

THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE

CHOICES FOR A BETTER SCHOOL YEAR

You are back. Back from your summer trips, back from your summer jobs, and back from the mall and nights out with your friends. School has started and by now you have your schedule figured out; or at least almost figured out. You know which book you need for each class, and which teachers are going to require more work. With the beginning of each school year there are important decisions to make. Like, what style am I going for this year? What electives am I going to take? What should I wear the first day? Should I try out for the school team?

While those are not earth shattering decisions I want to encourage you to ask three important questions this year: (1) To whom do I belong?; (2) What will I allow to influence me?; and (3) Who will I talk to about Christ? These may seem insignificant as you read them, but how you answer them will affect your life and those around you.

First, as you begin to think about who you belong to, you are really contemplating your identity. Some of you have parents that talk to you about your behavior and use phrases like, “we don’t do that” or “not in this household.” What they are basically saying is that this type of behavior is not to be identified with this family. Some of you may not have parents that talk to you in this way or you may not have parents at all. If, however, you are a Christian please know that you *do* belong to a family—the family of God (Ephesians 2:19) and the body of Christ (I Corinthians 12:27). In the Lord’s family, God expects a certain type of behavior with some actions being forbidden. Consider for example how the church in Ephesus in regard to sin was told, “let it not even be named among you, as is fitting for saints” (Ephesians 5:3). When you made the choice to become a Christian you also made the choice to identify your actions with those Christ taught and has shown.

Let me give you an example. There were four boys who were captured by a mighty king. Their names, language, culture, and family all changed. They were immediately thrown into an intensive course of study which involved learning a new language, culture, and laws. If they did not excel they would be made slaves or killed. These boys were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah also known as Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego. They still wanted to serve God so, “Daniel purposed in this heart that he would not defile himself with the portion of the king’s delicacies, nor with the wine which he drank” (Daniel 1:8). He refused to eat the king’s food because it violated God’s command. He “purposed in his heart” that he would serve God as did the other three. Each of them made the choice that no matter what happened they would always serve God. So when threatened with the furnace for not bowing down to the idol, they had already made up their minds to whom they belonged. Also when Daniel received word that he would be thrown to the lions for praying, he had already purposed in his heart to serve God. Likewise, as you begin this school year and the rest of your life, purpose in you heart to serve God and make the choice *now* about who you belong to. So, when the time comes and you are tempted, remember that you have made the choice to follow Christ.

Second, when you follow Jesus there will be outside influences to either help or hinder your decisions (II Timothy 3:12). Make a decision about who or what will influence you. Some things, like your family and environment, are beyond your control and may have influenced you. These, however, must not determine the rest of your life. At some point you must take personal accountability for your actions as is taught in Philippians 2:12: “work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.”

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

COMMON SENSE CHRISTIANITY:
SERVANTS DO...

Text: _____

I. Servants Do _____

Notes:

II. Servants Do _____

Notes:

III. Servants Do _____

Notes:

WHAT IS BIBLICAL FAITH?

Text: _____

I. Biblical Faith is _____

Notes:

II. Biblical Faith is _____

Notes:

III. Biblical Faith is _____

Notes:

As a young person you are making critical choices ranging from the people you hang out with to the media you allow yourself to see and hear. All these things play a role to influence you and your decisions. You are not completely powerless to the forces around you. You can choose what you allow to affect you. This is not a new concept. Solomon spoke about this subject concerning the company you should keep: “My son, do not walk in the way with them, keep your foot from their path; for their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood” (Proverbs 1:15-16 NKJV). Do not allow your friends or anything else to persuade you to do things that you know you should not do.

The third choice is deciding who you will talk to about Jesus. This is something the Lord has told you to do (Matthew 28:18-20). This can be as simple as taking a moment to tell someone why you are different. When a friend is asking questions about why you go to church or why you do not do all the things they do, use that moment to tell them why. You do not have to get up on the table and shout out to everybody. It is as simple as telling someone what and why you believe (I Peter 3:15). If you do this enough, people will see that you are serious about your convictions and begin asking you questions pertaining to their spiritual situation. Remember you do not have to know all the answers; but you do have to know where to look.

As you begin this school year, make changes in your life that will make a difference for you and those around you. You can start by putting God first and deciding who you will serve. Decide what you will allow to influence you and your life. Do your best to, “guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:7 NKJV). Look for opportunities to evangelize the lost. Don’t just see people that you like or do not like but see souls for whom Jesus died. He died so that we could live—we must live to serve.

-Josh Blackmer

INTEGRITY?

