

Christ's loving rebuke prepares His disciples

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Mark 16:14-20

He appeared to the eleven as they sat down to eat. How tragic that they were twelve but now they were referred to as the eleven. They were no longer complete. The Lord also has a register and takes notes where you were in the beginning and where you are now. On an earlier occasion He said to the twelve that there are twelve thrones prepared for them in Heaven (Matt 19:28). Yet one fell away.

Consider whether you are growing spiritually or backsliding. God does not take pleasure in those who backslide unto destruction (Hebrews 10:38).

Matthew Henry served the Lord from childhood. He could already read the whole Bible at the tender age of three. And he said that it was his habit to regularly recommit his life to the Lord and confess his shortcomings and failings. He would pour out his heart before God that the new year might be better than the previous one. His family and colleagues couldn't find any fault with him, he walked blamelessly before them, yet he would know and realise his failings before the Lord and recommit his life to Him. May we have the same spirit.

May we also consider the agony Jesus, the spotless Lamb of God, had to go through to redeem you and me. God poured out His wrath for our sin on Him. Jesus took our condemnation and judgement upon Himself. So great was the burden that an angel from Heaven had to strengthen Him, yet He still sweated drops of blood. We cannot comprehend what He went through on our account. It is indescribable. Anyone making light of it is dead spiritually.

Jesus humbled Himself to the lowest depths and God the Father raised Him up to be seated at His right hand. This is a heavenly principle. If you want to be lifted up you must humble yourself. Many Christians are so hard-hearted that they would rather go to hell than humble themselves.

If you want to live with Him you must die with Him. If you want to reign with Jesus you must know His suffering. Unless you know conviction and sorrow for sin you will not know union with Him.

Do not be surprised because of trials, suffering and temptations along the way. He is preparing you so that He can uplift you. God loves you and will protect you in those trials so that you might be a vessel fit for His use. Put your trust in Him.

In these verses we read Jesus' final moments with His disciples.

1) Firstly we note His warning. He rebuked them for their hardness of heart. It was a direct rebuke accurately aimed at what they had done.

Jesus brought an old matter into the light because it had not been dealt with yet. Jesus appeared to the women yet the disciples refused to believe them. The two disciples from Emmaus told them how the Lord had revealed Himself to them, yet the disciples did not believe their testimony.

Jesus Himself told them often that He would die and rise from the dead the third day, yet they did not believe Him. Their attitude remained that, unless they saw Him and touched His wounds they would not believe. They refused to believe solid reliable testimony of those who had seen Him.

Today we have the Word of His testimony over and over in many ways and forms, including the Bible. We are in the same boat as the disciples. The cause of unbelief is therefore not lack of proof but hardness of heart as Jesus pointed out.

Although their unbelief was a past event Jesus knew He had to deal with it, otherwise they could not be filled with the Holy Spirit - Pentecost would be impossible if past sin is not dealt with.

Jesus' rebuke seemed harsh and loveless but in fact it was because of His great love for them that He spoke the way that He did. He realised their grave danger because of unconfessed sin and brought it into the light so that they might be cleansed and prepared to experience Pentecost - the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Go and pour out your heart before God to search you whether there be any wicked way of unbelief in you and to

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lead you in His everlasting way.

2) He commanded them "go into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature and nation". If you do not feel for those going lost without Christ you are dead spiritually. And your deadness of heart could be because you hold onto grudges.

He also told them which signs will follow those who believe in Him. The early church experienced this.

Signs and wonders were done by the apostles so much so that the people placed the sick on the road where Peter had to pass so that only his shadow would fall on them (Acts 5:12-15). When the demon-possessed girl went after Paul and the others he rebuked the demon to leave her and immediately she was free. When Paul was on the island where they had been shipwrecked he collected firewood and a deadly snake bit him. But he shook the snake off in the fire and suffered no harm.

Even today the same signs follow those who believe in Jesus.

Do you truly believe in Jesus? Are there signs that follow? You don't have to answer that question - others will see whether you truly believe or not.

A rock can lie in a river for years yet if it is broken open it is still dust-dry inside. So too you can live in a revival but never experience it yourself because of your hardness of heart. Cry to God to remove the heart of stone and give you a soft heart.