

A Culture of Invitation

by Tyrone Daniel

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God is readying us for something He is going to sovereignly do. But He's going to do it with people who are obsessed with Jesus. With people who know (and are convinced about) who He is and who understand something of His heart.

There's a harvest time for the church in Johannesburg. I'm talking souls. It's a season where we're going to see people of all backgrounds getting saved. We're not to lose sight of this and make our work about other stuff. Instead, I believe we need to throw our nets out again because it's harvest time.

It's amazing how Jesus says to Peter in Luke 5 to throw out his nets after Peter had been fishing all night. Jesus was a carpenter while Peter was a fisherman. Peter knew how to fish but this carpenter tells him to throw out his nets again! Now I'm not being irreverent, but that must have irked Peter. He might have thought to himself, "I'm the fisherman and I know this business." But instead, he says, "Because you say so Lord, I'll do it." And he catches so many fish he needs help to bring them in!

The Lord is speaking to us and we need to respond with, "Yes, Lord, because you say so." Not because anyone else is saying it but because Jesus is saying it.

I'm stirred by what it is God is wanting to do in this season. We must thank God for what He has done and never cease to do that. But God has also put us together for incredible things. You [Gauteng churches] are living in a spacious place. There are challenges, no doubt. Some of you pastors are facing some real challenges and some of you who are part of a local church are struggling. In tough times it's easy to focus on yourself. We all have needs. And when you hear a message of other people's needs you often think, 'Well what about me?' But that seems to be the problem - what *about* me? I believe that there is a stirring in the heart of the Father that as we take care of what He has called us to, He will take care of us.

Isaiah 6: 1 – 8

6 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord, high and exalted, seated on a throne; and the train of his robe filled the temple. 2 Above him were seraphim, each with six wings: with two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they were flying. 3 And they were calling to one another:

'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Almighty;
the whole earth is full of his glory.'

4 At the sound of their voices the doorposts and thresholds shook and the temple was filled with smoke.

5 'Woe to me!' I cried. 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty.'

6 Then one of the seraphim flew to me with a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with tongs from the altar. 7 With it he touched my mouth and said, 'See, this has touched your

lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.’

8 Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?’

And I said, ‘Here am I. Send me!’

I love this picture. We can see God's heart here. God didn't send someone before they received a revelation of who God is. They had to see God before they could respond and really have the impact that God desired.

What's going to motivate us for this next season to win people to Jesus and get out there and gather the harvest is if we look up and are obsessed with Jesus. I wonder what you and I see when we worship Jesus. Because what you're seeing, in a sense, will determine everything else happening through you and have a huge impact on this city. We are filled with people who've bought into something and a dream but have lost out because it's not a dream, it's a nightmare, if it doesn't include our King.

One of my favourite texts is Hebrews 1:3 which says, “After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven.” That's what I see when I worship Jesus – an exalted King. He's not walking here on earth alone. I don't see a good man with white hair and well kept hair, with a white robe that's never creased. (It would seem that Israel's dirt never stuck to his robe, the way we present this picture of Jesus!) That's not the Jesus of the Bible. And it's certainly not where He is today. He is seated at the highest place and at the right hand of the Majesty of heaven.

We've got to live and understand that He has provided purification for our sins. He doesn't need to provide this purification again – it's already been done! He has already sat down! This means that who He says He is has been confirmed. That confirmation gives us the courage to tell people that Jesus is really who He says He is.

Now, if He is who He says He is, then we are who we say we are, and we can live in what He says we can live in.

There's a lot of people today claiming to be certain things but there's no back up to their claims. But when Jesus sat down it confirmed that He is who He says He is. He didn't sit down because He's lazy. No, you sit down when you've done your job. Jesus' work is complete. We need to know this as we conquer our cities again. He completed the work, it doesn't need to be done again. It's finished. It's complete and successful and God's very happy with what's been done. So it's good enough.

But are we living like it's finished?

