

Divinely Blessed & Restored



Invisible Institution[©]

Submitted by: Rev. Doris B. Ryans

remember....

**BLACK HISTORY MONTH
OUR HISTORY....**



As we celebrate Black History Month, I was reflecting upon the role of religion in our community. The roots of religion in the African American culture can be traced back to slavery times. During slavery times this nucleus developed as slavery religion, organized as their own secret and prohibited church gathering, known as the "invisible institution". Here the ring shouts, testifying, exhorting, preaching, and slave spirituals gave solace to suffering souls as they "stealed away to Jesus". It was here, they looked beyond their suffering, convinced that God's grace had brought us – all of us – safe this far, and that his grace will bring us – all of us – home. It was here, they traded sorrows, traded shame; laying them down for the joy of the Lord. Risking severe punishment to do so, nothing kept them away from the "church gathering".

Through signals, passwords, and messages in song, they waited for news that tonight was the night. Gathering in woods, ravines, and thickets called "hush harbors" and "praying grounds" they devised several techniques to avoid detection. They would form a circle on their knees around the preacher who would be on his knees. He would bend forward and speak into or over a vessel of water to help muffle his voice. Sometimes they huddled behind quilts and rags which had been wetted "to keep the sound of their voice from penetrating the air". Here they freely mixed African rhythms from their native land with singing. The Preacher delivered the word in "chanted sermons" in a unique, rhythmic, style of preaching. Slave religion was known for its expressiveness. The preacher's message of one's eternal damnation called for a groaning and wailing befitting of one's anguish and sorrow.

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Good news of God's gracious offer of forgiveness through the love of Christ's sacrificial death was received with shouts of joy and praise! Slave religion dealt with life .It was about pain and sorrow, sin and shortcomings, pardon and joy, praise and thanksgiving, grace and hope!

Sometimes one would become so "full of the spirit", the others would have to place their hands over the person's mouth to drown the sound.

For most, church life, was more important than anything. Forbidden by masters to attend church for fear that they might take literally such narratives as the Exodus and begin to harbor thoughts of escape from slavery.

Part church, part psychological refuge and part political gathering place for the occasional acts of rebellion, these meetings provided one of the few ways for them, to forget all their sufferings of the past week, and grasp at the hope, the promise things will not stay this way.

Our ancestors recognized and accepted the promise of future hope and present help that Christ offers. They professed faith in Christ in the midst of the storm. There's was a communal religion, one where they shared one another's sorrow and shared one another's joy. Deuteronomy 32:7 tells us to "Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past" and Jeremiah 6:16 tells us to "Stand ye in the ways, and see, and ask for the old paths, where is the good way, and walk therein, and ye shall find rest for your souls." Centuries later, we no longer are limited to an "invisible institution" yet in some ways we have made God "invisible" within our institution and our community. Let us be humble enough and wise enough to see the wisdom of our ancestors. *This month, let us Stand, and See, the Good Way and Walk Therein!*

HAVE YOU STARTED YOUR JOURNEY WITH CHRIST?

Our purpose in this article and daily scriptures is to encourage a heart-to-heart relationship with God. If you do not know God in a personal way, we invite you to make the first step today to receive God's love and the salvation that only Jesus Christ can give. Here are five steps you can take to receive salvation:

1. Recognize you are a sinner and need salvation. The Bible tells us "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23).
2. Repent of your sins. Sin separates us from God. By confessing your sins and turning from them you are forgiven. The Bible says: "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9).
3. Believe in Jesus. God sent His Son to die so that He could pay for all our sins. The Bible says: "For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life: (John 3:16).
4. Receive His Salvation. Jesus Christ is a gift you must receive and welcome to live in your heart. He promises: "But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God: (John 1:12).
5. Confess your belief verbally. The Bible assures "If you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved: (Rom. 10:9).

You now have been born again! Tell some else your good news and connect yourself with a church home as soon as possible. God Bless and Keep You!

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February 2010

Rev. Doris B. Ryans' Preaching Engagement

February 28, 2010 @ 7:30 am

Mt. Zion Missionary Baptist Church, Ecorse, Michigan

Make sure that you check our website for updates and upcoming events!!