



# A LETTER FROM YOUR PASTOR: APRIL 2023 by Lee Shipp

## DAVID'S AMEN

In the Psalms, the singer repeatedly prepares his heart for the Lord. For example, the Psalmist prays for God to enlarge his heart, strengthen his heart, create within him a clean heart, fix his heart, and break his heart. We should do likewise. We should be in the altars before, during, and after the service to prepare our hearts. We should prepare our hearts to seek God. God is more interested in speaking to our hearts than our heads.

It is great negligence to simply show up for Church, find a seat, listen to a preacher preach the Word of God, and have an unprepared heart. God requires much from a people with such easy and constant access to the blessing of preaching; we must prepare our hearts for this great privilege. All of us are aware of the many distractions constantly bombarding us; how easily we lose concentration. King David even wept over his divided heart, asking God to remove the many things that were pulling it in many directions.

Many people, with unprepared hearts, agree with God's message to their own demise. They do not understand the significance of the holy meeting between themselves and the Lord. There is an interesting moment when David said, "Amen" to a prophet's message; the consequence was not good for David.

Nathan said, *"There were two men in one city, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had exceedingly many flocks and herds. But the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb, which he had bought and nourished, and it grew up together with him and his children. It ate of his food, drank from his own cup, and lay in his bosom; it was like a daughter to him. And a traveler came to the rich man, who refused to take from his flock and herd to prepare one for the wayfaring man who had come to him; but he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for the man who had come to him."*

David's anger was greatly aroused against the man, and he said to Nathan, *"As the Lord lives, the man who has done this shall surely die! And he shall restore fourfold for the lamb because he did this and had no pity."*

Then Nathan said to David, *"You are the man! ..."* How typical is the scene? God speaks, and we heartily say "Amen," to the message of God. However, as David, we fail to see that the Word was spoken to us. I can see David agreeing with Nathan, nodding his head in agreement. Perhaps he is shouting him down, "You preach it, brother! Amen. Yes, that is the truth. Boy, I wish so and so were here to hear this." Then, as all good preachers and prophets do, Nathan lodges the arrow of God's Word into David. Don't think of others, David. Quit dodging the truth. How long will you take God's Word as common and for others? David, you are the man!

Nathan brought it home. As God's messenger, he doesn't throw a blanket sermon, hoping it applies to someone.

The preacher knows his God, and God knows his people. When God has something to say, He does not hope it is applicable; He knows it is. God speaks on purpose. God sends His Word to accomplish His great mission. When God speaks, He has something to say – to you! The listener is responsible for hearing when the messenger speaks God's Word. Nevertheless, we are often like David; we amen the sermon, encourage the message, and then want to be done with the whole thing. It is the habit of shuffling in, taking our place, and casually walking out instead of praying and worshipping.

The altar is not for the lost but for those who come to thank God for His Word and desire to hide His Word in their hearts! To fail here is to fail in our responsibility as hearers. Life and death have been set before us every time the message is given. **At that point, it is crucial what we do!** The problem is not merely with those who might scorn or reject the Word as nonsense. The problem is with those who love and believe it but do nothing with it. Jesus said the Word falls on all types of soil (hearts), some stony, rocky, hardened, and others prepared. If you do not have a prepared heart, the enemy will steal what God is trying to give you, or the cares of life will choke the life out of the promises of God.

The Holy Ghost warns all that is needed to choose death is to **NEGLECT the Word of God!** "... we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it.... How shall we escape if we neglect?" Neglect - that's a danger to believers.

Believers are not faced with the danger of disagreeing with the Word, counting God's Word as trite, or even ignoring the Word; the threat is neglect. Neglect occurs when one agrees with the Word but fails to apply the Word due to carelessness. You agree with it, but forget it. You love it, but don't live it. The Bible warns us that we will drift away. Drifting is not a conscious effort but a slow and unnoticed wandering. You might be asking, "So what do I do? I cannot possibly remember everything the preacher said." It is pretty simple, and I would like to help you by providing a contrast of examples. Consider Pharaoh. Exodus 7:22 says, *"Pharaoh's heart grew hard, and he did not heed them, as the Lord had said. And Pharaoh turned and went into his house. Neither was his heart moved by this."*

There are several things Pharaoh did to neglect God's Word. First, he hardened his heart. To harden means to restrain or to conquer. He fought off God's Word. He refused to let it affect his heart. He battled God's attempt to reach his heart. God was not allowed to affect his life. Secondly, he did not heed the Word of the Lord. To heed means to listen with the intent to obey. When you listen to God's messengers, do you listen with the intent to obey? Third, the Word did not move his heart. To be moved is to regard and consider. He never thought twice about it.

Again, how about you? Do you ponder the words of God? Do you remember and meditate upon them? Or are you like others who could not tell what the sermon was a week ago because they fought off God's Word; by neglect, they did not let the Word influence their heart? Friends, that is the purpose of the altar. The end of the service is the most critical time, for it is there, at the altar, we choose life. The altar is when we say to God, "Thank you for sending me your Word. Help me to remember it and allow it to have its full effect on my life!"

