

View

May 17, 2020

“Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” — John 12:21



These are difficult times, made more difficult — almost unbearable — due to little Bo’s passing this week. I don’t know what to write or what to say. A precious, wonderful family, whom we have grown to love so much has suffered a devastating loss. Words fail me... but we have God’s Word and that gives us hope in times like this.

I feel compelled to say this one thing: don’t tell me there’s no heaven. Lennon could sing, “Imagine there’s no heaven” but I can only imagine what heaven is like. I prefer hope over despair. Heaven is real and our hope is fixed on it. Many people we love are already there, enjoying its beauty and they are fortunate ones who have come face-to-face with Jesus and the Father and the Holy Spirit. We are just waiting anxiously to get where they are. Let’s look at a few words from God:

“...our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him to subject all things to himself.”
Philippians 3:20-21

“But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.”
I Thessalonians 4:13-14

“For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. II Corinthians 5:1

“Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in you.” Psalm 33:22

Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.”

“O death, where is your victory?”

“O death, where is your sting?”

The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

I Corinthians 15:51-57

2020:Are You Worried?

This recent pandemic has turned things upside down. Leaders have been caught off guard and experts have no precise idea of what to do. People of faith are not immune from the turmoil, and unfortunately, some have grown angry and fearful of the future.

Time to stop and recalibrate.

In *City of God* (ca. 410 AD) Augustine wrote there are two cities: The earthly city that loves self and holds God in contempt, as well as the heavenly city that loves God and holds self in contempt. As Christians, we know and struggle with this conflict everyday. In the earthly city (governments of men), leaders may be corrupt, laws unjust and virtue scarce, but scripture tells us these are ordained by God to secure a measure of peace (Romans 13:1-3). Certain civil liberties may be lost but the citizenry will survive.

Aristotle argued that because man could speak and morally reason, he was by nature a political animal. I suppose it is only natural that Christians are interested in the circumstances around them that affect their family's daily life, but to what extent do we defend political views or civil liberties? Jesus wasn't crucified to secure voting rights.

As disciples of the Lord, we are called to citizenship in the heavenly city (Hebrews 12:22-24). We're not lost, we know where that city is and we look forward to the day when we can walk in the fullness of our new creation before the throne of God...don't we?

Have we not commented in countless Bible classes that the first-century church was able to grow and flourish throughout the world in spite of the pagan Roman government? Could that dynamic not be replicated today? What if it were the plan of God to so again? What pattern of behavior would we follow?

Having traveled more times than I can count the past eighteen years with my wife to the former Soviet Union, having made loving friendships with many Russian Christians, having known their stories of faith in spite of their totalitarian world, I developed a deep respect for them, and I'm not worried for my grandchildren or even great-grandchildren. Let me explain.

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I turned 69 yesterday. We (baby boomers) have had the best of the best of this country (so far), and we recoil at the thought of giving that up. But in a moment of clarity, we must admit we didn't need that prosperity to serve God. Here's my

point: Our grandchildren or great-grandchildren may never know the fullest liberties this country has provided in the past, but as long as they have the New Testament story of first century Christians, which overcame pagan rulers and unjust laws to still serve the Lord and teach the gospel, our kids can make it...under any government.

"For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord." Romans 8:38, 39

—KENNY MARRS

The Vulgarization of Language

This pandemic has made Netflix richer, for sure. One effect of being stranded at home is that more people are tuning in to more streaming media more often. But how many times have you tuned in to a show on Netflix or Amazon Prime only to turn it off a couple of minutes in, due to vulgarity and/or profanity?

Back in the early 80s, a friend loaned me a cassette tape of an up-an-coming, very popular comedian. We had seen some of his routines on TV and they were hilarious. I didn't have time to listen to the tape, so I set it on top of the cassette player. My parents and my little sister Betsy were coming to visit, but we had to go out for awhile so we told them the key was under the doormat. My parents arrived and Betsy, who was about 13 years old, saw the tape and told my mom and dad they should listen to it because the man was really funny. She popped it into the cassette player and they listened to the entire tape.

When we arrived home about an hour later, my mom and dad were strangely silent. My dad had "that look" in his eye and I knew something was amiss. Turns out the tape not only included all of this new comedian's famous family friendly routines but also, right at the end of the tape, a disgusting joke, with a couple of expletives. I had no idea that such material was on the tape and I'm not even sure my friend did.

Of course, my parents thought the tape was mine, so when we got home, after enduring the "look," my dad lit into me about listening to garbage like that. I had to talk really fast to tell them what happened and eventually, with my mom's encouragement, my dad believed me. Of course, then we were stuck trying to explain our choice of friends.

That was a time when most Christians agreed that vulgar language and dirty jokes were a bad thing, and for good reason. Paul speaks about it in Ephesians 4:29,

Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear.

That word "corrupting" (Gk. *sapros*) means "rotten," "putrid," "impure." No Christian should allow rotten, putrid words to come out of his mouth any more than he would put rotten putrid food into his mouth. In Ephesians 5:4 Paul says,

Let there be no filthiness nor foolish talk nor crude joking, which are out of place, but instead let there be thanksgiving.

"Filthiness" is the Greek word *aischrotēs*, which means "obscenity," or "indecenty." We know what

"obscenity" is without having to define it. As the famous story goes, Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart said, in describing his threshold test for obscenity, "I know it when I see it."

Then there is the use of profanity — profaning God's name and the name of Jesus. Can you imagine facing God on judgment day having spent a lifetime of dragging God's name through the dirt. Of course, those who do it don't expect judgment.

There was a time when Christians were much more circumspect in their speech than they seem to be now. They were even reluctant to use words that were too close to cuss words.

The first time I met Christie was at a worship service on a Sunday when she inadvertently sat on the pew I was sitting on. I had not seen her before but I knew who it was. I don't mind telling you that, to this day, when I think of that moment, my heart skips a

beat. She was drop dead gorgeous and I had a hard time not staring at her. I didn't, because that would have been creepy. But I was smitten.

My dad was preaching that day, but I could not have told you what he preached about, even if you asked me right after services. My mind was elsewhere. However, just recently I mentioned that to Christie and she said, "Oh I remember what he preached really well." I'm thinking, "obviously, she was not smitten." But that's not the point. She said, "your dad was preaching on *euphemisms*." Euphemisms are words used as substitutes for words that might be considered profane or vulgar. I won't give examples — you all know the kinds of words I'm talking about.

My point is, there was an argument to be made that using substitute cuss words was just as bad as using the words themselves. Whether you agree with that or not (and I'm not sure I do) suffice to say there was a time when even those euphemisms were frowned upon. How many of our Christian family members and friends would be spinning in their graves if they heard some of the words we listen to and some even *use* today?

There used to be some things you could take for granted when someone claimed to be a Christian. One of those was the absence of *putridity* (as Dee Bowman used to say) in speech. Now, it seems, anything goes, even among some brethren, and that surprises and saddens me.

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