**Priestly Vision – Learning principles from the church at Antioch**

I believe the church in Antioch is a blueprint for the types of churches and ministries that the Lord Jesus is raising up across the Earth in this hour. The Lord is doing so for the purpose of finishing the task of the Great Commission, stewarding a global outpouring and preparing the planet for his return.

Acts 13:2-3 says, “Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a lifelong friend of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. 2 While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, “Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.” 3 Then after fasting and praying they laid their hands on them and sent them off.

According to this passage, the church at Antioch were

1. Worshipping
2. Praying
3. Fasting
4. Hearing
5. Sending

Results – Power encounter in Salamis – he and Proconsul believed (Acts 13:12), Antioch of Pisidia, entire city gathers to hear the word of the Lord (Acts 13:44), Many Gentiles believed and the word of Lord spread throughout the whole region (Acts 13:48-49), Persecution, and the Disciples filled with Joy.

Here are 10 basic characteristics or principles from the church at Antioch that I think can help shape and foster a fresh vision of what I believe is on his heart in these days.

1. It was an expression of a spiritual family living a ‘Priestly Rhythm’ of life together. In a New Testament context, it was the Tabernacle of David in the form of what Jesus and the apostles called the church.
2. The church in Antioch was started by men and women who demonstrated a pioneering faith and had simple bold obedience to Jesus’s commands.
3. The church in Antioch experienced an outpouring of the spirit that carried an Isaiah 61 anointing to proclaim the gospel with power to all people’s and Nations to heal the sick and to cast out demons
4. The church in Antioch was the first place where Jews and Gentiles were together in the same spiritual family - a new race and a new family called Christians – Antioch was a place for relational and racial reconciliation as a multi-ethnic multi-cultural family
5. The church in Antioch became a greenhouse to restore and repair broken leaders and wounded laborers - this church was committed to building people - they were committed to fathering not just a movement but fathering a family
6. The church in Antioch had a culture of compassionate generosity and it became the resource Hub of the New Testament and a pipeline for those in need
7. The church in Antioch raised up a new kind of prophetic movement - it’s the first place someone was identified after the Ascension as a prophet – prophets and teachers were gathering together in this worship -based prayer meeting – and they heard the Holy Spirit speak directly to them to set apart Paul and Barnabas.
8. The church in Antioch was the first place where fasting was mentioned - the church built corporate fasting into its Rhythm Life of worship and prayer.
9. The church in Antioch was built around team leaders – it was planted by teams led by teams and sent out teams for the sake of Jesus’ worth and the Great Commission
10. The church at Antioch became the sending Center in Asia - as the apostolic Hub of the New Testament it was a revolving door of many coming and going on God breathed Christ exalting spirit let assignments.

Summary - Presence centered families that are first ministering to the Lord and becoming greenhouses for nurturing and sending laborers to the neighborhoods and nations of the earth – 24/7 worship-based prayer, training and sending.

Acts 13 :1-2 gives us a peek into the priestly rhythm of life in the church in Antioch. It was a leadership team and spiritual family that were presence centered. In other words, their time, energy, programs and resources revolved around the presence of God. They’re spiritual family kept the person of Jesus and the presence of God at the center of everything they did.

The New American Standard Bible says ‘while they were ministering to the Lord.’ The word **while** implies an ongoing reality – this prayer meeting recorded here in Acts 13 was not a special time of prayer called by the leaders, it was not a prayer meeting for the needs of the church it was not a strategy meeting with a little prayer sprinkled in – they were continually ministering first to the Lord.

The word here for worship is different than the usual word for worship. This word means a rhythm of ministry that belonged to the priesthood. It is used only two times in the New Testament, both here Acts 13 and in Hebrews 10:11,“‘every priest stands daily ministering…” referring to the Rhythm of Life of the priesthood.

In the Septuagint which was the Greek translation of the Old Testament used by the apostles this word worship was used 100s of times. It was the word used every time to describe the Rhythm of Life of a Priestly family in the Old Testament and specifically was the description of the activity within the Tabernacle of David. As you know David brought the ark of the covenant back to Jerusalem – pitched a tent around it and surrounded it with an order of worship and intercession that went night and day - 288 full-time singers, 4000 musicians, and 4000 gatekeepers. He appointed 24 families, led by 24 elders who were singers and musicians that ministered before the ark 24hrs a day 365 days a year. David was building on earth as the Lord had instructed him based on the pattern of worship and prayer in heaven!

1 Chronicles 16:4, says, “… he (King David) appointed some of the Levites as ministers that’s the word worship there before the Ark of the Lord to invoke to thank and to praise the Lord the god of Israel.”

God’s design for all creation and redemption was for heaven and earth to be woven together and for humans to keep the place of God’s presence in Heaven’s activity on Earth – in other words to tend to the dwelling place of God on Earth. God’s great desire and plan for redemption is to reunite Heaven and Earth and for the image bearers, you and I, his sons and daughters to glorify him by enjoying him forever!

