

Living The Scriptures

HVBC – Rev. 20:11-15 & Matt. 25:31-46 9/24/06

There was a recent article in the USA today newspaper about how our views about God influence our values and politics. This was not a small article hidden in the newspaper. This article appeared on Sept. 12th, the day after the 5th Anniversary of the attack on our country. It was the lead article on page one. It is an interesting article based on a Baylor University study.

I have reflected about this article and I have thought that even things like our favorite Bible verse can reveal something about how we feel about God, about life & about faith. Some favorite versus:

John 3:16 – For God so loved the world that He gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him will not perish but will have everlasting life. (focus on God’s love & salvation)

Philippians 4:13 – I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. (strength from God.)

Romans 8:28 – All things work together for the good of those who love the Lord who are called according to His purpose. (looking beyond present situation – having hope)

Psalms 121:1-2 “I will lift up my eyes to the hills – from where will my help come? My help comes from the Lord who made heaven and earth.” (strength from God)

The text we focus on does say something about our relationship with God, and our views about life & faith. I will come back to that in a moment, but I want to take a few minutes to think back to last week.

Last week Bill Cox and his team led us in a powerful worship service. The sermon began with his wife singing a verse from “Were you there when they crucified my Lord?”

He then took on different characters that were there when Jesus was crucified from Judas to Peter to one of the soldiers. He went on to do a chalk drawing of the cross & empty tomb and then through some high tech means, the drawing seemingly came alive. We are able to watch and reflect on Christ’s suffering, death & resurrection that was for each of us.

But beyond that scene & what Jesus did, I want us to think about how we can become a Christian & to think this morning about the judgment scene.

How can a Person become a Christian?

John 3:16 - "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

Romans 3:23 "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God."

Romans 6:23 "the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Romans 10:9 "if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved."

That is the most important decision that you can ever make. Have you come to a point that you have accepted Jesus as your Lord and Savior? If not I hope you will do that today!!!

After you accept Christ, what next? And what about Heaven and life after this life? That brings me back to how we view different text. How many accounts are there in the Bible of the Judgment Scene?

Are they similar? (NO)

It also seems to me that some Christians will focus on one, while other Christians will focus on the other. (Does anyone know where they are located?) Revelation 20:11-15 & Matthew 25:31-46

Revelation 20:11-15 *11 Then I saw a great white throne and the one who sat on it; the earth and the heaven fled from his presence, and no place was found for them. 12 And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Also another book was opened, the book of life. **And the dead were judged according to their works, as recorded in the books.** 13 And the sea gave up the dead that were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and all were judged according to what they had done. 14 Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; 15 and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.*

So what does this passage tell us about the judgment? It tells us that in order to get to Heaven our name must be in the Lambs book of life?

So how do you get your name in that book? That is the most important question – for eternity. It says that the dead are judged according to their works, but we generally look to other scriptures for additional insight. Scriptures like:

Ephesians 2:8-9 *8 For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— 9 not the result of works, so that no one may boast.*

Or **Romans 10:9** *“if you confess with your lips that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”*

So one's name gets in the book by accepting Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and Savior. The passage is not just about Heaven, however, it adds that anyone whose name is not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire. That is a hard passage for me to read. I want to believe that everyone will go to Heaven and that it will all work out good for everyone, but that is not what the passage says. It says that our name must be in the book of life.

Well what about that other description of the judgment scene? Is that one a little easier to live up to? Well – actually that one is more difficult.

Matthew 25:31-46 *31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, 33 and he will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left. 34 Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; 35 for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.' 37 Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? 38 And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? 39 And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?' 40 And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.' 41 Then he will say to those at his left hand, "You that are accursed, depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels; 42 for I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, 43 I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not give me clothing, sick and in prison and you did not visit me.' 44 Then they also will answer, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not take care of you?' 45 Then he will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to me.' 46 And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."*

The separation of the sheep & goat. A literal interpretation of this text would be that we will be welcomed into heaven if we feed the hungry, give something to drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, and visit the sick & those in prison. Similarly a literal interpretation of this text would be that those who do not feed the hungry, give something to drink to the thirsty, welcome the stranger, clothe the naked and visit the sick & those in prison will spend eternity in Hell.

Some of us will look at this text and we know that that is not right that is not the way it is going to be. You go to Heaven, because you accept Christ & you get your name in the Lambs book of life. And in **Ephesians 2:8-9** it says that salvation is not about works *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God— 9 not the result of works, so that no one may boast.*

So which passage will we go with? This is what I was saying about how the passage that we chose says something about our views of God and how to live the Christian life. Sometimes we like to categorize groups or people. We may say well the Matthew passage that is for the Liberals who focus on a social gospel. They help people but they don't talk about God or work to convert these people they help.

