

# The Third Day Church

by David Orton

<http://lifemessenger.org/third-day-church/>

*On the third day He will raise us up, that we may live in His sight*

**Hosea 6:2**

The *Third Day Church* is not a new denomination. Neither is it any identifiable group or movement.

We've been there and tried that before. Under various names and at different times those of us who have had a hunger for God and his kingdom purposes have fallen prey to elitism and spiritual pride.

We have raised up our revival or reforming 'movements' and created our 'shibboleths'—our protocols for membership (Jdg 12:6). As self-appointed 'gatekeepers' we have established our tests of who is 'in' and who is 'out'—our measurements of 'movement' purity and orthodoxy. These usually come out of a position taken in response to a perceived weakness in the church, or a fresh understanding of a particular truth. As initially valid 'perspectives', in time, they become 'distinctives' that serve to divide the body of Christ. And what began as a genuine initiative of the Spirit becomes just another 'club'.

From the beginning of Christian history this has been the downfall of most revival and reforming movements. It can be seen in the Montanists (circa 172 AD), the first revival movement of history, the Novatianists (circa 251 AD), and the Donatists (circa 313 AD), who all maintained they were the pure and exclusive expression of the church.

So, in our understanding of what some are calling the *Third Day Church*, how do we prophetically 'press the envelope' without succumbing to spiritual pride and sectarianism?

## **The Church — *visible* and *invisible***

In the flow of the Reformation tradition we must distinguish between the church *visible* and the church *invisible*.

Why did the Reformers make this distinction? Because they were faced with an institutional church – in their case Rome – that arrogated the biblical promise of the church's glory to itself—to the temporal organisation. In other words they were saying, "*Hey, look at our size, our buildings, at the beauty of our worship, the influence we have, and the amazing blessing of our wealth — surely this is the glory of God!*" Not a lot has changed—this is where we find many churches and movements of our day, measuring the blessing and glory of God by outward appearances. But in the Reformer's case, as in ours, it was obvious that the visible church's earthly power and glory was not matched by its conformity to the glory of God in its holiness and spiritual life.

The teaching that distinguishes the invisible from the visible church, therefore, concedes that not all "professing" Christians within the visible institution are the elect (i.e. born of the Spirit), and that there is mixture within it—that tares and wheat are growing together (see Mtt 13:24-30, 47-50). In fact, any visible organisational expression of the church – including ours – is tainted in some degree by sin and hubris. Therefore the true church is essentially spiritual and invisible (Mtt 13:33), existing both within and outside of the visible institution. In effect, during a transitional era, there is a temporary overlapping of the two. Nonetheless, the invisible true church will ultimately be manifest at the close of the age. And that which is visible – but false – will be destroyed (Mtt 15:13; 13:38-43).

The implications of this are mind-bending—the church system that you now see is not the church that will be. In other words, what you thought was the church is not the church. And the closer we get to the end of the age the more visible the true church will become. And so, we in for some surprises!

At this moment there is an invisible – or 'underground' – church being prepared — a Davidic company coming together in the obscurity of Adullam's cave; David's refuge in the wilderness from King Saul. These are the "foolish things of this

world”—those whom the visible church marginalises; the discontented, distressed and in debt (see 1 Sam 22:2); those who by human standards are disqualified from office in the Saul-system. For God, as Paul explains, does not call many mighty or noble, but chooses the things that are not to bring to nought the things that are (1 Cor 1:26-31).

And so, this seeming band of misfits and discontents, in time, emerge from their darkness as a formidable fighting force—they are transformed as David's 'mighty men'; an army destined to usher in the kingdom (1 Chr 12).

In the timing and economy of God they ultimately become visible. But how will this happen in our day? A. A. Hodge, the great 19th Century Princeton theologian, gives the answer:

Wherever the true church is, it will be more or less visible; not in proportion, however, to the size or pretension of the organisation with which it may be associated, but in proportion to the purity of its faith and the spiritual activity and fruitfulness of its membership.

This, in my view, is what the *Third Day Church* is about.

