

“HOW SHOULD WE THEN LIVE?” (Ezekiel 33:10)

August 23, 2020

This morning how are we; as a nation, as Christians? What are the challenges? How should we then live?

Six months ago all was well. We were economically on the rise. “Those” people were still in their place. We felt good because we supported Christian positions about abortion and same sex marriage. Most of us felt healthy.

Now we are afraid. Hundreds of thousands of our fellow citizens peaceably protest and march while thousands are destructive. It has been very hot for weeks. 175,000 Americans have died from a virus. We wear masks and feel isolated. And we question why!

Is God trying to get our attention? When we finally realize we have no control over the economy, our health, the health of those we love and we are alone with ourselves and, if we are honest, we realize we are powerless. And we need the Real Living God.

“When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in this place.” (2 Chronicles 7:13-14)

Has our Christianity been defined by in-church worship? If so, then when we are separated from communal worship we are in trouble. Being scattered is testing our personal faith.

In six months we as a people, America, seem to have gone from comfort to fear. We as Christians who are used to meeting now often feel isolated.

These times test who we are: what we are. It is a time of introspection: what do I really believe. What does Jesus really tell me? And now, isolated, it is a test of our individual faith.

How well do I know God's word? Not what some book writer or video maker tells me?

It is "In him we live and move and have our being". Is this unsettling? We are filled with the Living God. But do we feel like it? (Acts 17:28)

Do we meet in the parking lot and sing and listen and then have six days of anger.

Jesus tells us 'it is not for us to know the times or periods that the Father has set by his own authority. But we will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon us; and we will be his witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.' (Acts 1:7-8)

The Webster dictionary defines a witness as someone who can give a first-hand account of something, testify to something, or serve as evidence of something.

I don't want to be a weak witness for Jesus. We are the people "God has chosen to make known how great among the Gentiles what are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." (Colossians 1:27)

"In Christ God was reconciling the world to himself, not counting their trespasses against them, and entrusting the message of reconciliation to you and me. So we are ambassadors for Christ, since God is making his appeal through us; we entreat you on behalf of Christ, with the message: be reconciled to God."
(2 Corinthians 5:19-20)

We must be more than against things. Can't we figure out a way to bring a message of being for something without condemning anyone?

To the unsaved, Christianity is not "the city on a hill" but judgmental, condemning, hateful, etc. This doesn't bring light into anyone's darkness.

We are not to be judges or law makers but witnesses. Where are we spending our spiritual, emotional and physical energy? "There is one lawgiver and judge who is able to save and to destroy. So who then are we to judge our neighbor?"
(James 4:12)

I don't want to be like the "Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Does Jesus see us like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth? (Matthew 23:22)

We must not dumb down Christianity.

We are to study: “do our best to present ourselves to God as approved by him, workers who have no need to be ashamed, rightly explaining the word of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:15)

“In your hearts sanctify Christ as Lord. Always be ready with an answer to anyone who demands from you an account of the hope that is in you.” (1 Peter 3:15)

The world seems eager to offer anger to cover fear about what is happening. We should not answer people’s fear by giving them something to be angry about – we are to give them hope.

To be people of hope we must start in our own hearts and heads. Our words come out of our hearts Jesus tells us “let not let your hearts be troubled. Believe in God, believe also in me.” (John 14:1)

“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled, and do not let them be afraid.” (John 14:27)

Christianity is a faith not a religion. Christianity cannot be co-opted and used for personal or political gain.

In frightening times people seek God. What are we offering them? What do they see and hear? What can the unsaved see in us? We are supposed to be blessed.

Jesus tells us what being blessed means. ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, those who mourn, the meek, those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, the merciful, pure in heart, and peacemakers...’ (Matthew 5:3-9)

Jesus tells you and me we are the light of the world. “A city built on a hill cannot be hidden. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14-15)

Yes, we are to live our faith and let them see us and our works but seeing us will not save them.

