

## What Would It Take?

Scripture Reading:

**Psalms 96:7-9** "GIVE UNTO THE **LORD**, O YE KINDREDS OF THE PEOPLE, GIVE UNTO THE **LORD** GLORY AND STRENGTH. GIVE UNTO THE **LORD** THE GLORY *due unto* HIS NAME: BRING AN OFFERING, AND COME INTO HIS COURTS. O WORSHIP THE **LORD** IN THE BEAUTY OF HOLINESS: FEAR BEFORE HIM, ALL THE EARTH.

We're not told who wrote this Psalm. Quite probably this is because those who compiled the scriptures could not identify a specific author. But we know the attitude of David, the sweet singer of Israel, toward the worship of God. He tells us in:

**Psalms 26:8** "**LORD**, I HAVE LOVED THE HABITATION OF THY HOUSE, AND THE PLACE WHERE THINE HONOUR DWELLETH."

And then again in:

**Psalms 122:1** "I WAS GLAD WHEN THEY SAID UNTO ME, LET US GO INTO THE HOUSE OF THE **LORD**."

He understood what we read in **Psalm 96**. He loved God and willingly, eagerly gave "UNTO THE **LORD** THE GLORY *due unto* HIS NAME". He loved to be in the presence of God in worship. He "WAS GLAD" when it came time to go up to the house of the Lord (**Psalms 122:1**).

But sadly not everyone who claims to be a Christian, not even everyone who claims to be a faithful member of the Lord's church, the church that Jesus build, the saints called out of the world into his kingdom have that same mindset. As we travel, talk to people, read church bulletins and look at church web-sites across the country. We see a condition that has grown worse and worse over the past two or three decades. In many congregations of the Lord's church, one third, forty percent or even half, or more, of the congregation are not willing and eager to give "UNTO THE **LORD** THE GLORY *due unto* HIS NAME"; they are not "GLAD" when it comes time to worship God. How can we tell? Because they fail to take advantage of the opportunity to study God's word in Bible School, they fail to give God "GLORY" by absenting themselves from opportunities to worship Him. Sometimes this even applies to Sunday mornings but most often they absent themselves on Sunday evening, gospel meetings, etc. if they attend at all. They fail to avail themselves of the opportunity to recharge their spiritual batteries in a mid-week service and Bible study. This spiritual illness has gotten so bad in some places that one of our brethren has seen fit to write a bit of satire on the subject.

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This was published just two weeks ago in the bulletin of the Garden City church of Christ in Garden City, Michigan. It is entitled "**A DEATH NOTICE**"

"We are extremely sorry and saddened to announce the passing of Mr. Midweek Service. He died recently at the Neglected Church on Ho Hum Avenue.

Born many years ago, he was strong and healthy as a child. Fed largely on zeal and Bible study, he grew into world-wide prominence and was one of the most influential members of the church family. However, in recent years, Mr. Midweek Service has been failing in health, wasting away until rendered helpless by stiffness of the knee, cooling of the heart and lack of spiritual sensitivity. He was quoted as whispering some last words about the absence of his loved ones.

A post-mortem examination showed a deficiency of spiritual food, lack of prayer, lack of love for God and the absence of Christian fellowship as contributing factors in his passing.

Also, we have been informed that his wife, Mrs. Sunday Evening Service has just been admitted to the local hospital. Preliminary tests reveal the same diseases as suffered by her husband. At this point, it appears to also be terminal. Let's all be praying for her recovery."

These symptoms of spiritual weakness and potential terminal spiritual illness are plaguing elders in every congregation of the Lord's church that I know about. The question is asked and debated "What would it take to get everybody back Sunday nights." Some churches have employed "Church Growth" experts and gone into the marketing business. They "jazz" up their services by appealing to fleshly lusts with skits, giveaways, children's church, parties, food, music, singing groups and various other manmade programs. Most of these are not only unscriptural and a sign of spiritual decay in their leadership, they don't work. Oh, the hype will bring folks for a little while but then the speed of their spiritual decline accelerates and the problem gets worse.

