

Sunday, September 27, 2020

Climate Change is Real!

Growing up watching TV shows, I was always a little dismayed when this thing would come on, and it went something like this. This is a test of the emergency broadcast system. This is a test; it is only a test. I was reminded about it this week when I got an email from Legionnaire Ministries. They had just completed a poll, or study of over 3000 people in the United States, asking them questions in terms of where they stand religiously, where they are by faith. It was 35 questions long with over 3000 respondents. As I went through, they had different categories of people; you know people who had no religious affiliation whatsoever, people who were mainline Christians, evangelical Christians, Catholic, on and on. As I went through, I looked for which particular denomination had the most positive results. And it wasn't for those who are a part of an evangelical denomination, such as Assemblies of God. But it was those who call themselves Evangelicals, which would encompass Evangelical synods or denominations; but also, denominations like the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod which says we are an Evangelical Lutheran Church. Evangelical simply means- to all. So, we firmly believe in the Great Commission to go to all the world that Jesus said.

Well let's take a look at how evangelicals; those who call themselves evangelicals; a term we hear a lot in the news today. Let's see how they answered these questions. For instance, there was a statement do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, not sure, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with the statement; "God accepts the worship of all religions." I was blown away. 42% of those saying they're evangelical Christians agree or strongly agree with that statement that God accepts the worship of all religions. I felt a little better with the next statement, "The physical resurrection of Jesus Christ is historically true and accurate." 98% agreed or strongly agreed with that. And yet the statement, "Jesus was a great teacher, not God," 30% agreed or strongly agree with that statement. Everyone sins a little; even the smallest sin deserves condemnation; 51% agreed or strongly agreed. How about, "God will always reward faith with physical blessings? 39% believe that to be true; or they strongly believe that's true. Finally, "to be effective, you must offer worship that is entertaining," 26% agreed or strongly agree with that statement.

Now why do I lead with those statements, that test, and some percentages up a rather alarming? Because we now go into a phase of Pentecost; a phase that encompasses the last eight weeks of the church year. The first 5 weeks the gospel reading is focused on Jesus during Holy Week, 5 short days. Day 1, Palm Sunday where Jesus triumphally entered Jerusalem and the people claimed Him to be the Messiah. After entering Jerusalem, He went straight to the Temple, He looked around and then He left. Day 2 would be Monday. Jesus came back into Jerusalem, went to the Temple, and cleansed the Temple. He drove out those who were selling goods and the money changers because they had taken God's house, He said and made it a den of thieves. That brings us to the third day, Tuesday. It's not Taco Tuesday, it's Teaching Tuesday and Jesus starts laying down the very basic foundations of the Christian faith. You see, there was a lot of challenges because there was false teaching. False teaching coming from primarily two very influential groups; the Pharisees who also had a fair number of scribes among them, and the Sadducee's, which the chief priest was always a part of; and who ruled the Sanhedrin, the governing body of the Jews as well as the Temple. Last week we saw that the Pharisees basically taught a prosperity law; kind of like 39% of evangelical Christians believe in a prosperity gospel. That if you have faith, God will, God must give you personal physical blessings. Of course, when you think about it all we needed back then was someone to stand up and look at the Pharisees and say; "tell that to the prophets." Because when we look at the prophets, what happened to them? Well the writers to the Hebrews in Chapter 11, points out that they were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were put to death by the sword, they were mistreated, they were afflicted, they were destitute. And tell that to the disciples themselves. You know the guys in our windows up here. Eleven of them were martyred, killed for their faith. John wasn't. He was only imprisoned on the island of Patmos for years.

So, when you take a look at the prosperity law, follow God's law and he will physically bless you and make you rich and prosper you; the greatest people of the Old Testament with the greatest faith had the exact opposite experience. I would dare say, some of those of the greatest faith in the gospel era, those very disciples of Jesus all killed for their faith or imprisoned. And then you had the Sadducees, again chief priest, the Sanhedrin, those who ruled the temple. They didn't believe in the prophets. They only accepted the first five books of the Old Testament. They didn't believe the prophets. Since they

didn't believe the prophets, they did not believe in a coming Messiah that the prophets prophesied. Therefore, they also did not believe in Salvation. They did not believe in a resurrection. Instead they believed in unrestrained free will. When it came to God, he's the one who spun everything up in creation, but he has no role in our personal lives. You see, if you were to talk to a Sadducee that would say you know here's the key everyone is the master of his own or her own destiny. And as a result, their focus was on the here and now and they were the ones who together with the Pharisees took advantage of the people, became rich using the temple. The ramifications of such groups being in charge is that they did agree on all sinners will die. Therefore, you must try to appease God so that your life here is good; or your life in the next world will be good if you're a Pharisee. Therefore, you must follow his law and you must follow us because we are the truth bearers who will tell you what the law says. So, putting it all together, working together for their own good, the Pharisees, along with the scribes, the Sadducees, along with the Sanhedrin, and some scribes; taught the people. They led them to believe that they needed to flock to the temple, to fulfill everything that they said. And if the Pharisees and scribes would teach this, the Sadducees would then bill everybody who came, get every penny out of them that they could, and cut the Pharisees and the scribes in on it. You know it reminds me of some famous book somewhere; where it is written: "for the love of money is the root of all sorts of evil."

