January 6, 2013

JUST MY TAKE ON IT...

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Trying to find a handle on the world in which we live.

"God Told Me To Do It!"

On my back porch the temperature gauge is reading 77°. I think this is the warmest Christmas Eve I ever remember enjoying in Alabama. I'm sitting here in a short-sleeved T-shirt and a pair of lightweight sweat pants; any more than that would feel cumbersome. The sky is blue with a handful of lazy clouds out for a drift in the gentle breeze that is caressing the leafless trees. Way up high in the sky a crow is making its way to the horizon for a date with who knows what. Though the grasses on the gentle hills around our home have put on their brown winter coats, they are allowing the green clover to show itself off probably for the last time this winter. The solstice arrived a few days ago, ushering in an excellent opportunity for the doomsday preachers to find yet another date for the end of the world.

Max, our beloved family dog, is laying close by my side looking like he's trying to decide whether to have one last squirrel chase before spring, or to just take a nap. He never catches the squirrels; I don't know why he bothers. All in all, things couldn't look further from the end of the world; they look more like the dawn of days of wine and roses.

The trouble with the landscape is that it can often be a deceiving backdrop for reality. Because of the curve of the earth, at sea level a person can only see in a 15-mile radius from where they stand; beyond that, everything drops behind the horizon. When you think about the size of the earth, 15 miles is not very far. Fifteen miles yonder can
lurk a line of tornadoes with enough power to carry your entire belongings, house included, to the sea, or a thunderstorm packing enough wattage to take out your power for a day or two.

"It's hard to imagine how there can be any peace among the heavenly onlookers at all"

There is so much peace cascading onto the canvas around here right now, that were it not for the "blessing" of the worldwide news agencies spilling into our living rooms and smart phones, we'd hardly know there was any trouble in the world at all. Once we do become aware of how rough of a time many of the planet's inhabitants are having, it's hard to imagine how there can be any peace among the heavenly onlookers at all. But then I guess that's why Jesus said He offered a peace that man cannot understand -- we simply don't have the software installed between the ears to actually "get" the idea.

Off in the distance a pileated woodpecker is sounding off and digging his wooden holes; I can't see him, but I know he's there. I once took the time to identify to which bird that cry belongs, and his snapshot pops into my mind every time I hear him call. There are lots of woodpeckers in the forest, but only one that sounds like that one.

In our society are people, thankfully, who make a career of studying the natural world and its inhabitants; they can tell us without a doubt what's out there. If we're interested enough we can spend time with these people and learn how to identify the "voices" of nature for ourselves. We can learn which sounds belong to which respective birds, insects and animals. We can become educated by listening to recordings and watching videos, and eventually we may grow to be extremely proficient at identifying species. In fact we can become so learned in the art, that some of us might one day teach classes and offer courses. And all of that would be possible ... never once having walked through the forest or even having gone outside our front door. These days we can do just about anything through the use of the Internet. By this basic process of education a person can learn a foreign language, and teach others that language, never once visiting the country where that language is native or even spending time around anyone else who speaks that language.

"Beethoven was in his forties when he began to lose his hearing"

Though most of us can carry a tune, relatively few of us can actually read music. And in a bizarre twist of things, a person may know very well what note or action is represented by this or that symbol on a sheet of music ... but might never have the ability to actually play the music for themselves, perhaps because of some disability. In a strange twist, Beethoven was in his forties when he began to lose his hearing, but continued to compose long after his ability to hear the notes had left him completely, relying totally on the memory of the tones produced by this or that instrument playing the various notes he wrote on the staff paper.

I was interested to learn once that Christopher Reeve (of Superman fame) once taught his son to ride a bike for the first time. "So what?" you say, "Anyone can teach someone to ride a bike." What made this story interesting for me was that Mr. Reeve taught his son to ride the bike AFTER Mr. Reeve had been paralyzed from the neck down. His son relied totally on the instruction spoken to him ... and he learned to ride.

So, I guess my point is that it's not necessary to have any useful "hands-on" experience with the knowledge floating around in your head or on your tongue, but if you do know a little bit about it, chances are you can teach that knowledge to someone else; and so on and on and on, till the world is full of people who know everything there is to know about the starry sky and all its wonders ... without ever having once left the planet.
When it comes to things of the Spirit -- things that cannot be handled, tasted or touched - - the same rules seem to apply. What do I mean by that? Well, it's like this. Let's say we want to study things that are holy. First we have to decide what might be holy, then pursue that course. For some, another language must be learned -- among many Christian people I know, the language of Heaven is that which was spoken in the 17th century and recorded in the King James Version of the Bible. For others the holy words may be found in ancient languages spoken by Abraham and his kin, or by Moses and Aaron, maybe Daniel the Prophet.

