

Bible Study, Wednesday, May 13, 2020

"And when they had crucified him, they parted his garments, casting lots upon them, what every man should take" Mark 15:24

"And when the centurion, which stood over against him, saw that he so cried out, and gave up the ghost, he said, Truly this man was the Son of God" Mark 15:39.

Indiana Jones looked for the Ark of the Covenant in one movie and the Holy Grail in another. Both of these movies rekindled a public interest in biblical artifacts. These interests have included real searches for the two aforementioned objects along with searches for Noah's Ark, certifying the shroud of Turin and a host of other things. I guess like most of the world, I too have a keen interest in biblical artifacts. Some people are curious about and fascinated with all things ancient. Some are always hoping to find the real "truth" in artifacts; so-called truths that will prove the Bible wrong. Then there are many of us that believe the Bible that are simply interested, not that we need proof, but because these things just further bring the Bible to life for us.

My thoughts on artifacts have been shaped by something that occurred early on during my pilgrimage as a believer. It occurred in 1993. I was on a short-term mission trip to Bulgaria, more specifically the capital city of Sophia. We stayed pretty busy for most of the sixteen days that we were there, but we did have three afternoons off so we used this time to explore the city.

One of the places we explored was the huge Greek Orthodox cathedral. I love architecture and was fascinated by this massive, ornate structure that was built, best I can remember, in the fifteen or sixteen hundred. I was amazed that they could build something of that size and scope without machinery.

Of course, there were the catholic symbols, like candles everywhere, that you had to overlook to enjoy the building. But when we went down into the basement, I observed something that could not be overlooked. The basement was a large room with about a twelve-foot ceiling. The floor was some sort of highly polished stone that revealed centuries of foot traffic. And the room was filled with square columns that served as the pedestal on which the ornate round columns above sat.

Now on each of the four sides of every one of these columns there was a relic placed and below each was a small shelf for burning tiny candles. These relics include old portraits of "saints", pieces of wood and iron from different religious artifacts, and even fragments of bone from martyrs and saints. The majority of these columns had candles burning at them, indicating that someone had already been there that day. At least twenty of them had someone there lighting another candle, bowing and praying and crying.

The Catholics and the Greek Orthodox, which is merely an eastern version of Catholicism, claim that they don't worship the relics but only "venerate" them. The Webster dictionary defines venerate: *to regard with reverential respect or with admiring deference or: to honor with a ritual act of devotion*. Kind of sounds like worship to me.

So, what does all of this have to do with our two verses? Simply this. It's not our worship that makes the difference; it's the object of our worship.

The soldiers casting lots had the same opportunity as the centurion. But the object of their worship was in material things. On the other hand, the centurion worshiped not the robe, the importance of the robe, nor the value of the robe; he worshiped the One that had worn the robe.

I often think back on those people in Sophia. They were sincere, they were devoted; but they were lost. Having interest in artifacts and architecture is no sin. I loved all the sites of Israel when we were there. But those sites cannot replace my **sight**; "looking unto Him; the author and finisher of our faith".

Although interesting, the world can keep both arks, the Holy Grail and the robe... I'll take Jesus!

And as we return to church, let's not worship the concept of church, but rather let us gather to worship Him who died for the church!