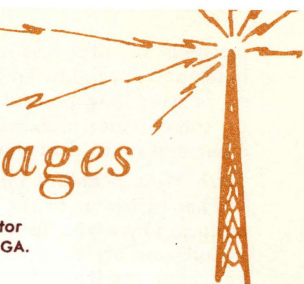


Baptist hour messages



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RECONFIRMING OUR RESERVATIONS

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Scripture: John 3:1-7

Today travel by air is fast becoming the preferred way of going. Due to the ever-increasing volume of flying, a recent change was made by the airlines concerning ticket reservations. Within a specified number of days before flight one must reconfirm his reservation or it will be cancelled. Many people who needed a seat were left at standby counters because folks who said they were going failed to show up while not cancelling their reservations. In a very definite way one's life as a Christian is like that. God wants to know if we are going along and He wants some specific evidence of the fact. As a matter of fact, He wants us to reconfirm our reservations if we plan to take that journey to eternity.

Immortality is not a natural endowment of the human race, though most aspire toward it one way or another. Eternal life is a gift of God through regeneration . . . not one of man's natural endowments. Man no more naturally falls to this lot than he naturally chooses to die. This wondrous arrangement is of God's own doing and that without man's merit. To conclude that all men are worthy of living endlessly is to conclude an absurdity. To join that school of theologians who believe that at the end of life all mankind will march into some celestial bliss, regardless of how they lived on earth, is a farce of the first magnitude! No, no one ever enters the portals of everlasting life without doing so by the route that God has provided.

INITIAL RESERVATION

Let us begin with the conviction that you must make your initial reservation. While the plan of salvation is plain and free, still the individual must take the initiative in being saved. God will not go beyond the point of providing the food, setting the table, and issuing the invitation. He does not pick up the spoon and force feed anyone. And thank God that He doesn't! Religion is no coercive medicine for man's fevered brow. It is the balm of life but the patient must be willing to partake of the life-sustaining substance. It is up to the individual man or woman, boy or girl to know that neither God nor God-like faith can be had by proxy . . . each must be experienced to be worth while.

The point is, that you must make your reservation if you plan to take the trip. No airline assumes that you are going to fly unless you pick up the phone and designate the time and place. Nor does God. You see, the plane is fueled, the pilots are on the job, the hostesses have all things in readiness, and a seat is there for you. But you must indicate your desire to go.

RECONFIRMATIONS

But I speak today primarily to those who have already done just that. I have met few people who were cynical to the point that they indicated no interest in that future trip. Oh, perhaps one percent of the population has so eclipsed the

meaning of life that continuance of it holds no appeal, but how about the masses of us who look beyond this vale of tears of some wider dimension of life, some other and more than this vague contradiction? Most people want to go along.

That brings us to the new ruling of the airlines. Once you have made your reservation, you are to leave your phone number, your resident address. In case there is a change of flight, inclement weather, or many other probabilities, they need to know how to get in touch with you. When the final passenger list is made up, they want to know whether or not you still plan to make the trip. Are you going? Or have you cultivated other interests now, changed your plans, or lost interest in going.

Just so is the business of being a Christian. God knows that one day you make your initial reservation. You walked down some church aisle and with full emotion committed your life to the greatest on earth. Though in fumbling words and charged feelings, still you knew that life was changing for you then and there. God knows that part of it. But in millions of cases He hasn't heard from them since. They signed a decision card which, incidentally, was sincere at the time, but all His efforts to contact them since have met with frustrating defeat. Ah, at this point we need to know what this business of salvation really means after all.

Friends, being saved does not make anybody saintly. It merely changed the destiny, the direction in which one is moving. It enrolls him as a new citizen of the new kingdom while pulling out his card from the old life of pagan belonging. While it changes one's status it does not change one's nature. Even the sacred baptismal waters are nothing more than the chemical equation of H_2O when it comes to washing white the inner spots of sin. Being saved is a point but being converted is a process. Conversion is a long, slow, painful process by which the old nature is fashioned into the new. That takes tears, sweat, forbearance and constant love and loyalties. The first process—that of being saved—merely enrolls you in school, buys your books and gets you started off. The other is the day by day attendance of classes, the midnight oil of preparation, the standing of the examination right up to the day of graduation.

Now what kind of student is it that matriculates as a freshman, gets his books, chooses his major subjects, then in a few weeks time, throw away the books, drops out of classes, and lapses back into his illiterate self? Then how about those multimillion who entered the kingdom of God as freshmen, who made their reservation for heaven, and then threw away the books when the lessons got hard and haven't shown the slightest evidence of growth since? God wants to know what happened!

