

Change of Attitude – The Purpose of Religion – Nick Maartens

“As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem” (Luk.9:51).

The determinate way in which Jesus decided to go to Jerusalem represents the culmination of His obedience to His Father’s will. To fulfil the Godly purpose for His life, He “*resolutely set out for Jerusalem.*” There, through His sacrificial death on the cross, He would make atonement for the sins of the world.

What is the “Jerusalem” for your and my life? What is the most important spiritual goal for which we “resolutely” have to aim for? The common idea is that it must involve some form of religious activities like going to church, attending meetings, reading the Bible or being involved in one or other form of charity. This idea of religion has contributed to the fact that some have missed the “Jerusalem” for their lives. According to Scripture “to be” is more important than “to do.” That’s why we are called “human beings” and not “human doings” – what you are, is going to determine the spiritual quality of what you do! What reflects what we are? Are the attitudes we display in life not a reflection of what we are? I think so. Around the development of our characters, revolves much of the teaching of the New Testament. It is so important that God makes His power and His ministries available to the church to help believers grow in this area: “*It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God’s people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God **and become mature**, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ... (Eph.4:11-13, my emphasis).*” According to this passage of Scripture, one of the most important goals of ministry is to help believers grow and mature in the growth of their characters. Peter confirms this when he writes: “*His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him...he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them **you may participate in the divine nature...**” (2Pet.1:3-8, my emphasis).*” Other passages in the New Testament convey the same message: “*For the kingdom of God consists of and is based on not talk, but power – **moral power and excellence of soul**” (1Cor.4:20, Amplified Bible, my emphasis).*”

In the Beatitudes we find Jesus addressing the attitudes he expects to find in His followers:

“Blessed are the poor in spirit...” (Those who know how dependent they are on God).

“Blessed are those who mourn...” (For their own sin, as well as for those of the world).

“Blessed are the meek...”

“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness...”

“Blessed are the merciful...”

“Blessed are the pure in heart...”

“Blessed are the peacemakers...” (Matt.5:3-12).

These teachings on attitudes are foundational to the Sermon on the Mount.

When we look at society around us, we find that most of the heartache and unhappiness we see, is caused by someone displaying an attitude contrary to the teachings of Jesus. Spiritual growth is not measured by how much we know about Scripture, but by the measure we have allowed it to influence our attitudes. Godly character is therefore our spiritual goal.

“And we... are being transformed into his likeness with ever increasing glory...t” (2Cor.3:18, my emphasis).

Conclusion

Although we do not have control of certain negative circumstances that come our way, we can do something about the way in which we react towards them. Your attitude concerning a negative situation can be influenced by focusing on something else. To use a very simple example; my son built a swimming pool right in front of his bedroom window and he told me that for the first two months the sound of the filtering system kept him awake at night, in such a way that he thought that, unless he changed his attitude towards the “noise”, he would have to close it. So instead of lying awake and concentrating on the sound of the swimming pool pump, he changed his attitude towards it and started focusing on something else. He says that now after about two months, thanks to a changed attitude, he does not hear the sound of the swimming pool pump anymore. It is a well-known fact that we are influenced by what we continually think about. I suppose, because Paul is conscious of this fact, he encourages Christian believers to think about: ***“...whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable...excellent or praiseworthy...” (Phil.4:8).***

He also advises: ***“...Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith...” (Heb.12:1-2).***

In this process of changing one’s attitude, one needs the help of the Holy Spirit. The main goal of the ministry of the Holy Spirit is not to give us sensual experiences, but to help us grow in godly character. Paul emphasises this fact when he writes: ***“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honour one another above yourselves...Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with God's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position....Do not repay anyone evil for evil...If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink... Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good” (Rom.12:9-21).***

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