

A PARABLE OF VISION

By Bob Moffitt

There once was a pastor of a small church in a very poor urban barrio of a large city. His name was Juan. Juan had recently moved into the community because he felt God had sent him. The church was small—about 40 people. They were mostly women and children. Juan had two jobs. He worked at another job in order to provide for his wife and two small children, and he also did his best to pastor his little flock.

One day, as was his custom, he rose an hour before daybreak to have a private time with God. He got up, dressed, and slipped quietly past the curtain that separated the living quarters of his one-room house from the area where his wife and children continued to sleep. He lit the small tin can filled with kerosene, topped with a wick. He began to read from his Bible. On this particular morning, he was reading from Isaiah, chapter 58, and was hearing God's cry for the kind of worship He wants:

Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—when you see the naked, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

Juan could go no further. His heart fought with his mind. How could God care so much for the poor, when Juan found himself in the midst of poverty and suffering that broke his heart? He knew how the people of his community struggled to survive. They were truly oppressed. Even he had barely enough to feed his family and often couldn't buy them medicine they needed. He thought, "Where is God? How can this Scripture fit in with the needs here in Las Pavas?"

While he was struggling with these thoughts, there was a quiet knock at the door. "Who could that be, so early in the morning?" Juan thought. He went to the door, "Who is it?" The voice on the other side said, "I'm Jesus, Juan." "Who?" asked Juan. "I'm Jesus, Juan," the voice replied. "Who are you, really?" asked Juan. The voice responded, "Juan, I'm Jesus. I've come because I heard the cry of your heart. I want you to show me what is troubling you."

The voice sounded genuine. Juan carefully unhooked the latch and opened the door. It was still dark and Juan could see only a silhouette, but it looked like who he imagined Jesus to be. "Come in, Lord," Juan said. "No, Juan, I want you to take me through your community and show me what it is that breaks your heart." Still surprised, Juan agreed, warning, "We'll have to walk carefully—it's been raining hard, there's lots of *basura*, and we don't have many latrines."

As they walked through the streets of the barrio, Juan told Jesus the stories of the houses they passed. In that one lived a woman who sold herself to feed her kids. In the next shack there was an alcoholic husband who beat his wife and kids every time he got drunk—which was often. Over there was the home of the *patronato* president, a corrupt man who extorted money on the promise of getting electricity for the community—but drank and gambled it away.

They passed an open place in the middle of the community. It was supposed to be a community square, but it was filled with foul-smelling garbage and scurrying rats. "See that house?" asked Juan, pointing to a shack on the brink of the hill. "A woman and four kids live there. The roof leaks—badly. They are very poor—they have very little to eat or wear, and they're almost always sick." By this time the two were at the edge of the hill on which Las Pavas was built. Juan pointed in the distance. "Way down there—that's where the women and children walk to get water. There isn't any water in Las Pavas."

Juan started to turn the corner, but he heard a soft weeping. He looked toward the sound. It was Jesus—Jesus was crying! Juan could see that the same things that broke his own heart also broke the heart of Jesus. Juan started to speak, but Jesus reached out and put his arm around Juan, looked at him, and said, "Juan, I want to show you what my intentions are for Las Pavas."

Suddenly, Juan found himself looking down on Las Pavas. Jesus began to speak, and Juan could see the things that Jesus described—they were taking place! Jesus talked about the people in Juan's church—as poor as they were—sharing what they had with their poorer neighbors. Daily, they saved a little rice and put it in a can. At the end of the week, they each had a full can of rice which they brought to the church to share, in Jesus' name, with community people who had less than they did. They did the same with soap. The church ladies visited the widows in the community and "adopted" them—helping them wash and cook and caring for their children when they were sick.

Jesus talked about employment, and Juan could see that the people had work. Not high-paying jobs, but jobs that gave dignity and paid enough to meet basic necessities. Jesus talked about housing, and Juan saw that the shacks that let in the cold and rain were changed into houses. Not fancy houses, but houses that were safe and clean. Jesus talked about water, and suddenly there were standpipes in strategic places where women and children were getting clean water. Jesus talked about sanitation, and Juan could see that there were latrines—not one for every house, but enough that everyone had access to one. And the garbage heap in the center of the community was gone. Instead, there were little trees, and there were children laughing and playing, kicking a ball. Jesus also talked about transformed lives, and Juan saw that the woman who had been selling her body now supported her kids with a respectable job. The drunkard was now a loving husband and dad. The *patronato* president wasn't using money dishonestly, but was really helping the community.

Then Jesus said, "Juan, look at the church!" Juan looked. It was full. There were men there! The people were happy. They were praising God for His goodness. There was Juan, preaching, teaching, and leading his people in the Spirit and in acts of obedient love. Jesus explained, "Juan, this vision won't come in its fullness until I return, but this is my intention for Las Pavas. I want you to share this vision and begin to lead the people of Las Pavas toward it."

Juan started to protest, "But, Lord, we're so poor!" "Juan, asked Jesus quietly, "who led the children of Israel across the Red Sea? Who multiplied the loaves and fish and fed five thousand men plus women and children? Who stretched the oil and flour of the widow of Zarephath so that there was enough to feed her family for three years of famine? Who calmed the Sea of Galilee?" "You did, Lord," said Juan. "Then, Juan, be obedient to what I have asked you to do. Share what you have, even though it is little. Proclaim my good intentions for your people both spiritually and physically. And I will heal your land!"

Juan heard a rooster crow. His wife coughed and stirred on the other side of the curtain. He was sitting at the table, but his lamp had gone out. It was becoming light. Juan looked around for Jesus, but didn't see Him. He wondered, "Did I have a dream? Was it a vision?" He didn't know, but Juan did know that he had

been met by Jesus and that he had a new understanding of God's concern for the poor ... and a fresh vision of how he was to lead his people to exhibit God's love in Las Pavas.