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THE TWO MOST IMPORTANT TRUTHS IN THE BIBLE?

Yesterday, I watched an interview with Max Lucado on TBN. He said that as a young man he had a small missionary church in Brazil and decided that in his preaching he would emphasize the two most important truths in the New Testament. He determined that those two truths are: **FIRST: The forgiveness of sins. SECOND: The resurrection of Christ.** When he started doing that, his church and his ministry started growing.

When Paul was writing to the church at Corinth, in Chapter 15 he summarized for them what was most important as follows: *Let me now remind you, dear brothers and sisters, of the Good News I preached to you before....I passed on to you what was most important and what had been passed on to me. **Christ died for our sins**, just as the Scriptures said. **He was buried, and He was raised from the dead on the third day**, just as the Scriptures said.* You will note, of course, that these are the two truths that Max Lucado determined are the most important truths in the Bible: that Christ's death on the cross purchased for us the forgiveness of sins; and after three days Christ was raised from the dead, thus divinely validating His sacrifice and His victory over death, sin and the devil.

When you and I are born into this world, we don't come into a peaceful place. We arrive in the middle of an ongoing battle. The Bible describes this as spiritual warfare. (See Galatians 5:17-21) The battle is both external and internal. There is "something," like a giant magnet, pulling us to do things that are destructive and hurtful to ourselves and those we love. And we have neither the desire nor the ability to consistently resist that magnetism. So we mess up our marriages, families, friendships, jobs, governments, and even our health and security.

We are also born with a limited but sure knowledge about God and His nature according to Romans 1 and Psalm 19, based on the creation and on an inner intuition. But we are born alienated from God and even hostile to Him. We misjudge God and perceive Him as our enemy and the source of our problems. (See Genesis 3 and Ephesians 2:1-3) Guilt, shame and fear can be our frequent companions.

So how do we resolve this huge problem? We can't, but God has resolved it for us by sending His Son to die for our sins. God solved this problem for the whole world! *For God so loved the world that He gave his only Son that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world but to save the world through him. There is no judgment against anyone who believes in him. But anyone who does not believe in him has already been judged for not believing in God's one and only Son.* (John 3:16-18) Note: The sin problem has been taken care of for everyone for all time: God took care of it by the sacrifice of His Son on the cross. So the problem for man is not sin, it is unbelief. Reread John 3:16-18. Why don't people choose to accept God's wonderful gift of forgiveness and salvation? That is explained in verse 19: *Because people loved darkness more than the light, for their actions were evil.*

Paul further explains God's amazing gift to us in Romans 3:21 ff: *But now God has shown us a way to be made right with him without keeping the requirements of the law (that is, by obeying all the commandments) ...We are made right with God by placing our faith in Jesus Christ. And this is true for everyone who believes...For everyone has sinned, we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet God, with undeserved kindness, declares that we are righteous. He did this through Christ Jesus when he freed us from the penalty for our sins. For God presented Jesus as the sacrifice for sin. People are made right with God when they believe that Jesus sacrificed his life, shedding his blood...*

The first most important truth in the Bible is that you and I are not going to be judged and condemned for our sins. We are forgiven when we believe in our hearts that Jesus died on the cross for our sins. Hallelujah!

But how do we know that that is not just wishful thinking or religious jargon? By the second most important truth in the Bible: the resurrection of Christ from the dead. There are two primary prophecies in the Old Testament about the future resurrection of the Messiah from the dead. One was the experience of Jonah, referenced by Jesus in one of his debates with the Pharisees: *One day some teachers of religious law and Pharisees came to Jesus and said, "Teacher, we want you to*

show us a miraculous sign to prove your authority.” But Jesus replied, “Only an evil, adulterous generation would demand a miraculous sign, but the only sign I will give them is the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish for three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth for three days and three nights.” (Matthew 12:38-40)

The second primary resurrection prophecy was in Psalm 16, a psalm of David, and it is quoted by Peter in his great sermon on the day of Pentecost: *People of Israel, listen! God publicly endorsed Jesus the Nazarene by doing powerful miracles, wonders, and signs through him, as you well know. But God knew what would happen....you nailed him to a cross and killed him. But God released him from the horrors of death and raised him back to life, for death could not keep him in its grip. King David said this about him: ‘I see that the Lord is always with me. I will not be shaken, for he is right beside me. No wonder my heart is glad, and my tongue shouts his praises! My body rests in hope. For you will not leave my soul among the dead or allow your Holy One to rot in the grave. You have shown me the way of life, and you will fill me with the joy of your presence.’*

You can be sure that David wasn’t referring to himself, for he died and his tomb is still here among us. David was looking into the future and speaking of the Messiah’s resurrection. God raised Jesus from the dead, and we all witnesses of this. Now he is exalted to the place of highest honor in heaven, at God’s right hand. (Acts 2:14-41, Psalm 16)

You will note that Peter made statements like, “As you well know,” and “and we are all witnesses of this.” The people in Jerusalem knew all about the reports of Jesus’ resurrection. They knew that Jesus’ body had disappeared from the tomb, even though the tomb had been sealed and Pilate had placed two squads of soldiers to guard it. They knew about the prophecies in the Old Testament, their Bible. They knew, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, that: *He was buried, and he was raised from the dead on the third day, just as the Scriptures said. He was seen by Peter and then by the twelve. After that, he was seen by more than 500 of his followers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have died. Then he was seen by James and later by all the apostles. Last of all, as though I had been born at the wrong time, I also saw him. (1 Cor. 15: 4-8)* Note that Peter said, “most of whom are still alive.” Multiple witnesses of the physically resurrected Christ were still alive and living among the residents of Jerusalem at that very time. It is inconceivable that Peter would have made such a statement if it were not true and verifiable.

