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February 2024 “They All Matter to God”

Dear Friend,

Over the past few years there has been increased talk about an end-time outpouring of God’s Spirit and a world-wide revival that will result in millions of people accepting Jesus as Savior. That outpouring and revival are taking place right now. Even as you are reading this letter, reports are coming from all over the world about people putting their faith in Jesus to be born again. This is happening in free nations, communist nations, Muslim nations, Buddhist nations, Hindu nations and more.

It’s not surprising if you have heard little or nothing about this revival, but it is happening. Several years ago, the Holy Spirit shared with me that this outpouring and revival would be different from any other move of God throughout history. Notable revivals in the past, such as the Welsh Revival, the First Great Awakening, the Second Great Awakening, Cane Ridge, the Layman’s Prayer Revival, Azusa, Brownsville and others, received a great amount of media attention and people traveled from many nations just to witness what God was doing. But in this latter-day revival the Holy Spirit explained that it would not receive media attention as those in the past; millions of souls would be harvested into the Kingdom, yet the majority of the lost and Christians would hear very little about this outpouring. That is precisely what is taking place at this very moment.

The Holy Spirit also corrected my thinking about people who would be born again during this end-time outpouring. He explained that the primary goals are for the lost to be saved and backsliders restored in fellowship with God, and – in what may be a shock to many Pentecostals and Charismatics – those saved and restored being filled with the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues is secondary. He went on to explain that God knows the hearts and minds of every person, and there are some who simply will not accept the idea of a “personal Day of Pentecost” resulting in the baptism of the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues. Although they will be missing out on so much that God can do in their lives, they will at least be a part of His Kingdom and spend eternity with Him as His sons and daughters. Remember, Jesus said “Ye must be born again” (John 3:7), not, “Ye must speak in tongues.”

Furthermore, the Holy Spirit lovingly reminded me that this revival is not about the growth of the church I pastor, but about Kingdom growth. Yes, Kingdom growth can – and will – result in the growth of churches that believe in the full manifestation of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit; but it will also result in the growth of churches that do not believe in the present-day manifestation of those gifts, yet do not corrupt the doctrine of salvation that comes exclusively through faith in Jesus. If any church or preacher corrupts that foundation and leads people into that corruption, they face eternity in the lake of fire.

Something else that has captured the attention of groups tracking evangelism throughout the world is that the fastest growing segment of Christianity is what is referred to as Charismatic. In the simplest terms, Charismatic Christianity is defined as “Christians who believe in the present-day manifestation of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit as described in 1 Corinthians chapter 12.” Not

only is God pouring out of His Spirit upon all flesh, but Christians world-wide are choosing to receive from God's Spirit.

I live in what is referred to as "the Miami Valley," so named because the Great Miami River flows through the region. A confession I make almost daily concerning revival is, *Father, I thank You for continuing to pour out of Your Spirit upon all flesh in the Miami Valley. I call the Miami Valley in revival. I say, the lost, backsliders, and those seeking for more of You are coming in from the east, west, north, and south, and are sitting down in the Kingdom of God. They are following You as You lead them into churches that You know would be cities of habitation and tabernacles of refuge for each of them.* (That confession is based on the following scriptures: Joel 2:27-29, Acts 2:17-18, Psalm 107:1-3, Luke 13:29, Psalm 107:6-7, and Isaiah 4:5-6.)

One day, while praying and making that confession the Holy Spirit asked this question, "When they are coming in from the east, west, north and south, what will they see and hear from you (the congregation)?" As I thought on what He had asked, He began helping me understand more clearly what is happening so much throughout the Body of Christ.

Not long ago, the United Methodist Denomination decided that performing same-sex marriages and ordaining into ministry people involved in same-sex relationships is permissible and accepted. This created a massive firestorm, resulting in an untold number of UM churches leaving that denomination, along with people leaving UM churches which chose to adhere to that terrible heresy.

Then, within the past couple of months, the Pope declared that priests could bless same-sex relationships. According to the document released by the Pope: "For, those seeking a blessing should not be required to have prior moral perfection. There is no intention to legitimize anything, but rather to open one's life to God, to ask for his help to live better, and also to invoke the Holy Spirit so that the values of the Gospel may be lived with greater faithfulness." In other words, living a holy life as God has described in the Bible is no longer important. The shock and outcry within Catholicism has been intensely passionate. I think we've only begun to see the fallout from that blasphemous decision.

God is, indeed, shaking all that can be shaken (Hebrews 12:23-27), and judgement absolutely is taking place in the Church (1 Peter 4:17).

One aspect that I have noticed pertaining to the revival is how some Christians appear to have prioritized who needs to hear the gospel of salvation. This has become very apparent in the way many speak and in what is happening in their church services. Many Christians and church leaders talk about reaching "the next generation," and how "the next generation" is the future of the Church. Generally, "the next generation" seems to imply those in their teens, twenties, and early thirties. Don't misunderstand, I am in 100% agreement that people in those age groups need to be reached with the gospel. But at what cost? What is being sacrificed to reach them? What about those who are older than "the next generation"?

I have watched a great number of church worship service videos on social media. During the videos various cameras show not only the worship team, but also those in the congregation. Notably absent in nearly all the videos are numerous adults who appear to be aged 50 and beyond mixed in with those in "the next generation." This is quite alarming, but not surprising.

Generally, these videos have excellent songs which speak of the greatness of God, what He has done for us, and who we are in Him. Yet at the same time, many of them feature worship team members dressed in T-shirts, worn jeans (some with holes), baseball caps, flip-flop beach sandals, “unique” hairstyles and colors, shorts, clothing that reveals bodies covered in tattoos, numerous facial piercings, women in very tight-fitting pants or skirts/dresses so short or low-cut that bending over presents no modesty whatsoever, and so on. Furthermore, many of the worship services include flashing lights, fog machines, laser light shows, a variety of background video presentations, darkened sanctuaries, and more. In other words, the appearance is that of a secular rock concert and of people going out for “a night on the town” instead of gathering in the presence of a Holy God to worship their Lord and Savior. Stated differently, they are trying to fit in with and be accepted by the world, wrapping their efforts in the Name of Jesus.

