

Stop Going to Church

2/12/23

Acts 2:42-47

Sunday AM

Good AM. I have to tell you that I'm just a tidbit excited today – actually, I'm pumped! The reason I'm so pumped is b/c I can hardly wait to see what God is going to do in/thru our church over the next (5) weeks.

Now... you're probably asking what's the big deal about the next 5-weeks. First, I'm excited about what we're going to be talking about which I believe can be life-changing for many of us and for our church. And 2nd, on March 12, (5) Sundays from today, we will be celebrating 50 yrs as a church. That's 50 yrs of ministry in PTC and around the world. 50 yrs of G.C. 50 yrs of God showing favor upon our church family.

To get us started this AM, I have a reoccurring story I want to share that's really not all that unique to me, and yet, it occurs to me all the time.

Almost weekly, I'll run into people in the community who'll introduce themselves and inevitably say, "We go to your church!" Of course, I love to hear when people are visiting or attending our church, and I'm grateful for each family, and yet, I'm always confounded by that statement – ***we go to church***.

This reminds me of a story, several mo. ago, while on my golf cart, I ran into a family who shared w/ me that they go to our church – **only I didn't recognize them**.

Toward the end of our conversation, the couple asked me to pray for them b/c of some family challenges they were experiencing. Of course, I did – but after praying w/ them, I felt prompted to ask which service they attended, if they'd gone to a LIFE Group or to Starting Point. And they told me they went to the service at the Bridge – which set off an alarm since we've not had a service at the Bridge since Covid. Come to find out, they didn't go during Covid – but went to services at the Bridge over 12 yrs ago and had only attended our Christmas eve services sometime in the past 12 yrs.

I don't share this story to shame anyone, but to make a point. In their eyes, this family truly thinks they go to church. But **LBH** – this isn't going to church. This is something else – but it is certainly not church!

As I've thought about this encounter (and others like it), I've come up w/ a solution that might seem strange, especially coming from me, yet I believe the time has come for all of us ***to stop going to church***. Yes, you heard me! S.T.O.P. (new word) I.T. Stop it!

I say this b/c of what I want all of us to GET – God's highest calling on our lives was never for us to just go to church – to walk into a building, sing a few songs, and listen to a sermon. *His calling is for so much more*. His calling is for us to be conformed to the image of Christ – to walk w/ the H.S. in an abiding life – and to **BE** His church by being His hands, feet, and voice to the world around us.

DYK that across our country, every year, some 3,700 churches are closing their doors – while according to the *Malphrus Group* – another 75-85% of churches are either plateaued or in the process of dying? **WHY?**

Well... there's a litany of answers, but ultimately, I think it boils down to too many churches having lost their way and too many churchgoers having chosen only to go to church – as if church is an event to attend.

As a result, as I've thought about it, prayed about it, and read the Scriptures about it, I've concluded the best/only solution to helping/fixing the current state of the church is for all of us to ***stop going to church***.

Now, I know what you're thinking! You're thinking he's lost his ever-loving mind, or at a minimum, he's lost his way; but I can assure you I haven't. In fact, it's actually the reverse – I've found my way b/c I've reconnected to God's way as I've been reminded that *Jesus started the church the way He wanted it, and now He wants it the way He started it.*

Listen. *God wants us to stop going to church b/c He never intended for us to go to church – He always only wanted us to BE the church!* Yet to be the church, all of our church hopping/shopping has got to cease. All of our consumer shenanigans have to go away and we all need to return the heart of the Gospel, the truth of the Word, the koinonia of the body, and the focus of the G.C.

We need to regain the understanding that church is not a *noun but a verb*. It's not a building – it's a body. It's not a feeling – it's a family. It's not an event we attend, but a community/mission we endeavor. **Listen** – the church has never been, nor will it ever be a noun – no matter how determined we are to make it a noun. Just listen to the Scripture about the church:

For it is by grace you have been saved, thru faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the free gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ to do good deeds, which God prepared in advance for us to do... Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens w/ God's people and members belonging to His household, built on the foundation of the apostles/prophets, w/ Christ Himself as the chief cornerstone. In Him, the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in Him, you too are being built together to become a dwelling place in which God lives by His Spirit. Ephesians 2:8-10, 19-22

You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own possession, to declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy.
2 Peter 2:9-10

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds, not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:19-24

In these verses, we learn the church isn't something we pretend to attend; but a family we engage/belong to.

So, *how did God start the church?* For this insight, we have to go to the book of Acts.

Let me set the stage. 50 days after the Passover – the day when Jesus was crucified, in conjunction w/ the Jewish Feast of Weeks, the H.S. descended upon the disciples in an unmistakable way and all-heaven broke loose. On that day, the H.S. revealed Himself, miraculous signs/wonders took place, Peter spoke, and over 3,000 people believed in Jesus as their Messiah and were saved – and on that, the church was born.

As a result of this miraculous moment – we discover what the church began doing in **Acts 2:42-47** – which I believe are the essential qualities Jesus wanted for His church at the beginning that He again wants today.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to prayer. Everyone was filled w/ awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together w/ glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. Acts 2:42-47

WOW! Over the next (5) weeks, I want us to take a deeper dive into these qualities to ensure that these are the qualities that mark our church and fellowship.

1st, we need to discuss – *they devoted themselves...*

devoted (*proskartereo*) the word implies continual motion and the willingness/ability to persevere on that which is most essential.

It means the early believers were focused on what was of God w/ an unwillingness to compromise or change anything that might hinder their faith or witness.

