

Church History

Looking Forward

Jim Lay – FBC Dawsonville, GA
June 23, 2010

This is the unofficial part of the History Series, since it is not facts about the historic Christian Church, but my view of where the Church is headed in the coming years. I have changed the look and feel of this presentation from the original versions to make sure there is no mistaking the change of focus. I had planned to end with the coverage of the time period from Pentecost through today, but Pastor Jim asked me to add this session. I have been in prayer with Vicki about this ever since that time and this is what God has led me to share, and my own convictions that come from it.

This view is indelibly altered by my view that the Church Age is coming to a close and all the signs of the times, plus the changing of the Church in aggregate are coming together into a “Perfect Storm” of prophecy, current events, social structures, religious structures, and timing to bring the world as we know it to a Biblical end.

Certainly a lot of my views are set by my own searching and praying to God for some direction that I should be taking to permit me to fulfill what He has called me to do.

Lets have an open discussion on points where you have questions or concerns with ideas I have presented

Jim Lay

Church History – *Looking Forward*

- This is the 6th part of this series on the History of the Christian Church
 - Except this “history” is predictive not reportive
- We will look at Trends
 - Church Trends
 - Political Trends
 - Social Trends
- Reality Check...what else is in-play
- We will discuss possible directions
- We will discuss what Churches should be doing...NOW
- We will discuss what Christians should be doing...NOW

Let me say at the outset...these are my thoughts only

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I have been burdened by the Lord in some areas regarding my own personal discipleship and what I believe the Lord is calling me to do. I am also burdened for the Church...not just our Church here in Dawsonville, but the worldwide Church. I have thought about what we might do differently to adapt to the changing world, since what we are now doing does not seem to be making a difference (my thoughts not others).

I have also been burdened for our Country and our way of life. All of these ideas led me to study the History of the Church to give myself the foundational understanding of God leading us through the wilderness to the promised land. The Church, like Israel, has failed in many ways but despite of this failing, He is accomplishing His purpose through us and through the Church and through the Country. Some of this will be weaved into this discussion today.

Most of you that know me, know that I am an avid reader and study both scripture, history, and read commentaries on all of them. These are the books I have read or am reading now on this subject.

Reference Books

Church History in Plain Language 3rd Ed.– Dr Bruce Shelley

The Age of the Unthinkable – Joshua Cooper Ramo

Survivors Club – Ben Sherwood

America’s Prophet – Moses and the American Story – Bruce Feiler

Every Prophecy of the Bible – John Walvoord

Living with Confidence in a Chaotic World – Dr David Jeremiah

Plus all the other prophecy books I have (which is a lot)

These are the basis for this understanding. Again these are just my thoughts.

Who are the Religious?

- Self identified results show non Christian % responses are UP
- Numbers of Christians is UP
- % Christians DOWN

Religious Self-Identification of the U.S. Adult Population 1990, 2001, 2008

	1990		2001		2008	
	Estimated Number of People	%	Estimated Number of People	%	Estimated Number of People	%
<i>Catholic</i>	46,004,000	26.2	50,873,000	24.5	57,199,000	25.1
<i>Other Christian</i>	105,221,000	60.0	108,641,000	52.2	116,203,000	50.9
Total Christians	151,225,000	86.2	159,514,000	76.7	173,402,000	76.0
<i>Other Religions</i>	5,853,000	3.3	7,740,000	3.7	8,796,000	3.9
<i>Nones</i>	14,331,000	8.2	29,481,000	14.1	34,169,000	15.0
<i>DK/Refused</i>	4,031,000	2.3	11,246,000	5.4	11,815,000	5.2
Total	175,440,000	100.0	207,983,000	100.0	228,182,000	100.0

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In understanding some the trends, I have used a standard report available online, called **ARIS** that samples religious thought periodically so trends are apparent. In these snapshots, we have 1990, 2001, and 2008 which is the most recent date. We can make some assumptions about 2010 from what we see around us.

The main points of this data is to show that while the numbers of Christians (self identified) is up, the overall percentages are down, except for Catholic. The Catholic responses are up because of immigration of Latin people groups who identify with Catholicism, not in home grown Catholic churches. Also make note of the significant % growth in those who are "Nones" or Don't Know/Refused to Answer. In America in 2008 there were nearly 45 Million people like this.

Closer look at changes...

