

HAS CHRISTIANITY FAILED?

“...when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?” — Luke 18:8

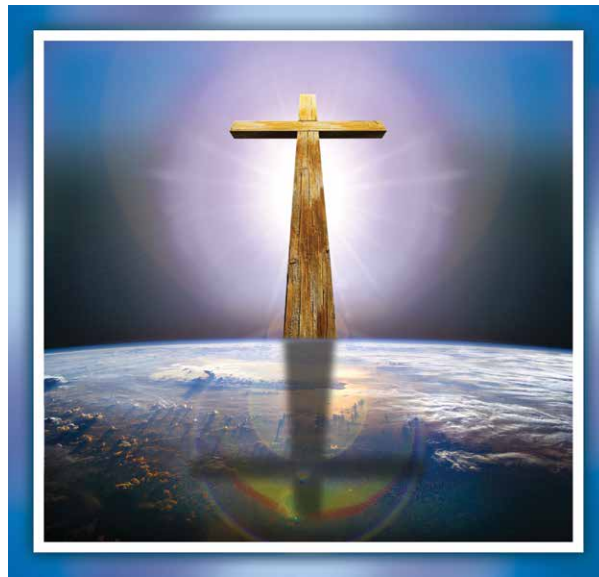
Nearly two thousand years have passed since Jesus came to die for mankind, and yet the world is still far from being converted to Christianity. In fact, the Christian population has been on a steady decline since the 1940s, and today Islam is quickly surpassing all Christian denominations combined. “*Christianity could be facing a catastrophic collapse in Britain according to official figures suggesting it is declining 50% faster than previously thought... Dr. Fraser Watts, a Cambridge theologian, said... ‘The expressions of optimism by the church are just completely misplaced.’*” (The Telegraph, UK, June 21, 2017) Are we to judge from these reports that God’s plan is failing?

FACING THE PROPHETIC REALITY

When we examine the words of Jesus, we can understand these statistics more clearly: “*When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth?*” (Luke 18:8) The Apostle Paul’s prophecy also warned that there would come a great *falling away* from the true faith. (2 Thessalonians 2:3) The Apostle Peter counseled that a great nominalism and confusion would fragment the Christian church, because beguiling men would enter into the church and distort the glorious truths of her Master. “*...there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable [destructible] heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them... And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.*” 2 Peter 2:1, 2

After the Apostles died, a lack of zeal pervaded the small companies of believers. They abandoned their personal responsibilities and turned these over to authoritarian religious rulers. This may have been brought on by continual persecution which wore down the resolve of Christ’s followers and gave rise to a desire to be more accepted by the world. By the third century AD, most Christian congregations had totally lost sight of the true purpose of preaching the Gospel — it became more a matter of filling church pews and building structures, rather than building up the faith.

As the centuries rolled on, the church became more and more distanced from their true mission. The vast majority of congregations no longer resembled the early, humble gatherings. Today, there are over 40,000 Christian denominations, each believing they maintain the true mission. The prophetic reality is that “*a house divided against itself cannot stand.*” (Mark 3:24-25) Jesus proclaimed this prophecy as a *sign* which would mark the time of his second advent — a time when he would begin to disrupt Satan’s kingdom.



This extreme fragmentation is not only a prophetic reality, but it is one of the major reasons why the churches of the world have lost the confidence of sincere truth seekers — many of whom have wandered into other world religions or have drifted into complete infidelity. Those who remain in the churches often lament the worldliness they see in their congregations. They denounce the commercial atmosphere and lack of doctrinal teaching from the pulpit.

As Jesus explained: “*The harvest is the end of the age,*” and true to the prophetic reality, we are indeed experiencing a time of *harvest*. We are living in the end of the Gospel era when Christian *wheat* are being separated from those who are lukewarm *tares* — those who claim to be Christians but are so in name only. Matthew 13:36-43

A DISMAL VIEW OF THE MISSION

When the divine commission was given to Jesus’ followers to go into all the world and preach the Gospel, the purpose was distinctly stated to be that of giving a witness to the entire world. (Matthew 24:14) This witness was not intended to reach every single ear of every person. If that was the mission, then the mission of the church has failed. Throughout history, billions of families have lived in remote places of the earth never having been exposed to the *only name whereby they might be saved*. Not only so, but even those who have had the opportunity to hear are skeptical to accept a message that has been clouded by

numerous and diverse errors. “...the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ... should shine unto them...” Ephesians 2:2; 2 Corinthians 4:4

False doctrines are often the most popular, and these have obscured the true mission of the church. A particularly destructive and yet popular view of the mission has been that God requires everyone to become a Christian before the end of life in order to escape the terrible fate of eternal torture. This hopeless prospect places those billions who have not heard, nor could not hear, in a condition worse than the most horrifying torture perpetrated by even ISIS! This does not portray a *God of love*.

