

INTRODUCTION

What ever happened to the English language? Words no longer mean what they once did. I can remember a time when somebody could say, “Today is a wonderful day. I feel so happy and gay!” Oops. There goes that word. Computers have changed everything—even the meaning of words. One of the reasons we have trouble communicating with the kids these days is because anyone my age speaks a different language. For instance, when I was growing up, a keyboard was the wooden board with cup hooks where my dad hung the keys to his pickup and my mom hung the keys to her Rambler. Today the kids can tell you a keyboard is a user interface device.

When I was a kid, a cursor was the mean guy down the street who used to yell at us when we rode our bikes through his yard. Today’s kids know it’s the little blinking icon on the screen. Internet? That was where Mabel, the lunchroom lady, kept her hair—internet. Today, kids connect with millions of computer through the internet.

Any cyber kid can tell you a URL is a Uniform Resource Locator. When I grew up, URL was the kid who played third base on my Little League Team: Earl Dukes. A browser was someone like Mabel who’d go into a store and just look around without shopping. Today it’s a program to link you to the internet. A hard drive used to be a trip to Mobile on two lane roads when it was raining. Today’s kids will tell you it’s a device to store their data, and it’d better have about 40 gigs—and gigs aren’t for flounders any more!

I can remember when cookies were the round sweet treats Mabel used to serve in the cafeteria; Computer kids can tell you cookies are frequently visited websites. A chat room was what my mother called the beauty parlor where she had her hair done every week—today it’s where folks go for a real-time IM communication experience with people all over the globe. (and IM doesn’t even mean “I’m” anymore).

Modem? That’s what we did to the yard when the grass got high. And any kid can tell you a search engine is a program to link you to other links. When I was a kid I worked at a Gulf Oil service station (we only offered full service) and a search engine was what I did the first time I tried to check the oil in a VW Beetle and I opened the hood in the front!

That brings me to my point. For most of the history of the English language a thumbnail was the hard covering at the end of your fattest finger, but today it means something else. You can look up the word “thumbnails” in the dictionary and find this definition: “A reduced image of a graphic used in order to view multiple images on a screen simultaneously.”

Thumbnails are small images that share a screen so you can study them. I want to use this idea today as we talk about Thumbnails of Truth. In the passage we’re about to read, there are four tremendous doctrinal truths. Each one of them could be the basis of an entire series of messages. But in this message, I’m going to reduce them down into thumbnails. I’m just going to give a brief scan of each one so we can see where they apply to our lives.

See if you can identify the four thumbnails of truth as we read them in I Peter 3:17-22:

It is better if it is God’s will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with angels, authorities, and powers in submission to him.

Each of these four truths is so large it would be difficult to exhaust them. So instead, let’s look at them as thumbnails of truth, so listen quickly!

1. SALVATION TRUTH: JESUS DIED TO BRING US TO GOD

vs. 18 For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God.

Our sin has created a huge chasm between us and God. We need someone who is perfectly sinless to bring us to God. That’s what Jesus did when He died on the cross. He was perfectly righteous and we are perfectly flawed. In dying, He brought us to God.

I was talking to man once about how Jesus is the only way to heaven and he disagreed. He said, “I used to live in Manhattan and there are five or six different bridges that you can take to get onto Manhattan. He said he believed there were many bridges to reach God, and Jesus was only one. That sounds logical, but the Bible says in I Timothy 2:5-6: “For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ, who gave himself as a ransom for all men.” There is only one bridge to God, and that is through the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ. I could talk about the cross for months, but that’s a thumbnail of truth.

2. DECLARATION TRUTH: JESUS PREACHED IN PRISON.

vs. 19-20: he went and preached to the spirits in prison who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah.

I’ll take a little more time with this thumbnail of truth because it may be new to you.

I grew up going to a Baptist Church. When I was in the seventh or eighth grade, a new Methodist Preacher moved to town and he had a son my age, named Bubba. Bubba Hill was the Bubba I’d ever met and I thought it was the neatest name on earth. Bubba and I became good friends and started spending time at each other’s homes. One Sunday I went to Bubba’s church. I’d never been to a Methodist church, but it was pretty cool, even though they had the pulpit in the wrong place. I recognized some of the music, but then at one part in the service everyone stood and read something out of the bulletin called “the Apostle’s Creed.” It was the first time I’d ever heard of it. Of course, since that time, I know it is a statement of faith dating back to about 500 years after Jesus. It reads: “I believe in God the Father Almighty; Maker of Heaven and Earth; and in Jesus Christ His only (begotten) Son our Lord; who was conceived by the Holy Ghost, born of the

Virgin Mary; suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried; He descended into hell; the third day He rose from the dead; He ascended into heaven; and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty; from thence He shall come to judge the quick and the dead. I believe in the Holy Ghost; the holy catholic church; the communion of saints; the forgiveness of sins; the resurrection of the body; and the life everlasting. Amen.”

