

Spring 2011 Gospel Meeting Report

By Paul R. Blake

Introduction:

- A. There are a number of things that need to be considered this morning that we may not have time to get to a traditional sermon.
 - 1. These matters are as important to the health of this congregation as a sermon for the purposes of edification, instruction, and persuasion
- B. We will discuss the following this morning:
 - 1. Our Gospel Meeting with Joseph Casimier
 - 2. The work done by the members here adjunct to the meeting
 - a. Attendance
 - b. Invitations
 - c. Attitudes
 - 3. The work done by members here unrelated to the meeting
 - a. Les Maydell report
 - b. The little girls singing
 - c. Preparing Christian men and women for the future
 - d. Website uses
 - e. Volunteers - class books, etc.
 - f. Preacher reports - Ethan Longhenry
 - g. Young people
 - 4. Opportunities presented to us resulting from the meeting
 - 5. How we will handle these opportunities in a scriptural manner
 - a. Chillicothe and non-traditional congregations examples
 - b. Risks connected with this opportunity

I. GOSPEL MEETING WITH JOSEPH CASIMIER

- A. Joseph Casimier
 - 1. Began preaching after 20 years in communications in the Navy; said he was like a kid in a candy store with all of his job options upon retirement; chose preaching
 - 2. Was raised as a Baptist in New Orleans as one of nine children; obeyed the Gospel while in the Navy and has to live with the fact that his family is still Baptist
 - 3. Holds six meetings each year and is in high demand
 - 4. We witnessed the zeal and soundness with which he preached; in a week's worth of conversations, I found nothing questionable in his understanding of the doctrine of Christ
 - 5. He did not plan his lessons for the week until we had a conversation at dinner Saturday evening
 - 6. He did his job in such a way that I would consider this an meeting that stands out even among the long list of gifted meeting preachers we have had here at TR in the past 12 years
- B. Attendance and response
 - 1. We had great attendance every service of the meeting, especially by visitors and our young people

2. We had several members quite involved in inviting others
3. We were privileged to witness a baptism
4. Historic in that it was the first time TR has had a Gospel Meeting with an African American preacher; it will not be the last

II. THE WORK DONE BY THE MEMBERS HERE ADJUNCT TO THE MEETING

A. Attendance

1. By visitors - the most I have seen in a meeting for over 20 years
2. By young people - the most I have ever seen in a gospel meeting; some brought friends and sweethearts; very attentive
3. By parents with small children - the most I have ever seen in a meeting, especially knowing what it takes to bring them for six days
4. By our older and physically limited members; no surprises here
5. One fly in the ointment: the weakest attendance was among those in good health in the 25 to 50 year old bracket; ironic that the ones most capable of attending turned out to have the weakest attendance. I hope that is not an indicator of a trend for their future service to God

B. Visitors from neighboring institutional congregations

1. Virginia Avenue in Chester, Weirton Heights, and St. Clair Avenue
2. Tell story of how it came about - invitations from TR members
3. Bob McMahan announcement as told by Jim, a member at Chester
4. Opportunities for teaching

C. Invitations

1. Several here are diligent in inviting people to Gospel meetings every time; results are often disappointing
2. Sometimes there are encouraging payoffs; in my conversations with visitors, there were three names that kept coming up; this is not to diminish the efforts of others who tried to invite: Sharon Barnhart, Joanne Stewart, and Carol Strum
3. I want to say something about a troubling attitude I have seen here more than anywhere else, the spirit that is upset when anyone is acknowledged for doing good work. The scriptures teach us otherwise, the Bible writers did it often, and we will do it here.
4. If you want to object, do so knowing that it is either out of ignorance of the scriptures; I know where you learned it, I grew up here, and they were wrong. Or, it is out of petty jealousy, in which case you need to grow up
5. Not going to promote family or allow anyone else to promote family above this congregation, not even Blakes or Berdines. Joseph said, "There are a lot of Blakes and Berdines in this church." I told him, "That's because they won't have us anywhere else."

