

Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

The African Import of Charismatic Chaos (Conrad Mbewe)

Scripture: Selected Scriptures

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Strange Fire Conference

Well it's a real joy for me to be with you on this occasion. When I got the invitation from John to come and speak here, it was a complete surprise. I've followed his ministry over many years, I just didn't know that he knew that I existed on the planet. I'm thankful although October I had already been taken up the people who had invited me were willing to shift things around me to make this possible. And so I'm really grateful for that opportunity.

I'm also glad that the evening when I'm speaking we've had the Master's College students singing for us because partly due to inspiration received from what is happening here we are in fact in the process of commencing a university back home. The African Christian University, the Lord willing, we open doors (Applause) the Lord willing, we open doors in January this coming year and what I've seen here hopefully with your prayers will be realized back home as well.

Now in the task that I have before me this evening, I'll be dealing with the African Import of Charismatic Chaos. I trust that that type reminds you of a book written a number of years ago and in many ways what you were reading, they is what we are seeing back home in Africa except that it is much worse as I hope to briefly show you this evening.

What I'll be doing is basically a brief overview of the Charismatic Movement in Africa and it's one that I have observed in the last 30 years or so and consequently it's a matter that I am coming to speak about as a matter of real concern. So this is not simply speaking about something that I've learned about through reading books, it's what I come across literally every day and I hope you will bear with me if from time to time I get a little emotional, it's a real concern in my own heart.

I also quickly want to say that most of what I will go on to paint before you is rather foreign to a western mindset. But I hope I'll do the best I could in the little time that I have, to make you appreciate what I'll speaking about from our own African backgrounds. Invariably being a short time that I will be speaking, you have to appreciate that I'll be using broad strokes in giving you something of that background and in doing so, you will have to read further and I'm hoping that as you do so, you will come to appreciate a little more something of its details.

And so to begin with, I just want you to turn with me to John and chapter 17, not because I'm expounding this text, but because it's really a point that I want us to keep in mind as we deal with this issue. Because ultimately the Charismatic chaos that I will be pointing out to you is one that would not have been the case if John 17 verse 17 had been taken seriously. It would not be where it is if we could get back to what Jesus was saying in His High Priestly prayer at this point.

If you are there, The Lord Jesus Christ...I begin with verse 16...says to God the Father, "They are not of the world even as I am not of it." And then the verse I have in mind, "Sanctify them by the truth, Your Word is truth. As You have sent Me into the world, I have sent them into the world for them I sanctify Myself that they too may be truly sanctified."

This was toward the end of the ministry of our Lord Jesus Christ, He's on the eve of being crucified and consequently He is basically wrapping up truths that He has been teaching over a long period. He is seeking to convince His disciples concerning how they ought to live, especially in the light of His absence. And then as it comes to this prayer, He deliberately prays it in the ears of His disciples so that they may remain with something of that which is at the center of His own heart, the glory of God. "Glorify Yourself" He says over and over again. He deals towards the end with this reality that there is a time between the first and second coming, but there is to be an organizing principle that must be maintained at the center of Christianity after He is gone. And it is this, His Word, God's Word is to remain saving and sanctifying His people. And He puts it within His prayer to the Father that this is what He desires, may His prayer be answered.

I'd like to suggest to you, and we shall see it as we proceed, that it has been a failure to recognize the centrality and let me add the sufficiency of the Word of God that has produced something of what we will look at this evening. There is no doubt that south of the Sahara Desert the Charismatic Movement has flooded the African continent. You can't miss it. North of the Sahara you have the Islamic north, but the moment you cross over that desert, you soon begin to see that this is what has become the most visible form of "evangelicalism" and I'm putting that in quotation marks. The phrase "born again" seems to be equated that form of Christianity.

This has been largely due to the use of public crusades, loud public address systems, the use of radio, the use of television, and in many ways even with respect to literature, it has been free literature that has been shipped across the Atlantic, largely from your shores, containing the kind of heresies that have become common diet in the health and wealth Charismatic Movement on this end. That's been shipped across over a number of decades, and more recently through broadcasting networks such as Trinity Broadcasting Network, this has become the staple diet of many of God's people over on our end.

Invariably this has been riding on the back of the old time conservative Pentecostalism which basically found its way, especially into much of English-speaking Africa in the second half of the last

century, that opened the doors and with respect to what we are now seeing, this is like a pushing further of that which was being taught previously. The door was open slightly and now it has been opened ajar. The Pandora's Box has been opened.

Many people invariably ask the question, "Why is it that in such a short period of time there has been such an acceptance, multiplication of churches that can be described as I will be describing in a minute or two. The answer which I have given in the blog post that you find in Grace to You is basically the fact that this form of Christianity has appealed to the African world view in terms of its understanding of the spiritual world.

Now I do not have the time to take you through all that and I hope you will find some time to visit that particular blog post. But what I do need to say is the fact that almost invariably when you look at the adverts for the meetings, crusades, the church services coming on a Sunday, the messages amount to something like this, "Come and receive your deliverance, your healing, and your break through."

