

THE WARNING SIGN OF OUR TIMES CHURCHES BURNING DOWN AND FIRE IN OUR BONES: HAVE WE MISSED IT? JEREMIAH 31:31-34

"Why are there so many warning signs?" There are warning signs for Speed Zones, Deer Crossings, Icy Bridges, Curves, School Zones, Falling Rocks, Bumps Ahead, Railroad Crossings, and Churches . . .

Wait a minute you say, why does a church need a warning signs? Isn't it the role of baptized and ordained ministries today – to build communities that understand warning signs? Yes it is, to build a church which is on fire for GOD.

Because you see there is only one kind of church that understand a warning sign and that is a church "ON FIRE". Have you ever seen a church on fire really on fire? One where the members are not afraid to tell the world that they belong to the Kingdom of GOD That they are fighters for GOD, Soldiers for GOD .Do you know anyone who really is on fire for GOD. Have you missed it?

Yes! We have a lot of churches "on fire" – but they are burning down, not being fired up. They are burning down from hellfire – from fear, from status quoism, from cultism, they are gleaming with ire, not fire .The ire or wrath of the "unholy fire" of the ideologies and idolatries Leviticus 10: 1 refers to has ignited them, they possess something that God has not commanded. There will be a fire blazing out from heaven and GOD will destroy them. They will die slowly, they will die in God's presence and as Moses said to Aaron," this is what God mean' t when he said,"To the one who comes near me, I will show myself holy; before all the people I will show my glory." If they do not walk in the will of GOD, everything will be lost. They will burn for eternity.

They are "burning down" not "being fired up" from "fire in the bones." What is this "fire in the bones"? In these familiar words from Jeremiah 31: 31-34, it is that which proclaims a sweet promise to the exiled people of Israel. Driven from their homeland, helpless and afraid, Jeremiah reminds Israel that not only is God still with them – God promises a brilliant future for them. A new covenant will be forged between God and Israel – a covenant written not just in stone, but a covenant seared and sealed upon the heart. I will put my laws in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people.v.33 b

Though this message was welcomed news, Jeremiah did not feel relieved. He had known too much rejection in his role as God's prophet. However, why are churches burning down? Is it because people are dying without knowing GOD or JESUS CHRIST and the church is not doing its duty to tell about the Lord, by leading the lost back to our Savior, our Father.

The difference between then and now was that Jeremiah had tasted God's word; it had become "a raging fire, shut up in his bones." Jeremiah knew that this inner fire was unquenchable and eternally warming. He knew that the power God promised in the coming covenant would be internalized, written, and burned onto the heart of God's people, it would be burned into the muscle memory, where it would never be destroyed.

We NEED THAT FIRE TODAY Church. Because from Moses at the burning bush to the Pentecost tongues, we have learned, that fire is a symbol of the incandescent presence of GOD. "Our GOD IS A CONSUMING FIRE (Hebrews 12:29), and GOD shares that fire with us." Can we find that fire in OUR bones again? Can we feel the reality of God's covenant seared and sealed into our hearts? Yes, we can! Are we willing to try? Let us be thankful and worship GOD acceptably with REVERENCE and AWE. This is a new start, an acceptable start Yes a new beginning.

AS we look at JOHN 12:20—34, we see some people who have the sign in their hearts. They are Greeks who came to see Jesus and they came with new eyes – the eyes of God. They came hoping to see Jesus the incarnated GOD, not just some reflection of their own desires. THEY WANTED TO KNOW JESUS CHRIST. THEY WANTED TO BE IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD. Do you want to feel the fire? DO you want to see JESUS? Do you want to be in the presence of GOD? DO you have new eyes?

More than anything else, faith in Jesus Christ means changing the way we see. Jesus said in (John 3:3) when in conversation with Nicodemus "no one can see the kingdom of GOD without being born from above." The reason we need to be born again is to be able to see, to have our vision cleared up, our imagination opened and our sight enlarged. It is our ability to see that releases power in our life. The wrong vision is imprisonment; the right vision is empowerment. Spirituality is, more than anything else, the ability of seeing – first, seeing things "as they are," and second, seeing things as they can be. Before we can "show and tell", we must "see and tell." Now faith is the substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things not seen. Have we missed it?

What are we seeing you ask? We must see Jesus Christ in our lives. We must tell that Jesus Christ is in our lives. We must feel Jesus Christ moving in our lives. We must see that Jesus is at the center of our lives and, Jesus must be the fire in our lives.

Seeing involves two kinds of sight, which may be called the experimental, and includes the cerebral, the rational and the scientific .The other is experiential which includes, celebratory, revelatory and the spiritual .The claims and the techniques of science are not the only valid methods of acquiring knowledge about the world, or the Word. Have we missed it?

In the experimental you keep something at arm's-length distance to study, it's called critical detachment; in the experiential, you put your arms around something. It's called loving embrace, you feel it, you smell it, you study it, you experience it.

The analytical takes apart; the synthetic puts together. In the one, we are rich – full of ourselves. In the other, we are poor – empty of ourselves. In the experimental, we are a distant observer or critic. While In the other, we are an intimate lover. Love is as much a mode of knowledge as scientific criticism. The predominant language of knowing Christ is the language of love.