Similarly we can say that the Revelation passage is for the fundamentalist. The people that all they want people to do is to say a prayer to accept Christ, but then they don't help them grow or care about anything else in their lives.

I use these terms as broad generalizations & I hope I haven't offended you by the terms, but what do we do with these text. Going along with the Matthew account we can find James 2:14-18 **14** *What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but do not have works? Can faith save you? 15* *If a brother or sister is naked and lacks daily food, 16* *and one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill," and yet you do not supply their bodily needs, what is the good of that? 17* *So faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead. 18* *But someone will say, "You have faith and I have works." Show me your faith apart from your works, and I by my works will show you my faith*

Ephesians 2 states that salvation is by faith not works. James tells us that faith is not enough. Revelation talks about having your name in a book. Matthew talks about feeding the poor, visiting people in prison.

How do we reconcile these text? I will tell you how I have sorted it all out. In the book of Ephesus Paul is writing to a group of people who had felt that works were all they needed and Paul tells them that salvation is by faith in God. It is about what God has done, not what we can do. And if you think that salvation comes by faith & works, then you are believing that what Jesus did on the cross was not enough.

I am here to tell you Jesus death & resurrection was sufficient. Our salvation comes by accepting Christ. It is not something that we can earn. James is writing to an established church. It is good people, but many of them are not living the Christian life. His basic message is that if you really a Christian, then you will be living different. If you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior then you will be doing the things that Jesus would do, you will be caring for people in need.

Similarly I believe that the book of Revelation is true. Our salvation comes by accepting Christ – I don't know that there is literally a book, but our names are to be in Heaven. When we accept Christ, we are a child of God. We are heaven bound.

The judgment scene in Matthew is actually the words of Jesus, so we need to really listen to what Jesus is saying. I don't believe that he is teaching us that salvation is simply based on our works. I believe, he is saying, however, that believers will live differently. We will allow God to live in and through us.

As Christians our goal of doing good works and caring for people in need is to come through our relationship with Christ. We are to allow God to so permeate our lives that we will care about others like Jesus does.

There are those that are not Christians that care for the poor and others in need and I am grateful for what they do, but we are to take it to another level. We have more to offer those in need than people that are not Christians, we have Jesus to offer them. I don't mean that we are to force Jesus on people or that we are to only care for people if they accept Jesus. What I mean is that as we care for others, we can look for opportunities to help people realize their greatest need – a relationship with God and to point them to God.

Conclusion

So perhaps our view of God impacts other areas of our life and our favorite Bible verses similarly can tell something about our faith & values as well. What I would like for us to do is to bring out as much as we can off all the text and live the Scriptures.

Bart Campolo will be here at Hope Valley in November and with him coming I decided to purchase a copy of a book he wrote. It is a great little book that is simply full of stories. I would like to close with one of the stories.

The Lady in White – chapter 19 – “Kingdom Works”

Bart begins by telling how he started taking public transportation after his car broke down. He then told of an incident that took place on the subway.

“This train is going straight for Hell!”

I looked up from my newspaper, startled by the screaming voice as the subway pulled away from the Broad Street station. There, holding fast to the silver pole in the middle of the train, stood an older woman dressed in white from head to toe, with an expression of unbridled fury on her chiseled ebony face. She paused for a moment and then screamed again.

“This train is going straight to hell, and everyone one of you is going with it!”

I looked around me at the other passengers, every one of them staring at the woman dressed in white. They were the usual subway mix of laborers, students, mothers, and children, and vagabonds. The whole scene seemed to me like something out of a movie.

“Repent, you sinners!”

The woman screamed again, her eyes darting wildly around the train. It seemed she was searching for someone upon whom to vent the fullness of her wrath. It must have seemed that way to the other passengers as well, because one after another averted their eyes to avoid meeting hers. Suddenly she pointed a long, white-gloved finger at me.

“You there, young man! Are you washed in the blood of Jesus Christ? Are you saved?”

I did not know whether it was safer to speak or keep silent. The other passengers were smiling now, nodding at each other as if to say, Better him than us. I tried to save myself.

“Yes, ma’am, I am,” I said with as much confidence as I could muster. “I am a born-again Christian.” That should do it, I thought, silently congratulating myself for throwing in the key phrase born-again. Wrong.

“Then why are you just sitting there? Why aren’t you warning these heathen about the coming judgment of God? Why aren’t you telling them they’re evil? Because you are evil too, that’s why! You better repent yourself! All of you sinners on this train better repent!”

Our opportunities to serve – IHN, Durham Rescue Mission, Karen (refugees from Burma), mission trips, toy store operation inasmuch, daily reaching out to people we see – friends, family, a homeless person on the street – not just to give money – but conversation & love.

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