Now I realize that again what I'm saying are but words to you, but it is a whole world in my mind as an African that that invariably plugs into. And very quickly, for instance, the word "break through," what it is really saying to the common man across where I am coming from is that if you're struggling in your marriage, or struggling to conceive, or struggling to maintain a job, or struggling to be promoted at work, struggling with even ill health, whatever it is that you're struggling with, despite your prayers, nothing seems to be happening. It is because between you and God there are other layers that need to be dealt with. One of those layers is that of angels and demons, and the other layer is that of your ancestral spirits. Until those layers are broken through, you will not get what you want.

Now that makes a lot of sense to an African because that's the way we have thought for centuries. We don't doubt the existence of God, but He's a God far away, He's a God who has these layers in between and until we deal with them, He will not hear us. He will not act on our behalf. And that's really the role as I'll be showing you in my next message that the man of God seems to be fulfilling, giving that break through.

Now, you quickly realize that that's not what the Bible teaches. And yet that is the form that the Charismatic Movement that is now clothed in African attire, that's what it has taken on. It's basically saying the same language that has already been there for centuries in Africa but now giving it a thin veneer of Bible verses. You can therefore well understand that if men and women are rushing in throngs to the witch doctor's den, they will rush in throngs to these so-called churches because ultimately it's the same "power play" they are looking for.

I'll be quick to say that that was not the initial thinking when the old, conservative Pentecostalism crossed over. As I said, I've had opportunity to be exposed sufficiently over a period of about 30

years. What is happening today is something that has gone a number of steps further and the only reason why it should be so as I've already hinted, is because the Word of God is no longer playing the role of governing our thinking and our practice.

My concern is this, that when a lot of people look at the full to overflowing churches in Africa, the apparent excitement in the churches, they cross back to the U.S. and say there's revival there. The churches are packed, multiple services, churches multiplying. But I do want to say to you tonight that it is not good news, it's bad news. And it's bad news primarily because of this same text that we looked at earlier. Jesus is God, He is all powerful, He is the one who can take out of us stony hearts and give to us hearts of flesh. And by His Spirit, lead us from one degree of glory to the other. And yet it is this same Jesus who now turns to the Father and says, "Sanctify them, set them apart, make them holy through the truth. And it is Your Word that is true."

When I say that it is bad news, first of all it is because of the absence of the exposition and study of this book in those circles. Thirty years ago you could attend a Pentecostal church and having survived a certain section that they call worship, the pastor would get into the pulpit and give you some exposition. You may disagree with his interpretations here and there, but you can at least see some effort at teaching you what this book is saying. You could go for a mid-week Bible study and you'd sit there and go through a passage of Scripture. You may again disagree with some conclusion, but at least you will see that it is an effort to get to this book. In those days when we're at the university, you'd meet with friends coming from that church and they'll say we were at Bible study. That phrase is almost completely absent, and I mean it. I cannot remember the last time I mingled with individuals who are participating in these kinds of churches with deliverances, and healing, and break through announced everywhere. I cannot remember the last time one of them said, "I'm going to Bible Study, or I'm coming from Bible Study."

Now, you cannot have spiritual life when this book is closed...you can't. (Applause) What you have are nice platitudes that are being borrowed here and thrown over there and going in the opposite direction. We are not the tail, but the head. People don't know where that phrase is coming from. They don't appreciate the context of that phrase. And just put it up here and they're reproducing it there, and amens, and hallelujahs coming from that.

Let me go further. When Jesus speaks about sanctify them by the truth, and Your Word is truth, He obviously also has in mind the fact that we are saved through this same truth, that the Word of God preached evangelistically is what will be used by the Holy Spirit to give life to the dead. The gospel has consequently also been lost. The message of deliverance as we saw it earlier is the common message now. And it's not what you think they are saying. You see, the gospel is about the fact that we have offended our Creator, the governor of history, the coming judge of the living and the dead, that we deserve to go to hell because of that, but however, God who is loving has given His Son and through Him purchased a full and free redemption so that we may come to Him not trying to merit

salvation, but in repentance and faith freely receiving that pardon, forgiveness of sins.

That's hardly ever being heard. And I mean it. Rather the modern gospel is something like this: there's about twenty minutes of motivational speaking and when that is over, it's now what problems have you got? Come to Jesus, He'll deal with them. And the coming to Jesus basically means come to the front... I'll be dealing with that when I deal with how we preach as witch doctors... and then the man of God will help you get over it. The result is this, the churches are full of goats in sheepskins. I do a lot of personal evangelism and I come across a lot of people who would tell me they go to such-and-such a church and often such-and-such international ministry. And when I ask the question whether they're Christians, they'll say yes. And when I ask how they became Christians, the testimony is often something like this.

"My marriage fell apart. My husband walked out on me. A friend told me that that preacher, or that prophet, or that Apostle... we'll deal with all those names when I'm back in here... he's got powerful prayers. And so I began to go to that church. And when I spoke to him, he invited me for the overnight prayer meeting. And there he prayed and prayed and prayed and there was a break through. One day my husband showed up, apologized for what had happened. And so we now go to that church. Praise the Lord."