I was already a Christian, but after we read the creed in church, there were two things in it that surprised me so I asked Bubba’s dad about them at lunch. I said, “I thought this was a Methodist church, but ya’ll said something about being the holy catholic church.” He settled it for me by explaining that the word “catholic” with a small “c” means all Christians, but that Roman Catholics (capital “C”) were a different group.

But then I asked him what that part was about Jesus going to hell, and I’ll never forget his answer. As I recall, he said something like, “I’m not completely sure about that myself, and nobody really knows, so don’t worry about it.” I remember thinking, “Wow, I thought preachers were supposed to know *everything* about the Bible!” Then I thought, “That just must be Baptist preachers that know everything.”

But I’ve since learned to say, “I don’t know.” Brother Hill wasn’t just copping out. There is a great deal of disagreement about what I Peter 3:19 is describing. Even Martin Luther wrote about it: “This is a strange text and certainly a more obscure passage than any other passage in the New Testament. I still do not know for sure what the apostle means.”

There are six or seven different interpretations about this. Some say it means Jesus went to hell to preach to lost sinners to give them a second chance. Others suggest Jesus went to hell to preach to all the people who lived before Noah. Still others claim Jesus went to paradise and announced victory and then took all the Old Testament saints to heaven. The list of possible meanings go on and on.

The Apostle’s Creed isn’t the Bible, so just because that statement is there doesn’t mean it is truth. The Bible never teaches Jesus went to hell; hell being the place of eternal punishment. I believe it is talking about something that happened in the time of Noah. Genesis 6 teaches there were “Sons of God” on earth at that time, which I believe were angels. These angels committed wicked sins and were sent to a place called Tartarus, which is a word for prison. After the cross, and before the resurrection, the Spirit of Jesus visited this prison and preached to these spirits. He didn’t preach the good news to them. The word for “preach” here means to announce judgement. It’s like a judge preaching to a convicted murderer. Jesus was announcing their eternal sentence.

Dr. Stan Toussaint, who was the Chairman of the Bible Department at Dallas Theological Seminary for many years, is my friend. He and Maxine retired to East Texas and were a part of our congregation for several years before he moved back to Dallas to resume teaching. I emailed him not long ago and asked his opinion on this verse. He wrote back confirming my interpretation. I could say he agreed with me, but it’s more truthful to say I agree with him. He wrote: “I am quite convinced that 1 Peter 3:19-20 refers to the Lord’s proclamation to the angels who sinned in Genesis 6 who are in Tartarus. This view is supported by Peter’s reference to

angels in II Peter 2:4: “God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to Tartarus, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgement.” I believe the point of the passage is that Christ humbled himself in suffering unjustly and was exalted for this above all principalities and powers. “

That’s a pretty weighty truth, but that’s only a Thumbnail.

3. RESURRECTION TRUTH: NOAH’S ARK AND BAPTISM

vs. 20-21: God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

In the 1970s there was an investment firm called E.F. Hutton. The theme of their commercials was “When E.F. Hutton speaks, everybody listens.” About that time, the Christian singer Carmen wrote a song about Noah that said: “Well, Noah was sittin’ on his front porch; he was eatin’ lasagna that he’d cooked with a torch; he was half-way through a meatball when the Lord spoke. He said, ‘Noah, you’re gonna’ be busy for awhile; building an ark from a huge woodpile.’ And Noah’s eyes got as big as baseballs and he almost choked. He told his family what was going down and they listened intently to him; and nobody fought, or fussed or fumed because nobody knew how to swim. When the rains came, they’s all safe inside; they didn’t get wet or nuttin’. Noah obeyed ‘cause when God speaks, everybody listens, even E.F. Hutton.”

