

The Most Important Thing

In a rather contentious Bible study, I was asked what I thought the most important thing to tell someone was.

If I were going to give them one thing out of the Bible, what would that one thing be?

After a brief pause, (because that was all that was allowed) I turned to Jeremiah and read to those in the study, the following:

Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise *man* glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty *man* glory in his might, let not the rich *man* glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I *am* the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these *things* I delight, saith the LORD. (*Jeremiah 9:23-24*)

At which point I was promptly argued with, and told that the most important thing was to tell them that Jesus died for their sins. I was not surprised. I knew before I read Jeremiah that I would be set upon because I was not “telling them about Jesus” and “giving them the gospel.” However, the accusation results from a failure to understand some basic facts about the passage above, and the logic of it. It has very much to do with understanding how the LORD God works and how human nature works. The passage above addresses both those issues in a very powerful way, that will, if the person has any love of the truth at all, lead them straight to the Lord Jesus Christ. Moreover, it will lead them there, not in ignorance, but in understanding, and enable them to trust the Lord Jesus fully.

In understanding how this is, it is essential to understand that it is the LORD God who seeks us, not we who seek Him:

But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: **for the Father seeketh such to worship him.** (*John 4:23*)

The Scripture confirms this by giving us the converse of the above:

As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: There is none that understandeth, **there is none that seeketh after God.** They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.

(*Romans 3:10-12*)

Whether we like it or not, the issue of someone coming to know and understand the LORD and subsequently trust the Lord Jesus Christ, is not actually left in the hands of man. Rather, it is the word, the Scripture, in which the LORD has invested the power to work in the heart and lives of men:

For my thoughts *are* not your thoughts, neither *are* your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: **So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it.** (*Isaiah 55:8-11*)

And so it is that all men can ever be, are mere messengers – ambassadors of the LORD and His word. The one simple duty of those who have been born again is to faithfully deliver that word of truth to everyone around them. It is the LORD and His word that will do the heavy lifting of working in the heart and soul of man. Ultimately, through the work of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross, the LORD God reconciles man to

Himself. This also, Scripture confirms:

Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new. And all things *are* of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath **given to us the ministry of reconciliation**; To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and **hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation**. Now then **we are ambassadors for Christ**, as though God did beseech *you* by us: we pray *you* in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him *to be* sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. (*II Corinthians 5:17-21*)

Seeing then that we are merely messengers, what message does the passage from Jeremiah bring that would be more important than "*telling them about Jesus?*"

To begin to understand this, we must understand that man has two significant problems in his nature that stand in the way of him ever coming to Christ. Those two things are addressed in the Jeremiah 9:23-24 in the following ways:

"Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise *man* **glory in his wisdom**, neither let the mighty *man* **glory in his might**, let not the rich *man* **glory in his riches**:"

And:

"let him that glorieth **glory in this**, that **he understandeth and knoweth me**, that **I am the LORD** which exercise **lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness**, in the earth: for **in these things I delight**, saith the LORD."

The first, which is addressed as glorying in oneself and what one has done, is pride. Pride is devastating to anyone's ability to come to the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation. Pride is what destroyed Lucifer and caused his fall. Pride will

cause the LORD to turn away from an individual and never offer them salvation. This the Scripture also confirms:

For all those *things* hath mine hand made, and all those *things* have been, saith the LORD: **but to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit,** and trembleth at my word. (*Isaiah 66:2*)

And again:

For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also *that is* of a contrite and humble spirit, **to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.** (*Isaiah 57:15*)

And yet again:

Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all *of you* be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for **God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.** (*I Peter 5:5*)

Hence, one of the most important messages that we, as individuals, must understand, is the fact that the LORD will not regard us, nor hear us if we are bound up in pride. Pride is insidious and perverse and will cause us even to be proud of being “humble” and “spiritual.” We must truly humble ourselves before we can even consider coming to Christ for salvation.

How critical is this? Consider the following illustration by the Lord Jesus Christ:

And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, **God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are,**

extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess. And the publican, standing afar off, **would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven,** but smote upon his breast, saying, **God be merciful to me a sinner.** I tell you, this man went down to his house justified *rather* than the other: for **every one that exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted.** (Luke 18:9-14)

The Pharisee demonstrated rank pride, and was rejected. The Pharisee believed he was justified before the LORD because of what he did. Consequently he was deceived of himself, by his own heart. Because the Pharisee did not know and understand the LORD God, he failed to realize that the LORD God had rejected him – all because of his pride. The publican on the other hand, knew he had no place to stand, and in all contriteness, humility and sincerity of heart, pleaded for mercy. To the publican, the LORD God looked, regarded, and accepted. This is because the publican did not come to the LORD demanding to be accepted. Neither came he expecting that the LORD should accept him. Rather, he came knowing that he was not qualified to even ask of the LORD anything, but placing his trust in the LORD's mercy and grace, knowing the LORD God to be a merciful and just Lord and God.

