

prayers-greatest-miracle

brought to some individual's attention and we would like to do so today. Mr. Vargo died during the festival. He was here last weekend. It came as quite a surprise because we had also the opportunity for some of the brethren who were in the Pasadena area to meet on Monday and Wednesday and we were expecting him on one of those occasions for study and lunch and we were notified that he had in fact died most unexpectedly. To my knowledge, the funeral is to be Monday at noontime at Mountain View as a graveside. For those of you who would like more details, it's possible if you have not been in Pasadena, at least to take note that you must go up Fair Oaks Avenue north into the area of Altadena. You would just simply ask where Mountain View is. It's the only major cemetery and it will be to the east of Fair Oaks. I would like to mention that my wife and I have known the Vargo family for decades, long before they lived in the Pasadena area and we have appreciated their presence these years in our church fellowship. Mr. Vargo in fact talked at some length the last time we had the occasion here together and I would certainly say that his vigor, his zeal, his interest and warmth and friendship was quite apparent. God gave him a lifetime of experience to wrestle with the world, the devil and himself as we all do and when God is satisfied with the work that he has done in a human being, sometimes that work may be focused on what the individual himself is to be. Sometimes it may be focused on what the individual himself is to be and what he is also to do on behalf of others. Some have been called to be of public service and some of private service. So for those of you who might be able to come, please do so New Monday Mountain View and for those of you who know you will not be able, I would certainly suggest that you express your appreciation for the experiences you've had with the family if you know them. It's one of those historic moments in the life of a family where we for a long time work together, live together and suddenly the person in our presence is no longer with us. We have to face the fact that if we were all asked to be here next year and we plan to be here next year we wouldn't all be here because simply by the nature of human life there would be some who would have died in the meantime. So help us also to encourage one another to live day by day and we thank Mrs. Vargo as the matriarch of the family for the work that she's done to take care of the family needs and bring those at some distance to come here in Southern California. My wife and I would publicly extend our best wishes to Mrs. Vargo and the rest of the family and we thank you for your presence here today.

There were a number of topics that were presented to those who would be invited to speak at the major festivals and those same topics were given to those who would meet locally as well up to our choice. After certain topics had been chosen I thought the last one for this festival, seeing what Mr. Ames would be addressing would perhaps be expressed best in a title, Prayer's Greatest Miracle, which is so general that you'd have to come here to know what the problem might be that you prayed about or that someone else prayed about.

I'd like to focus on a very short quote of a prayer that I think might astonish us if we note the time we are here and what it was that a certain person, Jesus of Nazareth, prayed when he was crucified. This is found in Luke chapter 23 verse 34.

Then said Jesus after the two malefactors had also been crucified.

You will read that in verses 32 and 33.

In the presence of his critics, in the presence of some friends, the women came there, his disciples had gone, they had fled. Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.

That's a very simple prayer. Perhaps many of us would have fewer problems if we were to incorporate the thoughts of this simple prayer. Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do. Because of what the Father was asked and what Jesus did, we have an implication here for all of mankind. There were those who were willing to listen to Jesus, those who were his critics, those who had paid no attention to him.

But he asks here without addressing anyone in particular, in a sense to take those who were in his presence and who had been involved in this punishment for crime as it would clearly have been seen, to use those as symbols for the human family. Forgive because they don't know what they do.

This is very important if you remember what you heard as a part of the previous sermon.

There are those who know what they do and there are those who know what they do but don't know what they do even while they do it. Because they know they're doing it but don't know what it means to know what it means to do it. Many years ago, this topic was discussed by the pastor general, the difference between willingly, let's say, to sin willingly and to sin willfully.

Adam knew what he was doing but he didn't really know what he was doing because after he did what he did, he perceived himself differently. Adam did not willfully do what he did but he willingly did what he did. Many, many people willingly do what they do.

There are only a few who willfully do what they do. Now willfulness is a very important distinction because Jesus said in one case that a certain person was not far from the kingdom of God and he said in another case, in speaking to certain religious leaders, how can you escape Gehenna fire, thinking and doing the things they were doing? If the natural man or woman willfully does, knowingly does, having been taught things but never having experienced the possibility of forgiveness. People such as that have to face themselves. It's much easier to repent of that which you willingly did but didn't willfully do in an attitude of rebellion. It is more difficult to knowingly do what you do and that's why Jesus expressed the concerns that he did with respect to the religious leaders of his day.

He said to the woman who was taken in adultery in the very act, one should ask why they didn't take the man. He said to her, go and sin no more like that. That's the emphasis of the Greek.

