

(For Monday, July 17, 2017) Have you thrown your pride to the Cross?

“And Saul was very angry, and this saying displeased him. He said, ‘They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands, and what more can he have but the Kingdom?’” (1Sam.18:8, ESV)

The entire spectrum of human broken-ness and its futility is wrapped up in this single verse. Because of our pride, you and I are so very prone to envy and jealousy. We’re just hard-wired that way. In one of the most powerful parables in the Bible, Jesus warns us that in some cases the seed (which represents the Word of God) falls among the thorns. And he goes onto explain that these thorns represent “the cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches which choke the word of God,” and impede its growth in the heart of the hearer.(See Mt.13:22) Yet, for you and me this envy and jealousy are pathetically pointless. Because, one day, we will inherit our full citizenry in the Kingdom of God, and indeed, “What more can we have but the Kingdom?”

Have you taken the time recently to throw your envy and jealousy to the Cross? The truth is, they can be nailed right there!

(For Tuesday, July 18, 2017) Have you recognized the God Spark?

“When Peter came to himself, he said, “Now I am sure that the Lord has sent his angel and rescued me from the hand of Herod and from all that the Jewish people were expecting.” (Acts 12:11, ESV)

It’s interesting that the wording of this verse is so very like the moment of realization of the Prodigal Son, when he awakens to his wretched state and “comes to himself.” (See Lk.15:17) Both accounts represent moments of rescue, and both also involve an instance of epiphany in being able to see the hand of God at work, and His ever available grace and mercy. Part of man’s fallen-ness is due to the fact that the Great Deceiver has built within us an artificial barrier that hides from human view the real presence of what I call the “God Spark,” which is part of being created in God’s image. But in our moments of quiet time with God, we can rend that wall of deceit which divides the spiritual from the physical, and realize that we are adopted children of the Creator God, made with both physical and spiritual components which are inalienably forged together in our creation.

Have you thanked God recently for the fact that you are fearfully and wonderfully made? (See Ps.139:14)

(For Wednesday, July 19, 2017) How does Satan provide a compass for God’s children?

“Those who repay evil for good slander me, because I follow the course that is right.” (Ps.38:20, NRSV)

One of the words used in the New Testament to describe someone who is slanderous is the *diabolos* (See *Strong’s Concordance* #1228). It’s the Greek from which English derives the word “Devil.” This is an important distinction. If you read the Bible with any kind of care, you come away with the insight that Satan really does exist. And as the “Great Slanderer,” his main focus is to cause pain and suffering among God’s children, often using as one of his primary tools gossip-filled liable. Since Satan really does prowl the planet looking for good people to attack and tear

down, the fact that righteous people often are subject to hurtful slander means that these folks are doing something for the Kingdom so powerful that they have caught the Devil's attention.

No, it's not at all pleasant. But in a weird kind of way, the next time you are the target of some kind of spiteful and malicious accusation, isn't that an indication that you are doing right in the eyes of God?

(For Thursday, July 20, 2017) What makes God angry?

"And he [Jesus] said to them [the Pharisees], 'Is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill?' But they were silent. And he looked around at them with anger, grieved at their hardness of heart..." (Mk.4:4-5a)

Jesus saw all kind of sin when he walked among us. Yet there are relatively few Scriptural accounts where he becomes angry about it. Christ is often troubled by his disciples' constant bickering, and He displayed countless expressions of grace when confronted with our brokenness. Yet here in this passage from Mark when the Pharisees were more concerned about their position of authority than in healing this wretched man with the withered hand, Jesus shows anger. And when He cleansed the Temple with a whip made of cords, his anger does indeed bubble to his human surface.

I define sin as any thought, word, or action that distances us from God. But could it be that God is most angry with us when we do something that not only distances ourselves from Him, but that also separates someone else from his love and mercy?

(For Friday, July 21, 2017) How will your seemingly small acts of kindness today have an effect on eternity?

"And he [Jesus] told his disciples to have a boat ready for him because of the crowd, lest they crush him." (Mk.3:9)

As I have grown older in the Christian faith, certain aspects of the Bible have begun to have new meaning for me. I am especially intrigued by the people working off-stage in the Biblical narrative. There is the man who raised the donkey so Jesus could ride into Jerusalem in triumph. (See Lk.10:29-36) There is the man who carried water in a jar to indicate to the Disciples where the Upper Room was. (See Mk.14:12-16) And in this passage, there must have been those who found a boat for Jesus to preach from so that he wouldn't be harmed by the press of the crowds. Apparently, even the smallest of human acts if done for the Kingdom of God can have eternal consequences in the history of salvation.

What will you do today, no matter how small. that will move people and our world closer to the Kingdom of God?

(Rev. James Barnhill blogs as www.1thes511.net)