

The Message Hasn't Changed

THE RELIGIOUS VIEWS OF ONE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

We all know that the race for the 2008 Presidential Elections is heating up. There are many politicians, both Democrat and Republican, vying for the hearts and minds of our citizens. But arguably no one has caused more of a stir than Illinois Senator Barack Obama. He is a highly respected and educated man with a diverse background. His father was a black African and his mother was a white Midwesterner. His grandfather and stepfather were Moslems and His mom came from Christian parents. As a result, he is thought by many to be one who can build bridges and bring people together.

But what does Senator Obama believe concerning his own faith? Obama claims to be a Christian. In fact, on one Sunday morning in 1988, he said he walked down aisle of his church, Chicago's Trinity United Church of Christ, during an altar call by the pastor, Jeremiah Wright.

In an interview with journalist Cathleen Falsini, Senator Obama stated that he has a deep faith *"...rooted in the Christian tradition."* He added, *"I believe that there are many paths to the same place, and that is a belief that there is a higher power, a belief that we are connected as a people, that there are values that transcend race or culture, that move us forward, and that there's an obligation for all of us individually as well as collectively to take responsibility to make those values lived."* He said his mother *"...was a deeply spiritual person and would spend a lot of time talking about values and give me books about the world's religions and talk to me about them. Her view always was that underlying these religions was a common set of beliefs about how you treat other people and how you aspire to act, not just for yourself but also for the greater good."* He also told Falsini, *"Alongside my own deep personal faith, I am a follower, as well, of our civic religion. I am a big believer in the separation of church and state. I am a big believer in our constitutional structure."* Regarding his conversion experience, Obama said, *"It wasn't an epiphany. It was much more of a gradual process for me. I know there are some people who fall out. Which is wonderful. God bless them. For me, I think it was just a moment to certify or publicly affirm a growing faith in me."*

In the same interview he also said that he reads the Bible, although not as much as he wants to, and that prayer is a part of his daily life but not in the formal sense. Obama says, *"I think I have an ongoing conversation with God. Throughout the day I'm constantly asking myself questions about what I'm doing, why I am doing it,"* he said. *"The difficult thing about any religion, including Christianity, is that at some level there is a call to evangelize and proselytize. There's the belief, certainly in some quarters, that if people haven't embraced Jesus Christ as their personal savior, they're going to hell."*

Falsani said Obama did not believe that he or anyone else was going to hell and that he wasn't sure he was going to heaven either. *"What I believe in is that if I live my life as well as I can, that I will be rewarded. I don't presume to have knowledge of what happens after I die. But I feel very strongly that whether the reward is in the here and now or in the hereafter, aligning myself to my faith and values is a good thing."*

A POPULAR MESSAGE OF OUR SOCIETY

Now why spend time looking at Senator Obama’s religious views? Certainly it’s important to know what our presidential candidates believe about faith and religion. But it is Obama’s view that reflects what many believe today in our nation. And it’s not just a view, it’s a message. You’ll find this message not only in universities and in government and even on the street, but you will also find it in many churches. And the message is this: there is a God or a higher power, and there are certain values and principles that transcend race and culture. We are called to be good and to do our best and we will be rewarded somehow. There may be a heaven but there is no hell. And the path that we can take varies, because there are many ways to the same place (ie. Heaven) or to the Higher Power.

This, my friends, is the message of our day. It’s very popular and it’s a very appealing. But it’s a lie. It is not the Christian message, it’s a counterfeit message. We are told in the Bible that Satan comes even as an angel of light (**2 Cor. 11:14**). Satan is the deceiver. And this is one of his greatest deceptions. A deception that says everything is ok. Just do the best you can. You can’t understand the truth about life and death. We can’t understand the reason for life, so just go ahead do the best you can and let the chips fall where they may.

And so Jesus is not the God whom we worship, He is an ideal, a figure we follow by example. Jesus is not coming back to judge the world. There is no final judgment, but simply He is there to lead us to our own Christ consciousness. Rather than talking about God as a personal being who loves us and to whom we are held accountable, we talk about our own faith and spiritual journeys and becoming a whole person. Your way, my way, it s all ok. We are all evolving into something better. We really don’t know what that is, but we move forward nonetheless.

SAME MESSAGE, DIFFERENT TIME

Well, as you might suspect, this has nothing to do with the message of God’s Word. In fact, it is completely contrary to the truth of the Gospel. What is the Gospel? It is the Good News of Jesus Christ. And the Good News of Jesus Christ is upheld by both the Old and New Testaments. The truth is the message of the Gospel, the message of the Good News of Jesus Christ is the same today as it was 2000 years ago. It has not changed. And it will not change.

And there are four reasons why it will not change. Please turn with me to **Acts 13:13-52**.

