

RELIGION

Scripture of the Week

Matthew 25:31

Get The Whole Story On Jesus

BY MICHAEL LINDSEY
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The text for the Sunday School lesson (International Series) for next Sunday is Acts 18:24-28; and 19:1-6. We encourage our readers to study the lesson this week and attend Sunday School at a good Bible-teaching church. Make Sunday School a good habit for the whole family.

The two incidents recounted in this week's lesson are very different, and yet they have several things in common. Each story happened in the city of Ephesus, each involves disciples of John (that is, John the Baptist), and in each case these disciples of John received the good news of Jesus Christ, and became His disciples.

Paul had earlier wanted to go to Ephesus, the capital of the Roman province of Asia (the west coast of modern Turkey, Acts 16:6). Instead the Spirit of God led him into successful ministries in Philippi, Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, and finally most extensively, in Corinth. The missionary band had great success in Corinth, with a strong church established over a space of eighteen months.

At the beginning of this ministry in Corinth, Paul had met a couple of Christian Jews from Rome, Priscilla and Aquila. They were apparently willing to travel for the spreading of the gospel: ready-made, bi-vocational missionaries. They were "tent-makers," as was Paul, a term which really meant leathers workers, and they had already traveled from Rome to Corinth (18:1-3). Now they accompanied Paul across the Aegean Sea to Ephesus, and stayed there in waiting, while Paul and his gospel team reported back briefly to the churches in Jerusalem and Antioch (20-22).

While Paul was away, Priscilla and Aquila continued to worship in the Jewish synagogue, and undoubtedly they were bearing witness for the Lord Jesus. Here they met a most interesting man, Apollos, a Jew of Alexandria (Egypt), described as "an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures" (24). He was well-

educated generally, and also well-educated in the Old Testament scriptures. There's nothing wrong with a good education for a Christian. It opens doors of opportunity which would not be available otherwise. But it is even more important to be well versed in the Bible--to know what it says, and what it means, and to know by experience how to obey its teachings.

But Apollos clearly made quite an impression on the synagogue, for he knew about the "way of the Lord," a description of Christians and their doctrine (compare 9:2; 19:9,23; and others), and taught it fervently. However, he only knew about the baptism of John (25). Given the accounts in the gospels, one would have thought that the movement of righteousness and repentance started by John the Baptist died out not long after he was beheaded. After all, he was the forerunner, who prepared the way for the Lord Jesus, and he explicitly pointed his own disciples to follow Jesus. But apparently some of John's disciples continued to teach on their own, and some also knew about Jesus, and accepted his ministry and ethics.

Apollos was a result of their ministry, now some 20 years after Jesus' death and resurrection. He knew only the baptism of John, implying that he did not know about Christian baptism, which symbolizes the death and resurrection of Christ and our identity with Christ. Neither did he know about the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and the great events of the day of Pentecost. So Apollos still had a lot to learn, and Aquila and Priscilla were ready to teach him.

After they took him aside, and taught him about Jesus, Apollos continued to be a powerful preacher and debater, but now he had the whole truth about Jesus Christ. He was taking on the Jews in their synagogues, both in Ephesus and Corinth, and proving through Old Testament evidence that Jesus must be the Christ.

There is no evidence that the two tent-makers were eloquent, or natural

leaders, or convincing debaters. They did not try to mount an evangelistic outreach in Ephesus while Paul was away. But they did know their Bibles (the Old Testament), they loved the Lord, and they were strong and sure in their faith. And given the opportunity, they led Apollos to a deeper, fuller commitment to Jesus. And as a result, Apollos used the natural gifts God had given him to advance the good news of God's kingdom, and encourage the believers.

Upon his return, Paul found a small group of John's disciples in Ephesus, and he also taught them the whole truth about Jesus Christ. They also responded completely (19:1-6).

These two stories, especially the former, ought to remind us of some basics about doing the Will of God in our lives. Let me mention three things.

(1) A lot of people around us have gotten part of the truth about Jesus, but don't really see the whole picture. If you think you might be one of those people, I'd invite you to contact me through NPBC (288-2919) or this paper. Maybe I can help.

Sometimes Christians forget this truth, and assume that anyone who says "Praise the Lord," or attends the church, or prays every night, is all right with God. There's a lot of folks around us who are still struggling in spiritual darkness, though they may seem to be good, moral people. Let's be careful, and ask for the Spirit's guidance to know how to help others.

(2) You don't have to be a Bible scholar to tell others about Jesus, and lead them to the truth. That song says it well: "Ordinary people--God uses ordinary people. He uses people just like you and me, who are willing to do as He commands." God is not as interested in our ability, as in our availability.

