

## **Great Works Done by Small Congregations**

**By Paul R. Blake**

In our recent vacation, Coral and I had the opportunity to attend Sunday services and Wednesday Bible studies at four small congregations. The first Sunday services were at the church on Frey Road near Toledo, OH. Their attendance that day was in the twenties, and the service followed familiar patterns. They had a located preacher, but the Bible class was overseen by one of the members who taught from the book of Ezekiel. I was impressed with his familiarity with the prophet and his presentation of the text. On Wednesday, I went to Pritchard Avenue in Lisbon, where the class was taught by one of the members. He was not a gifted speaker, but he knew the lesson well and generated good comments and discussion in the class. The following Sunday, we went to Kent & Sussex congregation in Camden, DE. Their attendance was about 30 and their located preacher was out of town in a meeting, but the class was taught by someone who turned out to be one of the most skilled Bible class teachers I have heard in years (and I have heard a number of good teachers over the years). Their preacher is planning to move to the mid-south this fall, but I have every confidence this congregation will thrive with or without an evangelist. Wednesday evening I attended at Charles Street in Wellsburg. The Bible class was taught by Zach Rhodes, and his class on 1Samuel 24-25 was well organized and confidently presented. I was blessed to sing with an aged and infirm Homer Henthorn who taught the congregation a new song that night.

In every congregation, the disciples were happy to come together for worship and fellowship, and in some cases, more so than what I have observed in other larger congregations over the years. But while I learned some good things in the Bible classes and assemblies of the churches I visited, the three best lessons they taught were unconsciously presented. They reminded me that small congregations can do great works.

There is an unintentional tendency to believe that great works are best accomplished in larger congregations. Some members of small congregations self-consciously apologize for not having a located preacher, or for having few members, or for having small Bible classes, or not having elders, etc. Some members of larger congregations thoughtlessly look at small congregations as if they were disabled, in a spiritual holding pattern, or even weak and substandard. However, there are some things accomplished in small congregations that can only be described as great works.

Small churches often give opportunities to young men from larger congregations to teach and preach on a regular basis, opportunities they would not have in larger congregations with located preachers and elders. This not only prepares the young men to be preachers and teachers, but it also serves to prepare them to become deacons and elders one day. Large congregations should not only be grateful to brethren in smaller neighboring works for helping them to develop these young preachers, they should express it publicly and often, at home as well as to their neighboring brethren.

Small churches provide a place of assembly and a place from whence the Gospel is proclaimed in areas distant from large congregations. They are often small churches because they are located in a place where the Gospel is "out of season" (2Tim. 4:2). They recognize that difficult areas need the Gospel; they understand that the few saints that live in difficult areas need to worship God and have fellowship with one another; and, they labor diligently to supply those needs, often knowing all the while that they may never be anything more than a small congregation.

They supply an example of perseverance and dedication to one another, to disciples who visit, and to non-Christians in their own community. They develop and refine Christians who work and worship with them, where they learn to grow in the Lord with fewer resources and under difficult conditions. Superficial observations by members of large congregations who visit with small congregations often consider such things as frail, off-key singing, or a hesitant, ineloquent preaching, or that several men had to fill multiple roles in the service. A more careful observer will see that these Christians have a determined spirit that is produced in an atmosphere of surviving ongoing hardship. They have lived what the Lord said to the suffering saints at Smyrna: "Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer... you may be tested, and you will have

tribulation... Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life” (Rev. 2:10). It is more difficult to have this kind of training experience in larger congregations where there are a number of disciples who share the needs and a number of resources available to do the work.

I am not advocating that one congregation is better than another. The Lord certainly had as much regard for Smyrna (apparently a small congregation under persecution), as He had for the church at Ephesus (a larger congregation with whom the apostle Paul once labored). Nor am I suggesting that members of larger congregations migrate to smaller congregations. The truth is that both congregations are beloved by the Lord; both congregations are peopled by strong, faithful, sound Christians; both congregations do great works; and, disciples from both congregations will be blessed and rewarded by the Lord.

### **A Moments Wisdom**

- Indifference, not hate, is the strongest enemy of love.
- God loves each one of us as if there were only one of us.
- Faults are thick where love is thin.
- Many people would learn from their mistakes if they weren't so busy trying to put the blame on someone else.
- He who makes a mistake, makes a second mistake when he refuses to correct the first one.
- No man ever becomes very good or very bad suddenly.
- If you won't learn from your mistakes, there isn't much sense in making them.
- Many want to live a long time, but few want to grow old.
- Our character is put to the test when we suddenly acquire or quickly lose a considerable sum of money.
- There few pain medications as effective as a mother's kiss.
- Worry is a thin stream of fear trickling through the mind. If encouraged, it cuts a channel into which all other thoughts are drained.
- There were four million people living in the colonies, and we had Jefferson, Washington, and Franklin. Now we have three hundred million people living in the US and just look at the statesmen we now have. Obviously, Darwin was wrong.
- There is nothing wrong with good men possessing riches; the wrong comes when riches possess good men.
- The only exercise some people seem to get is jumping to conclusions, running down their brethren, sidestepping their responsibilities, and pushing their luck.
- It is not good to have all of our wishes come true: it is through sickness we recognize the value of health, it is through hunger the value of food, and it is through labor the value of rest.
- Commit the golden rule to life, not just to memory.
- No one ever drowned in sweat.
- We are told to let our lights shine; and if it does, we will not need to tell anyone. Lighthouses don't need to fire cannons to call attention to the light; it just shines.
- When a window of opportunity appears, don't pull down the shade.
- Only the mediocre are at their best all of the time.
- A candle loses nothing by lighting another candle.
- It isn't the mountains we must climb that wear us down; it is the bit of gravel in our shoe.