

Sermon

Sunday, October 21, 2018

Charleston, SC

8:00 am & 10:30 am Sermon ~ 1 Peter 4:1-11, Matthew 24:45-51

It Matters

The Rev. Al Zadig, Jr.

You matter. You really matter. Your life matters. When was the last time you heard that? You have value as a human being, not just a human doing. You matter, you are loved, created in the image of God through His artistry. Do you believe it? I say this because the biggest danger today is the belief that you don't. We live in a disposable-relationship kind of "whatever" culture. You do matter. You are loved.

John Ortberg in his great little book, *If You Want to Walk On Water, You've Got To Get Out Of the Boat*, calls this "whatever" phenomenon "Learned Helplessness." It's the "giving up" reaction, the quitting response that follows from the belief that "What I do isn't changing anything, why bother?" Ortberg mentions a study done at the University of Pennsylvania, where 122 men were evaluated on their degree of optimism verses pessimism. Of the 25 most pessimistic men, twenty-one died within 8 years. Of the 25 most optimistic men, six died. The loss of hope increased the odds of death by more than 300 percent!

In the last 12 years, suicides amongst teenagers have increased by 77%. Why? Schools, universities, parents, and culture are saying either there is no god, or he's just a good luck charm. If there is no God, our children have no idea where they have come from and where they're headed, which leads to no purpose. And when God is pushed out, helplessness rushes in.

The Disciple Peter is talking to a people in our New Testament reading who are living that helplessness. Emperor Nero is wanting to remove Christianity from the face of the planet and is therefore killing and torturing all Christians. Peter is writing to a bunch of Christians who are

the poster-children of helplessness, hopelessness, and suffering. They would have seen Nero crucifying Christians, coating their bodies with wax, hanging them on posts, and setting them on fire to use them as street lights. Peter writes this book that bears his name to say one thing: you matter, because Jesus is still in control.

As Ortberg writes, the difference between hope and optimism, is this. Optimism is the belief in progress, that life will get better for me. Hope is much deeper. Hope is believing that God is at work, and using us to redeem all things regardless of how things are turning out for me today. Hope is believing that God is at work, and using you and me as part of his divine rescue plan!

Peter writes to these suffering Christians to remind them that their lives do matter, because their earthly lives have a beginning and an end. Peter says, because of Adam and Eve, Jesus had to suffer and die on the Cross to release us from sin. Jesus knows our suffering. God is on one side, humans on the other, with that valley of sin between. Jesus died to bridge that gap to take our sin so we could be reborn into the Father's image and saved for eternity. This is why we're baptizing little Henry Mills Johnson and Hugh Preston Merriman, Jr: To say, this is the beginning of your mission!

Peter is also very clear to say we have an end. There will be a day we have to give an account for our lives. There will be a judgment day. I think of the words of Woody Allen, I'm not afraid to die, I just don't want to be there when it happens! We all die, but the promise of Jesus is that, for those who give their lives to Him, we are given everlasting life! So, Peter is saying to the suffering and helpless

yesterday and today, the life you and I are living right now is the life between the bookends of the cross and judgment today.

Two bookends. which means our lives right now, in the BETWEEN time, not only matter, our lives are therefore incredibly valuable and precious! And Peter is so practical, he gives us a way to live in these in-between days. Peter writes, "Through Jesus we are done with sin, as a result, we don't live for evil." In this between-bookends time we live, quote, for the will of God. What is the will of God? To tell the world by the way we live and through our words that through Jesus we have the cure for death! Jesus out of the most powerful love the world has ever known, has given you and me the mission to let the world know we have the cure for death! Therefore, Peter is urging us not to withdraw from the world. No, in this bookend time between the cross and judgment, we are to manage everything we have in a way that would engage the world at her deepest level with the life and death message of Christ! That doesn't make you a Jesus freak, anymore than it would make a Doctor a freak for wanting the world to know he had a cancer cure!

What if our children knew this? What if they were told by parents, teachers, and friends, "Son, daughter, you are on a mission to tell the world we have the cure for death!" What you do matters! The suicide rate amongst children would drop like a lead balloon!

This is why colleges such as Harvard and Yale were founded, to be training grounds for the young for the mission of Jesus Christ! Harvard named for the Rev. John Harvard! Yale also founded to train up the young for this exact mission! But these Universities have shed their Christian

identities because they've lost track of the mission. Think about it this way. Imagine you are going to take that brand new non-stop flight on British Air from Charleston to London to hike through the Cotswolds. So, there is a beginning in Charleston. The destination is London. The purpose is to hike. But somehow while in the plane, you get amnesia. You don't know where you started, and you really don't know where you're headed. You're just flying. So, out of helplessness, you decide to devote your entire self, your entire purpose to the inflight magazine. Others to the movies offered on the plane, others to airplane dining, and others, well you just nap through the whole thing!

