

Chronicles of Diversity

Your leadership weekly



Color your wilderness

The Order of Wilderness Stuff Trekking International, *Possession Prison*

5 November 2003; Volume 5, Issue 39

Surfing through the channels over the weekend, I happened across Geraldo on Fox. He was doing a segment on the California wild fires and since I was looking for an introduction for this week's message related to those fires, I was sure he would provide me with something I could use.

It wasn't long until he showed an artist's sketch of the potential arsonist of one of the blazes. As he spun his way into the topic he stated that this guy was responsible for the deaths of the people who died in this particular fire and that this man should be punished accordingly. Man, what a great opening I thought to myself, "String up the dude for killing people who were so imprisoned by their stuff that they would not leave their possessions when ordered by the police and fire departments."

As of this writing and to the best of my knowledge, the twenty people who have lost their lives ignored orders to leave and chose to stay and protect their stuff, and they lost their gamble. On the other side, considering the nature of the fires, none of the fire fighters have been killed, just the Possession Prisoners.

From the state years ago that gave us Governor Moon Beam, and has recently elected Governor Terminator, we now have demonstrated before the whole world the power of the Possession Prison. If anyone knows or anyone cares, I wonder how many people have been executed in the last few years in California for murder and other capital crimes. And now a TV celebrity hints that someone else should be added to that group on death row, because of sick people unable to leave their stuff.

California with the fifth largest economy in the world has recalled a governor and elected another actor to see if he can do something about the unbalance of stuff in the state. We Washingtonians love

©2003; non-commercial education & forwarding encouraged, all other rights reserved

Jerry Bannon

Wonder Springs

7950 Seward Park Avenue South

Seattle, Washington USA 98118

phone: 206.723.7433

eFax: 425.675.8022

email: bannon@createleaders.org or chronicles@createleaders.org

Please forward prayer requests to: prayer@createleaders.org

Washington State Charity Number: 7529

Visit our web site at: www.createleaders.org

To subscribe to these free weekly messages please send us an email

to rip on the golden state, because mostly they deserve it, but there is a principle here that all should understand.

When I write in Washington about the area east of the coastal mountains and west of the hundredth meridian, it defines an area of natural arid realities. By the time you move south to Southern California the damp areas on the west coast have given way to the arid landscape. But true to the American dream that we can completely ignore the limits of creation and do what we damn well please, we find that this only works for a time. Thirty five hundred homes destroyed and priceless mementos lost, buried under the dust of burned stuff, shows a tragic testimony.

To the north of us this summer, British Columbia had a comparable fire season. I always considered most of the province to be quite lush, and got more so as you moved north. Even though I have traveled through the area, and should have known better, it was shocking to see vast areas of an ecology similar to that which I grew up with, burned and devastated in a similar fashion to what has occurred in California. Is God trying to tell all of us something? "Get your stuff in order, or I will do it for you."

Last week we looked at stuff that Christians carry from a time of solitude into the church. But times of solitude are such that physical stuff is cut to necessities. But as I heard someone once say especially when we are in this series so concerned with stuff, "Build a bridge and get over it."

Have you ever heard a series in church about management of your stuff? There have been some references to the sin of the rich young ruler (Matthew 19, Mark 10, Luke 18) and about building barns to hold your stuff (Luke 12). But most of the time these is taught with the underlying evangelical gnostic slant at stuff is always bad, and the things of the spirit are always good. It could also be that pastoral families are bounteous acquirers of stuff, just like the rest of us.

I used to go to a church where it was pretty much the prevailing assumption that if you ever drank a beer or glass of wine, that only a miracle of God could save you from hell's fire. However, the Fellowship Hall on most occasions featured two huge bowls three feet in diameter, one filled with potato chips and the other with ice cream. Ice cream is of course of foretaste of heaven, which all should enjoy with moderation.

But in my home, my moderation means a half a gallon of Moose Tracks may last maybe a week, if I ration my portions, just for me. Potato chips, I only eat one bag at a time. Therefore, both have to stay in the grocery store much longer than I would like, I don't want to become their prisoner. I enjoy these treats in isolation, because I really don't want to share, I want it all for me. Sort of my own Eucharist for my version of Calorie Chapel.

I bring up religion, because our relationship with stuff and with other people (personalities), is our religion. Last week, from the place of solitude we saw that our stuff problem concerned other people's stuff. We focused on spiritual stuff, but there was the underlying assumption that we didn't approve, in a religious way, of the way other people made relics and indulgences out of their stuff. Early Christianity was called The Way, because it treated rituals and traditions differently than Judaism. The Reformation occurred by the same changing of directions. These direction changes came about by individual choice made in the solitude where there was only God and man.

