

Chronicles of Diversity

Your leadership weekly



*Palmer Lake from
Adventure center porch*

Fractured Rapture Tales **Eternity versus Cheap Grace**

31 March 2004; Volume 6, Issue 13

Tale 14 Eternity versus Cheap Grace

Mel Gibson is reported to have spent \$25 million to make the movie, "The Passion of the Christ." As a few of you and I have discussed, my greatest concern with the movie is that it will become the next idol of evangelicalism. When you see and hear quotations from leading Christian spokesmen like, "The Passion is the greatest tool for evangelism the world has ever known.", you get a glimpse of just how sick the church really is. The living stones of the Body of Christ are God's only method of evangelism, a movie is a movie. And it doesn't depend on what your definition of is, is.

Back in my corporate days, I wrote a couple of proposals for \$25 million projects. Actually they were team efforts, but one interesting thing in the one project that was built, it had some problems with the cooling water treatment lagoon, that me and another "scientist" had recognized. We had written a small \$40,000 proposal to do a study. This little project would show what we knew was going to be a problem, and to begin to test treatment alternatives. Our proposal was rejected as being too costly for just some scientific possibilities.

Probably about five years after the project was completed, and I was doing other things, I got a call from a lawyer who wanted to talk to me about that proposal and the whole project. Over a fancy hamburger in the Red Robin in the University District, this litigator explained that our proposal was indeed right and that the parties had spend about \$2 million in legal fees alone, trying to find out who was to blame. The power plant was using one of the alternatives my friend and I had proposed, but it was more costly than the power plant's leadership could accept. I got to tell the pricey lawyer, "We told them that, but they were unwilling to listen." Then I got to eat my \$10 hamburger.

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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

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It is also reported that Mel Gibson got his \$25 million back in the first forty minutes of the showing of "The Passion" on opening night. This was after the leaders of Hollywood entertainment said there was no chance, Gibson would ever recover his investment, for him to make a profit was impossible. Now they are spending millions trying to figure out how they can capitalize on this unforeseen opportunity.

You have to have a godly passion, to make "The Passion of the Christ." Greed is not even a negative passion, but an evil vice. What I didn't get from the movie, but from the context of the movie's release into American culture, now celebrating the freedom of nihilistic gay marriage, is there are new lines of cultural norms being drawn. You can't have it both ways. This is true for the mayor of Seattle, and for the pew sitting Christian.

I think there are significant parallels between the Old Testament wilderness journey, and the time which I have been given the gift to live on this earth. There probably is also a prophetic link between these times and the restoration of the nation of Israel, but the excesses of that profit center we covered in some detail last week.

As we "Baby Boomers" came of age in the late sixties and seventies, we were given the opportunity to set a direction for society and culture. Some found Jesus, some found materialism. Since then, Jesus pretty much has been replaced by stuff idolatry, both in, and out of the church.

Thousands of years ago, that generation of the descendants of Jacob that left Egypt, were allowed to perish in the wilderness because of their lack of faith. Over a period of forty natural years, they all died, save two, because they were more focused upon the immediate material blessing, than on their understanding of the Promised Land. It was a new generation that had the opportunity to enter this land of eternal significance. I personally think that this is generally true for today, only the total numbers must be updated, but the ratios probably are not all that much different. As for me and my house, I plan on being like Joshua.

The Promised Land of Israel, like eternity, is more a condition than a place. Sure the place existed and exists, made out of rocks, and hills, and streams, and towns and villages. But just as then, if all you look at is the stuff, you will never develop any godly passion. And you will never risk any of your present stuff, for Godly stuff, and you will always be burdened with insecurity about the future.

Just as in the Old Testament, in our culture everyone is bound for heaven, they just don't want to walk the narrow path to get there. It could be said that after Vatican II, Roman Catholicism became like mainstream Protestant Christianity, a wide road of cheap grace.

I grew up in the denominationalism of Lutheran doctrine. My doctrine really hasn't changed that much over the years. When I read Dietrich Bonhoeffer's "Cost of Discipleship" I understood what he meant when he writes at length on the problems of "Cheap Grace." I do have problems however, with some of Bonhoeffer's neo-orthodox doctrines. For many years when people ask me my religious affliction (sic), I used to answer, "I'm a Martin Luther, Lutheran."

