

Stem Cells for the World

Text: Acts 7:44 – 8:8

By Ted Phillips | ChristChurchBranchCove.org | July 18, 2010

We live in exciting and unprecedented times in which knowledge is expanding exponentially. The medical field is one of the most fascinating in its breakthroughs. One amazing new area of research is that of Adult Stem Cell therapy, which one doctor refers to as *regenocyte*, derived from the same Latin root word from which we get *regeneration* or “to create again”.¹ This is a simple version of how it works: Stem cells are removed from the patient’s blood or bone marrow (embryonic stem cells are not used, so there is less risk of the body rejecting its own stem cells). These cells are then multiplied using naturally occurring growth compounds and are capable of developing into almost any other type of cell. Next they are injected back into the patient’s heart or blood vessels where they act as catalysts for the regeneration of tissue in the affected areas.² This treatment is part of the growing medical tourism industry because it cannot be performed in the United States, since the Food and Drug Administration has not completed its clinical trials. As a result of the lack of double-blind trials, there is controversy over effectiveness of stem cell therapy. However, many patients, who feel they cannot wait for the civil government’s approval for treatment of their life threatening heart or lung diseases, are willing to take the risk.³ While heart and lung patients are benefitting now, there is potential for stem cell therapy to help neurological diseases such as Parkinson’s and Alzheimer’s. Dr. Russell Blaylock reports,

“As these techniques are refined, the door may be opened to something we could only dream about – replacing damaged and diseased cells without surgery. In time, organ transplantation will be a thing of the past, that is, unless the government takes over all healthcare and decides such treatments are only for the elite.”⁴

We can only imagine the future impact stem cell therapy will have on longevity – the ability in God’s providence to not only live long, but to live well.

¹ “About Regenocyte”, Regenocyte Worldwide, 2010, 17 Jul. 2010 <<http://www.regenocyte.com/about-regenocyte.html>>.

² “Adult Stem Cell Therapy”, Regenocyte Worldwide, 2010, 17 Jul. 2010 <<http://www.regenocyte.com/adult-stem-cell-therapy.html>>.

³ Elizabeth Svoboda, “Stem-Cell Tourism: Adventures at the Fringes of Experimental Medicine”, *Popular Science*, 10 Jun. 2010, 17 Jul. 2010 <<http://www.popsi.com/science/article/2010-06/offshore-operations-crossing-atlantic-pursuit-stem-cells?page=5>>

⁴ Russell L. Blaylock, ed. “Stem Cell Treatments: A View of the Future”, *The Blaylock Wellness Report*, Jun. 2010: 9

The second century Christian writer, Tertullian said, “the blood of the martyrs is seed”.⁵ Like stem cells harvested from the blood of a diseased body, so God extracted his regenerated people after they greatly multiplied in the heart of Jerusalem.⁶ With the martyrdom of Stephen and the subsequent persecution of the church, the Great Physician injected into a dying world his own people bearing with them the Word of God, the seed of regeneration. Jesus promised and commanded his followers saying, “you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”⁷

The Greek word for *church* used in the 8th chapter of Acts, and about twenty times in the book, is *ekklesia*⁸, from which we derive the English word, *ecclesiastical*. It is also the word used by Stephen in his defense describing the “*congregation* in the wilderness” which, after multiplying in Egypt, was extracted and injected into the sin laden land of the Canaanites.⁹ *Ekklesia* is a compound word from the prefix, *ek* or *ex* meaning *out of*, and *kaleo*, meaning *to call*¹⁰. In the Greek culture of the day, it simply meant “a gathering of citizens called out from their homes into some public place”¹¹ and is referred to as an *assembly* later in Acts when the Ephesians riotously gathered in opposition to the Apostle Paul.¹² When Scripture applies this term to the people of God, the connotation is that the church is a community of people called out of the dying culture of the world. While the term, *ekklesia*, is only used twice in the gospel record,¹³ the concept is clearly conveyed in Jesus’s High Priestly prayer for his disciples. “They are *not of the world*, just as I am *not of the world*. Sanctify them in the truth; your word is truth. As you *sent me into the world*, so I have *sent them into the world*.”¹⁴ (*Italics added*)

Christ chooses his people, calling them out of the world, that is the surrounding culture in which they live, in order to transform and re-inject them into the culture from which they came, or in the case of a missionary, into a different culture. The ultimate purpose is *regeneration*, the creating

⁵ Tim Dowley, ed. “*Introduction to the History of Christianity*”, (Fortress Press, 2002) 112.