In this, the knowledge of Jonah is illustrative:

But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was very angry. And he prayed unto the LORD, and said, I pray thee, O LORD, **was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I fled before unto Tarshish: for I knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and of great kindness, and repentest thee of the evil.** (Jonah 4:1-2)

This leads us into the second trait of man's nature, which is intertwined with a very critical issue: The ability to trust and have that trust based on sure knowledge, rather than ignorant superstition. If we recall the Pharisee in the

illustration from Luke, he thought he knew God, and was accepted of the LORD. However, he only thought he knew, but did not actually know the truth of the LORD God. Hence, for lack of knowledge and understanding, he trusted in error, and it failed him. In sum, he believed, but did so as he was ignorant of reality, not realizing his ignorance. This is not an uncommon problem. Most fail in understanding Who the LORD God is, and what He will accept and what He will reject. It is plain the LORD rejects superstition, which is the believing of something in ignorance or without concrete evidence in fact.

This failing of man, the apostle Paul addressed when he spoke in Athens at Mars Hill:

Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry. Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him. Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection. And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is? For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean. (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.) Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. (Acts 17:16-23)

Though Paul had preached the gospel to many in Athens, it bore little fruit as it seemed to the Athenians to be just another god, somewhat different from the gods they already had. But

having no understanding or knowledge of what the God Paul preached was about, they were unable to come to any conclusion, and hence brought Paul to a place where they could hear more. Thus, the problem they had, Paul addressed directly on Mars Hill – declaring unto them that they worshiped without knowledge and understanding. They worshiped a God which they, in their present state, could not perceive. Having no real perception of Him, it was impossible for them to understand Who He was, and what He was about. Hence, the apostle Paul set about rectify that shortcoming by declaring the LORD God, and Who He is to the Athenians. The end he sought to achieve was their coming to the knowledge of the truth, and subsequent trusting of the LORD in truth, and not in ignorance and superstition.

This is exactly what the LORD requires, as the Scripture makes it very plain and clear:

But the hour cometh, and now is, when **the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth:** for the Father seeketh such to worship him. (*John 4:23*)

God is a Spirit: and **they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.** (*John 4:24*)

It is manifestly impossible to worship in truth, if you have no idea, no concrete proof of whether or not you actually know the truth. If you are only guessing, then you do not have the truth. If you actually do not know and understand the LORD God, you are only guessing. I am sorry. That is an unacceptable basis for coming to the Lord Jesus Christ for salvation.

This, the Lord Jesus Christ made quite plain to the woman at the well in Sychar: That you must come in spirit and in truth:

Jesus answered and said unto her, **If thou knewest the gift of God, and who it is that saith to thee,** Give me to drink; thou wouldest have asked of him, and he would have given thee

living water. (*John 4:10*)

We should note that the Lord Jesus tells the woman plainly and clearly what is required BEFORE she asked for it, not after. The Lord Jesus told the woman:

- if you know what the gift of God is
- and you know who is offering it

... then you will ask, and He will give.

Which brings us to the issue of trust.

It is the inherent tendency of every person to trust themselves before they will trust anyone else. In fact, we learn at an early age to not depend upon someone we do not know and do not trust. Hence, to place our eternal destiny in the hands of someone of whom we know little to nothing, is ignorance and foolishness. If we are honest with ourselves at all, we will admit that we have difficulty trusting even those we do know. How then can we trust someone we cannot see, and have never met, and do not know?

The short answer is: We don't.

However much outwardly we may say differently to placate those around us and not hurt their feelings, we reserve judgment and withhold trust. Since no one can see our heart, we “*get away with it*” and no one is the wiser. However, the LORD God knows different:

But the LORD said unto Samuel, Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for *the LORD seeth* not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart. (*I Samuel 16:7*)

Hence, we will not fool the LORD God. If we choose to believe, deciding to “trust,” yet not fully, we are reserving part of ourselves from the LORD and not allowing Him liberty in our

hearts. To do so, is to say that we hold the LORD no differently than anyone else. This the LORD God will not abide, and will reject as it is inasmuch to say that He is not totally and completely worthy of our trust. In short, it is an insult and an offense. Additionally, if we do choose to trust in ignorance, thinking it is the Lord Jesus we are trusting in, what is to insure that it is actually the Lord Jesus Christ in whom we are trusting? After all, the Scripture is express that Satan has insured there is a false Christ, a false gospel, and a false spirit that he uses to snare men with.