Yet, while experimental knowledge is honored and heeded, experiential knowledge is usually considered suspect and faulty. The modern worldview has achieved idolatrous status in the church. It has become almost the only way we have taught people to know God: through science, under glass, until the suffocating bell jar of a church brings no air and little fire to people's lives. However, Jeremiah reminds us that life-sustaining knowledge of God must come through experience – through feeling the fire shut up in our bones and burned into our hearts.

Tired of all the rational philosophies and salvation systems Greek culture offered them, John's God-fearing Greeks described in this gospel text asked for a direct encounter with experiential knowledge – "Sir, we wish to see Jesus! (v.21) People today want to see Jesus. They want to feel the covenant burning in their hearts too. THEY want the real fire too, the real spirit too, the real Jesus too .THE REAL GOD of mercy, hope, grace and love .THE GOD of our lives too, the GOD the sign represents in front of our churches, like the one here at CEDAR GROVE which say's" THE CHURCH WERE JESUS IS LORD."HAVE WE MISSED IT? The organized church should give seekers what they need, because what they need and what they want is a touch from Jesus Christ our lord. Is that what you want here today? It sure is what I want.

Experiential knowledge does not just inform, it transforms. That is why the message Jesus preached to the crowd was one that proclaimed he would be "lifted up" and would "draw all people to myself" (John 12:32). I have news for you, some good news for you today, Jesus is lifted up by his death on the cross, and he is drawing all men into himself. Thank GOD church!

However, Christ's story is not finished yet. Because we are called to complete the story of Christ by spreading the gospel. We are called to help lift Christ up before the rest of the world. The living experience of "seeing Christ" must ignite a fire in us that compels us to make Christ known to others. We can only "keep the faith" by "spreading the faith".

The question is how do we make Christ known. We must begin by

Experiencing Christ, knowing Christ, following the commands that we relinquish the control we pretend we have over our lives, give in to Jesus Christ.

Look at the Bible, and you will see over and over again the story of men and women who have this fire burning in their bones, this fire seared and sealed upon their hearts. Have we missed it?

- Mary did not say, "I don't do virgin births."
- Mary Magdalene did not say, "I don't do feet."
- John did not say, "I don't do deserts."
- Paul did not say, "I don't do letters."
- Jesus did not say, "I don't do crosses."
- You didn't say, "I don't do praises, I don't do songs, I don't do prayers, I don't do worships..."

All of these things that show the Jesus Christ we love through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit sometimes knocks to get in, because we refuse to let him into our hearts. For any church to be worthy of its warning sign, it has to be turned on. It has to be on fire yes the fire burning in its bones.

We as Christians today should become a flaming torch of Spirit, Energy, Faith and Firepower for the entire world to see and feel? We need to say yes to Jesus .Say yes to Jesus, Say yes to Jesus, then, and only then will we have deserved our sign, which says," church on fire for God. It has a wonderful spirit, a saving spirit, a loving spirit, and a Christ filled spirit"

"It has the Holy Spirit and whenever you walk into it, it's on fire for Christ Jesus

"I love to worship where the spirit is real. We can be that kind of church for our father. A worshiping, praising, loving, spiritual church. Alive with the Holy Spirit, God centered, Jesus Christ loving". Amen Thank God!

The role of the church is to lift up the Lord Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit, not the hydraulics of doctrines, dogmas or denominations and traditions created by men, which are not Holy Spirit led.

God's charge to the church is to "see and tell," before "show and tell."

Do we deserve our warning sign? Are we a Holy Spirit filled, Jesus Christ, God fearing and loving church?

Do we deserve a sign? Let us see, are we doing those things Jesus Christ demands of us indeed commands of us?

Is our light shining so men will see it and glorify our Father who is in heaven?

GOD is that light in us that shines out for the world to see through us. GOD is the story of glory that we must be telling the world about.

His saving grace, his mercy, his love, his gift of life, and his continual blessings need to be spread abroad for the world to see and hear. Yes, we need to see and tell not the childish game of show and tell, where envy, jealousy and doubt about others relationship with GOD surfaces. GOD gives me direction just as HE anyone else and I am so glad that GOD is not a respecter of persons, but rather loves us all the same.

Let your sign be seen, let the world know that you are a worker that need not be ashamed to be called a child of our heavenly FATHER, the true and living God through Jesus Christ Amen. Being about our Father's business is our job .In Luke 12: 49 Jesus said,"I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled!" We need to light that fire, restart the blaze. It is expected of us. I need to ask a question here, have you missed an opportunity to praise GOD today, have you missed an opportunity to show love today, have you missed an opportunity to truly worship GOD today. If you have Lord have mercy on all of us because we have failed someone here today.

- Your warning sign is in the Name of the Lord and is a manifestation of his character.
- It has no separate existence apart from the Lord.
- We can pray to him by calling on his name.
- His name protects us.
- His saving acts testify that his name is near us.
- We can trust in his name.
- We can hope in his name.
- We can sing praises in his name.

We can rejoice in his name.

When we do all of these things, we can surely say by faith that we deserve those signs that lets a dying, sinful world know that we are children, stamped in the heart by a God who has placed a testimony on our lips and love our spirit. Amen, amen!

Then and only then will churches stop burning because their testimonies will please the LORD. THANK GOD! THANK GOD CHURCH!

FOR HE IS TRULY WORTHY TO BE SERVED.