Noah listened, obeyed and trusted God. Now, Noah wasn’t saved by the ark, he was saved by faith, the same way you and I are saved. The Bible says, “By faith Noah, when warned about things not yet seen, in holy fear built an ark to save his family. By faith he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness that comes by faith.” (Hebrews 11:7) The pictures of the ark portraying it as a boat are probably inaccurate. An engineer studied the dimensions from Genesis 6 and determined it probably looked like an enormous barge. In Genesis 6:15 God told Noah to build the ark as long as 1-1/2 football fields. It was ten times as long as it was high and almost twice as wide as it was high.

The Apostle Peter compares the Noah’s flood to Christian baptism. Some people claim this passage teaches that baptism saves you, but I think they miss the point. It says just as Noah was saved (delivered) by faith through the flood, this verse says, by faith, we are delivered through the waters of God’s judgement. That which saves us is *not* the water of baptism; instead verse 21 says it is the pledge of a good conscience toward God. A pledge is a statement of trust and commitment. When I say, “I pledge allegiance to the flag” I’m making a commitment to follow and serve what the flag represents—not the actual cloth flag. Saving faith is when you say, “I pledge allegiance to the One who died for me.”

When a believer is baptized, the water is a symbol of God’s judgement against sin—death. Baptism symbolizes death, burial and resurrection. When you are submerged beneath the water it pictures your death to sin and your burial with Christ. Wouldn’t it be tragic if you were *held* underneath the water? If you were, you would identify with the people of Noah’s generation who

died. But, thankfully, you are raised up out of the water to symbolize your personal resurrection.

Hebrews 9:27 says, “It is appointed to man once to die; and after that the judgement.” Every person has to consider the possibility of facing the flood waters of God’s judgement against sin. Noah was safe in the ark. And when we are in Christ, we are safe. Everyone needs an ark to deliver them. But you don’t need Noah’s ark, you need the Jesus ark. Jesus is the ark who delivers us through the waters of God’s judgement. That’s a pretty deep truth, but that’s just the thumbnail.

4. EXALTATION TRUTH: JESUS HAS ALL AUTHORITY

vs. 21-22: Jesus Christ, who has gone into heaven and is at God’s right hand—with angels, authorities, and powers in submission to him.

Do you know where Jesus is at this moment? While Jesus was on this earth He told the disciples after He died He was going to return to His Father’s house. After the resurrection, Jesus ascended into heaven. Right now He is in heaven with all power and authority. He has been highly exalted and has been given a name is above every other name.

In Acts 7 we read the story of a young Christian named Stephen. He was arrested and arraigned before the same Jewish Sanhedrin that demanded the death of Jesus a few months earlier. Instead of trying to defend himself, Stephen delivered an eloquent message proving Jesus is the Messiah. He fearlessly told these leaders they murdered the Messiah, but God raised Him from the dead. Then it says in Acts 7:55 that Stephen, being filled with the Holy Spirit, looked up into heaven and said, “Look, I see the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God!” That really sent them over the edge. They mobbed him and tore off his clothes to stone him. As the stones were thudding into his body, he said, “Lord Jesus, lay not this sin to their charge.” And then, blissfully, the pain ended and he was with Jesus.

Let me ask you to look with me into heaven for a minute. Use your eyes of faith. What do you see? A throne? You won’t see three Gods or even One God with Jesus beside Him. God is Spirit. But if you look with the eyes of faith you’ll see Jesus and He is exalted as Lord and King. He’s in control. Everything in this old world is moving along according to His plan. And one day, He’s going to return—but that’s another thumbnail!

CONCLUSION

When you look at these four thumbnails of truth you may be a little overwhelmed. Just remember, you don’t have to understand everything about God and the Bible to have a relationship with Him. Rather than being frustrated because you don’t understand everything in the Bible, what you should do is to apply what you do understand. God’s truth is like sunscreen. Sunscreen doesn’t protect you unless you get it out of the bottle and apply it to your skin. God’s Word is worthless to you unless you apply it to your life. Here are three quick applications from this passage:

(1) When you grumble about unfair suffering, remember Jesus. Are you suffering and you

don't think you've done anything to deserve it? Do you think you've gotten a raw deal? Congratulations, that's exactly what happened to Jesus. As I've said several times during this series, *life isn't fair*, but God is good. Jesus lived a perfect life, and yet He suffered. But by His suffering, He brought us to God. That's the paradox of the Bible. Because of God's goodness and purpose, even suffering can result in good. Sometimes suffering drives us to God.