My other example is one who cherished God's Word and found life. Her name is Mary. In Luke 2:17-19 we are told, *"Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this child. And all those who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart."* Many marveled at the Word. That is precisely what occurs today. As David did, we marvel at the truth of the Word. We find it exciting and compelling.

It comes, and we are genuinely moved and love it. However, this response is set in opposition to the correct response that Mary gave. Hearing the Word, she first kept all these things in her heart.

This means to preserve from perishing. Do you do that? Do you write and take notes recording what God has said? Secondly, she pondered them in her heart. Other passages tell us that she hid them in her heart, not her mind but her heart. To ponder means to consider and fight to understand.

In our examples, there is one common occurrence – the heart! It is a matter of the heart. *"When you said, 'Seek my face,' my **heart** said, 'Your face, Lord, I will seek.'"* God tells us in Proverbs 4:4, *"He also taught me, and said to me: 'Let your **heart** retain my words; Keep my commands, and live.'"* The heart is the seat of our will and passions. God wants us to feel his Word. His Word is to be grafted into our will, providing convictions that will make us godly!

The parable of the Sower talks about good soil and bad soil. The Word of God falls upon both; however, it will only take root and bring forth life in good soil. The condition of your heart (whether it is good soil or bad) is in your hands. God grants you the liberty to be a Pharosah or a Mary. It is your choice!

## WHEN OUR HEARTS AGREE WITH GOD

Confession is the key to walking in the light. Peter did not confess with Jesus and walked in a night of great darkness, being sifted by Satan! When the Holy Spirit reaches one with His Word, the hearer must respond for the complete planting of that message into their heart. So much is lost by silence and lack of confession. Believers should respond to the sermon! Words of confession (agreement) should echo around the room: "Amen! That's right! God is speaking to me!" There needs to be confession.

We must agree with the Lord and the truth He declares at the altar, and every time a truth knocks on our hearts. Agreement is a sure way of opening the heart as Mary did; this allows entrance for the Word. Sadly, our response to the Word of God has been conditioned by a very stale western culture. This tradition is in direct contradiction to the demands of God. Even our altar services have become a tradition used by those who are being saved or rededicating their life to God. However, in the Bible, the altar was for believers who desired to worship, celebrate, and praise God. This very truth will be ignored by countless believers who will refuse to bow to God week after week; it is just not their custom to do so, though it is the culture of heaven.

## THE ALTAR AND A PREPARED HEART

When we speak of the altar, it is evident that our altar is always and forever the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross.

Our reference to the word altar represents a place and time where believers do business with God: cry, pray, celebrate, and praise. I believe God is here, and my heart desires Him. I believe that He is and must seek Him. It can be anywhere in the room. However, Hebrews 13 tells us that we should *"go out to Him ... By Him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name"* (Hebrews 13:13, 14). Peter called us priests of the Lord. We are privileged to lead the worship of God. Leadership is never done in private or from the back. It is always upfront and visible.

*"Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.... Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light"* (1 Peter 2:5, 9).

You are supposed to show the praises of God

People are supposed to see you praising God, honoring God, and celebrating God. Gathering together with the particular focus of honoring and calling upon the name of the Lord is what we mean by the altar. You can call it what you will. Call it the gathering, the choir of praise, but for God's sake, let the priests of the Lord show forth His praise!

The altar is where the heart can express its pursuit of God. The place where we take our shoes off, we are on holy ground. The question is not, "Why do I have to go?" But "Why would you not want to go?"

Many churches are dying by the unbelief that says, "Why do I have to go to the altar?" As Naaman, they even feel contempt to suggest that I bathe in Jordan to be healed. The blind man could have suggested, why do I have to go to the pool of Silom to wash? Daniel could have reasoned; I can pray anywhere. Why must I open my window and pray where my enemies can see? I can pray secretly; after all, God is looking at my heart. Mary had to leave her house and go outside to meet Jesus. Jesus is the God; we must go to Him!

Moreover, do you not hear the testimony of many you admire telling you repeatedly, "There is just something unique about being at the altar with so many people crying out to God." There is something different.

## CHURCHES WITH NO ALTAR

Please imagine the Church having no altar. Actually, you don't have to imagine. Most churches do not have an altar. So, consider the churches where there is no altar. No life. No power. No Presence. No miracles. No joy. No participation. Is that the kind of Church you want to have? Nobody is taking the lead up front and crying out to God. Nobody responds in joyful faith. Nobody is getting help from the body. Would you like for our Church to be like that? Would God want our Church like that?

Where the Spirit is not allowed to move there is no altar. Where the Spirit is moving there is an altar? Those of you not in an altar: where are your children? Are they in Church with you? Are they walking with God? What is the value of your faith if those closest to you don't want to follow? God always demanded a response to His Word and His Presence. Beloved, let your heart worship God. Let your heart draw near to God. Let your heart rejoice. Let your heart be happy in Jesus, and let others see; this is your priestly privilege!