

IF THE CHURCH DOES NOT MATTER—concluded**THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE****The Kingdom Does Not Matter**

The kingdom of God is the church of Jesus Christ. Jesus used the terms interchangeably in Matthew 16:18-19. Jesus said the Lord's Supper would be in the kingdom (Luke 22:29-30). But the church at Jerusalem observed it faithfully (Acts 2:42). The Corinthians ate the Supper in the church or should have eaten it therein had their grave abuses not interfered with such a precious practice. Jesus said the kingdom would come with power (Mark 9:1). The Spirit and the power would come together according to the Lord's decisive declaration in Acts 1:8). The Spirit came on the first Pentecost subsequent to the Lord's resurrection and ascension (Acts 2:1-4). Thus this is when the power arrived. People became members of the church on this day (Acts 2:41,47). Therefore this is when the church or kingdom began.

If the church does not matter, neither does the kingdom of God matter. There are but two kingdoms wherein responsible people can be spiritually located. These are the Lord's kingdom and Satan's kingdom. If the church does not matter, neither does the Lord's kingdom for they are one and the same. If membership in the Lord's kingdom does not matter, the ultimate of such logic would make Jehovah just as pleased with subjects in Satan's kingdom and with subjects in His own kingdom. If not, why not? If the church does not matter, then:

Baptism Is Not Important

Of course, much of the religious world of our day already accepts this false proposition as true but are they ready to accept the following? If baptism is not important, then neither are the various things with which baptism is divinely linked. Baptism is connected with salvation (Mark 16:16; I Peter 3:21). If baptism is not important, neither is salvation. If baptism is not important, neither would the remission of sins be important. Baptism is linked with putting on Christ, coming into Him, having our sins washed away, and coming into the benefits of His death where His blood was shed (Galatians 3:27; Acts 22:16; Romans 6:3). If baptism is not important, then neither are the things with which baptism is linked. If the church does not matter, then:

The Gospel Does Not Matter Either

The gospel of Christ produces the church of Christ. If the gospel had never been preached, then the church never could have existed. The church and the gospel are inseparably linked. The church is not just a part of Jehovah's plan to save; it with its glorious head is **the** gospel plan of salvation. If the church does not matter, neither does the whole gospel matter. If the whole gospel does not matter, neither would any of its component parts matter. The gospel is composed of facts to be believed. We must believe Christ died, was buried, and rose again for our sins according to the Scriptures (I Corinthians 15:1-4). Do the facts matter? The gospel is composed of commandments to be obeyed. These are hearing, believing, repenting, confessing, being baptized, and a life of continued faithfulness. None of these is important if the church does not matter. The gospel has promises to be enjoyed, such as remission of sins, sonship in the heavenly kingdom, and the sustaining hope of eternal life. None of these is important if the church does not matter. The gospel has warnings to heed. However, these do not matter, either, if the church is of no matter or value. If the church is of no matter or value, neither is the Bible which produces the church. Who is ready for the ultimate conclusions to which this blasphemous argument inevitably leads?

Does the church really matter to you? If so, where is it in your list of preferred priorities? If it is not first as Jesus said it must be in Matthew 6:33, then it really means but little to you. When the church is secondary, it is of little lasting value.

-Robert R. Taylor, Jr.

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

**THE SOURCE OF STRENGTH
IN TIMES OF TROUBLE**

Text: _____

I. The _____ of God's Strength

Notes:

II. The _____ for God's Strength

Notes:

III. The _____ of God's Strength

Notes:

IV. The _____ for God's Strength

Notes:

V. The _____ for God's Strength

Notes:

WOE TO THEM

Text: _____

I. God's _____ Against the _____

Notes:

II. God's _____ Against the _____

Notes:

III. God's _____ Against the _____

Notes:

TRUST IN GOD

One man is quoted as saying "Trust in yourself, and you are doomed to disappointment; trust in your friends, and they will die and leave you; trust in reputation, and some slanderous tongue may blast it; but trust in God, and you are never to be confounded in time or eternity."

Another man gave a similar testimony when he said, I have held many things in my hands, and I have lost them all; but whatever I have placed in God's hands, that I still possess."

FRIDAY OF GLOOM, SUNDAY OF GLORY

Many of us have heard the recent report of a sermon by a black man called, Sunday is coming. Its setting is the day of our Lord's crucifixion when things looked dark. Yet, you look beyond this day to the day of His resurrection when things have undergone a great change. Yes, it may be the Friday of gloom, but there is the Sunday of glory.

Go back to that setting as found in Matthew 27 and see what we can learn.

We Have the Friday When Trust Seems Futile

From the human standpoint, the trust that Jesus has in God seems to be a futile thing. They indeed said, "He trusted in God; let him deliver him now" (Matthew 27:43). It does seem that all is lost as he hands on a cross with His hands fastened by the nails. It surely dealt a blow to those disciples that followed Him along the way. But the fact that God did not meet their timetable does not mean His trust was not well placed. They said "let him deliver him NOW." But there was the Sunday that was to come. That day would reveal the value of that trust. That day would show God is not limited by our way of thinking.

