



ANTIOCH
COMMUNITY CHURCH
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A Strange Visitation

written by J. Mark Fox

It was early in the first year that we started getting visits on Sunday afternoons from a woman who had a quiet, but mysterious, demeanor. She rarely spoke and was usually accompanied by her grown son who always appeared to be a bit uncomfortable. He reminded me of a rabbit who had been spooked a number of times. There was no husband.

I knew we were in for trouble when she first introduced herself to me after a service.

“Hello, my name is Mark Fox,” I said.

“My name is Miriam White,” she replied. (OK, I thought, so far so good.) Then she added, “I am the bride of Christ.”

“Excuse me, ma’am, wh-what did you say?” I stammered. I knew full well what I thought she said, but I was hoping I was wrong.

“I am the bride of Christ,” she repeated. I caught a glimpse of her son who was fervently studying a mole on the back of his hand. Seeing that he was not going to be any help, I leveled my gaze on the “bride.”

“Mrs. White,” I began, “You can be a part of the bride of Christ, but you cannot BE the bride of Christ. You see, the Bible is very clear that the church is His bride and He is coming back to get us one day to take us home to heaven. He is not coming back to get just one person, but the whole church.”

She smiled at me like she was a sixth grader and I was a kid who had just graduated from kindergarten and was bragging that I could “cipher” all the way up to my sixes.

“The Lord has revealed to me that I am the Bride of Christ,” she insisted. I was surprised she didn’t reach out and pat me on the head when she said it.

Well, that conversation fizzled out pretty quickly after that, but it was one of those times when you think of all kinds of things you SHOULD have said when you get home that day. I knew we were in for trouble with Mrs. Bride, so I alerted the other elders about it at our next meeting. Sure enough, it wasn’t long before it happened.

She showed up at church soon after that wearing a full length, white dress, a flowy thing that looked a lot like something a bride might wear. I whispered a warning to my wife, something like, ‘Here comes the bride.’

We had just finished our time of singing praise to the Lord the very next Sunday, when I stood up to ask if anyone in the church had something to share that would encourage the body. There were a few testimonies and thanksgivings, and then the Bride in White stood up. I didn't want to be rude to her, and I didn't really have a clue what she was going to say (that's always the exciting part of having 'open sharing time' at church!), so I nodded that she could speak.

"The time of the Gentiles is over!" she exclaimed. All heads swiveled as one as every person in the congregation turned to look. "God has closed the door on the Gentiles, and they will no longer be allowed to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Yea, I am returning to My people now," she spoke "prophetically," and "Israel will come back to the fold. But the day of the Gentiles is over."

She took a breath, I was hoping along with everyone else that she was finished, but the 'bride' was just getting warmed up.

"Not only that," she said, "The Lord says there will be a plague of ants on the earth."

There goes our church picnic at the park next week, I thought.

About this time, one of the elders (the most experienced among us) was bending over and pulling up his socks. I had no idea what that meant. *Maybe he is worried about all those ants that are going to be running wild in here any minute, I thought.*

I found out later from his wife that she knew *exactly* what the sock-pulling was all about. "Some men clear their throats when they are getting ready to stand up and say something," she said after the service. "Some men fidget in their seats or fix their hair. *MY* husband pulls up his socks!"

He kept pulling and the bride kept talking.

"The ants will cover the earth as a sign of God's judgment," Mrs. Bride continued. "The hand of the Lord is against you. He is against this church because you will not submit to Him and His Spirit. The day of the Gentiles is over!"

The would-be bride looked confident, even smug, as she sat back down in her metal folding chair. I could feel the sweat trickling down the side of my face, as every head in the place snapped back to full-frontal attention. *What're you going to do, now?*, some seemed to be saying to me with a sympathetic gaze. Others communicated a clear word with one look: *Set that woman straight!* At that moment, only one thought came to my mind, and I know it was put there by the Holy Spirit. That thought was, *This church is led by elders.*

"The Bible says to **test the spirits to see whether they are from God**," (1 John 4:1) I said. "Do any of the elders have anything to say to that prophecy?"