So there were people in Jesus' lifetime who well knew what their conduct was like and received forgiveness as their spirit of repentance was apparent.

But when you begin to get into the habit of wilfulness, then you deal with a different kind of problem. You establish a habit that is much more difficult to break. And so it is very important that we learn the significance of the habits we form.

Jesus Christ, king of kings and lord of lords, the one who was promised as the savior of mankind to come to confirm the promises made to Abraham which he has not yet inherited as an heir of the world and eternal life. This one also came to give sight to the blind figuratively as well as literally. And for those who were blind but who recognized that they had sinned as a result of the light of his discussion to grant them forgiveness.

He came to save those who were lost. He came to save those who knew that they had sinned but who didn't really understand it before. He did not come to heal those who knew they were whole or who knew that they see. Jesus said to them, your sin remains. Yet he died for all.

So we need to realize how important it is to examine ourselves and to know the habits that we form. And as we look at ourselves, as we wrestle with ourselves and with the world and with the devil, that

we remember what Jesus said elsewhere in a prayer that is a kind of standard. This prayer we all had some knowledge of in growing up within the Christian realm.

Forgive us as we forgive those who trespass against us. There are other translations but the perspective is the same. Jesus asked, he who was without sinned that God would forgive those who were putting him to death. God in fact came to address us and his mind came to be manifest.

His wisdom, his will, his spirit was manifest to us. God was manifest as a human being.

And that human being behaved as a son and voluntarily died to pay for the sins of the world.

John makes quite clear it's the whole world. But it does involve repentance. Jesus' message was very clear. If you want to partake of a new covenant arrangement distinct from that which had been made with the children of Israel at Sinai, you must repent, believe, and be baptized.

That is, you must acknowledge whether you did things in ignorance, didn't even realize what was happening as some people who lose their temper, did things knowing what you were doing but not understanding what you were doing, doing things you understood willingly but not willfully hate, out of spite and hate, and then doing those things which you know better and willfully do it because of hate. It is a far greater problem to wrestle with some than others, some kinds of sin. And the sin is not so much in the deed itself, the sin is in the attitude with which such misdeeds are committed. I think we haven't taken quite a look at this in terms of the whole world around us, because whether we fully understand it or not, whether the Church wishes fully to address it or not, the Church would prefer at this moment to focus on those things which the Christian community holds in common. In the one thing, the Christian community does not hold in common is what Christ is going to do to save this wicked world after he returns, both as to the time of his kingdom and the nature of his kingdom.

This is where today you will have to read on your own to know what the Scripture says in old and New Testament and to know how you're going to give an account to God with respect to what you teach your children and how you explain the Church. For the Church does not now officially teach a clarification of what it means to live and reign with Christ a thousand years.

I think you should know it. It does not clarify the question, because it is not one of the basic five or six or seven or eight or whatever doctrines as to how God is going to deal with the unsaved, as we call them, in the world who have never heard or who have heard and never understood, or didn't hear clearly and only understood in part.

How you will live and reign with Christ, you will have to examine yourself.

You will become responsible for the Word of God. You have the Bible in your possession.

What you choose to do with it, what you choose to think about, is now your responsibility, for the Church does not choose to magnify and make fundamental the distinction of the faith of this fellowship on the basis of anything beyond that which, in principle, the evangelical communities, whether Catholic, Orthodox, or Protestant, accept. And I am speaking plainly so you know, because some of you don't know and think the teachers today in the Church teach the same thing that you may be thinking. If this is new to your ears, unplug them.

If this is new to your eyes when you read our literature, learn to anoint your eyes to see.

Jesus prayed that there were those who might be forgiven, and he died for the whole world, the sins of the world. In fact, it's in the singular meaning collective, the sin of the world. There is not a sin

that human beings in general commit that cannot be forgiven. We're not talking about the question of a relationship to blasphemy.

But in terms of moral principles, Christ died, and he rose again, and he ascended to heaven, provided by petitioning the Father that the Holy Spirit should be sent to those who repent, believe, and are baptized. And he acts today as our advocate. To be an advocate in a sense is to say that when you come to God in prayer and ask Him to forgive you as you forgive others, you are even now appearing before the judgment seat of Christ, because God is the judge. He is the Father. The devil is the accuser of the brother and now, not just in the future. And Jesus Christ is your advocate now, and your sins can be forgiven now and blotted out, and you do not have to give an account of them at any other time in the future, going all over your life once more. But you have a privilege, not everyone here, because we don't all understand equally, but we have a privilege to participate in the first resurrection, to bring the knowledge of God to those who do not participate in that first resurrection.