Yesterday our family was in Oklahoma City attending the medical school graduation of our daughter and son-in-law, Jenni and Jason Holman. They are both M.D.s now, so I really do have a "pair-o-docs." The commencement speaker was Dr. Michael Palmer from Boston. Dr. Palmer is a medical doctor who also has written several best-selling medical thrillers. He spoke of how 25 years ago, as a physician he realized he was addicted to alcohol and prescription narcotics. He suffered in denial for a long time. Then he made a statement that sounds like something I've said before, but he put a new twist on it. He said, "Then one day I was given the wonderful gift of total desperation." When he got to the very bottom, he finally sought help. His suffering became his salvation.

(2) If you want forgiveness and a home in heaven, Jesus is the ONLY way. Mark Twain once told the story of an uneducated man who operated a small cable drawn ferry across a fast moving river. Travelers loaded their buggy or horse on the ferry and the man pulled the cable attached to a pulley on the other side. It was boring, hard work. One day a college professor engaged the ferry. As they were crossing the river, the professor asked the ferry operator, "Mister, do you know anything about philosophy?" He said, "No sir, I ain't never studied that." The professor said, "What a shame, you've wasted a third of your life." The professor said, "Do you know anything about Greek mythology?" He said, "Nope, never heard of it." The Professor clucked, "What a shame, you've wasted another third of your life." About that time the ferry collided with a submerged log and dumped them into the swirling water. As the professor was splashing and sputtering, the ferry operator shouted, "Mister, don't you know anything about swimming?" The professor gasped, "No, I never learned how to swim!" The ferry operator clung to a rock and watched as the professor floated away. He said, "Then, I guess you could say you've wasted your whole life!" You can know a lot about a lot of things, but if you don't know Jesus, you've wasted more than this life. You've forfeited eternity as well.

Jesus Christ made this audacious statement: "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but through me." (John 14:6) That's not my opinion, that's what Jesus said. And either it is truth or it is lie—there's no other alternative.

(3) To experience full salvation, you must be immersed under water as a demonstration of your faith. Now, before you get ready to send me to be a Church of Christ minister, understand what I said. I didn't say you have to be baptized to go to heaven. I didn't say baptism saves you. I said it if you want to experience full salvation. Salvation is so much more than just having your sins forgiven and going to heaven when you die. Full salvation begins when you repent and place your faith in Jesus. The process continues as you make Jesus your Lord and begin to bring your life into obedience to Him. It is through this process of obedience (called sanctification) that you are changed into the likeness of Christ. If you claim to have placed your faith in Jesus but you have refused to undergo Believer's baptism you have an obedience problem and you'll never experience to fullness God has for you until you obey Him in that area.

You may be thinking, "Pastor, that's pretty strong! I don't like what you're saying." Well as kindly as I know how, may I say, "The devil doesn't like what I'm saying either, so classify yourself and decide what you're going to do."

Are you waiting for a more convenient time? Obedience is never convenient. A few months ago a military chaplain in Iraq led Sergeant Andrew Jones to faith in Jesus. When he told the soldier he needed to be baptized, Sergeant Jones didn't say, "I'll wait until I get back home." He said, "Let's do it. It's hard to find that much water in the desert, but soldiers got together and built a baptistry in the desert and about 300 soldiers agreed to give up on of their water rations so this new brother could be baptized. They later recycled the water to wash their vehicles.

He didn't hesitate, so what's your excuse? God is asking you the same question that Ananias asked Saul after he met the Lord on the road to Damascus: "What are you waiting for? Get up, be baptized and wash your sins away, calling on his name." (Acts 22:16)

I want to ask you the same thing? What are you waiting for?

There's something miraculous about God's truth. If you don't USE it you LOSE it. You can't put God's truth in your pocket and save it for a rainy day. When you hear it, you must act on it. Scan these four Thumbnails of Truth again and ask God to show you areas of your life where obedience is required.

OUTLINE

1. SALVATION TRUTH: Jesus died to bring us to God
2. DECLARATION TRUTH: Jesus preached in prison
3. RESURRECTION TRUTH: Noah's Ark and baptism
4. EXALTATION TRUTH: Jesus has all authority

SO WHAT? (Application for my life)

- (1) When you grumble about unfair suffering, remember Jesus.
- (2) If you want forgiveness and a home in heaven, Jesus is the ONLY way.
- (3) To experience full salvation, you must be immersed under water as a demonstration of your faith.



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For the Joy...
Pastor David Dykes