

I. The Point; Sunday, August 31, 2014 (Sunnyslope)

Psalm 19:14

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be  
pleasing in your sight, O LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.

- A. "Good morning, church!"
- B. I'd like to start this morning with a funny true story
  - 1. Several years ago, the City Bank of Binghamton, New York built a new branch of their bank
  - 2. When construction was complete and the staff of the bank arrived for their first day or work...
    - a) ...they were greeted by some flowers and a card
    - b) The bank's executives had wanted to send the local branch managers and staff a nice welcome to their new branch
  - 3. The new branch's senior manager opened the card that came with the flowers
    - a) He glanced down at its message
    - b) And his face dropped from smile to a perplexed and sad look
    - c) He looked up at the rest of the group, who were beginning to get a bit concerned
    - d) One of them asked, "Well, what does it say?"
    - e) The branch manager replied, "Deepest sympathy"
  - 4. You see, what happened was that the florist had made a mistake

- a) She had mixed up the flower arrangement for the bank with another arrangement meant for a funeral
    - b) It had meant that the staff of the new bank branch got a rather strange and disheartening welcome
  - 5. But that was nothing compared to the strange letter of condolence received at the funeral
  - 6. It read, "Congratulations on your new location"
- C. When it comes to discussion of our ultimate destination, I've noticed that there tend to be 3 distinct groups
  - 1. There's the practicing Christian who says, "I'm secure. I'm standing on the promises of God. I have blessed assurance."
  - 2. There's the non-Christian, who just doesn't care
    - a) The question of ultimate destination is irrelevant to them
    - b) They believe it doesn't pertain to them
    - c) They don't think about their own death and the consequences of a life of sin
    - d) So the whole question and topic is annoying to them
  - 3. And then there's the Christian in name only
    - a) This is the person who, if someone pressed them to state their religious affiliation would say Christian...
    - b) ...but otherwise there would be very little or nothing that would differentiate this person from a non-Christian
- D. Christians in name only are like a person who has a button that says "Christian" on it

1. They picked up that button years back somewhere, maybe at a church youth group event or a Christian camp or something
2. But the button is at the bottom of a drawer somewhere, or in a box in the garage
3. It's probably somewhere in the house, but the person hasn't seen it in ages
4. The person thinks that because they have that button somewhere in their house, that means they're Christian
5. Simply put, though: the button doesn't really mean anything; it's just a button

II. Let me ask a very pointed question: Is authentic Christian faith required for salvation?

A. What do I mean by salvation?

1. Of course, I mean a rescuing from the ultimate destination that as sinners we all rightly deserve
2. Hell
3. A place of perpetual torment
4. A place of perpetual suffering
5. A place of perpetual horror

B. Is authentic Christian faith absolutely the only way to avoid hell?

C. I believe the answer is yes

D. Then naturally, it's rather important, critically important, to understand what is authentic Christian faith

E. Would it not be unreasonable to say that the two most important questions of our entire lives are: "What is authentic Christian faith?" and, "How can I have some?"

1. Is authentic Christian faith having a button stored away in a drawer or a box in the garage that you picked up some number of years in the past?
  2. Of course no
  3. Or perhaps is authentic Christian faith the wearing of a button proudly and visibly, something that labels you "Christian" to the rest of the world?
  4. Of course no
- F. The hallmark of authentic Christian faith is the personal transformation that takes place because of that faith
1. The authentic Christian is changed spiritually
  2. Sometimes this happens quickly
  3. Other times it happens slowly over time
  4. But there is always transformation
- G. The whole point of authentic Christian faith is transformation
- H. And so if we are concerned with our ultimate destination, which we ought to be...
- I. ...then it seems obvious to me that we need to ask ourselves: "Am I being transformed by my faith?"
- III. Christianity is all about transformation; being changed from who we are naturally into a more holy being
- A. I'd like to review 3 stories about transformation from Scripture
  - B. These all happen in a single chapter of the Bible
  - C. They are 3 stories about 3 different people who were all transformed by Jesus
    1. There is first a man with leprosy who is cured

2. Then there is a paralyzed man who is forgiven
  3. And finally, there is Levi, a tax collector, who leaves all he has to host Jesus at a great banquet
- D. Let's start first with the story of Jesus healing a man with leprosy

Luke 5:12-16

<sup>12</sup>While Jesus was in one of the towns, a man came along who was covered with leprosy. When he saw Jesus, he fell with his face to the ground and begged him, "Lord, if you are willing, you can make me clean."

<sup>13</sup>Jesus reached out his hand and touched the man. "I am willing," he said. "Be clean!" And immediately the leprosy left him.

<sup>14</sup>Then Jesus ordered him, "Don't tell anyone, but go, show yourself to the priest and offer the sacrifices that Moses commanded for your cleansing, as a testimony to them."

<sup>15</sup>Yet the news about him spread all the more, so that crowds of people came to hear him and to be healed of their sicknesses. <sup>16</sup>But Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed.

1. I worry sometimes that there's a growing misconception of Christianity, a false belief that can be summed up with the phrase: God as butler
  - a) It's a belief or rather a practice of relating to God as a divine being that just hangs out in heaven waiting for our prayers
  - b) And then He responds to our prayers like a magical genie, granting us our wishes
  - c) God in this misconception is a butler who serves our needs, granting us changes to our physical selves and the world around us
2. This of course is incorrect, but there's also a false anti-teaching, a reaction to the butler falsehood

- a) There's a counter-belief that God only cares about our souls
  - b) That nothing matters in the physical world
  - c) Only the spiritual matters
3. But the reality is that God cares about both the soul and the body
- E. Let's look at the second story, the story of Jesus forgiving a paralyzed man

Luke 5:17-26

<sup>17</sup>One day Jesus was teaching, and Pharisees and teachers of the law were sitting there. They had come from every village of Galilee and from Judea and Jerusalem. And the power of the Lord was with Jesus to heal the sick. <sup>18</sup>Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a mat and tried to take him into the house to lay him before Jesus. <sup>19</sup>When they could not find a way to do this because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and lowered him on his mat through the tiles into the middle of the crowd, right in front of Jesus.

