

CHECKING IN: WHAT'S REALLY IMPORTANT

MULTIPLE TEXTS

10.17.21

INTRODUCTION:

At many times in our lives, we do “check-ins,” either on ourselves or on something we use a lot, to make sure that it is still in good working order. Many of us bring our cars in for an oil change, and for the repair guys to perform a check on how the car is holding together. Every six months, people visit their dentist to see how their teeth are doing. My dental hygienist wife loves me so much, she schedules me for every three months. We have periodic check-ins with our doctors as well. Home improvement guys recommend regularly scheduled check-ins on heating and air-conditioning units. Batteries for smoke detectors are to be replaced with every changing of our clocks to ensure that those devices are working as good as possible. Checking in things allows us to stay connected with how things are working, and to intervene with some help to prevent failure as some future, critical time.

Well, there are few operations more important to be operating in a healthy way than the church. So this morning I thought I would take some time for us to “check-in” with our church, to evaluate things to get a sense for how we are doing, and to see what we can do to improve. As we begin, let’s turn in prayer to the Master of this “house,” that He would guide us through this opportunity to check in. **Let’s pray!**

TEXT

Over the past several months, God has been impressing me deeply with two incredibly important things. No matter what’s going on, these two subjects have continued to bang on my mind and my heart: (1) the incredible importance of the church, and (2) the incredible urgency of the Gospel.

So first off, let’s look at the church. Very simple, what are we; what is this place? The Bible gives two answer that, though seemingly polar opposites, are both simultaneously absolutely true:

- 1) The church is the presence of Christ on earth – His body. Once upon a time Jesus Christ was actually present on earth: *The Word became flesh and made His dwelling among us – John 1:14a*. That blows me away that, once upon a time, in real time, the Creator of the entire universe left His footprints on this planet. But upon His return to heaven – His ascension – what remained of Him – His message, His ministry – was now to be found in us. The church that He founded He considers to be His body, His presence on earth, over which He rules: *God places all things under [Christ’s] feet and appointed Him to be head over everything for the church, which is His body, the fulness of Him who fills everything in every way – Paul, Ephesians 1:22-23*. This means that the church is an absolute “God thing.” It is neither a human invention or human, social institution. Rather, it is the result of

God's working in and among us; it is just as much a product of His creative power and skill as anything else that exists by the sheer force and desire of His word:

- a) It is God who has pulled us together: ***God has placed the parts in the body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be – Paul, I Corinthians 12:18.***
In fact, the Greek work for church – *ekklesia* – literally means, “to call out from among.” God has pulled together the church from every nation, every ethnicity, every language, every culture, every personality, every gender, every age, every background imaginable. It is no accident that any of us – not the oldest, not the youngest – are here. It's not our plans; it's not our ideas. We are uniquely in this place because God – He Himself, personally – has drawn us and brought us together into this place.
 - b) It is God who binds us together: ***[T]he whole body, supported and held together [Greek: “knit together”] by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow – Paul, Colossians 2:19b.*** What a cool picture – God is patiently causing us to be knit together, one with the other, and simultaneously making us collectively more – more strong, more impacting – than we could ever be on our own.
 - c) And that church, so carefully pulled together by God, so carefully bound together by God, was founded on one central, unchangeable truth; the story is found in Matthew 16, in a private conversation between Jesus and His disciples: ***When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, He asked His disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets,” “But what about you?” He asked. “Who do you say I AM?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” ...And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church” – Matthew 16:13-16, 18a.*** This wasn't just a quiz, some kind of academic moment. Jesus wanted to know, needed to know, where the disciples stood in regard to who He really was, and the disciples needed to know too. And that truth was also going to be their backbone going forward – long after Jesus had left this planet.
 - d) Therefore, the church is built and grown by the Father. It was purchased by the blood of His Son, and it is directed by the power of His Spirit. It is NOT any kind of human institution or club. It is “God-stuff.” We are here by His direction. We are therefore here out of love and obedience to Him.
- 2) The church is a hospital. Both the OT and the NT tell us very clearly where we ALL are coming from, the one common ailment, the one common diagnosis, from which we all suffer – sin:
- a) From the OT: ***We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to our own way – Isaiah 53:6.***
 - b) From the NT: ***[A]ll have sinned and fall short of the glory of God – Paul, Romans 3:23.***