My friends, our sins have been forgiven by God if we have received Christ as our Savior. And because of the resurrection of Christ from the dead, you and I can have a sure and certain hope of our own physical resurrection so that we might spend eternity in our new heavenly home with our loving heavenly Father. Glory Hallelujah!

TWELVE STEPS

Celebrate Recovery is a Christ-centered program with foundations firmly established in Biblical truth. Leaders in our church, Canyon View Vineyard, are Fred and Char _____ and they meet at the church on Tuesday evenings, starting at 6:30 PM with a pot-luck meal. If you know someone who could use some excellent help with addictions, give C.R. a try. Following are the Twelve Steps and their Biblical comparisons, and I believe that these steps are for all Christians. They are for you and me, brother and sister!

- 1. We admitted we were powerless over our addictions and compulsive behaviors. That our lives had become unmanageable.** *I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. (Romans 7:18)*
- 2. Came to believe that a power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity.** *For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. (Philippians 2:13)*
- 3. Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God.** *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God’s mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship. (Romans 12:1)*
- 4. Made a searching and fearless moral inventory of ourselves.** *Let us examine our ways and test them, and let us return to the Lord. (Lamentations 3:40)*
- 5. Admitted to God, to ourselves, and to another human being, the exact nature of our wrongs.** *Therefore, confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. (James 5:16a)*

6. **Were entirely ready to have God remove all these defects of character.** Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. (James 4:10)

7. **Humbly asked Him to remove all our shortcomings.** *If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.* (1 John 1:9)

8. **Made a list of all persons we had harmed and became willing to make amends to them all.** *Do to others as you would have them do to you.* (Luke 6:31)

9. **Made direct amends to such people whenever possible, except when to do so would injure them or others.** *Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother, then come and offer your gift.* (Matthew 5:23-24)

10. **Continued to take personal inventory and when we were wrong, promptly admitted it.** *So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall.* (1 Corinthians 10:12)

11. **Sought through prayer and meditation to improve our conscious contact with God, praying only for knowledge of His will for us and power to carry that out.** *Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.* (Colossians 3:16a)

12. **Having had a spiritual experience as the result of these steps, we tried to carry this message to others, and practice these principles in all our affairs.** *Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you as spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted.* (Galatians 6:1)

GO! WHERE?

One of the members of my cell group is a lady named Diane. She is a faithful disciple, has led Bible studies, has been on trips to the mission field, etc.

Several months ago a friend of hers from Boulder told her that a few folks, 5 or 6, were planning a short mission trip to Brazil and invited her to come along. She told him that she was putting her home up for sale at that time and would have to decline.

Three weeks ago she was having her morning quiet time when she “heard” God speak to her clearly with a one word admonition: “Go!” She said she immediately responded, “Where?” And God said, “To Brazil.” She called her friend in Boulder and told him she would like to go with the group, and they leave this coming Sunday, April 16th.

I love that story. And I think God loves it. When God says go, you ask, “Where?”

ADDICTION IS IDOLATRY

Let me tell you a conviction that I have: Addiction is not a disease, it is idolatry. An idol is something, anything, besides God, that has your heart.

Do you know what God wants from you and me? He doesn't want our vote and our approval since He already has the top job. He doesn't want just our acknowledgement that He exists. *Even the demons acknowledge that He exists, and they tremble in terror* (James 2:19). He doesn't need our money since He created all things, although it is very important for our own sakes that we give our money to support the church and to help the poor and needy. God says again and again that He wants our **hearts**. How are we “saved” from death to life? *Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead...*(Romans 10:9) *Trust in the Lord with all your heart...and He will guide your steps...*(Proverbs 3:5) **The word “heart” is in the Bible 560 times.**

What is the heart? It is who we are inside. It is our soul – our thinking, feeling, and deciding (mind, emotions and will); our personality, our identity.

That is what God wants. You. He loves you so much that He gave everything to rescue you from destruction: His Son, the cross. He is passionate in His pursuit of you. He will never be satisfied with a nod or tip of the hat from you. He wants

you to be as passionate about Him as He is about you. He wants your **heart**: your passion, enthusiasm, commitment to Him as your highest value. He will never be satisfied with anything less, with a divided heart, with a heart in love with an idol.

