

What Did You Go Out To See?

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There have been so many people who have left the “church” that certain phrases have come into regular use among those who have come out. “De-toxing” – a time of isolation and aloneness when one first stops “attending church” and the contaminants and poisons of “church” begin to dissipate and disappear from one’s life – is one such phrase. “Wilderness” – a similar condition of isolation and aloneness but which can take many varied forms and be of considerably longer duration, even of years – is another such phrase. Unfortunately, as is true with all catch phrases, these mean various things to various people and can even convey elements of truth and deception simultaneously.

John the Baptist, after all his fiery preaching, exhortations and rebukes, was suddenly uncertain that Jesus was really the Messiah after all. John was now in prison and, perhaps himself believing – as so many prophecies foretold – that Messiah would come and set up an everlasting kingdom (Dan. 7:27, etc.), was confused by what he heard that Jesus was accomplishing. So “he sent his disciple to ask [Jesus], ‘Are You the one who was to come, or should we expect someone else?’” (Mt. 11:2-3)

Jesus relays a message of confirmation back to John by telling these men, “Go back and report to John what you hear and see: 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.” (Mt. 11:4-5) This message would be welcome comfort to John because it was other prophecies, given by Isaiah, about the Messiah (see Isa. 35:5-6, 61:1) and the fulfillment of these Messianic prophecies were just as important as would be the fulfillment of the other Messianic prophecies. Jesus concludes his message of confirmation to John by saying, “Blessed is the man who does not fall away on account of Me.” (Mt. 11:6) In other words, though what you seek the Messiah doing, John, does not match the popular notions of a Warrior-Messiah who would destroy Rome and initiate His own everlasting dominion over the entire world, what the real Messiah is doing is exactly what was foretold. Blessed are you if you continue to believe that the Man you see and hear of doing these miraculous things is truly the Messiah who was to come.

The story does not end there. “As John’s disciples were leaving, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John:

‘What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear fine clothes are in kings’ palaces [- not out in the desert]. Then what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet.’” (Mt. 11:7-9)

Those who have exited the “church” and entered into some form of the “wilderness” experience need to reconsider this question: “What did you go out to see?”

- There are some who have exited the “church” – some even admittedly in rebellion or dissatisfaction because *they* could not be the CEO-“pastor” who got to lord over the assembly. Those who were not broken of this fleshly deception are disqualified, perhaps completely, from being able to lead anyone into the kingdom of Christ and God. This does not mean that they will have no followers

– it only means that *they* will be the ones who lead others into the ditch because of *their* blindness rather than being blind followers of some man who leads some man who leads them into the same ditch. (see Mt. 13:14)

- There are some who have exited the “church” because they were hurt, betrayed, oppressed or persecuted there. Those who take these wounds into the “wilderness” fail to forgive those who so wounded them will never experience the healing touch of Christ. Instead, they will continue to suffer at the hands of the tormenters unless they forgive their brother from their heart (Mt. 18:34-35), assuming the deceived men or women who inflicted such wounds are indeed members of Christ’s family – if not, they indeed are to be pitied and not hated.

- There are those who have exited the “church” because they heard and obeyed the call to “Come out and be separate” (2 Cor. 6:17, Rev. 18:4) – whether they fully understood that call or not or “heard” a specific spiritual, prophetic-type “word” or just “knew” they had to separate themselves from the uncleanness of the counterfeit “church” they were involved with. Some of these have succumbed to various forms of religious pride and, rather than continue to humbly and fearfully follow the Lord wherever He should lead them, these have carried along some form of leftover “church” baggage – some methodology (“Bible studies,” “teachings,” “worship,” “sermons,” “agape feasts,” whatever) or some fleshly tactic (such as power mongering, using gossip and slander, especially to gain the pre-eminence in the assembly, or such as passive listening that differs little from “church” attendance) or have even fled from the “wilderness” and returned to “church.”