UGLY PICTURE

This is the ugly picture of the Church of Jesus Christ. A picture of multitudes who frequent the holy precincts but whose lives deny the power of the presence of the living God. What Christ has done for them is never permitted to be done through them. God, what a tragedy! That the love that was shed for man's sin is not permitted to operate through man as the life-giving, soul-saving, moral-changing, wondrous power.

The saved yet unconverted man is like a block of granite. Potentially he is a work of art. But there is no magic about it. One becomes educated only through the long progression of grades. One is inured to the image of Christlikeness only by staying on the job, of reconfirming his reservations daily.

I think today of the millions who are out of touch with God. This mammoth nation on the move from farm to factory, from hamlet to city, from job to job means constant unsettlement, the pulling up of old ties that gave stability. The spiritual causality of such movement means that millions have no longer any church belonging. In our city of Atlanta, Georgia, a city of three-quarters of a million people one out of three of its residents do not belong to local churches. Every third person would have to borrow someone else's preacher to preach his funeral!

Recently here in our church we held a banquet for new members. A wonderful response was shown in attendance, yet a week later I received a letter from one of the new members who obviously spoke of a guilty conscience. She had moved to Virginia four months previously without

doing even the common courtesy of telling us that she was going. So, we cooked a good meal, provided all the niceties for her. Her vacant chair was a silent testimony to one of the malignant symptoms of our day. God wants you to reconfirm your reservation. Every large church has on its regular mailing list scores of people who have been dead for years. But believe me, and I do not overstate it, there are hundreds on the role who are dead in spirit but who never have been buried by any mortician!

EVIDENCES OF RECONFIRMATION

That brings me then to ask, "What evidence is there for reconfirming?" How can you know for certain that you are going along? Is it a matter of guesswork? Hardly. One sure way of doing this is returning to the altar. That is where you were originally, then why not go back? The ease of overdoing it isn't as pronounced as you have been led to believe. The danger of this day is not emotional spasms in church. Our danger is the sin of the dry eye! Down at the altar one will be smitten by the conviction that you cannot tell God that you love only one time and expect that to suffice. No more so than one filling of the tank with gasoline will run permanently. You must check in so God will know where you are standing.

Am I not speaking now to throngs of people who because of little spirits, or bickering jealousies, or some trivial misunderstanding are at odds with their church? Perhaps some of you haven't been inside a church for a long, long time.

Then God has led me to ask you, "Are you still planning to go along?" If so, then you need to reconfirm your reservation by swallowing your pride, and returning to that sacred spot wherein God dwells.

Just now it seems that I hear some saying, "But preacher, are you implying that if one is once saved that he isn't always saved?" I am saying simply that if one is once saved he will always act like he is saved! He will go on through conversion until his life is made in the image of the Giver of Life. Let us be done with this foolish notion that one can make a public profession of faith at twenty-five years of age, then live the rest of his life as though there were no Bible, no God, nor Christ and then expect to be saved in the end. Brother, that simply is not so! But if he is genuinely saved, he will give evidence that he is taking the trip. He will fall down, yes, but the difference is that he resents being down and will struggle to get back up. He, like the brilliant artist of Sienna, who stood before his work of art for a long time after finishing it, then was heard to say, "May God forgive me that I did not do it better," will always want to do it better.

Permit me to close the sermon by telling you that God will leave without you! It breaks His heart to do so, but let there be no misunderstanding about it. God can do without us. But can we do without Him? Ah, that's the most needed question. All our self-importance notwithstanding, when God makes up that final passenger list, He wants to know if you still plan to be on it.

IF I WERE SATAN

October 13, 1957

Scripture: Romans 2:1-11

Did you ever wonder what you would do if you were Satan? If I were Satan and really wanted to succeed at the job, I think I would major on several things.

First of all, I think I would try to convince people that the Christian religion impoverishes life—that it is a pretty dull affair, staid, outmoded, and at best, represents the left-overs of priestcraft and sup-

erstitions. I would speak as old Nietzsche by saying, "God is dead and let's get back to the business of running the world as we please." I would do my level best to knock the polish and luster off of Christian faith. As a matter of fact, Satan has succeeded to a great extent in doing exactly this. To millions the idea of God and religion excite nothing more than idle curiosity. The notion of God is so tarnished and tame, worn so slick by