

"Lessons Learned From A Jury Summons"

by Tom Wacaster

Over the years I have received a number of "invitations" to appear at the local county courthouse for possible selection and service as a juror. Those who have been so selected know that with those summons comes some kind of leaflet describing duties, expectations, and certain regulations that must be followed throughout the process of being selected and/or serving on a jury. Someone once suggested that all of life is a learning process. Here are some lessons learned from my most recent jury summons.

First, a civilized people still recognize the value of properly administered justice. Life is not always fair. The innocent are often wronged, and the guilty too often go free. In his book, *A Nation of Victims*, Charles Sykes related the following: An FBI agent embezzled two thousand dollars from the government, and then lost the whole amount in one afternoon of gambling in Atlantic City. He was fired but won reinstatement after a court ruled that his affinity for gambling with other people's money was a "handicap." He was protected under the federal law. In another incident, a young man in Framingham, Massachusetts steals a car from a parking lot and is killed while driving it. His family sues the proprietor of the parking lot for failing to take steps to prevent such thefts. Admittedly there are injustices in our society. But I am thankful that we still have a system that says the accused are innocent until proven guilty. Occasionally justice is not properly administered. In that case we can rest assured that there is a day coming in which absolute and impartial justice will be administered to everyone who has ever lived. In the words of Samuel Johnson: "Since the common events of the present life happen alike to the good and the bad, it follows from the justice of the Supreme Being that there must be another state of existence in which a just retribution shall be made."

Second, those summoned to jury duty are not excused except on a limited basis. There are, in fact, only four reasons for being excused from service. (1) You are not a citizen of the U.S.; (2) You do not reside in Harris County; (3) You are under 18 years of age; and (4) You have been convicted of a felony or any type of theft. Interestingly, the summons says that "job-related excuses are not accepted..." Someone has said that excuses are nothing more than a lie in devil's clothing. Throughout my quarter century of preaching I have heard a number of "excuses" for failure to serve in the Master's Kingdom. Like our civil counterpart, service is expected, excuses notwithstanding.

Third, punctuality is a must when you are summoned to jury service. Failure to appear "on time" can result "in criminal penalties." Once selected to serve on a jury, you must be present for the proceedings. You cannot come and go as you wish. Why do you suppose there are such demands on you as a juror? It is because of the seriousness of the business at hand. Can we not see the same need when it comes to meeting our spiritual obligations. In every congregation there are the proverbial "late-comers" to Bible classes and worship services. Tardiness, in most cases, is due to laziness and/or lack of consideration for others. The same could be said for the constant commotion that exists in our worship service when we shuffle in and out of the auditorium for the most trivial of reasons. Could it be that we have not yet come to grasp the seriousness of what we are doing when we are called to Bible class and worship?

Fourth, jurors are expected to "dress the part." The leaflet states in no uncertain terms: "Jury service is serious business and you should dress accordingly." Most folks that appear in court are dressed in some of their finest clothes. T-shirts, tank-tops, sloppy clothing that is tattered and torn, are not appropriate. Why is it, brethren, that we seem to think that we can appear before God Almighty in casual, sloppy attire, when such is neither appropriate nor acceptable in

the courtrooms of our land? Why is it that common sense dictates a certain type of clothing when it comes to courtroom service, funerals, etc., but we seem to think that any-ol-rag will do for worship services unto the Almighty? Again, could it be that we do not perceive of our summons to worship the Almighty as something that is as serious as appearing before a judge in a civil courtroom?

Finally, all prospective jurors are encouraged to "come prepared." Careful consideration should be given to bringing those things necessary to the task at hand. The clear message of the Bible is precisely the same: "Come prepared." When it comes our time to appear before the Great "I Am," nothing less will do. You and I are given a lifetime to properly prepare for the greatest summons we will ever receive: that of appearing at the judgment bar of Jehovah God.