There is ultimately a visibility for the true; but it has absolutely nothing to do with the "size or the pretension of the organisation", nor with the protocols of belonging to any movement, structure, or institution, no matter how subliminal or unwritten they may be. There is no room for worldly dependence, on the 'arm of the flesh', in the thing that God is doing. This is why God allows his 'Davids' to be hunted into the caves of Adullam—to extract anything in them that answers to the Saul-system (see Jn 14:30).

It is one thing to take the man out of the system, but another to take the system out of the man.

### **The *Third Day Principle***

So, this brings us to the essence of the *Third Day Church*. It is not only the church of the Third Millennium (2 Pet 3:8), but more importantly, the church of the *Third Day Principle*.

The first reference to the 'Third Day' sets the pattern for this theme in Scripture.

This is obviously the 'third day' of the Genesis creation—a day of *separation* and *fruitfulness* (Gen 1:9- 13). The seas were separated from the dry land and vegetation brought forth with its seed in it with the ability to replicate after its own kind.

And so, the *Third Day Principle* is in effect the seed principle for the church of this third millennium—one of death (separation) and new life (fruitfulness). This then flows as a thread throughout the whole of Scripture, ultimately fulfilled and exemplified in Jesus: "*Unless the corn of wheat fall into the ground and dies it abides alone*" (Jn 12:24).

This is the foundational principle of all God's operations—it is the 'way of the cross'. And only by walking in this way are we truly associated with Jesus, who is *the Way* (Jn 14:6).

### **The *Third Dimension***

This is the key to the *Third Dimension* of the spiritual life.

Progress in God is three-dimensional: Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life.

The **Way** is experienced by *association*, the **Truth** by *incarnation*, and the **Life** by *manifestation*.

This third level – life – is the destiny of the *Third Day Church*; a level where we finally experience the fullness of the life of God on earth – an unhindered manifestation of all he is – of all his glorious attributes, and especially his power over Satan, sin, and death—a level where we finally "...attain to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Eph 4:13).

Now, our problem is that we all want the fullness of Life, but not the Way and the Truth.

And yet, this is the only way to enter the *Third Dimension*.

Spiritual life is not only three-dimensional, but also cyclical—spiralling upwards as we ascend Zion's hill. We step from the Way into the Truth, from the Truth into the Life, and back again. Every greater appropriation of the Life immediately brings us again to Christ as the Way—to the cross. This is the paradox of the kingdom – the way up is down – and life comes by way of death.

As we daily take up our cross and follow Jesus as the Way, laying down 'self' – self-will, self-promotion, self-interest – we begin to climb, coming face to face with him as the Truth in our "inner most being" (Ps 51:6), ultimately rising into the *Third Dimension*—to Jesus the Life in whom dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily (see Col 2:9).

The 'ways of God' are the thermal currents of the Spirit, causing us to ascend the heights of God; but they are not our ways—they are not of this world, nor of its wisdom. In fact, they are foolishness to the world (see 1 Cor 1:18-25, 30). And so, only as we deny ourselves, responding to the law of the Spirit of life (Rom 8:2), do we discover Jesus as the Way – the wisdom of God – and we spiral heavenward.

The *Third Day Church* will ultimately break through into clear air—free from earth's atmosphere. It will soar into the *Third Dimension*—into a manifestation of the life of God that other generations have only seen from a distance.

They will die to *self*, yielding to the ways of God.

And so, the life of the ascended Christ will finally flow through his body unhindered by sin and human control.

This *Third Dimension* correlates with the many 'threes' of Scripture:

3rd *Day* – 3rd Millennium of the Church (2 Pet 3:8);

3rd *Feast* – Tabernacles – fruit harvest – fullness of the Spirit;

3rd *Anointing* – David – the fullness of the Kingdom;

3rd *Heaven* – Paul – the fullness of apostolic revelation;

3rd *Compartment* of the Tabernacle – Holy of Holies – the *shekinah* glory;

3rd *Level* of Fruitfulness – 30, 60, 100 fold;

3rd *Habitation* – Moses' Tabernacle, David's Tabernacle, Solomon's Temple;

3rd *Dimension* of Ministry – Priest, Prophet, King – Pastor/Teacher, Prophet, Apostle.

Now, let's have a look at how the *Third Day Principle* works in Scripture.

