

Think On This – 2

March 22, 2020

With regards to the current Covid 19 crisis some of you may hear complaints about God or comments such as, “So where is this God of yours now?” Some of you may be thinking similar kinds of thoughts as well. In the March 20 post of his blog entitled THE ILLUSION OF HISTORY, Skye Jethani talks about the “narrative fallacy”. That’s when we create a false narrative for life based on our own experiences. Author Nassim Nicholas Taleb describes it with a story about the turkey.

The Turkey lives in an illusion of his own making. He lives in a shelter with clean shavings for nice bedding, food when ever he is hungry, clean water to drink and fresh air. A good man comes to the shelter everyday and if there are any who are sick or laying down he picks them up and takes them away restoring the equilibrium of the shelter. There are no coyote’s or predators of any kind to bother them. They are treated like kings and queens. The turkey’s has come to expect this life style. It is his normal until two weeks before Thanksgiving when his “narrative fallacy” undergoes a revision.

It is perhaps just as telling that we sit around a table with our friends and family, at the center of which is the bird that was no less deluded than we. God tell us,

“...my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts”. (Isa. 55)

And lest you think I am making too much of this consider God’s question at the beginning of Isaiah 55,

*Why spend money on what is not bread,
and your labor on what does not satisfy?
Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good,
and you will delight in the richest of fare.*

God asks this question exactly because of the illusion we create for ourselves. It is not that we may not enjoy the comforts of this life, it is that we may not make those the source of our comfort. When we ‘demand’ God come through for us we make our illusions more important than his reality. The truth is that his reality must overwhelm us. We need to find ourselves on the beach head of his LOVE waiting to be overwhelmed by his tsunami of GRACE. We need to be awash in the Living Water of the Spirit. Paul tells that, “...the person without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit

of God but considers them foolishness, and cannot understand them because they are discerned only through the Spirit.” (1 Cor.2) The people of Israel were also deluded. They were more concerned for the comforts of this life and 'their way' than they were about 'God's ways'. It is why God sends them the prophet Isaiah with this message,

A voice says, “Cry out.”

And I said, “What shall I cry?”

“All people are like grass, and all their faithfulness is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God endures forever.”

Why do you complain, Jacob? Why do you say, Israel,

“My way is hidden from the Lord; my cause is disregarded by my God”?

Do you not know? Have you not heard?

The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.

He will not grow tired or weary, and his understanding no one can fathom.

He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.

Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall;

but those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary,

they will walk and not be faint.

Isaiah 40: 27-31

Not to be too trite but I'd sooner soar on wings like an eagle than bide my time in the warmth and safety of the turkey barn. I think that that is what God has in mind for us as well. I am not a 'prosperity gospel' preacher but I do believe that God is very interested in reorienting us. That truth puts me in mind of a funny incident with Peter, Jesus and the collectors of the temple tax from Matthew 17.

After Jesus and his disciples arrived in Capernaum, the collectors of the two-drachma temple tax came to Peter and asked, “Doesn't your teacher pay the temple tax?”

“Yes, he does,” he replied.

When Peter came into the house, Jesus was the first to speak. “What do you think, Simon?” he asked. “From whom do the kings of the earth collect duty and taxes—from their own children or from others?”

“From others,” Peter answered.

“Then the children are exempt,” Jesus said to him. “But so that we may not cause offense, go to the lake and throw out your line. Take the first fish you catch; open its mouth and you will find a four-drachma coin. Take it and give it to them for my tax and yours.”

The wonderful thing about this story is not having your taxes paid by God. (that would be cool though). The better thing here is that Jesus is telling Peter that he is a royal. He is an eagle, not a turkey. His is a position of privilege. It is a wonderful example about who we truly are and the fact that while we should never flaunt that in front of others, we should never forget that we are children of the King. Ours are not the table scraps from the palace’s dining hall. Ours is the Holy Bread of Heaven. We are fed by the King – literally by his body and blood. This is a truth worth recalling and chewing on to be nourished by especially in the midst of a crisis. Everything else is delusional.

The following hymn was penned by Martin Luther after Emperor Charles V issued the Edict of Worms, pronouncing Luther a heretic. The edict effectively isolated him from the rest of the church. No one was allowed to socialize with Luther. It was during this time that Luther wrote the words to **A MIGHTY FORTRESS IS OUR GOD**. I find these words equally true for our current situation.

A Mighty Fortress is Our God

Verse 1

A mighty fortress is our God,
a bulwark never failing;
our helper he, amid the flood
of mortal ills prevailing.
For still our ancient foe
does seek to work us woe;
his craft and power are great,
and armed with cruel hate,
on earth is not his equal.

Verse 2

Did we in our own strength confide,
our striving would be losing,
were not the right Man on our side,
the Man of God’s own choosing.
You ask who that may be?
Christ Jesus, it is he;
Lord Sabbath his name,
from age to age the same;
and he must win the battle.

Verse 3

And though this world, with devils filled,
should threaten to undo us,
we will not fear, for God has willed
his truth to triumph through us.
The prince of darkness grim,
we tremble not for him;
his rage we can endure,
for lo! his doom is sure;
one little word shall fell him.

Verse 4

That Word above all earthly powers
no thanks to them abideth;
the Spirit and the gifts are ours
through him who with us sideth.
Let goods and kindred go,
this mortal life also;
the body they may kill:
God's truth abideth still;
his kingdom is forever!

Martin Luther, 1529, trans. Frederick H. Hedge, 1852

Blessings in Christ –

Pastor Kasey VanderVeen