- Catholics UP due to Latin Immigration
- Lowest rate of growth is Other Christian
- “Nones” grew dramatically

Change in the Religious Self-Identification of the U.S. Adult Population 1990-2008

	Estimated Population 1990	Estimated Population 2008	Estimated Population Growth	% Growth of Group	% Share of National Population Growth
Catholic	46,004,000	57,199,000	11,195,000	24	21
Other Christian	105,221,000	116,201,000	10,980,000	10	20
Other Religions	5,853,000	8,796,000	2,943,000	50	6
Nones	14,331,000	34,169,000	19,838,000	138	37
DK/Refused	4,031,000	11,815,000	7,784,000	193	15
Total U.S.	175,440,000	228,182,000	52,742,000	30	100

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Looking a little closer at the data validates the Latin Immigration result we talked about since there are roughly 10 Million Illegal Aliens in the country, virtually all Latino, plus several other legal alien groups that are Catholic.

Other groups growing as well, especially the “Nones” who grew 37%, and the lowest growth rate is the Other Christian (non Catholic) segment which grew 10%

Other Trends...

FRIDAY APRIL 30, 2010

CHRISTIANITY • RELIGION TRENDS:

Survey: 72% of Millennials 'more spiritual than religious'



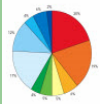
Most young adults today don't pray, don't worship and don't read the Bible, a major survey by a Christian research firm shows.

Among the 65% who call themselves Christian, "many are either mushy Christians or Christians in name only," Rainer says. "Most are just indifferent. The more precisely you try to measure their Christianity, the fewer you find committed to the faith."

WEDNESDAY DECEMBER 16, 2009

RELIGION TRENDS:

Just half of Britons now call themselves Christian; 'nones' growing



Only half of Britons now consider themselves Christian after a "sharp decline" in religious belief over the past quarter of a century, according to a new academic study.

At the same time, the proportion of Britons who say they have "no religion" has increased from 31 per cent to 43 per cent.

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TUESDAY SEPTEMBER 22, 2009

RELIGION TRENDS:

Nones: people with 'no religion' gaining on major denominations



Americans who don't identify with any religion are now 15% of the USA, but trends in a new study shows they could one day surpass the nation's largest denominations — including Catholics, now 24% of the nation.

As it has grown larger, the no religion or None population is no longer a fringe group and the "None" choice in terms of (ir)religious identification is now attracting wide swaths of Middle America.

THURSDAY APRIL 15, 2010

RELIGION TRENDS • SURVEYS:

US study sheds light on Africa's unique religious mix



In the space of a century, Africa has morphed from a continent dominated by traditional beliefs to one where the majority of people are Christian or Muslim, a US study showed Thursday.

The vast majority of people in sub-Saharan Africa are deeply committed to the world's two largest religions, according to the study by the Pew Research Forum on Religion and Public Life.

Many other trends are listed in the report, which you can download yourself at:
<http://www.scribd.com/doc/13090932/Final-ARIS-Report-3-6>

Most of us are Boomers or the WW2 Generation, but the young adults of today are called "Millennials". They have turned away from traditional Christianity are more Spiritual than religious. The most disturbing of their routine is that they do not pray, do not worship, and don't read the Bible. Clearly they are what we might call casual or cultural Christians. The churches are full of them, especially the hipper, younger congregations. As you probe their beliefs, you find no solid rocks of faith, only soft sand.

The "Nones" are becoming a larger and more significant factor and having some influence over public policy and establishing the cultural norms for society without much influence by the "Church". We see public expressions of Faith or Prayer in God reflected by godless people as "Anti Intellectual" to demean us and marginalize us in the eyes of the unwashed.

As we look back at Britain, we can see the future of the church, as we know it...empty of people...empty of the Holy Spirit...irrelevant to the population that live around it...museums. In Britain, now 50% of people are "Nones" in terms of self defining their religious beliefs.

In Africa, the "dark" continent, the light is shining and Christianity is competing with Islam for the hearts and minds of the population. The evangelical movement is having great positive effects in Africa and Asia, but dying in Europe and declining in North America. (Look at Canada)

Summary of Religious Trends

- Percentages of population as Christian is down
 - Spiritualism is growing but this does not mean prayer, church attendance, or Bible understanding
- Percentages of “None” and “DK/Refused” is growing
- Details of denominations show that Mainline churches dropping the worst, not including Catholic

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With the faith and belief becoming poorly defined, and poorly taught, the Christianity is turning more nominal and casual, with behavior emphasis rather than doctrinal emphasis. “Nones” are growing as they see irrelevant Christians, irrelevant Churches, irrelevant Preaching, and irrelevant witnessing. The dying bones of the Mainline churches are visible today. What little life that exists in the church is in the evangelical community, but it is fading.