## **THE THIRD DAY PRINCIPLE IN SCRIPTURE**

### **Resurrection on the *Third Day***

On the 'Third Day' Abraham sacrificed Isaac. Likewise, the *Third Day Church* will know what it is to lay down their dream—to surrender the legitimate gift of God. It was not so much Isaac that was dying that day but Abraham—dying to the visible evidence of his destiny, abandoning his future to the providence and faithfulness of God. Committing it to the fact that God would raise it up again from the dead (Gen 22:4; Heb 11:14-17).

Entrusting his life to the Father by surrendering to the death of the cross, Christ – the seed of Abraham – was raised on the 'third day' (Gal 3:16; 1 Cor 15:4).

Consequently, the *Third Day Church* will not walk by sight but by faith – calling those things that are not as though they are (Rom 4:17) – as they bring the blessing of Abraham to the nations.

### **Heavens opened & the Law given on the *Third Day***

It was on the 'Third Day' God that came down on Mount Sinai; but first the people were called to consecrate themselves and to prepare (see Ex 19:10-18).

Likewise, the *Third Day Church* is being called to prepare for an 'open heaven'. It is significant that the Feast of Pentecost commemorates this 'open heaven' over Mt Sinai. The 'Third Day Church' will experience all that Pentecost signifies—the outpouring of the Spirit in supernatural manifestations – by which the new covenant is sealed – and the inscribing of the law in their hearts (Ex 19-20; 2 Cor 3:3-18; Eph 1:13; 4:30). As a consecrated people, they will no longer walk according to the flesh but the Spirit, fulfilling all the righteousness of the law (Rom 8:4). What Adam and Israel failed to attain Christ has attained—that is, the fulfilling of the law (Mtt 5:17). Thus, a people filled with fullness of Christ – that is, his body, the church in which there is neither Jew nor Greek (Gal 3:28) – will celebrate all that the Feast of Pentecost signifies, living in complete obedience to the Lord and his covenant.

### **Esther received favour on the *Third Day***

On the 'Third Day' Esther went before the King to intercede for her people. In those days it was a high-risk venture to approach an oriental king, even if you were his bride. Responding to the realisation "*that she had come to the kingdom for such a time as this*" she abandoned all self-interest and boldly approached him on behalf of her people.

As the bride of Christ, the *Third Day Church* – through fasting, intercession, and self-abandonment – will receive favour from God for the deliverance of nations (Est 5:1 ff; Eph 5:27).

### **Jonah delivered on the *Third Day***

Like Jonah, the church has run from its prophetic call and has been consigned to the belly of a whale. But in this 'Third Day', like him, she will be delivered by great and powerful operations of the Spirit, and the word of the Lord will come the "second time". As with Jonah, this 'Third Day' prophetic anointing will bring whole cities and nations into the kingdom (Jon 1-3).

### **Jesus Worked Miracles on the *Third Day***

On the 'Third Day' Jesus performed his first miracle at the wedding of Cana, "manifesting his glory" by turning water into wine (Jn 2:1-11). In this climax of the ages, the "*best wine has been kept until last*". And, in this 'Third Day', as we celebrate the wedding feast impossible circumstances are again being changed by the miracle working power of God.

And finally, we come to Jesus, the ultimate expression of the *Third Day Principle*.

### **A Day of 'Destiny Purpose': the *Third Day***

In responding to the Pharisees' and to Herod's threats Jesus said:

Go tell that fox, 'I will drive out demons and heal people today and tomorrow, and on the third day I will reach my goal [or, 'I will be perfected']'

Luke 13:32 NIV

The 'Third Day' is a day of *destiny purpose*. Just as Jesus pressed through the resistance of political (Herod) and religious (Pharisees) opposition the 'Third Day Church' will likewise move forward to fulfil a 'destiny purpose'—a *goal*. But what is the goal?

It is the Greek word *teleioo*, meaning "to complete, finish, fulfil, and perfect".

This same word is used in Hebrews 2:10:

In bringing many sons to glory, it was fitting that God...should make the author of their salvation perfect [*teleioo*] through suffering.

So, the *Third Day Destiny Purpose* for Jesus was to be perfected through suffering, and thus, "*bring many sons to glory*". Through the embrace of suffering he "*learned obedience*" (Heb 5:9), was perfected as a man, and thus, raised up a new humanity in his image.

