



I have been serving as a missionary in Kiev, Ukraine for the past twelve years. I am involved in making disciples, and in planting, establishing and caring for simple churches.

In light of the fact that most of the churches with which I work are small and are simple and organic in nature, I am often asked a question. Timmy, are you against big churches and big meetings? I am quick to answer that I am not against that which is big. For me it is not about big or small, and it is not about a model or strategy for church planting, development and reproduction.

For me, it is about laying hold of, fulfilling, and living out what is expressed in these verses from

Colossians 1:

13For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, 14in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins. 15He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. 16For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. 17He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. 18And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. 19For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, 20and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

In fewer words, it is about a king(Jesus) and His kingdom. It is about a life lived in Christ's presence and with Him as our consuming focus. My passion is to help people experience right now 24/7 life in the kingdom of God, which is life in Christ.

God's Kingdom Arrives Among Us

When John the Baptist prepared the way for Jesus, the Messiah; he said, "repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand." When Jesus came out of obscurity and begin His earthly ministry, He said, "the time has come." "The kingdom of God is at hand " "The kingdom of God has come upon you." " Repent and believe the good news. "

He was announcing the beginning of something that was as different from the past as the dark is from light. He was talking about being able to experience the world and life in a whole new way. He was talking about something that had been long awaited, that had now arrived, and that was going to radically change everything.

When asked by John from prison if he was the Messiah, the one for whom they had been waiting, Jesus explained his ministry and the coming of the kingdom this way-

At that very time Jesus cured many who had diseases, sicknesses and evil spirits, and gave sight to many who were blind. So he replied to the messengers, "Go back and report to John what you have seen and heard: The blind receive sight, the lame walk, those who have leprosy are cured, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the good news is preached to the poor. (Luke 7:21, 22)

Stop for a moment and think about one of these images.

Imagine being born blind. You don't know what a sunrise looks like. You can't picture the mountain or ocean. You don't know what it is like to see a smile or joyous expression on a friend's face. Suddenly someone comes and heals you. Everything about the world and how you experience it changes in an instant. You can see. Things that you have tried to imagine suddenly become alive. Words gain new meaning. Relationships with friends and family take on a whole new context.

Considering that gives you a little taste of what was happening when Jesus announced His kingdom. The change people were experiencing physically from healing was only a taste of

what was happening spiritually. Things were changing for many people physically, but more important, things were being changed spiritually.

The miracles and healing Jesus was doing in the physical realm were only a foretaste of what was going to happen in the spiritual realm of His kingdom. The coming of the kingdom of God was going to radically change everything.

Jesus in this same dialogue, while speaking about John the Baptist, would go on to make this amazing statement about the kingdom.

But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. This is the one about whom it is written: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you." I tell you, among those born of women there is no one greater than John; yet the one who is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he.

Luke 7: 26-28

We find a similar shocking statement from Jesus later in Luke.

"The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of God is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it.

Luke 16:16

There had been the law and the prophets, and now the kingdom had arrived. What did this

mean? It is important before we look deeper at what had been during the time of the law and the prophets and what was now radically changing, to note that the public start of Jesus ministry was only the first step, the first light that would reach greater brightness and true fulfillment only as Jesus went to the cross, rose again from the dead, and then ascended and birthed His church through the sending of the Holy Spirit. And of course the fully glory of Jesus and His kingdom will only be realized on that day in eternity when every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus is king and Lord.

The Arrival of the Kingdom Radically Changes Everything

Now, let's compare the law and the prophets (what was in the past) with the kingdom (which Jesus announced as coming into being and which continues to this day).

- In the past there was a sacrificial system. The priests(a special group of people that came from the tribe of Levi) had to daily offer up sacrifices for the sins of the people.

Jesus came and offered Himself up as one sacrifice for all time.

- The presence of God was in a place- the Holy of Holies. Only the high priest could be in the presence of God for a short time once a year.

Jesus opened up the holy of holies for every believer. The presence of Christ is now among His people.

- The Holy Spirit only was given to certain people for certain special purposes.

After the birth of the church, at Pentecost, the Holy Spirit comes to reside in the life of every true believer.

- Only specially selected people were the prophets and priests of God.

Now every believer is a priest and God desires to prophesy (speak forth His Word) through every believer.

Those who lived before the announcing of the kingdom lived in the Age of Promise. They lived in hope of a promise of a Messiah. Now the Messiah had come. The Kingdom of God had come. Everything radically changed.

My Eyes Were Opened

Honestly, I don't particularly like labels like simple church and organic church, because it can easily give a perception of a new model or strategy. When people ask me questions about structure, size, strategy, and leadership what I want to do is to take them deeper into the heart of God. I want to help them discover a life focused on Christ, a life lived in His kingdom. Based on the aforementioned realities of the kingdom of God, let me share with you a little of my personal story and some of the truths and insights that have impacted me along the way.

I grew up in a pretty traditional church background. My understanding was that the church was a holy place, which you went to on a holy day(Sunday), to hear a holy man(the Pastor) tell you about the holy things of God.

A little over thirty years ago, while I was in my final year at the university, a friend invited me and my fiancée to attend a church service that met on the college campus. That invitation changed the course of our lives.

