

Bold Claims, Bolder Promises



TouchPoint 12

Ok, I'll admit that in our last conversation in TouchPoint 11, I came on pretty strong. I pressed you to consider making a decision to serve the Jesus that I have been introducing you to. The Bible drives the sense of urgency I have about pressing you on this because of some bold claims contained in it. This is so important that I am going to give you several texts to read. Some of them are words that Jesus spoke, others are words that his closest followers spoke about Him. After each text, write its essential thrust:

John 14:6 _____

1 John 5:12 _____

John 3:17-18 _____

John 10:7-10 _____

Acts 4:12 _____

I don't know if you were startled by the tenor of these words, but the Bible makes it very clear. Jesus is not just one way of getting into heaven, Jesus is the only way. Told you these were bold claims!

It would be arrogant for virtually anyone to say something like this – except for God. And remember, we have already seen that Jesus is indeed God. Though it is a bold claim, it does seem fair that God does have the

prerogative to define the pathway back to Himself. He has clearly spoken of the path. His name is Jesus.

I realize that in today's post-modern world it's not "proper" to make claims of exclusivity when it comes to truth. But here the Word of God leaves little room for negotiating.

Think back to TouchPoint 2 where we talked about the introduction of evil on planet earth. The essence of the serpent's temptation of Eve was to choose to believe that God's warning against eating of that fruit because death would come in its wake was not, after all, absolute. They bet their lives on it. They lost. When God makes a bold claim of truth, history always backs up God. In spite of the serpent's claim otherwise, what God said would happen did happen. Absolutely.

So I have made the personal decision to believe God has the right as ruler, creator, sustainer, and spiritual heart of the universe, to proclaim whatever He chooses to be truth. I have decided to believe that the path He has designated is indeed the path to life. Which brings me to the important things I want to say to you in this, our last TouchPoint.

**“They bet their lives on it.
They lost.”**

If you've taken some time to read in the Gospels, you may remember that Jesus talked a lot about the "kingdom of God" and "eternal life." As Jesus developed these themes in His life and teachings, we can begin to see that Jesus has a dual intent for following Him: it is to affect our lives today, and our lives later on. Jesus wants to become an intimate friend, savior, lord, and influence in your life right now. But He didn't go to all the trouble of coming down here and dying for us just so that we'd be impacted by it only while we live our few years on earth.

Jesus also came here to proclaim that when God fully has His way in our world, one day things will return to the state of innocence, loveliness, and purity that used to mark earth. He also wants to live with you face-to-face. Forever. Remember, sin is about separation. God is about reconciliation. And when that day comes, we'll be completely unencumbered by evil, evil people, decay, hatred, selfishness, and greed. Personally, I'm really looking forward to living without those things around!

One of the questions that's often asked about Jesus' way of doing things is,

“Well, if Jesus died on the cross to save us, why aren’t we in heaven right now?”

There’s a sort of divine calculus that’s not obvious until you really probe into spiritual matters a bit. Here’s what’s at play. The Father, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit, who together make up what we call the Godhead, made this argument at the cross of Jesus: God is love, God has taken the steps necessary to save mankind and allow us to be reunited with them, and we are invited to respond by giving our lives to them.

No other argument could be made that would make those facts any more clear than seeing the innocent Jesus hanging on a Roman cross, dying for you and for me.

And for awhile, and only for awhile, God will allow Satan – a.k.a. the devil, the enemy, the serpent, to make his best case, too. That’s why there’s still evil around. Actually, that’s why our world seems to keep getting worse and worse instead of better and better.

There’s a false notion being foisted on humanity these days that says we’re getting better and better and one day our world will reach some utopian state by the sheer advancement of our species. Nope. Don’t buy it. You know better anyway. 30 minutes watching CNN or on your favorite news web page and you’ll find all the evidence you need to see that we are getting anything but better.

It’s all because Satan still has permission to make his argument. But only for just a while longer. How much longer? I was afraid you’d ask me that. I’d love to tell you, I really would. But Jesus wouldn’t even tell His closest friends about that one. He did, however, give a parable to teach the lesson He wanted His people to learn. It was about an ancient practice surrounding a wedding. In Jesus’ day, weddings lasted a week!



The parable portrayed a wedding which was about to happen and the attendants were supposed to watch carefully for when the bride groom came to claim his bride. Turns out some of them were alert and watching, and others dozed. When the bride groom came, those who were watching were taken in to enjoy the wedding celebration, while the others slept right through it! When they realized what had passed them by, they banged on the door, but to no avail. Jesus ended His story by coming directly to the

point:

“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.” Matthew 25:13.

Jesus’ whole point in sharing this was to let them know that when He came was not the important thing to know. What was important was to just always be ready, so that whenever He comes, you will be there to greet Him.

“Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day...” to

According to the Bible, Jesus will return one day, and when he comes, it will be a big deal. The biggest thing since – well – actually there’s nothing to use here as a reference point because it will be bigger than anything that we’ve ever experienced! Look what Revelation 1:7 says about it: “He is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him...”

