

The Cross of Christ: The Goodness, the Wisdom, and the Power of God

Sunday, April 9, 2017

One of my favorite books, is called the **Knowledge of the Holy by AW Tozer**. The book is written as a proclamation of the character of God as God has revealed Himself in his word. And how the reality of His distinguishing traits should inform how we see life, how we think, and ultimately how we act. And Tozer even as he attempts to explain the character of God - in what I would assume he would admit was a fallible work - is quick to point out that we do not receive information about God the way that we do other 'facts'. What we are accustomed to doing, is taking in information - maybe about a person, or a business, or a situation, or a product - and then processing that information to determine what we think or how we feel. But when it comes to the creator of ALL things, it has been determined that our approach must be VASTLY different. Anyone who comes to God, must **first believe**. We can not merely try to understand God so that we can determine what we think about Him; but rather our call is to **believe** in God and what He has done *so that we might understand him more and more*. **'Whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life'** - Eternal life filled with increasing knowledge of God.

Jesus Christ - God's eternal son who became a man and lived on the earth for a time - taught **unless you receive the kingdom of God like a child you shall not enter it (Mark 10:15)**. Jesus taught that to adults; not just adults but educated, religious men who had spent much of their life pursuing intellectual study of God and His scripture. And Jesus looked at them with all of their pride in knowledge and facts and said, **you** need to become like a child. Children are not pretentious, full of pride of all that they know or all that they can do. Children live in a way characterized by **dependence on someone else**. They trust those over them to meet their needs. And they do not assume that they must understand something to believe in it. Some of the most culturally renowned biblical scholars on earth, do not depend on God; they do not trust Him and they do not believe. And no matter how many words they write that are published and acclaimed among religious circles, they have no true understanding of the Creator. They have an incorrect and LOW view of God, which as TOZER stated *is the cause of a hundred lesser evils everywhere among us*. So let me say, the point being made is NOT that understanding God is insignificant. Quite the opposite, it is critically important **that** what **we** think about God is as true to His being as possible. But **Belief** is the key that unlocks for us the gate to the Kingdom. Our **knowledge of God** corresponds entirely with our **faith in God**. If you desire to know God more, then you must ask for an increase in belief. And I use those words **'ask for an increase'** with purpose, because belief is not something you create, and it's not something you sustain. It is a gift.

This is not how we are conditioned. Again, the adult mind is used to processing facts to determine how to think. But the journey to believe is not primarily intellectual. And it is not primarily emotional either. The human mind that lacks belief in God, will never be convinced of God **in a way that pleases Him**, by any amount of facts or any form of passion. Jesus told a parable in **Luke 16** of two men - one rich and one poor. The rich man, who had lived his life self-centeredly with no regard for God or others, died and his soul went to Hades. The poor man, named Lazarus, died as well, but he was carried by angels to

Heaven. And from his place in Hades the rich man looks up and sees Abraham and Lazarus far away. And he cries out to them, first requesting relief for himself which is denied. And then requesting that Lazarus would be sent back from the dead to the rich man's family, so that they would not end up in Hades as well. Abraham denies that request, and tells the rich man that his family has '**Moses and the prophets**' to listen to (meaning God's word, the Law and the Prophets). The rich man essentially says **no - that is not enough, but** if a dead man rises and goes to them - they will repent from their sins. And Abraham replies, '**If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead**'. Let's think for a moment what Jesus is teaching. If a person does not accept God's word as truth, then seeing a dead man rise to life and warn them of hell will not convince them either. If today we had the option of sitting down with an unbeliever to try and convince them about our faith, and you could be armed EITHER with **the bible** OR with **the power to raise someone from the dead** - which would we choose? Our inclination would be to have the power to raise the dead. **WHO could deny that?** Certainly they would be convinced by the facts before them; **OR** they would be stirred to great emotion and accept. But Jesus says many would deny that. If they do not believe through the Word, they will not believe through a sign.

