

Chronicles of Diversity

Your leadership weekly



A winter bridge

Fractured Rapture Tales

Going home?

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Ash Wednesday

Today opens the heralded “The Passion of the Christ.” I had the opportunity to see a preview showing Monday afternoon. But rather than comment on the movie this week, I will save my impressions for next week’s episode. In that way you can see it if you wish, without being colored by my comments. Those comments will also follow more in line with what will be covered in this message.

Tale 9 Going home?

A vision of eternity, what does it look like? *The great street of the city (new Jerusalem) was of pure gold, like transparent glass.*

When I was younger this question bothered me, not so much for what the Bible said, but that the adults I ask for a better understanding, didn’t have one. This doesn’t bother me any more because I now can see clearly that this golden street description, is a picture of something beyond our world, but must be described in words limited by this reality.

Gold is the symbol of eternal value in this world. Street paving with our perception of eternal value, then kicked up to a higher level, gives us a metaphor, that we really can’t understand, just appreciate as beyond the limits of our comprehension. An unknowable material more costly than gold, is as common in heaven as asphalt, cement, and gravel in our world.

But really the Bible says this of the city, the new Jerusalem, is that it comes out of heaven. It is a city that descends out of the eternal heavens to a new, or recreated earth.

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What bothered me as a kid, no longer troubles me. What does bother me is this heavenly statement. "This world (earth) is not my home, I'm just passing through."

Let's see, you were conceived in this earthly realm. You were born here, you will live here all the days of this life, then you will die here and be buried here, should the Lord tarry and you not be raptured out for seven years. If you are raptured out, you will take a short vacation, (to heaven?) only to return seven years later. Then you will rule and reign with Christ here on this earth for a thousand years. Then after God creates the new heavens and the new earth, you will have a dwelling abode in a new Jerusalem, which in some way is still mysteriously connected to this planet. If this world is not your home and heaven is, you must have a really distorted picture of eternity, because to me earth is home whether I like it or not.

Now by definition, this deviance from earthly reality, didn't come from the Bible, so it must have come from someone's fractured understanding of what the Bible really is discussing. Our commonly portrayed picture of heaven is of stuff too, but in heaven stuff is not the end, only the conveyance of the glory of God. Everything is eternal for starters. From there all our thoughts disconnect.

We think stuff must be the focus of heaven, our mansion in glory. We are quite good at the mansion part, it is the glory part we have the problem with. Because this glory is not our glory, or our perception of our glory, or even our perception of God's glory, eternity is God's glory, alone. God's glory is eternal and it is rapture to us, in the first dictionary definition.

"I'm going home!"

"So if heaven is your home, what's it like? If you've been there have you got any pictures you can send me? How about a T shirt to show you've been there. But before we go there can you tell me about the trip? Was it a rapture?"

"Well what I mean by heaven is my eternal home, I'm a pilgrim just passing through this sinful land, full of all sorts of yucky people, like you. You rub me the wrong way, you ask too many questions. Leave me alone."

"So you have the itch to get out of here?"

"That's right, I want to be with Jesus. I want to see Him face to face. I want to find out why I had to suffer so much in this life."

"Well, now we are getting somewhere. What you really are looking forward to, that this world currently can not supply, is true intimacy with God. In heaven your stuff and all stuff is of secondary importance. But if that is true, is not that just life in the spirit? Now this is a trick question.

"What trick question? In heaven I will be a free spirit, I'll be able to fly. I will live forever. I'll be just like God."

"Let's see, just like God. Do you mean like in Genesis 3, were you will be like God and know good from evil? Or do you mean, let's say in a heavenly context, since we are talking about heaven, why don't I call you, 'um Lucifer, like in Isaiah 14: 12-15:

""How you are fallen from heaven,
O Lucifer, son of the morning!
How you are cut down to the ground,
You who weakened the nations!
For you have said in your heart:
"I will ascend into heaven,
I will exalt my throne above the stars of God;
I will also sit on the mount of the congregation
On the farthest sides of the north;
I will ascend above the heights of the clouds,
I will be like the Most High.'
Yet you shall be brought down to Sheol,
To the lowest depths of the Pit.'"

"Well, not exactly. I never really thought of heaven that way. Lucifer, Satan, the Devil caused the world to sin, I don't want to know sin again, that is why I want to go to heaven."

“I can see you are never going to get to heaven with your attitude. If you were to die in this very instant, why should God let you into His heaven?”

“Because of Jesus. I know the answer to that question. I took EE, or Evangelism Explosion at my church. I asked Jesus into my heart on March 15, 1993. He changed my life forever, I want to go to heaven to be with Him. Do you want to hear my testimony? I’ve got it memorized, and I also have it written down sort of like a track. Let’s see, um, I gave my last copy away to that drunk while I was waiting for the bus this morning, so I guess I will just have to tell you what Jesus did for me.

“Well, let’s hold off on that for a while. I’m sure it is very unique to you. But I have another question, You just didn’t die, so God must be keeping you around this sinful dying world for a reason. What do you suppose that reason is?

“To tell others about Jesus. To help evangelize the world, and my pastor says to be conformed into the likeness of Jesus by the sufferings and tribulations I go through in this life.

