

Quite a Promise

Wayne Waibel – 03/10/2024

Our view of the life and times of Jesus Christ, though reverent and humbling is tempered by both our reluctance to fully examine the depth of His sacrifice and our limited perspective as humans to comprehend the magnitude of His salvific trajectory.

Lent is a time to remind ourselves that faith comes with a certain responsibility and a good deal of mystery. When we encounter the unexplained – it is our tendency to be skeptical. With a mystery, the more we know, the more we realize that there is more to be known.

We too easily get bogged down in meaningless details, entirely missing the point all together. This is where critical thinking becomes a pivotal skill. Not everything is for us to know. Some things remain mysterious by design. So Lent is also a time of acceptance wrapped in contentment.

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There is a certain comfort in knowing that the arch of Christ's life was punctuated with moments of extreme temptation which He overcame – each and every time.

When He compares Himself to an obscure reference in the Old Testament book of Numbers that has a decidedly mystical quality to it – we are left to wonder, and to ponder. What is the connection?

“And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life.”

I believe John would have us understand that the Son of Man being lifted up refers both to His being lifted up onto the cross and being lifted up into heaven.

And to further clarify, when Jesus talks about eternal life – it is not just being alive perpetually – He is talking about living with God – eternally. That’s quite a promise.

We need to understand that the opposite of belief is not unbelief, but disobedience. Therefore, belief is more than simply seeing and saying – it is to obey. This is a critical component to faith in that it allows us to put our faith into practice – not just talk about it.

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Some of the most trying aspects of contemporary life are the complications and alternatives that persist. We live in the age that is referenced scripturally as the age to come.

Those things which were unimaginable to our ancient counterparts are not only present in this age – they are already part of our past as well. We have come a long way from curing snake bites by gazing upon a bronze serpent mounted on a pole. And yet – the universally accepted symbol of healing is the caduceus – a serpent wrapped around a pole.

Is it any wonder that this age has so many uncertainties, illusions, pretenders, and charlatans? Where is the assurance of truth and simplicity? These things are certainly within our reach. Good works are expressions of Christ alive in us ministering to the world. We are indeed playing a privileged role in God's plan.

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The mission of our Savior began with His forty days in the wilderness where Satan tempted him to become a different kind of Messiah. The kind of Messiah that lived into the expectation of the typical Jew under Roman occupation.

A warrior king who would vanquish the evil empire and restore the Jewish nation to its glory of old. But that was never God's plan – "He so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." A much higher calling.

The arch of His life continued through the feeding of the multitude when He rejected the people's efforts to make Him king. The temptation must have been overwhelming.

An entire nation united in an effort to crown Him. What modern politician would say no to that kind of endorsement? But no – Jesus would choose the cross over a crown.

Even in the Garden, He turned back His own desire for another way, understanding what was at stake, and what He would need to endure for the sake of all humankind. Full in the knowledge of what lay ahead – He chose the cross.

And on that cross, He overcame the temptation to save Himself – choosing instead to remain obedient to the point of death – even death on a cross. If that knowledge rests on your heart, then you might begin to understand the meaning of the word unbearable.

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Despite the trying times we currently endure – there is much in the area of good news. The marvels of modern medicine. The progress that has been made in dismantling systemic privilege. The slow erosion of empire.

In the final analysis – a servant’s heart will prevail, for we are an Easter people and the trajectory of our Lord and Savior accomplished what He alone was pre-ordained to complete. The utter redemption of a human family that strives each day to live justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with their God. Amen.