

Clarifying Our Vision Part II: Are We Doing Our Best?

Joshua 24:1;14-18 Judges 2: 6-13

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On a dangerous seacoast where shipwrecks often occur, there was once a crude little life-saving station. The building was just a hut, and there was only one boat, but the few devoted members kept a constant watch over the sea and with no thought for themselves went out day and night tirelessly searching for the lost. Some of those who were saved, and various others in the surrounding area, wanted to become associated with the station and give of their time and money and effort for the support of its work. New boats were brought in and new crews trained. The little lifesaving station grew.

Some members of the lifesaving station were unhappy that the building was so crude and poorly equipped. They felt that a more comfortable place should be provided as a first refuge of those saved from the sea. They replaced the emergency cots with beds and put better furniture in the enlarged building. Now the lifesaving station became a popular gathering place for its members and they decorated it beautifully and furnished it exquisitely, because they used it as sort of a club.

Fewer members were now interested in going to sea on lifesaving missions, so they hired lifeboat crews to do this work. The lifesaving motif still prevailed in this club's decorations, and there was a miniature lifeboat in the room where the club's initiations were held.

About this time, a large ship was wrecked off the coast, and the hired crews brought in boatloads of cold, wet and half-drowned people. They were dirty and sick, and some of them had black skin and some had yellow skin. The beautiful new club was in chaos. So the property committee immediately had a shower house built outside the club where victims of shipwreck could be cleaned up before coming inside.

At the next meeting, there was a split in the club's membership. Most of the members wanted to stop the club's lifesaving activities, since they were unpleasant and a hindrance to the normal social life of the club. Some members insisted upon lifesaving as their primary purpose and pointed out that they were still called a lifesaving station. But they were finally voted down and told that if they wanted to save the lives of all the various kinds of people who were shipwrecked in those waters, they could begin their own lifesaving station down the coast. They did.

As the years went by, the new station experienced the same changes that had occurred in the old. It evolved into a club, and yet another lifesaving station was founded. History continued to repeat itself, and if you visit the seacoast today, you will find a number of exclusive clubs along the shore. Shipwrecks are frequent in those waters, but most of the people drown.

The purpose of Ingomar Church is to reach people with the Good News of Jesus and together become fully devoted followers of Christ.

There is an interesting theme that runs through this story – life saving, the saving of lives, the saving of lives of people who are lost at sea; the saving of the lost. Saving lives is also a theme that can be found in the Bible, in the life of Jesus and in the church.

What is your favorite holiday? Most people would say Christmas because it is so awesome. We decorate our homes and churches. Owners decorate their stores. Cities and towns are decorated. We get presents. We give presents and have parties.

As followers of Jesus, most of us love Christmas the most because we celebrate the birth of Jesus. So why was Jesus born? Why did he come to earth? What's the big deal about Jesus?

Joseph discovers that his future wife Mary is pregnant and the baby is not his. He plans to divorce her but an angel appears to him in a dream telling him that the baby is from God. The angel explains,

She will give birth to a son and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins. Matthew 1:21

An angel appears to some nearby shepherds. The angel says to them,

Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a savior has been born to you; he is Christ the Lord. Luke 2: 10-11

Jesus has an encounter with a crooked tax collector named Zacchaeus. Jesus invites himself to Zacchaeus' home. His visit transforms Zacchaeus and he promises to reimburse the people he has cheated 4 times the amount. Jesus announces,

Today salvation has come to this house,...for the Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost. Luke 19: 9-10

- “You are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their sins.”
- “Today in the town of David a savior has been born to you.”
- “For the son of man came to seek and to save the lost.”

Christmas is our favorite holiday because we celebrate the birth of our savior. A savior is one who saves.

“Oh Holy Night, the stars are brightly shining. It is the night of our dear saviors' birth.”

So there's this theme that we see again and again. Saved, savior, salvation.

From what do we need to be saved? We need to be saved from sin. We all sin. And in as much as we are sinners we need to be saved from the impact of our sin because, as sinners we deserve eternal death. But as saved sinners we receive the hope and promise of eternal life.

From what sin so we need to be saved: we aren't murderers! But....

Some don't love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Some don't love our neighbors as we love ourselves.

Some get angry, remain angry, and never forget.

Some refuse to forgive

Some have emotional affairs with colleagues.

Some have physical affairs that also violate their marriage covenant.

Some lie, cheat or steal.

Some are selfish, greedy and refuse to share.

Some discriminate against others because of sex, ethnicity, age, or appearance.

Some are so caught up in their own world, in their own lives that they seldom, if ever, think of others.

Some refuse to hear the cry of the needy.

Those are some of the sins we commit and that we need to admit and for which we need to ask forgiveness.

