

**November 15, 2009
Mark 13:1-8**

The Soul Train

If you grew up in Metro Detroit during the 50's 60's, or 70's you might have learned the word soul from outside the church walls.

There was soul music, soul food, and the TV show Soul Train. Soul Train continues to hold the honor of the longest continuously-running first-run syndicated program on television

For those of you who are not familiar with the show it first appeared in 1973 and was popular with black Americans long before Dancing With the Stars.

The show primarily featured jazz, blues, gospel and soul music performers. While they played, young people danced.

For many white Americans of that era, Soul Train provided a unique window into black culture. So what are the unique windows into our American culture today?

What are the popular cultural medias that are selling? Well according to Hollywood we now have only three years left until the apocalypse.

On Friday the new blockbuster movie 2012 was released.

Hollywood, not always a reliable or spiritual source, is basing this movie on the ancient Mayan long-count calendar.

Unfortunately for the Mayans this calendar could not even predict their own demise.

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In today's gospel lesson Peter, James, John and Andrew are walking together out of Jerusalem's great Temple. Jesus turned to them and predicted, ...

"Do you see these great buildings? Not one stone will be left here upon another; all will be thrown down."

You can understand the disciple's surprise. The smallest stones in Herod's great temple weighed 2 to 3 tons. Many of the stones weighed 50 tons.

Today the only stones remaining from that great temple are part of the Western or Wailing Wall. Those stones remain because they weigh hundreds of tons.

Forty years after Jesus made that prediction it came true. In 70 AD the Temple was destroyed by Rome.

So what can we learn from today's lesson?

I believe this lesson has brought into sharper focus the spiritual hunger that is consuming our culture.

(1) The Search for Soul

Our culture is entheogenic, which means the birth of the divine within. There is a massive Soul Search, a huge quest for personal spirituality, a widespread turning inward across our country.

People want to grow spiritually above all else.

Experiences of "the good life" are now taking a back seat to "good soul" experiences. "Great Soul" is the Holy Grail of our modern culture.

Our culture is one of the most God-besotted cultures in the history of civilization.

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But the waters of superstition are rising quickly in our modern culture.

We are less a culture of "seekers" than a culture of "believers."

People believe in everything and anything -- vampires, new age crystals, and anything else they are told.

A spiritual tsunami is coming and is already being felt. People no longer want to know about God.

People want to know God.

People want to experience "the Beyond" in "the Within."

It is this kind of spiritual quest where people combine the technology of the Internet, the science of astronomy, and the science fiction of Scientology, to create a new sacred reality.

If the '80s were the decade when nothing was sacred, then this is the decade when everything is. And when we allow the label "sacred" to be affixed to everything from movies to crop circles, we are treading on hazardous ground.

We are living in a secular society but a spiritual culture. We are one of the most religious nations in the industrial world, yet at the same time one of the most secular

This double ring can be confusing, where on the same day, and on the same page, one story might read "Spiritual Renewal Flourishes" while another story headlines, "Religion's Influence May Be Fading."

The search for soul will accelerate and move from the individual and family to organizations of all sorts and sizes.

Christians who call the church their home should sit up and take notice: Society is not disinterested in God; society is disinterested in the institutionalized church.

Society has not detached itself from spirituality; it is just rebelling against the ways that the church has sought to guide spiritual experiences.

(2) Hollywood Spirituality

Society has not detached itself from spirituality.

The X-Files TV show and movie proclaimed, "The truth is out there." The movie 2012 states: "Find out the truth."

The culture says that the "truth is out there," and that is why God is "hot" with Hollywood. The media loves spiritual stories, God is a Hot commodity.

The New York Times best-seller list often includes books about spirituality and personal growth.

As Hollywood movie makers are being bashed more than ever for glorifying wrongdoing at its lowest levels, new films are reaching more blatantly than ever into religious imagery to harvest heavenly heroes.

