



Plumb Service

2 Samuel 6:1-5, 12b-19; Ps 24; Amos 7:7-15; Mark 6:14-29

George Barna says “Many people name Jesus as their savior, but relatively few have lives that consistently demonstrate He is truly Lord of their hearts, minds, and souls.”¹ He goes on to say that if we would truly live in a way that makes Christ Lord, our witness would become a compelling reality. Whether or not his second conclusion is true is another matter. He assumes that if we would live the gospel as Christ Jesus that people would flock to the church. This is the message of so many who tell us that if we would simply do evangelism the right way, preach the true gospel, follow the right model of church, we will be successful and fill our buildings.

We would like to accept this version of reality. It just does not stack up to the words, life, and teaching of Jesus, Paul, Amos, Elijah, Peter, and John the Baptist. We want to hear that there is a simple process or strategy we might use to find success ready at our fingertips. It is the outlook we expect from our background in the industrial revolution. It is what we have learned to believe from our exposure to gardening, mechanics, and an Enlightenment perspective on our world. If we follow the right procedure, we can enjoy the results we desire.

Process, procedure, and following the established guidelines is the pattern set before us. So why does it only very rarely work? Why are churches all over the nation closing their doors much faster than churches are growing or being planted? Many have said that trying something over and over again the same way while expecting different results is a clear sign of insanity. Yet we so often continue to beat dead horses and expect that some day they will move, simply because we have faithfully followed the traditions handed to us. Or have we?

More likely, we follow only part of the process and tradition. More commonly, we isolate one or two points in the practice of being church, yet we neglect weightier issues. We also expect different results than those God has in mind. Our ideal is a thriving institution, a well-oiled financial system, a building bursting at the seams with people, activities, and programs. Jesus never indicated interest in buildings, programs, or financially secure institutions. So does God desire for the church?

David was a breath of fresh air. Saul had come along at a critical time in the history of Israel, when the people were yearning for a king. They were ready to build a secure institution for the nation in the name of *Yahweh*. It was not really about *Yahweh*, but they used *Yahweh*'s name to advance their own cause of building a secure state with visible leadership. They were ready for a greater degree of security and prominence among their neighbors. Saul was the one designated to stand head and shoulders above the rest and represent the people before their enemies. He was a symbol of confidence, prosperity, and God's blessing. Unfortunately, he was not much of a symbol of depending upon *Yahweh*.

Saul served *Yahweh* in name, but he soon thought too much of himself to fulfill the purpose of his calling. He thought too much of himself to wait upon the prophet of *Yahweh*. He thought too much of himself to worship *Yahweh* in honest service. By contrast, David enters the scene in today's passage in

¹ George Barna. *Grow Your Church from the Outside In*, Regal: Ventura, CA, 2002, p. 18.

humility, sacrifice, and dancing before God. Michal looks on with disdain. The narrator calls her the daughter of Saul, echoing that somehow her attitude and actions flow from her relationship to her father.

It was not sufficient for her to avoid participating in the worship of *Yahweh*. She also looked down on her husband's sincere devotion and humility in placing himself in an attitude of self-abasing worship. David parades and celebrates with dance and sacrifice before the Ark of the Covenant, yet not all are incited to turn their lives to *Yahweh* in sincerity. His own wife turns against him, even while he worships with sincerity. David performs the proper rites, yet all do not turn to *Yahweh* in faith.

John the Baptist was faithful. It cost him his head on a platter. Herod made pretense of serving *Yahweh*, but it was only a show. He liked to have John in to preach at him, but then would send him back to a cell. He wanted access to God, but he also wanted god on a leash. John had a following, but it was not sufficient to keep him alive in Herod's prison.

Amos suffered from the same issues. God's word to and through him was not what people wanted to hear. He was called to issue a challenge of a plumb line that measures the uprightness of a wall. His message would show the reality of Israel's state before *Yahweh*. It was not a popular word of comfort. It was not the message to find its way to a best-seller list. He was told by those in power to change his tune. There were threats. From shepherd in Israel, *Yahweh* took him as a spokesman. It was not a question of his choosing. It was not a question of attempting to become popular. It was simply a response of faithful submission and service.

David understood that serving God in faithfulness is not synonymous with contests for popularity. He understood that being faithful could lead to threats on his life, abuse, suffering, and death. He knew that others often did not look kindly upon another's submission to the will of *Yahweh*. He was politically astute enough to understand all that. He had experience as the brunt of Saul's displeasure. He also saw life from a perspective that gave balance to forces arrayed against him.

He was not so concerned with the masses of Israel following his lead. He focused rather on following God's lead. If and when the people came along behind him that would be well and good. Regardless, he was called to faithfulness and humble service to *Yahweh*. Serving *Yahweh* had been the issue on facing Goliath of Gath. It had been the issue in leading his men against the Philistines. It had been the issue on fleeing Saul and refusing to kill Saul as the anointed King of Israel, though Saul sought to end David's own life time and again. His concern was to present a faithful response to the call of God on his life. His aim was to live a life in plumb faithful service to *Yahweh*, God of Israel.

Barna is right on one level. A life of dedication and sincere devotion captures our imagination and attention. On the other hand, it is not the kind of life we choose to live for ourselves. We are much more interested in seeking after other interests, entertainment, wealth, security, and leisure. If we live in committed faithfulness to Christ, it will not guarantee that crowds will flock through the doors of our sanctuary. That is not a realistic expectation. It misses the point of faithfulness to God.

We are not called to live the gospel in plumb faithfulness in order to grow a stable, secure, and thriving institution. We are called to faithful service because that is the measure of true faith. It is the responsibility of those called by the name of Christ Jesus. If we should refuse the call to dance according to the music set before us, it is our lives that are out of plumb, not the ones at whom we would jeer.

—*Christopher B. Harbin*