Peter is saying in Chapter 4, wake up! You're on mission. Proclaim the cure for death. Yes, you matter. Church matters. Our lives together matter. Remember your beginning. Remember your end. There will be a day of accountability. And that's when Peter gets unbelievably practical. He says, "Therefore, in these precious in-between bookend years, don't live your lives as the world is living theirs in drunken-ness, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry. No, your life is mission, therefore, live for the will of God. Be self-controlled, sober minded, love one another transparently, show hospitality, use your gifts to serve the mission, speak only what glorifies the mission. Do not grumble. What Peter is doing is setting a Biblical Order for the years of our lives between the bookends.

Let me take the liberty to translate that Biblical Order into a very simple missional lifestyle with four priorities. God first in our lives, spouse second, children third, vocation fourth. I don't know of any other way we can accomplish the will of God, other than this Biblical Order. Unless God is number one, we forget what our mission is and end up dedicating our lives to inflight movies. Secondly, God gives marriage to shape us into His image, helping us stay self-controlled, and pointing to God. It's why I find one of the most intimate and powerful things my wife and I can do, is to go on mission together. When I see my wife evangelizing, I fall in love with her all over again!

Third, as God and our spouse are pouring into us, we are to be pouring into our children. If we don't have biological children, it's helping pour into the children of this church! Training up children in that mission how? Consider this. Statistics tell

us that 60% of children who grew up in the church around our country have walked away from faith. Yet, the number one indicator for keeping children in the faith is this: Children who read the Bible and or have the Bible read to them DAILY in their homes stay in the church. Yet fewer than one in ten Christian families read the Bible during the week. Which means 90% of Christians aren't reading Scripture at home, so how could we think our children would know their mission? It's why we give Bibles away at every Baptism to the families, to be absolutely worn out in the home. It's why in our Sunday School we give Monday through Friday devotionals for the home for that week! Fourth, our vocation, our jobs are seen as that place to spread the Gospel! Working as a lawyer, and realizing I am an agent of God's justice. Working as a Doctor, and realizing I am an agent of God's healing. Working as a Waitress, and realizing I am an agent of God's hospitality!

Biblical Order: God First, Spouse Second, Children Third, followed by Vocation. And God has given us something to gauge each one. It's the principle of the tithe. Tithing is a way of managing this Biblical Order between the bookends. Tithing in the original Greek has less to do with money. Tithing is giving away the first one-tenth part of something. So, let's look at that Biblical Order again. If God is our number one priority in life, it means tithing the first 10% of our time, our waking hours to him in prayer and Bible!

According to a recent study, for those who read the Bible three times a week, there was little or no life change. But for those who read the Bible four days a week, for at least five minutes, the life change was drastic. Why? Because we are reminding ourselves over and over what our mission is!

My Friends, it really does matter! Giving away that first 10% of our time, reminds us God is in Control. Tithing time to our marriages reminds us we are one flesh for the mission. Tithing time to our children reminds us we have to coach the next generation in the mission. Tithing time to our vocations reminds us our church life must be consistent with our work life. All this talk, and I've not even mentioned money. If your life is like mine, time is the most valuable thing in the world. The second is like unto it...money! God wants a tithe of both because both are vying for

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that top spot in our heart. And when we can use both for the mission, that's when we find the highest joy in our lives. Which means, tithing 10% is one of the chief indicators of our spiritual maturity. We tithe financially because the church is the vehicle God has chosen to tell the world of the cure for death!

The Church Matters. You matter. Managing our resources for the mission matters. Tithing in each of the four areas matters. We will be judged at the end of our lives on this question of stewardship.

I think of a man who came into my office some years ago, we were talking about tithing. He said, "I understand church giving. In the ancient day's people gave to the temple or church which would then feed the poor, and house the homeless. Now we have government agencies to do that. Therefore, I don't need to tithe anymore." He missed the point completely! My friends, unless you and I believe that one of the purposes of the church is to save men, women and children from eternal death, tithing time or money will never make sense to you. For God so loved the world, that He sent His only son, so that all who believe in Him will not die eternally, but have eternal life. The tithe is an expression of the heart where we say to Jesus, "I'm in, I'm all in for the mission."

And therefore, my life matters. Church matters. Our lives together matter.

Finally, this morning, this life and death matter is terrifically close to the heart for me. Just four years ago, after an intervention, my sister Betsy came to live with us from California. At the time, Betsy was struggling with addiction, needing inner healing, and was walking away from God in every way. What I witnessed through St. Michael's was

life from death for Betsy. She gave her life to Christ in the Alpha Course. She was healed at the Day of Healing Prayer and has never been the same since. Do you know what it's like for a priest? To see a member of your own family saved in your own church from eternal death? The Holy Spirit used St. Michael's Church, indeed, many of you, not just to make her life better: No her life was saved. She will never be the same again. No United Way program can save a life, my friends, in this way. You, your life, matters. Church matters. Our lives together matter. Amen.