

It's About People

By Jim Hohnberger

*"But he turned and rebuked them and said,
Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of.
For the Son of man is not come to destroy
men's lives but to save them."*

—Luke 9:55-56—

I awakened near midnight, sensing a presence in the room. Wide-awake now, I listen to the sounds of our wilderness home, as it too seemed to be resting from the day's activities. A gibbous moon travels majestically over Glacier National Park headed westward to set beyond the Whitefish Mountains. The quiet is so loud you can almost touch it, with only the distant yip of a coyote disturbing the peaceful setting we love so much.

The moonlight through the windows illuminates our room and gives the familiar surroundings an ethereal look, but the mists of dreamland hold no appeal for me. I have a visitor awaiting my company. I sit up, trying not to disturb my sleeping wife and turn my attention to my audience with the King of Kings.

I had been recently meditating on Calvary. It wasn't the first time. For years, I had longed to

understand it more fully, to experience it more deeply, and I had been praying for many months that God would reveal its mysteries more fully to me. Now I sensed God's presence in the room. It was nothing I could see or hear, but I sensed that God was there and He had chosen that particular time to give me a little larger glimpse of Calvary. The panorama spread before my mind's eye and I was there. I could see it all; and what God showed me that night, I now share with you.

It is a beautiful spring morning in Jerusalem and the sun greets the city with a blast of brilliant light that promises heat. The streets are jammed even at this early hour, due to the Passover. Thousands of pilgrims throng the nation's capital. The attention of the people seems riveted on some event now taking place and a cohort of soldiers on escort duty catches my eye. They are leading three prisoners to execution, slowly forcing their way through the hostile crowds.

Hostile crowds are nothing new to Jerusalem's garrison. The Jews are a proud, independent people, and the very sight of Rome's banners on her walls rankled the populous, which made no secret of their hatred of Roman rule.

Yet, today's crowd seemingly bears little enmi-

ty towards the legionaries. No, today, it is the prisoners who garner the public's spite. Only the most despicable of criminals are disposed of in this manner and even the Jews, who despise being under Rome's heel, approve the government's method for the demise of these criminals. The mob sends both insults and saliva in the direction of the condemned men. Such behavior is not so removed from our day, as we would like to think. Imagine, if you will, how the public would respond to a parade of convicted child molesters and you'll get the idea.

I watch as Jesus is led down the crowded avenue. He is lean from travel and ministry, but still his form reveals the strength of a craftsman. He is visibly weakened by His all night trial and repeated beatings, but his bloodied form awakens no sympathy from the onlookers who jeer and mock Him with words and stones.

I seem to be walking behind Jesus, following as close as I dare. Then suddenly he glances back at me and for a moment our eyes meet. I can contain myself no longer. "Look at them," I cry, gesturing towards the crowd. "They laugh at you! They don't even care!" I state emphatically. I am appalled, disgusted and revolted. I want nothing to do with those sinners who could greet a man's dying with such a carnival atmosphere. To them it is just a big joke-no it's worse than that-they think they are preserving their nation from this revolutionary. I am ready to write them off.

But then Jesus turns to me and with a seriousness I cannot mistake, rebukes me saying, "It's about people, Jim! The gospel is about taking poor, lost, mixed up people, and restoring them into my image." Jim, it is not just about holding up truth and pointing out error, as you have tended to think. It's about restoring those very people who are spitting on me right now."

That's the gospel
of Jesus Christ.
His gospel seeks
for the restoration
of the erring -
all the erring.

There in the quiet of my room, as the scenes of Calvary fade from my view, Jesus asked me four questions in the recesses of my mind. Their echoes have lasted through the years, their impact on my life, my ministry, and my relationship with others continually growing, as I realize the love which Christ had for me, for us and how far below His standard is our puny love for others.

"Jim, what would you have done with Aaron? You remember Moses' brother, the one who allowed the golden calf to be built by the children of Israel while Moses was up on the mountain speaking with Me and getting the tablets of stone with the Ten Commandments. We could perhaps refer to him as the vice president of God's denominated church. What would you have done with him?"

I could picture the whole story my mind. Aaron had been left in charge while Moses was on the mount. Problems started when Moses spent far longer on the mountain than the people expected and came to Aaron saying "...make us gods which shall go before us; for as to this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we want not what has become of him." (Exodus 32:1). So, Aaron asked them to bring him gold jewelry and then he melted it down and made a golden calf for the people and told them that this was the god that had lead them out of bondage.

Then later when confronted by Moses, he denied responsibility and claimed all he had done was toss the gold into the fire and by a miracle out came that calf. Think about it. Aaron was left in charge, but he led the people into sin. He explicitly disobeyed God and made a false god, an idol. Then he had the nerve to lie about the whole affair. What would you do with a national or church leader who had been involved in such a scandal? I know what I would do. I would throw them out and I bet you would too! We'd make

sure they never had another position of responsibility to misuse again. What did God do? He made Aaron High Priest. The gospel is about restoring those who are weak in character, not throwing them out!

Then God asked me, "What would you have done with David? King David, who not only committed adultery, but to cover it up he murdered a man. What would we have done with a leader like that?" We would throw them out, but God didn't. Yes, there was need of reproof and repentance, but not only was David restored to the throne, but through his union with Bathsheba, another man's wife, He brought forth the royal line of Solomon, and eventually Christ Himself.

The third question God asked me that night was, "What would you have done with Peter...self-confident Peter, who cut the ear off the high priest's servant with a concealed sword?" What did Jesus do with that ear? He restored it! Who do we resemble? Are we like Peter, chopping off ears? Or like Christ, bending down and picking up the ear and restoring that which was harmed? Not only did Peter cut off the servant's ear that night, he denied his Lord three times! What would you have done with Peter? I would have said, "There's nothing we can do with that guy. There's no hope for someone like that. Throw him out!"

What did Jesus do with Peter? He turned and looked at him, and it broke Peter's heart. Can you just imagine the love in His eyes, the drawing of his heart out in sympathy towards the one who was denying Him? That single look spoke volumes; it said, "Peter, Peter, you're trusting in yourself. Put it all down and surrender it to me. I want you Peter. Give me your heart." That's the gospel of Jesus Christ. His gospel seeks for the restoration of the erring-all the erring.

The Lord continued on, "Jim what would you do with Saul before he became Paul?"

I was starting to catch on to what the Lord wanted me to see, but this was too much. "Lord," I said, "Saul was the worse persecutor of God's people in his day. He made life miserable for them! Surely I'm not supposed to try and restore such a one as this...am I?" What would we do with Saul? I don't like to think about it, but Christ took Saul and made him into Paul, the greatest evangelist the world has ever seen.

The gospel is about taking these kinds of people, transforming them, and then using them to reach the world with the same gospel that has reached down and changed their lives. We, as a people, seemed to have missed it, but the gospel is a whole lot more than a system of truths, the opposition of error or even which church you go to. It's about the redemption of those who don't see it our way or who are antagonistic to our truths, our church or our lifestyle.

What would you
have done
with David?

Power for Living

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Empowered Living Ministries

9550 High Mesa Road, Olathe, CO 81425
970-615-0046

Email: office@EmpoweredLivingMinistries.org

Web: www.EmpoweredLivingMinistries.org