

December 1, 2009

Have A Holy Christmas!

“Where There Is A ‘Will’, There Isn’t Necessarily ‘The Way’”

Dear Friends & Family,

Next month will mark my 25th anniversary in full-time ministry. Having preached the gospel to all ages, from small children to senior citizens, either separately or combined, during those years, I have come to learn a truth that is both sobering—& frightening re: the human heart. It is the reality that the fallen & inherently depraved human heart, because it is made in the image of God, is still capable of intense spiritual & religious activity, interest, curiosity, & desire. I saw this afresh last week while studying Paul’s sermon to the Athenians on Mars Hill in Acts 17. After preaching Jesus & His resurrection, some of the Epicurean & Stoic philosophers actually took & brought him to their place of discussion & debate. This reveals considerable “interest” in Paul’s message on their part, to the degree that they would actually escort him to their “hangout”. They then expressed twice an interest to “know” & understand Paul’s message. Surely, this would indicate that they were prime candidates for salvation! But, it did not. When Paul mentioned Jesus’ resurrection to their further inquiry, it says some sneered, while others presumed they’d have another opportunity to listen again (vs.32). Curious. Inquisitive. **“Almost persuaded”**. **“Close—but no cigar”**.

The Lord Jesus Himself experienced several times the same tragic experience. So many came to Him with a display of fervent zeal, interest, & desire to follow Him, yet, when He confronted & exposed their real motives & lack of self-sacrifice, they quickly fell away. After the feeding of the 5,000, recorded in all four gospels but elaborated upon in John’s account, it says the crowds tried to follow Him; it says they tried to ascertain through much mental energy where He was; it implies they traveled a great distance to find Him—John actually writes they went “in search of Jesus” (6:24). What pastor wouldn’t drool to have visitors to his church do the same? Yet, when they found Jesus, they asked Him how He got across the lake, as they noticed He hadn’t done so in the boat with His disciples the day before. Jesus, instead of welcoming with open arms this considerable crowd, who again, expended much effort to find Him, exposes & rebukes them for their real motive in doing so: to get another free meal. On the surface, once again, the followers seemed so spiritually hungry. They would remain that way as long as *their real motives are not brought to the light*. As the dialogue with these same people progressed, they became more & more hostile, disrespectful, & arrogant toward Him! These are the very same people who *just moments before* had approached Jesus sincerely & respectfully entreated Him to give them “this bread”. Within minutes, they, along with MOST of Jesus’ disciples, *deserted Him!* These were the same people whom Jesus told, “You have seen Me, but you still don’t believe” (Jn.6:36). Just think—they visibly saw Him, with some even able to recognize the color of Jesus’ eyes! Some privileged ones were perhaps close enough to even touch Him & perhaps get a scent of His fragrance. This tragic scene reminded me of those referred to in Heb. 6: “...who have tasted of the Heavenly powers, & then fall away”. Here, after doing so, they walked away. Those in Mt. 7 whom Jesus refers to actually did perform miracles in His Name, not unlike Judas Iscariot when he was sent out with the Eleven to do the same, via, “the heavenly powers”, &, obviously, as with Judas, Jesus said “He *never* knew them”. This is terribly frightening, Beloved, terribly frightening, that one can see, hear, taste, touch, handle, etc. The Word of Life (I Jn.1:1), yet, not know Him!

