

Article of the Month

January, 2021

***The Ultimate Consideration:
The Value of a Man***

One thing which the year of 2020 should have made more obvious to us all is how valuable people are. It is an important lesson. Actually, it is THE lesson which God intends for the entire race to learn as it enters soon into the Peaceable Kingdom for which so many have so long prayed.

THE SHEEP & GOATS PARABLE

Is the value of the individual not the lesson of Matthew 25:31-46? That passage is the famous Parable of the Sheep and the Goats. It is a parable about the Kingdom — not about now. But its lessons have applications now to all of us if and when we want to bring our characters into conformity with righteousness. We can and must learn to be sympathetic and concerned if we are not so naturally.

In this parable, the “sheep” represent those whose characters are not self-centered. They almost automatically do good things to help others. It will result in everlasting life for them. The “goats,” on the other hand, represent people who seem never able to be cognizant of their fellows. When they are finally accused of not being interested in their fellow men, they, quite in surprise, exclaim, “WHEN didn’t we help others?” They apparently have characters that are simply oblivious to their relationships with others. They don’t know that they are deficient in the most basic of human decencies.

THE SINS OF SODOM

Many of us, when we hear the name of Sodom, automatically think of its fleshly immoralities. And, while Sodom is famous for that, it is so very instructive for us to note what the Lord condemns it for — something quite different from what the rest of us usually focus on! In Ezekiel 16:49, it says, “Behold, this was the guilt of your sister, Sodom. She and her daughters had arrogance, abundant food, and careless ease; but she did not help the poor and needy.” According to the Lord, THIS was Sodom’s downfall. It is just about identical to the “goats” of the Matthew parable. It is frighteningly similar-sounding to our current world! The world now will do little or nothing about this. But as this world disintegrates around us, we should have little surprise that God has no desire to perpetuate our lack of care for one another. He intends to do something about it.

LOVE THY NEIGHBOR AS THYSELF

This little command is so well known! It was a vital part of the spirit of the Jewish Law. It was important enough that it is quoted three times in Matthew, twice in Mark, and twice by Paul (in Romans and Galatians). James also quotes it. When Jesus comments on it, he first quotes the commandment to love God above all; but then he adds that the **SECOND** commandment (second in importance) is **LIKE** the first in our hearts — to love our neighbor as ourselves.

The first appearance of this idea occurs early in Genesis (4:9). Cain asked God if he were his brother's keeper. Unfortunately, he actually **THOUGHT** he was not responsible for his brother. But he could not have been more mistaken. We all are our brothers' keepers. That was Jesus' point when he referred to the "second commandment." It is **NOT** one of the "Ten Commandments." But it is implied in the very first of those ten. To love God above all is to love mankind which He loves and intends to restore.

In the Church — those who are prospective members of **THE CHRIST** — this same principle becomes a law. Paul states this clearly in Galatians 6:2: "Bear one another's burdens, and thus fulfill the law of Christ." True Christians **ARE** now being judged on this. The world is not. The world's judgment will be during the Kingdom — when the Sheep and Goats Parable will apply.

EVEN COVID SHOWED OUR DEFICIENCIES

We could make a long list of ways which the pandemic demonstrated lack of care for each other. But we will use only one provocative example. Clearly, no one among us should approve of theft. But consider this:

Even up to the point of this writing, there seem to be those who are irate over the fact that some governments are trying to steal the recipes for Covid-19 vaccine research. But, does not love of neighbor suggest that all scientists in all countries would want openly to share the cure with the world? The whole world is in this together. And are we **REALLY** upset or concerned that **ALL** want to be cured? Is there not some kind of global shame when we don't rush out to help everyone — to **SHARE** what we know in this matter? It is not as though there won't be enough! It is not as though sharing ideas is going to bankrupt someone! And even if it would, is not mass death worse than bankruptcy?

Ah, yes! We cannot expect righteousness now or from this world. But we can certainly see where righteousness is **NEEDED**! We **ARE** our brothers' keepers. We **NEED** to get away from the guilt of Sodom. But only Christ's Kingdom will accomplish this great feat!