“How are they to call on one in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in one of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone to proclaim him? And how are they to proclaim him unless they are sent? As it is written, ‘How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!’ So faith comes from what is heard, and what is heard comes through the word of Christ.” (Romans 10:14-18)

If someone asked you ‘Are you now or have you ever been a Christian evangelist? how would you answer?’

Webster defines an Evangelist as “a revivalist or preacher who holds large services in various cities, now often televised.”

Here are Biblical definitions:

Evangel: the good news or gospel of salvation thru Christ.

Evangelism: the sharing of the gospel of Jesus Christ.

Evangelize: to preach the gospel (teachings of Jesus and the Apostles).

Evangelist: one who announces good news.

Evangelical: in America it has come to refer to one who stresses the need for a personal relationship with God in Jesus Christ by faith.

There are some believers who say the answer to what is happening is because all are sinners, therefore, there is no hope until Jesus comes. That is a cop-out. There is a lot for us to do.

Black lives matter because all lives matter. What does that mean to us as Christians? Today as Christians we cannot just be non-racist. We must be anti-racists.

Black lives matter. We cannot let this moment go by. Unborn lives matter. We do not have to decide on one or the other. To a Christian black lives matter and unborn lives matter.

God's message is all lives matter. Why does Black Lives Matter cause problems if we believe all lives matter? It should be easy to say Black Lives Matter unless we are uncomfortable saying it.

Unborn lives matter! Black lives matter! Police lives matter!

In this time of hate we are supposed to be voices of hope not covering our fear with anger. It is very straight forward. We are not to hate people but hate the sin. Sometimes I sense people hate Black Live Matter more than the sin of racism. To turn this around we must do something.

We have many programs to be sure no one goes hungry such as SNAP the new name for the old food stamps program. We have breakfast and lunch programs for school children and food assistance programs for pregnant women and infants. I think these programs would make Jesus happy.

Do we as Christians get upset that some cheat the system or abuse it? Forty-three million people were fed last month, July 2020. If thousands, even tens of thousands, took advantage of these food programs should we demand the programs be cut to stop the cheating? Or, do we say provide food for the hungry millions and let God deal with the cheaters?

If you and I see injustice and do nothing about it what do you think a Holy God sees? What do you think God thinks about our reaction?

Jesus says to us 'when he is lifted up from the earth he will draw all people to himself.' (John 12:32)

For the life of me I cannot understand the mask issue. Lay down our lives for another versus being against masks. What don't we understand? "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends". (John 15:13)

"Love your neighbor as you love yourself." (Matthew 19:19, 22:39, 12)

I hope no one calling themselves a Christian is against wearing masks to protect others. That would be anti-Christian

If you are my friend I will wear a mask because I am called to give up myself for you.

In this time, right now, people need to hear good news. When we who are entrusted with the good news fail to share it becomes a matter of life and death.

Jesus says ‘Not everyone who says to me, “Lord, Lord”, will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only one who does the will of my Father in heaven. On that day many will say to me, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many deeds of power in your name?” Then I will declare to them, “I never knew you; go away from me, you evildoers.” (Matthew 7:21-23)

“It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.” (Hebrews 10:31)

We must decide to think about certain things. ‘Think about these things whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is pleasing, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence and if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things.’ (Philippians 4:8)

‘God has told us, O mortal, what is good: and what does the LORD require of us but to do justice and to be merciful and to walk humbly with your God.’ (Micah 6:8)

We must not sacrifice our Christian witness at the feet of politicians.

The people asked Jesus, ‘What must we do to perform the works of God?’ Jesus answered them, ‘This is the work of God, believe in him whom he has sent.’ (John 6:28)

“We will know the truth, and the truth will make us free.” The great challenge of freedom is that if we are free we must accept responsibility for our actions or inactions. (John 8:32)

Remember God’s words. “When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, pray, seek my face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land. Now my eyes will be open and my ears attentive to the prayer that is made in this place. (2 Chronicles 7:13-15)

How important are our words?

How important is our witness?

They make a difference between eternal life and eternal death. They offer God given hope in fearful times. How we live does make a difference!