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# Churches of Christ Salute You with a Herald of Truth

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The Churches of Christ

Salute You

with a

Herald of Truth

A DIVIDED HOUSE

September 21, 1952

by James D. Willeford

Sermon No. 33

Station WCAE

3:00 P.M.



## A DIVIDED HOUSE

1 In Matt. 12:25 Christ said, "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand." In this passage the Lord makes a statement we all know to be true. An earthly kingdom that is divided cannot stand long, for when it divides it soon crumbles. Abraham Lincoln knew this well and in his race for the Presidency he used Matthew 12:25 as his text. He preached that a nation cannot remain half slave and half free. He was right!

2 When Christ said "Every kingdom divided shall come to desolation" He applied it to the spiritual Kingdom. At that time He was casting out evil spirits and His enemies said He was doing so by the power of Satan. But Christ said if that were so then Satan was working against himself, and if he did this his kingdom would soon fall. Then the Lord concluded, "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation." This statement is true of the Lord's Kingdom or of earthly kingdoms. Let us recognize this truth and try to do something about it.

3 We can demonstrate from human history the truth that a kingdom cannot long endure if it is divided. The kingdom of Israel of the Old Testament is an example. During the early days of Israel as a kingdom she accomplished great things. Her borders were extended from the Mediterranean Sea on the West to the Arabian Desert on the East, and from Syria in the North to Egypt in the South. Her judges and kings were looked upon by the other nations as honorable men, and she was noted for righteousness. Israel was one nation of twelve tribes with one law, one priesthood, one tabernacle, one place of worship and one king. During this time David exclaimed, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" Psa. 133:1. While Israel was united God smiled upon her and blessed her beyond measure.

4 But the downfall of Israel as a kingdom began when she divided in B.C. 975. The first division was political and it was followed by religious division. When Solomon died the ten tribes of Israel in the northern part of Palestine refused to have Rehoboam, Solomon's son as their king. They selected Jeroboam to be their king and formed the Northern Kingdom with their capital in Samaria. This division was tragic enough, but a greater tragedy followed. Jeroboam was

, afraid for the people to go three times each year to Jerusalem to worship as God had commanded lest they see Rehoboam the King of Judah and be tempted to return to him. Jeroboam knew God had commanded that all men go to Jerusalem three times each year with certain offerings, but he ignored the command. He erected two altars in northern Palestine, one at Bethel and the other at Dan, and then persuaded the Israelites to make their offerings in the land. Jeroboam said, "It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem; worship here in the land." By this scheme the king divided Israel religiously, and God sent a young prophet from Judah to speak against this sin of division. Ever after this when a king of Israel was sinful God would say, "He walked in the way of Jeroboam who made Israel to sin." If God spoke so harshly of a man who brought division to Israel in that distant age, what do you think He will say of people who bring religious division in our Day? In the Bible the Lord commands unity but condemns division. In our day some speak of division as though it were a blessing to the world. But it is a tragedy today just as it was with fleshly Israel.

5 In observing the fruits of division in Israel we come to the days of Christ. When the Lord came He found the Israelites divided into four parties. About two hundred years before Christ these groups came into existence. Nowhere in the Old Testament did God suggest that such a division was right or that He would approve of it, but in spite of what God said these sects were born. Christ condemned these divisions in Matt. 15. In verse nine He said of the Pharisees, "In vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." This offended the Pharisees, but Christ went a step further in condemning divisions and said, "Every plant which my heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up." After hearing this statement of our Lord we should make every effort to be united.

6 From this brief review of Israel we see a concrete example of the truth Christ expressed in Matt. 12:25 where He said, "Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation, and every city or house divided shall not stand." While the kingdom of Israel was united it had a glorious history, but when the kingdom divided it began to decay, and finally it came to desolation. With the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. the Israelite nation as a kingdom was blotted out of existence. What an appalling picture, but how true to the eternal principle that division brings destruction.



7 In this respect there is a close analogy between the kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Christ. The kingdom of Christ was first united; then division came and today the church fails to cover the earth because of the divided state.

8 There is no question about the unity that characterized the kingdom of Christ when it was first established. In Acts 4:32 Luke said, "The multitude of them that believed were of one heart and one soul." This was true because the early Christians "walked by the same rule; they minded the same thing," Phil. 3:16. They remembered the prayer of Christ in John 17 in which He prayed that all believers in Him would be one even as He and the Father were one. They obeyed the inspired command given in Ephesians 4 when Paul enjoined upon them the duty to "Give diligence to keep the unity of the Spirit." In the New Testament the Holy Spirit gives a platform of unity with seven planks in it. He says there is one God, one Lord, one Spirit, one Hope, one Faith, one baptism and one body. And the Lord says this chain of unity is to be kept unbroken. The early Christians kept the unity of the Spirit because they looked to Christ only as the head of the Church, and to His word as the sole authority in religious matters.

9 During the early years of Christianity when the kingdom of Christ was united it accomplished much. Within thirty to forty years after it came into existence it preached the gospel to the known world, Col. 1:24. Within three hundred years it overcame Greek philosophy, Roman might and the power of kings. Like a mighty flood it swept over the land. And this was true because it was a united force that could not be stopped by the enemies of the cross.