⁶ Acts 6:7, ESV.

⁷ Acts 1:8, ESV.

⁸ James Strong, The Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible, electronic ed. (Ontario: Woodside Bible Fellowship., 1996) G1577 ἐκκλησία.

⁹ Acts 7:35-46, ESV.

¹⁰ Strong G1537 ἐκ and G2564 καλέω.

¹¹ Strong G1577 ἐκκλησία.

¹² Acts 19:32, ESV.

¹³ Matthew 16:18 and 18:17, ESV.

¹⁴ John 17:16-18, ESV.

anew, of not only individuals but entire cultures. Jesus says the catalyst that makes this happen, that calls his people out and sets them apart, is *truth*: the powerful, living and facilitating Word of God. He draws an analogy with his own extraction from the glories of heaven and injection into a sin infested world to be the model for his church. We are called out, transformed and infused back into the culture as regenerating agents. In a similar way, the Apostle Paul puts it like this in a letter to the church at Corinth:

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a *new creation*. The old has passed away; behold, the *new has come*. All this is from God, who through Christ *reconciled* us to himself and gave us the *ministry of reconciliation*; that is, in Christ God was *reconciling the world* to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting to us the *message of reconciliation*. Therefore, we are ambassadors for Christ, God making his appeal through us. We implore you on behalf of Christ, be *reconciled* to God. For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.¹⁵ (*Italics added*)

The word translated *reconciliation* has an interesting monetary connotation in the Greek. At face value, it means to exchange coins of equal worth, but it also refers to making up a deficit in order to restore favor.¹⁶ So in financial language, God restores the world to a peaceful and loving relationship with himself by writing off a crushing weight of debt accumulated through unrestrained rebellion to his perfect ways. But *someone* has to pay! Christ was given the bill. After a life of perfect obedience to every aspect of God's will, Jesus amassed a flawless record of immeasurable worth. And so the great exchange is available to all who surrender to Christ, as the one making up our deficit with his blood of infinite value, exchanging our fatal sin for his life giving righteousness. This indeed is a colossal global bailout, but one paid for upfront and in full on the cross, not as the false messianic state pays with money it does not have and promises it cannot keep. Yet there is more to this Greek word, *katallasso*, which means to reconcile. The root of it, *allasso*, means *to change* or *to transform*.¹⁷ Our ministry is to bring about the transformation of the world with this truth: "*Be restored to God through Christ, exchanging your sin for his righteousness*". The question for us is,

¹⁵ 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, ESV.

¹⁶ Strong G2644 καταλλάσσω.

¹⁷ Strong G236 ἀλλάσσω.

how are we, who are called out of the culture and sent back into the culture, going to be catalysts for cultural transformation?

Culture is not an easy word to define. It comes to us from a Latin phrase which means to *tend, guard, cultivate, till*.¹⁸ This is precisely what the Lord of creation called man to do when he “put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it.”¹⁹ Adam was to multiply his offspring and cultivate the earth from a *very good, yet undeveloped* state, through harmony with the Lord’s design, beauty, and moral perfection. So from the beginning, the development of culture was always intended to be the human community sharing in God’s goodness, beauty, and truth. However, the Fall of man through willful rebellion, radically altered this design. Alienation, from God and each other, was the first consequence of this new state of affairs. Death, disease, and decay were introduced into the human experience. The downward spiral of broken relationships through mistrust, guilt, blame, anger, envy, and irresponsibility compounded from generation to generation, violating God’s expressed will and corrupting entire cultures. As they slipped into depravity, they ceased to value the things he values. Yet, the Lord did not leave man without a seed of hope. In his providence, he revealed the promise of new life out of death – a *Seed* of the woman.²⁰ As with all seeds, this one must fall into the earth and die before it is resurrected bringing forth much fruit.²¹ Paul tells us that Jesus corresponds to Adam, in reverse. Everything that Adam lost in the Fall, Jesus restores through his life, death, resurrection, and ascension. Paul writes to the Corinthians,

...Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ. Then comes the end, when he delivers the kingdom to God the Father after destroying every rule and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. The last enemy to be destroyed is death.²²

Therefore, Jesus is the new representative of redeemed humanity. By his resurrection, Christ has initiated the re-creation of which he is the firstfruits. His ascension to the right hand of the throne of

¹⁸ Douglas Harper, *Online Etymology Dictionary*, 2001, 17 Jul. 2010 <<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=culture>>.

¹⁹ Genesis 2:15, NKJV.

