

Prayer List

Sheila
Ophelia
Josh
Daniel
Olene

Services:

Sunday

Bible Class 9:00 a.m.
Assembly 9:50 a.m.
Assembly 6:00 p.m.

Wednesday

Bible Class 7:00 p.m.

Pinole Tidings

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Elders:

Brad Behrens - bradbehrens@pinolechurchofchrist.com
Michael Odom - MichaelOdom@pinolechurchofchrist.com
Ernie Sprinkel - preacher@pinolechurchofchrist.com

Interesting Times

by Ed Sanderson, Sr.

They claim that the Chinese have a curse that says, "may you live in interesting times." Well, someone must be listening to some Chinese folks because we live in interesting times.

Our little congregation has had a constant flow of interested people moving among us. This is a great blessing to us – and sometimes a curse.

Many are interested in our Bible-centered sermons and classes. That is a blessing. But then, many come and listen again and again and never obey. We call them and invite them to special studies and "gospel meetings," but the heart of the gospel is not their primary interest.

Others study and obey the gospel. This is a great blessing. But some never form the habits of life that produce lasting peace and joy. Some will study but never change their lives so that they worship God with His people. Others attend for a while, but their other interests in life keep them from growing spiritually. We try to connect with them, but they drift on the breezes of their other interests.

Still others obey and become active. This is a blessing beyond words! They help others and become beloved. They become Bible class teachers and learn to train others to teach Bible classes.

This Week's Question:

Who, besides Isaiah, saw the Lord sitting upon his throne?

Answer To Last Week's Question:

Baal-berith - Judges 8:33

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They are chosen to serve in special capacities, sometimes called "Deacons" and "Elders." But some of these have other interests that keep them from fulfilling the spirituality that God offers. And these may not get our calls or concerns since they look like they are doing fine – except for things that you can't quite put your finger on.

What a curse! Maybe we get a little too interested in careers when our neighbors are in need of true friendship and good examples. Maybe we are a little too interested in baseball, or movies, or concerts, or whatever when fellow Christians are in need of teaching or comforting. Maybe we are a little too interested in pleasing faithless family members when fellow Christians need moral support found only in the assembling with the saints. What is clear is that people stop growing a crop that looks like New Testament Christians looked.

In today's interesting times, such people often judge services of the Lord to be cursed because they seem "no longer interesting to me." Classes focused on the Bible that interest visitors just don't interest these people anymore. Discussions about current events and "what I think" or what "I just can't believe anymore" are more the taste. People stop growing beyond the "eye of the beholder." I, I, I – the beginning of "interest."

Sermons that once were heard, digested, and applied are "old news." Attention span is shortened for singing songs in the interest of getting back to "real life." Prayers seem long because interests are elsewhere. The Lord's Supper is not interesting enough, so let's add background music, dim the lights, and add external stimulation since Jesus by Himself is not enough. Less of what New Testament Christians did is more of what is "interesting" today – even termed "more spiritual."

Most of us have known this curse in moments of our own lives. It is like a stalk of wheat growing among thorns and thistles, struggling for every inch of growth but never producing a grain good enough to eat – much less helping others live productively.

Come to think of it, that is exactly what Jesus called it in His parable of the Sower (Mk. 4:1-20/Lk. 8:4-15/Mt. 13:2-23). Jesus

told this parable to a large crowd who came together, but the point of the parable is that it is "normal" for large crowds to have various "interests" and to drift apart.

Any crowd in any era will have many people who are not interested in the good news that Jesus brings. Each one of these is created to be God's child just as I am. Many are our relatives and dear friends. Oh, how this hurts.

Many with shallow interest in God's ways won't survive the "hot sun" of trials, so the breezes of life gently blow them around without any spiritual harvest. Many are members of our genetic families or circle of fellowship. Oh, how this hurts.

Many whose "interests" are so mixed up with temporary cares and riches produce no real lasting fruit, though they look healthy enough. They are "successful." They are "Deacons" and "Elders." Many are our parents, children, spouses – sometimes our "Deacons" or "Elders." Oh, how this hurts. Only a few have what Jesus calls truly "honest and good hearts."

But Jesus also gives us good news. The faithful few will produce much more fruit than one would predict. It's like small seeds that produce big trees or a little leaven that changes the nature of much flour (Mk. 4:31-32/Matt. 13:31-35/Lk. 13:18-21). And it is very interesting to see in our local churches!

Our "old fashioned" interest in Bible-based classes once condemned as not capable of interesting people produces real understanding and spirituality. Our "long" services and sermons condemned as "turning off the young people" by parents whose kids have left the Lord for other interests produced young people who swallowed the whole gospel kernel and let it grow into productive, Christian lives.

This is the blessing and the curse of interesting times. Interest is everything. Catering to "interests" other than the Lord's never has produced what God is interested in seeing. Taking interest in God and His work is everything.

Are you interested?