**Round Top Church Christian Fellowship**

Ekklesia Sermon Series

 *Awaken*

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February 23rd In the Year of Our Lord 2020

(Unless otherwise noted, NAS quoted)

Last week, we reviewed the history of the Church, that is people coming together to worship God. We stopped at the First Great Awakening which took place in the 1700’s. We also made observations on the impact of the Age of Reason/Enlightenment on Western Civilization to the present day. A key point to keep in mind as we move forward.

20 For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there among them." (Matthew 18:20 CSB)

This is important because Jesus points to God walking and talking with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. The Church starts there. God has never abandoned meeting with people. Abel, Adam’s son, was bringing his righteous offering to God. Enoch, Cain’s son, was taken-up by God as they walked together (Genesis 5:24). We are close to God when we commune with Him.

I have heard an evangelist give an account of people who said God does not talk to them. They cannot feel the presence of God in their life. The evangelist asked when the last time was that they were in a position to talk to God, meaning had the rebellion been removed from their heart? Had sin impeded the channels of communication? Had their spiritual heart arteries been choked with pride, ego or materialism? Had sin so clouded the relationship that God could not be seen through their bitterness and unforgiveness? The answer is self-evident. This condition is the reality for many in the world. Always was and is today.

Unfortunately, the Church parallels the lost person’s inability to feel the presence of God. The State-Church apparatus erected barriers to where the common person was removed from the presence of God. The State-Church claimed and enforced intermediator authority. As we have seen, the State-Church institution of man, the political apparatus, ruled the masses during the 1000 years of the Dark Ages choking-off the Bible and withholding the Word of God from the people. They made laws making it illegal to possess the Bible much less duplicate its text. We still have remnants of the State-Church today. We have previously mentioned that the Roman Catholic Church State Church (RCSC) still has a seat at the United Nations, as a state would among the other nations of the world.

Many of the movements that broke away from the Bishop in Rome aligned themselves with local political authorities. In time, these too developed their own ecclesiastical structures regarding worship and a path to be reconciled to God. The King of England and the Arch Bishop of Canterbury for the Church of England was aligned to rule their realm. There is a long history of the two ruling. We see Luther in Germany was aligned with Prince Fredrick. In essence, the people exchanged one political master for another. From our standpoint today, this was an improvement. The new masters were more closely aligned with God’s Word. The Reformation is an ongoing process. No doubt that the Church aligning itself with the state has afforded some political protection from adversaries. Be it these adversaries were none-other than those with different teachings about God and His Word. And we shall not forget that it was the States of Europe aligned with Churches’ spiritual leadership who stopped the Muslim invasion of Europe.

It is applicable to examine some of the main elements of the Reformation that caused many to revolt against the Roman Catholic State Church. Once people started reading the Bible for themselves, the RCSC was challenged. Here are some of the challenges.

1. Priesthood of the Believer (No mediator needed)
2. Transubstantiation (RCSC authority to change the elements and serve the Lord’s Supper)
3. Infant Baptism (Remove Original Sin)
4. Solo Scripture (refutes Roman Bishop’s authority)
5. Sole Fidia (Faith alone Saves)
6. In England (Separation between Church and State)
7. Believer’s Baptism

All of these were front and center during the Reformation and, in some quarters, are still hotly contested today. This is why it can be said that we are still living during a reforming time. In reality, people have always struggled with God and His Word.

Today, in the West, especially here in America, the Church in Laodicea that John is told to address in the book of Revelation is to some degree a mirror image of the Church today. But then all the churches addressed in Revelation represent the condition of the Body of Christ, the Church Through the Ages.

**Revelation 3:14-22**

14 "Write to the angel of the church in Laodicea:

"The Amen, the faithful and true Witness,

the Originator [Jesus Christ] of God's creation says:

 15 I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot.

I wish that you were cold or hot.

16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold,

I am going to vomit you out of My mouth.

17 Because you say,

'I'm rich; I have become wealthy and need nothing,'

and you don't know that you are

wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked,

18 I advise you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire

so that you may be rich,

white clothes so that you may be dressed

and your shameful nakedness not be exposed,

and ointment to spread on your eyes so that you may see.

19 As many as I love, I rebuke and discipline.

So be committed and repent.

20 Listen! I stand at the door and knock.

If anyone hears My voice and opens the door,

I will come in to him and have dinner with him, and he with Me.

21 The victor:

I will give him the right to sit with Me on My throne,

just as I also won the victory

and sat down with My Father on His throne.