Religious Tradition	1990		2001		2008	
	Estimate	%	Estimate	%	Estimate	%
Catholic	46,004,000	26.2	50,873,000	24.5	57,199,000	25.1
Baptist	33,964,000	19.3	33,820,000	16.3	36,148,000	15.8
Mainline Christian	32,784,000	18.7	35,788,000	17.2	29,375,000	12.9
<i>Methodist</i>	14,174,000	8.0	14,039,000	6.8	11,366,000	5.0
<i>Lutheran</i>	9,110,000	5.2	9,580,000	4.6	8,674,000	3.8
<i>Presbyterian</i>	4,985,000	2.8	5,596,000	2.7	4,723,000	2.1
<i>Episcopalian/ Anglican</i>	3,043,000	1.7	3,451,000	1.7	2,405,000	1.1
<i>United Church of Christ</i>	438,000	0.2	1,378,000	0.7	736,000	0.3
Christian Generic	25,980,000	14.8	22,546,000	10.8	32,441,000	14.2
<i>Christian Unspecified</i>	8,073,000	4.6	14,190,000	6.8	16,834,000	7.4
<i>Non-Denom. Christian</i>	194,000	0.1	2,489,000	1.2	8,032,000	3.5
<i>Protestant Unspecified</i>	17,214,000	9.8	4,647,000	2.2	5,187,000	2.3
<i>Evangelical/ Born Again</i>	546,000	0.3	1,088,000	0.5	2,154,000	0.9
Pentecostal/ Charismatic	5,647,000	3.2	7,831,000	3.8	7,948,000	3.5
<i>Pentecostal Unspecified</i>	3,116,000	1.8	4,407,000	2.1	5,416,000	2.4
<i>Assemblies of God</i>	617,000	0.4	1,105,000	0.5	810,000	0.4
<i>Church of God</i>	590,000	0.4	943,000	0.5	663,000	0.3
Protestant Denominations	4,630,000	2.6	5,949,000	2.9	7,131,000	3.1

Baptist Tradition had dropped from **19.3%** of sampled community in 1990 to **16.8%** in 2008

Mainline Christianity has dropped from **18.7%** to **12.9%**

Others have remained fairly steady, some up, some down but all small

<i>Churches of Christ</i>	1,769,000	1.0	2,593,000	1.2	1,921,000	0.8
<i>Jehovah's Witness</i>	1,381,000	0.8	1,331,000	0.6	1,914,000	0.8
<i>Seventh Day Adventist</i>	668,000	0.4	724,000	0.3	938,000	0.4
Mormon/Latter Day Saints	2,487,000	1.4	2,697,000	1.3	3,158,000	1.4
Jewish*	3,137,000	1.8	2,837,000	1.4	2,680,000	1.2
Eastern Religions	687,000	0.4	2,020,000	1.0	1,961,000	0.9
<i>Buddhist</i>	404,000	0.2	1,082,000	0.5	1,189,000	0.5
Muslim	527,000	0.3	1,104,000	0.5	1,349,000	0.6
NRMs & Other Religions	1,296,000	0.8	1,770,000	0.9	2,804,000	1.2
Nones/No Religion	14,331,000	8.2	29,481,000	14.1	34,169,000	15.0
<i>Agnostic</i>	1,186,000**	0.7	991,000	0.5	1,985,000	0.9
<i>Atheist</i>	N/A	N/A	902,000	0.4	1,621,000	0.7
DK/Refused	4,031,000	2.3	11,300,000	5.4	11,815,000	5.2
Total	175,440,000	100	207,983,000	100	228,182,000	100

* This refers only to Jews by religion and not to the total Jewish ethnic population
 ** Agnostics and Atheists were combined in NSRI 1990

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One thing to note: The small relative numbers of Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, Jewish, and Muslims pale in comparison to the numbers of Christians but they bark loud and have influence far beyond their numbers.

If Christians wake up and the churches wake up, we can still have a decisive affect on our way of life and country.

If we stay asleep we will be overtaken by others. We need to be vocal and voice our opinion of the cultural decline and immorality of today and press our politicians and vote for other Christians.

First we need to come back to our historic roots and become again what God has called us to become.

Demographics...