Recently I met a pastor who spoke and acted like he was on parole with Jesus. Like so many believers today – and many times in my life – He doesn't understand that we've been fully pardoned. Parole means you're on a 'good behaviour bond' but if you mess up you're going straight back to prison. But if I pay one thing to my salvation it means I haven't been pardoned! I've earned it! And there's no penance either with God.

I know we know this and we say this but too many of us aren't living it. Jesus' work is complete. Jesus sits while Satan roams. Jesus is comfortable while the enemy is doing his utmost to mess it up. Jesus has been successful in what He's done. It's complete.

This verse in Hebrews also shows that He is now crowned the King of Kings. That's what I see when I worship. I don't worship a King who just walked here, I worship a King who is in heaven now, crowned with glory and splendour. I love how we sing about the Lamb that was slain and without that we'd be in trouble. But when He comes back He's not coming back as the Lamb but rather as the triumphant, conquering King who's done it and sat down and conquered the enemy.

Now If you don't see that it's very hard to see who you are. As we see in Isaiah 6: "I looked up and I saw this King in His glory." What do you see when you look up? Are you even looking up?

Secondly, in this Isaiah scripture, we see that after Isaiah saw the King he saw himself. And that's brilliant for evangelism - to see who you are. Isaiah prophesied "woe to you" for five chapters but then after he sees Jesus he says, "Woe to me." He saw that he was as unclean as everyone else. And that He needs God to make him clean – which happens when the angel touches his lips and pronounces him as clean. God changes our hearts when we see God. And when the church is changed by what it sees, we're going to reach far more people. Because we'll know who God is, who we are, who they are, and that everyone can taste the joy and freedom of this finished redemption we've been given. *People aren't looking for a good church, they're looking for Jesus. Jesus is still the longing of this city.*

Then we see in Isaiah 6 that the Lord asks who will go. It's not that you necessarily have to leave and go to another region. I'm saying that in this region, God is asking, "Who will go?"

The heart of the Father is still to see people come and be reconciled back to him. I understand there are signs and wonders and we're looking for more of that and I want to preach on that. But those signs and wonders are not the focus. They serve the harvest, the harvest doesn't serve those things. The greatest miracle on the planet is salvation. When someone gets saved it's forever. Don't run after all this stuff but forget the important thing - the heart of the Father. All this was given to see people saved. Jesus said you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes. What for? To be witnesses. (Acts 1:8.)

We want to point people to Jesus - we want to see them healed and delivered, yes, but we want to see them saved, primarily! Because that's what's on the heart of the Father. Jesus is coming soon.

What matters in eternity?

Recently I was challenged by a friend who said, "You preachers are always on the next thing. But you guys need to think about what happens on the other side of eternity. When you're there facing what you're facing, those are the things you should be highlighting this side of eternity."

It was sobering for me. Half of the things we arm-wrestle about over here will be irrelevant on the other side of eternity. Half the truth we preach in our churches will be irrelevant that side of eternity. But a focus on Jesus will never be irrelevant. And how many people are in heaven because we focused on Jesus and shared with them what we know today – that will never be irrelevant.

Coming and going

Jesus built his ministry on two key words: "come" and "go". He says come and follow me and I will make you into fishers of men. Now go. Even for us in our every day life, we need to come to him every day and then go from him to tell others about what we have.

Our churches are about coming and going. We must do both. If we're only coming or only ever going things are off balance. I understand there's a going and getting on the streets, but I also want

to say we've neglected the "coming" at times. If you're a church leader, your people need to be guaranteed that when they come to your church they will meet Jesus, and if they bring people to your church those people will meet Jesus. We've got to develop something of a bringing culture.

One of the things I'm learning as a church planter is you don't inherit a culture when you plant, you've got to develop one, and you have to be intentional about it because if you don't a culture will develop on its own. When we first planted we saw people getting saved every week without fail. It was wonderful and exciting. But statistics say that within two years of most church plants the church stops seeing people saved. Why? Because we get too busy with the people we've been given and we forget about why we're here.