So in the time that we have remaining in our study this morning we are going to address the question:

### **WHAT WOULD IT TAKE... ... TO GET US BACK ON SUNDAY NIGHT?**

The only answer must come from the revelation of God Almighty. The revelation in which we are assured by the apostle:

**I Peter 1:3** "ACCORDING AS HIS DIVINE POWER HATH GIVEN UNTO US ALL THINGS THAT *pertain* UNTO LIFE AND GODLINESS, THROUGH THE KNOWLEDGE OF HIM THAT HATH CALLED US TO GLORY AND VIRTUE:"

## What Would It Take?

### MORE LOVE FROM GOD?

How could God love us any more than He does already? When God placed mankind on this earth He prepared a special place for them called Eden. It wasn't just good - it was "VERY GOOD" (**Genesis 1:31**)

God not only provided for the physical wellbeing of his creation at that time in our history but he continues to do so today. Through his providence and because of his love we have everything we need and more. James the brother of our Lord records:

**James 1:17** "EVERY GOOD GIFT AND EVERY PERFECT GIFT IS FROM ABOVE, AND COMETH DOWN FROM THE FATHER OF LIGHTS, WITH WHOM IS NO VARIABLENESS, NEITHER SHADOW OF TURNING."

But the most precious gift that God has given us has come through his grace and mercy. He gave his Son:

**John 3:16** "FOR GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD, THAT HE GAVE HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON, THAT WHOSOEVER BELIEVETH IN HIM SHOULD NOT PERISH, BUT HAVE EVERLASTING LIFE."

God "SO LOVED"; God "SO LOVED" you and I that he sent his Son to this earth, to live the life of a man, and to be sacrificed in the most cruel way that man had devised at that time and to shed his blood for our sins. But not only that, He did so when we were in a condition that He could not even stand to look at us (**Isaiah 59:2**).

"BUT GOD COMMENDETH HIS LOVE TOWARD US, IN THAT, WHILE WE WERE YET SINNERS, CHRIST DIED FOR US." **Romans 5:8**

No we don't need any more love from God. We need more love for God, we need to live the first and greatest commandment:

**Matthew 22:37-38** "JESUS SAID UNTO HIM, THOU SHALT LOVE THE LORD THY GOD WITH ALL THY HEART, AND WITH ALL THY SOUL, AND WITH ALL THY MIND. THIS IS THE FIRST AND GREAT COMMANDMENT."

## What Would It Take?

### MORE SACRIFICE FROM CHRIST?

The logic behind this question would be that if Christ had just given more, surely we would feel a greater debt, surely we would feel a deep and abiding need to worship and honor him more. But is it that he did not sacrifice enough? Observe please:

**Matthew 27:26** “THEN RELEASED HE BARABBAS UNTO THEM: AND WHEN HE HAD SCOURGED JESUS, HE DELIVERED *him* TO BE CRUCIFIED.”

They scourged him. When someone was scourged he was beaten with a whip with several ends or tails. Many times glass, rock or some other material was fastened to the end of these tails. A strong armed soldier could literally peel the skin and flesh off the back exposing ribs and even organs. Some died under the scourge without even making it as far as the cross.

**Matthew 27:28-30** “AND THEY STRIPPED HIM, AND PUT ON HIM A SCARLET ROBE. AND WHEN THEY HAD PLATTED A CROWN OF THORNS, THEY PUT IT UPON HIS HEAD, AND A REED IN HIS RIGHT HAND: AND THEY BOWED THE KNEE BEFORE HIM, AND MOCKED HIM, SAYING, HAIL, KING OF THE JEWS! AND THEY SPIT UPON HIM, AND TOOK THE REED, AND SMOTE HIM ON THE HEAD.”