Size and Composition of the Born-Again or Evangelical Christian Population 2008

Religious identification	Number	% Born Again
Mainline Christians	11,158,000	38.6
Other Christian Groups	56,505,000	60.2
Catholics	10,083,000	18.4
Total Christian Adults	77,747,000	44.8

Born again Christians are only 45%
Of the total – self identified

Gender View

Gender Composition of the Religious Traditions 2008

	% Male	% Female
Catholic	46	54
Baptist	43	57
Mainline Christian	44	56
Christian Generic	48	52
Pentecostal/Charismatic	42	58
Protestant Denominations	45	55
Mormon/LDS	45	55
Jewish	49	51
Eastern Religions	53	47
Muslim	52	48
NRM & Other Religions	52	48
Nones	60	40

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Other demographics paint a separate but equally disturbing view

Whether one is “born again” is a good indicator of knowledge by the person of a personal faith and trust in Jesus Christ. Sometimes this group is called Evangelical as well, but when Christians were asked the Q, **only 45% indicated they considered themselves “born again”**. You can see the splits of tradition and this belief, which has deeper implications to Christianity in the US.

Similarly, women make up the largest gender block in all Christian communities, some by a wide margin. We see this in the fact that women are more active in the programs of the churches and take a stronger role in the spiritual leadership in the homes. This is a direct assault on the men’s role as God ordained them within the church and family. Fewer men are self identifying as Christians than women, except in the non Christian traditions. These signs are not good for our strong continuation and defense of the faith. Men...pay attention !

Age View in 2008

Age Composition of the Religious Traditions 2008

	18-29	30-49	50-69	70+	% Total
U.S. National Population	22	38	28	12	100
Catholic	21	38	28	13	100
Baptist	11	31	37	21	100
Mainline Christian	18	35	33	14	100
Christian Generic	25	41	25	9	100
Pentecostal/Charismatic	16	34	36	14	100
Protestant Denominations	22	36	28	14	100
Mormon/LDS	22	40	28	10	100
Jewish	21	28	33	18	100
Eastern Religions	37	40	20	3	100
Muslim	42	45	12	1	100
NRM & Other Religions	24	40	27	9	100
Nones	29	41	23	7	100

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Finally, a view by Age is striking.

Note the normal age distribution in the top line and then the differences by tradition below it.

Declining Baptisms, declining conversions, declining witnessing by one generation to another are bearing the bitter fruit of the "me" generation. We are too lazy to do the work required to grow the Kingdom.

Look at the percentages of <50 in the Christian Traditions, compared to the non Christian religions...where are our youth, where are our young adults? They see no relevance or commitment by the church, the preaching, the witnessing, the examples by their elders...and have received little one-on-one witnessing by someone who cares. The ones who come to church are seeking the emotional connection and the high energy that the seeker churches are providing. Some are coming, but what is their real status as a Christian...that is the question.

If we get them to come to our traditional churches, what do they see and hear? Do good, be good, no fire, no Biblical Training, no passion, little commitment or excitement so they move on. They seek but do not find, and they settle for emotion, or personal caring by a cult group, or dead worship. When they have children they feel the tug to return but many are discouraged by what they find and the family moves on to a life without God.

Political Trends

- Financial Markets unstable and unpredictable
- Taxes and fees going up dramatically
 - Debt increasing geometrically. Now more than we earn
 - Deductions will be curbed to "add" revenue
- Healthcare costs going up, coverage down
- Government control going up
- Freedom of action and business declining
- States in the US bordering bankruptcy, and Countries in default
- Immigration and open borders are Chaos
- Populations are becoming Balkanized in US, elsewhere
- Muslims a growing force in Western Countries and violence is gaining
- Discussions of Global governance and Linked Finance and Economic Systems are happening now
- *Will one world Government be far behind?*

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Political discussion is all around us. We are in the midst of a deep recession and prolonged collapse of many sectors of the economies, with the resulting high unemployment. Our financial markets are in chaos, and unstable. We see a government eager to raise "income" by heaping more taxes on us. We see our National Debt skyrocketing, beyond our ability to even pay for it. We have become a debtor nation to our enemies and are held hostage to dependence on foreign oil, and foreign countries buying our debt.

Our Health care costs are going up, and Government is taking over many segments of our economy and our lives...in Healthcare, Automobiles, Banking, Energy, Insurance and other linked sectors. We see the gross inefficiency and waste of government bureaucracies and should expect the worse in these areas.

Business is being restricted and made subject to more government oversight and controls. Our states are becoming bankrupt and European nations like Greece and Spain are about to collapse. We are following their path and are about to lose our top Moody's ranking due to our debt load and fiscal irresponsibility.

People are pitted against people, and cultures are becoming Balkanized. America is no longer a melting pot for immigrants, but a salad bowl. We do not assimilate and we do not learn English, and we demand cultural services in our native languages.