Thankfully, when the Scriptures are studied without the creeds of men, they indicate something very different than this dreadful prospect. God said that “...their fear toward me is taught by the precept of men...” (Isaiah 29:13) God’s message is one of hope! The prophet Haggai declared that in the judgment day “the desire of all nations shall come!” (Haggai 2:7) Isaiah portrayed a wonderful time when “none shall hurt nor destroy” in God’s kingdom, for the earth shall then “be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” (Isaiah 11:9) The Apostle Paul proclaimed that God “is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.” (1 Timothy 4:10) These and so many more inspiring prophecies provide a hope for those who do not hear the Gospel call now.

THE TRUE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

If the mission of the true church has not been to convert the world now, then what is the mission? It has been to call out from among earth’s billions a *people for God’s name*. These are to be a faithful and devoted group of Christians willing to lay aside their own aims and ambitions to do the will of their Heavenly Father. The Apostle James explained this mission well: “God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name... After this [after the church is called, chosen and found faithful] I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up [Christ will return to restore Israel to divine favor] That the residue of men might seek after the Lord... [these will have an opportunity to receive redemption when they see God’s kingdom established in Jerusalem]” Acts 15:14-17

As this prophecy illustrates, there is an order to all of God’s plans. First must be completed the work of taking out a *people for His name* — the church of Christ — to be made up of all fully consecrated Christians. This is the true purpose of Christianity now, and, measured by these true goals, the mission of the church is *not* a failure. Throughout the Gospel age, God has successfully been calling out a special *people for His name* to be the administrators with Jesus over the next age

— the resurrection age — when the true followers of Christ will live and reign with him during his thousand years. “I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus and for the Word of God, ...and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.” (Revelation 20:4) Over whom will Christ and his church reign if all others are forever lost? This difficulty vanishes when we realize from the Scriptures that the world is to be blessed, not lost, following the completion of the true church.

WHO ARE THOSE ON THE TRUE MISSION?

To accomplish the mission of gathering and perfecting His elect, God has given “some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ...” (Ephesians 4:11-14) Completing the church of Christ by perfecting their faith comes by their diligent study, prayer, assembling together, witnessing to God’s loving plan and by suffering for Christ’s sake. Philippians 1:29

To enter into the service of completing Christ’s body, each individual member is to *consecrate* — be fully devoted — to the will of God. “I beseech you therefore,

brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” (Romans 12:1) But *consecration* is only the first step. Paul goes on to say, “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” (vs. 2) This *sanctification* process progresses throughout the Christian’s life until the character is fully developed and matured, and it must then be maintained until the end of the Christian walk. “Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life.” Revelation 2:10

John the Revelator admonished the church, especially those living at the end of the Christian age: “I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire...and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve that thou mayest see.” (Revelation 3:18, 20) This advice for the Christian is to be active, not passive. *Buy of me gold* — spiritual riches of divine truth which will stand the test of all opposition. *Anoint thine eyes* — spiritual eyesight made clear by a humble, teachable character. Christians have a responsibility to *work out their own salvation* and study to show themselves approved unto God. (2 Timothy 2:15; Philippians 2:12) In other words, Christians are not to rely on the clergy, nor are they to believe that a particular denomination is as a ship traveling to heaven, and as long as they are in it, they are safe. In addition, true Christian goals



are not those preached by certain church leaders who promise earthly prosperity and an easy path. Jesus' followers place God above all — dedicating life itself to know and to preach God's truth in word and conduct — no matter the cost. This is why the true followers of Christ are small in number now.

NOT A POPULAR MISSION NOW

Jesus said that the path his followers would take in this age would be a *narrow way* of sacrifice, and thus, the true spiritual disciples of Christ, their mission and message, has always been described in Scripture as unpopular. The true church is comprised of those fully devoted joint-sacrificers with Christ — a *little flock*. (Matthew 7:14; Luke 12:32) Their faith manifests their loyalty to God and His truth under the harsh circumstances of this age.

