

Steve Hill: Read All the Words in Red

The other day I picked up my Bible, opened to the **Gospels** and began to read only the words printed in red. Yes, every word of **Scripture** is God-breathed, but for this devotion I simply wanted to emphasize the words of Christ.

I had barely turned a few pages before tears began to well up in my eyes. I looked to heaven and said, "Jesus, it's a wonder You weren't killed long before the cross."

His words were full of spirit and they were life, but they were also cutting. Jesus was a radical man who preached a bold message. He confronted the popular teachings of the day, and He challenged the religious rituals that kept the people in bondage. He never held back, and He never backed down.

Several years ago, I had the opportunity to preach on the steps of the old temple in the heart of Jerusalem. As I stood there and proclaimed the **gospel**, I was overwhelmed with the thought that this was the exact spot Jesus drove out the money changers. That was a violent event as the Great Shepherd ran out the thief and the robber. He didn't whisper. He didn't politely ask these men to leave. He was a man consumed with righteous anger. Armed with a whip, He forcefully removed those who would take advantage of God's people. Jesus' own disciples commented on the zeal Christ displayed for God's house.

"It is written ... 'My house will be called a house of prayer,' but you are making it 'a den of robbers'" (Matt. 21:13, NIV).

Pastor, read the all the words in red! Were Jesus to attend your church this weekend, how many tables would be overturned? How many leaders would He have to whip? Would this radical be

welcomed through your doors or ushered out of them?

Has Jesus been given unrestricted access to your own heart? What would He overturn or seek to drive out? How will you respond when this radical **Jesus** is set loose in your own life? Will you reject His words, or will you rejoice in them?

Is this image of Jesus in line with the messages you're hearing preached? Don't misunderstand me. I am not seeking to make Jesus mean. I am simply seeking to complete the picture.

Everyone loves the image of Christ with a child on His lap as He teaches us to become like a child:

"Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Therefore, whoever takes the lowly position of this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. And whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me" (Matt. 18:3–5; see also Mark 9:33–37; Luke 9:46–48).

It is a beautiful picture of Christ. Do a quick image search online of "Jesus children." Thousands upon thousands of pictures will be displayed of our loving Savior embracing children like the perfect father He is. I have several pictures like these created by master artists from centuries ago. But this can't be the only way we see Christ. Keep reading the words in red. With a child still on His lap, Jesus warns:

"If anyone causes one of these little ones—those who believe in me—to stumble, it would be better for them to have a large millstone hung around their neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea. Woe to the world because of the things that cause people to stumble! Such things must come, but woe to the person through whom they come!" (Matt. 18:6–7).

I've seen the millstones with my own eyes. They are scattered throughout the Holy Land. Most weigh more than two tons.

Pastor, do you understand the implications of ignoring all of Jesus' words in red? Are you causing your people to stumble because you refuse to preach the whole Word? Is there a millstone with your name on it?

Leaders today are frantically trying to create a no-cost cross. We want Christianity without sacrifice, heaven without holiness, and worldliness without consequence. Jesus didn't leave any middle ground. His words were clear.

John 3:16 is the most-quoted Scripture on Planet Earth. I've shared Christ with men who just stepped out of a bar, covered in the stench of alcohol, who in a drunken stupor could still quote "for God so loved the world." Sinful man loves to comfort himself with the notion that God loves him. However, the same verse that tells us of God's love is the same verse that shares His judgment as well. Read all the words in red:

"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only Son. This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil. Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed" (John 3:16-20).

John 3:16 is just as much a judgment Scripture as it is a love Scripture. These words in red tell us that we were perishing. We were already condemned. The verdict was in; the judgment was made. We loved the darkness and hated the light. Yet in spite of all that stood against us, God so loved us that He sent His Son, the Deliverer.

Many ask the question, "How could a loving God send anyone to

hell?" Yet the very verse that so many know and misquote answers the question. He didn't come to condemn the world—we were already condemned. He didn't come to send anyone to hell—we were already headed there. He came to deliver us from hell. Those who listen to His words, Jesus tells us, will not perish but have eternal life. Those who do not listen are already condemned.

I thank God for the hope found in the red letters. His words saved my life. He sacrificed His life—spilled His blood to save me from my sin. Every drop of His blood is priceless. How dare anyone have the audacity to cheapen His sacrifice by ignoring a single one of His red-lettered words.

Friend, ignoring the words written in red will cost you as well. Pastor, omitting the words written in red will cost you and your people. Preach all the red-letter words. Saint, open the Word and ask **Holy Spirit** to breathe fresh life upon Christ's words. These red-lettered words will do you much good! Let them go through you like the sharp sword that they are. Let the radical words of Jesus deliver you from the spiritual avalanche that awaits everyone who foolishly chooses to ignore what is plainly posted in bold red letters.

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