The Son of God had been beaten within an inch of his life. Now he becomes an object of scorn and ridicule. And when that humiliation was over they led him out to that place called Golgotha; nailed him to a cross and there they crucified him. He died for you and I because without that sacrifice there would be no means of removing sin from our souls, there would be no remission of sin:

**Hebrews 9:22-23** “AND ALMOST ALL THINGS ARE BY THE LAW PURGED WITH BLOOD; AND WITHOUT SHEDDING OF BLOOD IS NO REMISSION. IT WAS THEREFORE NECESSARY THAT THE PATTERNS OF THINGS IN THE HEAVENS SHOULD BE PURIFIED WITH THESE; BUT THE HEAVENLY THINGS THEMSELVES WITH BETTER SACRIFICES THAN THESE.”

No, we don't need more sacrifice from Christ. He made the ultimate sacrifice under conditions that, even with the vivid descriptions given in scripture, are hard for our minds to comprehend. We need more sacrifice in our lives for Christ. We need to truly: “SEEK YE FIRST THE KINGDOM OF GOD, AND HIS RIGHTEOUSNESS.” **Matthew 6:33**

## What Would It Take?

### A BETTER GOD TO WORSHIP?

Someone might reason; maybe if we had a better God to worship, then perhaps we would be able to “get more out of Sunday nights and other opportunities for Bible study and worship”. After all not getting something that is valuable to them out of the worship of God is one of the major complaints made by people who absent themselves from that worship. But we know that the problem doesn't lie with the need for a better God. In a prayer of David we find:

**Psalms 86:8** “AMONG THE GODS *there is* NONE LIKE UNTO THEE, O **LORD**; NEITHER *are there any* WORKS LIKE UNTO THY WORKS.”

We need but look at the wonders of this world and the universe that we can see and marvel at the fact that God spoke these things into existence. (**Genesis 1:1-25**). We need only see the beauty of a sunset, or a rose, the intricate construction of an eye, think about the ability that we have been given to think and reason; to see the sign of God's promise to Noah that he would never destroy the earth again with water to know that there is no one and no thing better than the God we worship.

**Isaiah 40:25-26** “TO WHOM THEN WILL YE LIKEN ME, OR SHALL I BE EQUAL? SAITH THE HOLY ONE. LIFT UP YOUR EYES ON HIGH, AND BEHOLD WHO HATH CREATED THESE *things*, THAT BRINGETH OUT THEIR HOST BY NUMBER: HE CALLETH THEM ALL BY NAMES BY THE GREATNESS OF HIS MIGHT, FOR THAT *he is* STRONG IN POWER; NOT ONE FAILETH.”

We need only look at the revelation by God of his nature to understand that He is that all powerful, Supreme Being that His word describes:

**Isaiah 40:28** “HAST THOU NOT KNOWN? HAST THOU NOT HEARD, *that* THE EVERLASTING GOD, THE **LORD**, THE CREATOR OF THE ENDS OF THE EARTH, FAINTETH NOT, NEITHER IS WEARY? *there is* NO SEARCHING OF HIS UNDERSTANDING.”

There are no limits to His power. He doesn't grow faint or weary. He doesn't need to search His mind and try to remember to understand or comprehend something as we do.

“FOR *as* THE HEAVENS ARE HIGHER THAN THE EARTH, SO ARE MY WAYS HIGHER THAN YOUR WAYS, AND MY THOUGHTS THAN YOUR THOUGHTS.” **Isaiah 55:9**

## **What Would It Take?**

No, we do not need a better God; God needs better children.

## **A BETTER BOOK TO STUDY?**

Surely, someone says, "if we had a better book to study" a revelation from God that met all of the felt needs of mankind then we would come back to study and/or worship more often than just Sunday morning. And men have tried to provide what men think would be a better book to study. Even in many of the congregations of the Lord's church they're using versions of God's word that have been perverted. So-called translators have rewritten, paraphrased, condensed, and polluted the sacred scripture until in many places when it is read it is unrecognizable because it no longer resembles that which is true. But these perversions haven't helped the problem, they have added to it.

