

(For Monday, November 13, 2017) Have you realized that only Jesus suffices for you and me?

“In spite of all this, they still sinned; despite his wonders, they did not believe.” (Ps.78:32, ESV)

One of my favorite things to tell people about the Bible is that it’s all about Jesus from the very first “letting be of light,” in *Genesis*, to the very last “Amen” of *Revelation*. And while it’s not always easy to see Jesus in the Old Testament, there is in this first part of the Bible the constant and repeated illustration of just how critically he is needed, in order for mankind to truly be saved. Psalm 78 recounts the countless signs and wonders that God did for his children to prove to them how much he loved them. But it was never enough to change their rebellious hearts. No, something else was needed to truly convert the likes of you and me. Something immeasurably grand, and wonderful, and awesomely personal was needed in order for broken man to be truly changed. Only the Cross of Calvary was enough to change our hearts, and break them open to God’s love. Have you ever stopped for a moment to think about the fact that the only way for God to bring us home was to give himself to us through his son? Truly, we just didn’t leave him any other option!

(For Tuesday, November 14 , 2017) ?

“You gave them bread from heaven for their hunger and brought water for them out of the rock for their thirst, and you told them to go in to possess the land that you had sworn to give them.” (Neh.9:15, ESV)

My wife loves to ride. I’ve noticed that at her stable, from time to time a horse will absolutely refuse to come out of its stall. It can be an absolutely gorgeous day, the grass can be sweet with dew and deliciously green, the air can be full of the promise of a changing season, and yet sometimes it’s nearly impossible to coax a horse from the darkness of his stall. There’s no Biblical evidence of this, but I often wonder whether among the Children of Israel there were some who, even brought to the very bank of the Jordan River just wouldn’t cross over. And I’m afraid that may be the destiny that some people inhabit as well. Although they have seen over and over again how love is working miracles in the lives of so many around them, these skeptics simply can’t get beyond their insistence of earthly proof in order to believe in heavenly glory. The old saying proclaims that “You can lead a horse to water but you can’t make him drink.” Isn’t it astoundingly wonderful that for some reason you and I have been brought to drink at the fountain of God’s infinite grace and mercy, of a water which makes us thirst not more?

(For Wednesday, November 15, 2017) Have you thought about what awaits those who persecute the innocent?

“And in her was found the blood of prophets and of saints and of all who have been slain on earth.” (Rev. 18:24, ESV)

In the apocalyptic fall of the great depicted in *Revelation*, God will finally execute his judgement and justice for all the blood that has been shed among his saints and martyrs for all time. It’s difficult to comprehend the level of retribution here. It will be staggering. But completely justified, given all the horrific acts of violence that have been practiced on the church militant. We often forget in our view of things that we serve the God of absolute righteousness. And it wouldn’t be right for mankind to try and execute justice for the many acts of bloody violence born by those who are persecuted for The Faith. Because this man-made punishment would only be an imperfect and partial form of justice, for all the suffering that has been imparted down through the ages. But God is not mocked. And there will come a day and an hour when total justice is brought about in this matter, by the only hand capable of meeting out this kind of absolute retribution. You often hear the phrase, “Justice delayed is justice denied.” But in the case of divine justice, it will arrive in full measure and exactly on time: God’s time!

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(For Thursday, November 16, 2017) Are you susceptible to the “yeast of the Pharisees”?

“An evil and adulterous generation seeks for a sign, but no sign will be given to it except the sign of Jonah.’ So he left them and departed.” (Mt.16:4, ESV)

The problem with the Pharisees in Jesus’ day was that they had become a party full of self-seeking cynicism. And make no mistake – cynicism is not the equivalent of agnosticism. People who are in the former state are truly open to the possibility of God’s existence. They have remained vulnerable to the mystery of life. Cynics scorn mystery and the Spiritual plane in which mystery dwells. Cynics demand that the world be reduced to practical, mundane terms that do not challenge the limits of their mortal minds and formulaic reason. Jesus’ words about the promise of Jonah’s sign are important. Remember how Jonah, though he obeyed God, was resentful because God’s mercy as given to the people of Ninevah did not correspond to what Jonah thought was appropriate, in his exclusionary view of who was deserving of mercy and grace. The Pharisees are locked in this same Spiritual prison of demanding that the world and its God conform to their own ideas about what is appropriate, and who is deserving of God’s love.

Have there been times in your own life recently when you have been right there with the Pharisees in how you have seen the world?

(For Friday, November 17, 2017)) ?

“And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.” (Mt.16:18, ESV)

If you read the Bible long enough, you can be astounded at new contexts and meanings that can leap out of passages of Scripture that you’ve read 100 times before. That was the case for me with Matthew Chapter 18, which is the Gospel passage appointed to be read in this the next-to-the-last week of the church-year. Scholars have given this particular verse different commentaries down through the centuries. Some read Mt.16:18 as the Commissioning of the Papacy. Others claim this verse talks of the faith in Jesus as the Son of God being the “rock” on which Christ’s church will be built. This year, I was struck by how closely this verse is connected to the verse which has just preceded it, where Jesus assures Peter that this true and full identity of Christ has not “been revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my father who is in heaven.” So one profound meaning of Mt.16:18 is that the “rock” on which the church of Jesus Christ is established forever is, in fact, the truths of the Christian faith as given to us through divine revelation, rather than in the strictly human application of human intellect. One of the beautiful things about this perspective is that, since God’s truth does not depend on human reasoning and studious application alone, then salvation is NOT a possibility open only the insightful and intelligent among us.

I find it wonderfully encouraging that to be a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven does NOT depend on an IQ test! 😊

(Rev. James Barnhill blogs at www.1thes511.net)