

‘What are you doing there?’

Jesus was always concerned for the purity of his Father's house. John records his arriving at the temple on one occasion to find his ears assaulted by the non-stop cacophony of sheep, oxen and bartering men and women all struggling to make their own voice heard above everyone else's.

Entering the temple court, he was filled with holy fury as he witnessed the scene inside. After tying some cords together to make a whip, Jesus ran through the court driving out the sheep and oxen and turning over the tables of the money-changers as he went.

‘Get out!’ he thundered, as men, women and animals fled in all directions. ‘Get out! How dare you turn my Father's house into a market!’

His stand for the purity of his Father's house was uncompromising. Hence his forceful response as he witnessed its degradation by people seeking position and prosperity at the hands of gullible worshippers (John 2:13-17).

On this occasion his anger was directed only towards those who had provided the service. He was denying them the use of the temple for their own dubious ends.

But how many of them were willing to listen? Just three years later, unrepentant dealers and an apathetic congregation had made a bad situation even worse. What three years before he had described as a 'market' Jesus now denounced as a 'den of robbers'. And this time he didn't just throw out the sellers; he threw out the buyers as well! (Matthew 21:12-13).

By his action Jesus laid blame on those whose passive acceptance of the defiling of the temple had provided an atmosphere in which corruption could continue to flourish.

It is a subtle form of hypocrisy which allows a person to be appalled by a degenerate religious system and yet continue in it. How can we grumble about the rapid erosion of truth and the ready acceptance of non-biblical practices in our 'church' yet at the same time remain committed to its continuance?

To act in this way is as ridiculous, and as risky, as to live in an old house that is falling down around our ears and never do anything about it. We complain about the leaking roof and grumble about the dry rot. Once in a while we view with consternation the ever-widening cracks in the bathroom ceiling. We become increasingly concerned with the antiquated wiring in the house, which at the best of times is unsafe – yet we never take any active measures to put things right.

Finally, the house falls down one night while we lie sleeping and crushes us in our beds.

Ridiculous, you think? Perhaps, but in the 'church' it is happening all the time – and taking its casualties with it.

'We needed to find life – quick!'

For David and Jean it was recognition that the 'house' was heading for collapse that finally convinced them to move and find somewhere with firm foundations.

'There were several warning signs,' they recall. 'Two successive annual church retreats were led by a godly minister from another area. At the first one he prophesied that God wanted us to open ourselves up to him completely. He implored

us to choose life and follow God wholeheartedly. But nothing changed, and when he returned a year later his message was still the same. We hadn't listened the first time around, he said, and he could do nothing but repeat his original message.

'His concern was confirmed by a series of meetings held at the church by another visiting preacher who said, as directly as he could, that something was very wrong with the church and things would have to change. He urged us to shut down all the meetings and seek God.

'We felt very strongly that the church should take his advice. A two-hundred-strong congregation had been reduced by half over a period of two years and numerous families had gone their separate ways, but many just didn't seem willing, or able, to understand what it was all about. Some wanted change and some didn't. Some were for the pastor and some were against him - while he himself just wanted to sit on the fence and please everybody! We were dying on our feet but the environment made change impossible.

'We realised that we desperately needed to find life - and we needed to find it quick!'

Sadly, the church still hasn't changed. The pastor resigned just before David and Jean did, only to be replaced by another who is strongly opposed to the work of the Holy Spirit. So what hope is there for the future?

Such a church, deprived of the vital life of God, is doomed to failure. It may hang on for years as it passes through the various stages of decay, but sooner or later it will collapse - and who is willing to risk being buried under its rubble?

For David and Jean, however, the story is a very different one. They are now in a church where they know the pastor is totally committed to Jesus Christ and they are continually being encouraged in their walk with God. Their own testimony is that they have benefited in every way, but one of their greatest joys was to see their young son give his life to Jesus and get baptised within the first six months of their going to the new church.

In their own words: 'Why settle for less than life? If there's a choice between life and just existing, choose life.'

It's your choice

Christian maturity has a great deal to do with our ability to choose and refuse (see Isaiah 7:14-16; Hebrews 5:14).

From the day Adam sinned and hid himself, the voice of the Lord has been calling, 'Where are you?' He continues to face men and women with his claims upon their lives: 'If anyone comes to me and does not hate his father and mother, his wife and children, his brothers and sisters - yes, even his own life - he cannot be my disciple' (Luke 14:26).

Jesus didn't say that, without the meeting of this condition, it would be *difficult* to be a disciple or that a person would be at a *disadvantage* in his discipleship. Neither did he say that there would merely be a *deficiency* in a person's discipleship. He said, 'He *cannot* be my disciple.'

True discipleship is costly - Jesus left us in no doubt. It requires absolute loyalty to him. Many, like the buyers in the temple, have succumbed to a lesser loyalty, giving first allegiance to a man, a movement, a doctrine or a denomination rather than to Christ. But we do have a choice; if you refuse to buy they cannot sell to you.

Consider Moses. Once the call of God had come to him, he could no longer remain in the comfort of ignorance: 'By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. He chose to be ill-treated along with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time. He regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward' (Hebrews 11:24-26).

There was a choice to make, a destiny to fulfil and a price to pay. He was living among the oppressors of God's people, and God had confronted him with, 'What are you doing there?'

'Well, that was Moses, God's mighty servant,' you reply. 'It's

hardly relevant to me.'

Wrong! It is very relevant to you. The details may be different but if you have given your life to God then his call is as much upon you as it was upon Moses. You, too, have a choice to make, a destiny to fulfil and, yes, a price to pay.

All who would choose life and fulfil their calling in God must be prepared to follow him whatever the consequences. Redemption history is well signposted by men and women who remained true and were willing to pay the price.

If you still feel Moses is too great an example for you to follow, consider Elijah. Though he was one of the most mightily used prophets in the history of Israel, James records that he was 'a man just like us' (James 5:17).

Elijah dared to stand alone for what was right among a people who had chosen wrong. In the name of the Lord he confronted sin, compromise and indecision and withstood the religious attitudes of the time.

But, like us, he was human. At the height of his triumph of faith - calling down fire from heaven on Mount Carmel and slaughtering the prophets of Baal - the continued opposition and growing antagonism brought him to despair. Determined now to opt for the quiet life, he ran away and hid in a cave.

But God found him and once again came that searching question: 'What are you doing here, Elijah?' (1 Kings 19:9).

Elijah was simply depressed. He was tired of the opposition. He had tried, but he was alone, the only man zealous for the truth of God. And now, because of his zeal, he was decried as a troublemaker and had become the focus of growing official persecution.

But God had a surprise for him: there were seven thousand others in Israel who had not forsaken the Lord or backslidden into false religion!

As in Elijah's day, there are multitudes of genuine believers in our own generation who remain hidden in the mass of people who pay lip-service to God but have no real faith in Jesus Christ. However, before we grasp a crumb of comfort from that and

slip back into complacency, allow me to ask this question: What effect can seven thousand – or seven hundred thousand – have if they are all hiding in caves?

It is time to repent of our self-pity and complacency. The mountain-top of confrontation, not the cave of concealment, is the place for the true servants of God. We are not alone, and God is calling us to stand up for him and be counted.

If you have resigned and retired to your cave, hear him calling, 'What are you doing there?'