

THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE

"...then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel..." (Amos 7:8)

YOU SHOULD'VE SEEN WHAT HAPPENED SUNDAY!

The view from the pulpit is often interesting. People are so used to watching unresponsive TV and computer screens that they forget preachers can see them! After a while, the unexpected becomes commonplace, and he is able to keep his composure though "the walls come tumbling down."

When Christians gather for worship on the Lord's Day, something special happens. Their common bond is strengthened as in concert they pour out their gratitude to their Savior. It is a time of worship (Acts 20:7; I Corinthians 16:1-2), rejoicing (Psalm 118:24), examination (II Corinthians 13:5), and fellowship (Acts 2:42-47). It is the week's beginning and the week's highlight—nothing else done in the next six days equals it. We understand why Paul delayed a journey for seven days so he could worship the Lord on the Lord's day with the Lord's people (Acts 20:6-7).

People of all ages are usually present: babies, children, teens, young adults, families, empty-nest couples, senior adults, widows, and widowers. Each comes to express a common love for an uncommon God; each feels a universal thirst for eternal truth. While worship is formal and congregational, it is neither cold nor impersonal—it is "in spirit" (John 4:24). Personalities are involved, and that can make it interesting. This past Lord's day we had an uncommon service. You should have seen what happened...

A BABY CRIED. Occasionally someone frowns when a child cries during services, but most of us smile. Parents recognize the need to take a child out to avoid disturbing others, but we don't want them to feel self-conscious. We are glad it happens! What if no baby had cried Sunday? It would have meant there were no babies there, for all babies cry. Now church want to be *that* quiet—a tomb is quieter than a nursery, but who wants to worship in a cemetery? A church without children is a church with its best days behind instead of ahead. If no babies had cried Sunday, it might also have indicated that parents saw no need to train the next generation in the Lord's way (Ephesians 6:4). Good parents want children to learn about God from their first Sunday on planet earth (cf. Matthew 18:13-; 19:13-14). They do not want them to be able to remember the first time they came to worship. We know they'll eventually learn to be quiet, but for now we're glad to hear them.

A SISTER LEFT EARLY FOR WORK. In a perfect world, all businesses would close on the Lord's day so that every person could exalt the name of God in worship (Psalm 34:3). It will be that way in heaven, but it is not that way on earth. Christians are sometimes forced to make decisions. This sister had to be at work before the service ended...what to do? She could have skipped the service and told others that she "had to work." She could have slept in, had plenty of time to get ready, left in time to avoid traffic, and got a bite to eat before her shift. But she chose to get up early, be in Bible class, sing God some songs, open her heart to Him in prayer, thank him for Christ's sacrifice during communion, give Him part of last week's check, and listen to His Word. She sat toward the back so as not to disturb others when she got up a few minutes before the sermon ended. Few saw her sermon on priorities (Matthew 6:33; Colossians 3:1-2) - but the preacher did.

PAGES RUSTLED. As the messenger preached the word (II Timothy 4:2), hearers "searched the scriptures to see whether those things were so" (Acts 17:11). Far from offending him, it was music to his ears. Jesus found "the place where it was written" (Luke 4:17), and so should we. We joke that our favorite words in a sermon are "in conclusion," but we find most Christians thirsty for the Word (I Peter 2:2) and hungering after righteousness (Matthew 5:8). They bring their Bibles, read their Bibles, mark their Bibles, memorize their Bibles, and live by their Bibles.

A SISTER NODDED. No one except the preacher probably noticed, but a faithful sister nodded in agreement with a sermon point. She would not speak out to say "amen" like her husband (I Corinthians 14:34; I Timothy 2:11), but she encouraged the

WILL A MAN ROB GOD?

Text: _____

- I. Robbing God of our _____
 - A. _____ as _____
 - B. _____ as a _____
- II. Robbing God of our _____
 - A. _____ of _____
 - B. _____ of _____
- III. Robbing God of our _____
 - A. _____ through _____
 - B. _____ through _____

KINSMAN COMMITMENT

Text: _____

- I. Commitment from _____ to _____
 - A. Do not _____ children to _____
 - B. Bring them up in the _____ and _____ of the Lord
- II. Commitment from _____ to _____
 - A. _____ from the children
 - B. _____ the children in the _____ of the _____ of the Lord
- III. Commitment from _____ to _____
 - A. _____ your _____
 - B. _____ your _____
 - C. _____ of _____ and _____ your parents

preacher just as much without saying a word. Nods also help others in the audience to know that the sermon is expressing both the preacher's convictions and those of other Christians.

A CHILD DREW A PICTURE. Any parent knows that "out of the mouths of babes" come profound statements. Often a little child has led God's people (cf. Isaiah 11:6). Most churches can point to some young people whose example is worth imitating by those much older (I Timothy 4:12). Last Sunday a child was interested enough to draw a picture of what the preacher was talking about (cf. I Timothy 3:15). There is nothing so unusual about that—when a Power Point presentation is made, little eyes are always paying attention, and little hands are often copying those words down. They may not fully comprehend the concepts, but the seed is planted, the foundation is laid, the base color is on the canvas. One day fruit will ripen, the structure will stand, and the painting will be perfected. And these very notes may become fresh classes and sermons for another generation of children. Some in pulpits now still occasionally use notes with childish letters on yellowing paper. These have been born again into lessons for those who were not born when the notes were first taken. The truth never ages; it only needs recycling.