Regardless of Vatican II, official Roman Catholic doctrine has not changed since the Council of Trent 1545-1563. In essence, these precepts were issued in response to the Protestant Reformation *solus*. One major difference between my Martin Luther Lutheranism and Mel Gibson's Trent doctrine is that I would separate Saving Faith from Discipleship. He would link the two. This can get into some real hair splitting theology with the linkage, or lack thereof.

In my theological dogma, the Christian life is a continuum with a salvation point (Saving Faith) expressed alone by the grace of God. From hence you begin your journey on the same path, thereafter called Obedient Faith, you with a limited but important part to play in this obedience walk. In my path, salvation is a gate you pass through, but the path does not change. Roman Catholic doctrine says my gate is not significant in the way I define it, but again the issues of God's covenants and other points are complexly involved.

I will admit my doctrine, and even more so, evangelical Protestantism, works well to get people through the gate. Once through the gate however, most Protestants have a tendency to forgo the path of costly grace and Obedient Faith, and enter the ditch of sloppy agape and cheap grace, or the ditch on the other side of the path, the ditch of self righteousness and legalism. In those ditches all types of serpents and reptiles live and reproduce in abundance. Many Christians inebriated on themselves or

their religion, continually run from one ditch to the other, until both ditches lead to the Slough of Despair.

That passage across this swamp is only via “The Bridge of Costly Grace and Obedient Faith.” When Christians, or anybody else for that matter, feel surrounded by alligators, alone with their beast of burden, their donkey, they must recognize that the swamp is too big for them to drain in their own strength. Jesus Christ alone is the only source of rescue.

Our Saving Faith gate may have been many years back up the road, or may be right before the bridge, but the bridge across the permanent Slough of Despair was bought and paid for by the blood of Jesus Christ. A word of wisdom, once you cross that bridge, stay out of the ditches, no matter how rough or narrow the path may seem.

I don't have \$25 million to invest in anything. But I do know this, that if I had \$25 million I would invest it in the work of God and building the church, to help us all stay on focus, to stay on the path of Obedient Faith. My investment potential lacks at least one comma, and three or four digits, and my credit rating isn't any better. It must be my presumption, I suppose. But that does not mean I don't know how to invest \$25 million in the work of God. I had to learn it as the application for one of the classes I teach.

In this class on money management taken from Matthew 25:14-30, at the beginning I hand everyone a sealed envelop. Here's your envelop! In that envelop you randomly receive a check for the equivalent of one, two, or five talents of gold. If I did the math correctly, at today's gold fixing and you use the Hebrew equivalent of ten thousand shekels per talent, your check will vary from \$1,141,291.67 to \$5,706,458.33. Now, how are you going to invest that money?

This teaching opportunity has at times included pastors and other learned religious leaders. They fare no better than anyone else. The first thing every Christian does is to give a tithe to the church. We don't even want to get into the situation on what any church would do with a gift of between \$100,000 and \$500,000.

Then people would pay off their short term debt, maybe buy a new car if they need one, then pay off their house, or buy one, then? Then they run out of things to do with the money. Then when forced to do something with the remaining capital, they either put it in the bank or similar investment and collect interest, or bury it in the ground. Virtually no one thinks about being actively involved directly or indirectly in ministry, as an Godly blessing opportunity, beyond the limits of their current lifestyle.

Now in the age in which we live in, we all do have another asset that relates to our Promise Land by faith scenario, that is our credit rating. The Bible says that without faith it is impossible to please God. Credit is the ultimate faith adventure in our society. Much more complex than we can even begin to discuss this week.

However, Christians like all other members of western culture are severely burdened by consumer debt. We buy stuff we don't need, to satisfy desires that stuff can't satisfy, then to make ends meet, we put twenty bucks (or less) in the collection plate on Sunday. We make no investment in eternity, because we are too controlled by our stuff and keeping it all running and balanced, to even seriously look at the potential for using our great resources for eternal investments.

