

“A DIFFERENT MESSAGE MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE”

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Text -Matthew 7:21-23 NKJV

God’s Word-Romans 3:20-26 NKJV

The last time I spoke I tried to draw a clear contrast between our faith and religion. If you missed that Sunday....you’re probably a lousy Christian...kidding! If you weren’t here for that that’s ok. If you were here for that you may notice some of the themes from that message crossover into this one.

I’d like to start in the book of Romans:

Romans 1:16 says that the Gospel of Christ “...is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes”. And then in Romans 10 we’re told that “faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.”

The gospel, is the good news about Jesus Christ, and people need to hear it because it contains the truth that people need to believe in order to be born again. Its truth sets Christianity apart, and makes it fundamentally different from all of the religions the world has to offer.

Despite this, right now in this country there is a wide held belief that Christianity is just like everything else. Why is that? Today I want to discuss what I believe are two contributing factors to this problem and how I believe we correct them.

Firstly, I think we often view our primary responsibility of being a Christians as, “well, I’m going to be really nice to people and show them love.” And don’t get me wrong, that’s good. We should be loving towards people. But that doesn’t distinguish us. Mormons are nice to people, Muslims are nice to people. Atheist are nice to people!

Our message, the gospel, is what sets us apart from everything else. If we want to show someone the love of Jesus then we should be telling people about how He demonstrated that love and what it means for us! We need to do more than exhibit politeness and kindness. We need to be telling people the gospel.

I think the second contributing factor is that we sometimes unwittingly conflate instructions for those who have been born again with the gospel, which is what someone needs to hear in order to be born again. The sobering reality of this is that when we make that error we warp Christianity into the same thing that every other religion is.

You see there are a myriad of common Christian sayings that get thrown around with good intentions, but when used in the incorrect context they corrupt our message. Some examples of common sayings on how to be saved...

“Turn from all your sins and believe in Jesus”

“Live the Christian life and believe in Jesus”

“Try to be good, and believe in Jesus”

Are those instructions fundamentally different from the Muslim, the Jehovah’s Witness, or the Mormon? No. They’re fundamentally the same. In doing that the contrast between Christianity and everything else is blurred. Our message loses its power. The Gospel loses its power. As a matter of fact in Galatians Paul said it becomes no gospel at all.

I want to share a breakdown of a couple of verses that I think help to illustrate what I’m saying. I’m not the one responsible for this analysis, but I think it’s true. Matthew 7:21-23 reads...

“Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. 22 Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ 23 And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’

What can we learn from this? First, we see that there will be people expecting to get into Heaven that Jesus turns away.

What can we conclude about these people? They knew who Jesus was. They knew Him by name indicated by the fact they did works in His name, and they called Him Lord, indicating they considered Him to be their Lord.

Some believe these people lost their salvation because they worked iniquity or sinned too much, but the Bible tells us that where sin abounds grace abounds even more. Scripture makes it clear that this fact isn’t reason to keep sinning, but it’s equally clear that one cannot out-sin God’s Grace. So I think this explanation falls short.

Some people believe those in this verse lost their salvation because they didn’t produce enough good works, but this verse says they did MANY good works in HIS name. Spectacular works including driving out devils and prophesying. So again, I don’t think that’s the answer.

Perhaps the best indicator that these men didn’t lose their salvation is the fact Jesus tells them He NEVER knew them. If they’d have been saved and then lost salvation (which I don’t believe is possible) then we’d have expected Jesus to tell them that He didn’t know them anymore or that He used to know them. This indicates that these men were never saved. They never placed their faith in Jesus as savior.

So these people knew Jesus by name, considered Him to be their Lord, and did good works, but what didn’t they do? They never did the will of the father. What is the will of the father? John 6:40 tells us very clearly. “And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.”

These people were expecting entry into Heaven because they thought they’d saved themselves with their works. That is where they had placed their faith. The fact they were trying to save themselves means that, despite knowing Jesus by name and considering Him to be Lord, they never believed on Him as their savior, and they never believed His promise to save through faith. They placed their faith in their works. When they examined their lives and looked at the work they had done they were, while probably being blinded by pride, convinced that they had earned it. Why were they trying to earn something that’s free? Why were they trying

to work for something that comes through faith? The sad answer....perhaps someone told them they needed to.

If someone asks me why I know I'm going to Heaven when I die, if I answered...

"Well, I started going to church, I quit drinking, I quit smoking, I try to be loving, and I believe in Jesus."

What's wrong with that answer?it's all about me and what I did.

In that scenario what am I trusting for salvation? Am I believing in Jesus and his finished work for salvation or am I believing in myself and what I did? Answer....in myself and my works.

