

A Call To Stay The Course

“Satisfy us by your loving kindness in the morning; so shall we rejoice and be glad all the days of our life.”
Psalm 90:14.

As we face difficult times ahead with the downturn in the stock market, wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and other parts of the world, a failing housing market, a slow down in our economy, high unemployment, a change in our executive administration and threats to our internal and external security, we need encouraging words of consolation and hope. What we have to understand is that such encouragement only comes wrapped in prophetic word of warning. Today, I have six reactions to the lessons: four to the O.T. lesson and one each to the other two.

I. Moses At His End On Mount Nebo: Deuteronomy 34:1-12

We find Moses in the land of Moab, atop Pisgah on Mount Nebo. God showed him the land promised to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Levi, Kohath, Amram and Moses—the land from Dan in the north to Beer Sheba in the south, from the river Jordan eastward to the great Mediterranean Sea, but Moses was not permitted to enter the promised land. Moses died and was buried there in the land of Moab. The story continues, telling of Moses’ successor, Joshua the son of Nun, of Joshua’s fitness to succeed Moses and of the greatness of Moses as an unequaled prophet and deliverer.

My first reaction to this story is that of sadness, in that Moses was not privileged to enter the promised land after leading the Israelites to the precipice overlooking it. I think of all the parents who did not live long enough to see their sons and daughters marry, to hold their grandchildren in their arms or to watch their children’s children grow up. I pine for contestants and candidates who come so close to winning but lose, never to realizing their dreams and I feel sad. Why many fall short of realizing their dreams, I do not know. The chronicler concluded that Moses died before he entered the promised land because he angrily took credit for providing water for the Israelites in the wilderness and did not acknowledge that it came from God. I hardly think that is the reason. It is often just the way things turn out. That is the reality with which we live.

My second reaction is to realize that it is seldom just about the individual. It is also about the community, the collective. Six generations before Moses did not witness God’s promise to Abraham. Yet, it did come to fruition in God’s time. The psalmist wrote, *“For a thousand years in your sight are like yesterday when it is past; and like a watch in the night.”* Psalm 90:4.

My third reaction is that one must realize that receiving the promise is seldom about the destination. It is more often about the journey, because every destination constitutes a new beginning. As soon as Joshua got to the promised land, divided the plots up among the tribes and settled in, they had difficulty with the nations around them. When the exiles of Judah were freed by the Persians and permitted to return to Jerusalem to re-build their temple, they had to do it with a trowel in one hand and a weapon in the other. You cut the grass on your lawn only to have to do it again and again during the growing season. Then comes autumn, when you get all of your leaves raked up, then the neighbors share their leaves with you also. Life is a journey not just a destination and stuff happens.

My fourth reaction is that whatever we are blessed to experience or accomplish must serve to be enough. We must learn to celebrate the moment and move on to another venture, because life or success as we deem them, are not guaranteed. Life is not just about the destination, but also the journey. Whatever my place or lot in life, must be sufficient.

II. Jesus' Challenge To The Pharisee: Matthew 22:34-46

In the Gospel lesson, the pharisees came to Jesus for a final time to entrap him with a question. For them, life and their doctrines were all about the moment, the destination, the particular group's direction. "Which," they asked Jesus, "*is the greatest commandment?*" Now there were ten commandments, 613 testimonies, precepts, ordinances, statutes and laws in Judaism. Perhaps, whatever answer Jesus might have given, would have been wrong or incomplete. Jesus surprised them by going to Deuteronomy 6:5 and Leviticus 19:18. "*The greatest commandment,*" Jesus said, "*is to love the Lord with all of your heart, soul and might.*" Then he added, "*and the second is like it, Love your neighbor as yourself.*" On these two commandments, hang all the tenets of the law and the wisdom of the prophets.

Jesus would not leave the matter there. "*The Messiah,*" Jesus asked, "*whose son is he?*" They replied boldly, "*Why, he is the son of David.*" Then, "*why did David call him Lord,*" asked Jesus? "*Yahweh said to the Messiah, sit at my right hand, until I put your enemies under your feet.*" Matthew 22:44 from Psalm 110:1. "*If David called the Messiah, Lord, how can the Messiah be David's son?*" Jesus implied that the Messiah was God's son and not just the descendant of an earthly king. In other words, the kingdom of God, the rule that Christ came to institute was not about earthly kingdoms at all, be they of the emperor, pharaoh or even the Davidic line. The significance of the Messiah is that he was to be the unique incarnation of God who was to initiate the messianic age by being an example by which we may pattern our lives. In response to Jesus' question, the pharisees were silenced. From that moment on, they did not dare to ask him any more questions.

My fifth reaction, this morning, is that in everything we do (in our family relationships, on the job, in our churches and in our politics), we must remember that the kingdom of God is based upon two commandments and two commandments only, the love of God and the love of the neighbor as oneself. That constitutes the whole law.

III. Paul's Encouragement To The Thessalonians: I Thessalonians 2:1-8

Paul, while in Corinth, wrote and sent Timothy to Thessalonika to learn of the state of affairs in that church. Paul reminded the Thessalonians that in spite of the difficulties they had at Philippi, that persecution did not hinder their witness to the Thessalonians. Paul and his companions experienced great success among some Jews, lots of gentiles and some of the leading ladies there in Thessalonika. He also reminded them that their witness to the church in Thessalonika was not with deceit, impure motives or trickery. It was not with flattery, pretexts, greed or in order to please humans. It was only to please God. Paul ends this passage by telling this church that he and his companions cherished the Christians of Thessalonika and while there delivered to them not only the Gospel of Jesus Christ but

their whole selves.

The church in Thessalonika was one of which Paul was very proud. The Christians there had remained faithful in the face of much adversity. My sixth reaction is that we must stay the course.

Downturns in the stock market, wars in Iraq, Afghanistan and other parts of the world, failing housing markets, slow downs in our economy, high unemployment, a soon to be new administration and threats to our internal and external security, will occur. Often we cannot stop them from happening. But knowing who God is among us, we can find hope, consolation, strength and the courage to trust in God through Christ Jesus. The psalmist writes, *“Lord, you have been our refuge from one generation to another. Before the mountains were brought forth, or the land and the earth were born, from age to age you are God.”* Psalm 90:1-2.

IV. The Epilogue

Moses brought the Israelites within view of the Holy Land, but did not enter. We often come to our mountain tops and are not permitted any further. Knowing that is often the case, we must not be afraid to start the journey or to remain courageous in the face of difficulties. So in summary,

1. The fact that Moses was not permitted to experience the fruits of his labors, makes us sad.
2. Life and accomplishments are seldom about the individual, they are also about the community, the collective.
3. Our Christian faith is seldom about the destination, it is also about the journey.
4. In our roles along the journey, we must find our consolation in doing our parts well.
5. We must let our actions and relationships be guided by the love of God and the love of our neighbor.
6. You and I must remain faithful to our parts in the process, with hope toward the future and the final consummation of God’s kingdom on earth. We are important cogs in God’s wheel of salvation; we are links in God chain of lineal history and we staff important way-stations on the road to eternity. Therefore , let us celebrate the moment and move on with faith and hope toward a brighter tomorrow. For, this is the day which the lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it!

Let us pray. Almighty and everlasting God, increase in us the gifts of faith, hope and love, and that we may obtain your promises, make us love what you command and enable us to live our lives as a testimony to your Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.