



A Call to Gather Together with Jesus

*He [Jesus] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities -- all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have **first place in everything**. (Col. 1:15-18)*

God has a plan, and when that plan is fully accomplished, His Son, Jesus Christ will indisputably occupy first place in **everything**, so that: ...*at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.* (Phil. 2:10-11)

The only question is—must we wait till some future millennial time before these words are fulfilled, or can we actually hope to see and experience this in our lifetimes?

It seems clear Jesus Himself expected us to gather around Him **now** in unity, because He said, "*And I, if I am lifted up from the earth, will draw **all men to Myself**."* (John 12:32) This "drawing" began at the cross and continues to this very day, in direct answer to His passionate prayer, "*I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; **that they may all be one**; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, **that they may be one**, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me."* (John 17:20-23)

The apostles and first disciples were fully committed to this principle, and provide us with clear examples of what it looks like when people are drawn together around the Lord Jesus:

Acts 1:14 *These **all with one mind** were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.*

Acts 2:1 *When the day of Pentecost had come, they were **all together in one place**.*

Acts 2:46-47 *Day by day continuing with **one mind** in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.*

Acts 4:24-32 *And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God **with one accord** and said, "O Lord, it is You who made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and all that is in them...And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with boldness. And the congregation of those who believed were of **one heart and soul**; and not one of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them.*

It's easy to see how they came to enjoy such unity, while also experiencing the presence of the Lord with such power: they got together **frequently** to pray, worship and basically share life with one another. In short, they purposely gathered together with Jesus, and allowed Him to have His way in their midst, through the power of the Holy Spirit. They understood well just how important this is to our Savior. After all, He makes it His top priority to **always** show up whenever two or more of His people gather together in His name! (Mt. 18:20)

And without hesitation they fully acknowledged His complete Lordship over their gatherings, recognizing that *"He [the Father] put all things in subjection under His [Jesus'] feet, and gave Him as **head over all things** to the church,"* (Eph. 1:22).

For those of us who follow Him today it should be no different. His Lordship begins in our hearts and must **extend** to encompass our gatherings. Instead of merely acknowledging Him as our "Guest of Honor," when we come together He deserves to be honored as the Master of all our ceremonies...the exalted Conductor of the symphony which He alone writes and performs through us by His Spirit!

In light of this, I believe the Lord is calling us to establish a regional night of worship and prayer, where like-minded believers can gather on a regular basis for the sole purpose of exalting Him and Him alone! No agendas or plans, no schedule or time limits...just Jesus.

There are 7 values that the Lord showed me will be established as we obey Him in this:

1. **Worship.**

Jesus declared, *"But an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for such people the Father seeks to be His worshipers."* (Jn. 4:23)

Who and what we choose to worship is the single most important issue of all eternity. The Father **seeks** for worshipers...can we do any less than respond to the desire of His heart? The eternal priority of worship is revealed throughout scripture, and it is our highest obedience to the Greatest Commandment (Mt. 22:37).

2. **Unity.**

As noted earlier, Jesus prayed fervently that we would be one. Is there any greater expression of unity than when we gather together to worship our Savior? Though many things continue to divide us, gathering together unto Him will bring our focus back to what really matters most: loving and obeying Him.

Jesus also prayed, *"The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, **that they may be one, just as We are one**;"* (Jn. 17:20-22) His glory is revealed as we worship! This glory tears down man-made divisions and boundaries, and transforms us into a testimony worthy of His matchless name. (2 Cor. 3:17,18; 1 Pet 2:9)

3. Experiencing Him.

Jesus proclaimed, *“This is eternal life, that they may **know** You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”* (Jn. 17:3) This goes way beyond mere intellectual comprehension, and speaks of our need *“to know by experience and observation,”* which is how the Greek word for “know” is actually defined.

The Father longs for us to **experience** His presence, as David did when he wrote, *“In Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever.”* (Ps. 16:11) Gathering together for worship will empower us to *“comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to **know** the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, **that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.**”* (Eph. 3:18-19) Lord, we need more of You!

4. Foundational Authority.

*“And when they heard this, they lifted their voices to God with **one accord**... And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was **shaken**, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak the word of God with **boldness.**”* (Acts 4:24-33)

Our unity through worship and prayer is crucial in order for the Lord to release His authority upon and through us corporately, so that a breakthrough against the powers of darkness can be accomplished in this region (see Eph. 3:10). With the high praises of God in our mouths and His two-edged sword in our hands, we are authorized *“to execute vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples, to bind their kings with chains and their nobles with fetters of iron, to execute on them the judgment written”* (Ps. 149:6-9). It's time to war for the freedom of those still held captive in our region!

5. The Power of God.

*“At the hands of the apostles many **signs and wonders** were taking place among the people; and they were all with **one accord** in Solomon's portico... And all the more believers in the Lord, multitudes of men and women, were constantly added to their number, to such an extent that they even carried the sick out into the streets and laid them on cots and pallets, so that when Peter came by at least his **shadow** might fall on any one of them. Also the people from the cities in the vicinity of Jerusalem were coming together, bringing people who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were **all being healed.**”* (Acts 5:12-16)

As we gather in unity to worship Him, the power of the Lord will be released to perform the awesome signs and wonders that He promised would accompany His gospel (Mk. 16:17-18, see also Ps. 133). But it will not be limited to just these gatherings, however. We will see a greater *apostolic* anointing released, that will enable and propel us to bring His presence and power out into the streets and marketplaces, just as in the days of the book of Acts.

