

Fled For Refuge

Joe Slater

The God we serve keeps His promises! Due to His holy nature, it is impossible for Him to lie. Yet, to help us in our weakness, He not only promised to bless the world through the seed of Abraham, but swore with an oath that He would keep His promise. Therefore, *“We may have strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us”* (Hebrews 6:18).

These words call to mind at least two Old Testament practices with which the original readers of Hebrews would have been familiar. First, fleeing for refuge takes us to Numbers 35 where six cities were appointed as safe zones where a person who had killed another should flee. There he would receive a fair trial. If guilty of murder, he would be executed; but if the killing was justified or accidental, the avenger of blood couldn't harm him. Nevertheless, the manslayer would have to remain inside the city of refuge until the death of the High Priest.

Sinners flee to God for refuge through Christ, and the Lord adds the saved to the church (Acts 2:47). Jesus is our High Priest forever (Hebrews 6:20). He will never die! Therefore, we must remain faithful within the body of Christ (the church) as long as we live.

“Laying hold” of the hope set before us reminds us of another practice: laying hold of the horns of the altar. Solomon's brother, Adonijah, and later the army captain, Joab, did so as a place of presumed safety. Unfortunately for them, both were guilty and therefore were executed.

Rather than running to an altar, we lay hold of the hope we have in Christ. Hebrews 6:19-20 compares this hope to an anchor firmly secured in the presence of Christ in Heaven itself. Hope keeps us from being blown off course, as it were, by the trials and temptations we face.

Stay in the city of refuge! Rejoice in your certain hope!

Pure Salt

About 650 feet below the streets of Hutchinson, KS, lies the Kansas Underground Salt Museum. My wife and I bought small bags of salt scooped from the mine floor as souvenirs for our grandchildren. But we were warned not to eat the salt, as it is heavily contaminated by mineral deposits and therefore unfit for human consumption.

As I observed the layers of grayish salt crystals interspersed with streaks of black shale, I thought of Jesus' words: *“You are the salt of the earth; but if the salt loses its flavor, how shall it be seasoned? It is good for nothing but to be thrown out and trampled underfoot by men”* (Matthew 5:13). It is not a perfect analogy, for this salt hasn't lost its flavor. However, the impurities make it worthless and unhealthy, fit only for deicing roads.

In stark contrast were a few locations where water had leached onto the salt, dissolving it and allowing the impurities to settle to the bottom. Once recrystallized, the salt was clean and fit to adorn a juicy, tender, T-bone steak (a far more noble use than being scattered on a highway)!

It occurred to me that a similar process must take place in the human heart to cleanse it from the impurity of sin. Hearts hardened by sin must be made pliable by the gospel message. Then faith in the truth about the suffering of Jesus our Savior will lead us to the life-long task of repentance (Acts 2:38 & 17:30).

At this point two liquids purify our hearts. One, the same water which dissolves the salt becomes the medium through which we share in the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus (Romans 6:4-5). This grants us access to the second and most potent liquid – the blood of Christ. This awesome liquid, shed once for the world's sins (Hebrews 9:24-26), acts as a powerful cleansing agent, purifying our hearts and making us fit for noble service to our Lord (Titus 2:14) and, ultimately to enter into heaven.

So, what kind of salt are you?

--Mike Hinton (Blanchard, OK) adapted, via *Old Paths*

FOMO (#2)

FOMO is an acronym for the “fear of missing out.” As mentioned last week, the “fear of missing out” can leave us with a gnawing sense of discontent. FOMO can also have a profound effect on our attitude toward the worship assembly.

For many years, churches of Christ were known for a strong “seek first His kingdom” (Matthew 6:33) and “forsake not the assembly” (Hebrews 10:25) mentality as it pertains to the first day of the week and our responsibility to worship the Lord “in spirit and truth” (John 4:24). Even Sunday nights and Wednesday nights were set aside by the shepherds as much-needed appointments for prayer, study, and fellowship.

But, judging from declining attendance, especially on Sunday and Wednesday nights, “fear of missing out” may have impacted church attendance negatively. More and more churches are abandoning the Sunday night/Wednesday night format altogether. This doesn't mean they are apostate; each congregation is self-governing (1 Peter 5:2).

However, declining attendance among those who could be and should be present raises questions about our “fear of missing out.” Does our “fear of missing out” on time spent visiting with family and friends cause us to absent ourselves from the worship services of the church? Is our “fear of missing out” on ball games and recreational pursuits the reason why we are absent? Shouldn't these, instead, be opportunities for us to share our commitment to Jesus Christ?

One of the tragic consequences of COVID isolation is that, while we have resumed everyday life in most respects, there remains a lingering effect – a tendency to neglect spiritual responsibilities in preference to short-term pleasure. Live-streaming our services is for the benefit of members who are truly unable to be present for worship, as well as a means of reaching out to the lost. It was never intended to enable members to side-step worship and Bible study opportunities out of “fear of missing out” on something else in this life.

--Glen Elliott (Greenbriar, AR) adapted