“LEST I HAD ‘RUN’ IN VAIN”

The rich young ruler actually *ran up to Jesus & fell on his face* before Him! Surely, we’ve got a sure “convert” here! Not so. He diligently & fervently kept the Law since his youth. Given his relatively good track record compared to other men, surely Jesus would take this “young” (He could “use” his zeal & energy!), “rich” (another supporter for His ministry!) into His company. He did not. He exposed the idol of “\$” in his heart, which, as long as it resided there, kept him from loving, & hence, following God. Another told

Jesus that he'd follow Him, but said, "...**first** permit me to...", his mouth revealing his heart's true priority, to which Jesus replied, that people with these "conditions" in their hearts in order for them to follow the Lord are not fit for the Kingdom of God! King Herod "enjoyed" listening to the preaching of John the Baptist & regarded him as a prophet & holy man (Mk.6:20); yet, Herod most assuredly still died in his sin. Herod's tragic state-of-affairs (literally!) was reminiscent of the Israelites of Ezekiel's day. The Lord told the prophet concerning them, "...they come to you...& sit before you...but they do the lustful desires...& their heart goes after their gain...you are to them like a sensual song by one who has a beautiful voice & plays well on an instrument, for they hear your words, but do not practice them" (Ez.33:31,32).

"Curses! 'Soiled' Again!" It's intensely sobering to realize that of the four soils depicting the four different types of hearers of Jesus' words in Mark 4, only one "made it". It strikes deep within the soul to consider that two of the four had considerable "interaction" & intercourse with the Word, yet failed to produce lasting fruit. Jesus said that one was *truly* & genuinely a disciple of His if that same one *continued* in His word (Jn.8:31). John later confirmed Jesus' words in his first epistle when he related the event of people "in the Church" leaving the Church. John said they never really were with the Church, or they would not have left it (I Jn.2:19). Jesus said that tares would be forever on earth in the same company as that of the wheat & that they "appeared" too similar to decipher, detect, & divide them until Judgment Day. Hebrews 6 asserts that the "things & influences of God" can have a considerable effect on the very religious, spiritual, made-in-the image-of-God human soul, & still not convert the soul! **"BAR? NONE!"**

In the light of the very sad & tragic state of affairs with serious, irretrievable eternal consequences, re: the soul's susceptibility to the influences of God's Word, Spirit, & presence, yet, at the same time, without being converted by them, it is absolutely dumbfounding. It is at the same time horrific, that so many American churches in the past 15 years or so have "lowered the bar" & removed the "filters & screens". They have done so by toning down the message of the gospel, removing its many references to repentance, judgment, God's sure & holy fierce wrath upon those who do not repent preached by Jesus, *the* Lover of men's souls & the Apostles. Hence, MASSES of people have "flooded" their churches, & given what I said above, that the fallen human heart, though hostile to God, is still helplessly "spiritual" & religious, by lowering the bar, now these same churches are FILLED with tares! The mother church of all seeker-sensitive churches in our country, to my amazement, has recently admitted this! It's difficult enough keeping out tares when the *full counsel* of God is preached! To put it another way, Beloved, just think—If Jesus, Who preached (& was!) the whole counsel of God & rightly divided the Word of Truth, had so very many masses of people come to Him, in Person, *for the wrong reasons*, how many do you think are coming—& *staying* in our churches where His precious word is toned-down or omitted?! **"Sober Truth"** Paul is so often in Acts as "solemnly testifying" to the truth of the gospel. Again, when so very many approached Jesus with the fervent desire to become His follower, He Himself placed several "filters" to "screen applicants" that the Church today, by its man-pleasing & man-centered preaching, is not doing. While the gospel is truly & surely to "whomsoever will", to all who believe, etc., we must be sure we do all on our part, in the presentation of the gospel, to give a biblical basis for "why" those who "will", will! Jesus Himself preached that it *does* come with some prerequisites: self-denial, daily cross-bearing, the hating of one's life, forsaking family if they would hinder your decision, etc. Oh, may the Lord of His Church purge It of purveyors of these false gospels, who are filling churches with false converts! I so very much want to be one who pleases the Lord with "what" I preach, re: my doctrine & "how" I preach it, re: by His Spirit.