22 "Anyone who has an ear

should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches."

The Church in Laodicea was a wealthy community. They had become complacent in their faith for the Lord. Laodicea was the seventh and final church-body about which was written. Verse twenty is telling of the condition of those believers in Laodicea. They had a faith but had left the Lord from their intimate life. Jesus says, listen to Me. I am standing at your door knocking. Wow, what a picture Jesus gives! These are believers who had spiritually dwindled to a place where they could not hear the Lord. Jesus had to tell them that he was knocking on their door. They were not bad people, but at the same time, they were just there. They were so busy with their lives of comfort that they could not hear the Lord knocking. He had to tell them He was knocking. Verse twenty starts with the word, “Listen.”

Jesus says of them. . .

15 I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot.

 I wish that you were cold or hot.

16 So, because you are lukewarm, and neither hot nor cold,

I am going to vomit you out of My mouth.

Very tough words. Jesus calls for them to be committed and turn from their spiritually apathetic malaise. Jesus wanted to come and dine with them. This means that they had not asked Jesus to be with them. They had talked about the Lord but had not made Him a part of their intimate life. Mealtime was an intimate setting. Remember, the two on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:30-31) did not recognize Jesus until they sat down with Him to have a meal at the end of the day.

The Lord directs John to write at the close of the citation regarding the church at Laodicea. . .

22 "Anyone who has an ear

should listen to what the Spirit says to the churches."

“Awakenings” took place because God’s Spirit awoke the Church from deadness and some people were listening, just like the church in Laodicea. God sovereignty takes the first move. There was a spiritual stirring that took place in people’s hearts. This means that someone, just a few, were “Listening.” There were some who had an ear. This means a spiritual ear. We know that if you put your ear to a rail you can hear the train coming way before you can see the train. If you put your ear to the ground, you can hear horse’s hooves bounding the ground way before you can see them.

The observation applied to this visual is to what is your ear listening? How close is your ear to what you need to be paying attention? I would say to a person who is frustrated about God’s participation in their life . . . How close is your ear to God? Is your ear to the ground? Is there too much interference in your life to hear the Lord knocking at your door?

I recently was shopping for ear-buds. You know, those things you wear in your ear to listen to great music. I noticed the better ones had the ability to block outside noise around you. Thus, you could listen to the source of the sound you were tuned without interference. The goal is to be focused on the music of the message coming through the ear buds. People pay big bucks for this feature to work correctly. Obviously, the parallel is. . . can we tune-out the surrounding noise of life to hear God? Do we place ourselves in a position to distance ourselves from the noise of life?

In Job 42:5, Job confesses to the Lord.

"I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear;

But now my eye sees Thee; (NAS)

 God did not give-up on Job or his three friends. Note that Job’s three friends also had an opportunity to confess and make a sacrifice to God. God is eternally patient with His creation. God’s patience with us is beyond our understanding. Through all the Dark Ages and the on-going Reformation, God works through the hearts of individual people. We note the individual people through which history traces the work of God. We observed Wycliff in 1380’s and Huss in the early 1400’s then Tyndale in the early 1500’s, along with the rest of the Reformation leaders. Again, huge gains were made. It is my observation that the Reformation paved the way for those seeking to escape the tyranny of the State-Church system, be it Roman, English, German or French, and come to the New World to live a life free of religious oppression. It is true, once they arrived, they established their version of a Christian community. From the mid 1500’s, Christians came; some under a state flag of Europe, while others struck-out on their own under privilege of private funding.

So, from the 1500’s to the 1700’s, The New World became populated with European Christians who brought with them slaves from Africa and others under economic bondage called indentured servants. Slavery was an international business, and Christians would have to learn over time to end this practice. We know they did at a great price, the Civil War. We remember that God worked through fallen people throughout history. Be it King David or King Cyrus of Persia, God moved His plan forward.

These people of Christian Faith lived harsh lives and many died. But the persistence of people of Christian Faith who came to the New World paid-off. Eventually, a new order of Christian life was created. These people ebbed and flowed spiritually. Yes, they became the establishment of the state churches of Europe in the New World. With their own ecclesiastical structures, many of the people became complacent and spiritually dead. But then there is God’s Spirit that never gives-up and is at work constantly. By the 1730’s, men like George Whitefield and John and Charles Wesley were at work for the Lord.

**New Changes**

Building on the foundations of older traditions—Puritanism, pietism and Presbyterianism—major leaders of the revival such as George Whitefield, John Wesley and Jonathan Edwards articulated a theology of revival and salvation that transcended denominational boundaries and helped create a common evangelical identity.

