

Chronicles of Diversity

Your leadership weekly



Johnny Appleseed postcard

Fractured Rapture Tales

Johnny Appleseed

18 February 2004; Volume 6, Issue 7

Tale 8 Johnny Appleseed

If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which He has testified of His Son. He who believes in the Son of God has the witness in himself; he who does not believe God has made Him a liar, because he has not believed the testimony that God has given of His Son. And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life. These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life, and that you may continue to believe in the name of the Son of God. (1 John 5:9-13)

Sometime between my age 8-13 I had my first problem with Bible exposition. I know it was in that age bracket, because I remember clearly what house we lived in in Reardan. My problem was with what I was told about heaven. Basically, that teaching was just what we have all heard. "The streets of heaven are paved with gold."

My real problem was simply, "If the streets are paved with gold, so what in heaven has real value?" I don't remember how it came about, but I came up with a Bible and read about heaven in the Book of Revelation. What I found out was the Bible really didn't say that the streets of heaven were paved with gold, like I understood gold from my mother's wedding ring, but *The great street of the city (new Jerusalem) was of pure gold, like transparent glass.*

It made all the difference, the whole context, but no one could answer what was meant by, "like transparent glass." Seemed to me, that while I wasn't as smart as adults, I was the smartest kid on the

©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

block. (True, because I was the only kid for a number of blocks around.) Adults, should have some sort of description about transparent gold that made some sense to me.

I didn't have the same problem with God however. God was always true to his word, not in the Bible as I knew Him, but in my real world. God would never let me down, all I had to do is sing my secret song. In fact, many times I used my secret song to show kids from outside my small block domain, the reality of God. This was my first step into evangelism, perhaps my most significant.

When you grow up in the grasslands around Reardan, if not mowed, the grass grows a couple of feet high. As a youngster with a bow and a few arrows, when you shot your arrow into the air, lots of time it fell to earth you knew not where, or could not find. But if you didn't find your arrows just playing with a bow was not all that much fun. What made the search for lost arrows very difficult was the fact that the arrows were about the same length, size, and color of the stocks of grass. It wasn't like looking for a needle in a haystack, but more like looking for a real arrow in a field of grass arrows.

To find those arrows when all hope of finding them in my own ability, or that of my visiting friends, had evaporated, I sang my secret song to myself, sort of as a prayer to the Lord. I stole the song from the TV, but I adapted it to arrow hunting. The song never failed. After a while, when me and my friends had lost all hope for finding the lost arrows, I sheepishly began to ask my little friends to help out by singing the song with me.

As I just learned, the song I sang came from a Walt Disney cartoon from 1948, Johnny Appleseed, and was sung by Dennis Day. My arrow finding rendition follows:

*The Lord is good to me,
And so I thank the Lord,
For giving me the things I need,
The sun and rain and the apple seed,
And helping me find my lost arrow too.*

It might sound corny, but it always worked. When you only have a few arrows and a whole lot of tall grass, it better work.

That song has served my ignorance gracefully over the years. For example, it was not until about twenty years ago, I didn't know there was such a thing as "The Rapture" of the church to escape the "Great Tribulation."

How could this great 150 year old revelation of God's election escaped my knowledge? After all, I would say I was a Christian most of my life, I had attended church all my formative years. And I knew, from my song and other countless examples, that God always answers prayer. This Rapture has always perplexed me to some extent, and this is probably one of the reasons for this Fractured series. "If you don't know much about something, why not use your foolishness to enlighten others."

As I learned, along with The Rapture came Dispensational Theology, to prove that The Rapture was reality. Therefore, we added six, seven, nine, or twelve Dispensations to the Bible, depending on who you talked to. These epochs of God's dealing with mankind of course flow out of a new understanding of literal, as opposed to spiritual and allegorical, interpretations of Bible prophesy.

But as I learned last week, and have thought about significantly in this intervening epoch of this week, besides The Rapture, a whole lot more happened in the English speaking western culture these last two hundred years. These I have not previously linked to one cultural cause.

This non exhaustive list includes:

*Increased prosperity as the results of the application of technology to the industrial revolution.
The adaptation of the Protestant work ethic into a revised model of the American Dream.
The incorporation of Evolution as the accepted model for scientific thinking.
Increased development of a revised theology that the English speaking world is in some way the Biblical model of God's chosen people, perhaps even as the descendants of the lost tribes of Israel.
The substitution and addition of massive quantities of stuff, as the determination of success.
Environmental havoc that pollutes the air, the water, and decimated much of God's creation, as an example of man's dominion on this earth.*

And relatively recently, the belief that man can manage the environment to the benefit of all our evolutionary subhuman brothers and sisters.

Added to Dispensationalism and The Rapture, these concepts point in arrogance to the fact that we, the English speaking humans, have, or can figure out everything. Just give us enough resources and time. We are the Saviors, or is that Saviours of the world.