The elder who had been getting his socks (and his thoughts) ready shot to his feet in less than a New York second and said, “Yes, I do.” The swivel was immediate as all heads and eyes were turned toward this man who was the “elder brother” in the church.

“This prophecy is clearly not from God, but is of another spirit,” he said. “The Bible is clear that many things must take place that have not yet taken place before the end of times can come and the age of the Gentiles is fulfilled. ***‘The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise,’*** as Peter said, ***‘but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.’*** (2 Peter 3:9) There is also no Scripture that would support her prophecy that God will bring a plague of ants on the earth. This is not a word from the Lord.”

He sat down, I thanked him for sharing that correction, and everyone (almost) was nodding with satisfaction. Everyone, that is, except for the lady in white. She was looking through me with a steely gaze, a slight smile curling her lips, and I sensed that this little skirmish was just getting started. No sooner had I started preaching that I noticed motion.

You know how your eye tends to go to the moving object when everything else is still? My eyes were drawn like a magnet to the spurned, would-be prophetess, and I couldn’t believe what I was seeing. She was rolling her hands around in the air in front of her in a way that resembled a sorceress’s incantation, and then she was pointing both hands at me as if they were six shooters, thumbs up, index finger extended, other fingers cocked. Roll, roll, roll, shoot, shoot. Roll, roll, roll, shoot, shoot. This went on for about a minute and I tried, I really did, to keep preaching. But I knew I was going to have to stop and deal with this before she got even more disruptive. Already some of the teens nearby were beginning to gape, elbow their Dads, and point.

I stopped preaching and said, “Mrs. White, you’re going to have to stop doing that, or you will have to leave.”

Again, the swivel happened in unison as those in the front (who had no idea what was going on) turned to look.

She just continued the motion with a mocking smile that said, “Make me.”

I looked at the other elders and without a word two of them got up and made their way to the rolling, shooting ‘prophetess.’ They leaned over and whispered to her that she would not be allowed to continue to disrupt the service, and would she like to go outside to the foyer and talk? She got up, still smiling, and walked out the front door. Her son, hat in hand and looking like this was not the first time this had happened, sat still for several minutes after I had resumed preaching. Then, he got up sadly, and walked out.

I was shaken after that incident and couldn’t begin to tell you what I said after that. My bet is there is no one who was at Antioch that day who could tell you, either. But what preached the loudest was the response of the elders when a false prophet was in the fold.

Rather than allowing the wolf to have its way, or trying to coexist with the wolf so as not to “lose” a church member (she was not a member, but you get my drift), the elders had exercised one of the oldest and most-often ignored practice—church discipline. That made an impression on the young congregation and built their trust in us, their spiritual leaders. It also impressed a truth on me that I already knew but *love* to be reminded of—the responsibility for leadership is not upon my shoulders alone but is spread among a group of godly elders. When there is a need for reproof or correction, we seek the Lord for wisdom and act on what He tells us. (More about church discipline in a later chapter)

Paul said to Titus that he was leaving him in Crete to ***put what remained into order, and appoint elders...*** (Titus 1:5) What do the elders do? Among other things, Paul said it is the responsibility of an elder to know the Word of God ***so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it. For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers...They must be silenced...***(Titus 1:9-11)

When the elders of any church are willing to be men of God and men of the Word, and stop the mouths of those who would contradict the teaching of Scripture, the church will be blessed. That incident in the first year of ministry was a defining moment for us as a church. There would be many others along the way, and the Lord would continue to test our resolve to fully trust Him and His Word.

In fact, it wasn't long after this ‘visitation’ that the Lord really *did* speak to us about something. He wanted to see if we would be willing to humble ourselves.

This is the second chapter of Mark Fox's book, *Age Integrated Church*. You can find the book for purchase [HERE](#).