

A MESSAGE OF FIRST IMPORTANCE!

Sermonette by Robert Schmid

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Last year, that is in 1989, my wife and I had the opportunity to keep the Feast of Tabernacles on a ship cruising the Mediterranean, or more specifically the Aegean Sea, and in the process we visited the ancient city of Corinth.

Now I had read about Corinth in the Bible for many years, and both 1st and 2nd Corinthian is of course written and addressed specifically to the Church of God in Corinth. And so we know, without a doubt, that there was a Church of God in Corinth, just as we know there is a Church of God right here in our town.

Since our visit to Corinth, my perception of what it was like as a member of God's Church at that time in Corinth, has very much taken on a new dimension, and yet, I couldn't help wondering, whether much or anything has changed since the Apostle Paul spoke to the Church of God in Corinth.

In Corinth we saw the temples that were erected so the Greeks could worship their many gods, no different from the temples that are all over America in honor and for the worship of many strange gods. Both the Jews and the Greeks had their own peculiar beliefs, either about "The God" or "A god". No different from today. And so, we can easily see that whatever Paul had to say to the Church of God in Corinth, Paul - that is God through Paul, through the Bible - has the same message to say to the Church of God, in our time, right here to our congregation.

In other words, nothing has really changed, and so I like to share with you that message that God gave to the Church of God in Corinth, for in the words of Paul it is the message of "**FIRST IMPORTANCE**". It is the Good News, or the Gospel by which you and I are saved. Obviously, there can not be a more important message than that. Obviously, this then is my most important Sermonette I have, or will ever give. It is the message - the Good News by which you and I are saved from the penalty of death that we would otherwise deserve for our sinfulness.

And so, please take your Bibles and turn to I. Cor. the 15th chapter, and we will begin with vs. 1. Now, I am going to read this from the Living Bible, but no matter what translation you use - the message you will find is the same. I Corinthians 15 vs.1

"Now let me remind you, brothers, (or brethren), of what the Gospel really is, for it has not changed - it is the same Good News I preached to you before. You welcomed it then and still do now, for your faith is squarely built upon this wonderful message;" verse 2: *"and it is this Good News that saves you if you still firmly believe it, unless of course you never really believed it in the first place:"* verse 3 *"I passed on to you right from the first",* (or as it says in the RSV): *"For I delivered to you as of **first importance**, what has been told to me, that Christ died for our sins just as the Scriptures said he would, and that he was buried, and that three days afterwards he arose from the grave just as the Prophets foretold."* verse 5 *"He was seen by Peter and later by the rest of the twelve and subsequently of course by many more."*

What an incredible message. God is reminding us of something very simple and basic and yet of something so very profound.

The whole message is expressed in one simple sentence in John 3:16

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

This one sentence, simple and yet very powerful, gives us the foundation, gives us the beginning point of the gospel, the beginning point of our belief, for without it everything else is in vain.

So now that we know, and know that we know, what the Gospel is, what are we to do with this knowledge? Well, I believe the answer is quite obvious but, let me illustrate with a personal experience which although negative in one respect, can nevertheless serve as a positive example.

I like to share with you my experience with a personal friend - a young man by the name of Allen Van Winkle. Some of you know of Allen for his grandparents, that now live out of town, used to attend church here for many years. Some of you also know Allen's parents and his sister Holly who visited our church from time to time. On Sundays they attend a Lutheran Church.

I first got to know Allen 13 years ago. He was about nine years old then and wasn't much different then any other boy his age, except for one big difference and that was that he had Muscular Dystrophy from birth, and he knew that it would only be a matter of time until he would be confined to a wheelchair, and would have to helplessly watch the disease take its inevitable course.

And so on the 7th of this month, a Saturday night, we received a call from his grandmother, telling us that Allen was not well and that he had to be taken by ambulance to the emergency ward at a local hospital. His grandmother obviously was concerned and she asked us to go and see Allen right away.

About 11:00 that night, my wife and I drove to the hospital and found Allen with his mother at his side, hooked up to various tubes, but awake and alert. Doctors and nurses came and went, and in between tests, we talked to Allen as best as we could.

The doctors indicated that Allen was doing better and were considering whether to keep him there or whether to send him home. And so after some more small talk, we said good by, wished him well and went home.

The next day we called the hospital and were told that Allen was undergoing more tests - he obviously was not send home, and that it would not be a good time to visit him just now.

That evening, Allen went into a coma, and by 7:00 am the next morning he had died. Allen had just turned 22.

Now a good question at this point would be? What does all of this have to do with the Gospel, with the Good News of Christ's death and resurrection?

Well, let me explain. You see, Allen was not ignorant of the Gospel. Over the years, on various occasions we had talked about God, about Jesus Christ and we had prayed together, and his grandparents in their own way have told Allen about the love of God.

And so it was not surprising that, Allen's grandmother called me that night from out of town, asking me to go to the hospital and see Allen. She wanted someone from the Church, someone from God's true Church to be with Allen, just in case.

Well, as I mentioned earlier, I did visit Allen that night, I talked to him, I wished him well and let him know that we would pray for him. But, you know what I didn't do? I didn't bring my Bible, I didn't share with Allen the message, the Good News of Christ's death and resurrection. Don't you think that Allen wanted, or, at least should have heard that message at that crucial point in his life? I believe he should have. And I believe he wanted to. But he didn't, at least not from me!

You see, later that night after I left, either because Allen asked for, or because of his family's concern, I do not know, they called in a Minister, a Lutheran Minister, who told Allen about Christ and the resurrection, who prayed with Allen that night, just before he died. I met this Minister a few days later at Allen's funeral and thanked him for being there with Allen that night.

What about you? Have you ever had the opportunity to share the love of God with someone, and share the Good News of Christ's death and resurrection, but didn't? Maybe you were to embarrassed, or maybe it just didn't enter your mind, or maybe you thought the message is only for baptized members of the Worldwide Church of God. Whatever the reason, the Good News is for everyone, and the good news is that God will give you and me other opportunities, and so, I want to encourage you to be prepared, so that when God calls, you can say, as did Abraham and Samuel: *Here I am Lord - use me!*

As for myself, I have asked God to forgive me for not sharing the Good News of His Son Jesus Christ with Allen, my friend, that night. I have asked God to give me other opportunities. And so I stand before you this day, to share with you, and to remind you, brethren, of what the Gospel really is.-

“For I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to everyone that believes.”

So, my dear brethren (as it says in vs. 58 of 1st Cor. 15),

“since future victory is sure, be strong and steady, always abounding in the Lord's work, for you know that nothing you do for the Lord is ever wasted, as it would be if there were no resurrection.”

But you and I, brethren, know that there is a resurrection, so lets be busy and diligent doing the Lord's work, when the opportunity comes your way.