

“THINK ON THESE THINGS”

Philippians 4:8

What Does The Preacher See?

By Micky Galloway

When the southern kingdom had been taken captive by Babylon in 586 B.C., the city of Jerusalem was virtually destroyed. Cyrus, the king of the Persians, was stirred up by the Lord and made a decree in 536 B.C. allowing the Jews to return to their homeland. Ezra led a group back and in 520-516 B.C. the temple was rebuilt. Nehemiah was commissioned about 444 B.C. by Artaxerxes to return to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls of the city.

Nehemiah, a man with a purpose, focused on the work to be done. He petitioned the king to send him to Jerusalem to rebuild the walls of the city (Neh. 2:3-8). Having received the good will of the king, no doubt in answer to his prayer (Neh. 1:4-11), Nehemiah went into action. When he arrived in the land, he rallied the people saying, **“Let us rise up and build...”** (Neh. 2:18). Nehemiah led the people with zeal and enthusiasm for, **“the people had a mind to work”** (Neh. 4:6). The wall was finished in fifty-two days and the nations were caused to fear (Neh. 6:15-16).

In Nehemiah 8:1-9 the people assembled from early morning until midday to hear God’s word read to them. The text tells us, **“And Ezra the scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose...And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the people; (for he was above all the people;) and when he opened it, all the people stood up.”** They revered the occasion to hear God’s word.

Please note that the purpose of the pulpit was for Ezra to stand upon it above all the people so he could be seen and heard. However, as the people could see Ezra, so likewise, Ezra could see them and observe their response to the reading of God’s law. **What did the preacher see?** The people lifted **“up of their hands: and they bowed their heads, and worshipped Jehovah with their faces to the ground...”** (Neh. 8:6) and **“all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law”** (Neh. 8:9). Verse 13 tells us that on the second day, many were gathered together **“to give attention to the words of the law.”** Ezra could see these things. Indeed, the people learned many things, repented and began to make confession of their sins.

In a similar way today, we prepare a pulpit for the preacher to stand in front of the people so he can be seen and heard. But what does the preacher see? Some of the things the preacher sees are very encouraging. Some of the things the preacher and others see need to be brought to our attention and corrected.

The preacher sees heads bowed in reverence and study, meditating upon what is taught. Certainly we are to meditate upon God’s word. **“I will meditate on thy precepts, and have respect unto thy ways.” “Princes also sat and talked against me; (but) thy servant did meditate on thy statutes.” “Make me to understand the way of thy precepts: so shall I meditate on thy wondrous works.” “I will lift up my hands also unto thy commandments, which I have loved; and I will meditate on thy statutes.” “Let the proud be put to shame; for they have overthrown me wrongfully: (but) I will meditate on thy precepts.” “Mine eyes anticipated the night-watches, that I might meditate on thy word”** (Psa. 119:15, 23, 27, 48, 78, 148). Indeed, we are **“to give attention to the words of the law.”** However, it is not uncommon for the preacher to see folks with their heads bowed in sleep, not paying attention to the mighty words of God.

The preacher sees some who weep because the word of God pricks their tender consciences, or they are troubled by the application of God’s word to someone they love. Indeed, Israel **“wept, when they heard the words of the law”** and **“stood and confessed their iniquities”** (Neh. 9:1-3). As Jesus came into the city of Jerusalem, **“he saw the city and wept over it”** (Lk. 19:41). Peter remembering the words of the Lord, **“how that he said unto him, Before the cock crow this day thou shalt deny me thrice. And he went out, and wept bitterly”** (Lk. 22:61-62). However, it is not uncommon for the preacher to see folks laughing and picking at each other.

The preacher sees some who are taking notes, studying or as Paul said, **“Give diligence to present thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, handling aright the word of truth”** (2 Tim. 2:15). But sometimes the preacher sees folks passing personal notes, playing games, Sudoku, tic-tac-toe, or hangman (evidenced from trash left in the seats). Sometimes the preacher sees people wearing headsets (not used to amplify the sermon). Such

distractions indicate that these are not really interested in learning, repenting or correcting sin.

