



SAFE HARBOR

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Paying Attention

The messages to the seven churches all come with the admonition, *“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches”*. Each church is given a warning and told to repent or to be strong. The consequence would be the removal of the church from the lampstand. From losing the first love and spiraling down into apathy and being lukewarm the picture is of the church which does not pay attention to the message of the gospel and ends up condemned. The message gone. The hope of bringing the kingdom vanishes into empty words and lifeless rituals. The writer of Hebrews also expresses concern, *“Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it”*.

And even with these clear warnings the church and its people are like the people that Isaiah was sent to who *“have eyes that can't see and ears that can't hear”*. We have believed the lie of the Tempter who would have us understand that we can have it all and that God will not punish the transgressor. So the message of Christ is diluted and watered down. Preachers stand up and proclaim a gospel of wealth and power. Teachers re-interpret words at their convenience. Spirituality dies amidst the buzz words of political correctness, diversity, acceptance and universalism. The congregations collect to have their ears tickled and their egos built up.

“For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, ³ how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?” Yet the great salvation, won for all of mankind by Christ, is being neglected by those who should heed more closely the warning about neglecting the great salvation God has provided.

The message has not changed. Jesus Christ came and died to bring the remittance for sins. He is the God-Man. His mission was to bring about a new Creation that would be populated by persons whose faith would lead them in a path of holiness, truly pleasing to God. The problem is that this message has become watered down by speculative theology, a surrendering to popular, secular culture and disbelief. Portions of Scripture are ignored because these writings are seen as being

out of place in a superficial culture that desires instant gratification rather than a long, narrow pathway leading to salvation.

In this way the Church, the body of believers, is guilty of neglecting this precious gift of salvation from God. We go to services, sing hymns and songs of praise, say amen to the ramblings of preachers but choose to live a life that shows no separation from the “world” and its follies. We ignore Paul’s warning that, “Though they know God’s righteous decree that those who practice such things, deserve to die, they not only do them but **give approval to those who practice them.**” If you read Romans 1:18-32 you can understand the nature of God’s wrath and judgement upon evil. Couple Paul’s listing with the list found in Revelation 21:8. These verses alone paints a portrait of the Righteous Judge, the Lamb that sits upon the Throne. God drove Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden because of their willful disobedience, but He also made away for humankind to be restored to full fellowship with its Creator by the new Adam, Jesus Christ.

That is the message we must heed, that in Christ all made be made alive and God will dwell among His people. The message shows in the lives of the children of God. These lives reflect the glory of the Father for all to see. These lives that were once dead in their sins are made alive in the new birth by the power of the Holy Spirit. We are not part of a dying religion but rather living by faith in a vibrant, living faith.

Revivals come when the Holy Spirit calls out for repentance and then faith. Let us heed the message of the ages. Do not be as the people Isaiah was sent to with the message, Keep on hearing but do not understand, keep on seeing but do not perceive. The call is a call to heed the message of salvation and not neglect such.

Reflections

We are fast approaching the season of Holidays. Indeed many look forward to this time of year for a variety of reasons. So maybe it is time to reflect on this festive time.

The first of the holidays in this time period is not religious nor particularly festive. This is Veterans Day. Originally a day of the remembrance of the Armistice ending World War One. This war had been the most widespread war up to this point in history. The casualties were horrendous and the face of the warfare changed into new devastation.

Today in America it is a day to remember the sacrifices made by citizen soldiers as well as their families. It is a solemn time commemorating those who have served through the year as well as those who are serving today.

As President of the United States, George Washington proclaimed the first nationwide thanksgiving celebration in America marking November 26, 1789, "as a day of public

thanksgiving and prayer to be observed by acknowledging with grateful hearts the many and signal favours of Almighty God".¹

The specialness of Thanksgiving should not be centered in football, feasting and Black Friday. We should understand that this is one day set aside for the expression of grateful hearts for the mercy God has shown to this nation.

In a way the celebration of Thanksgiving has its roots in the harvests feasts where people thanked God for the abundance of the harvest as well as the blessings that come from family and friends.

Next we move into the season of Advent which was originally a time of preparation leading up to the Christmas Celebration.

Christmas then comes quickly. In the Church Calendar it begins on December 25th and last through the Feast of the Epiphany, January 6. This is the most celebrated of the holidays. It is seen as a time of giving and sharing. It is the remembrance of the Greatest of all Gifts when God became man in the person of the Christ child.

It is true that we really do not know of the actual time of the birth. And many of the trappings of the festivities have non-Christian origins. There was also a time in England where the celebration of Christmas was outlawed.

For the believer the celebration is a remembrance of the time where God began his final work of salvation for all of humankind. So with joyous hearts and renewed faith we need to join in the holy festivities of the season. It is in Christ that our hope becomes living.

Words of Promise

1 Peter 1:3-5 English Standard Version (ESV)

Born Again to a Living Hope

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, ⁵ who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

English Standard Version (ESV)

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