

20/20 Vision for the Heartland

“God Loves You!”

(4/19/20)

This past Friday, I was a part of a Zoom meeting with 4 other pastors and a godly Christian prayer warrior.

The topic was the upcoming: “*20/20 Vision for the Heartland Outreach*” (Explain)

This is what God laid on the heart of Mike Macintosh:

- *God loves Americans*
- *But we must repent*
- *God will punish sin*
- *Judgment is coming*
- *Pray for revival*

God loves Americans

Mike said that God was very specific in that He wants us to know that He loves Americans—that is the message He wants proclaimed at this time in our history.

To tell people that He loves Americans, not simply ‘America’—but individual Americans!

Please don't misunderstand—I'm not saying that God ONLY loves Americans.

According to one of the greatest verses in the Bible, John 3:16, it clearly teaches us that—God loves the whole world!

But since this outreach is going to take place in America directed to Americans—it's important that we be specific.

What will impact a person more—to tell them that God loves America, or that God loves them personally—by name?

“How can you say that God loves Americans with one breath and then turn around and say He's going to judge (kill) Americans with the next breath?”

One of the problems that people have had over the centuries when it comes to understanding God—is trying to reconcile the concept of a God who loves people, with a God Who judges sinners?

The answer is that God is a God of love—but is at the same time a God who is holy, righteous and just—a God that must punish sin if He's going to be true to His nature.

In the Bible God is referred to as: *“The Righteous Judge of all the earth”*—a righteous judge has to punish law breakers and criminals.

How then can God, because of His great love for man, pardon him from his sins while at the same time still be—the righteous Judge of the earth?

Well, the answer to that is found in Psalm 85:10 (and other places!)—

Psalm 85:10 (NKJV)

¹⁰ Mercy and truth have met together; Righteousness and peace have kissed.

This verse deals with the cosmic problem of the ages—

- How can God show mercy to fallen man by not sending him to hell and still be true to His Word—“*The soul that sins shall surely die (eternally)?*”

- How can a righteous God ever have or make peace with unrighteous sinners so as to enter into fellowship with them?

And of course, the answer is—the cross!

1 John 2:1-2 (NKJV)

¹ My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. ² And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.

When Jesus died on the cross—the righteousness and justice of God was satisfied (propitiated)—sin had been paid for.

And that allowed God to offer sinners (guilty criminals who had broken His laws) mercy (not punishing them for their sins) in the form of a pardon.

When Jesus hung on the cross, just before He died He said, “*It is finished*” (tetelestai)—“paid in full”.

Ephesians 1:7 (NKJV)

⁷ In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace (free gift)...

The Greek word translated “**forgiveness**” in Ephesians 1:7 means “*to send away.*”

It speaks of canceling a debt or granting a pardon—a pardon that must be *received* if it's going to benefit a guilty man or woman (those who have broken God's laws).

That pardon can be received when a person acknowledges their guilt before a holy God, repents for their sins and receives Jesus into their heart as their Savior.

The prophet Micah proclaimed—“*Who is a God like You? You who pardons sin and passes over the rebellious acts of sinners? Who, because You are a God who delights in mercy...will tread our iniquities under foot. Yes, You will cast all our sins into the depths of the sea [where they will be remembered no more].*” (Micah 7:18-19)

When a person repents and accepts Jesus as their Savior, their sins are sent away—but they themselves are brought near to God (fellowship)—

Ephesians 2:13 (NKJV)

¹³ But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far off have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

We must repent

There can be no salvation without repentance—it is essential for forgiveness and receiving God's pardon.

Luke 13:3, 5 (NKJV)

³ I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish...⁵ I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish."

But where is that kind of preaching today?—it has been replaced by a modern, politically correct gospel.

The gospel that we hear being preached today is, “*Come to Jesus and you'll be rich. Come to Jesus and He'll take away all the pain of life and make you happy...*”

That is not the true gospel that Jesus and the apostles preached—but rather, it’s a ‘cross-less’ gospel that tells people to simply believe some facts about Jesus and pray a generic prayer to ‘God’—and He’ll forgive you all your sins and give you heaven.

And listen, the best part is—you don’t have to change a thing!

You can go on living your life as you always have (living with your boyfriend or girlfriend, getting drunk and/or high, cheating on your spouse, stealing from your boss etc.)—and still go to heaven because—you believe in Jesus!

The modern gospel being preached today is a *cross-less* gospel—but a ‘cross-less’ gospel is a Christ-less gospel—and a Christ-less gospel won’t save anybody!

That’s where repentance comes in—it is the repentance that drives you to Jesus where you receive Him and then receive from Him the cross—where you die to self and follow Jesus.

At that point sanctification begins which means we start to change—true biblical repentance always involves change.

A change of heart initially (inward change) leading to salvation—followed by an outward change of lifestyle (sanctification).

It is true that sometimes outward change takes time—but true repentance always leads to change.

Because true repentance brings salvation—and salvation is where God makes a person a new creation—where old things pass away, and everything becomes brand new! (2Cor.5:17)

What is repentance? Very simply—it is turning from sin to God.