²⁰ Genesis 3:15, NKJV.

²¹ John 12:23-34, ESV.

²² 1 Corinthians 15:20-26, ESV.

God has established a new global rule that will continue until death is destroyed. As his called out community, we are sent back into the world to re-establish a culture that shares God's values.

At creation God made value statements. Six times in the opening passage of Genesis, Scripture states, "God saw that it was good", with a seventh reflection over everything summarizing, "it was very good."²³ The word for *good* in Hebrew has the connotation of not only being valuable, beneficial and ethical, but also pleasing, agreeable and beautiful.²⁴ Therefore a redemptive, regenerated culture is a community that seeks *to restore God's goodness, beauty and truth* in this world. As a result of the transforming power of the Holy Spirit, such a community will calibrate itself on the standard of God's moral law. His revelation is the unifying goodness, beauty and truth for which the world is searching. Even after the corruption of sin, God left in man a spark of life in his conscience, a desire to be free from the yoke of bondage and a yearning for goodness, beauty and truth, but an inability to achieve it on his own. The early development of culture is found in the fourth chapter of Genesis: Jabal "was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock... Jubal... was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe... Tubal-cain... was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron."²⁵ So we see the development of agriculture, music and technology early in human history. Ancient civilizations continue to amaze us today with their advanced knowledge of mathematics, physics, and architecture. In spite of their wonders, these cultures were not able to survive the accumulating effects of sin, corruption and death resulting from rebellion against God's moral law.

However, what character is to an individual, culture is to a community. Just as character is transformed through the regeneration of the Holy Spirit, so cultures can be rejuvenated through people who, by the power of God's Spirit, live out with a contagious joy, grateful obedience to a new way of life. With his law written on our hearts, the church, as a called out community, is sent back into the culture to cultivate the new creation which Christ, as the second Adam, has inaugurated through his death, resurrection and ascension. Our task is to restore to the culture the goodness, beauty, and truth which God has always intended.

We see it in the first century church, who were by no means dejected in spirit by hardship and persecution, but scattered about taking with them the regenerating truth of peace with God through the

²³ Genesis 1:4, 10, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31, ESV.

²⁴ Strong, H2896 תָּבַב.

²⁵ Genesis 4:20-22, ESV.

blood of Christ. Philip took that truth with power to a community in Samaria, and the truth set the people free from spiritual oppression and physical maladies. This resulted in a city transformed into a culture of joy. Goodness, beauty and truth were on the way to being restored. This, of course, did not stop in Samaria, but spread like leaven to the Greeks and across Europe, down into Africa and even east to Asia, all along the way transforming self-deluded civilizations and barbaric tribes, eventually conquering empires.

The same call is on us today: to live as a people called out of the world to go back into world to transform the culture with the regenerating truth of our reigning King. We implore them to surrender to him and exchange their futile way of life for his goodness, beauty and truth. We thus adorn the gospel, when we seek to cultivate beauty in our spheres of influence and calling. Remembering that delightful music is not just the hitting right the notes, rather it is the spirit in which it is performed. So, too, our tasks are not to be measured by just getting them done; its how they were accomplished that determines their beauty. Merely cramming facts and experiences into children's lives is no substitute for the patient nurture of a loving relationship. Likewise, accomplishing personal or vocational goals with collateral damage of people left in the wake falls far short of the humble servant leadership that Jesus modeled for us. Indeed, our calling is not just to make a living. In whatever we put our hand and in every relationship, we are to make it beautiful. Even in those situations charred by our own sin or the selfish irresponsibility others, we cling to the promise of God through the prophet Isaiah,

“To give them beauty for ashes,
The oil of joy for mourning,
The garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness;
That they may be called trees of righteousness,
The planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified.”²⁶

Though we still have a ways to go in reaching every tribe, tongue, and nation, the injection of a called out community back into a decaying world in order to revitalize the culture is just what the Great Physician has ordered. ✠

²⁶ Isaiah 61:3, NKJV.

Follow up questions to explore:

1. Culture can be defined as shared values, goals, customs, and practices of any group of people. What are the things you enjoy about the culture of your family? What are the things you would like to change about the culture of your family?
2. Cultural transformation happens when God's goodness, beauty and truth are restored. What ways can you promote goodness, beauty, and truth in your home, relationships, and vocation?
3. What interests, gifts or abilities do you have to change the culture around you in the areas of music, art, business, technology, agriculture, public policy, deeds of mercy, etc.?