But there are also circumstances and experiences from which we need to be saved, such as the uncertainties of life.

When we have Jesus in our lives, life is better for us. As a church, we believe that life is better when Jesus is at the center of our lives.

Now, to say we believe life is better when Jesus is at the center does not mean we will be wealthy, that we will never get sick, that we will never face anguish in our lives, or that we will always have everything we want in life. No, we will still face illness, we'll still have to endure anguish, and we probably won't ever have everything we want. But in the midst of all that, we'll be better off, we'll be in a better place because Jesus is with us, at the center of our lives.

The human body does not last forever. Some of us face illnesses. Some face disease. None of us will live forever. But let me ask you, which is better:

Is it better to go through a difficult experience in life with Jesus by your side or without Jesus?

Is it better, when you have a sick child, to be able to pray to God for help for healing, for strength, for guidance so they will get better, or not?

Is it better to go into surgery knowing that God is with you and those around you are covering you and the doctors and the nurses in prayer, or not?

Is it better to receive bad news knowing that God is still with you, still loves you and will never leave you, or not?

Is it better to face uncertainty in your life with God in your life, or not?

Is it better to send your son or daughter to their first day of preschool, or 1st grade, or middle school or high school or college or off to Afghanistan with your prayers, asking God to watch over them or not?

Is it better to face the eventual end of your own life, or of someone you love, knowing that there is salvation, life after death, eternal life in heaven someday, and that you will see them again someday, or not?

Is it better to face the eventual end of your own life, or of someone you love, knowing that there is salvation, life after death, eternal life in heaven someday, and that you will see them again someday, or not?

As a church, we make life better for people because we teach people that life is better when Christ is at the center. Every time we receive new members, we remind ourselves,

The church is of God and shall be preserved to the end of time for the conduct of worship, the administration of God's word and the sacraments, the edification of believers and the conversion of the world. All of every age and station stand in need of the means of grace which it alone supplies.

You see friends we are the church and so we need to be the church. We must assume our responsibility. We need to help people find their way to God. The world needs the church, the world needs Jesus like it has never before. Do we realize, do we remember why we exist? Are we reaching people, are we becoming fully devoted followers of Jesus? And, and are we careful to teach those coming after us? Are we doing our best?

Which brings us to Joshua. Do you know much about Joshua? Joshua was with Moses when the Hebrew people left Egypt through the Red Sea. Joshua and Caleb were among the 12 spies Moses sent into Canaan to see if they could be overtaken.

10 of the 12 spies said, we can't do it. They are huge people. They'll destroy us. But Joshua and Caleb disagreed and said with the Lord by our side we can do this.

The Israelites decided not to go. God sent them back into the wilderness to wander for 40 more years, 'til all those who lacked faith died out. Of all the people who left Egypt, only Joshua and Caleb lived to enter the Promised Land. If your name is Joshua, or Caleb for that matter, you have a great name. Joshua led the Hebrews into the land that would become Israel.

Joshua led the Israelites to become a great nation. As he approached his death at age 110, he charged those he was leaving behind with these words.

Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness...But if serving the Lord seems undesirable for you, then choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve...But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord. Joshua 24:14,15

The people responded to Joshua.

Far be it from us to forsake the Lord to serve other Gods!...We too will serve the Lord because he is our God. Joshua 24: 16, 18

A few verses later, Joshua has died and is buried. And in verse 31 we read these words,

Israel served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him, and who had experienced everything the Lord had done for Israel. Joshua 24:31

Now look at Judges, Chapter 2, verse 10.

After that whole generation had been gathered up to their fathers (they died), another generation grew up, and knew neither the Lord now what he had done for Israel.

From Sue Hoffman:

After living a life of such great faith, seeing countless signs and wonders, and winning so many victories, Joshua and his generation dropped the baton from one generation to the next. By God's grace, they had crossed the Jordan River on dry

ground, watched the walls of Jericho come down, and even saw the sun stand still. Yet after all these miracles that showed the power and provision of a mighty God, the next generation – an entire generation – did not know the Lord nor the work he had done for Israel.

What happened: Where was the legacy of Joshua's generation? Were they so busy defeating foreign armies that they forgot to remind their children that it had been the Lord who fought for them? Were they not purposeful about passing those stories on to their children: Did they not encourage their children to encounter God for themselves? Maybe after many hard years of war the parents dropped their guard, complacently dwelling in cities they had not built and eating the fruit of vineyards and olive orchards they did not plant...Someone dropped the baton of faith and a great big God became so small in the eyes of his people that an entire generation could no longer see him.

We have a tremendous responsibility. Hand off the baton well and we represent God as a great big God to the world around us.

How shall we pass the baton to the next generation? Please come back next week for the answer to that question, and for part III of our series, clarifying our future.