

REVIVE OR REMOVE

April 6, 2024

My most memorable Easter took place on April 6, 1980 at my rural home church (Clymer Hill Reformed Church, founded by some of my Dutch ancestors in the mid-1800's) During some of the 1970's I lived across the road from the church, but in 1979 I had moved over 35 miles away at the other end of our county in the town of Fredonia, N.Y. Occasionally I would return home to visit family and my church friends.

In November of 1979 I planned to return home for a Sunday Service. However, before doing so, I had this strong impression from God that I should do something unusual at the Sunday church service. When the pastor asked for prayer requests (which he did every week), I was to request that he pray for someone that was not born again (it was a relative). I returned home in November, ready to obey this prompting from God. However, much to my consternation, the Pastor never asked for prayer requests that particular day!

I returned to Fredonia, wondering if I had really heard from God. I put it out of my mind for the winter, but by March, God brought the same idea to my mind, but this time I was to share my request at the church on Easter Sunday. As I pondered this, I realized this would be an opportune time, for the church would be full. The morning that Easter arrived, I remember being somewhat anxious as I got ready to make the 45 minute journey back home. I did a lot of praying that morning, especially as I drove through the rolling hills of rural Chautauqua county. I sensed that this was going to be something significant, since God had repeated the same instruction from November.

When I arrived at the church, I sat about 4 rows from the back on the left side. I was somewhat nervous when it came time for the Pastor to ask for prayer requests. The first person to respond was Helen B., who stood up in her seat and asked for prayer for someone in the hospital. I was the next person to share my prayer request. I did not stand but remained seated as I spoke these words.

“I would like prayer for a person who is not born again. We all have friends, relatives and neighbors who are not born again. I believe the Lord is coming soon and He wants them to be born again.”

As Pastor Jack heard those words, he seemed to be somewhat caught off guard. When it came time for him to pray about the requests, he totally omitted mine. After we had sung the last hymn and the benediction was said, something dramatic and unexpected happened. Two aunts of mine immediately came to me from the front pews and thanked me for what I had said. Aunt Hazel said these words to me - “I'm so proud of you!” By this time the congregation was slowly leaving the sanctuary as each one was greeted by the Pastor, who was only about 12 feet away from where I was standing. It was then that Diane H. came towards me from the side aisle and **loudly** said this to me - ‘DO YOU REALIZE OUR PASTOR'S NOT BORN AGAIN?’ I was awestruck with curiosity. Somehow it seemed my words had lit a fuse of spiritual dynamite and I wondered why. I would find out the following evening when I went to visit Diane H. and another lady Connie D.

They explained to me that each of them had separately gone to visit Pastor Jack that week and had asked him if he knew what it meant to be born again and he said no. Now it was clear to me, for I had mentioned the term born again in my prayer request. Looking back, I think the Pastor probably thought it was a setup between me, Diane and Connie in order to get his attention. However, I had not spoken to either of them for the whole winter. Although the three of us were used by God in our own way, it was God who had orchestrated this event for his divine purpose.

Later that summer I organized an outside evangelism meeting at the park in our local village. The Sunday before the event, my uncle Don C. gave a request for prayer about the service. Just as he had done before at Easter, Pastor Jack ignored the request during his prayer. I had become very evangelistic the previous two years when God had caught my attention through this scripture:

'Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven.' - Matthew 10:32-33 NIV

In 1978 I received the classic book on Revival by Charles Finney, which also lit a fire in my soul. Pastor Jack seemed uncomfortable when he heard evangelistic preaching. One time I preached a powerful sermon on a Sunday night about the lukewarm church at Laodicea from Revelation 3. I noticed that Pastor Jack held his head down during the message. At the end of the service, Dorris H. came up front and was crying profusely and her son Kenton said: 'We need to hear more preaching like that around here!' (Pastor Jack was standing right there!) We had an evangelist from our denomination come from Michigan awhile later who had a series of evangelism meetings. At one service, I noticed Pastor Jack had his head down just like when I had preached.

Over a period of about 1 1/2 years I would get this queasy stomach when I heard Pastor Jack speak. He focused on the sovereignty of God but seemed to ignore man's responsibility. Charles Finney had a similar experience, for in his day there was a neglect of evangelism due to extreme sovereignty of God teaching. I began to pray about Pastor Jack, that **God would revive him or remove him.** Although he was a kind man and seemed to believe much of the scriptures, he lacked a personal experience with God. He never spoke anything about his own spiritual life but only about a God who was 'out there.' At my Grandmother's funeral, he acted like he was afraid of death himself and seemed very nervous and shaky, which did not exude much confidence in Christ.

A few years later he left our church and for several years he wandered around upstate New York and lived like a wandering vagabond, sometimes sleeping outside. God had removed him from the pastorate, at least for awhile. I was glad to hear, that several years later he seemed to have some sort of recovery and was an interim Pastor in upstate New York. Although I do not know if he was ever born again. This experience reminded me that sometimes we can go through the motions of Christianity but not know Christ himself. One thing I have noticed about church prayer requests; most are usually only about physical or material things. Seldom are they about the spiritual condition of people.

America and many formerly Christian nations have departed from true Christianity. Our only hope is a change of heart and a return to God. When we refuse to repent and return to God and His ways, He will remove His blessing as He allows the law of sin and death to follow its course. Here is a quote I just heard on an Elijah Streams broadcast on Rumble.

'Sometimes God allows what He hates to accomplish what He loves.'

- Amanda Grace/ Ark of Grace Ministries

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