We smart modern folks think of idolatry as those superstitious ancients, and Hindus, bowing down to statues of calves or hideous looking dolls portraying multiple “gods.” We don’t realize that when anything or anyone besides God captures our hearts then we are worshipping an idol.

Love of money probably heads the list. Jesus taught and warned about money more than He taught about heaven and hell. He said, *You cannot serve both God and Mammon.* (Matthew 6:24) Mammon is the Syrian god of money – a demonic idol.

BEHIND EVERY IDOL IS A DEMON!

This raises a crucially important point. The bible teaches that idolatry is demonic. It is a hidden way, hidden from the people who are doing it, that they are worshipping the devil. Deuteronomy 32:17 & 21 say: *(The people of Israel) offered sacrifices to **demons** which are not God.....they provoked my anger with their useless **idols**.* Psalm 106:36-38 says: *They worshiped their **idols**.....they sacrificed their sons and daughters to the **demons**.* 1 Corinthians 10:19-20 says: *...am I saying that **idols** are real gods? No, not at all. I am saying that these sacrifices are offered to **demons** and not to God*

ANYTHING YOU LOVE, FEAR, SERVE, GIVE ALL YOUR TIME, ENERGY AND ATTENTION TO BECOMES AN IDOL -- AND THEN IT AUTOMATICALLY DRAWS DEMONS TO ITSELF.

So if you love money in that way, it becomes a magnet for demons and becomes “Mammon,” a pagan god.

If you love celebrities (movie stars, musicians, sports stars, politicians or rulers) with all your devotion and attention, as millions do, they become little gods that you worship instead of God.

Ancient people formed their benches and chairs in a circle around the household idols, which was a shrine where they worshiped their false gods. Our chairs are focused on our television sets, and we carry a little idol with us and can’t keep our eyes off of it even when we are driving on the highway.

If you give all your passion to getting high on alcohol, marijuana, cocaine, Zanax or Oxycontin – then that becomes your god and a magnet for demons. Have you seen that photographic sequence of men and women who use meth or some other drug for several years and are transformed before your eyes from beautiful humans to zombies? What could possess people (Note the word “possess”) to act in such an irrational, destructive way?

A young mother just wrote on a Gamblers Anonymous site: “I abandoned my little children for a full year in order to devote myself to casinos and slot machines! I can’t understand why I did that.” She does not understand that there is a spiritual side to life that rules our conduct. Gambling, drugs, pornography appear so beautiful and fulfilling. *Satan disguises himself as an angel of light.*

When we talk about people captured by idolatry in the form of addictions we are not talking about people we would classify as evil. We are talking about normal humans like you and me: housewives, business men, students, teachers, carpenters, soldiers, scientists, pastors and priests, doctors and nurses, etc. Friends, you and I are being pursued by God.....and by the devil! The devil promises people fulfillment, happiness and security that only God can provide: *The name of the Lord is a strong fortress; the godly run to him and are safe. The rich think of their wealth as a strong city, they imagine it to be a high wall of safety.* (Proverbs 18:10)

Our family can even be an idol if it is the focus of our life. We can’t really love our own family in a healthy way unless God is first in our life.

Love of self is idol No. 1: my image, my savings, my entertainment, my comfort, my health, my home, my retirement, my family.

As Rick Warren said in the first sentence of his famous book, “It’s not about you!” No, it’s about God and His wonderful grace toward us.

Thank you, Lord, for your creative genius. Thank you for the gift of life, for our families, for all good things that you have provided, for music, for your kindness and patience, for your forgiveness, for healing our hearts, for the promise of heaven, for Jesus our Savior and our Friend. Thank you, Lord, for loving us and saving us.

SYNCOPATED RHYTHM

Christian Huygens was a Dutch clock maker who in the 1600's invented the pendulum clock. He subsequently discovered an amazing principle. One day as he lay in bed staring at his clock collection, he noticed that all of the pendulums were swinging in unison. He knew that he hadn't started them that way so he got out of bed and restarted the clocks, purposely setting them in a way to break the syncopated rhythm. To his surprise, in a short time the pendulums all began swinging together again. Later, scientists discovered that the largest clock with the strongest rhythm was pulling all of the other clocks into syncopation with itself. They named this phenomenon "entrainment," and noted that it is apparent throughout nature.

The fact is that the strongest biological oscillator in the body is the heart, and it acts in a way similar to Huygen's clocks. The heart has the ability to pull every other bodily system into its own rhythm, whatever that's may be. When the heart is at peace or filled with love, it communicates harmony to the entire body. Conversely, when toxic emotions cause the heart to beat in an irregular way, to beat harder or faster, the heart communicates the opposite of peace to the entire body. Spiritually speaking, when you experience God's peace, the heart communicates God's peace to every fiber of your being. Each and every organ experiences that rest. When a person experiences God's love and love of other people, his heart communicates that love to his mind and to his entire body. When love fills your heart, your entire body is pulled, is entrained into a healing atmosphere.

Above all, guard your heart, for out of the heart come the issues of life. (Prov. 4:23,KJV) Guard your heart above all else, for it determines the course of your life. (NLT)

God Bless
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