- There are those who exit the “church,” go out into the “wilderness” and expect to be united with some group of people (who will do “church” kinds of things with them) and from this group will spring a mighty harvest of souls into the kingdom. When this self-generated vision does not occur, the result is confusion and disillusionment as these continue to seek the fulfillment of their own vision which is at odds with God’s plan for their lives.

- There are some who, having simply (though not painlessly) obeyed the call to come out, are submitting to the “wilderness” training period – even if that should last for forty years as with Moses (Acts 7:29-30), and Joshua and Caleb (Josh. 14:10) – so that they learn:

- to hear clearly and only the voice of the Lord (Jn. 10:27, etc.);

- to keep themselves pure from the abominable apostate practices of “church” (2 Cor. 7:1, 1 Cor. 5:11, etc.);

- to obey Christ in whatever He commands but particularly to genuinely and deeply love one another as He loved us (Heb. 5:9, Jn. 10:27, 13:34, 1 Pet. 4:8);

- to endure hardship as God’s discipline (Heb. 12:7) and to patiently persevere as ones suffering oppression and persecution and so sharing in the sufferings of Christ (1 Pet. 4:12-13) and so attaining to the will of God (1 Pet. 4:19) while persevering to the end so as to be saved (Mt. 10:22);
- to rightly divide every word of truth (2 Tim. 2:15) and to reject and cast off every form of deception and guile (1 Jn. 2:21, 1 Pet. 2:1, 1 Ths. 2:3, etc.);
- to be blameless and pure children of God without fault who hold fast to the Head Christ Jesus and give out His word of life in the midst of a dark and dying world. (Phlp. 2:15-16, 1 Pet. 2:11-12, Eph. 4:15, etc.)

When crowds of people began coming out to see John the Baptist and to be baptized by him, what did they see? Whatever they expected or wanted to see, they saw a rough-dressed man (Mt. 3:4) “preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins.” (Lk. 3:3) John said to the crowds, “You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee the coming wrath? Produce fruit in keeping with repentance...” (Lk. 3:7-8)

John’s first question is, in effect, “Why are you here? Who told you that you needed to leave where you were at and come out here to see what is going on here?” Those who have exited the “church” and had any kind of “wilderness” experience need to re-examine these questions also:

- What did you expect or desire to see or experience when you first left the “church” and followed the Lord into what seemed to be a wasteland, especially devoid of all the religious trappings we’ve come to associate with “Christianity”? Go even further back in your experience and compare these expectations or desires with whatever interior leanings led you to seek God in a “church” in the first place. Don’t just ruminate through “old boxes” in your “attic” or “basement” – ask God to show you if anything important about yourself lies hidden in these deeply buried motivations.

- Then, what did you actually experience? Did you stay following the Lord or did you become diverted into following yet another man? Did he prove to be a false worker, or perhaps more charitably, did he prove to truly following only his own understandings and agendas and not just the Lord? Did you avoid this snare but have not yet experienced what you expected to see as “the body of Christ”?

Who warned you to flee the wrath that is coming upon the “church”? This question rightly deserves our undivided attention. Who warned us to flee from the idolatrous and abominable practices of “church”? It certainly wasn’t the “pastor”! It was not any man – even if there was some man or people who began to us of the problems and deceptions associated with “church.” Rather, it was the Holy Spirit of God convicting us of the coming judgment upon all

those who partake of the intoxicating wine of the great prostitute the book of Revelation calls “Babylon” (Jn. 16:11, Rev. 17:5, 14:8, 18:4-7, etc.)

So, if it was the Spirit of God who warned us to flee the coming wrath and it is the Holy Spirit we must turn to if we are to produce fruit in keeping with our repentance (see also Gal. 5:22-23, etc.), why would ever think we could finish (or abandon) the “wilderness” training period in the power of the flesh and go on then to reap God’s spiritual harvest of righteousness, peace, joy, unity and power (the things that constitute the kingdom of God – see Rom. 14:17, 1 Cor. 4:20, Gal. 3:3) If we began our exodus from the “church” and found ourselves in a “wilderness” that does not match our expectations or desires, we must still press on after Him who leads us or else we may yet find ourselves in a worse condition than when we heard the Spirit’s wooing to flee from the coming wrath. He will make all things clear in His time if we will but strive to faithfully obey Him in all that He places before us.