C. Attitudes

1. Also both historic and rare in an age where gospel meetings are being reduced or eliminated is the enthusiasm I saw here among the members for this meeting. Just as this congregation has been a beacon for sound doctrine, it will continue to set an example for meetings

III. THE WORK DONE BY MEMBERS HERE UNRELATED TO THE MEETING

- A. Les Maydell report - That's how it's done!
- B. The little girls singing
- C. Preparing Christian men and women for the future
 - 1. Custom used to be same men as teachers, etc - advantage is consistency; disadvantages are numerous, not the least of which is it does not develop men for the future; it just hopes someone will be there
 - 2. Our current approach is to be proactive in preparing men for teaching, preaching, elders, deacons; always have a few in mind all the time
 - 3. Need to get our focus on preparing women for their roles for the future of the church; and a one note ladies Bible class on subjection is not it
- D. Website uses that were unanticipated; Bible studies when out of town, links on personal pages, recommending it to others
- E. Volunteers - class books 12 people and only one copier and two binders
- F. Preacher reports - Ethan Longhenry; That's how it's done!
- G. Young people sitting up front; Joseph couldn't stop talking about it

IV. OPPORTUNITIES PRESENTED TO US RESULTING FROM THE MEETING

- A. We will handle these opportunities in a scriptural manner
 - 1. Chillicothe and non-traditional congregations' examples
 - a. F. Lagard Smith - Radical Restoration; led to a trend across the spectrum of professed churches of Christ from progressives to ultra-conservatives for malcontents, iconoclasts, and the inexperienced to distance themselves from Bible authority, expedient congregational assemblies, and sensible practices
 - b. Being different for the sake of being different; experimenting for its own sake; being guided by emotion rather than truth and Bible authority
 - 2. Risks connected with this opportunity
 - a. That we will allow fear, inertia, or stubbornness to let it pass
 - b. That we will use poor judgment in using it
 - c. That we will fail to communicate properly with you & the visitors
 - d. That we will yield to the temptation to compromise the truth in an effort to restore our erring brethren
 - e. That some disciples will allow their emotions to guide them to return to fellowship with our erring brethren without restoring them to the truth
 - f. This is an opportunity to restore our brethren; it is not a wholesale endorsement of worshiping with institutional congregations; do not misunderstand what is going on here
 - 3. What you can do
 - a. Pray daily that the Lord will help us handle this right
 - b. Pray daily for the souls that might be won from error
 - c. Be patient while this process unfolds
 - d. Avoid temptation to speculate and gossip about this process

- e. Continue to talk to and encourage our erring brethren; do not return to the practice of treating them like lepers
 - f. For those who volunteered to help with teaching, hold yourself in readiness
- B. This opportunity does not void Bible authority on the work of the church and the nature of fellowship
- 1. The New Testament way is not just the best way; it is the only way
 - 2. Les Maydell's report - we followed the Bible pattern
 - a. A good work is not a good work if it is not done God's way
 - 3. Preacher support - we follow the Bible pattern
 - a. Like the Pharisees, making converts does not save them if they are converted by erring means into erring congregations
 - 4. Little girls singing, members going to nursing homes to sing, women getting together socially, individually sponsored picnics and golf outings; we follow the Bible pattern for social purposes
 - 5. The Bible hands on way versus the institutional way
 - a. Supporting preachers, widows and orphans, social hospitality

Conclusion:

Aquila and Pricilla took Apollos aside and taught him the way of truth more perfectly. Apollos at that point was the student and they were the teachers; that's what their relationship consisted of. Fellowship manifested by their endorsement of him to other brethren did not come into being until Apollos learned and accepted the way more perfectly.

Is TR perfect? No. And we will continue to grow and work on our matters of concern. However, institutionalism is not a "Romans 14 Issue" or a matter of conscience, as Chester and Weirton would have you believe. And therefore we must know that our erring brethren are to be embraced for the purpose of teaching, not unqualified fellowship. They have manifested nobility and honor by their willingness to lay aside the attitudes of hostility and reach out to us. We will lay aside the spirits of hostility and prejudice and take their hands and lead them to the truth. Don't waste time with he said he said from 50 years ago. Focus on what is written. This is the Lord's will as stated in His word. If you are unwilling to get on board, then get out of the way. We will practice the truth, regardless. May the Lord bless us with strength, wisdom, love and peace in His work. May the Lord bless the Tomlinson Run church of Christ.