

Trends

A 2007 study of charitable giving shows that some population groups were more likely than others to have given away at least ten percent of their income. Among the most generous segments were evangelicals (24% of whom gave 10% of their income); conservatives (12%); people who had prayed, read the Bible and attended a church service during the past week (12%); and charismatic or Pentecostal Christians (11%). Several groups also stood out as highly unlikely to be generous in charitable giving: people under the age of 25, atheists and agnostics, single adults who have never been married, and liberals. One percent or less of the people in each of those segments gave 10% of their income in 2007.

-via The Barna Group

2 Corinthians 9:6: "He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap bountifully."

Sentence Sermons

"Better to keep your mouth shut and appear stupid than to open it and remove all doubt."

—Mark Twain

James 1:19: "So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath;"

News & Notes

Please pray for those mentioned in the announcements after services and others listed on the bulletin board in the foyer of the church building.

Pray for all the members at Westside! Susan Ferrell, a friend of the Thomas family from Michigan, had great news! Commenting on the latest MRI, the oncologist said, "it could not look better"! They've also been able to increase the chemotherapy dosage. Please continue to pray for Susan, her husband Shawn and their three boys: Samuel, Micah, and Eli.

Jennifer Shorter (Garner) a member at Knightsville is suffering from a brain tumor and needs our prayers. She's rehabbing from brain surgery in Indy. Also, please pray for Elias Dispennett (age 8). He is the son of Rob Dispennett, Knightsville's preacher, and has been diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes.

Christian Shadburne, the young Christian brother in Bowling Green (KY), is still dealing with cancer and needs our prayers.

Pray for the college students as they are now on summer break. Jonathan will be attending IUPUI law school this fall and Rachel plans to return to IU.

Please keep sister Wilma in your prayers! She gives all of us so much encouragement! God bless her and Virginia! Remember both of them in your prayers.

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Please direct questions and comments to the editor.

Words of Life

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"Lord, to whom shall we go? You
have the words of eternal life."

John 6:68



"Redemption Point"

Craig Thomas

I'm an avid collector of quotations. The really good ones always make me say, "Why didn't I think of that?" I recently found one of those while reading the book *Fire In My Heart*, when Connie Adams described much modern preaching as being a lot...

"Like grapenuts, it is neither grapes nor nuts. It is heavy on Lucado, Swindoll, McGregor, Baxter, and the like, but light on the prophets, Jesus, Peter, Paul, James, and John." (*Changing Attitudes*, p. 23)

He went on rightly describing such preaching as nothing more than "spiritual pep talks" that result in the hearers knowing "little basic truth." He also pointed out a prime fallacy of this "watered-down preaching" being its dedication to the mindset that we "accentuate the positive" and eliminate the negative from our preaching.

Brother Adam's thoughts really struck me as I recently prepared for a class on Ezekiel chapters 8 and 9. But first, perhaps a bit of historical background is in order. Those chapters were written after the first and second captives had been taken from Judah to Babylon in 605 and 597 B.C. In fact, Ezekiel was one of the many taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 B.C. (2 Kgs. 24:14; Ezek. 1:1-2) Judah and Jerusalem had been repeatedly told by God to repent or face the coming doom (e.g., Jeremiah's 40+ year's of preaching). These people should have known better since they had seen their northern brethren carried away as punishment for similar transgressions by the Assyrians over a century earlier (Jer. 3:6-10). God's next move was to send the Babylonians against them for a third and final time with a horrific siege. In fact, the Bible records a nearly two year siege that culminated in 586 B.C. (2 Kgs. 25) The gravity and extent of the siege can be seen as the people of Jerusalem even resorted to cannibalism (Lam. 2:20; 4:10; Ezek. 5:10).