This also the Scripture advises us of:

But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ. For if **he that cometh preacheth another Jesus**, whom we have not preached, or *if* ye **receive another spirit**, which ye have not received, or **another gospel**, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him. *(II Corinthians 11:3-4)*

And again:

But what I do, that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them which desire occasion; that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we. **For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.** And no marvel; **for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.** Therefore *it is* no great thing if **his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness;** whose end shall be according to their works. *(II Corinthians 11:12-15)*

There is but one way to prevent such deception from occurring:

To learn, from the Scripture, the person of the LORD God – before you decide to “trust and believe.”

This is not to learn about Him – that is, His attributes; but through seeing how He deals with individuals and nations, we learn His character, His nature, His Person – those things which are essential for trust. This we find throughout the entirety of the Old Testament. It is to see in the Gospels, how the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the “fullness of the Godhead bodily,” dealt with individuals from all social and economic strata, and from all walks of life, and perceive how His Person is. Then, and only then, can one trust truly and completely.

Can this be done by one who is lost, and not saved – not born again?

Absolutely. However, it does require the instrument of faith, which the LORD has promised to grant to anyone who will truly hear His word. Faith is not something one generates within themselves so that they may “believe.” Rather, faith is an “it,” an instrument well able to reveal the truth and make the Person of the LORD God perceivable and understandable. In many ways it is no different that any other instrument of perception, such as a telescope, binoculars or radar. Those instruments enable us to perceive physical things beyond normal vision. In like manner, faith enables us to perceive spiritually, that is, in the spiritual.

However, the attainment of faith does not come simply because one demands or expects it. Rather, it comes as a result of being granted it by the LORD God upon hearing of His word. This “hearing” does not mean that the sound fell upon the ear, or that one merely listened and it went in one ear and out the other. Rather, it is that one heard, and considered in the heart, the word of God, the Scripture. Upon this hearing, that instrument whereby anyone can clearly and accurately perceive the truth of things, which is faith, is granted:

So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of

God. (Romans 10:17)

But be forewarned, lest we think faith not really necessary or essential to knowing and understanding the LORD God:

But without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him. (Hebrews 11:6)

Hence, it cannot be that false faith which one gins up within themselves, making themselves see something which they do not actually see. It is not the "faith" which is born of pride that states "*If others are able to perceive and know, I can to.*" No. It is that faith which allows one to perceive, and reveals in surety of knowledge and understanding:

"This is the truth. I actually see this truth."

It is very much like getting proper eyeglasses to see with when your vision is bad. That is why the Lord in the Book of Revelation, calls it "eyesalve."

Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, **and blind**, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and *that* the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; **and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.** (Revelation 3:17-18)

This now brings us right back to the question:

How then can we trust someone we cannot see, and have never met, and do not know?

The answer is obvious and really doesn't need to be repeated. Therefore, when the Lord Jesus Christ gave the commission to the apostles, He stated it thus:

Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world. Amen. (Matthew 28:19-20)

***Teach** – Teach them Who the LORD God is, and what He has done for them in and through Jesus Christ. Teach them to the point where they can know Him and trust Him in truth and honesty. That point is different for every person, including some who will never come to the point of being able to trust. For them, there is no hope. Nonetheless, those who are in covenant with the Lord Jesus Christ are duty bound to teach all who will receive it. **Baptize** – Upon belief in the Lord Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, and desire to follow Him as His disciple. **Teach** – The doctrines of the LORD God so that they may grow in grace and be conformed to the image of Christ in all they are and do, to the end that they also may be able to teach others.*

Unfortunately, one of greatest barriers to someone coming to the LORD actually comes from a number of those who profess Christ. They will tell you that you cannot understand the LORD God. After all, they reason that the LORD is infinite and we are finite – we cannot possibly understand Him. However, the LORD states differently:

But **let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD** which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these *things* I delight, saith the LORD. (Jeremiah 9:24)

Thus it is obvious that when the LORD says that we can understand Him, and someone else tells us we cannot, the LORD's argument wins every time. Quite obviously, those who would contend the point do not know and understand the LORD God. But their lack of understanding should not be allowed to

preclude anyone else from knowing and understanding Him.

Hence, the most important thing that I can say to someone from the Scripture, if I only have one thing I can say, and that limited, is this:

Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise *man* glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty *man* glory in his might, let not the rich *man* glory in his riches: But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I *am* the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these *things* I delight, saith the LORD. (*Jeremiah 9:23-24*)

Come, put away your pride, humble yourselves and learn of LORD God. It will lead you to Christ, and you will find rest for your soul.