

The Church's Time to Shine

By PAUL J. SCHARF

Prior to 2020, there was only one stretch of time in my life when people ceased from their normal routines and showed a profound interest in spiritual things.

That, of course, was in the days following Sept. 11, 2001. The response was palpable. It was overwhelmingly patriotic, unifying and somber. People also turned their minds toward eternity. In fact, their reaction was so robust in those early days and weeks after the terrorist attacks that some even pondered if we were witnessing the beginnings of a genuine revival.

In short order, however, people returned to their old routines. To say that any heartfelt response was short-lived would be a severe understatement. Church pews—filled to overflowing for just a few weeks after 9/11—were comfortably empty quickly enough. We said we would “never forget” the lessons we learned on that awful Tuesday morning. But we greatly overestimated our resolve—at least from a spiritual perspective. For the most part, it's long forgotten.

But this time is so much different. The majority of my service with The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry has taken place since the world went into crisis mode, initially in March of 2020. I can testify that the response that people have shown over the last 18 months—while much more subtle than their behavior 20 years ago—is also considerably more profound and thoughtful.

Churchgoers may not be packing the pews these days—in fact, they may even be viewing the services from the comfort of their own homes. But many of them are interested and asking questions as never before.

As I said when I preached to a congregation near Green Bay, Wis., several weeks ago, many people are no longer so concerned about getting home in time for the kickoff. Instead, they are much more intent than they have been in my lifetime about finding answers to their questions—such as, “What is happening to our world?”

One dear elderly lady in a church in northern Wisconsin shook my hand after a service there last year and asked me a variation of that question. That is something that is going to be happening to more of us, more often. People are searching for answers and hoping to gain an “understanding of the times” (1 Chron. 12:32). They want to know if Scripture addresses the issues before us—and what all of the tumultuous events that we are watching unfold on our televisions mean, especially in light of Biblical prophecy. And there is nothing to suggest that their interest will begin fading anytime soon, because there is every indication that the crises before us will only continue to expand.

What an opportunity, then, has been entrusted to us who minister at this incredibly significant moment in history! People are open to the gospel, perhaps as never before;

and Christians are interested in knowing more about Bible prophecy, unlike anything we have seen in our lifetimes.

I believe that God has placed each one of us here, by His providence, for this time, and He will demand an accounting of our stewardship for our handling of this season in which we live.

As we answer people's questions and concerns, we must certainly refrain from going "beyond what is written" (1 Cor. 4:6), or from wandering into areas where we possess no expertise. Yet it is vital that we become equipped to apply the Bible skillfully to all aspects of life—especially the prophetic future.

This is truly the church's time to shine. May we be courageous in using this precious time wisely. As the Apostle Paul instructs us:

See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord *is*. (Eph. 5:15-17)

Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. (Eph. 6:13)

As we interact with people in the world and in the church, many are discouraged—they need reinforcement.

Many are fearful—they need reassurance.

Many are troubled—they need hope.

Many are confused, and asking questions ... and we must be prepared to give them Biblical answers.

As we look at the events taking place across our culture and around the world, it appears that we are seeing:

... the removal of those things that are being shaken, as of things that are made, that the things which cannot be shaken may remain. (Heb. 12:27)

What an awesome thing it is to minister in such a day as this.

Paul J. Scharf (M.A., M.Div., Faith Baptist Theological Seminary) is a church ministries representative for The Friends of Israel Gospel Ministry, based in Columbus, WI, and serving in the Midwest. For more information on his ministry, visit sermonaudio.com/pscharf or foi.org/scharf, or email pscharf@foi.org.

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