Talk about special effects! Jesus will come riding on the clouds, and it will grab the attention of every living person! Let me get even more graphic. Here are some words from Revelation 6, which depict what it will be like for many when he comes:

“...There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place.

“Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. They called to the mountains and the rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?’” Revelation 6:12-17.

What you are reading about here is the experience of those who have not chosen to follow Jesus. To them, this will be a horrific event. In that terrible moment they will remember the opportunities they had to choose to follow Jesus but didn’t. Instead, they are faced with the searing purity and holiness of Jesus coming in majesty and honor, no longer a sacrifice, but now as God enthroned on clouds brighter than an August day in Texas! Those who choose Jesus are

undone by the holiness of Jesus, so much so they'd rather have the rocks fall on them than face Jesus.

But for those who have loved Jesus and followed Him, this will be a day of joy and deliverance! No more will sin have any impact on your life! No more will you be tempted to hurt someone else or yourself. For on this day, Jesus will fully, finally, implement the full victory over death, evil, sin, and everything tainted by it that He won when He died for us.

Listen to how exciting it will be for God's people on that day:

“Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words.” 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

Notice what's completely missing. Fear. There's no dread for God's people. We will be caught up in the air along with Jesus. What a way to start forever!

I know this sounds good, but you still might be wondering why Jesus didn't just end things right after His resurrection 2000 years ago. Well first off, if He had done it that way, I wouldn't be writing this to you and you wouldn't be reading it! So His delay at destroying sin once and for all meant that you and I have been given the incredible gift of life.

But there's something else afoot that I've been stating as fact, but want you to see it from the Scripture for yourself. You read these words early on in our conversations together, but I want you to see something else in them today. They are some of the last words in Scripture, from Revelation 21:1-4:

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.

“And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.’”

I am so glad that God included words with the distinct aroma of finality: “There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain...” No more. Ever again.

Part of God’s great goal in His way of dealing with evil is to make sure that everyone alive in the universe is convinced beyond any doubt that sin is a bad deal. Evil will have proven itself so destructive and so repugnant that no one will ever again choose it. Ever.

That’s why God allows Satan a little time. Somehow, God will know when enough is enough, and then He will come and it will all be over for Satan and everyone who hasn’t chosen Jesus.

But that means that between now and then, there will be challenges to face. Some “Christians” (and I put that in quotes because their lives don’t back up their claim) will tell you that if you just follow Jesus’ life will suddenly become dreamy for you and everything will always turn out right like the end of every Lucy show on TV.

That’s not what the Scripture teaches. It’s pretty clear that God’s people are going to get caught in the crossfire of the battle God and Satan are fighting with each other. We’re going to get sick. We’ll go bankrupt. We’ll have disappointments and problems. Jesus said it Himself in John 16:33: “In this world you will have trouble.” He’s honest about that. But the verse doesn’t end there. Here’s the whole thing:

“In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.”



**“No matter what you face,
you will face ultimate victory...”**

Even when your life is still touched by evil, because of Jesus, you can rest in the knowledge that evil’s power over you is only temporary, because of what Jesus did on the cross for you. No

matter what you face, you will face ultimate victory because Jesus shares His life with those who choose Him.

The apostle Paul, the person responsible for most of the New Testament books, said something pretty incredible in Romans that should become the motto of every true believer.

“And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified.

“What, then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all-- how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things?

“Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? Christ Jesus, who died-- more than that, who was raised to life-- is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

“Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: ‘For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.’

“No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 8:28-39.

Told you it was incredible. Bold claims. And bolder promises. Promises meant for you.

Our conversations are finished, yours and mine. But if these bold promises have caught your imagination, the really important conversations, the ones between you and God, have just begun. He’s anxious to tell you how He can make a difference in your life now. And He wants to tell you that what He wants most of all is take you home to be with Him forever. I think that’s a conversation worth having. From the deepest place in my heart, I hope you do, too. •

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Questions

What bold claim does Jesus make about the manner in which we must gain entrance into heaven and eternal life? (it comes only through him)

Jesus has a dual intent for our following Him. What are the two elements of His intent? (to affect our lives today, and eternity)

Why is it that if Jesus has already died to save us that we are all not in heaven yet?

What permission has Satan been given for a little while? (to show His side of the argument)

What is more important than knowing when Jesus will come? (being ready for whenever it is)

According to Revelation 6, what will be the experience of those who do not choose Jesus on the day He comes back?

What will it be like for those who long for Jesus to return?

What will be completely missing in their experience? (fear)

How will we know that sin will never ever again be a problem?

Death, evil, pain, disillusionment, separation will not have the last word. God will one day destroy all who are evil, all that is evil, and we will never see a hint of it again after that. What words will you want to say to Jesus on the day that evil is finally destroyed?

Please send this answer sheet, either by e-mail or land mail

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