**Mike Hipes – Facebook Lesson, July 23, 2020**

Good afternoon!

In Tulsa Oklahoma, each March the church of Christ used to host the “Soul Winning Workshop.” They rented the fairgrounds in Tulsa where thousands of Christians attended the weekend event! There were keynote lectures and classes to attend. Bible book stores and Christian colleges reaching out to visitors, singing groups performing, and so much more were there. The atmosphere was energizing! When it was time for the lunch break, the town was flooded with Christens in restaurants. On one occasion while Margie and I were in line to enter a local Mexican restaurant for lunch we found ourselves literally in the midst of hundreds of people from the workshop, singing while waiting to eat! It was like a piece of heaven in that place! During the evening keynote lesson, thousands were gathered. The singing and the atmosphere were incredible! With all this joy and excitement, it was no wonder that many were drawn to it each year. After the lesson one evening on soul-winning, reaching out for Christ and making a personal commitment to do so when it was over, I overheard a man there say, “Boy you can count on me, I’m making a commitment to come to the next five workshops!” At that moment I could see that he missed the point! The reason for the gathering was not to be committed to the gathering alone but to the call to do what the Lord has asked beyond the gathering. Like a football team that comes together in the huddle for a plan and a boost, the goal of the huddle is to prepare to be a player on the field! Who would settle for just the huddle? One time I attended a football game between the NY Giants and the Dallas Cowboys. The Giants won! On the way out to the parking lot, I head many in the crowd saying, “boy we really whipped those Cowboys this time.” I thought, all we did was sit in the crowd eating hot dogs and drinking soda, we were not even near the field!

Some folks treat coming to the gathering of church services and workshops as an end in themselves! Although assembling with the saints is our scriptural calling, it is not an end in itself. It serves as a time of encouragement and recharging of the saints through worship, singing, and communing together and more. But like the man at the workshop and the guys leaving the football game, our commitment to the assembly is a launching point for participating in the fields of service beyond the doors of the church building.

Is your commitment to Christ being in the crowd or carrying a cross?

In John 6 Jesus addresses a large crowd. The feeding of the 5000. I’ll bet you remember the story! The following day when Jesus traveled to the other side of the lake, the multitudes followed to find Jesus again. Jesus knowing that they are looking for more bread to eat tells them not to settle for the physical bread that perishes but to seek the spiritual bread that endures to eternal life! Jesus tells them that He Himself is the bread of life. He then calls them to make a commitment to following Him by being more than in the crowd but to make a commitment to being a cross-carrier of Christ and serve on His team! Sadly, when they realized that Jesus was wanting more than a gathering for a meal, but service in the field, they turned and left.

Are you a true disciple and committed follower of Jesus? I am not asking if you go to church. I am not asking if you own 3 or more bibles. I am not asking you if your name is in the church directory, or if you can recite the books of the Bible by memory, or if you know bible facts, doctrines and the scripture better than most. What I am asking you is if you are a follower of Christ by His standards, not ours! The point is not how much you know but what are you doing with what you know!

The cross or the crowd, where are you? May we break from the huddle and be ready to rise up and carry a cross for Christ into all the world. When I lived in North Carolina we had a sign posted above the doors that led to the outside that read, “Beyond these doors is the real mission field.” Let’s not make a commitment to just continue to assemble at the Soul Winning Workshop, let’s take the workshop to the world!

Have a great day,

Mike