

# Altar Call

by Paul E. Hamilton

*“One of them, an expert in the law, tested Him with this question; ‘Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?’ Jesus replied: ‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it; ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”*

*- Matthew 22:35 - 40*

*“He has showed you, O man, what is good, and what does the Lord require of you? To act justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God.”*

*- Micah 6:8*

One question that most Christians ask themselves is what does God want from me? What exactly does He want me to do while I am in this world? Most answer the question with the most obvious answer which is to introduce people to a loving relationship with Jesus Christ so that they can have eternal life in Heaven. That purpose is what is referred to as the “Great Commission” and spoken of by Jesus in Matthew 28 and Mark 16. That is very important and the basis on which everything we as Christians do, but it is not the only commandment that Jesus gave us. In Matthew 22:35 -40, Jesus tells us what the greatest commandment is. It can all be boiled down to this, “Love God and love your neighbor”. God wants us, first and foremost, to love Him and to show our love for Him by loving others as much as we love ourselves and believe me, everyone loves themselves. But just how do we go about fulfilling this Great Commandment as well as the Great Commission?

That answer is seen in the book of Micah. Micah, a minor prophet, is an overlooked book in the Old Testament. I have never figured out why these books are considered Minor Prophets because they have many important things to tell us. The truth that is spoken about in Micah Chapter 6 verse 8 is something very enlightening. God wants us to stand up and work for justice.

Webster's Dictionary states that justice means "the quality of being just, righteousness, equitableness, or moral rightness; conformity to this principle, as manifested in conduct; just dealing, or treatment. God requires us as Christians to act justly and seek justice, not only for ourselves but for others. This is where we fall short as Christians. Let me explain. In the United States in the 1850's, evangelist Charles Finney led a national wide revival movement that is now called the Great Awakening. Finney would hold tent revivals all over the country preaching God's Word. It was during these revival meetings that Charles Finney created what we now know as the altar call. For those of you who are unfamiliar with an altar call, it is the time during a church service when the pastor invites people to walk down the aisle to the front of the church. It is usually during this time that people tell the pastor that they have accepted what Jesus did on the Cross for their sins or that they wish to become a church member. Did you know that salvation was not the original intention of the altar call? When Charles Finney created the altar call, it was not for people to announce their decision for Christ, it was to sign up as a member of the Abolitionist Movement against slavery. Finney preached that a person could not call themselves a follower of Christ and not be against slavery. Now I know that everyone reading this newsletter is against slavery as we knew it in the 1850's, but my question to you is this: How can we as followers of Christ sit back and allow individuals and families in our society today to be enslaved all over again by poverty, drugs, unemployment, and social class discrimination? How can we sit back in our "comfy pews" while there are millions of families that are being destroyed? The time for a new altar call is now and we as followers of Jesus Christ must seek to act justly. I am not talking about organizing a political movement to storm Washington (and Jefferson City for that matter), but a grass roots effort made by those who love Jesus to help those who are deep in the clutches of economic, emotional, and spiritual slavery.

The best way for us to accomplish this task is summed up in an old Chinese poem:

"Go to the people  
Live among them  
Learn from them  
Love them  
Start with what you know  
Build on what they have"

I first heard this poem last November when Jamie and I attended the Christian Community Development Association in Indianapolis, Indiana. It best expresses our desire at Hole in the Roof Ministry Center. Through our Family Empowerment Program, we want to empower families in the Gravois Park/Dutch Town Community to become independent by breaking the cycle of poverty, ending the welfare mindset, and developing a loving, Christian community. We are stilling looking to find a new location in the Gravois Park/Dutch Town area. In addition, we are currently setting up meetings with neighborhood leaders and local Aldermen. We also want to set up parenting classes, after school tutoring programs, while continuing to minister through our Bread of Life Outreach food pantry. This challenged area is very much in need of what Hole in the Roof has to offer. Just this week alone, four people have been shot to death. It is an area that needs a special touch from people who care.

One thing is for sure, we could not do any of this without your help. Your monthly support and your prayers are what keeps us going. Relaunching our ministries is quite complicated and very draining. Without you, we would not be able to do this. Please keep us in your prayers as we reach out to this hurting area of south St. Louis.