

Oak Mountain Informer

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Reagan Passes

Perhaps you have been watching the coverage of the funeral for President Ronald Reagan. If you have, no doubt you have been moved as you heard of his life and accomplishments. He has been called the greatest president of the twentieth century. Whether that is true or not, time will tell. Certainly those who spoke about him this week thought highly of him, but critics are not chosen to speak at funerals. It is not our place to judge such matters here. What we should do, however, is take note of some important spiritual lessons from the events of this week.

By all accounts President Reagan was a kind and thoughtful man. Even as president he was not above small acts of unselfish kindness. His friends have spoken of his generosity, decency, and courage. His patriotism is unsurpassed. But the one outstanding character President Reagan possessed was his love for Nancy. The two seemed completely devoted to one another, for richer or poorer, better or worse, in sickness and health. It is a lesson our nation (including other presidents) needs to learn.

We were impressed with the people who attended the funeral service. Dignitaries from all over the world were there - friend and foe alike. We were not surprised to see his friends and political allies Margaret Thatcher and Brian Mulrooney. We were not surprised to see all living former presidents - both Republican and Democrat. But even Mikhail Gorbachev, the former leader of the Soviet Union, came to express his respect for President Reagan. Impressive indeed.

Ronald Reagan grew up a common man. He was raised in Dixon, a small town in Illinois. He attended Eureka College in Eureka, Illinois. Cherri and I have been to Eureka many times. We worked with a congregation not far from there and some of the

members lived in Eureka. I have studied in the college library there on several occasions. It is a typical Illinois farming community surrounded by fields of corn or beans, the grain elevator standing on the outskirts of town. President Reagan never outgrew his roots. He always remembered that he was a common man at heart. Perhaps it is this sense of humility that has brought on such an outpouring of respect at his death.

As great as President Reagan may have been, as much as he may have accomplished, as powerful as he may have become - he will not escape the Judgment. The day is coming when he, like all of us, will stand before the judgment seat of God and give an account of himself. All of those who attended the funeral will also be there - Margaret Thatcher, Presidents Ford, Carter, Bush, and Clinton, Prince Charles and Prime Minister Blair. Mr. Gorbachev will also stand before the Lord in judgment along side the rest of us. John saw "the small and the great" standing before God's throne on that Day (Revelation 20:12).

We will all be judged by the same standard. That standard will not be the amount of political influence we had in the world. Not at all. Paul said that the day is coming when God will judge the secrets of men "according to my gospel" (Romans 2:16). Earthly prosperity, power, and prestige will mean nothing on that day. All people, presidents and prime ministers, men and women, rich and poor, great and small will be "open and laid bare to the eyes of him with whom we have to do." Only our relationship with God through Christ will matter.

"...on the day when, according to my gospel, God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus."

Two Ways to Handle the Word of God

Paul tells Timothy, “*Be diligent to present yourself approved of God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed, accurately handling the word of truth*” (2 Timothy 2:15). The older apostle Paul will later encourage the younger preacher Timothy to “*preach the word*” (2 Timothy 4:2). Timothy’s work will revolve around studying and teaching the Scriptures. He will spend countless hours reading them, meditating on them, talking about them, and arguing with others about their meaning.

It’s easy to understand why Paul would tell Timothy, the preacher, to “accurately handle the word of truth.” But every Bible student needs to heed the warning. Think about the two scenarios that follow and see if we find ourselves in one of them.

The first man studies the Scriptures diligently. He wants to know exactly what they mean. He pays close attention to such matters as the author’s intent as revealed by the context. He tries to determine when the book of the Bible he is studying was written, who wrote it, the reason(s) why it was written, and the original questions the passage was written to answer. As time passes and he studies more, he develops a thorough knowledge of the Bible. He finds great encouragement from his studies and when controversy arises due to false teaching, he is able to deal with it effectively.

The other man also studies diligently. But his study differs from the man just mentioned. This man’s study is more issue driven. He wants to learn all the answers to the various religious questions that have arisen through the years. He is quite successful in his study, and he learns the texts to use in answering error as it occurs. He knows how to answer the Calvinists, the Catholics, and the Charismatics. He can refute the Pentecostals and the Premillennialists. And he can expose both liberalism and ultra-liberalism.

Unfortunately his “cut and paste” approach to

study has created some problems. He knows a lot of Bible passages, and he can use them effectively to prove his position, but he has little genuine knowledge of the Bible itself. He simply “cuts” a verse here and a passage there, and “pastes” them under the false position he wants to answer. In fact, he at times uses a verse out of context and in a way the Bible author (who is ultimately God Himself) never intended in response to an argument because the wording of the passage seems to provide the perfect answer.

Which of the two is “accurately handling the word of truth”? It clearly is the first. He is able both to “exhort in sound doctrine and convict the gainsayer” (Titus 1:9). He has a good grasp of the truth taught by the Bible and as a result recognizes error when it occurs. He will continue to be able to recognize false teaching in the future because of his overall Bible knowledge.

His skill with the Bible goes beyond answering error, however. When people need encouragement, he knows just what passage will help. When people need rebuke, he knows the appropriate Scriptures to use. When people need motivation to do God’s work, he knows just how to use the great stories of the Bible to produce the needed zeal. If he is a preacher, his preaching is balanced including rebuke, exhortation, as well as refutation of error (the preaching of the other student described above is not balanced, consisting of answering false doctrine almost exclusively).

Obviously, we *must* be able to answer error as it arises. Only the truth will make us free (John 8:32). If we are ill equipped to respond according to truth, we will inevitable fall prey to it. The answers are in the Bible. But let’s be sure to handle the word of truth accurately, understanding its meaning and

May 30, 2004

Attendance
AM Worship: 205
PM Worship: 161

Wednesday Evening: 174

Our Goal:
Every member
at every
service!