This leads us to this question: **What does it take for a person to BELIEVE?** And the answer is it takes a **MIRACLE from God** that is even **greater THAN** a person being raised from the dead. Belief (or faith) is the key that unlocks the gate to the Kingdom - and **belief comes (from) hearing - moreover hearing by the word of Christ (Romans 10:17)**. God has designed for faith to be born through the word of Christ. Which is why Jesus taught that if belief is not activated through the Law and the Prophets, **then** seeing a miraculous sign will not mean anything. Hearing in that sense does not mean just physical hearing, although that is where it begins. **Belief comes from hearing** - that doesn't mean just physical - hearing in this sense means a *spiritually born and spiritually sustained hearing*; hearing that you can have **ONLY** if God has given it to you. **Ephesians 2:8** expounds on this - **We are SAVED by Faith and THIS (this belief) is not our own doing, but a gift from God**. Spiritual hearing, the type spoke of in Jesus' parable in Luke 16 and Paul's letter to the church of Rome in Romans 10, that spiritual hearing does not come UP from inside of us, but DOWN from Heaven. If a person does not **spiritually hear** God's word - then nothing will convince them in a genuine, sustained way.

Now - as an aside - does this mean that we do not seek miraculous physical signs from God? **No**. *God tells us to pray for His kingdom to come on the earth, so we should ask for those signs; for healing and for reconciliation*. Does this mean that we do not engage in apologetics, or defense of the faith through the presentation of facts? **No**. Quite the opposite as we just saw - *God has chosen the preaching and proclamation of the word of Christ as the avenue for belief to come down. So we should engage in all forms of telling the word of God*. But what this does tell us is that the highest miracle and the greatest apologetic, is when God gifts someone with the belief to spiritually hear and trust in the **person of Jesus Christ**. For anyone to turn their affection toward God; **believing** that He stepped onto earth as a human in the form of his eternal son Jesus; that he lived a sinless, perfectly obedient life; that he died a criminal's death on a cross; He made atonement for our rebellion; And 3 days later he rose from the dead; and today He is ascended to Heaven having rested from ALL his work; And He gives forgiveness of sins, and abundant life to anyone who asks him for it. For me, or you, or anyone to believe all of this to

the point of giving all of ourselves to God - **THIS is the highest miracle and the greatest apologetic.** THIS is the core of all we are AND it is the core of all that we do. If you personally lack belief in the person of Jesus, do not attempt to drum that up from within yourself - the greatest need you have is to cry out for God to miraculously **give you faith.** If you are drifting from God, and you are not growing in your knowledge of Him, like a child that lives in complete dependence upon those over them - cry out for your Father in Heaven **to increase your faith and help your unbelief.** IF your friends, your family, your audience, your co-workers lack belief in God, it's not your creativity, your relevance, your knowledge, or even your signs that they need. **They need a miracle.** They need God to give them belief. This should always inform how we do ministry: no preaching, no ministering, no handing out of tracts, no podcasting, no writing, no witnessing - WITHOUT a prayerful disposition that reflects our dependence on God and God alone to give people spiritual hearing that leads to spiritual understanding.

Today we begin what is called in the west **Holy Week** leading us into next Sunday (**Easter Sunday, Resurrection Day**) which is the celebration of **THE defining moment in Christianity;** what I wish to proclaim to you today, and this sermon is primarily a proclamation - is that there is a God in Heaven who is not only **ABLE** to miraculously grant people belief in Him; BUT He is **generously, graciously, and willingly** ready to do so. As Tozer wrote, **it was the goodness of God to desire our highest welfare, it was the wisdom of God to plan it, and it was the power of God to achieve it.** So this morning that is what we proclaim: The goodness, the wisdom, and the power of God seen in the cross of Christ.