Denominations that have been going for thirty years are starting to say that they need to plant churches again to see people saved, because the only time people got saved was in the first two years of churches being planted. But rather than planting churches, let's fix the thirty year problem. Church planting isn't the only solution – the real solution is we must get our eyes back on Jesus and understand we're there to serve the harvest.

I was challenged by this and the Lord said to me that we should develop a culture of bringing and not just going. Teach your people to bring people. But I asked, "Lord aren't we all about the apostolic?" But part of our going and sending is bringing people in. You've got to develop a bringing culture - not to fill your building but to have people find Jesus Christ.

Luke 14

12 Then Jesus said to his host, 'When you give a luncheon or dinner, *do not invite your friends*, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbours; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. 13 But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, 14 and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.'

The parable of the great banquet

15 When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, 'Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.'

16 Jesus replied: 'A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. 17 At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, "Come, for everything is now ready."

18 'But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, "I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me."

19 'Another said, "I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me."

20 'Still another said, "I have just got married, so I can't come."

21 'The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, "Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame."

22 "'Sir," the servant said, "what you ordered has been done, but there is still room."

Is there still room in your heart?

23 'Then the master told his servant, "Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. 24 I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet."

We can see here that those on the guest list must have had some kind of relationship with the host – but nevertheless, they were the ones who had excuses. I think for too long we've preached one side of evangelism, saying we must befriend the city before reaching it. That's Biblically not true. If you are only befriend people, how many are getting saved? Let's be honest – very few. Most people I know who I've befriended are full of excuses. They've got their business to worry about, their career, their family, their possessions and so on. Now I'm not saying don't befriend people, but I'm saying it's a lame excuse to say we're befriend the city before we reach it. I don't think we've got time to befriend the city before Jesus comes back.

When we planted I moved to a city where I didn't know one person. I got into the banks and shops, I built relationships. But I realised that when I began to ask them they didn't come. But when I asked people I didn't know, they came.

This city is full of people you may never get to befriend but they're ready to come and eat at this banquet. I'm daring you in this season to throw your net out and catch people you don't know. Honestly, we wouldn't connect with most of these people mentioned – the blind, the crippled, the poor – that's why they're not on the guest list. But don't invite your mates, because you'll get rewarded by them. Bring people you don't know.

I'm not saying you should drop your relationships but I am saying that we should stop wasting our time on building relationships *alone* and invite the one you're going to see tonight at the restaurant - you don't even need to give them a good tip - to a place where they can find Jesus. Bring people you don't know to a place where they can come and find Jesus. It's one thing to say, "God, give us a harvest" but another to say, "God, I'm the one to throw out the nets."

Pastors you've got to get your focus back on Jesus and seeing people come to Jesus and not keeping your churches happy. Keep the master happy. Go and bring the poor, crippled, blind and lame. People may be physically crippled and lame, but this is also referring to the spiritually blind and poor.

Let's compel them in. I don't think the church compels people in today because we don't realise what we've got at the banquet. If you knew there was a feast set for all people out there, wouldn't you bring them in? There's free food! Sometimes we become so complacent but we need to realise what we have at this table. We'd go pick people up and bring them to the table where they can eat if we just realised what we have.

I know this isn't America but here's an interesting statistic. The Institute for U.S. Church Growth asked 10,000 people from many different Christian walks one question: "Why did you come to this church?" Here were the answers:

- 2% said "We had a special need"
- 3% said "we walked in"
- 6% said "we just liked the pastor"
- 1% were visiting the area
- 1% liked the Sunday school. Only one percent! Yet I've heard so much about having a good children's programme.

- 3% liked the programmes
- 5% said "other"
- 79% said "someone invited me."

It's not because a "friend invited me" but "someone" invited me. This is not about filling a building but God wants a developing culture where we invite people of all kinds. Don't just bring friends and family. Out there are people who are crying out for God for you and I to just go up to them and invite them.