There are NO perfect people here. While we are seen by God as sinless, by faith in what God accomplished through Jesus Christ on the cross, the sad fact is that, this side of heaven, we all stumble and fall – every day, all the time – and we will continue to do so. Right now, we are sitting next to flawed human beings – and so are they. But we have hope, like how Paul encouraged the Philippian church with the faithfulness of God towards His children, that he was ***confident of this, that He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus – Paul, Philippians 1:6.*** That means that, as Christians, we are all “becomers,” to mold us and make us more Christ-like. And eventually, we will be perfect, complete in holiness and righteousness, in heaven but, this side of heaven, not so much. But because we are a hospital, we are brought together to minister to each other and through our spiritual gifts, to stimulate spiritual growth. Because we know struggle, we can come alongside others who struggle – to encourage, to admonish, to love. We can pray for each other; we can literally represent each other before God.

Interesting, isn't it? God comes to earth in the form of His Son, Jesus Christ. And Jesus was perfect – how He lived, how He talked, how He responded, as Peter made clear, Jesus was ***a lamb without blemish or defect – 1 Peter 1:19b.*** Then He leaves; He goes back to heaven. So, what continues that ministry, begun with so perfect a Founder? Us – grossly imperfect us. And there's no Plan B.

So, all that being true, what are our roles as a church?

- 1) Ambassador. In Bible times (as now), an ambassador was a representative of a nation or ruler. For Christians, we are the representatives of God on earth; Paul told us that in no uncertain terms through his second letter to the Corinthians that God ***reconciled us to Himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to Himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And He has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making His appeal through us – Paul, II Corinthians 5:18-20a.*** We even have the words of Jesus Himself from Matthew 10 which gives us an incredible promise as to how we will be enabled to tell God's Story: ***“[D]o not worry about what to say or how to say it. At this time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you” – Jesus Christ, Matthew 10:19-20***
- 2) Priests. In the OT, priests, were ministers who represented the people before God as mediators. Because God desired intimate relationship with His people, the role of priests was designed to guard and preserve that relationship. The whole point was about restoring and maintaining a relationship of harmony between God and His people. In the NT, because the cross created the opportunity for a perfectly harmonized relationship between God and mankind. Peter told his readers in his first letter: ***As you come to Him, the living Stone – rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious***

to Him – you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ... [Y]ou are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s special possession, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy – I Peter 2:4-5, 9-10. Christians, like the priests of old, live to promote relationship with God through the salvation that Christ offered and placed into their lives.

- 3) Reflectors: As Christians, we are called to literally be “moons” to God’s Son. Jesus said as much: *I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life” – Jesus Christ, John 8:12b.* We have a message to share, a lifestyle to imitate, and a story to confirm what Jesus has done for us, and will do for others as well, declaring not only what God continues to offer through Christ, but also the story of how we came to Jesus and have been transformed by believing in Him. We can offer ourselves as a proof positive through our testimonies that Jesus provides exactly what He said He would; in other words, we have experienced that Christ’s message is true. Therefore, we are to be declaring a message of God’s offering of reconciliation through the salvation offered through His Son, Jesus Christ, and declaring a message of praise to Him and about Him and for Him for that reconciliation that occurred only through an operation for His mercy. WE have been rescued, we have been healed, we have been changed, from the darkness that once plagued us to the light that now envelops us. All things are truly new because what we once were we are no more?

OK. Now the second of the things with which God has been impressing me is the urgency of His message. But there is one thing that we are, I believe, lacking in this time and place: urgency. Two things get in the way of urgency:

- 1) The feeling that this world is all that matters
- 2) The feeling that we have all the time in the world.