Ezekiel 33:7, 11 (NKJV)

⁷ "So you, son of man [Ezekiel]: I have made you a watchman for the house of Israel; therefore you shall hear a word from My mouth and warn them for Me... ¹¹ Say to them: 'As I live,' says the Lord GOD, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn, turn from your evil ways! For why should you die...?'

Ezekiel 18:30-32 (NKJV)

³⁰ "Therefore I will judge you, O house of Israel, every one according to his ways," says the Lord GOD. "Repent, and turn from all your transgressions, so that iniquity will not be your ruin. ³¹ Cast away from you all the transgressions which you have committed, and get yourselves a new heart and a new spirit. For why should you die...? ³² For I have no pleasure in the death of one who dies," says the Lord GOD. "Therefore turn and live!"

At this point, there are always some people who think that, because they believe in Jesus and go to church—they're fine, and God will let them into heaven when they die—no matter how they're living.

1 Corinthians 6:9-10 (NKJV)

⁹ Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, ¹⁰ nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God.

Genuine repentance is essential for salvation—but beware, there is a deadly, demonic counterfeit!

And that deadly counterfeit that Satan uses to deceive people with is—*Regret*.

Regret is rooted in *feelings*, whereas true repentance is rooted in *action* (turning around and making a change).

Paul the apostle addressed this very issue in 2Corinthians 7 calling regret—“*worldly sorrow*”:

2 Corinthians 7:9-10 (NKJV)

⁹ Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to [genuine] repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner...¹⁰ For godly sorrow produces repentance [change] *leading* to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

Paul is saying that feelings of regret over your sins can make you feel bad for what you have done—but in and of itself doesn't lead a person to make any changes or provide restitution—in other words, it doesn't produce any change.

I'm talking about the 'fruit' of genuine repentance—not that we earn our salvation by 'cleaning' up our lives first.

Paul said this kind of 'sorrow' is worldly and therefore cannot bring a person into salvation—it only leads to death (spiritual death—separation from God in hell).

Look at the change that godly sorrow (true repentance) produced in the Corinthians—

2 Corinthians 7:11 (NKJV)

¹¹ For observe this very thing, that you sorrowed in a godly manner: What diligence it produced in you, *what clearing of yourselves, what indignation, what fear, what vehement desire, what zeal, what vindication!* In all *things* you proved yourselves to be clear in this matter.

Worldly sorrow will keep a person from being saved (not true repentance)—but it can also hinder a Christian from growth, victory and fruit-bearing as well:

One pastor put it this way—

“Simply feeling guilty over what I have done is not repentance. In essence I haven't even touched upon the sin itself, and Satan has effectively counterfeited the path that leads to repentance because it is so important to our walk with God. And it is possible for a Christian to remain in an attitude of regret and remorse for years and get nowhere in victory over sin—because God doesn't work through regret and remorse—He works through repentance.”

God will punish sin

Without repentance there can be no forgiveness of sins, and the only course God has left is judgment—this is what happened in Israel.

Jeremiah 26:4-6 (NLT2)

⁴ “Say to them, ‘This is what the LORD says: If you will not listen to me and obey my word I have given you, ⁵ and if you will not listen to my servants, the prophets—for I sent them again and again to warn you, but you would not listen to them— ⁶ then I will destroy this Temple...And I will make Jerusalem an object of cursing in every nation on earth.’”

Jeremiah 29:17-19 (NLT2)

¹⁷ This is what the LORD of Heaven’s Armies says: “I will send war, famine, and disease upon them and make them like bad figs, too rotten to eat. ¹⁸ Yes, I will pursue them with war, famine, and disease, and I will scatter them around the world. In every nation where I send them, I will make them an object of damnation, horror, contempt, and mockery. ¹⁹ For they refuse to listen to me [repent], though I have spoken to them repeatedly through the prophets I sent...”

Jeremiah 35:15, 17 (NLT2)

¹⁵ Time after time I sent you prophets, who told you, “Turn [repent] from your wicked ways, and start doing things right [things God has commanded]. Stop worshiping other gods so that you might live in peace here in the land I have given to you and your ancestors.” But you would not listen to me or obey me...¹⁷ “Therefore, this is what the LORD God of Heaven’s Armies, the God of Israel, says: ‘Because you refuse to listen or answer when I call, I will send upon Judah and Jerusalem all the disasters [including diseases] I have threatened.’”

Judgment is Coming

The prayer warrior at that Zoom meeting was convinced that God told her He was involved in this COVID-19 pandemic—and was using it to get a hold of people’s hearts.

We cannot flippantly dismiss the possibility that this pandemic isn’t a judgment from God upon the nations of the world for their sins.

Listen, it wouldn’t be the first or last time God has used *pestilence* (disease, among other things) to bring judgment upon a group of people who refused to repent of their sins.

A few weeks ago, we read from Numbers 14:11-12 and 1Kings 8:37-40 to prove that this is true.

God’s judgments have a ‘multi-pronged’ purpose—to judge the wicked, awaken the righteous and save the lost (who are also wicked but who have an open heart to the gospel and God’s Son, Jesus Christ).