Now, this does not reject the theory that in some of these cultural issues an element of truth is present. It is just as we now say, the spin is always toward the ascendancy of man, at the expense of God and His kingdom. This is far beyond the pagan practices of worshiping the creation instead of the Creator.

What does this really point to however?

There is a strong tendency in all of these endeavors to try to build a legacy for perpetuity. That is a much more socially acceptable way to say, "I want to live forever, solely on the basis of my achievements and my abilities."

To paraphrase a popular saying, "Patience is my donkey, and together we want to kill something. I'm just afraid everyone will remember Patience and forget about me."

Historic Christianity has taught that eternal life is a free gift of God's grace. As such, from our perspective, we can not measure the application of that grace as it involves the practices above, or other practices for that matter. We absolutely find that concept of unmerited grace an anathema to our understanding.

Because of some of our deistic beliefs however, the requirement that man needs to be born again to enter eternal life is practiced and highly promoted. Contrary to what is sometimes taught, your decision for Christ is really just a manifestation of God's election.

Now, that concept has a tendency to stick in my craw, except I know that my crop has evolved into my stomach. But it still gives me at least a tummy ache. I, I am free to choose what I want to do with my life, that includes what I want to eat, even though sometimes it gives me heartburn.

"Do you mean I can do nothing towards my own salvation? That I can't, no I won't accept this concept. Your old fashioned ideas make me sick! You are just a pain to my Patience."

The gospel (Good News) rests alone on the propitiatory, substitutionary atonement of Jesus Christ for the sins of man, and his bodily resurrection from the dead, as the first example of eternal life to all who believe and follow Him.

Now, if you get nothing else out of this message, here is something I have never taught before, or ever heard before.

The preexisting Creator God (Jesus Christ) had to be born into the flesh of humanity. Even though He was not created, He, in a way, had to be born (again) into humanity. From that birth, He lived a life to die in this human condition. This propitiatory sacrificial system was created to satisfy the requirement of the redemptive process, from sin to holiness, by unmerited grace and justification. The truth of this process is consummated in the resurrection from death, into a new eternal life with God.

What the evangelical church has been quite good at, in this era of enlightened understanding, is the requirement for Christians to be born again. What we have missed, is that rebirth is not into a life of glory (eternity), but a life of following Jesus into His death. From that death comes the resurrection to the eternal state. The focus of that eternal state is not stuff, even though stuff is still reality, more real however, is the adoration that the real comes through the LORD, or YHWH.

Stated another way, we have taught that you must be reborn, but death is still only a natural process. But that was not the case with Jesus of Nazareth. In the life of Jesus, death was a choice. That death was a choice to die on a cross for the sins of man. That was God, the Father's, plan for redemption for the sins of man. God, the Holy Spirit, working with Jesus gave Him the human strength to walk that path. God gives each Christian a cross and a choice. That choice is to carry your cross on the tribulation path of discipleship, or to follow the path of human understanding.

As we will see as we continue, the biggest problem with the teaching of The Rapture of the church from a literal time of judgment on the earth is not The Rapture, the problem is that this literalism

means that nothing from Chapter 4 through Chapter 19 of the Book of Revelation applies to me. It might apply to those guys who have not been born again, and for those born again, who don't understand I can escape this world without dying. As long as I continue to live in a western culture, which promotes my eternal life into my current lifestyle, I choose not to think of death to self, only natural evolutionary death.

The Book of Revelation, is a book of the Revelation of Jesus Christ, both as the literal author of time and events, and also as symbolic allegory to the church, the body of Christ, as tribulation as a means to a Godly death. There is a literal application to the future, and a symbolic but sometimes real application to me and others on this earth, as we face times of tribulation uncertainties. At the end of the (our) book, tribulation ceases and God's people win, all others lose, big time.

In the Old Testament, as the people of the nation of Israel would go up to Jerusalem for a required feast, they would sing a Song of Ascents. As the church we hunger after the blessings of the Nation of Israel, but we are very good at leaving any of the consequences for our sins with them. They are in the Dispensation of the Law, we live in the Dispensation of Grace. We are to be pilgrims to a New Jerusalem, but we don't want that pilgrimage to affect our lifestyle.

However, if we truly understand grace, we must first understand the requirements and the sacrifices of the law. Without death, grace cannot exist. Grace without law is license. License leads to a haughty spirit.

David lived within the context of the law and thereby penned one of the great songs of God's grace. In our sheltered world of bountiful knowledge of stuff and things, the wisdom of David's words should give us food for thought. We may not find these words palatable for our age of understanding, but it does provide us with eternal nourishment.

Psalm 131 Simple Trust in the LORD

A Song of Ascents. Of David.

*LORD, my heart is not haughty,
Nor my eyes lofty.
Neither do I concern myself with great matters,
Nor with things too profound for me.*

*Surely I have calmed and quieted my soul,
Like a weaned child with his mother;
Like a weaned child is my soul within me.*

*O Israel, hope in the LORD
From this time forth and forever.*