Our world has become an incredible distraction to the gospel. So many of our passions are divided by politics and issues. Christians wind us using up resources of time and energy because of this or that political candidate or issue or agenda. So many of us complain or wish that the world was some other kind of place. Yet we live with the greatest agent of change in the world: the Holy Spirit, who works the will of the Son who works the will of the Father. But we wind up focused on earthly matters instead of spiritual ones. Politics and policies; politicians and passions rule. This world is all that matters

But Jesus Christ taught something else, enunciated so clearly when He was being interrogated by Pilate: *“My kingdom is not of this world” – Jesus Christ, John 18:36a.* There were many human, earthly issues that Christ could have taken on while He lived here, but He didn’t. Why? Because there was something far more important for Him to battle: Sin. And His

method of battling sin? Offering Himself – His perfect, unblemished life – as a sacrifice for sin, available to everybody whose lives were surrendered to His. And the overwhelming truth that fed that choice? There is an eternity to choose, a destiny to decide. Everybody is going to live forever. The question is not one of duration but rather of destination. Where are people going to spend their eternity? Jesus went to the cross to provide an option to a judgment that a hold, perfect God would be completely justified in exercising – an eternity that would feature just one destination, one nonnegotiable conclusion: hell. Folks, every time we choose to promote life on earth as an end-all, every time we get caught up in the issues and the politics and the personalities of this culture, we take away the clarity of understanding that this world is not all there is: it ain't even close. There is a life far more important to consider.

And then we act like we have all the time in the world with which to spread God's message. What we so easily forget is that, according to Christ Himself, heaven and earth will one day "pass away." Nothing around is going to last forever – most obviously including us.

There are two end times scenarios for us to consider as witnesses of Jesus Christ:

- 1) One is that, at a specific moment in real human history, the entire church – everybody on the planet who is genuinely saved and belonging to God through Jesus Christ – is going to be taken off the planet, in an event we call the "Rapture." Jesus Himself gave His disciples some amazing words in John 14 to describe this: ***"In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also"*** – Jesus Christ, John 14:2-3 (NKJV)
- 2) A second consideration is our own, personal, end times. As of today, as I am speaking these words, I have lived 24,130 days. I say that because one of my favorite scriptures was written by David some 3,000 years ago: ***[A]ll the days ordained for me were written in Your book before one of them came to be*** – David, Psalm 139:16. No matter how many days I have lived, it wasn't me that wrote the number of the days ordained for me; that was God. And how many more I have; I don't have a clue. Which means that I need to be about my Father's business with the urgency of knowing that any day could be my last. That's not drama. That's fact. And add to that the fact that nobody outside our church doors has that information concerning their own length of life. There are souls to save right in front of us. What are we waiting for?

CONCLUSION

So, as we close, considering each of these two areas, how do we increase our passions?

- 1) Regarding church, first evaluate your call. Pastors get the headlines of being "called" to a church because there is almost always some sort of process to play out. But if it is God that is bringing in the parts that He wants to be a part of this body, then we are each called. It is therefore worthwhile and appropriate that we evaluate that this is indeed the body of believers to whom God wants us to be connected. And confirming that call should fuel us to be as present as possible in the workings of this place. And

second, pray that God makes you see this church as God's work in the world. God doesn't work with independent contractors. He works with His Son's presence on earth – the church.

- 2) Regarding the lost, how do we increase our passion and urgency for those outside the kingdom? First, pray for opportunity, claiming those words of Jesus in Matthew 10 that we talked about earlier. Second, pray to be reminded of God's saving you, a sinner. What was that like? How would you tell somebody else your story? And third, pray that God grant each and every one of us the heart of Jesus, who died for every sinner because every sinner mattered to Him. If we are going to imitate our Savior, we need to imitate His passion and His heart for sinners as well. If sinners mattered to Him, then all sinners, without limit, must matter to us. After all, that's how He viewed us.

God's call to the world is our call as well. Let's get after it. Let's pray!