

Sunday, October 3, 2021 am

ANOTHER GOSPEL MEETING

Next week, we begin another gospel meeting. With past 2 years, it is good to be trying to get back to normal. While we are not there yet, we are trying to go in that direction. We had a good gospel meeting just a few months ago with Brian Haines, and now we have another one beginning next Sunday. Looking at my calendar, it has been a few years since I preached a lesson specifically addressing gospel meetings (about 5 years – 9/11/2016), so I decided to present this one today.

While gospel meetings in many places are dying out or being reduced, in number and/or length, I firmly believe they still serve a purpose. So in this lesson I want to remind and encourage you to be here.

I. To glorify God – always our first priority.

- a. All that we do is to be to the glory of God. 1 Peter 4:11 – in all things we do, God ought to be glorified. Romans 11:36 notes that all things are through Him and to Him belongs the glory.
- b. When we worship God “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23-24), we are glorifying Him. The idea of praise directed toward Him is glorifying Him. Romans 15:5-6 notes that with one mind and mouth we glorify God and Jesus. Whether it is singing, praying or listening to His word. He is glorified in our worship.
- c. When we set a good example – God is glorified before others and at times by others. (Matthew 5:16)
- d. We have so much for which to be thankful, both materially and physically. When we truly appreciate God’s love toward us, and the work of His Son we ought to glorify Him – Ephesians 3:17-21.

II. To edify us – this will be the focus of this meeting.

- a. The word **edify** is often misunderstood in our society. Far too many associate it with food, entertainment and fun – and that fits the definition of the word in our modern language. However, biblically the word is always associated with spiritual building up.
- b. One of the functions of the church is building up the body.
 - i. Ephesians 4:11-16 is a prime passage that emphasizes this. Note how it involves teaching.
 - ii. The focus of this gospel meeting will be teaching. In fact, the lessons prepared are designed primarily to build us up as the body here.
- c. While worship is its own work, a byproduct of worship is edification. When we seek to glorify God, we will naturally be edified in the process. God in His wisdom designed every act of worship to make us better. So by being here, you will be edified. 1 Corinthians 14, a passage addressing proper worship emphasizes how the message needs to be building us up. 1 Corinthians 14:2-5 starts with that understanding. This chapter, dealing with worship mentions – teaching, singing and prayer (1 Corinthians 14:15) (And the other acts of worship on Sunday are addressed in other passages in this letter (1 Corinthians 10-11, 16:1-4).
- d. Furthermore, by being here, we will be edifying one another! (Again, Ephesians 4:16) We ALL need each other, especially in these troubling times. We have emphasized that continually in our study of 1 Peter and numerous other studies.

III. To evangelize –

- a. This is certainly more challenging this year, but it is still a worthwhile goal. We must never forget the great commission – Matthew 28:18-20, Mark 16:15-16 (something we have emphasized the past 3 Sundays).
- b. Evangelism is a work of the church – supporting the preaching of the gospel and ensuring that the word sounds forth locally and abroad.
 - i. Churches were instrumental in spreading the word – 1 Thessalonians 1:8 notes that the word sounded forth from their midst.

- ii. Paul was supported by churches to preach the gospel – 2 Corinthians 11:8, Philippians 4:15-17, etc.
- iii. The fact that churches were growing and increasing in number by people obeying the gospel shows that they did what they could to reach the lost.
- c. Gospel meetings always afford an opportunity to share God's gospel with others, with more opportunities for some. NOTE: While these lessons will be geared to strengthening us, you can see by the titles they will also be beneficial for our friends and neighbors to hear these messages.
- d. Also, consider that by simply being here we are sending a message to the world that God and His word are important to us. Matthew 5:14-16.