The preacher sees that some have made preparation to study and worship. In Acts 10:23-33 Peter saw that Cornelius had called together his kinsmen and his near friends and was ready and waiting to **“hear all things that have been commanded thee of the Lord.”** Cornelius had made considerable effort to be ready for this important occasion. Sometimes, however, the preacher sees some not so prepared for worship. Some wait until it is time to worship to go to the restroom or get a drink and interrupt the lesson going in and out. Sometimes the preacher sees people gathered in the hallway apparently not having made preparation earlier to **“hear all things that have been commanded thee of the Lord.”**

There are many distractions when we come together. I am not talking about those who have to care for small children, or those with physical ailments that sometimes hinder their focusing on the lesson. But unnecessary distractions are unacceptable. These need to be brought to our attention and corrected. They hinder the quality of our worship. **“Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God; for to draw nigh to hear is better than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they know not that they do evil”** (Eccl. 5:1). – *Fifth Street East church of Christ Bulletin Articles*, March 23, 2014. ■



An Attendance Problem?

I am persuaded to believe that every local congregation has members who are not faithful in their attendance. These saints would not think of missing work or missing an important appointment, yet they often think nothing of being absent when the saints gather together for work and worship. Usually, it is said that members like this have an “attendance problem.” Is the problem really attendance? I recently discussed attendance with another preacher and his comments were as follows, *“Usually, attendance is not a person’s problem. It is but a symptom of a larger, deeper problem. Visitation and exhortation, with an attempt to figure out what the real problem is, would be all that I know to do. Most often, folks simply lack true faith and real conviction about the Lord, eternity and the judgment. They become so hardened in the world and are of the worldly mind-set, though they may not lead an immoral lifestyle, that the word is choked out of their hearts—see Mk. 4:19. I believe Mk. 4:19 is related to Heb. 3:12, 13, and describes that individual, who, though he may not be a moral reprobate, is simply given over to the cares, riches and pleasures of this life that he becomes dull and insensitive to spiritual and eternal matters. This person’s conscience may be as seared with a hot iron as is the conscience of the one described in 1 Tim. 4:2. We may visit, exhort, even “nag” such people, but it will do no good, for they are hardened and are oblivious to efforts to redeem and reclaim them. Encourage as you are able but understand that you cannot spend all your time chasing down those whose hearts are not receptive, being impervious and ‘past feeling’ toward spiritual truth.”*

An “attendance problem” is really the symptom of a deep spiritual illness – a heart problem. In the parable of the Sower (Matt. 13:1-23; Mk. 4:1-20; Lk. 8:4-15), Jesus taught in parabolic style using four different soils to represent the differing hearts of men. Anyone who has done any gardening can easily understand the Lord’s message in this parable. The member who is unfaithful in attendance could be represented by any of the three soils — the **“way side”** ground, the **“stony”** ground, or the **“thorny”** ground.

Let us heed the words of the Hebrew writer where he wrote: **“And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching”** (Heb. 10:24, 25). When a saint willfully chooses to absent themselves from the assembly of the saints, how can they give scriptural consideration to other saints? How can they provoke other saints to love and good works? How can they exhort other saints? The answer is simple, they cannot!

I once heard a preacher express this truth—willfully absenting oneself from the assembly is like removing a coal of fire from the fireplace. That coal of fire that is removed from the presence of the other hot coals will die out quicker than it would have if it had been left in a heap with the other burning coals.

Willful absence from the assembly of the saints together is a symptom of a dying love for the Lord, His word, His church and other saints. Let us strive to maintain an undying love and not let our love become **“lukewarm”** (Rev. 3:15, 16) or **“wax cold”** (Matt. 24:12). — *tgmc* ■

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

Tommy Glendol McClure, Editor and Evangelist - 925-759-4357

Web Site: www.lodiCAchurchofchrist.com - Email: lodicachurchofchrist@gmail.com - Phone: 209-365-9250