Muslims are encroaching into Western societies with their Sharia law and violent and intolerant behaviors.

Being proposed now are Global governance , and global policies binding on all nations, and allegiance to World ideas, laws, and theories rather than US Law and the US Constitution.

We need instead to turn back to the Lord, but the voice is small and weak.

Social Trends

- Less importance on Religious instructions
 - Young people not coming to church in any significant numbers
 - Young parents not bringing children
 - God being forced into smaller place in daily life
- Lack of knowledge of Christian fundamentals
 - Entertainment Services rather than Worship Services
 - Lack of real Bible teaching
 - Service Opportunities falling away (Sunday night, Wednesday night, Church-wide Bible Study, etc)
- Lowering of morals from a Biblical standpoint
 - Acceptability of all sorts of activities previously considered improper...Right is wrong, and wrong is right
 - Homosexuality, Transgender, Pedophilia more visible and acceptable to society
- Higher divorce rates; Faith not a factor
- Single parent families, unwed parents
- Abortion > 40 million babies in US Aborted
- Drugs increasing and some legalized
- Alcohol abuse

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If all this is not bad enough, social trends are becoming social ills. Lack of Religious instructions, lack of knowledge, lowering of Christian ethics and morals, divorce, teen pregnancy, abortion, alcohol, drugs.

The Churches have been re-arranging the deck chairs on the Titanic rather than sounding the alarm, and showing the path to salvation and freedom. What does it all mean, and where do we go from here?

Bible verses to think about...

- **Matt 24 – Key Chapter in End times signs**

- Signs for 2nd coming, not Rapture
 - Many come in my name
 - Wars, rumors of wars
 - Nation against nation, kingdom against kingdom
 - Famines, earthquakes
 - These are the beginnings of birth pains
 - Christians will be persecuted, even unto death
 - People will turn away from the faith
 - Betray and hate each other
 - False Prophets, love grow cold
 - Those that stand firm will be saved.
 - Gospel preached to all Nations, then the End will come

- **Revelation 3 – Letters to Philadelphia and Laodicea**

- **Philadelphia**- The church of the open door – hold on
- **Laodicea** – The Lukewarm church – Repent and buy Gold from God that is refined in the fire

These two churches represent the final days of the Church Age before the Rapture of the Saints. One is the church of the Open door that witnesses and spreads the Gospel, and the other is smug, does not need God, and has no passion for the work or the calling. A wishy-washy church that panders to the people without taking any stands

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Matt 24

3 As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. "Tell us," they said, "when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?"

4 Jesus answered: "Watch out that no one deceives you. 5For many will come in my name, claiming, 'I am the Christ,' and will deceive many.

6 You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come.

7 Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places.

8 All these are the beginning of birth pains.

9 "Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me.

10 At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other,

11 and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people.

12 Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold,

13 but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Rev 3

To the Church in Philadelphia

7 "To the angel of the church in Philadelphia write:

These are the words of him who is holy and true, who holds the key of David. What he opens no one can shut, and what he shuts no one can open. 8 I know your deeds. See, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut. I know that you have little strength, yet you have kept my word and have not denied my name. 9 I will make those who are of the synagogue of Satan, who claim to be Jews though they are not, but are liars—I will make them come and fall down at your feet and acknowledge that I have loved you. 10 Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth. 11 I am coming soon. Hold on to what you have, so that no one will take your crown. 12 Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name. 13 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

To the Church in Laodicea

14 "To the angel of the church in Laodicea write:

These are the words of the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the ruler of God's creation. 15 I know your deeds, that you are neither cold nor hot. I wish you were either one or the other! 16 So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth. 17 You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked. 18 I counsel you to buy from me gold refined in the fire, so you can become rich; and white clothes to wear, so you can cover your shameful nakedness; and salve to put on your eyes, so you can see. 19 Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent. 20 Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. 21 To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne. 22 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

Reality Check

- Church Age is coming to an End
 - Prophetic signs of the times show that the second coming is getting closer. There is nothing that is required before the Rapture can occur. It will come like a thief in the night.
 - It is critical that Christians understand the urgency of the situation and take some action
- Should the Lord tarry a bit...
 - Income tax deductions like Home Mortgage Interest and Charitable deductions likely to be stopped or reduced
 - What will **you** do if the Home mortgage deduction is phased out?
 - What will the **church** do if the charitable deduction is phased out.
- What is the Lord's instruction to us and the Church?

We must prepare ourselves and our church, then we must act.