David made all the provisions for his ‘Tabernacle’ to be built into a permanent structure by his son Solomon. David gave Solomon the blueprint on how to build on Earth as it is in heaven and when Solomon finished building the Temple - the glory of the Lord filled the temple. Heaven and Earth converged.

2 Chronicle 7:1-2, “as soon as Solomon finished his prayer fire came down from heaven consumed the’ burnt offering and the sacrifices and the glory of the Lord filled the temple and the priests could not enter the house of the Lord because the glory of the Lord filled the Lord’s House”

Every king after David and Solomon was commanded to keep this worship order in place. If they did, it went well for them. The land prospered and Israel was saved from her enemies. Every King who decided to direct resources elsewhere experience trouble, famine and military invasion. All seven revivals in the Old Testament (list these with verses) coincided with the restoration of David’s worship order and every season of discipline Israel incurred was alongside the abandonment of the divine order of worship. What made Israel distinct from every other nation was the glory of God in her midst. If the leadership of Israel tried to exercise that kingly Authority without the ministry of worship (Priestly Ministry), it failed every time in the generations following.

Now the New Testament writers are explicitly clear that we as the body of Believers in the Earth are now a Priestly people or a kingdom of priests - Kings and Priests. Ministering first to the Lord is central to the identity and ministry of the church.

1 Peter 2 – “as you come to him a living Stone rejected by men but in the sight of God Chosen and precious you yourselves like living stones or being billed as a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ but you are a chosen race a royal priesthood a holy nation a people for his own possession that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness and Into His Marvelous Light”

Revelation 1:5-6, “from Jesus Christ the faithful witness the firstborn of the dead and the ruler of Kings on Earth to him who loves us and his freed us from our sins by his blood and made us a kingdom of priests to his God and Father to him be glory and Dominion forever and ever amen”

Our identity as a royal priesthood or a kingdom of priests has as much to do with the way we live together and how we express church as much as it has to do with our access to God. Jesus ‘made us a kingdom of priests’ through the finished work of the cross. The body of Christ is now the new tribe camped around the presence of the Living God. It is the Temple of the Lord, the Dwelling Place of God and it is a new priesthood whose Ministry is first to him and contending for Heaven to invade earth!

Antioch was one of the first places where this new priesthood was demonstrated. It was a spiritual family whose rhythms of life were centered around the Presence of God.

It was the apostle James, the brother of Jesus, who first made the connection between Antioch and the tabernacle of David.

More and more Gentiles were coming into the kingdom and this caused a controversy in the first century which led to the first church Council of Jerusalem in Acts 15. At the heart of the controversy was whether the Gentiles had to follow the law of Moses before they could be part of the Kingdom, this kingdom of priests. The Apostle James identified two key moments that gave him Clarity. He listened to Simeon who related how God first visited the Gentiles to take from them a people for his name,” and to Paul and Barnabas as they reported all that God had done through them for the Gentiles. The more he listened the more he began to see.

Let’s look at what he would have been hearing during the Jerusalem council

God first visited ‘the Gentiles’ in the house of a man named Cornelius in Acts 10. There he, “with all his household,” were praying continually and giving generously. An angel appeared to Cornelius and told him, “Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God.” What was the angel saying? Cornelius, your family is a priesthood, and your house is a temple”

The second model was the story at Antioch. Paul and Barnabas were based at Antioch, where they were ‘Ministering to the Lord’ as a priesthood together with the key leaders and community. Their report at the Jerusalem council would have included much of what was happening there.

Cornelius’ house and Antioch were where the new priesthood was taken up by the Gentiles. I believe James saw it as the beginning of the rebuilding of the tabernacle of David!

Acts 15:12- 18, “after they finish speaking James replied Brothers listen to me Simeon has related how God first visited the Gentiles to take from them a people for his name and with this the words of the prophets agree just as it is written ‘after this I will return and I will rebuild the tent of David that is Fallen. I will rebuild its ruins and I will restore it that the remnant of mankind may seek the Lord and all the Gentiles who are called by my name’ says the Lord who makes these things known from of old”

James understood that what was beginning in the first century in Antioch would mature into a global worship based prayer movement - modeled after the Tabernacle of David. It would lead to the restoration of David’s throne in Jerusalem and the son of David sitting on it! This is not just a promise of Gentiles being grafted into the Messianic Kingdom. The promise also included the Gentiles being given the worship order of David to fill the Earth with 24/7 worship-based prayer.

It is dynamically missional because the rest of mankind would seek the Lord in the context of that Davidic worship based prayer movement. This worship movement modeled after the Tabernacle of David will fill the Earth carrying the message of the Gospel of the kingdom and result in nations worshiping and preparing the way for the son of David to return to sit on David’s Throne. It will result in what the prophet Malachi described as incense in every place.

Malachi 1:11 (ESV), “ For from the rising of the sun to its setting my name will be great among the nations, and in every place incense will be offered to my name, and a pure offering. For my name will be great among the nations, says the Lord of hosts.