If I'm trusting myself and my works for salvation am I trusting Jesus as savior? Let me put it like this...

-Chair illustration- [explain that the chair represents Jesus and His finished work. My strength represents me and my work. Walk over to chair and place one knee on it. Then ask, "Am I trusting the chair to hold me up or am I trusting my own strength to hold me up?" Then sit in chair and lift feet off of the ground and explain, "This is what trust, full confidence, or faith looks like. This is me believing the chair is sufficient to save me from falling onto the ground"]

(While using illustration) see I think our fallen human nature has us hard-wired to think salvation looks like this (knee on chair). We like to make it about us. We think we have to add our own effort and performance to salvation. That leaves room for our pride. It leaves room for us to boast a little. That's what every other belief-system teaches....that if you are able to be good enough then your own self-righteousness can save you from Hell, but God tells us it doesn't work that way. As a matter of fact in the book of Isaiah we're told that our righteousness is like filthy rags to God.

And so when we botch the message and tell people they must merit or work for salvation in any way, we trample the finished work of Jesus underfoot by giving the impression that it wasn't enough. It shifts people's eyes toward pride in what they do or fear in what they fail to do rather than faith in what Jesus did for them.

So what is the correct answer to the question, how do you know you're going to Heaven?

I know I'm going to Heaven because Jesus said that if I would believe in Him I'd never perish and He'd give me everlasting life as a gift. And I believe. I believe that he died to pay for all my sins so I wouldn't have to. I believe he was buried and rose again. I know I'm going to Heaven because I'm not trusting myself, a sinner, to get there. I've trusted the sinless, perfect Son of God to get me there. I know I'm going to Heaven because my faith is not in any work that I've done or will do, but in the work He did for me. And His work is finished.

Some say, "that's too easy. It just can't be that simple!"

2 Corinthians 11:3~ But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

Is the writer worried that Satan will trick people into believing salvation from hell is too simple? No! On the contrary he's worried Satan will trick people into believing it isn't! Why? Because He knew how pride and human ego operated.

Now the questions I used to have were, “what about living holy lives, working to break free of sin, or picking up our crosses and following His example of service???” The answer....Yes, God wants His children to do these things, but they are instructions to the born again believer. They are what people who have believed the Gospel and received the free gift of eternal life SHOULD be doing, and when we believe and receive the Holy Spirit He will assist us on that journey. But they are NOT instructions for the lost on how to earn, obtain, or maintain salvation.

Think of it this way...

I have a daughter. I was excited when she learned to walk and I'm pleased when she follows my instructions. But do you know what had to happen before she did either of those things? She had to be born. She didn't have to earn or help with her birth. I didn't make my daughter walk before I claimed her as my own, and now that she's been born into my family, though I desire for her to listen and obey, she doesn't have to worry about being “unborn” if she disobeys me. The same is true for the born again believer. We didn't have to work for our new birth, salvation. We received it as a gift when we placed our faith in Jesus and the work He did for us. We don't have to fear being unborn because our new birth is everlasting. Jesus gives the gift of everlasting life and He promised He would never cast us out or lose us.

And so, what I hope to establish in your mind today is that we should share our CLEAR and DISTINCT message with the world of we want to have an impact and show it that Christianity is different...

We need to explain to people that mankind has a problem. We're sinners. And people need to know that the wages of sin is death, which means the only way we can pay for our own sin is to die and spend eternity in Hell. People need to know that entry into Heaven requires perfection, and that they can't save themselves because stopping sin and/or doing good works doesn't pay for sin. That means those things don't get anyone saved, and it means they don't keep anyone saved. But we have good news! The good news that people can be saved from Hell by grace through faith because God so loved the world that He sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, God in the flesh. Jesus lived a sinless life, died on the cross for our sins, was buried, and rose again on the third day. And Jesus promised that whosoever BELIEVES in HIM shall not perish but have everlasting life.

What does it mean to believe in Him? You see, when you believe or trust that Jesus paid for your sins that means that you no longer have any sins to pay for. It means His blood has you covered. It means Jesus and the work He did for you on the cross has accomplished what you could never achieve through your works. Perfection. And understanding that means there is no reason to try to save yourself because you're trusting Him for the gift of eternal life and relying on what He did for you to go to Heaven.

Invite them to believe that good news, and be irreversibly saved forever by Grace alone through faith alone in Jesus Christ alone.

I believe that's how we show the world that Christianity isn't just another religion. We share the good news that no other religion or philosophy or guru has to offer. And so I'll leave you with the words of Jesus, “go and preach the gospel to all creation.”