IV. Because we need this to refocus

- a. The past 18 months have been very trying. So many things have happened, and we are still not completely through with this pandemic or its associated effects.
 - i. Sadly, our government has shown us that worshipping God is not a priority to them. And whether you agree or not, at virtually all levels, our government has shown an incredible lack of compassion for those who disagree with their conclusions and policies.
 - ii. We have seen the ugliness in society in the way we treat each other.
 - iii. But we have also seen this in the church – every issue associated with this pandemic has driven has tested our tolerance for each other AND in many instances driven wedges between brethren.
- b. All of us have had our faith tested. For many, either in part or in whole, we have become stronger or weaker in the faith. How have you fared in all of this? Can your faith use a boost?
- c. The Bible tells us that our faith will be tested, but it also promises that we can overcome whatever comes our way (1 Corinthians 10:13), and that, if we overcome it can make us better – James 1:2-4, Romans 5:3-5.
- d. Is the church as important to you today as it was before? This pandemic has made it easier to push participation in the church aside. Many are now relying on online resources (a blessing, but may they NEVER become a substitute for what God wants us to do TOGETHER!).
- e. Have we become more casual? With online studies, have we become more casual (How do you dress when at home vs. when assembling? How focused are you? More laid back or easily distracted in these periods of study? Etc.) **This is WHY we need to get back to assembling together, even in our classes?**
- f. An observation: While gospel meetings are an expedient and at the discretion of each congregation (and we need to respect the decisions of a local congregation), I am concerned that their reduction or cessation is indication of a disturbing trend (NOTE: I realize this is a complex issue).
 - i. Some say meetings are not effective because fewer people are interested in hearing the gospel.
 - 1. That may or may not be true.
 - 2. I am NOT convinced, that a properly developed and executed gospel meeting cannot reach souls. There may be fewer willing to come, but there are still those out there who are searching.
 - 3. And as society grows worse and worse, more are going to be open to the gospel for answers. We need to be there when they are searching.
 - ii. But there is ANOTHER trend that is MORE disturbing to me – members.
 - 1. We can blame it on a lack of interest from the lost, but the bottom line in many cases is, members are not as interested in supporting them.
 - 2. The reason gospel meetings have been shortened (and Sunday night and midweek services eliminated in some places) is because that is what the members want. (How often do you hear protests from the majority {There MAY be a vocal few} –

“We need more worship services”, “Make the gospel meeting longer” “Let’s meet twice a day”, etc.?)

3. Their busy lives are crowding out God (choking out the word is how Jesus said it – Matthew 13). In preacher discussions, I have actually read of some who said by eliminating Sunday night, it gives them more time for kids to do their homework and rest for school on Monday. I understand the truth of that, and a gospel meeting is even more challenging – BUT what does it say about their busy weeks? Are their Saturdays so filled up (with anything BUT spiritual matters) that the only time they have for kids to prep for school is Sunday evening? What does this say about sacrificing for God and putting Him first?
- g. IF you are struggling spiritually – YOU NEED THIS! If you are off track, YOU NEED THIS! You need to be willing to make some sacrifices (isn’t that what the life of a Christian is to be about? cf. Romans 12:1-2, Hebrews 13:15).
- h. P.S. Do not say, “Well, the lessons are being recorded so I can listen to them INSTEAD of being here.” This is NOT the primary reason we record lessons (and it is the primary reason we have chosen to not live stream our services). These recordings are NOT intended as a substitute for worshipping God. This pandemic has driven many to that point.
- i. So I repeat, Why are we having this meeting? Because we need it!!!!!!!!!!

Conclusion: The intent of this lesson is not about pressuring or guiltting you into attending this meeting. **It is about examination!** (2 Corinthians 13:15). It is about the heart (Proverbs 4:23, Matthew 5:8). I want to be here because you WANT TO! I want you to be here because you believe it is a way to serve and glorify God. I want you to be here because you care about the church. If you don’t want to attend efforts like this, you have bigger issues to consider.

Final note: (And I hesitate to include this lest it nullify everything I have said for some - TT). I realize there are some who have legitimate reasons why they cannot be here at some, most or all services during this effort, or regularly. Ultimately, such matters are between you and God. He knows your heart and your abilities, and He does not expect more of you than you can handle. Life happens, and at times it is messy and limiting. But because he DOES know your heart, he knows your REAL reasons and how legitimate they really are. Most of us can do better, myself included. Think about this and see you next week.