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Chaos is everywhere, Church, politics, country, finances, costs, families. Now add the fact that the Church Age is coming to a close. No one knows the date or times, but those who are awake will know the seasons. In the End times passages in the Bible, we see the many signs that predict the end of the Age. One of the most striking is the making of the nation of Israel in 1948. This was a keystone of the prophecy becoming plausible, along with the calamity of life, the natural disasters like Earthquakes, Oil Leaks, Tornadoes, Hurricanes, Tsunamis. As the book I mentioned earlier, The Age of the Unthinkable, discusses...we are at risk for our food, water supply, biological and Chemical warfare and contamination, pandemic illness. We are seeing global government collapse and wars and aggression all over the world. We are also seeing the predicted arraying of the Persians, Gog/Magog, and the Army of the East (China/NK?) being allied against Israel and the Jews.

We are seeing the movement to a world government and the population weary of trouble and eager to embrace the false promises of a utopia on Earth. We are seeing the seeds of denominational collapse, the combining and watering down of the Faith. We are seeing the rise of the Islamic world and their expectation of the 12th Imam to usher in the end of the world. They are working to create the chaos that precedes his coming and takeover. There is a good reason to believe this will be the Anti Christ and will already have a huge, devoted following. All of these signs are signs of the Second coming, but there is an event before that we need to understand...The Rapture. There are NO signs for the Rapture, only that it precedes the 2nd coming. If we are seeing signs of the season for the 2nd coming, we are even closer to the Rapture. This will come like a thief in the night, un expected by many, but we have been forewarned. We believe the Church will be spared the scourge of the Tribulation period, which is the 7 years preceding the 2nd Coming, so my belief is that the Rapture could come any time.

We will need to survive the coming problems, should the Lord tarry a bit.

Sandpile Theory

- Basic explanation of idea
- How does it relate to this topic
 - Eschatology and Signs of the times
- Living in Chaotic times
 - The Age of the Unthinkable
 - Being a survivor
 - Church and Life implications

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Several theories are in play here. The Sandpile theory is simple to comprehend but impossible to express mathematically or empirically.

If you are at the beach and begin scooping sand and piling it up you create a conical shape that is broad at the bottom and narrow at the top. You can continue to add sand until the pile collapses from the top and makes the bottom wider. This builds a base for more sand. So far so good, but can we predict when the next grain of sand will cause the collapse? What if the sand is perfectly dry or wet, does that matter? How can we predict when to stop piling up the sand just before it collapses?

If we compare the world events or the financial markets to a sandpile, when can we predict the event that will cause the crash...just before it happens? Are world events like sand? Do they behave differently? What about the financial markets? **Relate Story of Start of WW1 with Archduke Ferdinand**

Sometimes we talk about events like these as “the straw that broke the camels back”. We understand that formula, because there are limited other affects to weigh in on the answer. The amount of straw can be weighed and when we reach the limit of the camel we know we are close.

Sandpiles are different, they are more unpredictable and less understood. What if the sand is people who do not just sit there, but take independent action based on self interest or risk or fear...well this is totally different from sand.

The answer is that we cannot predict these things, neither can we predict the signs of the times as it relates to the end of the age...but we can prepare.

Living in chaotic and unpredictable times a lost art for humans. Our ancestors had much greater flexibility and resiliency than we do. These traits should be prepared for by us as individuals, by us as God's ambassadors, and by the Church as Gods way of evangelizing and discipling the converted.

How do we change our thinking?

- We must become more flexible
 - We cannot and will not be able to predict when the sandpile will fall. We won't likely even see the signs
- We must become more resilient
 - Self sufficient, low/no debt, insulated from the winds of change, as much as possible
 - Deal with those that happen in spite of our efforts
- We must build alliances and work together without the dependency to the greatest extent
- Consider the farmer of old

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Flexibility.

What if there is an oil shortage, and trucks are not delivering goods?? Food-clothes-gasoline. What are your alternatives

What if there is a failure in our water supply or electricity or natural gas for 2 weeks? What would you do or where would you go?

Resiliency:

What are we slaves to? Our house payments, Kroger having food, our being able to drive, our being able to communicate over phones and internet. How do we insulate ourselves from these events personally? We will address the church in a minute.

What about our ancestors who lived in the 1700s or 1800s? What did they do without all our so-called necessities?

How do we change our lifestyles?

