

What A.J. Tomlinson Found

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Which is the Church?

Nothing has done more to confuse and frustrate the plan of God in the world than denominationalism.

One can understand the frustration of a new convert to Christ when he begins to look for a church home. Each one either claims to be the true church or a denominate part of it, yet there are others who claim the same thing and neither will have anything whatsoever to do with the other-no fellowship, no unity, no brotherhood, no agreement, no love for one another.

Can denominationalism, then, be the Church? Absolutely not. There is no similarity to it and the scriptural image of the Church. *"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all"* (Ephesians 4:4-6).

Where, then, is the Church? Is it to be found in the world? Is it functioning now? These questions must be answered by the support of Scripture; otherwise we would remain as confused as when we started.

Briefly, we can use the same test to identify the Church, the Body of Christ, as was used to identify Jesus Christ as the Messiah. That test was that He fit and fulfilled the prophetic image of that One. There were, no doubt, many little boys the age of Jesus who had the same name as He. But there was only one who was the true Messiah. The same test may be applied to identify the Church.

When John the Baptist was in prison and had some misgivings and apprehensions about Jesus being the true Messiah, he sent some of his own disciples to Jesus to ask Him personally if He was the one or should they begin looking for another. How did Jesus answer their question? At first He told them nothing; He simply asked that they accompany Him. *"And in that same hour he cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind he gave sight. Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached. And blessed is he, whosoever shall not be offended in me"* (Luke 7:21-23). That was Jesus' answer as to whether He was truly the Messiah. He did what the Messiah was supposed to do. He fulfilled that place in prophecy.

The same test of identity must be applied to the true Church. The one which fulfills exactly the image projected in prophecy is the true Church. Now, the only problem is to find it.

Let us return to the prophets and trace the conception, development, and continuity of the Church right to this moment.

The Church's appearance on the earth was prophesied by the prophet Isaiah and others: Isaiah 2:2- *"And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house (the theocracy, the Church) shall be established in the top of the mountains [literally mountains], and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it."* Read also almost the same words by the prophet Micah (Micah 4:1, 2). Then the Psalmist David, filling the role of prophet wrote, *"There shall be an handful of corn in the earth upon the top of the mountains; the fruit thereof shall shake like Lebanon: and they of the city shall flourish like grass of the earth"* (Psalm 72:16). The initial phase of these three prophecies was fulfilled when Jesus took the twelve up into a mountain (Mt. Hattin, about A.D. 28) and established the Church: *"And he goeth up into a mountain, and calleth unto him whom he would: and they came unto him. And he ordained twelve, that they should be with him, and that he might send them forth to preach, and to have power to heal sicknesses, and to cast out devils"* (Mark 3:13-15). Thus, the Church was organized, the names of the twelve were listed, Judas was appointed treasurer (John 12:6; 13:9), and the twelve were ordained.

The newly established Church worked with Christ and grew in its early stages. There were problems and persecutions but it was learning at the feet of Jesus.

After the crucifixion, at which time the Church was scattered and many turned away, it again was given a new impetus at Pentecost when one hundred and twenty of the saints experienced the infilling of the Comforter, the Holy Ghost, whom Jesus had promised to send after His ascension (Acts 2).

This new power caused the Church to grow and consequently to incur the wrath and persecution of those Jews who disagreed with its doctrine and the acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah. The Church survived the persecution and began to grow in numbers and influence. External threats were no longer their greatest problem. There was trouble brewing from within. The apostle Paul described it in Acts 20:29-31: *"For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears."* Read also 2 Peter 2:1, 2 and the book of Jude. All these warn the internal problems which threaten the Church.

This threat was not unknown to prophecy however, because both Isaiah and Micah again were inspired to warn of the events to come.

"For the Lord hath called thee as a woman forsaken and grieved in spirit, and a wife of youth (the early Church), when thou wast refused, saith thy God. For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee. In a little wrath I hid my face from thee for a moment; but with everlasting kindness will I have mercy on thee, saith the Lord thy Redeemer. For this is as the waters of Noah unto me: for as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more go over the earth; so have I sworn that I would not be wroth with thee, nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart, and the hills be removed; but my kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of my peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee" (Isaiah 54:6-10).