"A GUERTIN & CABOOSE! STATE OF THE UNION"

We are close to finishing my tenth year of doing living-by-faith itinerant ministry. Compared to the past nine years, this year has been very different. Below is a thank-you letter that Kim & I wrote to friends who gave to our work in the month of October. I'm submitting it here, as I told Kim tonight at the table that the

Lord always uses His Body to minister to His own. I told her in His Body are pray—ers, providers, & the “prophetic”. I suggested to her that I post the letter below, to give all of you a “what’s up”, re: what we’ve been dealing with, pondering, praying about, striving to be faithful through, etc...may our faithful God Who both called & equipped me to do His work, continue to do so in this “ambiguous season” we seem to be in.
Thursday, Nov. 12, 2009

Dear (Friends),

Kim & I heard from Elim Fellowship re: your gracious gift to us last month. It always touches our souls & humbles us, but, perhaps even more at this time, given the economy, where everything, both economically & spiritually is changing. Thank you so very much for thinking of us. We are in our 10th year of living by faith doing this itinerant work under the auspices & covering of Elim Fellowship. I would guess that my ministry has seen *at least 50% reduction in its workload* so far this year, compared to that of the past nine. I’ve often speculated as to reasons why. My first thought in the natural is “the economy”, but then my thinking quickly resorts to the fact that economy or not, the gospel needs to be preached, to both old & young. Another common speculation of mine re: this has been, “Is the Lord possibly changing the “venue” of my ministry?” Again, the desire & motivation is to still “go out”. I couldn’t help but wonder at times if maybe something might be wrong, that I’m not seeing, given the blind spots that all of us have. Hence, I’ve asked my pastor & other leaders & brothers that I love & trust. All have concurred that they don’t sense something is wrong. Another wonderment was if the Lord was giving me a (relative) “sabbatical”, as this coming January will mark my 25th anniversary in full-time ministry & I’m not presently on a church staff so as to receive such a gift. It was certainly a blessing from the Lord to have a lighter workload in the light of my mother dying this past September; in fact, two of my preaching engagements were canceled because of it, & rightly so. A dear sister in the Lord from VA recently emailed me & said she knows of a number of itinerant ministries like mine where the circumstances are the same right now. When Kim & I were recently at the altar of our church praying with another couple, the wife of that couple felt that by having this “respite” (in my words), when I did go out again, the ministry would be that much more effective. This greatly encouraged me. Hence, what do I do? First, I try to serve our own local church that we attend in any way I can. I then try to keep preparing, so that when I do go out, “I’m ready”. I preached this past Sunday in NY & had a wonderful time. When the pastor in NY asked me how things were & I shared these concerns, he said that the churches need to keep having outside ministry in to have “other” input from the Lord. May the Lord open His doors for me in His time. Thank you for standing with us in this “season”. Much love & thanks, Michael & Kim

Michael

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*[Michael is an ordained Elim Fellowship “itinerant” home missionary. For 14 years he served on various local church staffs full-time. Since Feb. of 2000, he & Kim have lived by faith, ministering “on the road” full-time, preaching God’s Word & systematic theology, using both visual aids & drama, to all age groups either separately or combined, as the Lord opens doors. If you feel the Lord leading you to help support this ministry, please make all tax-deductible gifts payable to: **Elim Fellowship**, 1703 Dalton Rd, Lima, NY 14485. Thanks!]

Ministry/events for DECEMBER and those not listed in last month’s newsletter:

Nov. 4: Immanuel Church, Wilmington, DE: Tabernacle of David worship leader

Nov. 15: Immanuel Church, Wilmington, DE: Flashpoint worship team: drummer

Nov. 19: Elim area pastors’ mtg., Medford, NJ (a.m.)//2nd pastors’ mtg., same location (p.m.)

Nov. 22: Immanuel Church, Wilmington, DE: Warehouse youth group worship team: drummer

Nov. 26-28: Visiting family in N. VA for Thanksgiving

Dec. 1: New Holland, PA: Hopewell Network pastors’ mtg. & Christmas luncheon

Dec. 7: Wilmington, DE: Urban Promise Children’s Christmas Outreach: preaching