

Telling My Brother in the Woods

Missionary Egerton Ryerson Young served the Salteaux tribe in Canada in the 1700s. The chief of the tribe thanked Young for bringing the good news of the Gospel to them, noting that he was hearing it for the first time in his old age. Since he knew that God was Young's heavenly Father, the chief asked, "Does that mean He is my Father too?" When the missionary answered, "Yes," the crowd that had gathered around burst into cheers.

The chief was not finished, however. "Well," said the chief, "I do not want to be rude, but it does seem to me ... that it took a long time for you to ... tell it to your brother in the woods." It was a remark that Young never forgot.

Many times Christians have been frustrated by the zigs and zags of life, thinking of the people they could reach if only, if only. The word of God reminds us to look around right where we are, and we will discover many who may have never heard the gospel. We are reminded that we have a message to relate wherever we go, "for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him" (Rom. 10:12-13). Sharing the good news of salvation with the lost is like one beggar telling another beggar where to find bread.

Worship on the Outside; Hide on the Inside

An older woman unfamiliar with the scriptures was given a Bible. But she stopped reading it because she couldn't understand why God would be so unfair as to reject Cain's offering. "After all," she said, "as a farmer, he simply brought to God what he had. Did God expect him to bring a different kind of sacrifice?" Sadly, she had missed the point. It wasn't that God didn't like vegetables. Rather, He knew that Cain's offering was masking an unrighteous attitude. Cain wasn't fully committed to God, as expressed by the fact that he wasn't living according to God's way.

It's easy to worship God on the outside while stubbornly keeping territory from Him on the inside. Jude writes about outwardly religious people who use religious activities to cover the reality of their sinful lives: "Woe to them! For they have gone in the way of Cain" (Jude 11). We can faithfully serve God, sing His praises, and give sacrificially to His work. But God doesn't want any of that without our hearts in it.

Does the Lord take priority over our plans and dreams? Is He worth more than the sin that tempts us? When we express to Him with our hearts and our actions that He is more worthy than anything or anyone else in our lives, it's an offering He won't refuse. God won't refuse a heart that is surrendered to Him.

A Garment of Praise

Praise is powerful. When Scottish minister Robert Murray McCheyne was troubled with a coldness of heart toward the things of the Lord, he would sing the praises of God until he felt revived in his spirit. Those in his household were often able to tell what hour he awoke because he began the day with a psalm of praise.

One day, while he was trying to prepare his heart for preaching, he wrote in his journal: "Is it the desire of my heart to be made altogether holy? ... Lord, You know all things ... I've felt so much deadness and grief that I cannot grieve for this deadness. Toward evening I revived. Got a calm spirit through singing psalms and prayer." McCheyne had been uplifted by praising God.

Perhaps you feel as if you are mired in what John Bunyan called the "slough of despond." Lift a song of praise to the Lord. The psalmist said, "I will sing of the mercies of the Lord forever" (89:1). When we do that, the praise will flow not only from our lips but over time

will also come from our heart. The Lord delights to give “the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness” (Isa. 61:3). Yes, “it is good to sing praises to our God” (Psalm 147:1). If you find yourself wearing a spirit of heaviness, try on a garment of praise. What a frustrating problem discouragement is. Everybody suffers with it; everyone complains about it; and yet, it seems that everybody contributes to it.

Shipwreck

William Scoresby was a British seafaring explorer in the 19th century who became a preacher. An interest in the workings of navigational compasses stayed with him during his ministry. His research led to the discovery that all newly built iron ships had their own magnetic influence on compasses. This influence would change at sea for various reasons—leading crews to read the compass incorrectly. Often this led to disaster.

There is a striking parallel between the misread compass and false biblical teaching. In 1 Timothy 1, Paul warned against “fables and endless genealogies” (v.4) -- man-made changes in the doctrine of God’s Word. People who teach false doctrines “have suffered shipwreck,” Paul concludes (v.19). Two people who opposed the Word of God by placing false teaching in its place, and who thus faced spiritual shipwreck, were Alexander and Hymenaeus (v.20).

Biblical truth is questioned and in some cases replaced in many churches today. Our opinions must never replace the truth of God’s Word. The Bible, not man’s erroneous opinions about it, is the ultimate guide for our conscience in navigating life’s changing seas. Beware of wrong readings. The first point of wisdom is to know the truth; the second, to discern what is false.

For Fear

If you’re a fan of Shakespeare, you know that his heroes always have a serious character flaw. It makes for a good story and teaches some important lessons. The same is true of our Bible hero Abraham. His flaw? Fear. Twice Abraham succumbed to his fear that a ruler would kill him and steal his wife (Gen. 12:11-20, 20:2-13). Fearing for his life, he deceived both Pharaoh and King Abimelech by saying, “She is my sister” -- in essence welcoming the kings to take Sarah into their harems (20:2). With fear dictating his actions, he put at risk God’s plan that through him and Sarah a great nation would arise (12:1-3).

But before we judge Abraham, we should ask ourselves a few questions. For fear of losing our job, would we compromise our integrity? For fear of appearing old-fashioned, would we set aside our values? For fear of being ridiculed or misunderstood, would we neglect sharing the gospel and put someone’s eternity at risk? Only one thing will conquer our fears: tenacious faith in God’s presence, protection, power, and promises.

If your fear is putting God’s wonderful plans for you at risk, remember that He will never ask you to do anything He can’t bring to completion. Let your faith overcome your fear, and your worry will turn into worship.

A Moments Wisdom

- The higher our position the more modestly we should behave.
- Where all think alike, no one thinks very much.
- Memories are created by what we do not by what we think.
- A man is known by the silence he keeps