

The University Heights Messenger

February 7, 2010

The Church At Antioch of Syria--3 A Dedicated Congregation

I had never attended a worship service at the Douglass Hills congregation in Louisville when I agreed to take part in their preacher training program. I had no idea what to expect when I walked in the building my first Sunday with them. As I stood in the vestibule greeting and introducing myself to the members it did not take long for a distinct impression to begin forming in my mind. These Christians were serious about what they were doing. When I left that congregation more than a year and a half later to go work with the brethren at Evendale, that initial impression had been reinforced and proven ten times over. To this day Douglass Hills remains one of the most serious and dedicated congregations I have had the pleasure of regular association and work with.

I suppose each one of us can think of any number of congregations, including this one, whose dedication to the Lord made an impression on us. The church at Antioch of Syria was one of those kind of congregations. In Acts 13:1-2 we read, **“Now there were in the church at Antioch prophets and teachers, Barnabas, Simeon who was called Niger, Lucius of Cyrene, Manaen a member of the court of Herod the tetrarch, and Saul. While they were worshipping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’”**

We as Christians don't have much to say about fasting these days, do we? It is not something that has been enjoined upon Christians as a command and so we generally see little reason for discussing it. However, let me suggest that their fasting was a sign of their dedication to the Lord. Before we discuss that it would be a good idea to refresh our memories a bit about the act of fasting itself.

Fasting is a decided and sustained abstinence from food for a specific time. Throughout Scripture we find it associated with

private acts of piety, times of disaster, times of emotional turbulence, times of mourning, times of repentance, or even part of public devotion.

Moses fasted while receiving the Law from God both times (Deuteronomy 9:9, 17f). The Law itself states, **“in the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall afflict yourselves...”** (Leviticus 16:29). Afflicting oneself and depriving oneself are the same thing, thus it certainly appears fasting was commanded in the Mosaic Law for the Day of Atonement. At seemingly every point in Israel's history fasts were proclaimed in moments of national trouble and disturbance.

As we come to the New Testament, we are able to deduce that John commanded, or at least encouraged, his disciples to fast while Jesus imposed no such rule on His followers. Our Lord was asked to explain this difference (Matthew 9:14-17). His response has led many to believe, including this writer, that fasting is a legitimate, though non essential, function of the Christian life.

I stated earlier that the fast by the prophets and teachers at Antioch was a sign of their dedication to the Lord. Let's explore that further at this point. Fasting necessarily involves discipline and self-sacrifice, both of which tend to heighten the spirituality of a man, and *will* heighten it if the fast is done for that specific reason. Keeping in mind that fasting *is not* commanded in the New Testament, we are able to see that it is the natural outgrowth of one's state of mind. As we read again Acts 13:2 it seems that these Christians were so deeply engaged in their worship (or service, as the word can mean) to the Lord that they determined not to interrupt those efforts to eat. How long this fast went on we do not know for Scripture is silent.

Are there lessons here for you and I? Certainly. Several years ago unrest entered a congregation of which I am quite familiar because of the length of the sermons. The preachers would preach anywhere from 40-50 minutes causing the congregation to dismiss

10-20 minutes past the “normal” time. I asked one of the men who was particularly upset about these “long” sermons exactly what his issue was. To paraphrase, it allowed the denominations to get out sooner and created longer waits at the restaurants. As it turned out, *everyone’s* issue with the length of the sermons came down to hunger related concerns. The problem was that they were hungering for the wrong thing!

Do not understand me as saying a Christian must fast for that would be binding where our Lord has not. Do understand me as saying that a Christian must be willing to self-sacrifice and develop greater discipline in their service to the Lord. Those prophets and teachers at Antioch of Syria were doing it through fasting, understanding that their service to the Lord was more important than the rumble of their belly’s. However we do it, let us continue to draw nearer to the Lord. Let our dedication match theirs. In that way University Heights will increasingly be a dedicated congregation.

IN NEED OF PRAYERS:

Jim Edwards and **Esmeralda Agustin** are struggling’ spiritually. Let’s encourage them and let them know that we are concerned.

Sister **Glenn Kimberlin** is shut in.

Jody Bowman’s surgery went well.

Taylor Osterling has been hospitalized several times recently due to respiratory distress.

Shannon Gilbert, the wife of a coworker of Troy Antle, has been diagnosed with breast cancer. She is receiving treatments.

Rachel Knollman’s is awaiting the results of two scans at this writing. I should have updates today.

Rachel Crawford’s aunt, **Gail Stein**, has been diagnosed with breast cancer. She is going to do chemo and radiation before surgery.

Robert Brundige, Richard’s brother, is in Parkside Manor in Cynthiana dealing with some issues. **Sarah Brundige**, Richard’s mother, is in Cambridge Place Nursing Home and in need of our prayer.

Let’s also remember **David Day and his wife, Michelle Oxendine, Ron Catchen, Chuck McDavitt, and David Blakeman.**

UPCOMING EVENTS:

The Men’s meeting will be next Sunday. Please make your plans to attend.

BIBLE READING SCHEDULE FOR 1/7-13:

Sunday: Gen 16-17, Ps 8, Matt 10

Monday: Gen 18-19, Ps 9, Matt 11

Tuesday: Gen 20-21, Ps 10, Matt 12

Wednesday: Gen 22-23, Ps 11, Matt 13

Thursday: Gen 24, Ps 12, Matt 14

Friday: Gen 25-26, Ps 13, Matt 15

Saturday: Gen 27, Ps 14, Matt 16-17

SERMON TOPICS:

Sunday AM. The Gospel of Jesus Christ

Sunday PM. Hebrews “Let Us” Statements--3

CLASS INFORMATION:

We will begin this morning in lesson 10 at I, B, 1 (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). I appreciate the comments thus far. It makes the class more interesting and effective!

