

Dave's Laptop

November 17, 2014

Yesterday we considered some of what it might mean to be “All In” with and for God, with particular attention to how such commitment might be measured. That consideration reminded me of a story told by one of the editors of *Christianity Today*:

“About five years ago, my wife and I visited an elderly and very sick man who had once been our pastor. We discovered that he and his wife lived not far from us, and we renewed our old acquaintance. During one of our first visits, the man’s grandsons—14-year-old twins—came for a visit. The moment I met them, an inner voice told me that someday I would play a role in one of their lives. I brushed it off as a ‘brain hiccup’ and thought little more of it.

“During the next five years, we drew closer to that family and got to know the twins well. Gradually, one of them shared with us his call to the ministry of music.

“When the twins were 17, they and their parents visited us and toured the campus where I teach. The one called to music ministry was immediately struck with the impression he was to attend this particular university and none other. Over the next year, it became clearer to us that he was very serious. As far as I could tell, it had nothing to do with the fact that I teach there; he was following an inner tug of divine guidance.

“But my university is expensive, and his family is of modest means. During his senior year of high school, he applied for scholarships, but the results were not encouraging. Still, his enthusiasm for studying for ministry at this university didn’t flag.

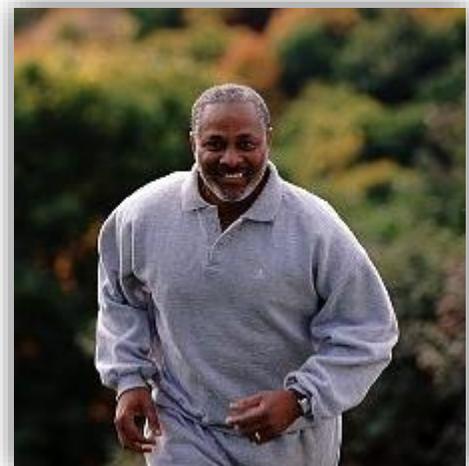
“I felt a strong burden to help him, but contrary to popular perception, Christian university professors are not prosperous. And my book royalties had never added up to any large amounts.

“One bright and beautiful morning in October 2005, I went out alone, walking and praying. I began to cry out to God for my young friend. ‘Oh, God, please use me to make it possible for him to go to this university!’ I don’t know what I expected to happen, but I committed to letting God use me however he wanted to on this young man’s behalf.

“The next week, I was at the same spot in my morning exercise when something amazing happened. Out of the blue, a book title came to me. It was so clever I knew two things instantly: It wasn’t mine, and it would sell.

“Then, in almost the same instant, the entire outline of the book was there in my mind. Every chapter and its title. No discursive thought preceded it. I immediately went home and began writing. As I wrote, I had the distinct feeling that this was not me. I had never written like this before. The words poured out. Two weeks later, a 200-page manuscript sat on my desk. I knew it was good.

“But what to do with it? I had never before written a book without a contract. As I sat and looked at the printed pages, the name of a well-known Christian book publisher suddenly came to mind. I had never dealt with the company before, but I had met the chief editor at professional society meetings. I felt directed to contact him, even though I knew the publisher’s procedure for considering book proposals and manuscripts was quite different and more complicated.



“I sent my acquaintance an e-mail message containing the title and the outline. A day later, I received an encouraging response; he wanted to read the manuscript. So I sent it to him. Within weeks, I had a contract; it required only a little tweaking of two or three brief portions of the manuscript.

“While talking to the editor assigned to this project, I discovered something astonishing. The publisher wanted to pay me a handsome royalty in advance for the book. It was approximately ten times anything I had ever received up-front before. I felt like I had won the lottery!



“Later, I took another brisk walk through my neighborhood. My mind was concentrating on the financial windfall and how to use it. Coincidentally, the estimated cost of my house’s much-needed roof replacement was the same as the royalty advance paid by my new publisher. The answer seemed clear—a new roof.

“Then God spoke: ***‘It’s not your money.’***

“Those were the first words of a conversation that lasted on and off for several days. Knowing instantly it wasn’t a ‘brain hiccup’ but something more real and serious, I asked, ‘What do you mean it’s not my money?’ My tone was resentful and defensive.

“***‘It’s not your money. It’s his.’*** The voice inside my head was as real as if it were audible. I knew with terrifying certainty it wasn’t my imagination, because I didn’t want to hear it.

“Whose?’ I asked.

“The voice named the young man for whom I had been praying only a few weeks earlier. ***‘It’s for him to go to the university and study for the ministry.’***

“All of it?’

“***That and the rest.***’

“I knew ‘the rest’ meant any further royalties the book might earn after it was published.

“Absolutely flabbergasted, I raised my fist in the air and asked aloud, ‘What about my roof?’

“The voice said, ***‘I’ll take care of your roof, if you’ll be obedient.’***

“Then I said, ‘If you want to use me to help him go to the university, why not give me everything it will cost? Why this amount that will make a difference but not pay his whole way?’