6. Preparation for Increase.

“Now at this time while the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint arose on the part of the Hellenistic Jews against the native Hebrews, because their widows were being overlooked in the daily serving of food. So the twelve summoned the congregation of the disciples and said, ‘It is not desirable for us to neglect the word of God in order to serve tables. Therefore, brethren, select from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the

*Spirit and of wisdom, whom we may put in charge of this task. But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.’ The statement found approval with the whole congregation; and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Spirit, and Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolas, a proselyte from Antioch. And these they brought before the apostles; and after praying, they laid their hands on them. The word of God kept on **spreading**; and the number of the disciples continued to **increase greatly** in Jerusalem, and a **great many** of the priests were becoming obedient to the faith.” (Acts 6:1-7)*

It’s no accident that the emerging order and diversification of gifts at that time resulted in great increase for the early church. We are **all** called to be royal priests (1 Pet. 2:9), and **all** must learn to function as such. This means, as Paul emphasized, our gatherings ought to be opportunities for **everyone** to participate, as the Spirit leads (1 Cor. 14:26). Here is where we will begin to move into true **functional** unity: building region-wide relationships and recognizing the critical connections each of us needs to advance together as the body of Christ (Eph. 4:15-16).

The saints cannot be equipped by theory, but only through actual participation in an atmosphere where spiritual gifts are welcomed and opportunities abound to flow in them. Those of us who have been called as leaders are responsible before God to provide this atmosphere, and then to follow Jesus as His Spirit transforms our gatherings into an **assembly**, where we can begin to “...attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the **measure** of the **stature** which belongs to the **fullness** of Christ.” (Eph. 4:13) Lord, our region needs to see more of You...through us! These gatherings will start the process whereby we are corporately and regionally prepared to handle the massive end-time harvest that is coming.

7. **Establishment of His Kingdom.**

*Now there were at Antioch, in the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. **While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said**, “Set apart for Me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, **they sent them away**. (Acts 13:1-3)*

Jesus described the kingdom of God using examples like the mustard seed and yeast, to illustrate its expanding and infiltrating nature (Mt. 13:31, 33). God’s kingdom begins in our hearts, moves outward into our homes and families, extends into our churches, and ultimately expands through us to encompass the entire world and its systems.

In Antioch, we are confronted with a model for kingdom expansion that resulted in one of the biggest harvests and church planting operations the world has ever seen. How was this done? They simply ministered to the Lord and the Holy Spirit spoke! In their gathering together for worship and prayer, this 1st century regional church provided an atmosphere in which the Holy Spirit could release His apostolic anointing. In this case, two men were set apart and sent out, and the rest, as they say, is history.

In this 21st century, I am convinced the Lord wants to do more. I believe He is offering us an opportunity to see this model restored here and now if we will again begin to gather together regionally for worship and prayer. But there’s going to be one major difference: Instead of just two, or even a few, being set apart and sent, I believe the Lord will release this apostolic

anointing on **all** His people! (Acts 2:17-21) Are we not **all** commanded to go? Are we not **all** to be empowered by the Holy Spirit to be His witnesses?

In our gatherings the Holy Spirit will speak to many hearts, setting them apart for the mission and destiny for which they were redeemed. In our gatherings many will be empowered to believe God for the kind of miracle-working power it will take to convince this sick, twisted world that our Lord is for real. And **from** those gatherings they will **go**--to their homes, jobs, schools, marketplaces--wherever the Lord sends them, to bring His overwhelming love and power to all who need Him. Then we will truly begin to see the fulfillment of our Lord's heart-cry through us: "Thy kingdom come! Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven!"

In the summer of 2006, Chuck Pierce (an internationally recognized prophet, www.glory-of-zion.org) came to NJ and delivered a major word of the Lord for our state. Here's a portion of that word:

"But the Lord would say, 'I brought you to this place tonight because I am re-centering my purpose in this state. I am beginning to put in the place where, in the past, my Spirit has visited so I have centered you here in the midst of past visitations so I can begin to come down and visit you again. I say to this state there are many winds and rains and hurricanes that will come near your border but it will be heard that it is My wind that is blowing in Jersey. It will be heard that in the garden state that once again I am walking in the midst of the cool of this garden. I will begin to judge that which needs to be judged. I am raising you up with a sound and a worship ability that will begin to cause the visitations of the past to be uncapped and mingled with the visitation of the future. I am creating crossroads from north to south, east to west, and I say, I will begin to cut this state like a pie and begin to serve the fruit of this state, and many will come to eat,' saith the Lord."

Worship (along with prayer) is central to the fulfillment of this word.

In no way should these gatherings be viewed as replacing existing local church ministry, but rather as one way we can bring greater kingdom awareness and unity to Jesus' regional body.

I am therefore calling on all leaders and brothers and sisters in the "Church of Union County" (and from surrounding areas as well) to seek the Lord concerning this word. As we move ahead this year, let's communicate with one another about further insights from the Lord, and begin now to prepare for the birth of a new wineskin in our midst.

Humbly and respectfully submitted on February 6, 2007,

Russ Painter

Director, ETR Destiny / FireSong Ministries

www.etrdestiny.com

russ@etrdestiny.com

848.628.4010