Take the ever-growing new releases and remakes of Charles Dickens, A Christmas Carol. This year's movie stars Jim Carey as Scrooge.

It's time for Christians to say, "The truth is not out there; the truth is in here, right here, right now.

The culture says that "the truth is out there," and that is why God is a "hot" commodity. Gothic revival furniture is now all the rage, partly because the "Gothic" style connects us with a more spiritual past.

That is why vampire movies, books and TV shows are all the rage.

It's time for the church to say, "The truth is not out there; the truth is in here, right here, right now (here at Franklin Church).

The culture says that "the truth is out there," and that is why God is "hot" with publishers. Spirituality has been the fastest growing segment in adult publishing.

Sales of religious publishers have topped \$1 billion in the last year 150 million book units sold. No wonder Wal-Mart, Target, Borders, Barnes & Noble are expanding their religious inventories.

It's time for us to say, "The truth is not out there; the truth is in here, right here, right now (here at Franklin Church).

The culture says that "the truth is out there," and that is why God is "hot" with musicians. Just look at the Top Billboard 200 Album Artists. Christian music sales alone topped \$600 million.

It's time for us to say, "The truth is not out there; the truth is in here, right here, right now (here at Franklin Church).

There are millions of Christian web sites on the internet. The culture says that "the truth is out there," and that is why God is hot on Madison Avenue. .

(3)Counterfeit Spiritualities

This unexamined, headlong spiritual search, unencumbered -- and unguided -- by any institutional boundaries, is bound to result in some spectacular hoaxes.

The world is awash in a host of counterfeit spiritualities. A culture on a soul train is bound to get derailed.

The apostle Paul also found himself living in frenetically "spiritual" times. Recall that Paul began his sermon on pagan Mars Hill with these words: "Men of Athens! I see that in every way you are very religious...." Acts 17:22

But the Athenians were caught up in idol worship. They were fervent. They were committed. But they were wrong. They were investing their lives in a spiritual being that was nothing more than a marble statue.

In today's gospel, Jesus cautions his disciples against falling prey to the parade of pretenders that will pass before them.

As Jesus' specially chosen disciples, Peter, James, John and Andrew found themselves privy to some pretty astounding eschatological (end times) predictions

But even as Jesus speaks to them about the "end times," he warns these disciples to keep their wits about them. "Don't go off after everyone who claims to be the Messiah," Jesus said.

"Just because I have chosen to let you know these things are coming, don't stamp every crazy leader, every tragic war or every natural disaster with the label 'the world is coming to an end.'"

(4)The Soul Train

Jesus' words call us back from the edge of a spiritual waterfall to a respect for moderation and discipline.

While the rest of the culture is a bit too anxious to jump on any "soul train" that is going down the tracks, Jesus' warning reminds us that before we jump on any soul train, we had better have some decent soul training under our belts.

This means training mind and body and spirit to recognize the false gods of both junky, excessive material accumulation and junky, excessive spiritual accumulation.

What Jesus does urge on his disciples is vigilance.

This means keeping a watchful, skeptical, critical eye on all the events and leaders and stories that will be trying to gain our attention and allegiance by presenting themselves in a dooms day light.

"Do not be deceived," Jesus cautions. "Reject those who would lead you astray." Hard times are not necessarily end times.

Has our soul training been rigorous enough to enable us to tell the difference? Can we distinguish between what is truth and what is false?

Let us ask God to help us train with vigilance and watchfulness in a world where God is "hot," but truth is not.

Amen.

Prayer

Govern all by Your wisdom, O Lord, so that our souls may always be serving Your will, and not as we may choose. Do not punish us, by granting that which we wish or ask, if it offends Your love, which should always live in us. Let us die to self, that we may serve You; let us live for You, who is the true life. ...Lord's Prayer

Before the sermon:

May all our days know God's surprising grace,
Christ's incredible peace,
and the Spirit's unquenchable joy.