On the same incident, Micah had this to say, *"Be in pain, and labour to bring forth, O daughter of Zion, like a woman in travail: for now shalt thou go forth out of the city, and thou shalt dwell in the field, and thou shalt go even to Babylon; there shalt thou be delivered; there the Lord shall redeem thee from the hand of thine enemies"* (Micah 4:10). (Although it is generally considered that the universal religious confusion constitutes the "Babylon" referred to in the Scriptures, there is a more specific application inferred here. In view of the fact that there is unlimited religious freedom in the United States of America, and as a result there are more than three thousand different religious organizations of all persuasions, both Christians and non-Christians this country above all other nations of the world is a seething bed of religious confusion. Within this context it seems plausible that it fits the description of the prophet Micah when he said of the Church *".. thou shalt go even to Babylon; there shalt thou be delivered . . ."* And since the Church arose this side of the Dark Ages in this land, the application seems to have some validity.)

These prophecies of the downfall of the early Church were officially fulfilled in A.D. 325 when the Church, weak in power and doctrine as a result of the evil leaders who had crept in, accepted an ecclesiastical, or council, form of government to replace theocracy at the Council of Nicaea. At that point it no longer existed as the Church, or the theocracy of God. This was the beginning of what is known in religious history as the Dark Age period.

In speaking of the eventual restoration of the Church, Isaiah gives a strong hint as to the geographical location of where it would be restored. *"For thy waste and thy desolate places, and the land of thy destruction, shall even now be too narrow by reason of the inhabitants, and they that swallowed thee up shall be far away"* (Isaiah 49:19).

Then God speaks to the Church through the prophet Isaiah to awake from her sleep and begin to shine: *"Arise, shine; for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee. For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth, and gross darkness the people: but the Lord shall*

arise upon thee, and his glory shall be seen upon thee. And the Gentiles shall come to thy light, and kings to the brightness of thy rising" (Isaiah 60:1-3).

After centuries of obscurity, glimmerings and rays of light began to appear, but the Church, theocracy, was still in the distance. God began to deal with devout men to take a stand on what they found to be true in the Word of God. Martin Luther discovered the doctrine of justification by faith, the regeneration of the new birth, which resulted in the formation of the Lutheran Church, but it stopped short of embracing all that God had provided in His word for the theocracy. John Wesley discovered the doctrine of personal sanctification and established the Methodist Church, but it, too, stopped short of embracing all that God had provided and required of the theocracy. Neither of the above officially recognized nor embraced the mighty outpouring of the Holy Ghost in the holiness and pentecostal movements which emerged during the latter part of the nineteenth and early part of the twentieth centuries.

But that was to be a part of doing all things and obeying "*All that the Lord hath spoken.*" The theocracy had not yet been restored. Even the holiness and pentecostal movements did not embrace New Testament government and discipline. All of this is a matter of religious history and may be substantiated by further research.

At the turn of the twentieth century there was a flurry of religious activity, but the prophecy of Isaiah and David was yet unfulfilled. Through Isaiah God was speaking to no one else but the Church when He said "*Arise and shine.*"

David was speaking in a dual prophetic role when he wrote Psalm 132:6. He was speaking of the immediate restoration of the Ark of the Covenant and prophetically of the arise of the Church, the theocracy, with the words, "*Lo. we heard of it at Ephratah: we found it in the fields of the Wood" (Psalm 132:6).*

The prophecy of David's was fulfilled on June 13, 1903, when A. J. Tomlinson met with a group of devout men and women who were seeking the true Church. They could not find it in the main line denominations. They were willing to make any sacrifice to find the Church which would obey God in everything.

After praying on the mountain near the cabin where the devout group had met, A. J. Tomlinson went down the mountain and joined the group in worship. Later he gave this testimony: "I came with the understanding that we were going to search the Bible to see if we could find the Church of God just like David said we would find it." And of the meeting after he came down from the mountain, he said, "I came back down the mountain and entered the meeting. Questions were asked; Bible answers were given. They said they took the whole Bible rightly divided as their only rule of faith and practice. I said, Well, if you take the whole Bible rightly divided, that

makes it the Church of God. Why do you want to call it the Holiness Church at Camp Creek? They agreed with me but couldn't answer my question. Then I said, You have agreed that this I have said (taking the whole Bible rightly divided) makes it the Church of God, and will you be willing to take it and keep it the Church of God? They said they were willing. I then asked if they were willing to take me in with the understanding that it is the Church of God-not going to be, but is the Church of God? They were willing. So I stood right there in front of the fireplace and Brother Spurling, who has gone to heaven, took the Bible and gave it to me. He handed it to me and said, Will you take this as the Word of God, believe it and practice it, obey its precepts and walk in the light as God is in the light? I thought deeply. I remembered what a time I had on the mountain. I meant business. God meant business. Right there I gave my hand to Brother Spurling. I took the obligation (covenant) with deep sincerity and extreme sacredness never to be forgotten." At that moment the Church, the theocracy, began to function again after the centuries of sleep. It arose and will shine brighter and brighter until the day when Christ raptures it away to be with Him forever!