

Chronicles of Diversity

Your leadership weekly



*Palmer Lake from
Adventure center porch*

Fractured Rapture Tales **Present Muskeg**

7 April 2004; Volume 6, Issue 14

Tale 15 Present Muskeg

This last week was one of those times when walking the straight and narrow path developed into a period of learning that I had not foreseen when I finished last week's message. It started with an observation that many of the people that I believe truly are walking on the straight and narrow path, seem to be still soiled by the muck and mire they obtained in the Slough of Despair at sometime in their life. As with my time in the ditch of cheap grace, it really wasn't my fault, but part of God's plan for my life to better understand the ditches on either side of the road.

My Martin Luther Lutheran heritage, eventually taught me that the whole Bible was divided into law and gospel. The difference between the Old and New Testaments was a distinction of the specific revelation of Jesus Christ, it was not a distinction between dispensations of law and grace. Just because we saw little need to do anything about it, just I suppose shows the serpents, the muck, and mire of that sloppy agape ditch.

What else it did however, was to give me a real worldly disdain for the ditch on the other side of the road. That was the ditch of the self-righteous, legalistic, evangelical. That contempt was again reinforced by a series of events in my early adult life, that led me to believe that if I could have chosen my ditch, I was grateful for the ditch of cheap grace. When the world considers the type of evangelicals as religious bigots, I want to say, "Amen, brother!" But then I realize that the world's criticism really isn't my brother, I am thinking of my self more righteous than the self righteous, therefore I should be humbled by the price of God's costly grace and move myself back to the center of the path.

©2004; 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

But this still doesn't change the fact that some of my real brethren are still covered with the dirt from their own ditch experience and don't even know it. Just like me, God's grace is sufficient to wash away their sins, but for some reason they (I) don't know that the dirt seems to be and come from everywhere. It isn't just a one time washing of your whole body, but to use a Biblical metaphor, a continual baptism of both your body and your feet.

Probably more appropriate however, is the fact that God's costly grace filters out the pollution, only allowing that dirt to reach you that serves to deepen and enrich your life in the eternal sense. Once we recognize the fertilizer's effect doesn't mean however, we still need to allow the stench in our life, but to wash it off as part of our responsibility of service to God.

Into this scene, I ventured to watch a news segment on television in which an arrogant Jew was discussing his problems with "The Passion of the Christ" with an evangelical Christian, who had a website promoting the movie. (No idol making there.) Both of these people strongly defended their beliefs with a zeal that I'm sure the producers of the show had sought when they chose them for the segment in the first place. "Fair and balanced," really didn't seem to fit, and it was not because this program didn't air on the fair and balanced network.

Neither party realized that to those outside their cultural bias, they were both equally disgusting. I thought to myself, "Don't these people understand that the world views both of these sincere religious positions as the same entity, two sides of the same coin. Most thinking people believe that the world would be better off with out both of them." Neither person, at least in the heat of the moment, had a clue that western culture has the sincere desire to hang them both. Hang them both separately, as long as they fight and bicker, it will be easier to hang them that way than if they join together.

The problem the world has with Jews and Christians is that they have been made the custodians of the Word of God, by God. In the strength of that gift, they have in their religious zeal forgotten, probably more likely they have never learned, or sought the wisdom, that life on the path of God's calling is going to be exclusive enough that there is no need to journey at all in the ditches on either side of that path.

The Slough of Despair is not quite the Present Muskeg however. How do we get from one swamp to the other, but by the straight and narrow path? To that I will have to thank one of my readers who sent me this link from a teaching by Jon Courson on Genesis Chapter 24.

<http://65.117.84.168:8080/ramgen/genesis/s3020.rm>

Jon's message has to do with the ten camels that accompanied Abraham's servant on the journey to and from Abraham's homeland in search of a bride for Isaac. So what do ten animals of the desert have to do with an arctic swamp? I'm glad you ask that question, because in the rest of this article we shall see that these ten camels, beasts of burden, will become the stepping stones that pave the path across the muskeg, to that eternal city, Anchorage, or more likely Fairbanks? (Ha, Ha, It's a Jon Courson type of joke, I'm sorry.)

The muskeg is a bottomless swamp of the permafrost region, that becomes a quagmire every year as the ice melts to a certain depth, and creates the swamp, but because any footings across the swamp are built on ice, if the ice should melt further for any reason, the footings sink deeper into the ground and the path disappears. So a generalized road building technique is to add material to the road bed only as necessary, because the ice will maintain an adequate base for the road as long as it doesn't melt, and the swamp may be many feet to hundreds of feet thick. It is much cheaper to build a road in this manner.