"We can read books, watch videos, and listen to recordings of what people think He might sound or look like"

Let's talk for a moment about the Creator behind the creation amidst which we live. I suppose a person could take all kinds of classes about the Creator. I imagine we can learn about what He made; how He made it; what He has to say about what He made and what He'd like us to do with it; how we might find Him, etc., etc. We can read books, watch videos, and listen to recordings of what people think He might sound or look like, and what He means when He says this or that. I suppose we can become quite good at identifying Him in the distance ... but never actually lay eyes on Him ... or hear His voice for ourselves. We might find that if we want to know what He's saying, we'll have to ask an "expert." Given time, we might even become experts ourselves and grow to be quite proficient at telling others how to manage their lives according to what the Creator has outlined, based on what we're learning from this or that expert we're reading from at any given moment.

Many people will tell you that the Creator God speaks to them all the time. When you ask them what His voice sounds like, they'll tell you that He generally speaks to them in their own voices, in their own language, and with intonation they would use themselves. God usually tells these people which decision they should make, but only after they have given Him a handful of choices. There is normally no new information offered by the voice of God in their heads; no winning lottery numbers; no new recipe for an unfamiliar food; no address on a Street called Straight where they might find someone waiting for their instruction. The voice of God either shuns them away from, or reinforces, an opinion they are forming about a portion of Scripture. Some people simply hear God's voice of reassurance telling them that He loves them or that He is watching out for them. Some of these people are locked up behind a series of heavy-duty doors and windows, because one day the voice in their head told them to do something really strange, like set off a bomb in an abortion clinic, or drown their young children in the bathtub, take a sniper rifle and shoot at passing cars on the freeway, or fly an airplane into a building. You might be surprised at how many institutions house more than their fair share of these kinds of people. Many of them, when they are asked why they carried out this or that attack, calmly explain that, "God told me to do it."

"If their children disobeyed they were to be stoned to death"

Perhaps we shouldn't be too quick to judge this latter set of listeners, because throughout early Old Testament history, the Children of Israel were given similar bizarre instructions regarding the handling of humanity. As they went through certain lands they were to leave no one alive, not even the livestock. If their children disobeyed they were to be stoned to death. The same for Sabbath-breakers, adulterers and witches. Although the story had a happy ending, even Abraham was told BY GOD to take his son, Isaac, up the mountain and kill him as a sacrifice to the God of Heaven. Abraham didn't have to complete the horrible task -- but he would have, had an angel not stayed the knife in Abraham's hand. If you or I heard that voice giving us those instructions today, we would likely cringe from the thought, thinking that we were crazy. But why? What makes you or me different from Abraham? We're all human. The Bible teaches that God doesn't change -- the same yesterday, today and
forever. So how shall we decide which instruction is from Heaven, and which from our own inclination? Many people explain their allegiance to certain Bible principles based upon reason: "If the instructions don't fit my picture of God, well, I just ignore them." And what we wind up with is a movement of believers who obey all Ten Commandments ... excepting one. While another denomination might find that they obey all Ten Commandments ... but nine.

"It's no wonder non-believers get sick and tired of the bizarre behavior of religious folk"

When someone arises saying God told me to commit this or that atrocious act, how shall we judge according to the Spirit? That's not just a rhetorical question -- I'm being serious. These people come out of the woodwork and "speak according to these words ..." regarding stealing, adultery, homosexuality. They want to take the lives of those not living according to their understanding of the Word of God. The Middle east is presently full of this type of attitude. Because these moralizers don't attend my particular brand of church does not seem a safe way to decide whether or not they are acting for God -- does it? And doesn't it seem strange to you that warriors on both sides of the battlefield, playing field and boxing ring are praying to the same God for victory. What's up with this strange attitude? It's no wonder non-believers get sick and tired of the bizarre behavior of religious folk.

"Ha!" you say, "All that craziness is beyond my horizon; I don't have to be concerned about the whackos on the other side of the world, or across the country, or even across the state. None of that affects me." Hmmm, think again, Miss Swan; the next phone call with bad news could be coming to you sooner than you think. If you are a person of prayer, now would be a good time to seek protection from those who only have the ability to protect you, and your children, and your spouses, and who only can protect those who every day are risking their mortal lives to protect you (you know who they are).

Well, forget all that. The sun is shining; the breeze is wafting; the dogs and the cat are now lazily snoozing. What could possibly be wrong with the world in which we live? Eat, drink and be merry ....

And that's just my take on it ....

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