Revivalists added to the doctrinal imperatives of Reformation Protestantism an emphasis on providential outpourings of the Holy Spirit.

Extemporaneous preaching gave listeners a sense of deep personal conviction of their need of salvation by Jesus Christ.

The preaching fostered introspection commitment to a new standard of personal morality.

Revival theology stressed that religious conversion was not only intellectual assent to correct Christian doctrine but had to be a "new birth" experienced in the heart.

Revivalists also taught that receiving assurance of salvation was a normal expectation in the Christian life.

**Division from the Established Churches**

In Europe, while the Evangelical Revival united evangelicals across various denominations around shared beliefs, it also led to division in existing churches between those who supported the revivals and those who did not. Opponents accused the revivals of fostering disorder and fanaticism within the churches by enabling uneducated, itinerant preachers and encouraging religious enthusiasm. In England, “Evangelical Anglicans” would grow into an important constituency within the Church of England, and “Methodism” would develop from the ministries of Whitefield and Wesley.

 In the American colonies, the Awakening caused the Congregational and Presbyterian churches to split, while it strengthened both the Methodist and Baptist denominations. It had little impact on most Lutherans, Quakers and non-Protestants.

Evangelical preachers "sought to include every person in conversion, regardless of gender, race, and status." Throughout the colonies, especially in the South, the revival movement increased the number of African slaves and free blacks who were exposed to and subsequently converted to Christianity. It also inspired the creation of new missionary societies, such as the Baptist Missionary Society in 1792.

**In God’s Providence, Why did the 1st Great Awakening Happen?**

I see that it isn’t any coincidence that the people of the New World, in what became known as America, were stirred to be God’s Light to the World. What was the fruit of the First Great Awakening? All the Founding Fathers of America lived during this time. They may have been young men, but the impact of the Spiritual Awakening impacted the whole of society in the colonies. This laid the groundwork for the new state documents that were to come in the last quarter of the 1700’s. This was a time of the Enlightenment; the Age of Reason had dawned upon the West. Even though the philosophers of these movements developed their own understanding of the natural and material world, God still moved in the hearts of the people. We see this in the Declaration of Independence with the words . . .

. . . assume among the powers of the earth, the separate and equal station to which the Laws of Nature and of Nature's God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to the separation.

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

 With these declarative words, God’s purpose to fulfill the Great Commission was in full swing. Even the Deist Thomas Jefferson and Ben Franklin put forth the depiction of God leading the Hebrewsfrom Egypt with the fire by night and cloud by day to become the great seal of the new nation. Their proposal did not pass, but it demonstrates the overall strongly held belief that God was at work in the new state of America. That God had a plan and the American people were to carry-out God’s plan.

Once again, God decided to work through people despite of their shortcomings.

**First Great Awakening leaders** (c. 1730–1755) George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, Gilbert Tennant, John & Charles Wesley

**Second** **Great Awakening Leaders** (c. 1790–1840) Charles Finney, Barton Stone, James McGready, Timothy Dwight, Lyman Beecher

 Camp Meetings started. This movement was not limited to but saw heavy Methodist and Baptist participation. Also, men like Joseph Smith claimed special revelations from God and established the Mormon Church.

**Third Great Awakening** (c. 1855–1930) Social Gospel movement, Postmillennialism, Mary Baker Eddy & Christian Science, Charles Taze Russel & Jehovah’s Witness, Salvation Army, Holiness Pentecostal Movements.

**Fourth** **Great Awakening** (c. 1960–1980) This time period is still being evaluated as to its impact. Among others, Billy Graham led the way, even though Graham started in the late 1940’s. This was a push-back against humanism, atheism and secularism by Christians who hold the Bible to be the Word of God and infallible regarding God’s Message of salvation and His plan for human life. It is my view that this is on-going. What is new?

**Fifth**? When people’s spirits respond adequately to God.

The First Great Awakening (sometimes Great Awakening) or the Evangelical Revival was a series of Christian revivals that swept Britain and its Thirteen Colonies between the 1730s and 1740s. The revival movement permanently affected Protestantism as adherents strove to renew individual piety and religious devotion. The First Great Awakening marked the emergence of Anglo-American evangelicalism as a transdenominational movement within the Protestant churches. In the United States, the term ‘Great Awakening’ is most often used, while in the United Kingdom, it is referred to as the Evangelical Revival.