As the "author" (or the *pioneer*) of their salvation (Heb 5:9), he has blazed the trail for this new humanity to experience "all the fullness of the Godhead bodily". And so, "*the one who makes men holy and those who are made holy are of the same family. So Jesus is not ashamed to call them brothers*" (Heb 2:11).

This is the *Third Dimension* referred to earlier. It is perfect union (and communion) with Jesus—what Peter describes as "*participating in the divine nature*" (2 Pet 1:4). And what Paul describes as the ultimate maturity of Christ's body:

...until we all reach...the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature [*teleios*], attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ

Ephesians 4:13 NIV

Paul, considered that he had not "*already obtained all this, or been made perfect (teleioo)*", and so "*pressed on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of him*" (Phil 3:12). This was his '*destiny purpose*' to "*know Christ and the power of his resurrection*" (v 10).

And so, as we "*press on to know the Lord*" in this 'Third Day' he will appear to us, coming to us as the rain (Hos 6:3). A new humanity will arise in the earth, standing in the full blaze of God's glory, enjoying without hindrance all the fullness of Christ. They will be so "full of God" they will reflect Paul's description of Christ's body, which is "*the fullness of him*" (Eph 1:23; see also Eph 3:19).

Returning to Jesus' response to Herod's threat in Luke 13 he said:

I must keep going today and tomorrow and the next day - for surely no prophet can die outside Jerusalem. (v. 33)

Jesus was propelled on a journey into the 'Third Day'—to the cross: "*he must keep going today, tomorrow, and the next day*". There is an urgency – an imperative – coming from the Spirit to this generation.

This new humanity will not be distracted from its *destiny purpose*—from the "fellowship of his sufferings, becoming like him in his death; and so, somehow, "*attaining to the resurrection from the dead*" (Phil 3:10- 11). They will not compromise with the spirit of the world. They will refuse, like Moses, "*to be known as the son of Pharaoh's daughter...regarding disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value...*" (Heb 11:25-26).

**Bearing the reproach**

Therefore, laying aside *"the way that seems right to man"* (Prov 14:12) – or in Hodge's words – *"the size or pretension of the organisation"*, this `Third Day Church' – like its head – *"must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and be killed, and on the `third day' be raised to life"* (Lk 9:22).

Jesus *"came to his own but they did not receive him"* (Jn 1:11). He came to the old order and to its leaders, but was executed by them, thinking they were serving God. The disciple is not above his master—the same is promised to all who follow him (Jn 16:2).

Saul will pursue those who have the heart of David—they will learn, like Jesus, what it is to *"bear the reproach outside the camp"* (see Heb 13:11-13).

In my reading of revival history, God has invariably moved *"outside the camp"*. He does not often come through the religious hierarchy of the day. Rather, he chooses the foolish things of this world to confound the wise, the things that are not to bring to nothing the things that are (1 Cor 1:28). Man looks at the outward appearance of things, but God looks at the heart. Samuel was impressed by the stature of Eliab, David's older brother. And his family completely ignored him as a candidate for the kingdom (1 Sam 16:7).

Am I suggesting we fall foul of a *Messianic complex*? Absolutely not! But I am underlining the imperative of going to the cross if we are to experience *"the glories that are to come"* (Rom 8:18; 1 Pet 1:11). And, for Jesus, the cross was at the hand of his brothers.

#### **The warfare of the flesh and the Spirit**

The warfare of the flesh and the Spirit is going to increase over the next season within the visible church—*"Now there was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David; and David grew steadily stronger, but the house of Saul grew weaker continually"* (2 Sam 3:1). The leaven of the kingdom will silently do its work until finally, the invisible order of the `Third Day Church' replaces the old.

But let us remember, that this *"kingdom is not of this world"*, as Jesus said, *"or else my servants would fight"* (Jn 18:36). The warfare of the `Third Day Church' is not with the weapons of worldly success and power, but with *"the weapons of righteousness in the right hand and in the left"* (2 Cor 6:7)—in one hand the self-emptying of Christ, but in the other his exaltation to the supreme government of all things (Phil 2:5-11).

And so, in the spirit of the `Third Day', the *"meek will inherit the earth"* (Mtt 5:5).

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