

THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE

"...then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel..." (Amos 7:8)

IF I WERE THE DEVIL

If I were the devil, I would count myself a glowing success, an undeniable, phenomenal, expanding influence near the end of the twentieth century in America. I would look at the declining moral standard and rejoice in my conquests. I would pat myself on the back for the inroads into evil made in the past few decades and I would exult further in that a multiplying evil effect seems now to be at work.

If I were the devil, I would cheer on the teeming multitudes who work so feverishly as my agents that I can rest assured that most men will soon forfeit any effort to conscientiously resist my wooing or threats of woes. If I were the devil, I would be confident that the prospects of a full house in hell to share my horrendous eternal misery grows brighter day by day (Matthew 25:41).

If I were the devil, I would rejoice in evil and again I would rejoice at what I had been able to do to the offspring and grand offspring of those who once so tenaciously held to biblical morality. I would take special glee in the fact that I have managed to subdivide denominational religion so much that its total picture is more repulsive than ever to religious seekers. Furthermore, I would count it a victory that denominationism has many more of its proponents thoroughly persuaded that there is no such thing as absolute truth to be found, believed, obeyed, and taught. It would tickle me that even the suggestion of there being only one approved church would bring a chuckle from most sectarians.

If I were the devil, I would be impressed with my accomplishments in the highest seat of national power. Already it has been shown that the one in the highest of secular positions is void of highest principle. Still, I would keep pressing the matter with the intent of showing the world that some men are indeed above the law and can do whatever they please with impunity. This would be a crowning accomplishment in that it would likely introduce another multiplying effect for evil. If I could show that one man is above the law and that he can pervert the good designs and safeguards of America's governmental checks and balances, I am confident that millions of eager onlookers would follow suit in basing their aspirations and "rights" for doing the same on his precedent.

If I were the devil, I would be enjoying the scandalous current events which so shame a nation once noted for its moral stand, but which is now hardly able to blush at the vilest of deeds. It would please me no end, that the nation once called "Christian," now better wears the title "The United States of Sodom and Gomorrah."

If I were the devil, there is almost no limit to the fun I would be having, but I would do anything but rest on my laurels (I Peter 5:8). I would have enough sense to know that any significant and enduring victory depends upon vigilance. While knowing and applying this axiom, I would be doing my best to insure that others not know it and I would be encouraging the ones who do know it to forget it (II Corinthians 4:4; II Peter 1:9; Revelation 12:9).

However, with all the fun I would be having as the devil with this nation as a whole, my keenest interest would remain focused on tearing up churches of Christ. After all, the worsening of lost men will not increase my companions in eternal misery a twig. If I were the devil, I would be as I know he is, especially interested in stealing the souls of the saved (I Peter 5:8).

If I were the devil, I would keep the great liberal digression aflame by multiplying the false teachers as well as the churches and "Christian" schools that produce

HOW CAN WE RESIST?

Text: _____

I. Their Need is _____

Notes:

II. Their Expectations are _____

Notes:

III. Their Object is _____

Notes:

THE LIFE OF THE LORD

Text: _____

I. The _____ of His Ministry

Notes:

II. The _____ of His Ministry

Notes:

III. The _____ of His Ministry

Notes:

IV. The _____ of His Ministry

Notes:

such unscrupulous characters (Matthew 7:15). I would keep parents as best I could ignorant about what is being taught to their sons and daughters in places like Abilene Christian University and David Lipscomb University (to mention only two well-documented cases of apostasy). I would endeavor to bias their thinking by warning them of the immorality of secular schools while keeping them ignorant of the professors who are “masters of spin” regarding antinomian attitudes and doctrinal error in the so-called Christian schools. I would be doubly delighted that parents are so gullible, who ignore the warnings about such schools, and who apparently oblivious to the fact that false doctrine will send the youth of America to hell as effectively and quickly as fornication and drunkenness.

If I were the devil, I would also keep the anti movements alive and busy in sowing their abominable discord (Proverbs 17:15). After all, what is more deceptive than those who argue strongly for Bible authority and then introduce and bind on the church doctrines of men (Acts 15:1)?

If I were the devil, I would do my very best to disrupt things among those who are holding the doctrinal line and doing their best to please God. I would keep playing one good brother against another (Acts 20:30). I would encourage brethren to bite and devour one another. I would encourage division over non-obligatory matters and then encourage subdivision and sub-subdivision among the divided parties. I would provide all the old excuses and invent some new ones, if possible, for disregarding the truth of the Bible and for following men rather than Christ. I would do my best to get brethren to act contrary to the Bible doctrine of love and in so doing I would win their souls (I Corinthians 13:3-7). Particularly, I would encourage brethren to be unquestionably confident of their own motives and super suspicious of the motives of others in contrast with verses 4 and 5.

If you do not think the devil has accomplished what is stated above and much more, you are one of the victims of his deceit. The devil is doing his best to worsen your spiritual condition! If you are in sin, he is happy, but he would be happier if you would go even deeper into forbidden waters. If you are a faithful follower of Jesus, you are his prime focus. Though he will flee when you resist him, he will not cease and desist for any great while in his pursuit (Luke 4:13; James 4:7). Your salvation hinges on your being as persistent as he.

