

After

Text: John 1:19-27; Acts 13:25; Proverbs 20:7

From our text, you noticed the word “after.” I have chosen this small, but significant, word to frame the message this morning. Jesus said in Matthew 7:13 and 14: “Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it.” As we travel through life we develop a philosophy of life. As we see in these words of our Lord, most people are on the wrong road - and traveling on the wrong road cultivates wrong philosophy. Philosophy is defined as a theory or attitude held by a person that acts as a guiding principle for behavior. The English word “philosophy” is not a translation; it is a transliteration of two Greek words, *philo*: “loving” plus *sophia*: “wisdom.” The apostle Paul wrote: “Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ” (Colossians 2:8). One who loves the wisdom of this world is not only traveling the wrong road, they are filled with vain and empty philosophy. Paul also said in I Corinthians 3:19, “For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness.” The man of the world is ruined by his own foolish philosophy. C. S. Lewis made two statements worth quoting that tie into our message: “If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world. If you live for the next world, you get this one in the deal; but if you live only for this world, you lose them both.”

If we love God and desire to walk in the wisdom of God, we need to adjust our lives in the understanding that we are heading toward “after.” Yes, there is an “after” awaiting all of us. This truth can lead us away from despondency to hope.

1. PRAYERS HAVE POWER AFTER OUR EXPECTATIONS HAVE FALLEN SHORT.

Acts 12:1-19

If I may say this reverently, this is one of the more humorous stories of the Bible. James had been martyred. When wicked King Herod saw that the death of James had pleased the unconverted Jewish people, he decided to go for the most visible representation of the Christian community, Peter. The Bible says in Acts 12:5, “Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.” God miraculously sent an angel to release Peter from the “death row” incarceration. Upon his release, Peter goes to Mary’s (John Mark’s mother) place. He knocked on the door and identified himself to the damsel who came to answer. Rhoda, recognizing Peter’s voice and without opening the door, ran back to the prayer meeting going on that very moment for Peter’s release and they told her, “...Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel” (Acts 12:15). They accused her of being haunted by Peter’s departed spirit. The next

verse says, "But Peter continued knocking: and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished" (Acts 12:16). God answered their prayer and they could not believe it!

Prayers are so powerful that heaven records them in golden vessels (Revelation 5:8; Revelation 8:3, 4). God makes record of every teardrop that has moistened your prayers (Psalm 56:8; Psalm 126:5, 6). With this knowledge of the heavenly linkage to prayers, let us take hope. Our prayers are effective even after this life. I often think of George Mueller who prayed fervently for people to be saved. His prayer list was found after he died and on that list were sixty-six men's names still on the list that had not been crossed off as an answer to prayer for salvation. This prayer list was saved and to God be the glory, in the twentieth year of Mueller's decease, all sixty-six names could be crossed off as answered! (Ephesians 3:20; Jeremiah 33:3).

2. THE BIBLE WORKS AFTER MY ARGUMENTS HAVE SEEMED TO FAIL.

II Timothy 2:9

Have you ever been exasperated when attempting to bring someone to Christ that you did not get through? Have you, in Christian love, attempted to show a wayward brother or sister in Christ the biblical pattern for life and been disappointed at your results? I am sure most who have served the Lord in any capacity for any length of time has been at that place. I am encouraged by Paul's lament, yet praise while he was yet imprisoned. He said in II Timothy 2:9: "Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds; but the word of God is not bound." He was bound, but the Word of God was not bound. We can be certain that Isaiah 55:11 shall be fulfilled: "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." Eighty-three years later Jeremiah gave an "Amen!" to what Isaiah previously wrote in Jeremiah 1:12: "Then said the LORD unto me, Thou hast well seen: for I will hasten my word to perform it."

When our reasonings and arguments miss the mark, God's Word will never fail. After we have "said our piece," the Bible will continue to talk, convict, convince and convert. Many years ago, an older friend of mine served in World War II. Fighting Nazis along beside him was a boyhood friend. After the war, they each furthered his education. My friend gave everything to Christ and became a preacher and went to Bible College. The other furthered his education in state education and became an agnostic. It had been a long time since they had talked and the agnostic invited his old friend to come over to his place with his wife for dinner. In the course of the long evening, my friend was asked pointed question after pointed question. When it was obvious that his arguments were going nowhere, he kept answering with one Bible verse, I John 5:12: "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." The preacher repeated this verse so much that finally his friend said, "Is that all you can say?" And then after hearing it so often, the agnostic quoted the Bible verse back to the preacher. Then the agnostic said, "Since that's all you're going to say, I'm going to wish you and your wife, goodnight." Three weeks later, after no contact with

one another, the agnostic called the preacher and said, "Will you please come over?" The preacher immediately came to the man's house. As soon as the door was open, the old friend said "For three weeks all I have been able to think about is, "He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life." The man was gloriously saved. It was not the clever argument of the preacher. It was the power of the Word of God. We may be bound literally or grammatically or logically - but the Bible is not bound!

3. OUR INFLUENCE LIVES AFTER OUR LIVES HAVE BEEN COMPLETED.

II Kings 13:21

This has to be one of the most unusual verses in the Bible. A man is being buried and the Bible went on to say, "...and they cast the man into the sepulchre of Elisha: and when the man was let down, and touched the bones of Elisha, he revived, and stood up on his feet." Although we are not undertaking a thorough discussion on this event, we can say this much, i.e., we still have influence beyond the grave. The point that should challenge all of us is what God says about those who died in Revelation 14:13c: "...they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them."

This past week, Lou Holtz was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by the President. In his acceptance remarks, Lou Holtz said, "The two most important days of your life are the day you were born; the other is the day you discover why you're born." I would say the most important day of your conscious life was the day you get saved by God's grace. It is, however very important to know why God placed you on the earth. Our Lord witnessed a good confession before Pontius Pilate (I Timothy 6:13) when He said in John 18:37B: "...To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world...." When we discover why God placed us here on this blue marble, let us do it. Our influence does not die with us.

Here's a word that I would like to say to parents – your kids are watching you. In order for us to do the right thing while our kids are watching, let us do the right thing when the kids are not watching; this is the essence of integrity. Dr. John Trainer said, "Children are not a distraction from more important work. They are the most important work." Proverbs 20:7: "The just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him." "After" will be here sooner than you think. And there is someone following you.

-Pastor Pope-