We see this hinted at in what Habakkuk the prophet prayed when God told him He was going to send judgment upon the southern kingdom of Judah—he prayed, “*Even in judgment, please don’t forget to be merciful.*” (Habakkuk 3:2)

In 2Peter 3, after Peter talks about the world-wide judgment that God brought in the days of Noah, he then talks about another world-wide judgment coming in the future—but even as Peter is prophesying about coming judgment he stops and says—

2 Peter 3:9 (NKJV)

⁹ The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise [of coming judgment], as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

Sometimes, before God brings forth His ultimate judgment upon a people—He will show mercy by first bringing lesser or *preliminary* judgments to get their attention.

God uses these judgments, in part, to revive His Church—but also to show mercy to the lost by creating fear in their hearts to hopefully bring them to Jesus for salvation!

1 Timothy 2:3-4 (NKJV)

³ For this *is* good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, ⁴ who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

There are many people that will wind up coming to Christ during this pandemic, people that wouldn’t ordinarily come to a church or listen to a sermon or Bible teaching—but during this quarantine they’re watching churches livestreaming their services—and many are getting saved!

Pray for revival

2 Chronicles 7:14 (NKJV)

¹⁴ if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

Dr. Clarence Sexton, founder and president of Crown College (go to our church website or our church Facebook page to see the actual video)—

“There was a great revival in the Hebrides in the early 1900s. It began to move and moved up thru the 40s – maybe we could say it topped out in the early 1950s. Two old woman—one was 84 years old and the other was 82 years old. One was blind and one was bent over badly with spinal stenosis—really hunched over. But they had a passion for revival, they so wanted God to work—and this is what happened.

They couldn’t even get out to the church to pray. They couldn’t even get out to the church to worship—so their house became a place to meet—and the people came. They had such a passion for revival to come to their Isle, the Isle of Lewis- they were very passionate about it.

They confronted the preacher (Rev. Duncan Campbell) and wanted to know if he was thoroughly right with God? And they prayed and prayed and prayed. They had seen of the Lord the church filled up and God blessing with a great overflow. And the fire of God struck in that tiny little obscure place off the coast of Scotland.

And when it happened there was a young teenage boy that got saved in the revival - his name was Donald—Donald Smith. And the preacher became so dependent on Donald and so close to Donald that he asked him to lead in public prayers and help him with the meetings—and he did.

Oh, how God worked! People began to hear about it and the revival fire spread—it spread, and God blessed it in a great way! Those two old women—the kind that people don’t even want in their church anymore.

And from that same island there was a young girl who was a cousin to Donald Smith who immigrated to America—her name was Mary Anne Smith McLeod.

She came to America in 1936. She met a man named Fred and they fell in love and were married—and God blessed them in a great way. Those two old women were her aunts who came out of that revival—that fiery revival. And they sent a Bible...a Bible that had been used in that revival in a special way—they sent it to Mary Anne.

She started having children in 1937. She had her first child and she named him Fred after his father. And then had a second child and named her after herself—Mary Anne. Then she had her third child—Elizabeth. Then she had her fourth child. She was so impacted by how God had used that teenage boy in those revival days that she named her fourth child, Donald. And she gave him that Bible—the one used in the Hebrides revival. He was born in 1946—he is now the 45th President of the United States, Donald J. Trump. That revival Bible is now in the oval office of the White House.

I’m saying to you that—I don’t know how or why. I don’t know how it all comes together—but I believe God is putting some things together to give us a window—just a window if He can find some open people who know what the window is for.

Can this be the time that the window is open? Providentially, God has prepared the moment, and will we become the people of prayer pleading with God? This plea – ‘Will Thou not revive us again?’ Will you be a part of that - will you?’

Invitation

As you know, Billy Graham, whom many consider to be the greatest evangelist that ever lived, died a couple of years ago (February 21, 2018).

As I watched the documentary on his life, what struck me was how over the course of his 60 plus years of ministry that—he always kept his message simple!

Billy Graham was a very smart man, graduating from Bible college and seminary—and yet the message he preached was never so deep and super-intellectual that the average person couldn't understand it.

Instead, Dr. Graham kept it simple choosing to emphasize the love of God for lost sinners, and how that no one—no matter how far from God they are and steeped in sin they might be—was beyond His love to save them.

And that is the message I want to leave you with this morning—that God loves you regardless of the life you're living or the sin you're involved in—God loves you and wants to save you.

But listen, as beautiful as God's love for sinners is—and regardless of how much, because of that love, He wants to save them—understand that God's love can't save you!

In fact, God's love has never saved anyone—all it can do is provide a way by which you might be saved.

John 3:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son [God's part], that whoever believes in Him [your part] should not perish but have everlasting life.

God is inviting you to come to Him right now so that He can forgive you your sins and adopt you into His family as a child of God!

He loves you and wants to save you from coming judgment and take you to heaven someday to live with Him forever!

But you must receive His pardon—you must believe in and receive His Son!

Jesus Christ will be one of two things to every person who has ever lived—Loving Savior or Righteous Judge.

What you do with Jesus now will determine what He becomes to you then.

Today is the day of salvation...