David wrote by the inspiration of God:

**"THE LAW OF THE LORD IS PERFECT, CONVERTING THE SOUL: THE TESTIMONY OF THE LORD IS SURE, MAKING WISE THE SIMPLE." Psalms 19:7**

Not only is God's law perfect it provides for us the formula, the way, the opportunity to be perfect or complete in the sight of God:

**"ALL SCRIPTURE *is* GIVEN BY INSPIRATION OF GOD, AND IS PROFITABLE FOR DOCTRINE, FOR REPROOF, FOR CORRECTION, FOR INSTRUCTION IN RIGHTEOUSNESS: THAT THE MAN OF GOD MAY BE PERFECT, THOROUGHLY FURNISHED UNTO ALL GOOD WORKS." II Timothy 3:16-17**

As children perfectly or completely furnished by God through his word our attitude toward it should be as another Psalmist, its author is unknown, also writes by the inspiration of God:

**"THE LAW OF THY MOUTH IS BETTER UNTO ME THAN THOUSANDS OF GOLD AND SILVER." Psalms 119:72**

**"O HOW LOVE I THY LAW! IT IS MY MEDITATION ALL THE DAY." Psalms 119:97**

**"THY WORD IS A LAMP UNTO MY FEET, AND A LIGHT UNTO MY PATH" Psalms 119:105**

## What Would It Take?

No, we have a book, all of which is more precious than “THOUSANDS OF GOLD AND SILVER”, a book that we should love and meditate upon every day a “LAMP UNTO” our feet to light the narrow way that leads to “LIFE” (**Matthew 7:14**).

No, we do not need a better book to study; we need better students to study the book.

## A BETTER GROUP TO FELLOWSHIP?

Christians are called out from among them:

**II Corinthians 6:17** “WHEREFORE COME OUT FROM AMONG THEM, AND BE YE SEPARATE, SAITH THE LORD AND TOUCH NOT THE UNCLEAN *thing*; AND I WILL RECEIVE YOU.”

Christians are called out of the world and all of its pollution, all of its sin to live better lives; to live lives for God. We have been washed in the blood of the Lamb of God, His only Begotten Son:

**Revelation 7:14** “AND I SAID UNTO HIM, SIR, THOU KNOWEST. AND HE SAID TO ME, THESE ARE THEY WHICH CAME OUT OF GREAT TRIBULATION, AND HAVE WASHED THEIR ROBES AND MADE THEM WHITE IN THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB.”

And we stand before God forgiven of our sins, pure in the sight of God. True Christians are the best people in the world. Oh, we’re not perfect, far from it. We still fail at times, we still utter words that we should not, that pierce and hurt. And sometimes we fall short, but what better group could you choose to spend your time with, especially as we join in the worship of Almighty God.

No, we do not need a better group of people with which to have fellowship; but a greater desire to encourage one another. How do we do that? The Hebrew writer tells us:

“AND LET US CONSIDER ONE ANOTHER TO PROVOKE UNTO LOVE AND GOOD WORKS;” **Hebrews 10:24** (ASV)

We must “CONSIDER ONE ANOTHER”, be concerned about each other, about our spiritual well-being and do what? “PROVOKE” don’t let that word lead you astray. In this context it doesn’t mean to generate anger, exasperate or to vex and which is the first definition in a common dictionary. Rather it means “to stir up, arouse, to call forth”, “to incite or stimulate to action”. It means to stimulate us “UNTO LOVE AND GOOD WORKS.” But if we’re not here we can’t be stimulated or encouraged, or aroused to do the work of the Lord now can we? So the Holy Spirit continues:

## What Would It Take?

“NOT FORSAKING OUR OWN ASSEMBLING TOGETHER, AS THE CUSTOM OF SOME IS, BUT EXHORTING ONE ANOTHER; AND SO MUCH THE MORE, AS YE SEE THE DAY DRAWING NIGH.” Hebrews 10:25 (ASV)

