

FEELINGS FOLLOW FACTS**THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE**

Humans are emotional creatures. We love and hate. We hope and hurt. We dread and rejoice. We cry when we are sad, as well as when we are happy. We shout when we are angry, and we shout when we are thrilled. I have one son who not only smiles when he is happy, he even smiles (seemingly uncontrollably) when he is in trouble (which I have yet to understand). We roller coaster of emotions that occasionally overcomes us can wear us out one day and energize us the next. Like any humans, Christians are emotional people. We are emotional because we are human, but we also are stirred with emotions because we are servants of Jesus Christ.

Christians are called to be spiritual people (Galatians 6:1). We are “partakers of ... spiritual things” (Romans 15:27). We are to “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Corinthians 5:7). We must “worship the Father in spirit” (John 4:23-24). We are building a “spiritual house...to offer up spiritual sacrifices” (1 Peter 2:5). Such spirituality leads us to feel an array of emotions: revenge for the Creator, compassion for the lost, hatred of evil, anticipation of the Lord’s return, etc. Sadly, however, many who call themselves followers of Christ think of Christianity simply as a “feel-good religion.” The mindset among many is, “Feelings first, knowledge later” (if ever). Like the prophets of Baal, they cry out with great emotion and leap around in hysteria (1 Kings 18:20-40). Like the Pharisees, they pray and do charitable deeds to be seen of men (Matthew 6:1-8). Like Cain, they make unacceptable offerings, rather than sacrifices “by faith” (Genesis 4:4-50; Hebrews 11:4; cf. Romans 10:17). The cornerstone of Christianity for such people is emotion rather than Christ (Ephesians 2:20), feelings rather than facts. They think they can be “spiritual” without knowing the Spirit-revealed Truth (John 16:13).

If scripture teaches anything, it teaches that a faithful Christian’s feelings follow the digestion of biblical facts. Unlike Israel who had a “zeal for God, but not according to knowledge” (Romans 10:2), our enthusiasm for the Lord is to be rooted in the knowledge of God’s Word. Prior to becoming Christians, our hearts can be properly “pricked” only after we have heard the Gospel (Acts 2:14-37). We can be saved after we have “come to the knowledge of the Truth” (1 Timothy 2:4) and “receive with meekness the implanted word” (James 1:21). We can be cleansed and comforted after “taking heed” according to God’s Word (Psalm 119:9,50-52). We can go on our way rejoicing after receiving the Word (Acts 8:26-39). We can praise God “with uprightness of heart” after learning God’s righteous judgments (Psalm 119:7). We can worship in spirit after learning after taking hold of “the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God” (Ephesians 6:17) and learning “the fruit of the Spirit” (Galatians 5:16-6:1).

Are we to worship God fervently? Certainly. Are we to be “zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14)? Definitely. Should the soul-saving message of Jesus Christ stir out souls intensely? Indeed. But, Christianity has never been rooted in raw human emotions. Spirituality is not equivalent to excitement. Faith is not a mere feeling. Christianity is grounded in God’s Word. Our salvation, spirituality, worship, work, and overall faithfulness to God are dependent on knowing God’s will. Remember: “Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God” (Romans 10:17).

-Eric Lyons

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

MAKING AN IMPACT

Text: _____

I. Make a _____ Impact

Notes:

II. Make a _____ Impact

Notes:

III. Make a _____ Impact

Notes:

THEY HEARD OF HIS FAME

Text: _____

I. They Heard of His _____

Notes:

II. They Heard of His _____

Notes:

III. They Heard of His _____

Notes:

THE CHURCH, WHAT THE WORLD CAN NEVER BE

The church is the society that the world wants and tries to be, but never can be.

In the church selfless love is typical, standard, normal. In the world it is the exception that makes headlines.

In the church Christians treat each other equally, as brothers. There is respect and equality. In the world men are judged by their skin, their clothes, their bank accounts, their homes and origins.

In the church justice and right-doing exemplify daily interaction. The world fails miserably to provide justice and approves of shameful behavior.

In the church mercy takes up where justice leaves off. Forgiveness is given freely. The world is harsh and unforgiving.

In the church service is the hallmark of the saints. The little ones are taken care of. In the world people elbow others out of the way to the top, and the elite, rich and powerful make the headlines.

In the church is joy of life and joy at the coming of the Lord. Circumstances cannot affect the church's mood. The world is a somber place punctuated by parties and temporary fixes.

