



Prophetic Observer

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Keeping Time On God's Prophetic Clock

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Bored Beyond Belief

by James Collins

Are you bored with your Christian life? A recent poll by the Barna Research Group found that many people today are bored with the things of God. According to Barna, seven of ten people have dropped out of church in the past decade. Here are the top reasons the respondents gave for leaving church: Twenty percent say God is missing from church.



Thirty-five percent say church is not personally relevant to them. Thirty-nine percent say church is not important because they can find God elsewhere. And an astounding forty-six percent find church boring.

Being bored with the things of God is nothing new. Over 2,400 years ago, the people in the time of the prophet Malachi were also bored with the things of God. We read in Malachi 1:13, "Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness is it! and ye have snuffed at it, saith the LORD of hosts ..." The Bible says when it comes to worship, when it comes to church, when it comes to spiritual things, God's people said, "It is weariness." In other words, they were bored. They were so bored they "snuffed" at it. That means they "sneered" at worship. They turned their noses up at Almighty God.

Isn't that where we find ourselves in America today? How else do you explain the fact that less than twenty percent of Americans regularly attend church? And that number drops every year. How else do you explain that 8,000 churches in America each year will fold up and close their doors? How else do you explain the fact that 1,700 pastors leave the ministry

each month to never return. It is because we are bored.

It is interesting to note Malachi was speaking of the condition of the people of God just before the First Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. And the Bible also speaks of how the condition of the people of God will be just before the Second Coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

In chapter three of the book of Revelation, we find a description of a lukewarm church. Have you ever had coffee that was lukewarm? It's terrible. It's not hot. It's not cold. It's lukewarm. A church that is lukewarm is bored.

Now, I understand all of us are spiritually at different levels and there are factors that influence our intimacy with God. Some of you are having the best days of your life, some are deep in mourning. Some trust the church, some have been deeply wounded by it. Some trust Jesus, and many don't ... and the list goes on and on. But understand, where you are spiritually affects your relationship with God. However, if you are bored with God, perhaps your problem is not with God. Could it be the problem is with your heart?

The people in Malachi's time had an issue of the heart. Notice what the Bible says in the rest of Malachi 1:13, "Ye said also, Behold, what a weariness is it! and ye have snuffed at it, saith the LORD of hosts; and ye brought that which was torn, and the lame, and the sick; thus ye brought an offering: should I accept this of your hand? saith the LORD." God's people brought Him lame and sick offerings. Even though they

promised to give God their best (Malachi 1:14), they brought offerings they didn't want.

Isn't that the way we treat God today? We don't give Him our best. We don't give Him our best time, our best emotions, our best effort. We give Him what's left-over. We give Him what we can do without. We try to get off cheap with God.

We live in a country where most of us are self-focused. We are number one. And it is true that we are number one — in narcissism. Research shows that Americans like to see ourselves as better than others. People in the United States are more self-centered than people in other countries. How can we give our best to God when we are so focused on ourselves? How can there be room for God in our life when we are so full of ourselves?

Several years ago, a young Christian man named Will decided to leave Bible college and instead focus on a career in business. Will thought he could do more for God in the corporate world. So, he went to college and received his degree in Business Administration. Then he got a job with a Fortune 500 company.

The years went by, and Will became a young and very successful executive. One day, Will was travelling down a suburban street in his brand-new, black Jaguar. Suddenly a brick was thrown from the sidewalk, thumping into the side of the car.

Will slammed on the brakes! He ground into reverse. The tires on the Jaguar spun quickly as he zoomed back to the spot from where the brick had been thrown.

Will jumped out, grabbed the kid who had thrown the brick, and pushed him up against a parked car. "What was that all about?!" he screamed. "That's my new Jag, that brick you threw is going to cost you a lot of money!"

The young boy said, "Please, mister, please ... I'm sorry! I didn't know what else to do! I threw the brick because no one else would stop!" Tears were dripping down the boy's chin as he pointed around the parked car. He said, "It's my brother, mister. He rolled off the curb and fell out of his wheelchair and I can't lift him up." Crying, the boy asked Will, "Sir, would you please help me get him back into his wheelchair? He's hurt and he's too heavy for me."

Will's anger left him. The mood was transformed in a moment as Will realized what had happened. He lifted the young man into the wheelchair and took out his handkerchief and wiped the scrapes and cuts. He then watched as the younger brother pushed him down the sidewalk toward their home.

Will decided to never fix the dented side door of his Jaguar. He kept the dent to remind him not to go through

life so fast that someone must throw a brick at him to get his attention.