- Get independent by reducing debt, engaging local suppliers, learning to reduce our needs.
- Have a 2 week supply of food on hand in case no trucks to deliver to stores, buy locally from local farmers, learn to do things yourself or pair with friends who can
- Simplify, simplify, simplify

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I am meddling here I know, but in the latest financial crisis we are in...the ones who are surviving have managed to keep their houses, cars, way of life, were those who were insulated from the chaos. Some by having no or little debt, or because their incomes were not greatly affected. Those who were most greatly affected were those who were at risk in areas they could not sustain when the storm hit.

To be a survivor and become more resilient, you must make changes, and simplify your life. Remove as many unmanageable dependencies as you can.

There are lots of plans. Backpacks of food, seed storage, underground bunkers...I am not talking about that. I am talking about common sense ideas that each of can do.

Our ancestors bought locally from other farmers and neighbors, had their own wells for water, did not depend on electricity or natural gas or gasoline. They went to town once a month and stored their needs.

We can't do all of that but we can do some of it. If we don't we are at risk unnecessarily. My whole point is to simplify our lives and become less dependent.

What will the Church look like?

- I believe it will be a more Apostate church than it is now. To get attendance and feed the machine it will
 - Become more entertainment than Gospel
 - Feel Good Gospel, media savvy
 - Focus on behavior that is Christian that pulls the heartstrings
 - De-emphasize the judgment part of scripture
 - Focus on acceptance and not repentance
 - More tolerant of deviancy and error
 - Become less denominational so it becomes freer to adapt to the world view
 - Theology replaced by Psycho-babble preaching
 - It will be the church of Laodicea in Revelation 3

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Now lets get back to discussion of the Church. The same forces are at play for the institutional church as it is for individuals.

But included in survival for the church is its historic mission and calling. I will talk to these separately:

What will the Church look like in the future?

Dumbed down, watered down, soft sell, seeking to entertain to keep the people in the pews.

Laodicea

Church Changes to stay relevant

- **Return back to the Basics**

- Bible Preaching / teaching and multiple services
 - Testimony that is real
 - Music that builds atmosphere for Worship
- Discipling our members
- No Social Gospel, but care for others as we go to share God
 - Works as an outgrowth of Evangelism and Mission

- **Genuine Evangelism- One on one, witnessing**

- **Small Group Study** that focuses on Jesus and His Word... **Action and outreach**

- **Prioritize the efforts that require funding since the level of income will probably drop 25%**

- **Pay off debts to increase resiliency and flexibility to change to meet unexpected needs**

- **Do nothing that does not either disciple, witness, or care for others**

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If we are to stay relevant, I believe we must return to the roots of Christianity and to the Biblical instruction

Mission and Call of the Church:

Well how does this affect the Church in the future? As in our own personal lives, the Church cannot control so many unmanageable dependencies. I believe we have to get back to the basics of what Church is about.

The mission of the church is found in Matt 28:19-20

19 Therefore **go and make disciples** of all nations, **baptizing them** in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit,

20 and **teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you**. And surely I am with you always, to the very **end of the age.**"

We are losing members, more drifting away than drifting in. We must be deliberate in focusing on what the Bible tells us to do. We need to share the Gospel, and preach the word. We need to provide Bible Study across the Church platforms: Sunday School (all ages / classes), we need to provide Pastor-led Bible Study...Books / Prophecy / Calling...but mainly through scripture. Use the Bibles to look up and reference. We need individual follow up with those drifting away to find out if there are any scriptural issues we need to address that would have encouraged them to stay.

We need outside the church small group Bible Study that we invite neighbors and friends to attend, and we need to expand the concepts of the DFM plan to be the main resource for benevolence and help. We should make sure a wider set of thoughts on funding is incorporated to expand the scope of the effort. We need to minister to those in need inside the church family, those attenders, and to other Brothers and Sisters in need. Lastly we need to do the social help ministries as we can, but after the others are done. We are seeking the approval of God and not man.

Evangelism – I prefer the non-program evangelism that was practiced in the early church. Because we are excited about Jesus and what He has done for us and through us, we share with our friends and neighbors.

Practical administration: We expect and plan for a 25% drop in giving beyond the new reality. We focus on paying off our debt so we can be freed from the millstone hanging around our necks. We prioritize what we have to meet the goals of the church.

I believe that denominations are becoming less relevant, and church organizations get in the way of church ministries. We MUST be about our Fathers business or we will disappear.

In Revelation, the first 3 chapters are letters to the 7 churches in Asia Minor. While they were churches then, they also represent both the types of churches we see today, and in general represent the churches through the Church Age. The final church mentioned is the Church in Laodicea in the 3rd chapter of Revelation. This Church has nothing to be commended by the Lord and is lukewarm towards the Gospel and the people. It represents the final stage of the Apostate Church. If we look around we see lots of churches like Laodicea who do not care about God or even find him relevant. They exist for their own purposes, some power, some social, and some fellowship and community, but none to worship God as the true focus of the church.