Why else do we need to invite people?

(1) Because of their future

Everyone will spend eternity somewhere and I think we forget that. Hebrews 9:27 says that it's been appointed that all will die once and afterwards face judgement. Everyone on this earth will spend eternity in one of two places – heaven or hell. If we've invited them to eat of that banquet we can change their destiny forever.

(2) Because we're followers

It's impossible to be connected to Christ and not care about those people He cares about. I meet many people who claim to know Christ but there's a difference when we know and follow Him. Jesus loves them, therefore we'll love them.

We're losing an inheritance because we're busy with all this other stuff the church is busy with. If I'm connected to Jesus then I have His heart, so I care about those he cares about. Jesus came to seek and save the lost (Luke 19:10).

(3) Found people find people

As people who are found, our automatic response is to go find people.

(4) A forgiving heart

We've got to have a forgiving heart. God is patient so we better be patient. God allowed me for many years to walk away from Him and He never gave up on me. I did, others did. Most sinners don't know they're sinning, but I knew what I was doing. The moment I turned to God He was there and look what I'm involved in today. Do I deserve this? No. He was patient with me and if He is patient with them so should we be.

Keep inviting them because one day they will respond.

(5) No other name

This is a foundational fact. There's no other name by which man can be saved except the name of Jesus. I need to invite people because they cannot get saved any other way.

(6) Because of our faith

Jesus will honour our faith when we do whatever it takes to get people to a place where they can meet Him. In Mark 2:5 we see Jesus respond to the faith of a man's friends – he pronounces the man's sins as forgiven and heals him. I don't understand it, but I've often seen it. Jesus responds to

our faith for others. So let's bring them!

(7) To enjoy rewards

What will matter on the other side of eternity? Those we introduced to Jesus. In heaven, what if we are to meet every person who we've played a role in for their salvation? I don't want to just be in heaven and watch others welcome people in because they played a role in their salvation. I want to be the one welcoming them in! I throw the net out just about everywhere now, even in our prayer meetings. Because I want to be in the welcoming committee in heaven all the time.

(8) We follow His commands

Scripture doesn't give us suggestions but commands. The Gospel is powerful but it has limitations in its reach. It has to be shared by us. It cannot be believed in if it hasn't been heard. And how will they hear? We need to tell them!

(9) The world is separated from God (Romans 3:23)

The scriptures say that every single one of us are agents of reconciliation (2 Corinthians 5:14). This is a primary calling for us all. And if this is our call, surely this is what we should give our attention to.

(10) We can't tell people to 'clean up their act'

I'm sure you must be frustrated with what you see out there. I hear many guys say, "If they just cleaned up their act..." Let me tell you, they can't. Imagine God said that to you? I tried to clean up my act. My act was pretty bad. But God had to clean it. We can't say this any longer. God wants to clean up their act. It's futile thinking to tell the world to clean up its act.

Let's not be afraid

God is more powerful than any argument of any kind. You might not have all the words for the atheists and the like, but God is more powerful and smarter than any argument. The one who can debate you and "prove" that God is not real - well, God wants to save that person. He wants them to meet Jesus.

I feel that many are almost wanting to abandon the evangelism thing but God is saying we must not. Some of us love our people and our church but God also wants us to be a people who reach out.

The veil is torn forever

Remember that God tore the veil between mankind and Himself when Jesus died (Matthew 27:51). It was torn from top to bottom, not from the bottom to the top (which would represent man's feeble religious attempt to have a relationship with God.) God tore the veil and destroyed it and it's never to be sewn up again. It seems that as the church becomes performance orientated and religious we sew up the very thing Jesus crushed. Let's not do that.

Address the religious centres of the day. Unfortunately, that's very much the church. I suggest we find out what the reasons for that ripping of the veil were and we'll find people will run to this Jesus we serve. We are justified and sanctified and adopted. They can be too. Let this be the season of salvation for our city.

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