

Chronicles of Diversity

Your leadership weekly



A winter bridge

Fractured Rapture Tales **Dislocated Revelations**

21 January 2004; Volume 6, Issue 3

Tale 3

The Bible says: *Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; But happy is he who keeps the law.* Proverbs 29:18

We are all pretty good at remembering the revelation of the first part of the proverb, but we are not too good about remembering the revelation of the second part. And the linkage between the two clauses is almost never within our understanding.

As a practical matter, I heard someone in the political scene mention on the tube last week, that the difference between Republicans and Democrats was that Republicans believed in the rights of the individual as their fundamental belief of (good) government. Democrats however believed in the rights of the community as their method for collective good.

Both of these statements are true, not only in the political scene, but in life as a whole. The problem is without the rule of law, and the rule of God, both systems end in anarchy and chaos. The difference between the two political parties then is really in the definitions and the application of law.

As we watch the United States 2004 political storm gathering momentum, you will see candidates promoting their specific revelation of the application of secular law. All candidates will claim, and more importantly their supporters will insist, that God is on their side. Even if this god many times seems quite remote from the Creator of the Universe.

When I was driving home last Sunday evening, I had a profound revelation that sort of ties into this theme. Not in the political sense, but in the religious. I had a revelation on what is wrong with the church, probably over its history, but more specifically these last two hundred years, and right now, today, I am right on.

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Remember that ‘70’s song by Carly Simon, “You’re So Vain, (you probably think this song is about you.)”? Of course you remember, its all about all the you’re’s in your life. At times it’s your wife, your husband, your kids, your coworkers, your friends, and your brothers and sisters in church, even sometimes the pastor. In your weaker moments, you even have some remote, passing tendencies to think you might be slightly, but only very slightly self absorbed. Praise the Lord, it is just a passing thought.

So where do you hear the most back to back, self absorbed music today? In the worship choruses in most evangelical churches. Even the old hymns from yesterday are about you and Jesus. A revelation of two individuals, two personalities. But the triune God is really three personalities, distinct but of one essence, we can’t understand that type of intimacy, so we simply ignore any desire for some revelation of that beauty.

That me and Jesus alone mentality of course brings up the remembrance of “In the Garden” written by C. Austin Miles in 1913. There have been times in my life when this song has brought tears to my eyes.

*I come to the garden alone
While the dew is still on the roses
And the voice I hear falling on my ear
The Son of God discloses.*

Refrain

And He walks with me, and He talks with me,
And He tells me I am His own;
And the joy we share as we tarry there,
None other has ever known.

*He speaks, and the sound of His voice,
Is so sweet the birds hush their singing,
And the melody that He gave to me
Within my heart is ringing.*

Refrain

*I’d stay in the garden with Him
Though the night around me be falling,
But He bids me go; through the voice of woe
His voice to me is calling.*

Refrain

What follows is alleged to be the authors revelation for this song as reported on the Cyber Hymnal: I read the story of the greatest morn in history: “The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, while it was yet very dark, unto the sepulcher.” Instantly, completely, there unfolded in my mind the scenes of the garden of Joseph. Out of the mists of the garden comes a form, halting, hesitating, tearful, seeking, turning from side to side in bewildering amazement. Falteringly, bearing grief in every accent, with tear-dimmed eyes, she whispers, “If thou hast borne him hence” He speaks, and the sound of His voice is so sweet the birds hush their singing.” Jesus said to her, “Mary!” Just one word from his lips, and forgotten the heartaches, the long dreary hours, all the past blotted out in the presence of the Living Present and the Eternal Future.

So how do you separate the vain, from the intimate? That is what our fractured revelation tale is all about.

One year ago, on January 20th it was a nice day in Seattle. So nice in fact, I decided to go to the park and shoot some baskets. Outdoors, in the sun, getting exercise, it really was a good day.

About two in the morning on the 21st, a year ago from the date of this message, I woke up short of breath. Nothing like this had ever happened to me before. I checked my heart rate and my breathing, and they seemed to be normal. So what was wrong? I got up and checked the internet to see if I

was having a heart attack. That didn't seem to be the case, but I still couldn't catch my breath. After a couple of hours and really working myself up emotionally, I decided to call 911. In a few minutes, the lights of the aid car and the fire truck will illuminate the sky on the street outside my house. The paramedics confirmed that I was not having a heart attack. But they recommended that I see my doctor.

Gracefully, sparing you the details of the next month plus, on February 26, 2003, after being bumped from surgery the previous day for a heart transplant, early in the morning, I was placed on a stainless steel gurney and wheeled into the operating theatre at the University of Washington Medical Center, there to have my aortic valve and my ascending aorta replaced.

This is an operation that either is successful or it isn't, there is no patching you up and sending you home for another day, or to hope for a miracle. You face the ultimate choice in this surgery, either trust God, and the more difficult, to trust the surgeons He has selected, or pass on this operation not knowing if, or how long your future may last.