Paul is on his first missionary journey. He is in the Roman province of Galatia which is in modern day Turkey. He is preaching with Barnabas in Antioch of Pisidia and they begin sharing the Gospel in a synagogue. **Read Acts 13:13-35.**

GOD DOES NOT CHANGE

The first thing we learn from this passage is that God has not changed. God has a plan. And He has not veered from this plan. His plan is to save mankind. And He does it through mankind. Note how the Apostle Paul highlights God’s involvement with His people. He refers to the Hebrew Scriptures - our present day Old Testament and how they bear witness of the promised Messiah of Israel. Paul then tells how Jesus is the Messiah who has been sent to save mankind. Note what Paul says – Jesus was crucified, He died, was buried, rose again and was seen by many witnesses. Paul cites three Old Testament passages to show how this was indeed God’s plan – **Ps. 2:7 (Acts 13:33); Is. 55:3(Acts 13:34);Ps. 16:10**

(Acts 13:35) and alludes to a fourth (2 Sam. 7:6-16) in showing that God’s promise to King David that His throne would be forever was fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

God’s promises are found in His Son, Jesus Christ. We are told in Heb. 13:8 that Jesus is the same yesterday, today and tomorrow. Jesus does not change. Why? Jesus is God. The message has not changed because God has not changed. By why else?

THE REQUIREMENTS HAVE NOT CHANGED

Second, the message has not changed because the requirements have not changed.

Note what Paul tells the people in Acts 13:39: *“By this Jesus everyone who believes is set free from all those sins from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses.”* Jesus said in Jn. 8:32-36, *“If you continue in My Word, you are truly my disciples and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free. Very truly everyone who commits sin is a slave to sin. The slave does not have a permanent place in the household; the son has a place there forever. So if the Son makes you free, you will be free indeed.”* We need to be set free from sin. Why? Sin alienates us from God and the more we sin, the more we become enslaved to sin, to the point where there is no escape unless we turn to the Lord and His provision for sin – Jesus Christ.

THE CONSEQUENCES HAVE NOT CHANGED

Third, the message has not changed because the consequences have not changed.

In Acts 13:41, Paul quotes Hab. 1:5 as a warning to those who would not believe: *“Look you scoffers! Be amazed and perish, for in your days I am doing a work, a work that you will never believe, even if someone tells you.”*

Paul not only warns those who would not believe but then on the next Sabbath, he warns the Jews who reject his message, *“It was necessary that the word of God should be spoken first to you. Since you reject it and judge yourselves to be unworthy of eternal, we are now turning to the Gentiles”* and Paul quotes Is. 49:6: *“I have set you to be a light for the Gentiles, so that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.”* For those Gentile believers we are told by Luke that *“As many had been destined for eternal life became believers.”* So the consequences are still the same for all – both Jew and Gentile. If you turn to God in Christ you have eternal life. If you reject Christ, you are guilty and face eternal damnation.

PEOPLE’S NEED FOR A SAVIOR HAS NOT CHANGED

Finally, we find that people have not changed. Whether they were Jewish or Gentile, rich or poor, prominent or not so prominent, there was a great interest in what Paul and Barnabas had to say. People are the same at heart no matter where they’re from, where they live, or who their parents are. There is a great spiritual hunger in most people. That’s why wherever you go in this world, you will find people worshipping someone or something. In fact, we read in Acts 13:44 that almost the whole city gathered to hear the word of the Lord.

And when told the Gospel many believed, but many also did not believe. Some even committed blasphemy (Acts 13:45). Why? By rejecting Christ they were rejecting God. They were scoffing at the

very one who made them. That’s an example of blasphemy. And just as people rejected the Gospel 2000 years ago, so too, do they today. As the Lord says in **Jeremiah 17:9**: *“The heart of man is deceitful above all else, it is perverse, who can know it?”*

But notice what happens when we do believe? Notice what happens when we do follow and trust the Lord? We will be filled *with joy and with the Holy Spirit (Acts 13:52)*. Do you want to have the joy of the Lord? Do you want to be filled with the Spirit of God? Then do what God says.

REMEMBERING TROOPER BRINKERHOFF

Last Friday, I had the opportunity to attend the memorial service for New York State Trooper, David Brinkerhoff at the Wesleyan Church of Hamburg. It was a moving tribute to David’s service and faith. David was killed in the line of duty almost two weeks ago. David not only was a dedicated servant of our state and faithful husband, friend and family member, he was a believer in our Lord Jesus Christ.

As many of you know, David’s father, Roy Brinkerhoff, is a member of our parish. He wrote these words in memory of David. They were printed in this past Saturday’s edition of the *Buffalo News*. I would like to read them now:

“As I look out and see all of David’s family, friends, fellow officers from near and far, and dignitaries, I am awed as to how many lives David has touched in his short period of time on this earth. David my be gone now in body, but I know that he is not alone. He is in Heaven now with the Lord our Savior, Jesus Christ. I can picture David up in Heaven with his Grandpa Brinkerhoff, who loved him to bits, constructing some massive toy train layout or helping him design a new dock extending out into Lake Erie. If you knew my father you would understand.

“As to the reason and horrific outcome of this tragedy, I do forgive. I know in my heart that David would want all of us to forgive. If the shoe were on the other foot, we also would pray for forgiveness. With the Lord’s help and guidance we must now move on as David would want us to do. David, you’ve been an outstanding and loving son to both your mother and me, husband to Barbara, father to Isabella, and friend to all the people you have touched. Until we meet again, may the Lord bless you and keep you. We will never forget you, David, you are my hero.”

David’s father could say such words, because the message of the Gospel has not changed. The message of the Gospel has not changed because God has not changed. And because God has not changed we can be confident that not only does He love us and forgive us, but He goes to prepare a place in heaven for us.

So in this world of change, may we look to the One who does not change, the One who is the same yesterday today and tomorrow – our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ! In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, AMEN!