

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 3/31/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

Is it the journey or the destination (or both)?

For several years, I attended the National Pastor's Convention in San Diego with my best friend, Chris. Since Chris grew up in San Diego, he knows the area well, so we made a point of inviting some pastors from out of state to join us at one of the really good restaurants in the San Diego area. One time, we invited three pastors from a non-denominational congregation in Pahrump, Nevada to come with us. During the dinner, I began talking with our server, Shelly. (If Peter was the apostle to the Jews and Paul the apostle to the Gentiles, I want to be the apostle to the restaurant servers.) I told Shelly that we were pastors, which began some conversation about churches. She told me that she had grown up in church, but as a young adult had quit going because of a mistake she made for which her church had public condemned her. We talked about how not all churches view our relationship with GOD in this way. Shelly told me about the things she missed from her church. (We were getting really good service from her, too.) Toward the end of our time at the restaurant, she expressed an interest in going back to church and Chris was able to name a couple of churches in the neighborhood where she lived. Suddenly, one of the Pahrump guys interrupted and asked her, "If you were to die tonight, do you know that you'd go to heaven?" Shelly disappeared.

Maybe you've been asked that question or heard it said to someone else. For those who ask it, this seems to be what Christianity is all about. There are many Christians who think their relationship with the LORD is exclusively limited to where you are going to end up. In the end, Christianity is just about getting to heaven. That's it. It's the destination that matters.

I think that really limits what a relationship with CHRIST is and what it can offer. I also think that's why so many participate in the life of a congregation only marginally. If you know that you have faith and believe that because of your faith you are going to heaven, what more is there?

JESUS didn't spend much time teach about heaven and what happens at the end of life. If HE had, we'd know a lot more about heaven. Instead, JESUS focused HIS conversations with people on their life now and how to bring it closer to GOD. HE talked about giving to others. HE pointed out changes that would eliminate those things that get in the way of one's relationship with GOD. HE shared that HE came "*that they might have life, and that they might have it abundantly*" (John 10:10). JESUS was concerned that people be able to get out of life all that GOD wants for them. In other words, JESUS was more concerned with the journey than the destination. Certainly, what happens at the end of time when HE returns matters. But there's so much more to a life that is connected to GOD and GOD'S will for each person.

When you look at a gravestone, it usually lists the birthdate of the deceased person and then the date of death. They came and then they died, as though that's all that matters. In between, there is a little dash. It's there to represent the whole of the person's life. JESUS wanted people to know that there is so much more to life than just the beginning and the end. And JESUS also wanted people to know that their life can and will have so much more meaning if it permeated with the love of GOD, both for them and for those to whom they show it. The destination certainly is important, but the journey has so much to offer, we shouldn't ignore it.

By the way, after we pastors went outside, I slipped back in, apologized to Shelly, and gave her the names of the churches she might try attending.

In CHRIST'S love,
Pastor Jeffrey