While it isn't true muskeg, there is an office complex built on a filled swamp over in Bellevue. In my corporate days there used to be an engineering firm located in the buildings so I had the opportunity to visit on a regular basis. The buildings were built on pilings sunk to the depth of the swamp so they never moved. But because of the depth of the swamp, the roads were just ribbons of asphalt that would periodically be overlaid with another layer of roadway when they became too broken and required repair.

There may be a few harmless snakes in the muskeg, but chances are on your journey, you and your donkey will never see any alligators, or poisonous serpents. Also, the muskeg is not a swamp you would want to drain, just pass through on your way to firmer ground. What there are in the

muskeg however, are all types of flying insects. Mosquitos, black flies, no-see-ums and a whole cloud of other dastardly critters, designed in the pit of hell, (well not really) to make your passage miserable even with your super-doooper deet insect repellent, your head net, and other bug zappers. The bugs of the muskeg, make the state bird of the plains states, the mosquito, seem like a song bird in Maui in comparison.

Jon's teaching uses the ten camels as a type of the Ten Commandments. In our story, the Ten Commandments are the paving stones for the straight and narrow path across the muskeg of the Pilgrim's Progress. Jon uses some interesting attributes of the camels to make his point. In our muskeg example, the stepping stones of the Ten Commandments also contain a 100% sure insect repellent, and insecticide, that keeps your path absolutely bug free as long as you travel your path at the pace God has designed for your life.

As with all stony paths, there are some bumps in the road, but as long as you stay with God's pace, you can rest assured, that these passage humps are only meant for your edification and development as a child of the living God. If you get ahead or behind a little, or a lot, that cloud of bugs will at least attack and bite your donkey, he then giving you the push, or restraint, that you need to get back on pace. He may not be able to talk as in the Bible, but that still means he is definitely not a horse's donkey, he is an eternal personality's donkey.

But the Ten Commandments are heavy stones, why don't they sink into the muskeg? I'm glad you asked. If you were to take one or all these paving stones and decided to make your own (self righteous) path they would sink just like rocks, they are tablets created in eternal stone. However, even though if in your own knowledge you were able to construct a temporary road on top of the ice, eventually the ice would melt. Christians and Jews are very good at making these paths as we have seen. Sometimes these paths have led to the drowning and destruction of well meaning individuals and movements.

The wisdom of not straying from the true path should become apparent, because this path of law is built on the Covenant of Grace. That covenant is first declared in Genesis Chapter 3 and continues to, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen." that closes the Bible.

Dispensationalism that divides this unity of the scriptures into distinct exclusive time periods, sets gaps for leaps of faith when no such rendering is required. If you take out even one stone and cast it into the surrounding swamp, even though this gap only may have water a millimeter deep, that channel will require a jump through a dark cloud of those awful critters, with their bites and diseases. But then again if you were raised in that ditch, you would think that this jump is just a passage of life.

To point equally to the sloppy agape ditch I was raised in, if you cover all the commandments with a thick frosting of sugar and molasses, there is no way that the effective repellent of the the law can do its work.

So here we are thus far. We are somewhere in the muskeg on our way to Fairbanks, safely secure in a camp protected from the bugs and sinking sand. That foundation of our path is build on the Creator of the universe, the word of God the Bible, and the secure foundation of the Chief Corner stone, Jesus Christ. We have built one layer on that foundation, the law as exemplified in the Ten Commandments. At this point there is no difference spiritually between Jews and Christians, it is the same path. This is what the world sees.

But for the Christian there is something that the Jewish revelation does not possess at this time. That is the revelation that Messiah has come. This does not mean the path needs more block or paving, just that Christians know that the path really finishes in Fairbanks, not in Nome. Also, when they get to Fairbanks they know the city will welcome them with gladness.

Jews fundamentally are still stuck with the insecurity of knowing that that eternal city is beyond their reach, even with their best efforts. For thousands of years, they have been able to see that eternal city, but know that Messiah is the only one able to open the gate and let them truly in. Until He comes they must be content to camp around its wall. For that is the law and gospel presentation of the Old Testament.