10 But this perfect unity in the early church did not continue always, and in I Cor. 1 we see the first step toward division. In the Corinthian church were people who had been baptized by such men as Paul, Cephas and Apollos, who were outstanding public proclaimers of the gospel. The members who had been baptized by these great men probably wanted to honor them, so they began to add their names to that of Christ. Some said we are of Paul or we are Paulite Christians because Paul baptized us. When Paul learned of what they were doing he wrote a letter in which he rebuked them severely. He asked, "Is Christ divided?" In asking this question he implied that if Christ were divided His followers might be, but that if

Christ were not divided His followers could not be. Paul also asked, "Were you baptized in my name?" The question implies that if they had been they might wear his name, but that if they were not baptized in his name they had no right to wear it. And of course no one was permitted to be baptized in the name of any man for all were commanded by the Lord to be baptized in the name of Christ, Acts 2:38.

11 Paul said to the Christians at Corinth that "when you wear the names of men you are contentious, divided, carnal, and you are walking as men." In this rebuke the apostle forever condemned division in religion, and that condemnation still stands. If the early Christians were not permitted to take even the first step toward religious division, let us not think for a moment that we have any such right today.

12 As the years went by and Christians became more worldly, division blossomed into a full flower. At the present there are 256 denominations in the United States alone! We should all put forth a mighty effort to correct this situation. Christ did not justify division when He prayed "that they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me," John 17:21. Paul did not condone division when he said, "I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgement," I Cor. 1:10.

13 The prayer of Christ was answered in the first century when Christians were of one heart and one soul. And His prayer can be answered today! If we will take the New Testament as our sole guide in religious matters, and be governed by what it plainly teaches, we can be united. Let us wear Christ's name only, teach His plan of salvation, worship as He directs and live in harmony with His will, and we can be one. We have the basis for unity in the New Testament. Our task is to be honest in saying, "Not my will but thine be done."

14 Christ said a kingdom divided shall come to desolation. The kingdom of Israel divided and came to desolation. What will happen to the kingdom of Christ? A comparable calamity will befall it if those who profess Christianity remain divided and fail to do some-



0- thing to correct the deplorable condition. The Church has already been hindered to an immeasurable extent by religious division. The feeble efforts men make in the many denominations may be compared to a man trying to hang a picture. A short man wishing to drive a nail on which to hang a picture, stood on a chair, but still was not tall enough. His wife got a box which fitted on the chair a bit unevenly. Balancing himself on this, he gave the nail a few uncertain taps. His wife asked, "Why don't you strike a brave blow and settle it?" He replied, "How can a man strike a brave blow when standing on such a wobbly foundation?" Brave blows for Christianity cannot be made when we are violating the teaching of Christ by being divided.

15 Let us never forget the warning of Christ that a kingdom divided cannot stand. Let us strive earnestly to answer Christ's prayer for unity, and let us keep the unity of the Spirit. We cannot believe in one God, one Lord, one Spirit, one hope, one faith, one body and one baptism, and be divided. But if we teach more than one God, or one faith, or one body, we cannot be united.

16 One day several years ago a little girl wandered away from home in North Dakota. A search was started. Parties went in every direction, but late in the afternoon the child had not been found. Great fear filled the hearts of the people for it was a cold winter day. Finally, one man suggested that the hundreds of people present clasp hands and start walking until every square yard of the countryside was covered. This plan was followed and just before dark the body of the little child was found. She had not been dead long. When the word was given to her mother, the sorrowful woman cried, "Oh why didn't you join hands sooner?" Friends, there will be multiplied thousands at the judgement who will ask the followers of Christ, "Why didn't you join hands?"

17 Will you clasp hands with simple New Testament Christians who are striving to bring unity to a divided world? In helping to bring unity to a strife-torn world you will be helping to answer the prayer of Christ that all believers may be one. It is possible to have unity, for our Lord prayed for it, and the apostles plead for it. Will you help to make it a reality?

18 Many times you have sung, "What A Friend We Have in Jesus." Have you ever asked how you can become His friend? Jesus said,

"Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you," John 15:14. You wish to be His friend. Why not do what He commands?

Paul became Christ's friend when he gave up the errors of Phariseism to obey the Lord. He denied himself and followed Christ. His faith in Jesus led him to repent and be baptized that his sins could be washed away. Christ had commanded that these steps be taken and Paul gladly took them to be a friend of Jesus. He continued to be Christ's friend, and at the end of life he said, "I have fought a good fight, I have kept the faith, henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing."

You can become Christ's friend by following in the steps of Paul, for he followed Christ all the way. Will you?

SOUL, A SAVIOR THOU ART NEEDING.

Soul, a Savior thou art needing!  
Soul, a Savior waits for thee!  
Hear His words of tender pleading,  
Hear His gracious "Come to Me."

He has died for thy transgression,  
If thou wilt, thou canst be free;  
Soul, He waits for thy confession,  
"Savior, I will go to Thee."

Do not linger till the morrow,  
Let thy loving answer be,  
"Savior, in my joy or sorrow,  
I will ever go to Thee."

Chorus:  
He is calling, softly calling,  
On thine ear ... His voice is falling;  
He is calling, softly calling,  
"Come to Me... and be at rest."



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