We Have the Friday When Evil Seems to be in Control

If one measured things by the way it looked that day he would think evil was on the throne and good was forever crushed. He would think righteousness would never rise again. And it does seem sometimes that righteousness has no chance. It seems that evil will forever be the popular cause. But, that is the wrong estimate. There is a Sunday coming when righteousness will reign again and when the lifetime of right living will pay dividends far beyond man's expectation.

We Have the Friday When Good People Feel Lonely

There were precious few in and around Jerusalem that dared stand very tall alongside the Son of God on that dark Friday. Most of the people near the cross were enemies, not friends. Even some of the disciples fled in fear, and good people stood alone. Can you imagine the feelings of Mary as she stood by when she would know of all who had been helped by that one now being killed? But that day would pass and Sunday would come when the hopes of many would be revived, and that good news of His resurrection would be told by these. They would later be challenged to tell the whole world about it (Mark 16:15-16).

Yes, they might face the Friday of gloom, but they could surely wait for the Sunday of glory.

-Winfred Clark

THE BOOK OF THE COUNTRY PROPHET

Amos was a prophet like no other. He describes his former lifestyle as, “...I was no prophet, neither was I a prophet’s son; but I was an herdman, and a gatherer of sycomore fruit” (Amos 7:14). Specifically Amos identifies himself as having been of the herdsmen of Tekoa, a small village about twelve miles south of Jerusalem. He was not of a priestly or prophetic line, but God saw in Amos the necessary character and steadfastness to deliver the needed message to God’s children. This message was one of judgment. Much like the other prophets, Amos immediately delves into the matter of repentance in hope of a future, but his denouncements did not limit themselves to God’s people alone, but also extended to neighboring nations whom themselves had rejected God. None would escape, not even Judah.

To realize the perspective from which Amos writes it is necessary to date his work so as to understand the conditions of the immediate time. Amos provided this timeframe in the first verse by saying that these were “*The words of Amos, who was among the herdmen of Tekoa, which he saw concerning Israel in the days of Uzziah king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam the son of Joash king of Israel, two years before the earthquake.*” The reigns of these two kings would have coincided around the year 765 B.C. indicating this as the year of his call to the work. Amos also identifies this time as two years before “the earthquake” of which nothing is really known. Zechariah also mentioned this earthquake some two hundred years after Amos so it must have been of unusual significance and magnitude. The reigns of Jeroboam and Uzziah were marked by great success resulting in prosperity. The borders of each nation were enlarged and through trade, agriculture, and conquest of other peoples a great deal of wealth had become theirs’. However, the result of such prosperity, as throughout the Jews’ history, was corruption morally, politically, and religiously. God then would use the natural appeal of such prosperity to bring other nations against His people that they might be humbled back into faithful service.

When Amos was sent to the people of God he warned both Israel and Judah that neither would escape divine retribution for their sins. Amos is known as the “prophet of woe” for the manifold message of doom he delivered. One might consider Amos 6 which is a continued list of woes upon the people. Among the many, though, is one that characterized the Jews as well as any statement made about them or to them in their history. In Amos 6:1, the prophet pronounces, “*Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came!*” God’s people throughout their history were marked by their “ease in Zion” and “trust in Samaria,” referring to the assumed security that they felt in the land. It was as though they believed that the land bestowed by God was invincible to any form of attack. Their history should have prepared them for a better conclusion than that, seeing as how already they had been taken from their land multiple times before (Judges 1ff). God would have to break their spirits again to prove to them that He is God, and He alone.

There is a general lesson provided in Amos that all people, nations, and languages would do well to hear and heed. In Amos 4:12, Amos counseled the people that, “*Therefore thus will I do unto thee, O Israel: and because I will do this unto thee, prepare to meet thy God, O Israel.*” These people needed to know that they were not indestructible, but that they like all others would give an account to God one day for their actions. For this they needed immediately to prepare. It is amazing that almost 3,000 years have passed since Amos told the Jewish nation to prepare to meet God, and yet many still believe that they have all the time in the world to prepare. Friends, if it was necessary to make an immediate change then, it is even more so today!

At the end of Amos’ prophetic book, Amos leaves the people with this message of hope: “*In that day will I raise up the tabernacle of David that is fallen, and close up the breaches thereof; and I will raise up his ruins, and I will build it as in the days of old: that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and of all the heathen, which are called by my name, saith the Lord that doeth this*” (Amos 9:11-12; see also vs. 13-15). Here is a clear look forward to the restoration of the people not only physically upon their repentance, but spiritually through “the tabernacle of David” Jesus Christ, the seed through whom all blessings flow.

Israel and Judah had a very important lesson to learn in those fateful years to come. Sadly they had to learn them the hard way, but God has preserved these records for the learning of all men today (Romans 15:4) that similar mistakes might be avoided. When will our people awaken to the reality of God’s judgment? It is sure, but are we?

-Andy Brewer