Possession Prison however, is a choice of stuff as it relates, not to God, but to the rest of the community. Possession Prison develops as we compare our stuff, or lack of stuff, with the perceived stuff of others. We make the commitment to let stuff fill the need that community does not fill. That is what makes the Southern California fires so tragic. It wasn't the affluence that was so terrible, it was that the affluence of stuff was really the primary means to find our secure place in the greater community.

The Religious Right has got at least part of the equation correct, in the west we have eliminated the Judeo-Christian roots of our culture, and in order for that culture to function as it once did, or as it should, those absolutes of God must again become the basis for all moral law. However, they miss the point in that the rule of law, really is of Greek and Roman heritage.

What the Religious Right also misses, no we all miss, is that western culture as it now exists is a religion of materialism, or as I called it in an earlier message Gnostic Materialism. No one can be part of the solution as long as they are part of the problem. The established church as bought into a bag of

relics and indulgences just as it did in pre Reformation times. Stuff can be a blessing from God, or it can be a curse depending upon a few distinctions. Those distinctions come through choice, not through ignoring the problem.

All this religious stuff, about stuff, only points to the fact that even the Word of God will not change the hearts of the people unless church culture is able to help people to tangibly deal with stuff addictions. I originally wrote additions, both seem to fit fine.

The church can be a cloister against the typical sins of amoral behavior, like drugs, divorce, illicit sex, pornography, adultery, alcohol, homosexuality, and other defined sins, because it offers a contrast with the world. But when you venture beyond these visible sins, the church begins to lose the tune, and becomes off key, it doesn't play too well on my MP3 player. (Actually that is one piece of stuff I do not own.)

Christian Enterprise is a large segment of our economy, and western pastors are among the largest barn builders in the world. This is especially tragic when you realize that most of that square footage of these barns are only occupied a few hours a week. One only has to tour the church barns of Europe to see that most people visit these cathedrals to see the stuff, not on the Lord's Day but during the week. Can that future be any different if we only look at the physical structure and not focus on the building blocks of God's temple, the living stones, God's people.

God's people leave their lush barns in the 'burbs to ride in an idolatrous mule to a fine physical church building, hopefully that will make them feel comfortable and not threatened. There they will hear a message that will challenge them spiritually, but not physically. The whole program will be repeated once or twice a week and it never becomes challenging or nauseous, (or effective). Praise the Lord?

Christianity that doesn't channel its resources toward changing the direction of a lost and dying world is accommodating the world, and is dying itself. There is a worldly business saying which states, "Show me how the money is spent and I will show you the direction the enterprise is going." The enterprise of the church is supposed to be only the preaching of the gospel as the manifest revelation of God's word, and God will take care of the other details. In the symbolism of the churches of Revelation you can't be the church of Philadelphia if the money is spent as in Thyatira, or Sardis, or Laodicea.

I only bring this up because I have never attended a church that did not consider itself to be representative of the Revelation church of Philadelphia. Some of them were, most of them were not, but the point of following the flow of the money is a tale that tells no lie.

We spoke in an earlier episode about the open door of Luther's Reformation stand, and the open door of Chuck Smith at Calvary Chapel, now located in Costa Mecca. The church of Philadelphia is also an open door church and is commended for that openness. However, it truly is how stuff is handled inside the church that signifies how open that church door remains to God's people.

Jesus can and will shut that door if it departs from the truth of God's word and the proclamation of the gospel. God will not let other stuff get in the way. Most of the churches that claimed to be of Philadelphia, you could tell the stuff problems right away. A church not founded and maintained on God's grace alone, can not proclaim the proper context of the five Reformation principles of scripture alone, by faith alone, through grace alone, by Christ alone, for God's glory alone.

If these Solas get lost amongst the other stuff, the transition to other forms of idolatry are not long in coming. In our culture the accommodation to materialism is so subtle, that it will quickly color our religion, if we do not use God's rainbow of colors to color the stuff he gives to us. These colors were codified in the Reformation, but were quickly lost in the desire to do other more sophisticated, or relevant stuff.

Again, the easy way to attempt to apply this color is to label the material as evil and the spiritual as good, or the other way around. Again we commit the heresies of Gnosticism or Arianism, two of the main heresies of the early church, the Revelation church of Ephesus.

Humanity was created in a material world, a universe of stuff. We relate to that material world as individuals either through solitude or isolation. The gospel of God through Jesus Christ alone is the only way to completely give us freedom from the bondage of stuff. Not by getting rid of the stuff, or

exalting the stuff to the level of idols, do we become free. Jesus Christ gives us a freedom to enjoy stuff as a blessing, or to use it as a positive means to grow in grace, these are His gifts to us.

You do not need to move to Southern California and fret and worry when your possessions will go up in smoke, but each of us needs to examine the role of stuff in our lives, to make sure we are not in Possession Prison. If you flip this off, chances are you really are to some degree controlled by your possessions, we all like to carry our own baggage, and the truth is that we all have too much baggage to carry without God's grace as the only burden we seek to carry and expound.