

My Thoughts for Sunday, 14 February 2016

Passive or Aggressive

It's Sunday morning. The pews are filling up. People are chatting, socializing with those around them. The Pastor enters and takes his usual seat behind the lectern waiting for the preservice music to fade. People are still chatting as the Pastor approaches the lectern. He quietly stands there waiting for the attention of his congregation. Silence is slow in coming so he proceeds with an attention-grabbing question. "*What are we doing here?*" There is much shuffling in the pews as everyone wonders if this is a rhetorical question or one someone needs to answer. Gradually the shuffling and chatting come to an end and he proceeds with the program of service. He did not qualify his question or delve into any insight into what he was telling them, it was a very clear message for many there.

The well-known preacher and author, Charles Stanley, once wrote that there are basically two kinds of listeners at any church service. "First are the passive or nonchalant listeners who can take it or leave it when it comes to the Bible. Then there are those who are aggressive listeners. These people have a look of hunger on their faces. They attend church to learn more about God and to worship Him. They are not there to hear a pastor speak. Instead, they are present to hear from God." The Pastor might have rephrased his question, in view of Charles statement, more along this nature: "*What are you here for?*"

You see, this is not a rhetorical question. Rather this is a question we could and should regularly ask of ourselves on any given Sunday. Are we here to listen to a Pastor speak? Are we here to show that we are Christian; at least in name and appearance? Or are we here with a genuine desire and hunger for the life-giving waters that we receive from the Word of our Lord? I pray that you truly do have that hunger, that desire to be fed and nourished through His Word. If we have that hunger for His feast then we shall reap the blessing that John wrote about in Revelation 1:3; "*Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near.*" The promised blessing is quite clear, but what is John trying to tell us when he writes... "*for the time is near?*" As we become more familiar with the Word, we see this phrase appear throughout the entire Bible. It is a word of warning and hope to all true believers that the hour is coming when our Savior will come a final time to gather His remaining faithful to Himself and take us all to our final home in heaven with Him. 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17.

The time is now! It's time for all listeners to become aggressive. Give up trying to convince your friends and neighbors that you are Christian because you go to church. Appeal to your God for strength to live up to the fact and believe in your Creator. Be a Christian by being a follower of Christ, rather than just being a fan of Christ. Jesus does not need a fan club. Fans, as we all know, like to cheer their heroes on to victory. When things don't look so good for a victory many fans turn away. Jesus, on the other hand wants you to share in His victory. And victory in and with Jesus is inevitable! He has already won! Through His sinless life, death on the cross, and resurrection, He has already become the victor over sin, death and the devil... "*but now has been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and*

brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” He wants us to share in that victory for all time and eternity. *“The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law; but thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”* 1 Corinthians 15:56-57. Let your very being show the hunger you have for the Lord and reap the benefits He has in store for you through the Word. His Word is not filled with idle promises. Isaiah was directed to tell us that the Word of the Lord is for real. It has a real purpose and will complete that which He ordains. *“So is My word that goes out from My mouth: it will not return to Me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.”* - Isaiah 55:11

I was attempting to show a friend of the hope in my heart to one day be with my Creator in heaven. After listing for a few seconds, he cut in with a very normal objection from the unbelievers of today. He proceeded to tell me his belief that “All you Christians”, as he put it, “are all alike. You need this crutch to lean on because you don’t like the facts of life.” He proceeded with his tirade, “When you die they will put you in a box in the ground and you will lie there till you rot. That’s all there is to life.” My response went something like this; “Friend, if you are right, then I have nothing to worry about. But if you are wrong and I am right, you have everything to worry about! I prefer to believe in the Word of God, knowing that I have an eternity of happiness to look forward to.” It’s difficult some days to overcome the obstacles that this sinful world throws up in front of us, but I have to remember all the words of Scripture that I have learned. I remember the great exodus out of Egypt and the obstacle in front of the Israelites, and how it was the power of God that removed the obstacle by parting the Red Sea. I remember all the trials the early Christians were forced to face, including martyrdom and how, again, it was and is the power of God, through His Word, that ultimately carries us all through these trials to victory. I am reminded of His promise to Joshua in his time of insecurity and doubt in his abilities... *“Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.”* - Joshua 1:9

It is imperative for you and for me to become aggressive listeners to the Word of the Lord. He is giving us a very important message for our very life, our salvation. He wants us to know that whatever obstacles and hardships we might encounter, He is with us and He will never give us more than we can hold up under, with His help. *“No temptation has overtaken you except such as is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also make the way of escape, that you may be able to bear it.”* – 1 Corinthians 10:13 NKJV. Remember, the obstacles and hardships are merely temptations by the devil to direct us away from the Word and the love of our Lord. When these temptations attempt to overpower you, call upon your Lord for His ever present help and listen to His, ever-so-soft reply to “trust me”. He is waiting to hear from you and will never leave you to fend for yourself. *“Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, ‘Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.’”* Hebrews 13:5