If you have a bible turn to **Isaiah 55.** I read this passage a few weeks ago when we were on vacation, and immediately just felt like I needed to spend some time in this place in the bible; and eventually to teach on it. **God grant us ears to hear: 1**“Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price. **2** Why do you spend your money for that which is not bread, and your labor for that which does not satisfy? Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. **3** Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live; and I will make with you an everlasting covenant, my steadfast, sure love for David. **4** Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples. **5** Behold, you shall call a nation that you do not know, and a nation that did not know you shall run to you, because of the LORD your God, and of the Holy One of Israel, for he has glorified you. **6**“Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; **7** let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. **8** For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. **9** For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts. **10** “For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven and do not return there but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, **11** so shall my word be that goes out from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and shall succeed in the thing for which I sent it. **12**“For you shall go out in joy and be led forth in peace; the mountains and the hills before you shall break forth into singing, and all the trees of the field shall clap their hands. **13** Instead of the thorn shall come up the cypress; instead of the brier shall come up the myrtle; and it shall make a name for the LORD, an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off.”

It was the **goodness of God** to desire our highest welfare. All of us thirst. Although many do not know why. And we seek to quench that thirst. We labor, and spend money, and are not satisfied. We look to created things to help us - some things not inherently bad (relationships, career, recreation, hobbies, material items). Some things that can be far more dangerous (fame, illicit sex, drugs). No matter what the created things - it quenches the thirst but only momentarily. That is why we have to go back to the well often. That is why we have to seek increase in what we are doing - trying to prolong the satisfaction. And to us God says: **Come, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters. Listen diligently to me, and eat what is good, and delight yourselves in rich food. Incline your ear, and come to me; hear, that your soul may live.** It is the **goodness of God** to desire our highest welfare.

It was the **wisdom of God** to plan it. This invitation is not without price. The water is not free. Yet God says **he who has no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.** We are the ones with no money - in a spiritual sense. We are poor. We have nothing to barter with. Nothing to achieve or to purchase that which we need, it is without price. Completely invaluable. The water that will bring everlasting satisfaction. Yet God invites us to **come and buy the wine and the milk without money.** Not because he has made it is free - but because someone else paid for it on our behalf. Most scholars agree the verse 4 looks past David to the 'son of David' which is another name in the bible for Jesus Christ. **Behold, I made him a witness to the peoples, a leader and commander for the peoples.** Jesus is a witness to the the world, of the wisdom of God. And encompassed in His wisdom is both **justice and goodness.** His cross is a witness to God's wrath. He is a just God. Our crimes against God demanded a payment. And Jesus paid it. He drank the cup of God's wrath. And in doing so, He is a witness of God's graciousness. That God would sacrifice His only son - to save all of us. So that we - poor with no money - could buy and eat in the Kingdom of Heaven.

It was the **goodness of God** to desire our highest welfare, it was the **wisdom of God** to plan it, and it was the **power of God** to achieve it. ONLY God can do this. Jesus said that **no one comes to the Father except through HIM (John 14:6).** But he also said, **No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him (John 6:44).** God's word **goes out and accomplishes that which he purposes.** His word became flesh and dwelt among us in Jesus. He accomplished our salvation on the cross. And now God's word goes out to our hearts - calling us to come to Him. Awakening in us belief. He is ABLE to grant you belief. Won't you ask Him for it? The sin we live in brings thorns and briars; chaos and pain. But God is able **Instead of the thorn to bring up the cypress; instead of the brier to bring up the myrtle.** He is able to bring good to you, and bring out good from you. And **YOU shall make a name for the LORD.** And you will be **an everlasting sign that shall not be cut off. It is the power of God** to achieve this.

6"Seek the LORD while he may be found; call upon him while he is near; **7** let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, that he may have compassion on him, and to our God, for he will abundantly pardon. **8** For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the LORD. This passage is preached by many theologians as a witness that even in the midst of dire circumstances that we do not understand - our trust can be that God's ways are higher than ours. And I would not say that is an erroneous application. But I do want you to

look at the context: **1)** We are wicked and must turn from our sin - toward God. Because His ways are higher and better than ours. We must conform to him, and not Him conform to us. **2)** God abundantly pardons the evil doer. He pardons those who hurt him. And he did so through the death of His son. Who would do that? Only God whose ways are higher than ours.

BELIEVE!!!! Cry out for it. Believe. Repent. Be baptized. You don't have to understand it all. Through belief you will.