First of all, the place where we met was a simple and ordinary room. When we walked in, there was excitement, enthusiasm, and expectation radiating from almost every person. After meeting many of the people and talking with them for awhile, one of the brothers asked us to take a seat in a circle on the floor. He asked, "Who has a song, a verse, or a testimony they want to share?" Someone suggested we sing Psalm 67. Everyone sang heartily the words straight from

scripture while a couple of guys played guitars. This was followed by a couple of more song requests, and then someone said, "I have a couple of verses that God has been using in my life this week." Someone else shared about an opportunity God had given them to share the gospel with a friend. We stopped and prayed that the person would come to Christ. More songs, more sharing of verses and testimonies, more spontaneous prayer, and at some point a discussion of a scripture passage. We had never been a part of anything like this, but we loved it. The presence of Christ was very real, and we sensed that it was He who was actually leading the time.

We were hooked. We wanted more of this. We discovered that in addition to the informal Sunday gathering, people gathered in smaller groups during the week for prayer and Bible study. As we saw people on the campus or around the city, they would share a verse that was on their heart or ask how they could pray for us. It was "church" every day, not once a week.

The believers were also regularly talking about loving and befriending the lost people around them and taking opportunity to share the gospel with them. This meant it was not a rare thing for a new person to show up at a meeting and say, "I became a Christian this week." Baptisms happened spontaneously and regularly whenever there were a few new followers of Christ ready to take that step of obedience. It really impacted us that anyone who had led someone to Christ and was helping that person grow could do the baptizing. This was reflective of a distinct mindset and understanding that was very present among these people. There was not a man or group of men "running the show", considered to be the professional clergy. There was leadership- a handful of elders(mature brothers) who helped equip us and encourage us. They, however, like the scripture teaches were among us, not over us. They helped us understand that we are all priests with the special privileges and responsibilities of that priesthood and that Christ is our leader, our true Shepherd, and our Head.

For the first time in our lives, my fiancée and I were experiencing the life with Christ that we read about in the book of Acts. We did not even know it was possible. If it was being labeled today, it could be called "organic church". It was church, fellowship and life that flowed naturally from the true source-Jesus. It was the 24/7 kingdom life that Jesus proclaimed.

This understanding of church and life in Christ, that I have described in my story, is what I have pursued for the past thirty years. At times the forms have looked a little different, and there was a time when "ministry success" tempted me away from this pure and simple devotion to Christ, but God faithfully pulled me back and I continue now to start churches and to help churches that want to be live in pure and simple devotion to Christ.

Today, I am heartbroken when I see so many churches and so many believers who are not experiencing the present reality of Christ, the 24/7 life in His kingdom. And unfortunately many Christians have left big churches or more traditional churches thinking they will find something different simply by meeting in a home, but often there is no more focus on Christ and living in His presence in the small setting than there was in the big church. This is why I said at the beginning- big or small is not the true issue. We must understand better what is on the heart and mind of God.

Looking into God's Heart

Christ as King and Head of the Church

In I Samuel 8 we read of the people of Israel desiring to have a king. God did not want to give them a king. He explained to Samuel that Israel wanted a king because they were rejecting Him. God wanted to be their king. He wanted them to depend on Him, but they wanted a man, "who will fight our battles for us. (v. 20)". And so, God gave them what they wanted.

Today the kingdom of God is among us. Christ is to be our king. Look at these words He spoke that, in practice, seem to often be forgotten.

25 But Jesus called them to Himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great men exercise authority over them. 26"It is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your servant, 27and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be your slave; 28 just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

Matthew 20:25-28

8"But do not be called Rabbi; for One is your Teacher, and you are all brothers. 9"Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven 10"Do not be called leaders; for One is your Leader, that is, Christ. 11But the greatest among you shall be your servant. 12"Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted.

Matthew 23:8-12

Often today, we as Christians seem to be much like the Hebrews. We want to be identified with a man. Many love to say, "I go to Pastor Andre's church". "I am a part of Michael's church." In many cases the church leader is innocent. He is a humble man and does not want people to look at him this way. He is just a product of the system.

The leadership that God set-up and of which we read in the New Testament was meant to guard against this mindset and temptation. We must realize that the things written in the epistles on church leadership (I Timothy 3, Titus 1, and I Peter 5) cannot be rightly understood unless they are seen through the lens of the foundational words that Jesus said about leadership in His kingdom.

This is a lengthy subject, but here are just a few things to consider:

- The primary word that is used concerning church leaders is elders- simply older ones, more mature ones. These elders did not possess special education. They were not brought in from the outside. They grew, matured, and developed in the context of the church body. The other words, used concerning leaders(for example see the use of shepherd and overseer in Acts 20), do not indicate a hierarchy of leadership, but rather a different way of describing the same role.

- Throughout the book of Acts and the epistles, the word elders is always used in plural form. We cannot find the concept or practice of a one pastor system. This is meant to be a protection against a leader exalting himself or the people exalting one man as the head. Christ said that only He is to be the Head. Just as God wanted the Israelites to trust and depend fully on Him, He wants us to do the same.

- The Apostle Paul (who always worked in plurality with a team) started churches in such a way as to keep people from exalting or depending on Him. He planned to leave after laying foundations, and thus the people had to learn what it meant to live under Christ's Headship and to be truly taught by Him. It is interesting to note that when the Corinthians started saying, "I am of Paul. I am of Apollos.", Paul strongly rebuked them for saying such a thing, and reminded them that they belonged to Christ, not to any man.

Final Note:

I am still learning in many of the areas I have written about here. I don't claim to be an expert or a theologian in these things. These are just convictions that God has given me. I know there are brothers and sisters that love Jesus who have very different perspectives. I respect them and recognizing that none of us have it all figured out, I welcome the opportunity to learn from others. I encourage you to post your thoughts, comments, and questions.

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(Russian or English is acceptable)