I think now we have had enough of Fairbanks, just like the Jews, because I have never really been there, only in my dreams. The sacrificial system does not take away guilt and sin but only provides a covering to keep the bugs from biting. The Jew on the television has the excuse, for he

knows that he needs to try to accomplish by his own efforts the impossible.

At least that is something the world cannot offer. In the world you believe that the muskeg just needs another layer of asphalt and the path doesn't lead to Fairbanks, but to Babylon the city of man's glory.

In my creative impression of this television program, the Christian tended to promote their world view that the road to heaven was wide, smooth and well paved for all to see, and so easy that all you need is the Jesus SUV. That blood you saw in the Passion movie was shed and dried two thousand years ago, and to complete the story, at Easter we need to send the SUV through the car wash. Not to get rid of any blood that is relevant to our lives, but just to clean off the dead bugs. Additionally, to really enjoy this celebration of the spring feast, all anyone would have to do is put on your fancy spring clothes, let the kids or grandkids search for Easter eggs, and without any thought or knowledge of history, serve ham for Easter dinner.

Have you ever thought that SUVs and pilgrimages are incompatible? In this church BBQ scenario I have learned for the price you need to get a real grand new Jesus SUV, with all the conveniences the world has to offer, you can get a new Crew Cab Truck, with an appropriate bed to carry all your BBQ equipment from Seattle to Fairbanks, and do it in style.

Along the way you have the capability to stop and feed some pilgrims and other travelers a meal in which some animal sacrificed their life. That may include delicious smoked ham, except on Resurrection Sunday. Thereby, we may enjoy a tasty feast and use that feast to show that along that muskeg path you don't have to travel alone, and you don't have to jump over gaps in the highway. Speaking of Jesus SUVs, I heard recently Hummers are worthless in New England, the roads are too narrow for them to pass.

Therefore, this brings us to the biggest gap in our story. That is the gap of unity. If our teaching is based on the word of God, we know that along our journey the living Jesus Christ is the only reason we are able to walk the path to the New Jerusalem. He is the Foundation, He is the Law, and He is our Justification through His propitiatory sacrifice. This is absolute truth, before we entered the path, while we are on the path, and when we reach our new home. As we walk this muskeg path He is the One Sure Companion, but that does not mean He desires to be our only friend, you are part of His body, and this pilgrimage was created as a body function. That function I call unmerited hospitality.

When we get to the eternal state, He will open the gates to the city and go out to meet us in bodily form saying, "Welcome to your new eternal home that I have prepared for you to dwell. Come in and rest from your difficult journey and when you are ready to be raptured, begin enjoying everything my love has prepared for you. Once you have been sufficiently raptured by this new present, we will discuss the rapture I have for you eternally."

The problem with this story is that this rapt event will be shared with many other people at the same time and we have just touched on that potential. Part of the reason for this is that we lived in different places, but part of it has to do with the fact that we were so busy swatting at the bugs and worrying about gaps in our net clothing, and gaps in the pavement, that we forgot to meet and fellowship with others on the trip.

The path may be narrow compared to the worldly interstate, but it does not mean it is a single file lane. But we need to sell our Hummer and walk most of the way. The main reason the Hummer won't get us there, is there is not enough room in the Hummer for all the friends God would like to join us on this trip. Who knows, there might even be some Jews and some Christians saved from their own religious afflictions.

In our era, the best Bible teachers are available in audio links on the internet. Much of the best of by gone times are either in print or again in internet versions. What we can't get on the internet, television, or seeing the DVD in our SUV, is that fellowship of other people, pilgrims all. God knows just who we can truly touch with our life and friendship. Get out of the SUV and truly smell the BBQ aroma and tastes, its not about the drive-thru.

It is our responsibility to cross the muskeg, exposed to the elements, secured on the path of solid rock, and by their supernatural bug shedding ability. There are no gaps in the path and there is no reason to explore the swamp. True fulfillment on the path will keep us raptured for eternal life. Stay on the path and out of the ditches.

Seeds for Prayer

Potentially, as a means to keep me on the path and out of the water, the next couple of weeks are looking quite busy. Nothing has progressed outside of my control, that I am aware of. That means please continue to pray for the provisions we discussed last week, or pray about selling your SUV and helping buy a BBQ truck, or a BBQ joint for every church community. It's not about the chow, its about the grace founded on the law and His eternal sacrifice. His resurrection is the true reason for the season. We don't need to worry about the swamp, even if it bugs us.