A CHRISTIAN WORSHIPPED FOR THE FIRST TIME. Baptized on Tuesday, a young man offered God acceptable worship for the first time Sunday. God cleansed him from sin, set him in the church, and watched with interest as he bowed his soul in adoration (Acts 22:16; I Corinthians 12:28; John 4:24). If the Lord delays His return, and the new Christian's days are prolonged, that is probably only 1 of 10,000 times he will offer public worship to his Creator (John 4:24; Hebrews 10:25), but it will likely never mean more to God or him than this first service. It was a beautiful step on a long journey, a first note in a grand symphony.

THOSE FROM "EIGHT TO EIGHTY" COMMITTED TO READ THE BIBLE. About this time each year we encourage each member to read through the Bible. On Sunday, more than a hundred agreed to do so. The youngest is just under eight years old and will read the Bible for the first time. Perhaps this is the first of fifty or more times this mind will have the cleansing Water of Life purify its recesses. The oldest is past eighty and may be reading it for the last time (Hebrews 9:27; James 4:14).

TEARS FLOWED. Christian love often finds itself expressed in tears, as it did with Jesus and the early Christians (Luke 19:41; Acts 20:37). God's Word touched good and honest hearts, and souls responded Sunday to the Lord's invitation. Joyful tears flowed over "one sinner that repenteth" (cf. James 5:16,19-20).

What's going to happen this Sunday? Come and see!
-Allen Webster

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST: AS TO LABOR THE VINEYARD OF THE LORD

The church of Christ has been called unto a purpose by her precious Lord. Her purpose, as being His bride, is the same purpose with which He came into this world, and that is “to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). Always she must be conscious of that obligation and faltering she must never be, at all times being “ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear” (I Peter 3:15). But what is the underlying factor in the Christian’s planning to propagate that purpose? **LABOR!!!**

Labor is absolutely necessary to being a child of the Living God. There are works one must work in order to personally receive the benefits and blessings of hope in redemption promised by the everlasting love of the Lord (Philippians 2:12-13; Ephesians 2:8-10; James 2:14-26). But even more pressing for the purposes of this study, there are works one must work in order to accomplish his/her purpose as a Christian in aiding others in receiving those benefits and blessings of salvation.

“Go ye therefore, and teach all nations” (Matthew 28:19); “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15); “The things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men” (II Timothy 2:2); and “Preach the word” (II Timothy 4:2) are all explicitly declared commands unto the elect of God, the church of Christ (Colossians 3:12; II Timothy 2:10). And it seemingly is the case that most have an earnest desire to see this labor accomplished, not only among children of God, but also among those of the world, who recognize the social benefits of a bold declaration of the gospel of peace. But how is it that this particular work, in addition to all of the other good works either commanded or authorized in the scriptures can be accomplished to the good of the world and the glory of God? Only in the church of Christ, who as to labor is the vineyard of God.

Christ, Himself, illustrated this fact in Matthew 20:1-16. The context of this parable was in response to the apostles’ inquiry as to what they should receive for their sacrifice of following Him. His answer through this parable was that regardless of when one entered the kingdom the reward of eternal life would be the same for all. However, embedded in this text is a valuable lesson on labor. Christ points out a householder, or one in charge of a vineyard, who went out and hired laborers into his vineyard settling on a penny a day as the price of reimbursement. Through the context of the parable it is known that the householder is Christ going out to gather precious souls to enter His church to render service unto God and be heirs of the precious gift of salvation. But could a person have rendered service unto the householder outside of the vineyard? Could the harvest have been gathered by remaining in the marketplace? No, because the point is made clear that the labor could only be rendered by those in the vineyard.

Similarly are the teachings regarding labor rendered unto God. He has called man unto the harvest (John 4:35), the question is whether or not we are willing to enter the vineyard. The church of Christ, the vineyard of God unto the laborers, is always open for additions to the workforce, and unto any who desire to serve God, to labor as Christians, that divine invitation stands open and ready at all times. Ultimately, though, there are five qualities of man that will affect his/her willingness to enter the vineyard and labor as a worker of God.

First is man’s **L**ove. Man must love God enough to obey and serve Him (John 14:15); but also he must love himself enough to know the eternal benefits of his obedience and service and the everlasting consequences without them.

Second is man’s **A**ttitude. The purpose of entrance into the temple in the Old Testament was to render service unto God, and David was of a joyful attitude to do such stating, “I was glad when they said unto me, Let us go into the house of the Lord” (Psalm 122:1). What is our attitude regarding entrance into God’s temple today, the church of Christ (I Corinthians 3:16-23), and rendering service to Him?

Third is man’s **B**ehavior. Paul told the Thessalonian brethren that they should follow his example because he had behaved himself, not being disorderly. One’s behavior affects the fruit of his labor because if he is blameworthy then his ministry will be blamed (II Corinthians 6:3), but if he is without reproach then reception will be his (II Corinthians 7:2).

Fourth is man’s **O**pportunities. Some might say that opportunities are the result of chance; but man controls his environment, and opportunity is commonly the result of the environment in which one has placed himself. Paul used his environment to ensure opportunity for service, as did Christ. We must use our environment to make opportunities to labor for God.

Fifth, and finally, is man’s **R**ighteousness. Christ commanded that His followers shine their lights of righteousness before men “that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16). The righteousness, or unrighteousness, of man will affect his usefulness in rendering labor unto God.

Do you, dear friend, desire to labor for the Lord? If so, delay not one second, but by obedience unto the gospel of Jesus Christ enter the church of Christ: as to labor the vineyard of the Lord.

-Andy Brewer