

“The Best Surprise is no Surprise!”

Matthew 16:13-18

Intro. – The Holiday Inn story is a real “success” story. Such results; however, are no accident. To date, Holiday Inn Inc. forms one of the largest chains of hotel/motels in the inhabited world. Let me use the Holiday Inn story to illustrate an important principle surrounding our Lord’s Church. One great reason travelers have been attracted to Holiday Inns is a reason that has and will attract pilgrims traveling to the land of endless days.

Several years ago I wrote a letter to Holiday Inn corporate headquarters requesting permission to use one of their advertisements in a sermon. The following letter was received: (read)

This is the advertisement: “152 Reasons Why”... The first paragraph says, “We’ve eliminated unpleasant surprises by setting up 152 strict standards that must be met at every Holiday Inn...” It goes on to say, “The most important rule of all is that every Holiday Inn property is inspected frequently to make sure it lives up to the other 151 rules... At Holiday Inn the best surprise is no surprise.”

Isn’t that sharp? Don’t you find that to be smart advertising? So simple, yet so profound! Let me use this and the outline from it to illustrate how this applies to our Lord’s Church. In His infinite wisdom and through His final, complete, inerrant Word, God set up His standards in establishing His Son’s Church. This is the only way unity of all believers will ever be realized. This is the only way local churches can be alike in name, doctrine, organization, and terms of membership.

This will explain the divine *surprise* when Christians traveling today can find “no surprise”. Those local churches seeking simply to RESTORE New Testament Christianity upon the basis of God’s Word alone are intentionally and constitutionally ONE!

Purpose: to better understand the significance behind there being no surprises in our Lord’s Church

I want to use this advertisement from a purely secular success story and apply its outline to our learning even better how our Lord’s Church has no surprises!

I A ROOM WITH NO SURPRISES

A. Christ Beckons the Weary

1. Matthew 11:28 *“Come to Me all who are weary and heavy-laden and I will give you rest.”*
2. When a person comes into Christ they find the following: rest, forgiveness, hope, strength, light, peace with God, a new beginning, a fresh start, promise, assurance, confidence, etc...
3. Our Lord’s greatest desire is found in 2 Peter 3:9 *“The Lord... is patient toward you, not wishing for any to perish but for all to come to repentance.”* – i.e. He wants the lost found!

B. Christ Adds to His Church

1. To be “in Christ” means to be in His Body – Colossians 1:18 makes clear His Body is His Church
2. The blessings/assurances “in Christ” are the same as those to be found in His Church.
3. Thus a person cannot come into Christ and stay aloof or be out of His Body/Church
4. When a person is baptized into Christ, they are at that moment “added” by the Lord to His Church – Acts 2:47
 - a. the same work of God that forgives of sins also gives immediate entrance into the Church
 - b. those who accept the gift of God’s grace through faith (repentance and confession of faith) and are immersed into Christ are at that moment forgiven of past/present/future sins, are given the gift of Holy Spirit and are added to the Body of Christ

C. Christ is the Head of the Church

1. Ephesians 5:23 *“For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body.”*
2. His church is a room with no surprises – i.e. salvation is through no One but Christ, salvation is in His Body the church, loved and blood bought by Christ Himself...
3. Those not “in Christ” are without hope/promise... BUT those “in Christ” have hope and promise!

We have reason to rejoice. Why? There are no surprises in the Lord's church!

II NO COOKED UP SURPRISES

- what kind of menu is served up at the faithful local church?

A. Lord's Supper is Observed Each Sunday

1. 1st Century church gathered on the first day of week for the Lord's Supper – Acts 20:7
 - since the first day of the week comes every week, we meet about His table every week...
2. There are no surprises of other frequencies... or other elements... or whether one can partake of the emblems or not...

B. Tithes and Offerings Received Each Sunday

1. 1st Century church gathered tithes/offerings to support the Lord's work (1 Corinthians 16:1-2)...
2. Thus, there are no surprises like bazaars, raffles or bake sales in Lord's church – Lord has always relied on His people to support His work.

C. Preaching Based on God's Word

1. The preaching/teaching of the Lord's church is NOT the latest headline, most recent political ploy, of the latest pop psychology; instead, it's like Paul said to Timothy – “preach the Word” and like what he wrote to the Christians in Thessalonica under Gods inspiration (1 Thessalonians 2:13) *“And for this reason we also constantly thank God that when you received from us the word of God's message, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe.”*
2. Thus, there will be no surprises such as women preachers/elders, or prayer beads, or prayers offered through anyone but Jesus.
3. There will be no appeal to other authorities such as Joseph Smith, Mary Baker Eddy, the New World Translation or Books and Covenants.

While the world may seek “the new and trendy” the heavenly traveler seeks “the ancient path.” Such is what the Lord's church presents – they cook up no surprises!

III SERVICE WITHOUT SURPRISES (idea of properly trained workers – equipped for the job)

A. Ready to Give Answers

1. 1 Peter 3:15 *“...always being ready to make a defense to everyone who asks you to give an account for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence.”* i.e. members of Christ's church are students of the Word and are well versed and growing through Scripture.
2. They also are learning to speak the truth in love having the attitude of Christ...

B. Word Dwells in Them Richly

1. These are the ones “constrained by the love of Christ” who seek to live grace responsive lives!
2. They live for Him who died for them... won to win and saved to serve!

C. Equipped Unto Every Good Work

1. They avail themselves for equipping – worship/study times are well attended/participated in...
2. If in place of leadership – lead by example... lead more to provide service without surprises...

All servants of the Lord's church receive special training in service to Christ!

IV DON'T LOOK FOR SURPRISES IN THE FOYER

A. Don't Expect Side Entrances

1. Those seeking membership (fellowship) in local church, come only through Christ.
2. If one is already an immersed believer in Christ, their word/desire to identify... is sufficient..
3. Those seeking salvation/membership will find no surprises:

- a. no sprinkling, mourner's bench, praying through, or faith only (ask Jesus into your heart)
- b. simply an appeal to accept the gift of God's grace on His terms and His terms alone – saved
BY GRACE, THROUGH FAITH, AT BAPTISM, FOR GOOD WORKS

B. Don't Expect Privileged Exceptions

1. Christ said, "*I am the way and the truth and the life, no man comes to the Father except through Me.*"
2. The Lord's church believes and practices this! The same response presented on Pentecost...
3. Don't look for tracts or other literature to encourage anything but adherence to God's Word!

V OTHER MATTERS THAT WON'T SURPRISE YOU

A. No Holy Water in the Foyer

1. But the baptistery is always filled and prepared...
2. Clothing for men/women/young people who are tired of sin and ready to be buried into the likeness of Christ's death and raised to walk in the likeness of His resurrection... new life!

B. Simple Organization Plan

1. Christ is "Head" with delegated responsibilities to the elders/pastors...
2. Preacher or evangelist works with training, equipping, and preparing local church...
3. In short, the local congregation is divine in purpose and plan but human in practice...

C. No Clergyman Concept

- no strange clothing, titles or privileges... only servants called of God through His Word...

All questions are settled by God's Word. Matters that are simply matters of opinion are given liberty with love prevailing.

Conclusion: In summary, the concluding paragraph of this advertisement says, "Stay with us soon. And give us a chance not to surprise you."

How we wish more people would give the Lord's church a chance not to surprise. How we pray this local church is intent and resolved to win the lost to Christ and build the won in Him – to give as many people in Eaton and the surrounding area a chance not to surprise them!