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FIREWORKS

Looking forward to fireworks displays this summer? I imagine quite a number of us are. In our community, one of the few in the area where it's still legal to buy and use so-called "safe and sane" fireworks, some of us will probably light up a display of our own. (Given the inherent danger of even such relatively benign devices as sparklers, I have often wondered what "unsafe and insane" fireworks would be like.)

Fireworks always attract a crowd, whether on the Fourth of July or at any other time when they might be displayed. There's a good reason why,

for example, Disneyland puts on a major "spectacular in the sky" every summer evening — people will stay in the park to watch the fireworks, and while they're waiting, will buy more Disney merchandise.

Sometimes people come to the services of the Lord's church in search of fireworks. Not in the literal sense, necessarily — but in the sense that they are looking for the same sort of entertainment spectacle that fireworks provide.

Without question, there are plenty of churches around offering that spectacle. In fact, there's a church that meets just

around the corner from my house that's actually selling fireworks this weekend, right in their parking lot. And many people will stop to buy.

When people visit our worship, however, they don't find much in the way of fireworks.

Our music is simple congregational singing, without mechanical accompaniment. No band, no choir, no soloists, no "praise team" — just the fruit of lips that praise the Lord (Hebrews 13:15) in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16).

Our prayers are simple petitions — just our supplications, prayers, intercessions, and thanksgiving (1 Timothy 2:1). The words aren't fancy or repeated from books written by men (Matthew 6:7), but they come from sincere hearts, and are offered in the name of Jesus (Ephesians 5:20; Colossians 3:17).

Our observance of the Lord's supper is not elaborate — we break bread and drink the fruit of the vine on the first day of each week (1 Corinthians 11:23-34; Acts 20:7). No one puts on special clothing or assumes a special title in order to serve at the Lord's table.

We support the Lord's work only through a collection for the saints on the first day of each week (1 Corinthians 16:1-2). We don't run bingo games or carnivals or car washes or bake sales or raffles to raise money — we don't even sell fireworks in the parking lot. And we only spend the money we give on things the Bible authorizes, such as worship and the means to conduct it, tools for teaching the gospel, supporting preachers locally and in other places, and helping one another in time of need.

Even our preacher isn't particularly flashy or eloquent or theatrical or well-dressed or good-

looking. (You can trust me on this.) He wears no lofty title or unique garments — he is merely a minister or servant of the church.

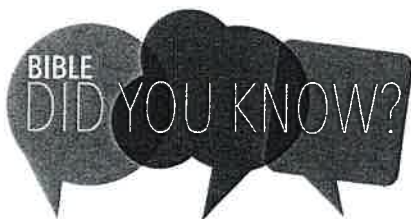
Jesus often contended with those who came to Him only in search of spectacle (John 6:25-27; Matthew 12:38-40). His miracles were never done for the purpose of providing entertainment for thrill-seekers, but to demonstrate His deity and authority. The power He invested in his apostles was given to confirm their witness of the gospel (Luke 24:48-49), not so they could perform parlor tricks.

The apostle Paul wrote, *“For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God”* (1 Corinthians 1:22-24). That is all that we have Christ’s

permission to offer the world — the gospel of His death, burial, and resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:1-5).

If you’ve come here in search of fireworks, I’m afraid you’ll be disappointed. But you might be surprised to find something infinitely better — the simple, precious truths of God’s holy word.

— Michael D. Rankins



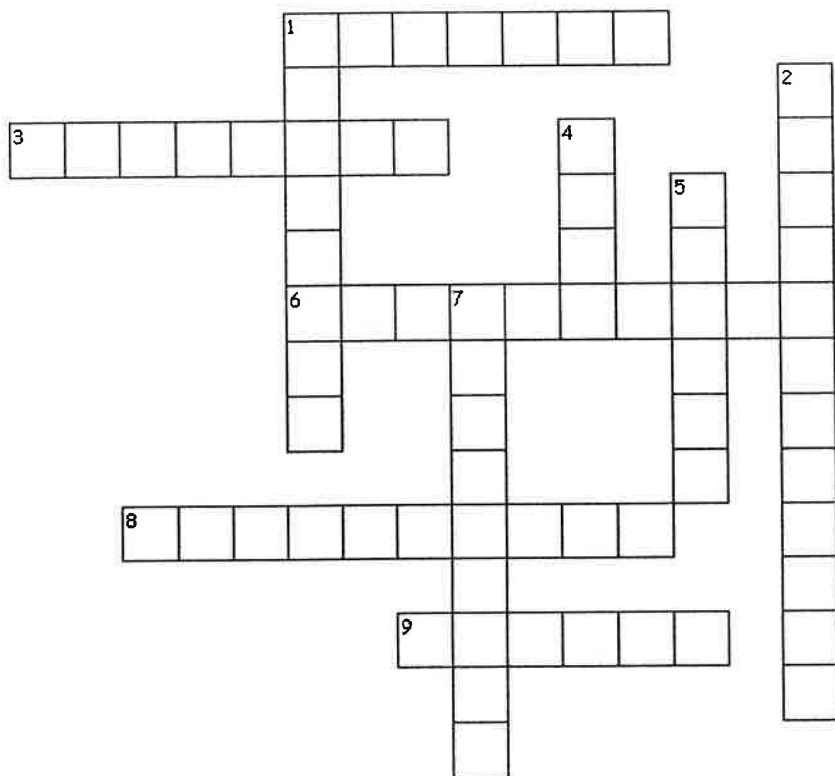
When Jesus cried, “I am thirsty,” on the cross, He was fulfilling prophecy.

“After this, Jesus, knowing that all things had already been accomplished, to fulfill the Scripture, said, ‘I am thirsty,’” (Jn. 19:28).

“They also gave me gall for my food and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink,”

Ps. 69:21

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ACROSS

1. A wife's submission to her husband is _____ in the Lord. (Col. 3:18)
3. When your work is for the Lord it will be done _____. (Col. 3:23)
6. Fathers who do this to their children cause them to lose heart. (Col. 3:21)
8. Husbands are to love their wives, not to be _____ against them. (Col. 3:19)
9. The word of Christ must dwell in us with this. (Col. 3:16)

DOWN

1. Masters are to grant their slaves justice and _____. (Col. 4:1)
4. This is the perfect bond of unity. (Col. 3:14)
5. Masters must remember they, too, have a Master here. (Col. 4:1)
7. Slaves must work with this of heart. (Col. 3:22)
2. Wrongdoers will not escape this. (Col. 3:25)