

## **McChurch Churches And Fast Food Worship Services!**

Dear friends, several years ago when I was still a pastor, I was driving very early one morning to a distant city to be with one of our church members who was going into surgery. I left home that morning at 5:00 a.m. and was almost to the city when I decided to stop at McDonalds, my favorite place to eat, for breakfast. I went up to the cashier and placed my order. I stood there for at least 10 minutes waiting on my food. I then began to get concerned about missing my patient who was going into surgery. I got frustrated and blurted out to the cashier that "I thought this was a fast food restaurant." She quickly snapped back at me and said, "It is a fast food restaurant but not immediate!" That statement stung me quite a bit, and by the grace of God, I was able to keep my cool and I left and went on to the hospital. I did get there before the patient left for surgery.

Now, the purpose of telling you this little story is that for the past two years JoAnne and I have been traveling all across America where I have had the privilege of preaching in some wonderful churches and being with some marvelous pastors. Yet, as we have traveled, I have noticed something that has really been hard for this old time preacher to deal with. That is that so many of our churches are so programed to quick services that I have begun to call them "Fast Food Worship Services". Now, I don't mean to put any church or any pastor down because of this, but my heart is broken over how we show up to supposedly worship our wonderful Lord and Savior, and then we hurry in, make announcements, sing songs, recognize our friends and families for 45 minutes, and then plan to give 15 minutes to the man of God to preach the unsearchable riches of Christ's Gospel. Then, because this fast food worship service is done so quickly, there is no time to give invitations long enough to let God's Holy Spirit deal with people's hearts, and if God wanted to move in on these services and start bringing repentance and revival, the people would not stay long enough for Him to do so. I believe that we are breaking God's heart with our programed orders of worship because if He does show up, He will mess up every thing on our program. I mean not to put any church down, but sometime ago, I spoke in a service where every part of the program was timed down to the seconds. I thought, how foolish this is if we really want God to show up in our worship services. But truthfully, I am not sure we do want Him to show up because if He does, He will mess up our program and performance mentality. Is it any wonder that our churches are seeing so few people saved? Why should we be so shocked when our conversions and baptism numbers are going down dramatically? Once again, the truth is that we are so "Fast Food Conscious" that we don't want to take the time for God to work. Poor Jesus! Visualize with me for a moment if you would, about Jesus speaking to a man's heart in one of these fast food worship services! The preacher is preaching, the Holy Spirit is convicting, and the man is ready to get saved. But suddenly, the preacher stops the sermon, gives a short appeal, and then closes the time of worship. When will we every learn that sometimes it takes God a while to get through the hard crusted heart of a sinner and bring him to repentance.

Why Do We Have Fast Food Worship Services?

I have thought very much about these fast food worship services for sometime, and I have tried sincerely to understand why pastors plan and allow these kind of services. I have tried to be as objective as I can in my conclusions, but I am still having a hard time with the reasons. First, I

believe that some pastors plan these short worship services simply because they are afraid of their people; especially those who give the most money. They don't want to offend these dear brethren and sisters by messing up their Sunday meals at the local steak house or the Sunday afternoon golf or football games. Secondly, some pastors plan these fast food worship services because they have capitulated their position as worship pastor to a music director who definitely wants more time for music; thus a long music program that takes precedence over the preached Word of God. Thirdly, some pastors plan these short worship services because they are needed due to a lack of space because the church is growing in number. Therefore, they schedule the early worship service to be very short so that it can be over and the people can go on to Sunday School. I know that ordinarily this is indeed a good reason, but I have had multiple services as a pastor and if God showed up in our early service and began to draw people to Himself, we would just delay Sunday School or even cancel it due to the fact that God was working. I can assure you that we need the manifested presence of God more than we need to abide by our regular routine to accommodate all of the Sunday School teachers who have developed ownership of their classes and their time slots! I can remember many times in my past as a pastor when God showed up in our services in power and great glory and we just let Him work regardless of whose classes or schedules He messed up by being there. And, I can tell you that we had scores of people that were getting saved in those meetings which did not end exactly on time. Fourthly, I believe that some pastors plan short worship services simply because they don't spend a lot of time in the study during the week, and that they don't have a full course meal to offer. Thus, they had rather meet, tweet, and then go eat, rather than to repeat! If this sounds harsh, let me ask you to visit a good number of churches in your area and see what the weekly menus are. I promise you that most of these, but not all, "Express Worship Services", have very little Gospel, certainly no preaching against sin, a lot of jived up music, and a people centered feel good worship experience. The people usually come away rejoicing over the good feeling they have, the shortness of the service, no conviction for their sin, and no need to change their lifestyles. They simply go out and live just as they did before they came! Why? Because they have not had an encounter with the living God!

### Real Worship Means To Linger Long With Jesus!

Many years ago when I started out in the ministry, I was attending Fruitland Baptist Bible Institute. We had a new professor of homiletics come to our school to teach sermon preparation. His name is Dr. Kenneth Ridings and he later became president of the school! I will never forget one day in a class when Dr. Ridings was preaching to us from the Book of Revelation on the Laodicean Church. In the text in Revelation 3:14-22, Jesus was on the outside of the church door knocking and asking to be allowed back in. In verse 20, the scripture says, "Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me." As vividly as it were yesterday, I can still hear Dr. Ridings say, "Gentleman, pay attention to the word sup."

He said, "the word sup comes from the same Greek word from which we get supper. And, in the Middle Eastern culture, supper time took a long time to eat and fellowship. So, what Jesus is saying to the church is open the door and I will come back in and will sup (linger long) with you, and you with me." That day's sermon by Dr. Kenneth Ridings has stuck with me for over 40 years. And, I will never forget that when Jesus shows up for supper, no one is in a hurry to leave. Pastors, staff, and church leaders, don't you think it is about time for us to let Jesus back into our

worship services so that we can enjoy a full course spiritual feast? I promise you that He will return in manifest glory if we allow Him to, but if we plan and program our services according to our consumerism society, then He won't be showing up because He only comes for long periods and Jesus never gets in a hurry! Is Jesus knocking on your church door asking for entrance once again? If He is, maybe you need to remember what the name "Laodicea" means. It means "Judgment by the people." We shut Jesus out of our lives and churches just because His coming will mess up our plans. May God forgive us!

One more thing! I can't stop this thought without mentioning that I don't believe that long services are in themselves conducive to Jesus showing up. But, I do believe that if He is going to show up, we better be willing to wait there until He is through changing lives. I feel very sorry for the pastors and church leaders who have so planned their worship services down to the very second, because they don't have much hope of really experiencing the manifest presence of God. What a solemn thought it is to know that one day at the Judgment Seat of Christ we might have to try to explain why we were so intent on ending on time that a lost unbeliever left our time pressured services and plunged into hell!