<sup>20</sup>When Jesus saw their faith, he said, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

<sup>21</sup>The Pharisees and the teachers of the law began thinking to themselves, "Who is this fellow who speaks blasphemy? Who can forgive sins but God alone?"

<sup>22</sup>Jesus knew what they were thinking and asked, "Why are you thinking these things in your hearts? <sup>23</sup>Which is easier: to say, 'Your sins are forgiven,' or to say, 'Get up and walk'? <sup>24</sup>But I want you to know that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins." So he said to the paralyzed man, "I tell you, get up, take your mat and go home." <sup>25</sup>Immediately he stood up in front of them, took what he had been lying on and went home praising God.

<sup>26</sup>Everyone was amazed and gave praise to God. They were filled with awe and said, "We have seen remarkable things today."

1. I'd like to ask you some questions about this passage; please think about them carefully
2. Why did Christ want the Pharisees to know He had the authority to forgive sins?

- a) Just a few verses earlier Jesus had told the man healed of leprosy not to tell anybody about the miracle
  - b) So then why now is Christ even bothering to respond to the Pharisees with a miracle?
  - c) Why not just say, "I am the Messiah; that's why I have the authority"?
3. Why did Christ want the Pharisees to know He had the authority to forgive sins?
- a) Is it possible the reason is that the Pharisees would really believe Jesus was the Messiah?
  - b) If so, why?
4. We may find the answer by continuing to read on
- F. The third and final story is about Jesus calling Levi and eating at a banquet with him

Luke 5:27-32

<sup>27</sup>After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me," Jesus said to him, <sup>28</sup>and Levi got up, left everything and followed him.

<sup>29</sup>Then Levi held a great banquet for Jesus at his house, and a large crowd of tax collectors and others were eating with them. <sup>30</sup>But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law who belonged to their sect complained to his disciples, "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?"

<sup>31</sup>Jesus answered them, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. <sup>32</sup>I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance."

1. So in the last few verses here, did Christ really mean to imply that the Pharisees were righteous?
- a) No, I don't think so

b) There were certainly indeed real righteous people alive in the age in which Jesus lived on earth

c) But the Pharisees were not them

2. The Pharisees were much like the self-proclaimed Christians who have their buttons clean and polished, well displayed on their person at all times, but who inwardly are unchanged, untransformed
3. The Pharisees were going through the motions of being devout, and they earnestly desired others to notice their shinny buttons labeling them as devout
4. But they were untransformed
5. The Pharisees in many ways were like those today who believe that if they are outwardly devout enough, God will answer their wishes; God will change to suit what these modern-day Pharisees want God to be

IV. So why did Christ want the Pharisees to know He had the authority to forgive sins? And then why did Christ say to the Pharisees that He had come to call sinners to repentance?

- A. I believe Christ wanted the Pharisees to know He had the authority to forgive sins because only God can forgive sins
- B. By Christ demonstrating He had the authority to forgive sins (through the miraculous physical healing of the paralyzed man), He was proving irrefutable proof to the Pharisees that He was the Messiah
- C. And then when Jesus said He had come to call sinners to repentance, He was making clear who the Messiah was and is for:
- D. The Messiah was for sinners who desired to be transformed, not for the Pharisees who desired the Messiah to be transformed

- E. The Messiah is for those who actively engage in faith, not those who profess to be Christian but stand on the periphery
  
- V. Christianity is all about transformation; being changed from a "normal" person into a "strange" person
  - A. What do I mean when I say "normal" people?
    - 1. I mean people who are primarily self-focused, which doesn't mean people who are selfish and ignore others...
    - 2. ...but rather people who tend to think primarily of themselves before others and think about how others interact with them...
  
  - B. The opposite of that are people who are externally focused, who think primarily of others before themselves, who tend to think primarily of others and how they interact with others
  
  - C. This is what I mean when I say "strange"
    - 1. Someone who has a heart of peace
    - 2. When bad things happen, or when that person is wronged or hurt, the person typically responds with peace, not hostility
    - 3. Someone that despite how they feel, what has happened to them, or how physically healthy their bodies are...
    - 4. ...seems to always have a heart of peace
    - 5. To be filled with patience, kindness, self-control
    - 6. To exhibit goodness, faithfulness, and gentleness
  
  - D. A transformed Christian, meaning an authentic Christian, meaning someone who is destined for heaven not hell, will be and do these things even at the worst of times

1. It's easy to be patient when you don't have to wait
  2. It's easy to be kind when others are kind to you
  3. It's easy to be loving when others are hurtful
- E. A transformed Christian, and authentic Christian is patient while waiting, kind when others are unkind, and filled with love when those around them treat them horribly
- F. To what extent has Christianity transformed you?
- G. To what extent are you patient, kind, filled with self-control, goodness, faithfulness, love, and peace?
- H. To what extent do we feel assured of our ultimate security, our promises of God, our final destination?
- I. May God continue to transform us daily as we submit ourselves to Him
- J. Amen