Maybe you have become so spiritually bored that God has had to throw a brick at you to get your attention? Maybe Malachi's message is the brick that God is throwing at you?

You can eliminate boredom in your Christian life by changing from the inside out. It starts with being honest about what is going on in your heart. Then look to God's Word as a guide. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. That's the cure for boredom. In Jesus Name.

You can learn more about the prophet Malachi in James Collins' new book The 12 available now from Beacon Street Press.



Flowers In the Sand

Pastor Larry Spargimino, Ph.D

I am in the process of writing a book on the subject of revival in the last days. I believe that God is changing the world and His people for an end-time harvest. On the front cover we intend to put a photo I took hiking at Great Sand Dunes National Park in Western Colorado several years ago. It's a picture of a beautiful flower growing out of a sand dune. It portrays what is happening today in places hostile to the Gospel. The beauty and persevering vitality of the Gospel brings revival in hostile settings.

After making my first trip to Pakistan in 2009 and interviewing Joel Rosenberg in that same year on his book, *Inside the Revolution: How the Followers of Jihad, Jefferson & Jesus Are Battling to Dominate the Middle East and Transform the World*, I came to realize that people are receiving new life in Christ all over the world.

Will Technology Destroy the Gospel In China?

The present government in China is hostile to all religions. Facial recognition technology and an invasive social credit system are onerous, and technology is making it impossible to evade, or so it would seem. Yet the underground church in China is sending out more missionaries to countries in the "10-40 window"—those countries from China westward, including Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran and the other Islamic "stan nations"—than any other nation. And this is being done in a country where "the walls have ears and the trees have eyes."

The Chinese State Administration of Religious Affairs recently announced new restrictive measures that will go into effect March 1, 2022. Christian ministries must "not incite subversion or oppose the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) leadership." This is a mandate that virtually condemns anything and everything in the Bible. How is it possible that the illegal underground church is not only surviving but actually thriving in such a hostile situation?

In his book, *China and End-Time Prophecy: How God Is Using the Red Dragon to Fulfill His Ultimate Purposes*, Eugene Bach (a pseudonym) writes:

"Pastor Enoch (a pseudonym) ... with four other leaders ... runs an underground house church of more than four million believers ... [he] ... is completely off the grid. He doesn't have email, a website, a Facebook or Twitter account, a private office, or a secretary, and yet he disciples hundreds of leaders every day, hosts daily illegal church services with thousands of believers all over China, and sends out an average of ten new missionaries per month to the most unreached areas of the world" (p. 7).

The Christian community is deeply indebted to Bach. He is an insider who brings first-hand testimony regarding God's work in the unregistered church. That the underground church could make such amazing advances in a hi-tech modern nation of committed Maoists should be an inspiration to Christians living in 21st century America.

There has been much suffering, and martyrdom in China, but Pastor Zhang Rongligang, probably one of the best-known house church pastors in China, said he believes that the church in China has benefited from the suffering it has experienced.

"Today, the underground house churches in China are not trying to survive. They are unified in the Back to Jerusalem vision, and churches are sending out missionaries into Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, and atheist countries around the world. Our church now has missionaries serving in Pakistan, Dubai, India, and many other nations that are hostile to the Gospel. Additionally, our young people are moving into China's cities in large numbers, but it is not for the purpose of making money. They are moving here to plant churches, to preach the gospel, to raise support for foreign missions, and to send new firebrand believers into the field. I can't help but feel excited about the future of China and the Chinese church" (Bach, p. 166).

The Cross and the Red Flag

The Chinese Communist Party has a long-standing and brutal disrespect for Christianity. In December of 1950, in the city of Qingdao, in Shandong Province, a church was visited by government officials who demanded the use of the church building for a communist conference a few days before Christmas. Pastor David Wang had no choice, but gave three conditions: no politically-themed portraits or posters, no flags displayed in the church building, and absolutely no smoking on the premises.

The conference had barely begun when the conditions were violated. A portrait of Chairman Mao Tse-tung was hung behind the pulpit with flags on either side, while several people in the audience were smoking. A blue haze hung in the air. Pastor Wang, who had a gentle and non-confrontational life-style, asked his family to join him for prayer in the pastor's study. Then he walked down the aisle of the crowded church, removed the portrait of Mao as well as the flags, and calmly walked out. He and his family quickly fled to Hong Kong. (Hattaway, *Shandong: The Revival Province*, p. 175).

