prophets and visionaries....where was the promised Messiah? How can the Messiah come to rule from Jerusalem now that it is destroyed? We did everything that scripture said we must do what Moses said we must do, return to the law, return to the temple and keep yourself separate from the unclean....they did it all...but there was no Kingdom come!

The Church of the Roman Empire

Out of the disaster of the 70 AD prophetic debacle Paul's version of the gospel was finally triumphant. The gentile church took over. Although they were at first persecuted after the Jerusalem uprising because the "Nazoreans/Christians were soon recognized as the prime instigators of the rebellion with their promise of the soon coming of the Messiah Jesus Christ to destroy Rome and set up a Jewish kingdom, the years went by, the persecution subsided, the church made great inroads throughout the Roman empire.

The house church was the model of the church. Christians became known for their charity and love and care for abandoned babies, divorced women, care for the sick and needy. The new church still had a vision of the coming king, of a return of Jesus, of a final victory of the church over the kingdoms of the world.

So when in 325 AD Constantine declared Christianity the state religion it seemed the victory was won...the kingdoms of the world have become the kingdom of our God and of His Christ. Paganism and its temple rituals were banished and all the temples given over to the church. The whole model of the church changed. Meetings were now held in the large ornate temples that were pagan shrines. The church was re-organized into administration units according to Roman provinces which were called "dioceses" run by Roman governors now each diocese had a Bishop. Politics and political influence was now the order of the day for Bishops. They were given preferences from Roman governors, wealth, land, a seat at the tables of power.

In short the prosperity of the church was closely aligned with the prosperity of the Roman empire. Rome needed the church to keep the populace docile and obedient...the church needed Rome to provide peace, resources, land, temple properties, finances. Church members were given preference in government posts and Bishops and clerics became a very professional administration along side Roman administration.

The church of the Roman Empire saw this prosperity and favour and blessing as a natural outcome of turning the Roman Empire into the Christian empire of Christ...preach the gospel, make new Christians and prosperity and success is the natural outcome.

This went on for about 100 years....but then the barbarians came! The Vandals, the Gauls, the Franks, the Visigoths....the borders of the Roman empire were overrun. Trajan had tried to keep the wild Picts in Scotland out by building a wall which was successful for a while...but you could not build a wall around the whole Roman empire.

The Roman empire by this time was engulfed by enormous public debts, debased currency (monetary inflation) as it tried to pay soldiers and bureaucrats with cheaper money, the welfare system of free bread and entertainment was falling apart, the vast administration system of complex Roman laws was becoming too much to administer.

When the first sacking of Rome took place by the Vandals in 420 AD this was an enormous shock to the Christian church. Where was God? Why was He not protecting us from these vicious ungodly pagans who hated Christ? The whole edifice of a world and society that provided the church with safety, privilege, finances, protection was rapidly falling apart. How can you sustain the elaborate large temple churches that needed constant income from financial offerings to keep going. That needed a functioning Roman economy to provide prosperous Christians who would be generous givers.

As the first Vandal invasions started and spread to north Africa where Augustine was Bishop of Hippo in Libya...as the pagans advanced and chaos erupted and the orderly Roman civilization was falling apart, Augustine wrote his magisterial vision for a church in crisis...The City of God. Forget Rome...it is lost...we need to get a new vision for the New Jerusalem. We need to go into all the world.

You see both the Jerusalem church and the church of Rome made this mistake...they did not see the enormous scope of what the Lord really wanted. Jerusalem church only saw Jews and a Jewish kingdom and Jesus as returning Jewish king. They told Paul, you go to the gentiles, we only see the salvation of the Jews as the key to the coming of the King.

So God took away their beloved Jerusalem and their false vision of a Jewish kingdom and the Antioch church took the gospel into all the Roman world. The "Jewish roots movement" of James and the elders died in 70 AD...the Judaizers were dead.

The Roman church was happy with their success over 200 years of preaching into all of the Roman empire...mission accomplished now its time to enjoy the good life that comes with peace and prosperity.

Except they forgot to go into all the world as Jesus commanded them...so He sent the world to them with a barbarian invasion of the Roman empire.

But it is what happened next that intrigues me. And here I want to really encourage you to get a New York Times best selling book:
"How the Irish Saved Civilization: The Untold story of Ireland's heroic role from the fall of Rome to the rise of Medieval Europe". by Thomas Cahill.

This is the great story of the what God did next to change how the church would operate, how it was to reorganize itself away from meetings on a Sunday and

hierarchies of clerics and bishops and ceremony...to the great Monastery Movement from 520 AD for 900 years....

In the midst of barbarian invasions and financial chaos and total collapse of law and order....what the Roman legions could not accomplish...to pacify and civilize the barbarian hordes...the new apostolic companies of monks did by creating the concept of church. Not a building for Sunday morning meetings but a community of people who created a whole community where there was not community. Creating work and food and education where there was not work or food or education. Living celibate lives allowed them to devote all the wealth that their work created to be re-invested into the community instead of using it to care for their families.

These communities created music, art, literature, developed new farming methods, copied scarce manuscripts that they collected to create and preserve knowledge that was dying out from illiterate pagan hordes that loved to burn books for fire starters.

But it wasn't just the power of work and example....there were mighty prophets like St. Columba of Iona who came from Ireland at age 41 with 12 disciples after establishing 41 monasteries there he set up training college 12 miles off the coast of the coast of Scotland and from there proceeded to evangelize the warrior Scots that Rome could not tame and according to his disciple and biographer Bede, he was a prophet who could see visions, he raised the dead, healed the sick, prophesied over kings, told the secrets of men's hearts...in other words this was not what you think of as the Catholic church. This was New Testament apostolic power in action.

However there was a big difference. These apostolic teams of monks did not go out to build traditional churches...they went out to create new communities of Christians with the monastery as the community of believers....a working community. Columba built over 150 monasteries in Scotland. And that is how the Irish saved civilization...through their apostolic monk teams and their vision of the Church as community.

And here is my prediction of the years ahead to which not many will agree with me but which I see coming and which I am now preparing for.

The whole Judaizing element in the charismatic evangelical movement, those that believe that God has a special and separate covenant with the Jews apart from the Church and that the Kingdom of God will come when Jesus returns to Jerusalem to restore an Israeli world government....this is going to fall apart in the years ahead just like it did in 70 AD.

Those charismatic movements in the church that are clinging on to a worldly Babylon system as the source of their prosperity gospel and are dependent on keeping the world money system operating to keep their ministries operating pleading...send me more money so I can reach more souls for Jesus, send more money for a newer jet so I can travel better, my organization needs more money...those people who confuse nationalism and cling to their national identities will see soon a collapsing world economic system.

Yes there is an end times upon us just as there was an end times for the Jerusalem church and an end times for the Roman Empire church.

In the midst of the coming world order collapse and the invasion of barbarians into Europe and other places....we are entering a new end times in which the entire way we do church is going to change from meetings to community. And those new communities will be self-sufficient outside of depending on the world system, those communities will define the new future for planer earth, those communities will take all the wonderful gifts and technologies of this age and preserve what we need, discard what we don't and build a new world in the midst of the collapse of the old world order.

That is why I am writing and exploring Kingdom economics....and many other technologies and preparations we need to take for creating a new world. And if you live in South Africa as I do or on the African continent as we do....then it must be obvious to all of us that it is time for a new order a new civilization and time to rebuild to the waste places.