In the church peace reigns, because disciples of Christ give preference to one another. The world has never seen a day without war and conflict.

The church is the community the world will never be because of its Governor and King. He is the one who makes all the difference between the church and the world.

“And the church is his body; it is filled by Christ, who fills everything everywhere with his presence” (Ephesians 1:23, NLT).

-J. Randal Matheny

An old man was sitting on his porch, when a young man walked up with a pad and pencil in his hand.

“What are you selling, young man?” he asked.

“I’m not selling anything sit,” the young man replied. “I’m the census taker.”

“A what?” the man asked.

“A census taker. We are trying to find out how many people are in the United States.”

“Well,” the man answered, “you’re wasting you time with me; I have no idea.”

GOD, GRIEF, AND GUILT

Sorrow affects us all. No one has ever lived who has not lost a person whom they have loved, or at the very least been negatively impacted in some other way. With sorrow comes emotional pain; pain that can considerably alter the direction of a person's life if left unresolved. Grief that is never properly resolved eventually turns to feelings of personal guilt, and those feelings of personal guilt often result in spiritual chaos. But because sorrow affects us all, we all need to know what source to which we must turn in order to find whatever degree of comfort that we can in those times of affliction. What is that source? The Psalmist would write: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Psalm 46:1). Is there trouble in life other than the grieving process to which this verse can refer? Absolutely. Grief, though, cannot be left out of the trouble into which we sometimes enter. And it is in those times of trouble that God continues to serve as the undeniable means of comfort. But in what capacity does the Psalmist say God serves?

God is our refuge. A refuge is a "shelter or protection from danger" (Webster's). It is a location in which we have implicit trust as a place of fortification against all threats. Soldiers in battle have peace when they are able to find a refuge from the fighting. Seamen have comfort when they take refuge from a frightful storm. When we finally arrive home after driving through inclement weather, is there not relief to know we have finally found refuge? How much greater, then, when facing dangers to the faith, is the refuge available with God? God is the one with whom we know answers to the questions of life and death reside. Might every answer we seek be provided? No (Deuteronomy 29:29). But every answer we need is present (2 Peter 1:3). Nothing can completely absolve the sting of death, but God is the means by which faith can remain intact and untouched by the questions that often are asked as we grieve. Elsewhere the Psalmist would say: "Be merciful unto me, O God, be merciful unto me: for my soul trusteth in thee: yea, in the shadow of thy wings will I make my refuge, until these calamities be overpast" (Psalm 57:1); "But I will sing of thy power; yea, I will sing aloud of thy mercy in the morning: for thou hast been my defence and refuge in the day of my trouble" (Psalm 59:16); "Trust in him at all times; ye people, pour out your heart before him: God is a refuge for us" (Psalm 62:8); and "I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust" (Psalm 91:2). Yes, God serves as a means of comfort as our refuge from the chaos that can often result from grief.

God is our strength. It is natural to, when in times of deep despair, ask questions of our faith that otherwise we would never consider. And these questions rarely come from a true skepticism, but rather from a desire to understand why certain things occur. But while these questions may be natural, they can also be dangerous if left unresolved in our hearts because sometimes they turn to skepticism and then to doubt, which ultimately will either weaken or absolve our faith. God, though, is in a position to help us overcome those times of despair. As much as anybody in history, Job stands out as an individual who had to face grief head on and resolve questions that arose in his life that otherwise could have caused him to lose his faith. But he turned to God for strength and by example encouraged others to do the same. Speaking of God, Job would write: "If I speak of strength, lo, he is strong..." (Job 9:19); "With him is wisdom and strength, he hath counsel and understanding" (Job 12:13); "With him is strength and wisdom..." (Job 12:16); and "Behold, God is mighty, and despiseth not any: he is mighty in strength and wisdom" (Job 36:5). In times of emotional and spiritual weakness, God is our source of strength.

God is our very present help. Does God help? Yes; and His means of help has been seen above. What is interesting about this statement are the qualifying words "very present." God is always there and always one upon whom we can rely. He never takes a day off, He is always on call, and He is never too busy to give aid. We have the comfort of knowing that, like the Psalmist, "If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me" (Psalm 139:8-10). Isaiah's soothing realization was, "Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear..." (Isaiah 59:1). At all times, God is present. His help is "just a prayer away."

Grief is common. The guilt that accompanies grief is a regular reaction to disasters. God, though, is our "refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble." We should seek His counsel, yield to His commands, and enjoy His comfort through life and eternity.