There is a saying that you don't know God and Jesus are all you need, until God and Jesus are all you have. To experience God's grace intimately in your life, day by day, as you are prepared to lay your life on that stainless table, is not only priceless in its intimacy, I think it is probably the most humbling experience a modern Christian can be given. There was very little doubt in my mind, that I would rise again off that table into a new life.

They super-glue the skin on your chest together. That scar on the skin is really the only lasting physical remembrance of that day. The surgeon said I would have more stamina. Which I noticed almost immediately. I can do more now longer than I could before my operation. But before my operation I never considered that I was at all limited in my physical capacity.

Doctors have checked out my heart and all the rest of the auxiliary plumbing and except for this congenital defect, which took decades to find, they suggest that I will probably die of some other abnormality. All the physicians also say that the episode of shortness of breath that started the whole thing, probably is not related to what they eventually found and fixed. Just lucky, or Divine providence, depending on the interpretation.

I don't really have a revelation of death any more. Without the grace of God working in my life, I could already have died, and be in eternity. Or I would not know that I really was born with a physical congenital heart defect, not just a spiritual one. I now have a very strong revelation that even if I pass on, there is no sting in death, I have been through that and got the scar to prove it, and I shall carry that scar of God's grace forever. What a blessing, what a gift.

There is a book in the Bible called the "Song of Solomon" or the "Song of Songs" depending on your translation. It is the last book just before you start the major prophets in Isaiah. Bible commentators both Jewish and Christian consider this book to be an allegory of God's love for Israel or the church. My now famous non Raptured Mac Sherlock dictionary defines allegory as, "the description of one thing under the image of another." The allegory of the "Song of Solomon" is the description of God's love for man in the image of human marriage.

To put it bluntly, in this Bible book, we are now so vain, (perhaps it has always been so) that we can only see the image of God's love for me as an individual and miss most of the collective love of Israel, either national, or as the church.

In Chapter 5 verse 1 we see a little different garden scene than the one described in the song above:

*I have come to my garden, my sister, my spouse;
I have gathered my myrrh with my spice;
I have eaten my honeycomb with my honey;
I have drunk my wine with my milk.
Eat, O friends!
Drink, yes, drink deeply,
O beloved ones!*

In this garden scene the beloved bridegroom has come to be intimate with his bride and brought along all His friends. "How disgusting!" we say. But God says: "Welcome to Spiritual Israel, welcome to the church."

We cannot understand the concept of intimacy where there are more than two. I can just see the bride saying, "How could you be so inconsiderate to bring all your vulgar friends, when you knew I wanted to be alone with you." The wife of many years would say, "There he goes again, my insensitive husband. Sometimes I don't understand why I love him so."

So what is the difference between the bride and the wife? The bride thinks she has just been born again into perfect love, the wife has died to herself, many, many times and learned the true depth of love. The man is just doing an insensitive guy thing. Our reason breaks down, but not God's allegory.

So this is the garden scene that fractures the revelation of modern evangelicalism. Church was created to love the brethren, not for individual intimacy. As we seek God on our own, He will provide the intimate we all need. To the degree we seek God on our own, to that degree He will provide that love and much more.

If our focus in church is to maintain our illusion of our initial born again experience and its intimacy, then the church misses its true calling to love one another and help God polish the rough living stones, that surround us, into the likeness of Jesus Christ. In order to love the brethren it is imperative that you have died to yourself.

If you seek that personal intimacy all the time, not only will you be sorely disillusioned, you also cease from spiritual growth. Faith looks forward, not back to the past. Our music shows what we really seek. We want that lonely lovely garden relationship, not a church barbecue.

It really is not about what you and I want, it is God's plan for our lives. That life is called the church, or the Body of Christ. We, by faith choices, must live in what we don't want to understand, the church, or we must retreat into our own narcissism.

Modern evangelicalism is politically Republican because its revelation is on the individual love at the expense of the community. Other sects and denominations are politically more associated with Democrat causes because they look to the church community as the a revelation of God's love to the world and the individual becomes of secondary importance.

Well balanced and successful marriages, require both intimacy and personal sacrifice to the family good. Without both aspects failure is inevitable. Without this tension one of the partners is going to become "so vain, that they think this message is about them."

The modern church has a fractured revelation of Jesus Christ because that is all it seeks. We are so arrogant in our own self righteousness that we no longer understand the humility that comes from God's justification through the propitiatory sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

In the effort to be politically correct, The Rapture has been taken out of many of our dictionaries. In an effort to be socially acceptable, individuality is worshiped along with God in most of our churches. Not only have we discarded the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer, we have taken justification and propitiation, out of our sermons and many of our modern Bible translations. Without those mysterious revelations, church becomes nothing but a vain social cloister.

Seeds for Prayer

I go over this week to look at the farm near the village of Addy. Please intercede for this trip and how and if God would want me to proceed with making an offer on the property. The goal of this purchase is to provide a facility to get people beyond their self imposed comfort level, to see the gifts and opportunities that real intimacy and community love can grow.