It was the day of the big exam, and the professor handed out the test papers to his students. When time was up, he called for the students to hand the tests back in. As he was grading exams, the professor noticed one of the students had attached a \$100 bill to his test with a note saying, “A dollar per point.” At the next class session, the professor handed the tests back out. That student got back his test paper plus \$56 change.

THE EARTH SHALL SEE THE SALVATION OF OUR GOD

The prophet Isaiah lived and worked during some of the most trying times in the land of promise. Neither Israel nor Judah had yet gone into captivity, but both had long since been on their respective roads that would eventually lead them there. Sin abounded and the people had joy in such. As Jeremiah would later say, “*The prophets prophesy falsely, and the priests bear rule by their means; and my people love to have it so...*” (Jeremiah 5:31). Thus, as Isaiah dwelt among these sinful people his primary job as God’s spokesman was to warn them of the consequences of their actions. Captivity would come and they would suffer. In fact, Isaiah pictures these captivities in such a profound way, that he speaks as though they were already suffering them. However, along with the warning of consequences came the promise of hope. Judah would one day respond to God’s message of “*awake, awake: put on thy strength, O Zion; put on thy beautiful garments, O Jerusalem, the holy city: for henceforth there shall no more come into thee the uncircumcised and the unclean*” (Isaiah 52:1). And it would be in that day that something great would happen that Isaiah depicts in this way: “*The Lord hath made bare his holy arm in the eyes of all the nations; and all the ends of the earth shall see the salvation of our God*” (Isaiah 52:10). To the multitudinous population of this world, something would be made evident by Judah’s return from Babylon—the power of the salvation of Jehovah God!

Isaiah’s prophetic book, though, is not the first instance in the Bible in which we have seen the reference made to the visual impact of God’s salvation. In Exodus 14, the newly emancipated nation of Israel had made it to the Red Sea with the massive army of Pharaoh hot on their trail. As they stand on the shore of that ancient landmark, they feared and cried out to Moses their displeasure that he had brought them out of Egypt only to now die in the wilderness. The real problem they faced was not the impending meeting with Pharaoh’s mighty men, but rather their complete lack of trust in the God who had in actuality brought them out. And thus, in order to instill what he hoped would be a lifelong lesson in their hearts, Moses stands and says to the people, “*Fear ye not, stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord, which he will shew to you this day...*” (Exodus 14:13). What would take place immediately afterwards would be visual evidence of the infinite power of the eternal God. But for Israel, that visual evidence would soon be but a forgotten memory.

Also, though, we find another instance in II Chronicles 20 where man had the opportunity to visually see the power of God’s salvation. During the reign of Jehoshaphat in Judah, the Moabites, Ammonites and others united in an attempt to overcome Judah and oust its godly king. Fearful for the future of his kingdom, Jehoshaphat prayed to God for deliverance, after which verse fourteen reveals that a man named Jahaziel received a prophetic word from the Lord and said: “*Ye shall not need to fight in this battle: set yourselves, stand ye still, and see the salvation of the Lord with you...*” (vs. 17). God’s promise of Divine protection was with His people, and after their ultimate deliverance, Jahaziel’s words rang true as verse twenty-nine reveals that “*the fear of God was on all the kingdoms of those counties, when they had heard that the Lord fought against the enemies of Israel.*” God provided the visual evidence needed of His infinite power and loving mercy, but, yet again, for Israel that evidence would soon be remembered no more and their lives would return to iniquity.

Now, turn attention back to Isaiah. Prophetically, Isaiah was trying to change the minds of the people before they had to suffer what he had assured them they would. And by demonstrating God’s love and mercy upon their eventual release from captivity, it was hopeful that they would change their lives before it all had to take place. But even as they were told that God’s actions would cause all the earth to “*see the salvation of our God*” (Isaiah 52:10), little attention was paid and that visual evidence was again forgotten, and Israel still trod the road leading them to Babylonian oppression.

The Bible provides for us the same evidence of God’s salvation. Promise after promise after promise, and picture after picture after picture is revealed in Holy Writ to provide man with the same mind changing and life altering information that Exodus, II Chronicles, and Isaiah all explicitly mention. How will we respond? Will we like Israel hear and soon forget the marvelous blessings of our God? Or will we learn from the mistakes of our predecessors and retain the evidence of God’s salvation in our lives, thereby maintaining a life of godliness to enjoy His blessings eternally? Surely, one day all the earth will see the salvation of our God—but will we see it in our mind’s eye as we suffer eternally in torment contemplating what could have been, or will we see it, as it were, face to face?

-Andy Brewer