That's supposed to be salvation. The offending of God absent. The redeeming blood of Christ absent. The note of repentance and faith, trusting in His complete work absent. But the claim is I'm now a Christian. Invariably it leads to the third point where I'm calling it bad news and it's all again coming from the word, the phrase, "Sanctify them by the truth, Your Word is truth." And it is this, where the Word of God is closed, the gospel has been lost, invariably the life remains sinful and self-centered. And one of the effects of that has been the loss of true worship. You can't miss it. There's no real interest in singing the kind of songs we've been singing here. Rather it is danceable tunes. So even if we're going to repeat a phrase a thousand times over, and maybe that phrase is something like, "We are going, we are going, we are going, we are going, we are going." What matters is the tune being given to the "we are going" so that we can really dance. That's not Christianity.

And it doesn't matter how many times people may say in the midst of that confusion the phrase, "Glory, glory, glory," it is not the glory of God. Just little phrases that are being repeated over and over again. Sadly, you can't miss it from even the life after that event as they go home, the scandals, especially the sexual scandals that are accepted in those ranks.

One such preacher changed wives three times in one year and is still an Apostle. Obviously, spiritually dead people cannot produce godliness. They can't produce true God-glorifying worship. It's impossible. Reverence for God is born out of hearts that are changed by the Spirit and the Spirit is not divorced from the Word. (Applause)

I wish I would say this is just a few churches here and there, scattered across Africa. I wish I would say you have to hunt long and hard to find them. But what I'm saying is that this is fast becoming the norm.

My question is, why are evangelicals on the Africa continent not addressing this? It seems so obvious. Why the silence? I think it's simply because this Movement is practicing what many evangelicals claim and it is this, that the extraordinary revelatory gifts are still operational today. The moment you open that door a little bit, where do you stop? Where? So the difference seems to simply be that of emphasis, some are not emphasizing it as much as others. Or perhaps the difference is in levels of success. Others seem to be more successful than others. Or perhaps it's in terms of one or two scandalous lives, immoral lives that misrepresent others. But largely, these are people that were in the same pews, listened to this same opening of the door. They remained behind with the same teaching when their friends decided they were going to push this matter to its logical conclusion.

So if that's the case, how do you address your friends who have reached this level? How do you do it without it looking as though you're just jealous because they are more successful than you? How do you address it?

The result has been that the so-called addressing of this matter has been simply to point out some individuals whose lives have fallen into scandalous sin, that's all. But, you see, addressing one or two rotten fruits is woefully insufficient when really all they're doing is taking the matter to its logical conclusion.

As we shall be seeing when I'm back in the pulpit, I mean, if God can speak directly through me, and everything depends on the fact that I still think it's God independent of this, what's to stop me from coming up with weird statements? What's to stop me from telling you that the reason why your marriage is falling apart is because there is some spirit husband who is really a demon but is sleeping with you? It's not in here, but the man of God is telling you.

Let me push it further. What is it that's going to stop you dead in the tracks when I say the only way to get that spirit husband out of your life is by me sleeping with you? This is closed. The book that says you shall not commit adultery or fornication is closed. And that's what's happening. I'm constantly counseling individuals who have come to the end of the road and have said, "Enough is enough. There's something wrong with all this." And when they tell you what's been going on, it's disgusting.

But on to repeat, the issue is what ought to be the governing principle? Let's go back to basics. What is Christianity? What should we use to describe it and so describe it that we...we know that it can sail through all the storms of the ages up to the end of history? Here it is. "Sanctify them by the truth, Your Word is truth."

It must be tied up with teaching God's Word, understanding God's Word, applying God's Word to others. And to every aspect of life and living. That's where the issue is and that's what I want to end brethren.

Why should it concern you, this story about Africa, the bad news I've brought you tonight? Why should it concern you? I'd have wanted to say that you caused the problems, but I won't. (Laughter) Two things, however, and with that I must take my seat. First of all, Africa's current population is over a billion people. God is concerned about them. As He said to Jonah, you remember, and as He said to Paul, "I have many people in this city, we ought to be concerned about that." But secondly, and I think this is the best place to stop, Africa is strategically placed to be the next major force in world missions. Imagine if this is what you're now going to export to the rest of the world. It's a disaster. It's a disaster. Everybody who has the cause of Christ at the center of his heart should surely be concerned about this. I'm glad to say there is a growing Reformed Movement on the continent. But it's still very much a trickle and we need to pray and do everything we can to get Christianity back to the Bible. (Applause).

Before the Reformation, Roman Catholicism threw in a lot of traditions. The rubble was on top of the Scriptures. Liberalism came around after the Reformation and basically removed the air out of the sails by insisting on this book not really being divine. I think today it's that we are not saying it enough that this book is sufficient...it's sufficient. (Applause) That's what's happening back home, we need to say it again. It's divine, yes, but it's also sufficient for the purposes for which God has had it written and secured it for our generation. Let's pray.

Eternal and gracious God, we thank You that history has shown that when it's the darkest hour then You have surprised the prince of darkness. You have shown forth Your light, the light of Your Word and a new day has dawned. That's our prayer for Africa, that's our prayer for America, that's our prayer for all the continents on this planet. Visit us, O God, we pray, and glorify Yourself through Your own dear Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

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