

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

“... for such a time as this”

“For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then shall there enlargement and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place; but thou and thy father's house shall be destroyed: and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this” (Esther 4:14)?

All who are familiar with the book of Esther are familiar with this statement uttered by Mordecai when he urged Queen Esther to go and appeal to the King Ahasuerus to save the Jews in Persia who were about to be destroyed by the evil plans of Haman who had risen to power and had respect of the King for a while. This story of Esther is a beautiful example of God's providence unfolding during a circumstance that seemed to be hopeless for the Jews of that time. As we wrestle with the present distress brought on by the coronavirus COVID-19 global crisis, you may wonder what will come to pass and what can we do *“for such a time as this”*?

Let me offer some things to consider:

Don't fear! Remember that this crisis will end, but we do not know when. John encouraged those being persecuted in to remain faithful to the Lord, come what may. Said he, *“Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer: behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried; and ye shall have tribulation ten days: be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life”* (Rev. 2:10; cf. Matt. 24:13). John's statement - *“ye shall have tribulation ten days”* indicates that the suffering was temporary. So it is with the COVID-19 crisis. It will end!

Don't give up! Christians must be those willing to endure any trial that comes our way. Consider the example of Jesus when He was tried in the wilderness (Matt. 4:1-11). Don't be like the 3 unprofitable soils (hearts) in the parable of the sower (Lk. 8:5-15). Don't give up on your desire for the milk of the word (1 Pet. 2:2). Don't give up on reading and studying God's word daily (Acts 17:11).

Don't give in! There are many new scams that have risen as a result of the crisis. Evil people are creating schemes to steal your information and thereby profit off naive people during this crisis. Warnings have been issued by Medicare, the IRS and health care organizations concerning scams that are popping up. Be aware of people who are posing as though they are in need when they are probably not in need. As Jesus told His disciples, *“Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves”* (Matt. 10:16). Use sound judgment and due diligence and don't let *“wolves”* pull the wool over your eyes!

Don't give over! There are a number of errors and false ideas in the religious world. This COVID-19 crisis is unusual and all calamities are not the same. Don't give heed to false teaching and unscriptural material that is on the internet. A number of sound churches of Christ are offering online studies during this time when we are ordered by civil leaders to “stay at home” which is a good and needed effort. But, don't get the idea that when the “stay at home” order is lifted, you can “stay at home” when the saints assemble. Remember, the “stay at home” order is a temporary order that was issued to help stop or slow the spread of this highly contagious virus. Christians are commanded to NOT forsake *“the assembling”* (Heb. 10:25).

Give your time and thanks to God. Use the time you have to “stay at home” to catch up on your Bible study, Bible reading and praying to God. Pray for our leaders as they make decisions they had no idea they would have to make when elected to office. Pray for the leaders of the church as they make difficult decisions. Pray and give thanks that you are safe and have a safe place of shelter during *“such a time as this.”* Give thanks that our government is making provisions to help those who have been severely negatively affected by this crisis. Give thanks for the blessings of technology that can be used to study God's word and glorify God. How many online sermons have you listened to during this “stay at home” time?

Finally, when the “stay and home” order is lifted, will you be as thirsty, studious and prayerful for spiritual things as you have been during *“such a time as this”* every day afterward and in the future when things are back to as normal as they can be? *“...think on these things”* (Phil. 4:8). — *tgmc* ■

WHAT IS “FORSAKING THE ASSEMBLY”?

Chuck Bartlett

Many of us are familiar with the text Hebrews 10:25, that states, *“not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.”* The question is, just what does this mean?

Some contend that a Christian can skip a Sunday here and there, and since they don’t “abandon” church services altogether, these people cannot be accused of forsaking the assembly. Let’s take a closer look at this idea. The word forsaking in this passage means to leave behind, leave to desert. Does this mean that in order to forsake the assembly you have to leave and not return? It can, but not always.

Consider when Jesus was hanging on the cross. There is no question that he felt all alone. He uttered the words, *“My God, My God, why have you forsaken Me?”* (Mk. 15:34). This is the exact same word that the Hebrew writer used. This isn’t a discussion of whether God forsook Jesus, or if Jesus just felt that way. The point we need to see is, could Jesus really use that word in that situation? I mean, wouldn’t Jesus have to wait weeks or months to then use the term? No. One can forsake when a person is not where they ought to be.

If a child of God decides I am going to take a first day of the week off and I will gather with the saints next week, the scriptures are teaching they have forsaken to assembly. Why? It is a place where they ought to be (1 Cor. 11:17-18; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 16:1-2). If this is not true, then there needs to be a cry for consistency. If one can skip a first day of the week, then everyone can. If not, why not?

Also, this is creating a double standard. If one says I will be back the next Sunday – are they not expecting/demanding that the church will be gathered then? So, he/she expects brethren to be there when they want, but they can’t expect the same in return. That isn’t right, and we all know it.

There is no question that such behavior of hit and miss, is a heart problem. When the Lord demands to be worshiped (Jn. 4:24), and they have a disposition of – I will do it when it fits into my schedule, you know the Lord is not pleased. On top of that we have to be mindful of the example and precedent this sets forth for their children and other members. Jesus said that we need to be lights in a world of darkness (Matt. 5:13-15). Just where is the example of seeking first the kingdom of God when we would rather to something else (Matt. 6:33)?

To help to understand that forsaking the assembly occurs when someone takes a Sunday off from worshipping when one could, think about a marriage. If a husband goes off with another woman for just one night, can you really say he forsook their wife? Yes!!! Even if they planned to go back to their mate the next day, he has forsook the vow that he made. Saints are described as being married to the Lord (2 Cor. 11:2). Therefore, when we choose not to gather with the saints to honor our Lord, is that being faithful? We know it isn’t.

Even though we have clearly explained what it means to forsake the assembly, let’s look at yet one more example. In Mark 14:50, it reads that when Jesus was arrested all his followers forsook Him. That word also means to forsake, to leave. Notice that this word was used even though very little time has passed. The point is made yet again that a Christian can be guilty of forsaking the assembly by taking a day off from worship.

This begs the question – what does it mean when someone does skip a day of worship? The answer is obvious, they need to repent of their sin (Lk. 13:3). Local churches may have a hard time knowing if members are guilty of such, since many are creative in coming up with “reasons” why they couldn’t make it. The fact is, you might fool mankind, but you can’t fool the Lord. After all, you don’t have to answer to man, you answer to the Lord (2 Cor. 5:1). ■

Service Times - Sunday: 9:00 & 10:00 AM; 6:00 PM - Wednesday: 7:00 PM

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