-Bob Berard

THE BOOK OF THE GOSPEL—1

Beginning the New Testament is a collection of four records of the birth, life, ministry, and death of Christ, often referred to as the gospel accounts. These are not four gospels, but rather four accounts of the same gospel, each written from a different viewpoint, with a different purpose, and to a different people.

The book of Matthew, the first of these four, bears the name of its inspired writer. There is no scriptural claim that Matthew was the author, but he has been accepted from antiquity as such and no credible evidence to the contrary has been forthcoming. Matthew, otherwise known as Levi, is identified in scripture in three ways: the son of Alphaeus, a tax-collector, and an apostle. His ancestry is of little importance, but his final two designations offer some insight into who he was. First, as a tax-collector, or publican, Matthew would have been engaged in a very lucrative occupation. Publicans were Jews appointed to this role by Rome for the purpose of collecting Caesar's tribute. This fact made them hated intensely among the Jews who viewed them as traitors. However, it was in Matthew 9:10 that "*as Jesus passed forth from thence, he saw a man, named Matthew, sitting at the receipt of custom: and he saith unto him, Follow me. And he arose, and followed him.*" Thus did Matthew leave a profitable vocation and humble himself under the authority and leadership of the Lord as one of twelve chosen apostles.

As mentioned, each of the gospel accounts was written in a particular manner for a particular group of people. Matthew's account, throughout, proves its worth as having been written primarily for the benefit of the Jewish people. This evidence begins in even the first chapter as Matthew traces Christ's ancestry to Abraham, the father of the Jews. Through the book Christ is continually pictured as the fulfillment of the Law and the prophets, a fact to which the Jews would have been most attracted. Added to this is the fact that almost one hundred times Matthew quotes the Old Testament scriptures and that about fifty times he alludes to the prophets proving that the Jews were at the forefront of his mind. Christ is portrayed throughout this book as the promised Messianic king for whom the Jews waited, the King of the Jews; and Matthew even recorded in its entirety the prophetic warning of Jerusalem's doom at the hands of Rome in the second half of Matthew 25. All of this information obviously has value to anyone who reads it, but it was without question written from the Jewish perspective to warn the Jews of that which was to come and to prove to the Jews that Jesus Christ was the Son of God.

The book of Matthew is perhaps the most comprehensive of the gospel accounts, though all contain information not necessarily found in the others, in that it begins with events prior to the birth of Christ and records events until just prior to His ascension. It is with this comprehensive overview that the book of Matthew is divided into five sections. First is the preliminary information found in Matthew 1:1-4:16. These chapters deal with everything leading up to the begin of His earthly ministry. Included is His genealogy, the promise of His birth, the birth itself, His flight from Herod and eventual return, and then finally His baptism at the hands of John and eventual temptation in the wilderness by Satan. This information in the sum of Matthews account regarding His first thirty years of life, though further information is pieced together from the other accounts.

The second section of this book is the beginning of His ministry (Matthew 4:17-7:29). Following his baptism and temptations, Christ immediately began proclaiming the message of His kingdom to all with whom he came in contact. His ministry was enhanced as he chose apostles, adding to His "work force." And then He preached His first recorded sermon, and the one that would set the precedent for the following three years of His work and the ensuing result of His work, Christianity. The Sermon on the Mount was a landmark oration in which Christ began telling the people about the blessings of Christianity, the ideals of Christianity, and the means of Christianity. It was the foundation upon which all else He did rested.

A third section of this book deals with His final three years of life and work. Matthew 8:1-26:46 chronicle a multitude of truths taught and miracles performed, all of which were done for the intent purpose of identifying Himself as the Son of God, the Messiah. Over the course of those three years a host of people came to believe on Him, but likewise did a host of people come to hate Him and despise Him. It was the wrath of the latter that leads the book to the fourth section.

Matthew's fourth section is the record of Jesus' trial, sentencing, death, burial, and resurrection (Matthew 26:47-28:8). Judas, true to form and expectation, sold his Lord to the Jewish dissenters for thirty pieces of silver, and after being apprehended in the Garden of Gethsemane, Christ was made to suffer a trial of incompetence and political corruption. He then was subjected to the cruelest form of torture and death imaginable at the time. The grave though could not hold Him for on the third day He defeated death and arose from the tomb, rendering a fatal blow to Satan and his cause of evil.

Then, Matthew's fifth section (Matthew 28:9-20) records Christ's appearance to many, including the apostles, just prior to His ascension. With a final charge to His beloved apostles, Christ gave them His divine plan for the propagation of the gospel and New Testament Christianity unto all the world by commanding them to go, teach, baptize, and instruct that His name and will might be known and enjoyed by all.

The book of Matthew transitions the student's mind from the Old Testament to the New in a marvelous way, connecting everything previously studied. But likewise does it set an astounding tone for everything that will follow. Its truth summarily revealed is that which is the cornerstone of man's salvation: "Jesus is Christ, the Son of God (Matthew 16:18).

-Andy Brewer