

WHAT WE LEARNED IN CALI

My dear companions in the Kingdom of God,

It is a special privilege for me to address you today even though it is only through a letter. First of all, it is a privilege to share with you what the Lord has done in our city. Secondly, Mexico has a very special place in my heart, for as I was working here as a short term consultant for the World Health Organization/Pan American Health Organization, it was in Mexico City that my husband asked me to marry him in 1976.

Please allow me to introduce myself. My name is Ruth Ruibal, widow of Julio Cesar Ruibal. You may have heard, through the Transformation video, about the wonderful work the Lord did to bring down the Cali cartel. It also included the story of our family because of the way the Lord used my beloved husband in the process and because of the price we had to pay – his death. It was at his funeral on December 16, 1995 that we experienced what I consider the turning point in Cali – as Christian leaders we made a covenant of unity. This covenant is well and alive today because, although it was never written on paper, it was written in our hearts – “We are one and we will not let anything divide us.”

We have experienced great victory in Cali – a story that has been shared across the globe, a story that demonstrates the power of united prayer. We had been dominated by the Cali drug cartel for a decade. At first we didn't grasp what was behind the increase in jobs, construction projects, new businesses, etc. because we were too satisfied about the fact that people had honest jobs. However, when we finally awoke to the fact that the jobs were because the cartel had invested their profits into these construction projects and businesses, and too much time had passed; by then the cartel literally owned the city. Not only had they brought in a false prosperity, but this illicit wealth came accompanied by violence, murders, prostitution, bribery and all sorts of corruption. The city awoke to the problem when it was too late because the cartel had bought off the police, the judicial system, the politicians, etc. and our city was in their hands. All hope was gone and we kept experiencing an increase in the most hideous crimes.

It was then that a few pastors thought that perhaps, just perhaps, God would move if we prayed together and sought His face as a city church. We set aside a Sunday night followed by a Monday holiday to pray that whole night in the coliseum that we had rented. In trying to estimate the number of people that would attend, we thought it would be a great success to have 2,000 people come, but would be satisfied with half that number. That Sunday night in March 1995 marked the history of our city. The Lord had made us realize that if He didn't intervene, nothing could be done and some 20,000 people shared that conviction as they entered the coliseum.

We knew that we were not praying against the cartel; we were confronted with a spiritual problem. First of all, we ourselves needed to repent. We needed to repent for not walking together as one body. We needed to repent of our passivity in allowing the city to get to such an extreme. We had waited too long to get desperate before the Lord. We had all suffered, anguished and lamented over our situation, but we had not become desperate and therefore we hadn't taken on our God-given responsibility for our city. So the very first thing we needed to do, and continue to do, is to repent as a unified church, seek His forgiveness and implore Him for mercy. It was only then that we could come against the principalities and powers that were behind the cartel.

It was a glorious night, one that we will not forget. The Lord's presence was there in a wonderful way as He promises in Psa. 133 – “for there the Lord commands His blessing and life forevermore.” His blessing was upon us and just days later we saw Him bring “life forevermore” – salvation to multitudes. We were so taken up with the wonderful night of prayer, that we were surprised when the headlines of Tuesday's newspaper read “No homicides over this three-day weekend”! Cali was a city where we had a least a dozen homicides every day, and usually more on a three-day weekend and now the history of our city was changing! What was different? What had happened? Naturally speaking everything was the same. But our God in heaven saw His church coming together in repentance and humility to seek His face and He responded from heaven. Ten days later the newspapers displayed another shaking headline declaring that the first druglord had fallen! To our surprise, the Lord had placed His hand into the situation and our city was being changed. Within 9 months, as we continued to walk and pray together, we saw six of the seven major druglords fall, and the seventh turned himself in a few months later.

That was almost 16 years ago and as we continue to walk together in unity, we have learned a lot. We learned that we must be desperate before God for our city. We learned that unity is not uniformity nor unanimity, but that we need to give space for each church to do the part that the Lord has given them to do – whether we are involved or not, we support one another. We also learned that cooperation is not unity, but rather a first step towards unity. Too many times city churches are satisfied to come together around an event – that is a good beginning. However, it is not unity, but rather cooperation. Unity is a revelation of God that we are only part of His plan, part of a whole, and we need each other to be able to fulfill the plan of God in our city. We all have our callings, giftings and anointing to do what the Lord has given us to do. However, that is never complete without the rest of the body of Christ with their calling, gifting and anointing. It reminds me of a jigsaw puzzle where every piece is important. Even though my piece may be in excellent condition, it is insignificant without the rest of the pieces.

We learned the importance of united desperate prayer – a prayer that is completely different to general prayers for the Lord to help us and work in our midst. We must have a desperation that says as Esther so long ago said, “If I die, I die.” In other words, “Lord, whatever it takes”. For God to intervene in our affairs, it takes death. I trust that none of you will have to give your physical life for the cause as did my husband, but it will demand death – death to self. It is the only way that we can walk together in unity – when we die to our ideas and desires to live for the Lord’s.

Only as we walk together as one can the Lord fulfill His promise to send “blessing and life forevermore”. Unity is not easy as it is challenged on every side. It has to be written in our hearts by the Spirit of God in order to be maintained. It requires humility and seeking the Lord. However, it is the means the Lord uses to reach a region for His glory.

Isa. 26:12b “All we have accomplished, You have done for us.”

May God bless you and give you His wisdom as you seek to see Him for your cities and country,

Ruth de Ruibal

Cali, el 12 de noviembre 2010