In the 1950s, Communism became more controlling and demanding. The government ordered multitudes of Christians to register and to promise to abide by its rules. Some pastors sought to train their congregations how to handle an interro-

gation by Party officials. One elderly farmer told his pastor he would respond to the interrogators as the Holy Spirit led him.

The interrogator asked the man, “What has Christianity done for you?” “It made me a better person,” the farmer answered. The official looked at the assembled villagers and asked, “Is that true?” “Yes,” the villagers replied. “His farm used to be the dirtiest and worst in the village, but now it is the best.”

When the farmer was pressed to explain how these changes had occurred, the farmer spoke with conviction and authority. “I was a drunkard and an opium smoker. Nothing could rid me of these two vices, and my farm had been brought to ruin.” The man raised his voice and said, “I accepted Jesus as my Savior, and He changed me. He enabled me to break with both opium and drink” (Hattaway, *Shandong*, p. 175).

A Century of Struggle

In the late 19th century and early 20th century, churches were being planted in China, souls saved and, in addition, hospitals and schools that were church-based were being built. The early years of the 20th century saw revival break out in Shandong Province, located on the Yellow Sea, across from the Korean Peninsula. It was a dramatic outpouring of God’s Spirit, exceeding every other revival in modern times. But in the late 1930s, the Japanese invasion of China brought great suffering. Japanese soldiers raped and pillaged China (“The Rape of Nanking”). Imperial soldiers tried to convince the Chinese Christians that the Godhead consisted of Father, Son, the Holy Spirit — AND the Japanese emperor. Refusal to accept this theological monstrosity brought torture and death.

Then came the Communist Revolution, the defeat of Chiang Kai-shek, his flight to what is now Taiwan, and the rise of Mao. The Japanese invasion and Communism forced the church to go “underground.” These were difficult years, but God was not done with China. Eric Liddell, the Scottish Olympian, had his story told in the 1981 movie *Chariots of Fire*. Liddell was born in China of missionary parents and returned to his birthplace despite warnings of imminent danger. Shandong, China’s “Revival Province,” was being overrun by Japanese troops and in a state of chaos. Liddell ministered the Gospel and spent much of his energies helping the wounded, the sick, and the dying. In 1943, Liddell was imprisoned with more than 2,000 other foreigners, including 327 children. He died in 1945 doing what God had called him to do—share the love of Christ in a loveless, hate-filled environment.

After Mao’s death in 1976, there was somewhat of a liberalizing movement in the Chinese Communist Party. Deng Xiaoping (1904-1997), who had been “purged” during the Cultural Revolution, re-emerged as a leader of the moderate pragmatists. In his book, *Jesus in Beijing*, David Aikman, former Beijing bureau chief, *Time Magazine*, writes, “It was

already clear in the 1980s that Christians were beginning to show up, though almost never identified as such, within the Chinese Communist Party.” Aikman notes, “From the grassroots of the peasantry to high within China’s establishment, the country was being seeded with believing Christians” (p. 9). Since 2013, President Xi Jinping has returned China to the hardline Marxism of Mao. His father was a moderate, but he certainly is not.

A Look In the Past — A Hope for the Future

In the Shandong revival, God used many men and women, Chinese and foreign, as instruments of revival. Dr. C.L. Culpepper, a graduate of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, in Fort Worth, Texas, and his wife, Ola, were appointed Southern Baptist missionaries to China in the 1920s. Ola had developed serious eye problems which caused her great pain. On the mission field the Culpeppers met Marie Monsen, a Norwegian evangelical Lutheran. Monsen asked the Culpeppers, “Have you been filled with the Holy Spirit? Have you prayed for the healing of your wife?”

In his book, *The Shantung Revival* (available online, gospeltruth.net/shantung.htm) Dr. Culpepper says he was not ready for Monsen’s questions. The next morning about 20 people were gathered in the Culpepper home for a prayer meeting. “We felt an electric excitement,” writes Culpepper, “a feeling that God was preparing us for something we had never known before. After praying for several hours we all seemed in a complete spirit of communion.”

They prayed for Ola’s eyesight and had many other petitions. God was evidently present. Two Chinese men who were cooks for the missionary residences were also present. Something wonderful was happening. It was common knowledge that these men had some issue, some grudge, and were never seen together, but during the prayer meeting they both accepted Christ and embraced. There was such joy in the group that they had forgotten all about Ola. What about Ola? She was so excited. Her vision had returned in that eye, and the pain was gone. Culpepper writes, the problem “never returned. We had never known such spiritual joy. The events surrounding those days in Chefoo were the prelude to the great *Shantung Revival*” (p. 6).

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