Now, the Bible describes that there is coming a time when the rest of the dead will live, but the rest of the dead do not live beginning at the same time that the first resurrection occurs.

You can read that in Revelation 20.

However you choose to define the time duration, which the church does not now define, the fact remains the first resurrection is a resurrection to life, of those who are part of the bride of Christ, who will be married to him as they are a fiance today. The Hebrew marriages had two parts, ours due today, but it was different. The first part was legally binding, and if not carried through with the second required a divorce. Today we may be engaged, that is not legally binding, though it can get some of you into legal trouble, but nevertheless, when the second is complete in our society, and there is a problem, a divorce would be required, but we are going to be married to Christ, those who are in the first resurrection, who have received the Spirit of God. And when the bride says, come, we are going to be participants in bringing spiritual understanding to others.

There is not just a resurrection, one only at the last day.

You see, the world has many ideas, and I am not persuaded that the world shares these ideas equally, that is why it is not one of the major concepts in evangelical Christianity.

For the majority of Christians, listen carefully, do not believe that the majority of Christians who have died are in heaven. The majority of Christians believe that there is an intermediate state, for the majority do acknowledge purgatory, not the minority, let's face it. And therefore, there is no consistent view between Catholic, Protestant, and Orthodox in what stands spiritual truth yet to come to repentance, to believe, and to acknowledge what baptism should teach us that we acknowledge that we should die symbolically by burial in water, that we might rise up in newness of life and receive the Spirit of God. It is our privilege at this festival in focusing on salvation to understand in measure what it means the world of the Christians, the world of the non-Christians, are confused on this matter. There are Jews, Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, Taoists, Confucianists, atheists, and many other smaller groups I need name with different aspects in their teaching about salvation.

How we know what salvation is should be made clear when Paul said salvation has been handed down, a knowledge of it has been handed down by the Jews. Salvation is of the Jews because it is revealed in Scripture and they were the preservers of Scripture. When they chose not to accept a Messiah, they were privileged to make that choice. They also cut themselves off for any further

revelation which came to be preserved by the New Testament church in Greek. And so this church has both the Hebrew Scriptures and the New to clarify salvation. And Christ is going to come to reveal salvation to Judah and to Levi, to the house of David, to the house of Israel, and to the Gentiles who do not now know. You have a knowledge from what you have heard of your personal salvation, how you handle yourself with respect to the responsibility that can be yours after Jesus Christ returns, and what you will be willing to do when Christ meets you.

You better get acquainted with how you look at the revelation of God through Paul's epistles, James, Peter, John, Jude. And if you don't think Paul wrote Hebrews, we'll just say the writer of Hebrews and Matthew, Mark, and Luke. And the prophets, they all speak not only of salvation of this time, but of salvation to come, and how that world should live, of which Jesus spoke when he said, my kingdom is not of this world, it is of one yet to come.

You have a responsibility. There were many, I do not know anything about percentages, but there were many who focused on what Christians, as they might have perceived it, should do to the point they forgot what Christ did. There are those in this world who have so focused on what Christ did that they don't know what you should do with respect to bringing salvation to the nations after Christ returns. For they have never heard of such a thing, having believed in the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, where you will have gone to heaven or to hell or some intermediate place.

And why, having been to these places, you must now return in some way to a judgment seat and discover whether it was the right decision or not. How would you like to discover yourself now in a body at that resurrection, at the judgment, if you've already been in heaven as a saint or in hell? Think about the confusion in this world with respect to the concept of salvation and judgment.

That is, if I must have, which I must have, and you must have, a personal knowledge and relationship with God as Father and Jesus Christ. And if salvation is not possible without that, and Abraham saw the Messiah's day and believed in it, and he had a working relationship, a knowledge through faith of the mind of God, that there was a whole world in his day that didn't, and there's a whole world out there in our day that doesn't even accept the name of Christianity.

They must yet discover a working relationship with Jesus Christ. They must yet discover as the house of Judah must yet discover a working understanding. That is something that really works for you because God can work in you through his spirit so that he can accomplish in you through faith and mercy and your forgiveness of others.

So you come to know God and Jesus Christ as Moses came to know and as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob did, but there are millions, billions, some three and a half out there who have now no such relationship and will be dead before this century or the next century is over without ever having discovered it.

And if we must have this spiritual relationship, so must they. If they can be saved without it and suddenly discover themselves in heaven, then you can too, and that's not possible.