Blessed is the one who does not fall away from the Lord because his or her own expectations or desires fail to match up with the experiential realities of life with Christ and God. Those who look for large-scale, mass movements are going to miss the building up of the body of Christ at the “atomic” or “molecular” level of twos and threes (Mt. 18:19-20, etc.) Those who simply seek to obey God in whatever is put before them will mesh with those whose hearts and lives are similarly focused on attaining to God’s will. No temporal or religious practice or spiritual experience will be of more value than one’s personal obedience to God – in whatever form God’s will takes for each individual – even as this individuality combines peacefully with the will of God for the corporate body around each individual. Those who persist in their own visions from their own vain imagination (Jer. 23:16) are those who are their own “God” and these will in the end be dismissed from Christ’s presence for their lawlessness (what was right in their own eyes – see Mt. 7:23, Jdgs. 21:25) and will, like Esau, ultimately forfeit their only inheritance rights for a mere pittance. (see Heb. 12:16-17) Only “he who stands firm to the end will be saved.” (Mt. 24:13)

There has never been a shortage of spiritually ignorant people who distort the Scriptures to what they perceive is their own advantage but is really to their destruction. (2 Pet. 3:16) There has never been a shortage of deceitful workmen who masquerade as servants of righteousness (2 Cor. 11:13-15) or who demand to be idolized and obeyed (3 Jn. 9) but who have in reality wandered away from the truth, whose teachings still spread like gangrene and destroy the faith of some. (2 Tim. 2:17-18, see also 1 Jn. 2:19) There has never been a shortage of idle busybodies with nothing better to do than meddle in the lives of others, leading others into their own errors. (2 Ths. 3:11) In the end of times, such people will *abound*. (Mt. 24:11, etc.)

Only the faithful, who have the name and Spirit of Christ and God prominently displayed in all of their life and who stand with the Lam of God on the true Mount Zion, the genuine ekklesia of Christ (see Heb. 12:22), who have endured and completed their time in the “wilderness” and produced fruit in keeping with repentance, righteousness and holiness will be those gathered up as “firstfruits” to God. (see Rev. 14:1, 4) All the rest of the idolatrous, lawless, unbelieving, dishonest, unholy, vile, apostate so-called “Christians” and “brothers” will simply be the great falling away from the faith that comes before the return of Christ Jesus. (2 Ths. 2:3) The former will be the genuine ekklesia, body and bride of Christ and the latter will be the abominable offspring of their mother Babylon. The former will be the genuine wheat, the sons of the kingdom who shine like the sun. (Mt. 13:38, 43) The latter will be the counterfeit tares or weeds, the sinful, lawless and wicked sons of the devil who are removed from Christ’s kingdom and cast into a fiery furnace where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Mt.

13:41-42) The time to take steps to be certain to which category one belongs is now. The day of judgment will prove to be too late to change one's eternal destiny as only those who have done the will of the Father will be permitted to remain. (Mt. 7:21) "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts." (Heb. 3:7-8) Instead, submit to the Father of our spirits and live (Heb. 12:9) – abundantly now and eternally hereafter. (Jn. 10:10, 3:16, etc.) The choice of being conformed to the cursed flesh of Adam or conformed to the resurrected and glorified Spirit of Christ is ours to make – God has never yet saved anyone who was not wanting to be saved from the darkness of evil and this world. Those who, in the name of Christ and God, perpetuate the evil and darkness of Satan and this world will be those for whom the severest of judgments are reserved. (2 Pet. 2:20, Jas. 3:1, etc.)

Let he who ears hear.

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