After Jesus came as *the light of the world*, mankind was plunged into a long period of darkness which we now speak of as the *Dark Ages*. Jesus warned his followers that the result of preaching the Gospel throughout the Christian age would generally have the effect of repelling the whole world. Jesus himself was despised, rejected and crucified by those who *professed* to love and follow righteousness. The Apostles were similarly treated because of their faithfulness in refusing to compromise the message of truth. And, all who faithfully proclaim God's Word shall follow in Jesus' footsteps. "*Ye shall be hated of all men for my sake.*"

(Matthew 10:22) "*Marvel not if the world hate you; ye know that it hated Me before it hated you.*" (John 15:18) We see that it is in proportion to their faithfulness as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ that his people are hated and persecuted.

Throughout the past 2,000 years, many denominational leaders with a lack of knowledge about the proper mission of the church and motivated by a misguided zeal have been impatient for God's kingdom. They have attempted to hurry things along by *forcibly* trying to convert the world before God's purposed *due time*. As a result, hundreds of thousands of Jews and Muslims have been tortured and killed or forced into insincere conversion. Even Christians have been persecuted by their fellow Christians for not embracing a particular set of sectarian creeds. As the true Gospel is proclaimed, it sheds a light upon the darkness of the worldly minded. "*For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd.*" John 3:20

THE TRUE MISSION'S REWARD

If the path of the Christian now is narrow and difficult, the reward is beyond comprehension! "*Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: That the trial of*

your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ..." 1 Peter 1:6, 7

Those who have accepted the invitation to a higher calling do so with joy, even in the midst of trials. (James 1:2-4) Jesus reassured them: "*Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven...*" (Matthew 5:11, 12) Although the result of shining the light of the Gospel will bring upon the true church persecution, nevertheless, these are commissioned to let their light shine that error may be revealed and that the faithful will be manifest.

To these faithful few the Master gave this promise, "*I go to prepare a place for you, ... that where I am, there ye may be also.*" (John 14:2,3) Yes, the *little flock*, the church, is to have a heavenly reward because they follow Jesus in laying down their lives sacrificially. "*To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life:*" (Romans 2:7) Therefore, "*...if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him: If we suffer, we shall also reign with him...*" (2 Timothy 2:11, 12) The *present* mission of the church is not that of conquering the world for Jesus, but of following faithfully in his footsteps — in preparation to be sympathetic *priests and kings* to the rest of the

world — the *poor groaning creation* of mankind. 1 Peter 2:9

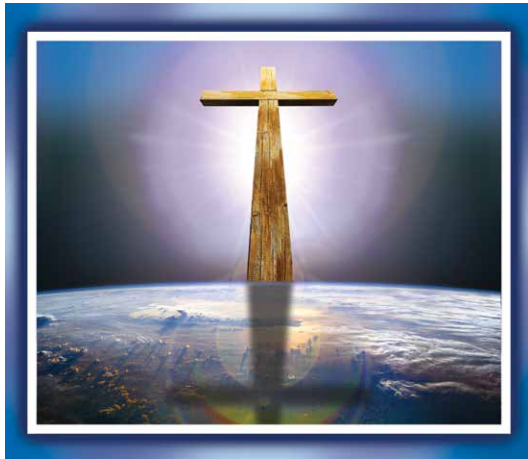


THE FUTURE MISSION OF THE CHURCH

At this time in history, God is selecting out a small group of specially trained Christian soldiers for the *future mission* of capturing the hearts of the rest of the world. Those who had been blinded by the deceiving influence of the *prince of darkness* will come forth from their graves ready to *hear* — seeking the full knowledge of the Lord. With Satan bound, these will have — for the first time — a reasonable opportunity to hear and to be brought to perfection and everlasting life. At that time, "*...they shall all know me from the least of them unto the greatest...*" Then if they refuse God's generous mercy during the reign of righteousness, they will *die for their own iniquity* in the second death — "*...they shall be as though they had not been.*" Jeremiah 31:29-34; Obadiah 16; Acts 3:19-23

How glad we are that *the real Christian mission has not failed* — that the divine plan for this age is being successfully accomplished, and that now this preparatory work for the incoming kingdom is about completed. *Then* will come the blessed mission of the church to convert the rest of the world. "*And the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick: the people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity.*" Isaiah 33:24

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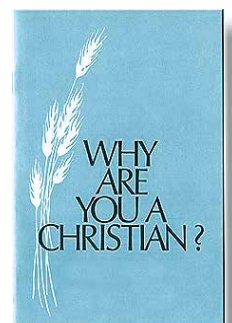
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