

WHAT WAS FROM THE BEGINNING

— *Translated*

God's truth never changes! Man may fail to be a testimony that agrees with his calling, but the truth remains unchangeable. During the most difficult times, faith can always rest on what was from the beginning. What we need is a single eye that is occupied with the glory of God and an undivided heart filled with the desire to maintain the rights of Christ. We need a firm tie with the Word of God and a complete dependence upon the Holy Spirit. May Christ and His glory be the main object of our affections and the sole purpose of our lives!

Men speak about different "churches." The Word of God speaks of only *one* Church, *one* Assembly. In human "churches" there are many members without life; in the true Church of Christ, "which is His body," there are only believers, each of which possesses divine life and is united with Christ, the glorified Head in heaven.

The Church's birthday was Pentecost. Although the saints of the Old Testament were born again, yet they were not connected with the glorified Christ, Who is at the right hand of God. He, the Man from heaven, is the Head of the Assembly, which is His body here upon earth, "the fullness of Him, Who fills all in all" (Ephesians 1:19-23). All true believers combined form the Church, but not so the professors who do not truly belong to Christ.

Although many true believers are now separated from each other and scattered among the various religious systems set up by men, yet in the eyes of God they are one in Christ. Soon they will be revealed in glory in this perfect oneness which is the fruit of Christ's work upon the cross (John 17:22).

However, God would have this unity of the saints practically revealed here below, in connection with His testimony to the world. This practical expression of the Church on earth is in complete ruin and God never restores what man has spoiled. Yet there is a path indicated in the Word of God for the faith of the faithful, even in these present difficult and perilous times. Christ has promised His presence where two or three are gathered in His name (Mt. 18:20). The faithful will always have the privilege to announce His death in the breaking of bread "until He comes" (1 Corinthians 11:26).

It is the duty of those who gather on this principle to accept all who are sound in the faith and holy in their walk, and separated from every connection with evil. Such don't require human authority nor an officially appointed person exercising oversight, because *Christ* is in their midst. In the measure in which the Spirit of God is free to work in their midst without being grieved by individual believers, nor quenched during their coming together to the name of the Lord, the saints will be able to worship and pray together and will be built up and comforted. Scripture does not know of any other association of believers than the one made by God's uniting the members of the body of Christ with their Head by the one Spirit. Not to admit those who are known as Christians and who are separated from things that dishonour Christ and from things that are contrary to His Word, to the breaking of bread betrays a sectarian position.

It would be useless to try to bring the Church back to her condition as it was at the day of Pentecost. Such efforts would show that there was no recognition of outward, practical ruin. Nevertheless it will always remain the privilege of faith, even unto the coming of the Lord, to keep His Word and not to deny His name in spite of the weakness of the saints (Revelation 3:8).

No matter how great the outward ruin of the Church, we have the privilege to announce the death of the Lord, until He come, at His table and we are always responsible to think of Him and to obey His Word.

QUESTIONS

- a. Who are the 144,000 in Revelation 14:1-5?
- b. Are they the only ones to inherit the Kingdom of God?

ANSWERS

To answer these questions let us first of all read the mentioned verses, so that we know what God says about them. We note the following:

- They are seen at the time of the Lord's return, standing on Mount Zion (v. 1).
- They have been bought from the earth (v. 3).

Before all else, it is helpful to be reminded of the basic fact that in Revelation the Church is found on earth up to the end of the third chapter. In verse 1 of chapter 4 we read: "Come up here," and from then on there is no mention of the *Church on earth* until chapter 19:14. From chapter 4 onward the Church (together with the Old Testament saints) is seen in heaven in the 24 elders. In chapter 19:7 we see the marriage of the Lamb, which takes place *in heaven* (so the entire Church must be there). This will serve as background information.

In Revelation 7 we see the 144,000 for the first time. There they are sealed before the seventh seal is opened and the seven trumpets are blown. We also note that they are specifically referred to as those sealed *out of the twelve tribes of Israel*. One more point to note in this chapter is that there is *a great crowd which no one could number* besides them (v. 9).

With the help of these verses we can now answer part a.:

— The 144,000 do not belong to the Church but to Israel. The fact that they are referred to as bought from *the earth* signifies once more that they are Israelites. The other nations are referred to as the sea (cf. ch. 13:1, the head of the restored Roman Empire; ch. 13:11, the head of the nation Israel). In chapter 7 we see them before the Great Tribulation, and in chapter 14 immediately thereafter.

Regarding part b. of our question we may observe that:

— They are not the only ones to inherit the Kingdom of God. Besides them there are the old-testament saints, the Church and the crowd which no one can number. Although they are the only ones referred to in chapter 14, there are others who accompany the Lord at His return from heaven; these we see in chapter 19:14. From their clothing we may observe that these latter ones are the wife of the Lamb (19:7,8), and therefore the Church.

May the Lord give you understanding.

—John van Dijk