As a side light, the biggest problem I have with ushering during the Sunday morning service is taking up the collection. If all people have to give to the Lord's work is \$20, or \$5, or \$1 it would be better if they kept their money. This disturbs me so much, not so much because of the money, but because the money is just a sign of the rest of their life, for the twenty bucks is accompanied by an hour and a half of passive time. Their worship reflects their priorities. To think that people believe they are justified (not positionally) but obediently in Jesus Christ by such a pittance of effort is absolutely depressing.

One talent, two commas, and six zeros, and change. Here is what I would do with that, in cash or faith credit.

1. Buy the house on the shores of Palmer Lake to serve as an adventure training center, as well as a base for planting a church in Oroville, with the desire to directly support church planting efforts in the Canadian Okanagan as well as church community developmental efforts in the states. It is not located in the real wilderness as defined by the government, but if the clouds raise, you can see it from

the picture I took from the front porch. This really is a priceless piece of property for which the owner is asking \$350,000. The fix up guesstimate. \$50,000. The portion of the talent remaining \$750,000.

2. Buy a truck, a commercial BBQ smoker, a tent and related supplies to support church planting and development. This would be used to provide cash flow to support the ministry in Oroville. If the truck I am now looking at in La Habra, California (or similar vehicle) could be obtained, the total remaining of the talent would be approximately \$700,000.

3. Buy a building in Oroville to use as a BBQ restaurant and as the basis for the church plant. There is currently a building, with a large parking lot, with a Mexican restaurant renting month to month. It has a separate dining room that could be used for Bible studies etc., and the hole asking price is \$160,000.

At this point, for capital expenditures exceeding about \$500,000, non profit adventures in Washington have the opportunity to finance projects with tax free bonds, as long as the resources purchased are not used directly for church buildings. But that does not mean you could not let a church use or rent the building at times, and be closed on Sunday, except for an all community BBQ after church.

4. The Chronicles of Diversity is about to begin its sixth year of weekly publishing. That calling means not that I am supposed to write these messages until I'm raptured to heaven one way or the other. It means that I, we, are supposed to document what the Lord is doing, and is about to do, in this time of renewal, revival, or whatever re word you feel comfortable with. That means some equipment, for our Propitiation movie, but also the working capital to travel where ever in the world the Lord would want us to be. With the purchase of the restaurant building that will take our remaining talent to about \$500,000 or less depending on the scope of that work.

5. Working capital is what all the preceding investments are designed to generate. Money to pay any debt and to pay people. Part of that relates to having taken too many collections and seeing, well, we have been there. The other thing is even if people are motivated in the giving more of both of their time and talent, the local church, is God's primary instrument for His work. By the vary nature of our tax system, the churches prime method of funding will remain tax deductible donations.

6. Six is the number of man, so this will be our last point. We have about \$500,000. remaining out of that first talent. But that does not mean we will use it as investments in worldly enterprise. As we wrote earlier, with proper application of funds we could pirate enough funds to see if the technology of my gold processing as any merit. That return or even funds of four more talents will be used to replicate the above model. This is one opportunity, where you don't need to be Mel Gibson to participate, and to use some of your more worldly assets to participate in ministry. Collectively we can see what God might do in the time after the show opens. Therefore, God creates and defines point number seven.

We seek both gifts of money and required stuff as a nonprofit religious organization, potentially as the issuer of tax exempt bonds, if the credit and other details can be worked out. We also seek people willing to move or regularly visit this near wilderness to become involved in God's work. Actually, the Canadian side of the border is quite civilized, the transition to the state side is somewhat similar to the north - south border with Mexico, remembering the prosperity and the directions remain the same.

Finally, we will develop the opportunity to invest both time, money, and again required stuff, as equity in Wonder Springs Adventures Ltd. a Washington for profit corporation, with the investment paradigm of doing God's work first and seeing by faith what type of return He may bring about.

The church's calling is to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ by preaching and teaching the word of God. The means of witnessing that gospel message is the message of true love and true community. Man was created to love God, and each other in love by friendship, food, and fellowship. That is the essence of the center of the narrow path. For God's reasons, even though He can, He has chosen not to drain the muck, mire, and the swamp on either ditch of that path. This is the only path to God, by obedience it is time once more for the church to walk by faith in that path as God's legally adopted children.