So with these things in mind let us look at the words of the prophet Isaiah in **Isaiah 1:18**; “COME NOW AND

## LET US REASON TOGETHER

As we see in Hebrews 10, being voluntarily or willfully absent from worship is doing the very thing that God said not to do. It is a transgression of God’s law and transgression of God’s law is sin:

**1 John 3:4** “WHOSOEVER COMMITTETH SIN TRANSGRESSETH ALSO THE LAW: FOR SIN IS THE TRANSGRESSION OF THE LAW.”

James, the brother of Jesus, records in his epistle that if we know to do good and don’t do it, refuse to do it, then we sin:

**James 4:17** “THEREFORE TO HIM THAT KNOWETH TO DO GOOD, AND DOETH IT NOT, TO HIM *it* IS SIN.”

I don’t think that anyone would deny that it would be good for one to attend all the services of the Lord’s church. So would we not also agree that whoever chooses to assemble with the saints in worship to God does a good thing in the sight of God? So if our attendance and participation in the worship of God is a good thing, we know that it is a good thing and we do not do it are we not sinning in the process? Think about it.

Well, there are some that think that the admonition of the Holy Spirit through the Hebrew writer applies only to the Sunday morning assembly, or at least that is the way they live. Literally the original language says “ASSEMBLIES”, or the act of assembling, the practice of assembling, or as the ASV quoted just a few moments ago say “OUR OWN ASSEMBLING TOGETHER”. The entire first day of the week – that day that John calls the “LORD’S DAY” belongs to the Lord; John writes in:

**Revelation 1:10** “I WAS IN THE SPIRIT ON THE LORD’S DAY, AND HEARD BEHIND ME A GREAT VOICE, AS OF A TRUMPET,”

The early church had Sunday night services:

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**Acts 20:7-8** “AND UPON THE FIRST *day* OF THE WEEK, WHEN THE DISCIPLES CAME TOGETHER TO BREAK BREAD, PAUL PREACHED UNTO THEM, READY TO DEPART ON THE MORROW; AND CONTINUED HIS SPEECH UNTIL MIDNIGHT. AND THERE WERE MANY LIGHTS IN THE UPPER CHAMBER, WHERE THEY WERE GATHERED TOGETHER.”

And the early church even had evening services at other times:

**Acts 12:12** “AND WHEN HE HAD CONSIDERED *the thing*, HE CAME TO THE HOUSE OF MARY THE MOTHER OF JOHN, WHOSE SURNAME WAS MARK; WHERE MANY WERE GATHERED TOGETHER PRAYING.”

Unfortunately it would seem that many who choose not to worship or study more than one hour a week use these excuses and a variety of others to try to justify their absence from the worship of God and study of God's word. But our time limits our review to these two or three. God knows our hearts, God knows those things that might hinder us from being present, God knows whether we are absent because we are weak in the faith. In which case we can:

“...CONFESS OUR SINS, HE IS FAITHFUL AND JUST TO FORGIVE US *our* SINS, AND TO CLEANSE US FROM ALL UNRIGHTEOUSNESS.” **I John 1:9**

God also knows when we absent ourselves from honoring and worshipping him simply because we don't want to. So would that not be willful sin? (**Hebrews 10:26**)? God knows if we absent ourselves from His worship or Bible Study because we need to have more love for Him (**Matthew 22:37-38**). God knows if we absent ourselves because we need to make a greater sacrifice for Christ (**Matthew 6:33**). God knows if we absent ourselves because we need to be better children of God. God knows if we absent ourselves because we need to be better students of His revelation. God knows if we think so little of our brothers and sisters in Christ that we don't feel the need to work and worship with them in the kingdom when we have opportunity. So as we close this lesson, stop and think, are we proud of what God knows about our dedication to Him, His worship and the work of His kingdom? Or do stand before God ashamed because we know that we neglect him?

Invitation