No doubt some people might say, “Brother Jim, you’re old and clueless.” Well, I won’t argue about the age part, but I am definitely not clueless. What I have described in the previous paragraph is a conscious, specific effort to reach that exclusive age group of those in their 30’s and younger. It is absolutely NOT an effort to reach “whosoever will” of any age.

Not long ago, an article in our local newspaper featured interviews with various pastors concerning church attendance and what they are doing in their churches. I was shocked when I read one pastor share that their church is focused entirely on reaching people in their 30’s and under. Excuse me? Can you imagine God telling a pastor to focus entirely on people in their 30’s and under? I thought the gospel, evangelism and discipleship are for all ages. It’s one thing to have classes for specific age groups, but for an entire church to direct its efforts in that way is extremely counterproductive to the Great Commission given by Jesus.

Services in Catholic and United Methodist churches tend to be rather conservative, including the way people dress to attend. The same is true for typical Baptist, Nazarene, Presbyterian, and Lutheran churches, to name a few. In this outpouring and revival, imagine people from those churches being touched by God and they start hungering and seeking for more of His truth, presence and power. They leave their church and visit a church similar to what I’ve described in previous paragraphs. How do you think they’re going to react? I’ll tell you how they’ll react: Many, if not most, will leave and never return. Their impression will be something along the lines of, “Those people have no respect for God or the house of God.” Their criticism won’t be so much about the songs, but about the appearance of those who are supposed to be leading the congregation into the presence of God through worship.

What about people in their 60’s, 70’s, 80’s and 90’s? They were raised in a more conservative era when it came to how people dressed for school, work, social events, and especially church attendance. Even lost people in those age ranges who rarely ever attended church were raised with an understanding that a person dressed appropriately when attending a church service (I remember when men would remove their hats and caps when entering church out of respect for the Lord). Do we not have a responsibility to reach them with the gospel and disciple them toward a deeper walk in Christ? How do you think they’re going to react when walking into a church service that’s more secular and Hollywood than respectful and holy?

Consider what God has said in His Word about this matter,

And the Lord said unto Moses, Go unto the people, and sanctify them to day and to morrow, and let them wash their clothes, And be ready against the third day: for

the third day the Lord will come down in the sight of all the people upon mount Sinai. (Exodus 19:10-11)

Then David arose from the earth, and washed, and anointed himself, and changed his apparel, and came into the house of the Lord, and worshiped: then he came to his own house; and when he required, they set bread before him, and he did eat. (2 Samuel 12:20)

And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him. (Colossians 3:17)

Those who come from conservative churches, as well as those in their 60's and beyond, are not going to walk into churches they visit expecting all the men to be dressed in suits and ties and all the women wearing fancy dresses. But there will be the anticipation that those in leadership and on the platform will be dressed in a way that expresses honor, respect, love and gratitude for the One Who bore their sin on the cross and gave them everlasting life. Furthermore, the lost need to see a difference between the bar they walked out of on Saturday night and the church they walked into on Sunday morning.

You may not be aware of it, but you are the focus of attention. This will be especially true as the fruit of revival – people who fully yield to God – are coming into your church. Your word-and-deed testimony is critically important. Consider what God has warned in James 4:4,

Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.

The word “friendship” in this verse comes from the Greek word “philia” which means, “to befriend, love, kiss; love, friendship, fondness; (it) involves the adopting of the interests of the world to be one's own.” In the above verse, God is saying that Christians who adopt the interests of the world over their relationship with Him are an enemy of His. That is very strong language, but that is how God views compromise. The problem is that so much of the world has been allowed to infiltrate churches that Christians no longer view it as compromise.

If you were asked to share a testimony or short exhortation during next week's church service, would you come prayed up, studied up, showered up, laundered up, and ready to go? Or would you compromise your appearance to fit in with a specific age group, wanting to look cool and be accepted by people whose approval you're seeking? Wouldn't it be wise to approach your church attendance in a manner that pleases God? Another person's spiritual shortcomings can never be allowed to set the course for your own spiritual growth. To do so is exalting the failures and wrong choices of others above the unchangeable truth of God's Word.

Yes, I know some people may severely criticize what I'm sharing in this letter. But keep in mind the goal is to reach everybody in every age group with God's message of salvation, healing, deliverance, restoration, hope. In Exodus chapter 28 God details the ornate manner in which the priests were to dress before entering His presence; it was a **REQUIREMENT**, and they were absolutely forbidden to wear anything else.

Both Revelation 1:6 and 5:10 state that Jesus has made us kings and priests unto God. Though He does not demand we dress in the same elaborate manner as the Old Testament Jewish priests,

do you think our liberty in Christ means God now has the attitude of “dress however you want when you go to church to serve Me; it doesn’t matter how you look or how it impacts others”? I have news for you: If it mattered to God how priests looked who were not washed in the blood of Jesus and born of His life and nature, it matters to Him today.

Again, this is not about taking a legalistic approach to appearance. Yes, we have liberty in Christ, but this liberty could be described by Galatians 5:13,

For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.

My desire is to honor God in my appearance at church and serve others out of honoring Him. I do not want to be a stumbling block to anyone of any age who comes to our church. I want the lost, backsliders and spiritually hungry to come in and recognize that those in any leadership capacity have a respect for God and for His church. Shouldn’t we all want the same?

In His Grace,

Jim

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