

It's all about Jesus

by Rev. Robert Griffith

I want to begin with a verse from the Gospel of Luke. It's just one sentence, but it's one of the most important sentences in the New Testament when we know what it really means. Luke 16:16 says this: *"The law and the prophets were until John. Since that time the kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is pressing into it."* The law and the prophets had a life-span. They served their purpose right up until John the Baptist came on the scene to prepare the way for the next chapter in God's master-plan.

The law and the prophets were intended to release something into the earth – a consciousness of sin, the need for salvation and a readiness for the coming Messiah. That era ended with John. So where do the law and the prophets fit into our lives now? The Apostle Paul tells us in Romans: *"... these things were written in earlier times for our instruction."* (15:4). The role of the Old Testament is to provide types, shadows and prophetic pictures of Jesus and His kingdom. That's why Jesus said that the law and the prophets were until John – now, the kingdom of God is being preached. The message changed and the voice changed.

The book of Hebrews begins with this opening statement: *"In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son ..."* (Heb.1:1-2). This is a profound statement. In the past God spoke in a variety of ways, allowing for a number of voices to broadcast the message from all different angles. Prophets spoke. Poets spoke. Law spoke. Those who wrote the Psalms and the music of Scripture spoke. Through all these various ways the Lord spoke to His people, but in these last days, there is only one voice and there is only one message. The voice is Jesus. The message is Jesus. It's all about Jesus.

Jesus Christ is absolutely perfect theology. The word theology simply means 'knowledge of God' and so whatever you think you know about God that you can't find in the person of Jesus, you should discard immediately. Jesus is the measure of all truth about God because Jesus is the Truth. Regardless of what took place in the Old Testament context, all our learning must measure up to the message and the model that Jesus provides for us. There is no other model. There is no other message. There is no other truth.

John the Baptist was the final prophet to end all prophets and he closed out that season and passed the baton to a new voice – to Jesus: the Messiah, the Light of the world and the Saviour of all mankind. In Hebrews 11 - the great faith chapter – we read the hall of fame for God's faithful servants of old. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Moses, Isaac, Jacob, Rahab ... they're all listed there. Then we get to verse 13: *"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth."* They all died in faith, not having received the promises.

Then Hebrews 11 gives us another list of great men and women who died in the pursuit of their faith and it gives an account of their torture, mocking, beatings and imprisonment. Then in verse 39, at the very end of this extended list of Biblical heroes it says this, *"And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise ..."* In other words, they received this accolade because they were faithful until the end of their life – but they didn't receive the promise. All of these great heroes of faith were only given a taste of what was to come. It was like God gave them a glimpse into the New Testament and what life would be like on this side of the cross – what life would be like living under the reign and Lordship of Christ.

All the miracles and amazing stories spinning around these great men and women of faith all happened without the Spirit of God indwelling them, without them being born again. But God gave them a little taste of what was to come and what would be the fruit of their faithfulness.

We then arrive at chapter 12 in Hebrews. All of chapter 11 – this extraordinary momentum of faith - is designed to take us to these two verses: *“Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.”* (Hebrews 12:1-2)

What does He mean by the ‘author and finisher’ of our faith? Hebrews 11 records the story of what was initiated by promise - which Jesus then completely fulfilled. Jesus is the author and the finisher of our faith – the initiator and the completer of our faith. Jesus is our creator - He knit us together in our mother’s womb and placed a God-shaped vacuum inside us. We were born with a built-in longing for the One Who created us. That’s where our faith truly began. Jesus was the author of that faith as our creator. But in the fullness of time Jesus is also the finisher of our faith – the answer to all our questions – the meaning to our whole life – the fulfilment of all our dreams – the manifestation of our destiny - the purpose of our existence. He was there in the beginning and He will be there in the end. It’s all about Jesus – the author and the finisher of our faith.

The Christian life has become so complicated for so many people today. Christian bookstores are filled with thousands of books - all telling us how we might be a better Christian and listing all the things we should do to build a great Church. Even a casual glance at some of those books will lead any observer to conclude that being a good Christian is really hard work. Well, that conclusion is only possible if we forget that it’s all about Jesus.

The Christian walk is only complicated and hard when we fail to accept that Jesus is the author and the finisher of our faith. What He calls us to do, He empowers us to do. Who He calls us to be, He imparts to us freely. Where He calls us to go, He has already gone first and prepared the way. What He calls us to suffer, He has suffered much worse and knows what we need to follow Him through the valleys of life. It’s all about Jesus!

There has been a huge cosmic battle being fought over the people of God for centuries now. I’m not talking about the battle between light and darkness, good and evil, God and Satan – not directly anyway – I’m talking about a battle at the grass roots level of humanity. I am talking about the battle between *religion* and *relationship*. At every turn in life we are encouraged to embrace religion – a set of rules, principles, beliefs, and morals to which we subscribe and which we try to follow and that, somehow, is supposed to please God and lead us into His presence where He can bless us.

There are just two problems with this approach to life. Firstly, God hates religion. He detests the sight and the sound of His children trying to perform their way into His good books. Everything God has for His people is free – none of it can be bought by our obedience, our stewardship, our service or our good works for God. We get everything free, by His grace, or we don’t get it at all. Religion tells us we have to pay for God’s love in the way we live and that’s offensive to God.

God’s only desire for us is that we enter into a close, personal, eternal relationship with Him – freely, openly and forever. That was and is all made possible by Jesus, because it’s all about Jesus. The author and finisher of our faith is also the One Who smashed through the throne room doors of heaven on the cross and ushered us into the presence and the fullness of God. Our relationship with God in Christ is all we need to focus on if we truly want to be the best God has called us to be.