What about You and Me?

- We need to put the God first in our mind and action
- We need to find and follow the call that the Lord has given us...we each have a specific call
- We need to pray and seek God's guidance continually
- We need to be a thankful people...blessed by God
- We need to meet in groups for Worship, Bible Study, training, and encouragement
- We need to be committed

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I believe we are all called by God for something. It may be preaching, teaching, witnessing, encouragement, administration, giving, singing, or any of the other gifts, but we need to find out where God has gifted and called us for service and then get busy.

Without prayer and seeking God's guidance, you will be doing what you want to do. Earnestly pray for God to reveal his plan for you and give you the courage to step out of the boat and do it. In the story in the synoptic gospels of the time when Jesus walked on the water, you remember that Peter asked the Lord:

Matt 18:

28 "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water."

29 "Come," he said. Then Peter got down out of the boat, walked on the water and came toward Jesus.

30 But when he saw the wind, he was afraid and, beginning to sink, cried out, "Lord, save me!"

31 Immediately Jesus reached out his hand and caught him. "You of little faith," he said, "why did you doubt?"

If we ask God, He will give us the guidance, but we need to keep our eyes on him, not all the surrounding issues. He is faithful to save us even if we fail to do what we need to do, but we must get out of the boat.

Are you committed? Are we as a church committed to being ready for what comes, and being prepared to share our witness to others. Are you committed to do what the Lord has called you to do?

Final Thoughts

- Remnants, Wheat, Tares
- Ready and anticipating
- Practiced in our minds and in reality
- Be a giver, not a taker...make a difference

Will you commit to be a difference maker?

- A prayer warrior?
- A witness, an active participant?

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This is not a talk on the Rapture or 2nd coming, but I believe that the Lord is preparing us for the time ahead. We are seeing historic falling away from the Biblical foundational truths. I cannot explain any other way the drifting away of the church members and the bliss of those who do not see any need for the Lord. This is called the Great Apostasy or the Apostate Church. Friends, we are there as we speak.

I believe the Lord is sifting his flock and there are parables in the NT that compare this to separating the sheep from the goats, or the wheat from the tares. In the wheat parable we see the master sowing pure wheat in his field but the "enemy" coming to sow tares. When the grain starts to come up the servants notice what appears to be tares (weeds) mixed in, but the master will not let them pull them because they might uproot some of the young wheat as well. He wants to wait until the harvest when they can be safely separated.

In similar manner, among the believers we have "tares" as well...mixed throughout the church flock which by their lack of faith, commitment, fruits, etc we suspect are not real Christians, but the Lord will do the separating when it is harvest time because He knows the difference.

I believe today the Lord is sifting his crop because we are approaching the harvest time. We are seeing the wheat being separated and the tares falling away, and the remnant of the church is becoming visible. As believers we must be both concerned and excited about this event and be about our Fathers business. The Rapture will come like a thief in the night, when you least expect it and the wheat and the remnant will be taken and the tares and the unbelievers will be left. Are we wheat or are we tares?

I know that the Wednesday night crowd and the Sunday night crowd are the committed core, or the wheat in the parable, but I care about the tares who come occasionally on Sunday morning, who seldom make Bible Study, and who almost never make the evening services. We should make an effort to bring or invite someone for each service that normally does not come. Perhaps do some personal outreach to them.

The Lord turned the world upside down with 12 Disciples. We are trying to work in the field the Lord has given us that is much smaller. How can we quit?

Be ready, be prayed up, be awake. Is the Church awake? Are you awake.

This is the time to be bold, and stand up for the Lord. Be His witness and His hands and feet here is Dawsonville.

For me personally, I am joining a neighborhood Bible Study to reach out to others outside the immediate flock, and will probably start a separate home Bible Study with a small group to look at what is ahead and make progress towards understanding and achievement of my goals to become more resilient and more relevant to Gods needs at this time. I encourage you to pray about your response and take some action to engage the wider community for the Lord.

Givers and takers are a theme we understand. I want to make a concerted effort to be a giver and a sharer in the time left. I want to help the Kingdom as a whole and our Church in particular to be a Philadelphia, not a Laodicea. We have the open door, we have the remnant of core believers ready to work, we just need to recommit to the Basics and teach the Bible and Witness outside the walls.

Will you help make things happen, watch what happens, or wonder what is happening? Your eternal destiny could be in the balance