

# THE RESPONSE OF THE CONGREGATION TO THE CRY

The sound of wailing startles you. It is the hopeless, heart-wrenching wailing of a crowd of mourners amid a melee of voices and people. Not only your ears, but also your eyes and your heart have become riveted on a shroud of darkness, a shroud of despair, of drunkenness, of longing, of lostness, of death. The grave has been dug and the body lowered into the earth to the tune of women frantically casting themselves on the fresh dirt. The body has been laid on its side facing the birthplace of the old man so that his spirit will know where to return and rest rather than roam and trouble the relatives of the deceased. This is done with gravity as the majority of the few hundred people in the crowd vividly remember the woman who had lain just some fifty meters away under total control of an evil spirit for days on end. The chief stands resolutely by, holding his cultural icons consisting of a staff and club which converts into a dagger. He stands, not looking at the corpse, for he is under threat by his genie if he ever lays his eyes to on a dead human body. Above him you see the words "Life is short! Death is sure! But they don't know Jesus Christ the cure!" You see the great hands of the clock approaching the midnight hour. The urgency of the message strikes home in your heart along with the depth of the lostness.

But then, a startling thing happens. You hear singing. "Joy to the world! The Lord is come!" Your attention is averted to a beaming, joy-filled group of Christians in a packed church house just behind the first scene. At first your heart relaxes and you are relieved to be able to lay your eyes on such a beautiful sight, streaming with light, and tune your ears to the beautiful singing. But suddenly you tune in your mind to the meaning of the words that are actually being sung. "Joy?... to the world?... But aren't those people in darkness also a part of the same world?" As your mind and heart reel, the music continues, "Let

every heart prepare Him room!" You hang your head in turmoil as the great disparity of the two scenes causes you to mumble to yourself, "If they really wished for every heart to receive Him, why does that overcrowded church not share a few of its people and some of its light with the other group of people which is still sitting in darkness and despair, oblivious to any joy or light?" You have just had a taste of the disparity and turmoil which many a missionary feels as he returns from a place of deep darkness, sits in a crowd of worshipping, joyful believers, and struggles with being fully joyful because a part of his heart is still hearing the cry of the death wail.

But wait! The worshipping congregation of saints does not seem to be content with experiencing their joy and light. The minister gets up in front of his congregation and begins to unburden his heart concerning the cry of the lost which he hears in his ears. The entire congregation united, agrees that they have been increasingly hearing the same cry, their hearts are burdened about it, and something must be done. The minister urges the church to go pray and seek God concerning the cry and what each one must do to contribute to a corporate response. Another meeting is scheduled for discussion. As a result of each one carrying in his heart the cry of the lost, every ability, resource, even weakness and deficiency, both personal and in the corporate congregation, is viewed with a brand new perspective. It is examined for what it may be able to contribute to sending a beachhead of light to the lost who sit in darkness. Each member of the congregation comes back to the second meeting with a tool clearly on his heart. Many even come carrying a tool such as a shovel, hammer, nail bag, broom, shovel, stethoscope, and even a little baby. One comes back with papers, statistics, maps, and some definite things to share.

At the beginning of the meeting, the leader of the congregation gets up to share how one brother discussed with the leaders concerning doing some research and

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traveling to bring more clear definition to the cry which has been sounding on the hearts of the congregation. He was encouraged to do just that. At this point Mr. Researcher gets up before the congregation and shares how God clearly directed and performed miracles in research and travel to help him learn about a tribal group of about 30,000 people tucked in a rural part of Tanzania called the Sichela. He describes a tribe steeped in drunkenness and animism with ne'er a church to show the light. As Mr. Researcher unburdens his heart, he concludes with the acknowledgement, "I believe this may be the specific definition of the cry that we are hearing, and if we all agree, I am willing to go." Another brother gets up before the congregation and speaks about the need for everyone to work together and cast in his much needed part. He lifts up a spear for an illustration. With deep conviction he reasons, "It seems God may have already called a man in the congregation to be the spearhead. But a spearhead, even if it is sharp and capable, cannot go anywhere or do anything effective unless there is a good shaft which is streamlined, shaped, straight, well-fitted to him, and bound to him in commitment." A response is then called for from the congregation and met with enthusiasm. Clearly it is voiced, "We believe, too, this is what God is calling us to. Let us send Mr. Researcher as a beachhead of light to the Sichela tribe." Spontaneously the man with the carpenter's tools volunteers to use his trade to support. The man with the screw gun commits to working harder and sacrificing more in order to support with finances. The young man with the stethoscope commits to use his training to provide medical care. The mother will raise her children so that they will one day go. On and on it goes as one after another, each one expresses the particular meaning which he has found in his own resources to contribute to the cause of establishing a beach head of light among the Sichela tribe. In doing so, the entire church finds itself beautifully aligned and fitly joined together as a spear launching a spearhead of light, sailing over the vast gulfs of strange languages, cultures, geographic distance, and spiritual strongholds. Most wonderful of all, they find that by effectively launching a spearhead, they have effectively launched themselves as the entire church, and lodged their hearts on a foreign field.

You find Mr. Researcher now addressing you as the third party onlooker to all of these things. The question comes, "Have you heard the cry?" Throughout Missions Conference, the theme: The Cry of the Nations was expressed in many different ways. Whether it is the cry of God, the cry of the animist, the cry of the cities, the cry of Islam, the cry of the Germanic peoples, the cry for prepa-

ration and training, or the cry of the children, the question remains the same. What is the response to the cry? God is not just looking for the response of the individual. He is searching for the response of the congregation.

If you feel you are clearly hearing God's call to go, do not forget that He is calling your church to go along with you. Value that. Take Paul's example in Acts 11:26. Take the time and attention needed to connect with your local congregation. It will be energy well invested and pay off many times over. This world has far too many missionaries who are floundering because they are lost in a parachurch organization and are without a vital, direct connection to their local church.

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*"Lord, we need churches with missionaries and missionaries with churches!"*

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If you feel burdened by all the needs but do not see how you can go because of other responsibilities which God has called you to, do not sit down in unproductive discouragement. Remember that God wants the cry of the nations on your heart to infuse every resource which you have with purpose. Pour your mission minded heart into your local church. Your heart will become one among many which will produce a mission minded congregation. There is someone in your congregation whom God desires to raise up and launch forth. But remember, God is calling you as a part of that shaft to go along with him. You will be amazed at how the entire church will be sanctified by it. This world has far too many churches which are floundering in materialism, worldliness, and lethargy because they only try to ease their consciences by sending off missionaries to other parachurch organizations instead of going along themselves.

Parachurch organizations can definitely have their place. But let us not stop there. Let us seriously consider what God may want to do even with your own local congregation, the institution which He has already clearly put in place.

*Lord, we need churches with missionaries and missionaries with churches! Give us missionaries like Paul! Give us churches like Antioch! Give us a vision for congregational missions!*

—Timothy Zeiset