

May 24, 2020

Seventh Sunday of Easter

Are We Really Paying Attention To Jesus' Words?

St. John 17:1-3

Dear Friends in Christ,

You'll recall that Jesus taught the importance of laying up treasure in heaven. He warned against being pulled away by the pursuit of earthly treasure. He said:

"No one can serve two masters, for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money." (Matt. 6:24).

Well, we can't. And, yet, the struggle is there, isn't it? And the question for each child of God is: "Which side will win: God or pursuit of the stuff of this world?" Place Jesus' teaching, "*You cannot serve God and money,*" next to now several generations that have been progressively and intensely taught self-esteem and personal fulfillment and look where that has brought us. It seems to me that the Pandemic has quickly underscored how fragile and fallen this world of self and fulfillment truly is! Who would have ever thought pursuit for a pack of toilet paper and a couple of pounds of hamburger would be somewhere at the top of the pursuit list? So, the question . . .

ARE WE REALLY PAYING ATTENTION TO JESUS' WORDS?

I. What He Had Spoken.

Our text begins, "*When Jesus had spoken these words, he lifted his eyes to heaven, and said...*". The question is, "What words had He spoken?" Well, they're the words from the preceding chapters. I want to consider two very familiar verses with you. The first from chapter fifteen: "*If the world hates you, know that it hated me before it hated you. If you were of the world, the world would love you as its own; but because you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you.*" (Jn. 15:18). Brothers and sisters, those words are for the church; then and now.

In connection with that, listen, again to these words from our Epistle lesson, I Peter 4:12 & 14: "*Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you... If you are insulted for the name of Christ, you are blessed, because the Spirit of glory and God rests upon you.*" The fiery trial started shortly after Christ's Ascension and exists wherever the Gospel is proclaimed. Wherever!

The second verse to consider is John 16:33: "*I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.*" We must pay careful attention to those words. If the church is faithful to the Word of God much of the world won't come running to it, but running after it! It's tragic that many approaches to growing the church are simply attempts to side step the offense of the Cross! Christ died only for unworthy sinners!

Those opening words of our text which I read moments ago - "*he lifted up his eyes to heaven and said...*" - those words introduce Christ's High Priestly Prayer. Commentator Gary Baumler states:

This prayer has been called Jesus' high priestly prayer because with it Jesus functioned as high priest and interceded to the Father, for the disciples first and then for all believers. It was a prayer such as only the Son of God could pray, truly the Lord's prayer. (Gary P. Baumler, "John", CPH, p. 222).

II. What He Prayed.

And that brings us to the opening of what he prayed:

“Father, the hour has come; glorify your Son that the Son may glorify you, since you have given him authority over all flesh, to give eternal life to all whom you have given him.” (vv. 1b-2).

If I asked, “What is the emphasis of Scripture,” what would we say? Would we not each confess: “*The Wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” ? (Rom. 6:23). It’s tied to these words:

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day you eat of it you shall surely die.” (Gen. 2:16-17).

The consequence of rebellion and sin stands in front of every human; four words: “*You shall surely die.*” It’s noteworthy that God did not go into detail about the process of dying and death. He did not discuss in detail with our first parents what they would experience along the way, such as one son murdering the other. He did not talk about diseased or aching or twisted bodies. He did not explore the futility of trying to hide the ravages of aging. Don’t you wonder what our first parents thought the first time they spilled tears from pain and sorrow? And then somebody with a bumbling show of human wisdom blurts out, “Well, death is part of the natural course of life.” No it isn’t! It’s the perversion of life! It’s the wages of sin. And denying the reality of sin is as ridiculous as denying the need for a beating heart to stay alive!

Jesus walking this earth was not to stop the working of sin, dying and death. At least, not at this point. Our Lord was very clear about the progression of sin in this fallen world. The Scriptures say:

But understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty. For people will be lovers of self, lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, without self-control...lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power. (2 Tim. 3:1-5).

The purpose for His walking the earth is simple and clear. In His prayer, He described His work in these words: “*...to give eternal life to all whom you have given...*” (v. 2b). That’s the issue. And I’m always drawn to the words of Zechariah to his son, the man we know as John the Baptist; these words: “*...you will go before the Lord to prepare his ways, to give knowledge of salvation to his people (that’s the eternal life about which Jesus is praying in our text) - to give knowledge of salvation to his people in the forgiveness of sins...*” (Lk. 1:76-77). The issue of life is not about self-esteem and personal fulfillment.

III. And This . . .

And with that in front of us, He prayed this: “*And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.*” (v. 3).

Of this verse, P. E. Kretzmann wrote:

But this life eternal, which the believers receive at the hands of Jesus, consists in the true

knowledge, in the right understanding of God as the only true God, as the one and only Lord, and of Jesus Christ, the Savior, in both person and office, as the one sent by God to accomplish the salvation of the world. The knowledge and belief in both the Father and the Son are necessary for obtaining eternal life, for the two are on the same level: the Father has revealed Himself in the Son, and the Son has made known the Father. (P. E. Kretzmann, *Popular Commentary of the Bible*, New Testament, Vol. 1, CPH, St. Louis, P. 503).

We cannot pacify human wisdom that wants or demands the thinking that all “gods” are equal, or that talking about sin is an offense. To do so is denial of Christ’s words: *“And this is eternal life, that they know you the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.”* To do so is denial of Christ’s words, *“No one comes to the Father except through me.”* (Jn. 14:6b). To do so is denial of Christ warning: *“The one who rejects me and does not receive my words has a judge; the word that I have spoken will judge him on the last day.”* (Jn. 12:48). How, in heaven’s name, could any child of God conclude that Jesus, as revealed in Holy Scripture, is the guide to worldly comfort and happiness?

There is the place in the Book of Philippians where Paul writes, *“...work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”* (Phil. 2:12-13). You understand that to *“work out your own salvation with fear and trembling”* is never a matter of us paying for our sin or living with the delusion that we can earn God’s love. Working out our salvation is doing everything necessary to protect the forgiveness of sin and the gift of eternal life won for us by our Lord Jesus. It’s making His Word our business.

Sure, all this is the old and familiar. But there is a world of flesh and a world of demons who want us to think and do differently. As Peter wrote, *“Your adversary the devil prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour. Resist him, firm in your faith...”*. (1 Pet. 5:8-9a). God help us to pay attention to what Jesus teaches, and to give our attention to those without the love of Jesus. God help us in these last days!

Amen.

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