I want you to think about these first three days. Day one was a day where Jesus looked; He looked at the temple, He looked at what was going on. Day two, He came in and He acted. Then day three, He began to teach. You know let's put that into the 21st century. How about September 2020? There's a church in a little place called Lodi. They are looking right now at the results of a poll. What do evangelical Christians believe? I can tell you the percentages for those who don't have any concept of Christianity are abysmal. So, we look at that and we see that there's a lot of false doctrine and in all honesty there's a lot of hypocrisy among those who claim to be Christians. Can you imagine being a Christian and not believing that Jesus is true God? Can you imagine being a Christian, knowing that only Jesus Christ the Son of God died to pay the price of our sin, and rose from the dead; could you believe that Christians would say 'yeah God accepts us worship from everybody,' 'it just doesn't matter,'? Try telling that to God who had His Son die for us. Imagine what He would say if you said, "you know God if someone is worshipping

Buddha, that's the same as Jesus, right?" I'm sure God would say something like; "No! My Son died on the cross for you. Buddha did not!"

So, we need to look and see we've got problems, just like Jesus saw there were problems. We need that and that is why we are back in church. That is why we are back in Bible study. That is why our childcare center is open. We are acting, because we understand the church is under attack and that attack is harming the spreading of the gospel and harming the faith of those who believe. But we are acting in such a way, that like Jesus, we can now teach and really focus on what we need to teach; the basic tenets of the Christian faith.

Because that's exactly what Jesus was doing and then notice the first response by those who were in control. "Who gave you the authority?" Does that sound familiar? For instance when Saint Peter opened the school they were asked, "who gave you the authority?" We've not had anybody call us but we may get that call someday. "Who gave you the authority to reopen?" Back then when the Pharisees the Sadducees asked this question they were basically saying, 'hey we're the authority. We didn't give you a permit because you didn't come and ask us. But is that any different than today, we have a State we have a County, that says, 'you can't open unless we give you permission.' And for a long time, in the case of schools and stuff, for the parochial schools 'you can't even ask for permission.' By what authority do you do these things? Who gave you this authority? Whoever it is, didn't ask us and we're the ones in that position. So, someone gave you authority, report to us so that we can bill them for their permit too. And in essence, we as a church stand and say, "The Bible tells us we're supposed to do." For some reason, I do not think the County or State is going to agree with that. I think they're going to say, 'Well God didn't ask us for a permit, He needs to file one first.'

Jesus came back with the question to them. This is again rabbinical teaching, asking questions till you get to the core. Jesus goes right to the core and asks them, "the baptism of John, where did it come? From heaven or from man? In other words, Jesus was saying, 'You know what? John didn't have a permit.' But as the Pharisees and Sadducees realized, if they said well if we say it was from heaven then Jesus is going to say to us why then didn't you believe him; and if we say well he got it from other men then he's going to point that out that well then he's not a Prophet. The people are going to get upset

they're going to riot. So, they come back with, well we don't know. True politicians. They don't know! Just do what we tell you!

Jesus says, if you can't answer that simple question that I won't tell you the answer to your question. But then He goes right into a parable which in essence is answering their question. But notice He's teaching now and the teaching of Christ is a threat to power, a threat to their control and to money and it remains the same today. Who is He addressing? Those leaders, but also the people. He's putting it out there for everybody to hear. People today would say, 'Oh well, He's going to cause calamity, a lack of unity, how dare He!

What do you think? There is a man, he owned a field, he had two sons. He told the first son go and work and the son said, 'I will not!' The son changed his mind and went out and did what his father had said. He went to the second son also and said, 'go to the field, work! The son said 'Sir, I am on my way.' Then he started to play with his phone or something and he didn't go. Jesus asked the question, "Which of the two did the father's will?" The people answered, 'the first.' And Jesus comes back with, 'truly.' In the Greek, it's amen. Yes, it is so. 'Truly, I say to you the tax collectors and the prostitutes...' Stop there, why tax collectors, why prostitutes? It is because the tax collectors were the most despised men in Israel and the prostitutes were the most despised women. 'Truly, I say to you the tax collectors, the most despised men and the prostitutes, the most despised women, go into the Kingdom of God before you. And I bet He had his finger pointing to those Pharisees and Sadducees. And why would he say this? Well he answers John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him. But the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him. Now think of the ramifications of that. John's message was, repent the Kingdom of heaven is near. So, if they believed him, they did what he said they repented they acknowledged their sins the tax collectors were overcharging; they stopped. The prostitutes were charging; they stopped. There was a radical change in the most despised men, in the most despised women. But though the Pharisees and the Sadducees saw it, well Jesus says, "even when you saw it, that transformation, a miracle in the worst people; even when you saw it, you did not change your minds and believe Him.

The first lesson in the Christian faith; Jesus leads with it in Holy Week; His first teaching and it's always the first, repent. Now think about that poll, 46% believes everyone sends a little but everyone is naturally good. Last week we heard of that teacher who came to Jesus and said, 'good teacher' and Jesus stops him and says, 'why do you call me good? Only God is good.' If Jesus says, 'only God is good,' how can anyone claiming to be a Christian say that mankind is naturally good? We are not! Our hearts are deceitful above all things and scripture tells us all, that is the biggest 3 letter word there is. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. The truth is we are not naturally good people, therefore we need a savior.

And so, as we begin this journey, we hear John the Baptist, we hear Jesus saying, repent! Change! And what do we hear from society, from the news, from politicians, from the scientists, from whoever? We hear change! Go green, stop climate change! Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, I contend, it is time for us as Christians individually, to take the time to honestly assess our lives and ask ourselves; Where do we need to repent? Where do we need to change? Where does the church need to repent? Where does the church need it? Where does Zion need to change? And then we need to do something very bold. We need to follow the tax collectors and the prostitutes and change, repent! Michael Jackson had a song years ago; 'Make that change, The man in the mirror, gotta make that change.'

We need to change those poll numbers, so that Christians truly know what they believe, stand up for what they believe, boldly share what they believe. But as we grow in our faith as we grow by listening to Jesus and applying what he says to our lives including repent; not only does it change our life, and being that of a disciple of Jesus it also changes the internal climate for us. You see eternal climate change is real. That's the climate change that really matters.

In Jesus name, Amen