

THE FIRST 15

Friday, March 22, 2024

Today is Friday, March 22 and we are reading through the third chapter of the Gospel of John.

OPENING PRAYER

Blessed Lord God, thank you for the daily joy of reading scripture and spending time in prayer. Speak to me from the ancient words of John's Gospel and help me understand the message you have for me. Teach me to listen to your still small voice guiding me throughout my day. Amen.

SCRIPTURE

The one who comes from above is above all; the one who is from the earth belongs to the earth, and speaks as one from the earth. The one who comes from heaven is above all. He testifies to what he has seen and heard, but no one accepts his testimony. Whoever has accepted it has certified that God is truthful. For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit. The Father loves the Son and has placed everything in his hands. Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them. John 3:31-36

REFLECTION

Jesus is the one who came from heaven, from above. He speaks as someone who is from God and not someone who is from earth. He speaks the very words of God. John says Jesus is above all. He reigns. He is God's only beloved Son and God has placed everything in his hands. He is One with the Father and the Holy Spirit. John promises that whoever believes in Jesus will have eternal life. What is required? John 3:16 says, "For God so loved the world he gave his one and only son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life." Believing in Jesus is the key.

In a comparison study of various world religions, there are many different views of what happens to us after we die. Atheists believe there is nothing after death, our physical bodies decompose, that is all. Taoism says that at death we refer back to a state of non-existence. According to Buddhism, after death one is either reborn into another body, human or animal (reincarnated) or enters a transcendent state called nirvana. Only a very few have ever achieved nirvana. Hindus believe we are reincarnated continually to many different levels based on the way we conduct ourselves during our life. Islam teaches there will be a day of judgment when all humans will be divided between the eternal destinations of Paradise and Hell. Those who have done the will of Allah will attain paradise, those who have not will go to hell. In Judaism, the Torah and Talmud focus on the purpose of earthly life, which is to fulfill one's duties to God and one's fellow man. Succeeding at this brings reward, failing at it brings punishment.

So considering the wide variety of world religions what we have to look forward to after death are (1) nothingness, (2) reincarnation (returning again and again as animals, insects or people) or (3) judgment (eternal reward or punishment based completely on our actions and how we have lived our lives). What Christians believe in comparison is extraordinary. Any human is promised eternal life by merely believing in Jesus. No deeds or actions are required, all of that has been done for us through grace. All we need to do is believe that Jesus is the Son of God and we will be saved. Eternal life is ours.

Sound too good to be true? Do you wonder, what if there really is nothing but decomposing in the grave? What if I come back reincarnated as an insect? What if I'm judged by my actions and land in hell? Eternal life is promised by God - it is ours by believing in Jesus. We are promised eternal life through Jesus not because of what we have done, but because of what God has done for us. Sure, we don't deserve that - that is why it is called grace. Amazing grace!

Ask: Do I have assurance of my salvation in Jesus Christ and confidence in eternal life? If I think I can get to heaven on my own, why did Jesus die on the cross?

Pause and Pray

CLOSING PRAYER

Lord, Jesus, I believe you are God's Son sent into this world for my salvation. Thank you for loving me so much that you willingly sacrificed your life on the cross. I repent of all my sins and ask for your forgiveness. God's generous grace is amazing. I am grateful that my sorry soul could find redemption, reconciliation and everlasting life. Sanctify me in your love and enable me to grow in holiness. Amen.