Spiritual First Responders

This week has been an emotionally and physically exhausting week for so many in our community. The loss of homes, the fear of losing homes, the stress of deciding what to take or leave during evacuations, the danger of the sacrificial work of our first responders, it weighs heavy on our hearts. And the fires aren’t all out yet. Add on to that the fact that this week we are reminded of the destruction that occurred on September 11th, 2001.

Just as the smoke taints the breath in our lungs, so does spiritual heaviness hinder our abilities to live life to the fullest with God and with each other. God wants that we would seek Him with the same kind of urgency we would have to stop a fire.

As we see homes that have been destroyed by the fires and homes that have barely been saved by first responders, it should wake us up to our need to be in a right relationship with our Creator.

I’m not the greatest pastor in the world, and Bonney Lake Community Church doesn’t have a corner on spirituality. But this Sunday, we want you to know that you are welcome to come and seek God with a sense of spiritual urgency. The Apostle Paul, while standing before a council in Athens, once said:

**23**…As I was walking along I saw your many shrines. And one of your altars had this inscription on it: ‘To an Unknown God.’ This God, whom you worship without knowing, is the one I’m telling you about.

**24**“He is the God who made the world and everything in it. Since he is Lord of heaven and earth, he doesn’t live in man-made temples, **25**and human hands can’t serve his needs—for he has no needs. He himself gives life and breath to everything, and he satisfies every need. **26**From one man he created all the nations throughout the whole earth. He decided beforehand when they should rise and fall, and he determined their boundaries.

**27**“His purpose was for the nations to seek after God and perhaps feel their way toward him and find him—though he is not far from any one of us. **28**For in him we live and move and exist. As some of your own poets have said, ‘We are his offspring.’ **29**And since this is true, we shouldn’t think of God as an idol designed by craftsmen from gold or silver or stone.

**30**“God overlooked people’s ignorance about these things in earlier times, but now he commands everyone everywhere to repent of their sins and turn to him. **31**For he has set a day for judging the world with justice by the man he has appointed, and he proved to everyone who this is by raising him from the dead.”

Acts 17:23-30

I have never been a “fire insurance” type of preacher. I have never been a scare you into making a commitment to God kind of guy. I’m still not that kind of pastor.

Trusting in Jesus is not about just praying the prayer to be spared in the next life. Getting to know God, is about growing in our understanding of what it looks like to live according to our design. Belief cannot be reduced to a fire insurance or a term life insurance policy. It’s more like a whole life kind of insurance plan. It is meant to be invested in and filled out.

And though I’m not going to lay some line of guilt on you, I am going to challenge you to have the same kind of urgency in your spiritual life that you have in your material life.

If you knew you were in the path of a fire, you would be trying to get out in a hurry and save everything you could. If you found out you won the lottery, I think you would be pretty eager to collect. If you found out there was a stock you could invest in that had guaranteed return for life, you’d probably jump on board.

I don’t expect you to just take my word for it, but I would challenge you to read, pray, think about, ask others about, and consider what really matters in life.

Even with all of the troubles we have in life the evidence for God can be seen all around us by everyone. As the book of Romans says:

**20**For ever since the world was created, people have seen the earth and sky. Through everything God made, they can clearly see his invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature. So they have no excuse for not knowing God.

Romans 1:20

This verse does not say that everyone believes in God. It says that God’s invisible qualities can be seen through the material universe that God created.

What do you see? Have you thought about it? Does it matter one way or the other?

Whether we die young or old or even if we are still alive when Christ comes back. For each of us, there will be an end to this earth and the stuff that we put such a premium on. Instead, put a vital urgency on getting to know God, learning to love our neighbors, and living to help others be safe from the fires that can destroy our spiritual homes. As Jude records:

**20**But you, dear friends, must build each other up in your most holy faith, pray in the power of the Holy Spirit, **21**and await the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ, who will bring you eternal life. In this way, you will keep yourselves safe in God’s love.

**22**And you must show mercy to those whose faith is wavering. **23**Rescue others by snatching them from the flames of judgment. Show mercy to still others, but do so with great caution, hating the sins that contaminate their lives.

Jude 1:20-23

The first responders in our community know how to protect us from fire. It is true that some houses have been destroyed, others will smell terribly of smoke, but can you imagine what would have happened to our community without the first responders.

Those of you who believe already are the spiritual first responders. And for those of you who don’t believe, I would wager that you wouldn’t have believed it if someone told you that in the Sumner-Bonney Lake area we would have an 800 acre fire.

Is it possible that God is real and Jesus is going to be known as Judge to some and Savior to others?

As the apostle John wrote:

**16**“For this is how God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. **17**God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him.

**18**“There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God’s one and only Son. **19**And the judgment is based on this fact: God’s light came into the world, but people loved the darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil. **20**All who do evil hate the light and refuse to go near it for fear their sins will be exposed. **21**But those who do what is right come to the light so others can see that they are doing what God wants.”

Jesus is the Light. Take your sins and failings to him. You don’t have to tell the whole world all of your sins, you don’t even have to tell a priest or a pastor all of your sins. But you have to agree with God and admit that He knows the truth about you and that you trust in Jesus as the One who took the penalty for your sins.

Do you want to do what is right in this life?

What are you urgent about?

Politics

Houses

Cars

Dirt bikes

Happy hour

Your book club

Your investment portfolio

Your Instagram page

Your Twitter feed

Your gaming presence

Jesus instructed people about what is important…

**19**“Don’t store up treasures here on earth, where moths eat them and rust destroys them, and where thieves break in and steal. **20**Store your treasures in heaven, where moths and rust cannot destroy, and thieves do not break in and steal. **21**Wherever your treasure is, there the desires of your heart will also be…

**31**“So don’t worry about these things, saying, ‘What will we eat? What will we drink? What will we wear?’ **32**These things dominate the thoughts of unbelievers, but your heavenly Father already knows all your needs. **33**Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need.

Matthew 6:19-21; 31-33

Moths, rust, thieves, and fire cannot destroy the things that we should be investing in. Do you want an easy way to know if you are investing in the right kinds of things?

Ask yourself if it can be completely destroyed by physical elements?

Or if it takes spiritual elements to destroy it?

As Jesus said:

**28**“Don’t be afraid of those who want to kill your body; they cannot touch your soul. Fear only God, who can destroy both soul and body in hell.

Matthew 10:28

First responders are so important, and I am so thankful for our first responders and the tireless urgency with which they worked to save lives and property in what has been come to be known as the Sumner grade fire. But the spiritual wellness and the souls of the people around us are far more important than homes and property, so I think we need to up our sense or urgency. Today if you are a believer, then chances are you are a first responder in someone’s life.

How will you respond?