It means they were all-in w/ God and w/ one another! It wasn't every person for themselves – but rather, *it was all for one and one for all*. Talk about a different perspective from then until now.

Notice what they were devoted to – (1) the apostle's teachings, (2) to koinonia, (3) to the breaking of bread, (4) to prayer, and (5) to seeing what God was going to do next in, thru, and among them.

Today – let's focus on what it means to be devoted to the Apostle's teachings.

apostle's teachings – included (1) what they knew from the O.T., (2) what they'd learned from walking w/ Jesus, and (3) what they were now receiving from the H.S. – which makes up the bulk of our N.T. today

And the people were devoted to *knowing, living, and sharing* God's Truth. They were more than hearers, they were doers. Like newborn babes, they were hungry for truth – *to know God and to know His will*.

SEE – **the truth about the Bible** is that it wasn't given to us to win at a game of Bible Trivia – it was given to us to *know God, to discover His will, and to help us to navigate life* under His guidance/leading.

WTM – I want to take you to a really descriptive text concerning the necessity and relevance of the Bible for our lives and how we're to engage it.

My brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry, b/c human anger does not produce the righteousness God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil so prevalent and humbly accept the Word planted in you, which can save you. Do not merely listen to the Word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. Anyone who listens to the Word but doesn't do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it – not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it – they will be blessed in what they do. James 1:19-25

In this passage – James gets right to the issue of the necessity and importance of God's Word by telling us that we need to **HEAR** it and we need to **HEED** it.

I **HEAR** the Word

*Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. **Prove** yourself by doing what it says.*

hearer (*akroates*) refers to a person who passively sits listening. Like auditing a class. You pay money to sit in a class but receive no credit b/c you choose only to listen instead of participate. James says, don't audit God's truth – instead be ALL-IN on it.

Sadly, too many people today like to have their ears tickled and their opinions heard – yet the intent of the Word is to address the faulty issues w/in our hearts to help us connect w/ God and live out His truths.

So, James is going to teach how to trust/obey God's Word by having a proper **approach**, a proper **alignment**, and a proper **attitude**.

A Proper **APPROACH**

Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger doesn't bring about the righteous life God desires.

Notice the progression – *quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.*

James is calling us to carefully, continually, and skillfully put ourselves in a position to hear God speak by seizing ***every*** opportunity to be exposed to His Truth – and then to not get offended when it confronts the sinful issues of our hearts – b/c it will. ***God gave us His Word to clarify truth – not to clobber us.***

B Proper **ALIGNMENT**

get rid of all moral filth and the evil that's prevalent

filth (*rhuparia*) any sort of impurity or moral vice – refers to the building up of ear wax on your eardrums

Point – to hear/receive God's Word we have to deal w/ the sin in our lives and pursue God's holiness b/c sin cakes our spiritual ears preventing our ability to distinguish God's voice/truth in our lives.

C Proper **ATTITUDE**

and humbly accept the word planted in you...

This simply means we have a receptive, teachable disposition to receive God's truth w/ a willingness to

NOW – as vital as it is to ***hear*** the Word, it means nothing if you don't put it into action. The reason we **receive** the Word is to **respond** to it.

II **HEED** the Word

Which simply means we're to trust/obey it – ***we're to live it by putting it into practice.***

*Do not merely listen to the Word, and so deceive yourselves – do what it says. Anyone who listens to the Word but doesn't do what it says is like a man who **looks** at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. But the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it – he'll be blessed in what he does.*

doer (*poiete*) to be totally immersed – body, soul, and spirit into the activity for which we've been called. This is more than **practicing** what you hear; it's **becoming** what you hear b/c you believe/value it.

James does well to remind us that what is heard in the holy place must be lived in the marketplace or there is no point in hearing at all. *Barclay*

This means that Christianity isn't a **noun**; it's a **verb**! Jesus isn't going to say on that day – “Well *thought* or well *said*, but well ***done*** my good/faithful servant!”

Yet to hear God say – *well done* will require that we put into practice the truths of His Word – **and this is what the early church was committed to doing.**

Listen – these early believers weren't committed to amassing knowledge, although they certainly gained depth in their beliefs – they were committed to living out and obeying God's truth in their everyday lives.

This is a real conviction of mine. Too many people today think learning something about God is the be all – but that's false. God is far more impressed w/ our obedience than w/ our knowledge.

Question – in God's eyes, who is more mature? The man who knows (100) things about God and puts (5) of them into practice or the man who knows (5) things about God and puts all (5) principles into practice?

I can assure you it's the latter and not the former. God is far more concerned w/ our transformation than w/ our information. This isn't to say knowing our faith is unimportant – it is. ***But if knowing your faith prevents you from living it – then you've missed the point.***

*How can a young man keep his way pure? By **living** according to Your Word. Ps. 119:9*

Authentic Christianity is about knowing God and hearing His voice, so we can obey His will. When we tune our lives to His Word, He's enabled to work in us to draw us closer to Him and empower us to represent His kingdom in this world. But it's all conditional on hearing the Word, and putting it into action.

This means God's Word isn't a book to sit on our nightstand or coffee table to help us look religious and pious; it's His breath spoken to man thru the ministry of the H.S. to guide us in the way of the Lord.

A man entered into church late one Sunday asking, "Is the sermon done yet?" Another man wisely replied, "The sermon has been preached, but it has yet to be done." Why? It's b/c **the sermon isn't done when it's preached, but when it's practiced!**