The really sad part is that all of this destruction, devastation, and degradation was avoidable. Time and time again, even unto the eleventh hour,

God called these people to repentance through the preaching of the prophets (e.g., Jer. 22:1-9). Furthermore, the message of the prophets was not new, for God had warned of such potential punishments from the nation's very beginning (e.g., Deut. 28). But all of God's words and all the preaching was to no avail as the people hardened their hearts, stopped their ears, and seared their consciences (Ezek. 3:7; 1 Tim. 4:2). As a result God's patience ran out. There would be no more calls to repentance. No more divine hand extended in tender mercy. No more prophets sent preaching either the thunderous message of doom or the compassionate message of potential forgiveness. Instead, God said, *"Therefore I also will act in fury. My eye will not spare nor will I have pity; and though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them."* (Ezek. 8:18) As Jim McGuiggan said, "Judah had passed 'Redemption Point.'" (Ezekiel, p. 10) What a situation of utter hopelessness! (cf. Matt. 13:42; 24:51; 25:30)

No doubt God gave these people their just deserts. However, Ezekiel was still bowed down with grief as the slaughter even extended to the women and children (Ezek. 9:6). The text tells us Ezekiel fell on his face *"and cried out, and said, 'Ah, Lord GOD! Will You destroy all the remnant of Israel in pouring out Your fury on Jerusalem?'"* (Ezek. 9:8) I believe Ezekiel reacted as any true and tenderhearted man or woman of God would react. Jeremiah expressed this attitude when he said, *"My eyes overflow with rivers of water for the destruction of the daughter of my people."* (Lam. 3:48) Even God, who sends such judgments, takes *"no pleasure in the death of the wicked"* (Ezek. 33:11).

There are so many lessons we can learn from this passage. And, certainly the Lord expects us to learn something from it! *"For whatever things were written before were written for our learning, that we through the patience and comfort of the Scriptures might have hope."* (Rom. 15:4) *"Now all these things happened to them as examples, and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the ages have come."* (1 Cor. 10:11)

One important thing I learn is that brother Adams was right: much preaching is "neither grapes nor nuts"! Any man who would call himself a gospel preacher or an evangelist and would not—OFTEN—include the message of doom God promises sinners (Matt. 7:13-14; 2 Thess. 1:7-9; Rev. 20:15; 21:8) should quit preaching...immediately! Men, women, boys, and girls need a frequent and clarion wake-up call to the ultimate reality that *"we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad"* (2 Cor. 5:10). Sooner, rather than later, we all may pass beyond our own personal "Redemption Point." A point beyond which we find only troubled waters and treacherous shoals; a point beyond which there is no mercy but only *"a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries"* (Heb. 10:27). The deceitfulness of sin can easily lead us

to sear our conscience and steer our spiritual ship beyond that fateful point!

Any gospel preacher worth his salt will remind us often and vividly of this unsavory, but profoundly important fact. We need preachers brave and faithful enough to keep this aspect of God's character and our relationship with Him ever fresh in our minds. To ever remind us that *"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God."* (Heb. 10:31) So fresh in our minds that each time we are tempted to sin we recall such passages as Ezekiel 8 and 9. So fresh in our minds that anytime we are enticed to indulge the lusts of the flesh, forsake the assembly, or disobey in anyway; we instead fall on our faces and pray for that precious "way of escape" and summon the courage to take it (1 Cor. 10:13). So fresh in our minds we can't wait to teach God's truth to our children, to our family, to our friends, to our neighbors, and, yea, to anyone who will listen.

I thank God for those faithful few gospel preachers willing to ignore the popular trend to "accentuate the positive and eliminate the negative." I love a "positive" message as well as the next man, but I don't find such in the *"smooth words and flattering speech"* offered by the many (Rom. 16:18). Instead, I find it a much more "positive" message when I'm reminded I have my own personal "Redemption Point" beyond which I dare not pass. Bless those who warn me to steer clear.

Needs

There remain many brethren in need of your help. There are faithful gospel preachers in the U.S. and foreign lands in dire need of financial support. Brethren in Zimbabwe are still suffering through another year of drought. There is also a severe drought in the Philippines. Brethren are suffering! They and their families faithfully labor in the gospel and suffer from material deprivations due to their stand for the truth, concern for the soul's of men and love for the Lord and His Christ. Other brethren are in acute need of the basics of life (food, clothing, shelter, medical attention). If you would like to help please send me an e-mail (craigthomas82000@gmail.com) and I'll put you in direct contact with a needy brother. Remember 1 John 3:17: *"But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him?"*