THE LAST PLAGUE

In Revelation 16 are listed “seven last plagues.” These are not diseases. They are the results of events (social, economic, political, and religious) which are “poured out” on the world in our day. Their collective purpose is to let man destroy his own corrupt systems of things. These plagues, for instance, include two World Wars, a Communist Revolution, etc. But, whatever might be symbolized in each of the seven, it is the 7th Plague which centers in on our subject.

The 7th Plague is just before us. We are currently chronologically in the events symbolized under the 6th Plague. Note, then, one of the peculiar items symbolized in this Last Plague (Revelation 16:17-21). As everything in society disintegrates, the Plague lists a final “HARD LESSON.” —

“And huge hailstones, about the weight of a talent each, came down from heaven upon men; and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail, because its plague was extremely severe.”

In applying the symbolic lessons, two items need to be interpreted. —

HAIL. Hail is frozen water. “Water” in Biblical symbology represents truth — something quite refreshing when it is consumed! But when it is frozen and falling from the sky, it is damaging — sometimes extremely so!

Thus, the final effect of this plague is some kind of HARD TRUTH. Man’s reaction makes him speak evil of God. (To “blaspheme” means to speak evil of.) The hard truth, paraphrased, is that “You MUST learn to get away from your own selfishness and, instead, take care of each other. EVERY PERSON is of much value to God. You DON’T seem to want to learn that hard truth right now! You speak evil of God for His beginning to enforce the concept upon you because it disrupts your way of life!”

TALENT-WEIGHT. There is a reason why this prophecy tells us how much each hailstone weighs. It will establish for us what is here symbolized. A talent is about 100 pounds. YES! Hailstones weighing 100 pounds each will destroy about anything they might hit! We can see why the initial reaction is blasphemy! This particular truth must be so important and so basic — yet so contrary and destructive to man’s normal practices.

There is a text in the Old Testament which will give us much enlightenment regarding this hailstone episode. It is found in I Kings 20:39. It reads, in part:

“Guard this man. If for any reason he is missing, then your life shall be for his life; or else you shall pay a talent of silver.”

What is the lesson here? Regardless of its context, this verse is telling us that two options were available for a lost life. One was that the life of the responsible person was to be forfeited in exchange for the lost life. The other was that the responsible

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person must pay a talent in silver. This was an enormous amount of money. But the point, for the sake of symbology, is this: One talent represents THE VALUE OF A MAN.

Now we can see the objective of not only the 7th Plague, but, in essence, of all Seven Plagues. The objective is to destroy man's old ways of doing things so that the eternal and important lesson can be learned. The life-value of each human being is paramount in God's sight. It is the lesson which will come out of all the accumulated plagues. The entire Kingdom of God is being established to write that one truth into man's hearts. People, as individuals, will HAVE value and will BE VALUED. If anyone fails to learn that in the Kingdom, he will be a "goat" and will go into destruction.

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IN SUMMARY

Mankind is learning (the hard way — and it will get harder yet) that we are to value each other above and beyond all other things. Until this lesson is learned, there will be no way to have an ideal society — to have "peace on earth, good will toward men." But once it IS learned, there will be nothing more that man could desire! God will take care of all the rest of things. Eternity will express the sincere love and helpfulness that each individual will have toward each other individual. Nothing will be lacking!

In Isaiah 13:12 there is a lovely text about this. The passage is in the middle of a prophecy about the tearing down of the old order of things. It is virtually a passage parallel to Revelation 16. But in the 12th verse, we learn the same lesson taught by the 7th Plague. —

"I will make a man more precious than pure gold, and mankind
than the gold of Ophir."

Ophir was a region famous for its abundant production of gold. But Isaiah tells us that mankind's value will exceed the most abundant sources of gold. And man IS worth so much more than gold! But he seems not quite to have discovered that yet!

May your new year find you valuing each other intensely and abundantly!

Isaiah 14:7: "The whole earth is at rest and is quiet. They break forth into singing!"

SOON!

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