“***Others have to be obedient, too,***’ I heard in reply.

“When I arrived home, I shared the conversation with my wife, who had been looking forward to a roof that wouldn’t leak. I couldn’t talk about it without sobbing almost uncontrollably. I was shaking with emotion. Nothing like this had ever happened to me

before. My wife is more spiritual than I am. She immediately agreed; we would wait for a new roof. . . .

“Today, my young friend is living in a residence hall and taking courses, including courses in preparation for music ministry.”

As amazing as this story is, the most important words in it are “**Others have to be obedient, too.**” Churches tend to be filled with persons who earnestly want to experience “lives that matter” and “relationships that last,” and who rightly understand that Jesus holds the keys to these gifts. At the same time, it’s very frequently the case that these same persons only dabble in the Way of Jesus, not really taking Him very seriously in the broader scope of their lives.

This may happen because we haven’t understood that heart satisfaction comes only from deep soul friendship with Jesus, not in halfhearted religious motions. In fact, *dabbling in the Way of Jesus is almost worse than not knowing Him at all*, because it tends to inoculate us against faith’s more virile forms.

People who try to secure “lives that matter and relationships that last” along paths that are not directed by obedience to Jesus eventually discover that people who are all wrapped up in themselves make pretty small packages. That’s not the life Jesus envisions for you.

Organizing our lives around obedience to Jesus is something that we do, not to be “religious,” but to satisfy our deepest heart hungers. Living faithfully in the faith family of the church is not something we do to be “respectable members of our community,” but because God’s Spirit compels us to join ourselves together into the Body of Christ as we are transformed into His likeness. Telling others about what is happening to us and inviting them to join us on the journey is the most natural thing in the world when we begin to know Jesus as He intends for us to know Him.

I like the way that Aslan, the Christ figure in C. S. Lewis’s *Chronicles of Narnia*, put it, “**You do not yet look so happy as I mean for you to be.**” If you can’t imagine Jesus saying that to you, then you do not yet really know Jesus in the soul friendship He intends for you.

So what are you doing with your life? What does Jesus see when He watches you in our sanctuary on Sunday and in other places during the week?

If you listen carefully, you can hear Jesus’ response to what He sees. Is He sadly saying, “You are a fool to store up earthly wealth for yourself without having a rich relationship with Me,” or is He saying with a smile, “You have put it all on the altar, and now your life can become a channel of My power. You’re ALL IN. Enter into the joy of your Lord!”

Choose wisely.

Dave

“You do not yet look so happy
as I mean for you to be.”

The Joshua Code: Fifty-Two Verses Every Believer Should Know

O.S. Hawkins (Thomas Nelson, 2012)

Week forty-four: The Word became Flesh

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14).

Who is this “Word” spoken of in the opening verses of John’s gospel? This is God Himself, stepping out of heaven, clothing Himself in human flesh, and entering human history. John is explicit about His identity: *“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God” (John 1:1).*

GOD’S GARMENT

“The Word became flesh.” Jesus came down to where we are so we could go to where He is! He came to us and took on our flesh. He was not God *and* man as He walked the ways of this world. He was the unique God-man. As God, He walked on water, calmed the storm, healed the sick, and rose from the dead. As man, He got thirsty and tired; He felt sorrow and pain.

Think about it. Jesus came, not clinging to all the brightness of His glory, not shunning us for our sinful condition, but humbling Himself to become a servant and to clothe Himself in flesh. By doing so, He would be able to say, “I understand” every emotion, temptation, and pain we experience.

GOD’S GRACE

In the incarnation, we also see God’s amazing grace. Yes, He *“dwelt among us . . . full of grace and truth.”* The word translated *dwelt* means “to take up temporary residence as though one lived in a tent.”

The text continues to inform us that Jesus was *“full of grace.”* There is a difference between mercy and grace. *Mercy* is not getting what we do deserve. *Grace* is getting what we do not deserve. Jesus’ love is always manifested in His grace.

Our Lord was also *“full of . . . truth.”* In fact, He was the embodiment of truth. It is only when His grace leads us to know the truth that we are truly free. Jesus came, not to talk to us about God, but to show us what God was like so that the simplest mind might know the Father as intimately as the most intelligent academic.

GOD’S GLORY

In Christ’s incarnation, we also catch a glimpse of His glory: *“We beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father.”* There is little doubt that John, now an old man, was reminiscing about the Transfiguration when he penned these words. He had been there, along with his brother James and Simon Peter, when our Lord was transfigured into His glorified body. John saw “His glory” all right! On that mountain John witnessed Jesus as *“His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light” (Matthew 17:2).*

The incarnation of Christ should not be thought of as a past, historical phenomenon. This same Jesus who was born in Bethlehem, who took on human flesh, longs to be born again in our hearts. His desire is to take up residency in you, to dwell in your heart today. Paul reveled in this thought when he said, *“Christ in you, the hope of glory” (Colossians 1:27).* Have you personally *“beheld His glory”* in yourself?