



September 23, 2007

Today Part IV

Today's sermon is the fourth in our sermon series on preparing for heaven. Our focus has been on righteous living that is what we will be doing for all eternity. But we are also told that we are to work out our salvation in Philippians 2:12 not because our works save us; Ephesians 2:8&9 makes it very clear its by grace it's a gift of God but rather because it is an expression of our faith as James says, "faith apart from works is dead." But why the title today? Because Hebrews 4:7 tells us that God has set a day and he calls it today. Today is the day to listen to His word to listen to His voice and to make a change in our hearts and lives.

Where have we gone in our first three sermons? In our first sermon we saw that we are commanded and admonished and given the example of Christ that we are to go to church. Then we saw that we need a pure heart that will motivate our thoughts, our words and our deeds. Last week we saw that we are again commanded, admonished and given the example by the prophets the apostles and Christ himself to pray continually. This week we will look at another righteous use of our time Bible study.

The study of God's word has been a powerful component of the Christian church from it's very beginning. In fact if we look Acts Chapter 2 we see the birth of the new church in Pentecost. Peter gives a powerful sermon a powerful spirit filled sermon. In this short sermon, which is only 22 verses long, he continually refers to events of the Old Testament and quotes scripture three times. Now that might not seem like much but those three quotes constitute 11 of the 22 verses. A full 50% or one half of the great Pentecost sermon is a repeat of what was said in the Old Testament. How would Peter know this unless he, a simple fisherman, had studied God's word and

committed it to memory? In fact immediately following the sermon 3,000 people were baptized and we hear in Acts 2:42, "They devoted themselves to the Apostle's teaching and to the fellowship to the breaking of bread and prayer." According to Webster's dictionary devote is, "to dedicate by a solemn act. To center the attention or activity of oneself; suggests motives as solemn as a vow." Too often we skip over a word in scripture like devote and we read they listened to the apostles on occasion. No, they devoted themselves they made the apostles teaching, Bible study, fellowship, which was church, breaking bread, communion and prayer the center of their attention.

Now what really is meant by the apostles teaching? I just said its Bible study. Is it really? Lets look at 1 Thessalonians 2:13 where Paul writes and says, "When you receive the word of God which you heard from us you accepted it not as the word of men but as it actually is the Word of God." Consider Peter's words in 2 Peter 3:16 when referring to Paul he says, "he writes the same way in all his letters speaking of them in these matters. His letter contains some things that are hard to understand which ignorant and unstable people distort as they do the other scriptures to their own destruction." Paul says that his word and the word of the other apostles is not the word of men but the word of God that would be scripture and Peter says, if people distort Paul's words as they do the other scriptures then Peter is saying that Paul's words are scripture too. They distort his word as they do the other scriptures that would be the Old Testament. So what are the scriptures? The New Testament too. The New Testament is clear the apostle's teachings are scripture. Yet the apostles didn't just say listen to us we have the full scripture no Peter says in 2 Peter 1:19, "We have the word of the prophets made more certain and you will do well to pay attention to it." Peter was not a fool he tells us to pay attention to the Old Testament and to the New Testament.

Jesus himself addressed the topic of Bible study in John 5:39, "You diligently study the scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the scriptures that testify about me." When he said this he was speaking to the Pharisees and Sadducees. The Pharisees put on a good show dressing in long robes, wearing their phylacteries, praying out loud and publicly studying the scripture but why did they study scripture? Jesus makes it clear they knew the scripture held the key to eternal life but what is that key? It is Him the scriptures point to Him. This was one of the

key criteria in establishing the 39 books of the Old Testament. The books had to be a part of the covenant history or prophecy of the Messiah. The problem Jesus was addressing was not that they studied the Bible it was their rationale and state of mind and look pious but were oblivious to what it really said. In essence Jesus was saying if you really were in Bible study you would see that I am the Savior. Paul points this out in 2 Timothy 3:15 where he says, "These are the scriptures that testify about me." It is the scriptures that point us to Jesus. Which leads us to the final component of Bible study.

We must study it so that we can understand the covenant relationship between God and man. That covenant is expressed when God says, "I will be your God you will be my people", it's a two way street. If we are His people he will be our God and if He is our God we certainly should be His people. To understand that covenant relationship we have to understand both the law, which is God's expectations of us, and the Gospel, which is what we can expect from God because he's already done it. Now, at this point I could give a blistering sermon on the corruption of God's word. We see it unfolding daily in the news and the life around us. Disregard for the marriage vows, the increasing push for ordination of gay pastors, priests and bishops, disregard for God's name, for the church and for doing what is right and all of this is within not just our society but the church. "Christians" are rewriting scripture in their thoughts words and deed by doing the exact opposite of what the Bible says and then justifying themselves, which, by the way, scripture says, will happen. 2 Timothy 4:3&4, "For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers who say what their itching ears want to hear. They will turn from the truth and turn aside to myths." Wow people are going to turn away from the truth and turn to myths because it suits their own desires. What are we to do?

Paul makes it very clear again in 2 Timothy 4:2 "Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct rebuke, rebuke and encourage-with great patience and careful instruction." We are to preach the Word and we are to correct, rebuke and encourage using God's word. We're to do this patiently and with careful instruction. If you're going to be careful you need to know your Bible. The Bible also tells us the effect of ignoring that careful instruction. Hebrews 10:26 the writer is speaking about someone who has received that careful instruction and he writes, "If we

deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth no sacrifice for sins is left but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of the raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. To ignore God's word is to become an enemy of God." Boy we better not ignore God's word we better study it we better know what it says. How does God view such a person? Look at what the writer continues and says, "anyone who rejected the Law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses how much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him and who has insulted the spirit of grace." You see when ignore God's word God sees that as trampling on Christ's sacrifice and an insult to the Holy Spirit and so the writer to the Hebrews gives a final warning, "for we know Him who said it is mine to avenge I will repay and again the Lord will judge His people." Listen to this, "It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the Living God."

I honestly believe that our country, the Christian church as a whole and our own Zion Reformed Church is at a cross roads today. Are we going to hold onto not just the good promises of the Bible but to all the promises both good gospel and bad the law? Are we going to hold onto all the teachings of the Bible or are we going to pick and choose what are itching ears want to hear? The Bible is very clear we are to know God's word its to become a very part of our life. When we are made aware of God's Word we are to do what it says and not ignore it to do so you become an enemy of God. You insult the Holy Spirit; you trample Christ's sacrifice it is a terrible thing to fall into the hands of the Living God if we have ignored His Word, which He has given us. James has a final word for us to consider James 1:22, "Do not merely listen to the word and so deceive yourselves, do what it says." May Zion Reformed Church be known as a place where the foundation is not of concrete poured almost 60 years ago but as in the foundation of God's word which began at creation and continues to live and breathe among us today.

In our Saviors' name, Amen.