

CHRIST AWAKENING

Does the Watching World See Christ in Us?



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SCRIPTURE STUDY

Acts 4:13
Romans 12:2
Hebrews 3:13; 10:25
Romans 1:8; 15:4
1 Timothy 3:7
1 Peter 2:9
Romans 1:8; 16:19
1 Timothy 3:7
Hebrews 13:15
Matthew 16:18

PRAYER FOCUS

Dear Jesus,
Jesus, help us to be light and salt
in our everyday lives so that
people will notice You and your
work.

In Jesus' Name, Amen.

... and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.

(Acts 4:13)

When God truly gets into His people and sanctifies us through and through, He begins to infuse excellence and impact not only into our worship but also into our workday. This is one of the ways we know a Christ Awakening is stirring—when we begin to see the sacredness of everything we do in His name, even on a Tuesday morning or Wednesday afternoon.

This releases us to honor Him as exquisitely through a piece of studio musicianship as through an hour of corporate praise. We are turned loose to influence culture through artistic performance, through screenwriting, through film production, through Web design. When we offer God everything that describes who we are, we are able to bear witness of His glory not only through the object of our conversation but through the offering of our craft.

These are exciting days of opportunity for those who see Christianity in a larger context than the church's mailing address. God knows how to speak where the culture can hear. He knows how to bring about . . .

*A transformation of society through
the restoration of Christ's influence in the arts,
media, and communications*

Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. (Rom. 12:2)

But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. (Heb. 3:13)

Our country is on the verge of spiritual bankruptcy. Both political and religious scandals have splashed across the television screen of our nation. In the 1990s, former President Bill Clinton's behavior became headline news.

During the late 1980s, televangelist scandals involved Jim Bakker and Jimmy Swaggart. Polls done by the Gallup organization show that the number of Americans who rated clergy as having high ethical standards dropped from 67 percent in 1985 to only 55 percent by 1990. The price of these scandals has been costly to Christian efforts in the nation. In addition, America's role as a primary nation for sending missionaries has been significantly reduced. During this decline in morals and missions, America has seen a dramatic increase in such Eastern religions as Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Moreover, the Barna Research Group indicates that almost one-third of the nation's adults (31 percent) can be deemed unchurched. In addition to the rise in unchurched individuals, there has been an alarming increase in crime, illegitimate births, and abortions. The U.S. sadly leads the industrialized world in murder and rapes. More and more children are born to single mothers, and in many cities abortions outnumber live births.

First-Century Irony

How is it that the first-century church set the world on fire with the gospel, and yet, at times, we seem barely to survive? The story of the church could have ended after its first two hundred years, another failed utopian dream. Many a social movement has burned brightly for a few years, only to fade and grow cold. But Christians would not recant, for Christianity is not a social movement, a hopeless utopia, or an inspired fabrication of some dazed apostles' imaginations. Christians were filled with confidence that God had raised Jesus from the dead. On the basis of this reality, ordinary men, women, and children faced torture, wild beasts, and the flames.

Persecution and the threat of death can never squelch God's promise to His people, His grace to the righteous and unrighteous, and the accomplishment of His ultimate will. The faithful testimony of these Christians perpetuated the faith through many centuries—all the way to you and me. Because of their steadfastness, you and I have the gospel today. That alone is evidence of God's hand through the ages to bless the church and the world.

Signs of Hope

This is a great time to be alive. The gospel is going global because of the faithful unknown, missionaries, first-generation Christians in every land, and the persecuted Christians. God is bringing about hope through the restoration of Christ's influence in the arts, media, and communications. We see these signs of hope in music, newspaper, radio, and Internet. The skyrocketing music sales of Integrity Incorporated indicate an enormous hunger worldwide for God's presence. In 1998, Integrity's sales skyrocketed to 48 percent of the market, selling 40 million units in 140 countries. In addition to praise music, an avalanche of books was released on the topic, and a wide variety of worship seminars are available. In 1980, worship conferences were almost unheard of, but a decade later there were scores to choose from across America.

In 1967, Radio Tirana began broadcasting, declaring Albania to be an officially atheistic nation. In 1992, that same station began to broadcast the gospel of Jesus Christ three hours every night to a potential audience of 100 million people. Also in 1992, South Africa's *Imvo*, a secular newspaper with circulation of more than one million, reported on an extensive revival, in which tens of thousands received Christ. It took Archbishop Mazwi Mboniswa and twenty-one bishops from Saint John Apostolic Church five hours to baptize a line of new converts five kilometers long. Eyewitnesses reported that physical healings and deliverance occurred as believers came up out of the waters of the Tsomo River (in the Transkei region). The number of people baptized in that November 1992 service totaled 70,000! This is undoubtedly the largest baptismal service ever recorded in Christian history.

Be Encouraged

An exhilarating statistic about the expansion of Christianity is related by George Otis Jr., who says that 70 percent of all evangelization has taken place since 1900! And 70 percent of that increase has occurred since World War II! And to demonstrate the explosive growth of Christianity today, 70 percent of the increase since World War II has occurred in the three-year span between 1990 and 1993! This is exponential growth!

Beware all enemies of the Church of Jesus Christ. Contrary to your wishes, the Church of Jesus Christ is alive and well. Nothing will stop God's Church from accomplishing the goal He has set for her. Through the work of the Church of Jesus Christ, civilization will be saved.

Be encouraged, saints of God. Though Christians may yet face great trials and persecutions, though the Church may seem weak and downtrodden, it is alive and well. The Church of Jesus Christ is flourishing; and as Jesus Himself said, the very gates of hell will not stand against His Church. The Church is alive, and it's well!

Prayers to Offer

Thank You, Lord, that we can restore Christ's influence on media, for we "are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God" (1 Pet. 2:9a).

Jesus, we are grateful that we can transform our society, as we are "wise about what is good, and innocent about what is evil" (Rom. 16:19).

Dear God, we appreciate that we can leave Christ's imprint on culture, for You called us "out of darkness into . . . wonderful light" (1 Pet. 2:9b).

Confession

We are guilty of spiritual bankruptcy. Forgive us, Lord, for allowing a decline in morals and missions in America.

Our churches have contributed to a first-century irony, for we are barely surviving in the face of similar challenges. Cleanse us, Dear God, of our ineffectiveness.

We need signs of hope. Jesus, forgive us for losing our influence on the culture.

Our churches need to be encouraged, for we have allowed the enemy to gain ground. We repent, Lord.

Petition

Lord, may we have the testimony of the early Christians, whose "faith is being reported all over the world" (Rom. 1:8).

Dear God, might we "have a good reputation with outsiders, so that we will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap" (1 Tim. 3:7).

"Through Jesus . . . let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise—the fruit of lips that confess his name" (Heb. 13:15).

Promises to Claim

Spiritual Bankruptcy

Lord, in the face of spiritual decline, "let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Heb. 10:25).

First-Century Irony

Dear God, might we turn our twenty-first-century world upside down for Christ, realizing "everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope" (Rom. 15:4).

Signs of Hope

Jesus, may the Church help restore Your influence in the arts, media, and communications, being confident that "the gates of Hades will not overcome it" (Matt. 16:18).

Be Encouraged

Dear God, might the members of our congregations transform society by “encouraging one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none . . . may be hardened by sin’s deceitfulness” (Heb. 3:13).

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Jim Garlow, *How God Saved Civilization* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 2000), used by permission.