“I can see that you have got the telling part down pretty well, but I have some trouble with your conforming to the likeness of the Christ through your sufferings and tribulations. After all, you live in the suburbs, have a wonderful loving wife, four intelligent kids, a well paying, meaningful job and as far as I know, you really haven’t had any real trials in your life, at least in the natural sense.

“I guess I really have had it pretty good. I think it is a blessing from God. It’s just the grace of God. I guess He has given me a foretaste of heaven right here on earth.

“And you’ve just sucked it all up, squandered your position on yourself and your family. I don’t see much conversion to the image of Christ, as I see Him portrayed in my Bible.

“The Abrahamic covenant says in this world God will bless us, if we live holy lives.

“So we are back to that Lucifer scenario again, I thought you lived under grace not under the Mosaic Law. And as I just said, you’ve just sucked it all up, squandered your position on yourself and your family. I don’t see much conversion to the image of Christ, as I see Him portrayed in my Bible.

“So what would you like me to do? Give up everything and become a missionary to Africa, or to Russia, to France, or even Canada? What would my wife and kids say?

“I don’t know what God would want you to do. But what I am asking, Are you trusting yourself, or are you really trusting God? However, before I give you the time to answer that, let me put it in a little different perspective. Would you be willing to leave the security of your little piece of heaven and go to a world which was foreign to you. There you would have to get a real job. Not like just being a full time preacher, but let’s say a carpenter. You have to juggle the two jobs. In that land, it really isn’t a good place to raise a family, in fact it is an awful place to raise a family. And finally, you couldn’t purchase a round trip ticket. The only way out would be to die there, unless Jesus would come rapture you out.

“Well that is sort of a story of how Jesus came to this earth, to die for my sins. I guess I should go talk to the family and tell them I am willing to lead this family wherever God may call us, and the rest of our family will have to come along. It might be difficult, but really by learning first hand about God’s grace, we shall overcome.

“So, you say, you are willing to deny yourself, to pick up your cross to follow Jesus?”

“Yes, I must give it a shot, the old college try. That Bible verse in Matthew 10, and repeated in Mark 8, and Luke 9, says: ‘If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it.’

“But before you put your house on the market, and search for some ministry to join in the darker parts of the world, why not just spend about 40 days or so, reflecting on who you really are in Jesus Christ. Have your family do it also. Maybe see if you can talk some of your Christian friends to joining you in this time of reflection. Don’t care if anyone in your particular church follows you, just press in to follow Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ. Begin today.

“Who knows, someday, you might make a movie, called “The Passion of the Christ.” You could release it on Ash Wednesday, the first Day of Lent. I’ll bet that evangelical Christians around the world

will flock to see your movie. They will call it the best evangelistic tool, perhaps in the history of the world. And all you did was take a Roman Catholic passion play and adopt it to the movie screen.

“You will find friends you never knew you had and enemies too, and also a lot of publicity, much of it not all that good. After all, it would be sort of a personal cross carrying adventure. Isn’t the grace of God amazing, you could be the next Mel Gibson. But I guess that part is already cast. However, what is your role, in the documentary drama of the passion of the Christ? The one that continues until this day.

Seeds for Prayer

My short spin on “The Passion of the Christ,” is that the grace of God is truly amazing, but not just in the typical way you might expect. Stay tuned for next weeks message.

I too, would like to make movies, not movies of the person of Jesus Christ. But movies about the Body of Christ, the church. Not the Christian television type movies, giving to get, but about people giving to carry their cross. Knowing that their reward is probably not a home in the ‘burbs with a white picket fence, an SUV and a mini-van in the drive, and a mortgage that would pay for their whole vision of ministry. Those servants of Christ are out there, but their numbers are too few.

That mortgage and the trappings are a real problem, because there is nothing left over for ministry after some, or all the bills are paid. The solution for the church however, is not to beat on the ones who pay their share either financially or in their service. The solution is to educate all into the reality that just taking up space is not an option. Not especially as you wait for the rapture, or to die. The gift of salvation is a free gift of God’s grace. The cross carrying thing is not a free ride, and to say that the Bible teaches such is heresy. His yoke may be easy and the burden is light, but you can have a burden and not be willing to carry your cross. However, that is an Old Testament paradigm of preaching.

The New Testament paradigm is that this cross bearing thing is the greatest adventure you can live in this life. All the world has to offer is to work for 30 years and then you can retire to do what you always wanted to do. But the cause of the Christ is that you can bring part of that eternal understanding into this world’s pilgrimage. In that sense, you can begin to learn the reason for your creation right in this life. Truly by trials and suffering. That was made possible by the passion of the Christ, but the Resurrection is the title promise that the grave is not the end.

Over the next few weeks we will begin to lay out a loose plan to allow others to begin to develop their adventure through these Wonder Springs Adventures. It takes some seed money, but the whole thing can be done for less than that mortgage in the suburbs and the goal is to make it pay its way like carpenter Jesus learned in His fathers shop.

One night last week, I went to bed thinking what’s the use, it will all be burned up someday after all. However, those thoughts were replaced with the possibility that the stuff of this world is really all we have to work with. My problem is somehow I want to see in this world God’s sanctifying glory. When that glory is not reserved for a place called heaven, but a life called eternity. In this world we are to make movies, build stuff and give and allow God to receive all the glory. That is the passion the Christ came to show, to live, and to die for.