Because the scripture makes clear that we must have such a relationship, and we must receive the spirit of God and be willing to forgive others as God is willing through Jesus Christ to forgive us.

Think about this with respect to the Christian communities in Rwanda, Burundi, in Christian and Muslim communities, the dominant ones in Bosnia.

Think about the spirit of forgiveness that yet has to be reflected even within the Christian world, for it was not Islam that began World War I, and it wasn't Hinduism that began World War II.

Surely something major has been missing in the Christian world to have ever had a Christian power that is represented in Europe, become so divided that the British, not uncommonly and wisely, would say that World War I and World War II were two European Christian civil wars.

I add the word Christian, which most don't discuss, but it was Christian nations warring against one another, Christian empires earlier warring against one another. What had they not learned that they did this? Who could not forgive one another? They had not learned that this whole world groans in travail, the whole of creation waiting for the manifestation of the sons of God, as Paul tells the Romans, speaking Greek, Latin, Aramaic. Do we believe, do we really understand that our calling is very significant with respect to the fact that we are going to be manifest as the children of God to straighten out a world that without the kingdom or government of God ruling the nations, we would be living in the same kind of crisis as we faced from the time that Christianity came to be the power of the Roman Empire. Then we had wars between Christian states and the Holy Roman Empire, the wars between the Christian British Empire and the French Christian Empire, shall we call it? Somehow we leave religion out because secularists don't care. And those who have religion at heart seem not to understand what went wrong with the human heart.

Conversion is more than just believing. It must be expressed by the Spirit of God in you.

Which enables the Father and the Son to live in you. That is, Christ lives his life in you willingly on your part and his part. And how he lives it would clearly indicate, if you read the Bible, that historic Christianity with the knowledge of all the truths it may have had somehow failed to let Christ live in this fellowship to be a light to the other religions of the world.

You need to know what it's like to live as a Muslim, a Hindu, a Buddhist, Confucianist, Taoist, whatever and stand and look at the history of Christianity as professed by the nations that have it. And if you want to know why today there are still 3.6 billion who have not accepted Christianity, you will understand it much better when you see what Christians have done to themselves over time. I'm speaking plainly here in a way we wouldn't dare to speak even in the plain truth because the world and its leaders in our West is not prepared to accept this reality. It is not prepared to accept it. And only when we are able to forgive one another and forgive other religions attacks on us, speaking of the Christian world, and forgive what we did to one another, then and then only. Will Christianity have the kind of meaning that it will have when Christ returns? When people will see who it is who is in the first resurrection and will see what their purpose is when Messiah reigns, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Do you know what that means when you pray? And if you do, and I hope you do, you will be letting Christ live in you and your light will shine in the eyes of those who have never seen it before. See they will, a new kind of Christianity such as the nations of the West where Christians are politically dominant and I will not exclude from that Africa where there are Christian nations and South America is a part of the West.

They will see an entirely different perspective and the Jews will see the Messiah and accept him.

They must learn to forgive.

The Muslims must learn to forgive. The Buddhists must yet discover God for they have only a great teacher.

And the Christians will have to give an answer for why they lived as they did and answer to the whole world for they've had the opportunity now for some 19 centuries and the history book judges it.

It is time that we take seriously what it's like to enter a new millennium as humans measured time with 2001 in January for this millennium as humans measured time will be over with the year 2000

December 31. Yes I have every reason to think this work will continue. Into that millennium it will be very important to see how we conduct ourselves as a group and how the Christian world conducts itself because we should be the light of the world and the world has not beheld much light from the Christian West.

That's the great tragedy that we have to in part undo when Christ returns to reign over the nations bring the world peace and through the bride the wife in a new covenant relationship we will all be teachers and the world will beat its swords any other instruments into instruments of productivity instead of war.

But Jesus of course knew this world would be like it. He said my kingdom is not of this world.

If my kingdom were of this world my servants would fight because this world is still the world over which the devil has reigned ever since he has gotten possession of the human family when Adam surrendered to him and did his will instead of doing the Lord's will.

I want to thank all of those who were responsible for the studies in midweek and all of you who have come early and stay late when we meet here for probably one of the highest standards of any of the local sites.

I don't know what the others are like I trust they are equal but it is my judgment that they would have to work to reach the same standard of quality and concern that has been expressed here by the men and the women and the children who serve.

I want to extend my appreciation to Mr. Ames for asking me also to speak.

We have known each other many years.

I stand behind him I told him because we wanted to come over here when he did.

He said he stands behind me too.

Let's all do that to one another.