(3) In some situations, we have to stand alone for Christ. But if we are faithful, and available, God can win some exciting victories through us. Why settle for boring Christianity? Let's let others know about the great God and Savior we serve. Jesus Christ!

How Are You Today?

BY MATTIE ANNE CALLIER-SPEARS

Nowadays, everywhere you go -- there is trouble. I also found in my search, that there is little or no encouragement to be received from anybody. There is so much hatred. There is so much rivalry. There is so much jealousy. Just plain, old mean faces.

When you approach someone and ask the question, "How are you today?" are you prepared to receive and process the response? How big is your heart? How big are your ears? How long is your patience?

You know how it is, don't you? You get in trouble and you just need someone to talk your troubles over with. Well, unless that person is deeply rooted in the Lord, you will not receive the type of advice that will be helpful to you. Oh, you might be given some kind of remedy. "Rub these herbs on your forehead for seven days and then on the very next day -- boil it and drink it. All! Ok?" You might be allergic to the contents of whatever this concoction is or drinking it might kill you; but if you had the Lord in your life, you wouldn't need these kinds of get-well-quick remedies.

Not all the time is it the person giving the advice--but maybe, just maybe, it's you.

Do you have a bad attitude? Is it hard for you to receive advice from others? Do you have a bad habit of accepting advice that you never intended to use? If your answer to all three questions was an unequivocal "YES!" then you need the sound advice and assistance of the HOLY SPIRIT.

We must learn to live together, work together, learn together, pray together, and talk together. Some are able to converse on a one-to-one basis;

while some are very uncomfortable.

Philippians, the second chapter and verses 1-5 says, "Now if your experience of Christ's encouragement and love means anything to you, if you have known something of the fellowship of his Spirit, and all that it means in kindness and deep sympathy, do make my best hopes for you come true! Live together in love, as though you had only one mind and one spirit between you. Never act from motives or rivalry or personal vanity, but in humility think more of one another than you do of yourselves. None of you should think only of his own affairs, but each should learn to see things from other people's point of view. Let Christ be your example as to what your attitude should be.

Don't go trudging along life's highway with your mouth all poked out and your rear-end sitting squarely on top of your head. There IS a better way. There IS a better answer.

We must learn to encourage with love and we must learn to accept encouragement.

One of the great authors of Christian literature, William Barclay, said "One of the highest of human duties is the duty of encouragement...it is easy to laugh at men's ideas; it is easy to pour cold water on their enthusiasm; it is easy to discourage others. The world is full of discouragers. We have a Christian duty to encourage one another. Many a time a word of praise or thanks or appreciation or cheer has kept a man on his feet. Blessed is the man who speaks such a word."

How many times have you gone down on your knees and just asked the Lord for some encouragement? "Lord, please speak to me. Tell me that you

understand my dilemma. Tell me that you can feel my anguish. I feel that all the walls are closing around me and there is no way out. Lord, Jesus! I need your encouragement. Let me feel your gentle touch. In the name of Jesus!

We all experience moments in our lives that sound so familiar to this outcry. God -- alone, can relieve you of your burdens. He can give you fresh air to breathe. God urges us to set our hopes in Him. No matter how big the burden, no matter how hard the task, God knows just how much we can bear.

Right now, we feel that everything is happening to us. "I just can't take any more, Lord!" But one day we shall all be at the receiving end--you can count on it. We shall be the ones in need of affirmation, encouragement, and a gentle touch of tenderness.

Reach out and touch someone with kindness, with love, with understanding and you will be surprised how soon that same touch will come back to you.

The feelings of most who seek help are fragile and delicate. Yes, those in need, need to sense that we (Christian Believers) are there because we care... not just because it is something we have been assigned to do. Help...because God's love within you dictated your actions.

The noted author and communicator, Chuck Swindoll, wrote, "Truth and tact make great bedfellows."

Be sympathetic, be caring, be kind, show mercy and love; let God's love shine through YOU.

Be of good courage, and he shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord. Psalms 31:24

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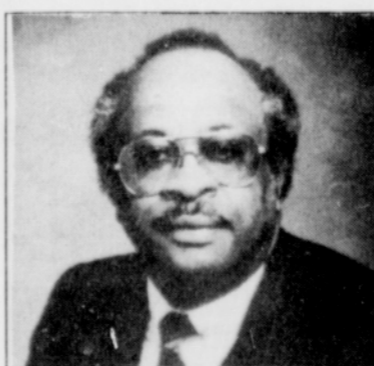
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Theme: Whatever you're going to do for the Lord, do it now

I Peter iv.11

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Psalms 34:3

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