Who saved us? Jesus! Who redeemed us? Jesus! Who protects us and keeps us each day? Jesus! Who will fulfill His mission in us and through us? Jesus! Who is the Way, the Truth and the Life? Jesus! Who is the creator of life and the Lord of the universe? Jesus! Who is the one and only mediator between us and God? Jesus! Who promised to build a Church so strong that even hell itself will not come against it? Jesus! Who promised to be with us always and will never, ever leave us? Jesus!

The Christian life is not about performing better, trying harder, doing more, hoping it all pleases God. The Christian life is only about believing the promises of God, submitting and yielding to the presence and power of God within us and allowing Jesus to fulfill His mission in us and then through us. He is the vine, we are only the branches and we have nothing to do except hang on and stay connected! As branches, our fruit, our purpose, our life and our beauty all come from the vine. We have to let the vine feed us, nourish us and bring us life and hope – and we do this every single day.

That's why Jesus asks us to abide in Him. That means we draw near to Jesus and stay there. He didn't say, *"Visit me on Sundays and be somewhere else the rest of the week."* He said abide in me always. When we visit our Lord occasionally we lose connection to our life-source and our purpose. Abiding means continual fellowship. Jesus doesn't just get a look in on Sundays - it's all about Jesus every moment of every day. It's not all about Jesus in some abstract philosophical sense. If you are a believer; if you are born again; if you are a disciple of Christ, then your whole life is all about Jesus. Every waking moment is all about Jesus. Every activity of our lives only find their ultimate purpose and meaning in Jesus.

Not long before He was promoted to glory in February this year, someone asked Billy Graham what he would have done differently if he had his time over again. His response was fascinating. He said, *"I would not have travelled so much and I would have spent more time with Jesus."* What a powerful insight from one of the greatest preachers and ministers of our time. The Apostle Paul had that same singular focus on knowing Christ and being found in Christ because He knew better than anyone in His day that it's all about Jesus. When writing to his friends in Philippi, towards the very end of Paul's life - he said this:

"But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ - the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith. I want to know Christ ...!" (Phil. 3:7-10)

This is Paul, who met the Lord in that powerful encounter on the road to Damascus. This is Paul, who ended up writing almost half the New Testament. This is Paul, who preached Jesus, taught Jesus, healed in Jesus' name and spent his whole life bringing people to Jesus. Even at death's door with such a wonderful life and ministry behind him, Paul was still crying out to know Christ better and draw nearer to his Lord every day because Paul knew, better than any of us know, that it's all about Jesus. Paul really only had one sermon. He said, *"I preach Christ crucified."* There was nothing else for Paul to say. The message of the Gospel is Jesus because Jesus is the gospel. The way to freedom and fulfilment is Jesus, because Jesus is the Way. The way out of error and into truth is Jesus, because Jesus is the Truth. The way to heaven and eternal life with God is Jesus, because Jesus is the Life.

We live in a broken and dysfunctional world and yet this world is not our home. We are aliens and strangers in this place – pilgrims on a journey to our promised land – our eternal destination. We belong to Jesus. Our citizenship is in heaven and our experience of the kingdom of Heaven does not begin when we leave this earth, it begins when we die to our old life and are born again by Christ, in Christ and for Christ. We belong to Jesus.

One of the greatest healing ministers this world has known was the late Kathryn Kuhlman and she used to say all the time that there are millions of Christians who are going to get to heaven and be so shocked when they realise how much they missed out on back here and how much of heaven God meant for us to have in this life. I will also never forget how she ended every one her services throughout her long ministry. The last words she would speak in a service were always the same: *“Never forget to Whom you belong.”*

I grew up listening to preachers who only every preached about Jesus as Lord and us as His disciples, responding to His call to partner with Him in His mission to save the world and bring all of God’s children home. That preaching focussed on dying to self, living in Christ, serving the kingdom and sacrificing everything for the privilege of being called a competent minister of reconciliation. Today we hear so much noise from so many pulpits about what we can do with God’s help. Who we can become; what we can achieve; how much we can be blessed; and how much God will give us if we let Him. Nothing about suffering, sacrifice, submission or service. With too much preaching and Christian ministry now, it’s all about us and how great we can be with God’s help. Jesus is not presented as the Lord, as the author and finisher of our faith – Jesus is just our assistant in this self-help program we are all on. He’s like a personal trainer at the gym – He is there to help us and get us into shape so we look good and stay fit.

That’s not what Jesus preached. That’s not what Paul and the other Apostles preached. That’s not what the great revivalist preachers of old preached as God put a bomb under the Church and brought hundreds of thousands of people to faith. For those preachers it was always all about Jesus and only Jesus.

The message Jesus preached was unbelievably simple: *“Love me and follow me.”* His message was essentially the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. Jesus calls us to love the Lord with all our heart, soul, mind and strength and our neighbour as ourselves. Then that personal, intimate relationship with the Lord will empower us to make disciples of all nations, teaching them everything Jesus teaches us. It’s all about Jesus. It’s ALL about Jesus.

That is not the message emanating from so many pulpits today, but it’s the message we so desperately need to hear again – over and over and over again. We need the light of Christ to shine brightly within His Church once more. We need His awesome presence to be experienced every time we gather. We need to fix our eyes upon His kingly brightness so we then reflect Him to the world around us – so that, like Moses, our glowing faces reflect the Lord’s glory and light into the darkness of the world.

Friends, we only have one story and that’s the story of Jesus. Our lives need to tell that story and that story alone. When that happens, we will have people knocking down the doors to be in the presence of Jesus and His people. That is a promise!

Bring it on Lord, bring it on!