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JUST MY TAKE ON IT...

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

"Patterns & Maps"

I thought I would share an observation I've enjoyed mulling over just recently. It goes like this: if we wanted to make a dress, a shirt or a tie, we might get a book or go online and find a sewing pattern. If we want to make a scarf, a hat or a pair of mittens, we find ourselves a knitting pattern. Followed closely, the pattern will give us a nice rendition of an article of clothing. Somewhere out there is the original, or at least the original idea, of that nice addition to the wardrobe. What I finish up with is a copy of the original intention.

A menu is a list of food items that are available to eat from this or that eatery. It seems the classier the place, the less likely there are to be pictures in the menu, so the palette is tempted by the vivid descriptions: juicy fruits; zesty sauces; tangy spices; melt-in-your mouth pastries, and so on. Until your order arrives, all of the food on the menu is given lines, curves and texture by your imagination alone. But notice that the menu is not the food; it only tells you about the food. You can’t eat the menu.
For our tech-savvy friends comes the example of the playlist. A playlist is a collection of names of songs that have been assembled under headings such as "Lazy Days;" "Driving Songs;" "Workout Mix" or "Spiritual." These playlists appear on your smartphone, computer or MP3 player. Click on any one of them and some of your favorite tunes start to play. A playlist might also be made up of lectures, sermons or audiobooks. A quick look down the list brings an assemblage of tunes to your ear, and might set you up for a good listen. Notice that the Playlist is not the songs or listening material; it only tells you what is available to be played.

"Some manuals can be very complex in their detail and description"

If you buy an appliance or a piece of equipment -- an oven, let's say, or a lawnmower -- chances are that you have a manual for the beast. Open the manual and you can learn all about your purchase. You can learn what goes where and how often; how to change belts and blades, bulbs and tires. You might notice an electrical plan for the contraption, or a levels and capacities page. Reading the manual you will learn how to clean and take care of your addition to the kitchen or the garage. And one day you'll be happy that you have this manual, because without it, you would have no idea how to change this or that tiny component. Some manuals can be very complex in their detail and description, and can often be quite sizable; they might even come in multiple languages. Again, notice that the manual is neither the mower nor the oven; it only tells you about those things.

Consider for a moment a phone book, or the Yellow Pages; think about how much information these books contain regarding the whereabouts and code numbers for almost every person and business in the city, county or state. Imagine how much trouble it would be tracking down a person or business without the phone book. By now you're getting the idea; the phone book is only a means to an end -- it is not the end. The finding of the person is the goal for which the book has been created.

I have in my personal library a rather large book which announces itself as a Chronicle of the Twentieth Century. The book contains page after page of interesting moments in the time between the years 1900 and 2000. There are fascinating accounts of world wars, men walking on the moon, the rise and fall of Communism, the invention of the personal computer and the Internet. As world-changing as these events were in their day, it must also be noted that this history of the events are not the events themselves, only the record of them. The details of those times paint into our minds scenes that most of us had no clue about; unless we are somewhat elderly, we may not have even been living at the time.

"Something about the way God IS is printed all over us and through us"

The Book of Genesis records, "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness .... So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him." (Gen. 1:26, 27). No matter our mental picture of what these verses mean regarding "image," what we should take from the declaration is that something may be learned about God by looking at the image of mankind. Whether God has blue eyes or brown, white hair or ginger, dark skin or pale ... is immaterial to the intent of making us this way. Something about the way God IS is printed all over us and through us.
Regarding the assembly of the wilderness Sanctuary, "Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle: for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount." (Hebrews 8:5). Moses conveyed the instructions for the making of a Sanctuary, which was to be built "So that I may dwell among them;" this was the message from the Lord in the mount. The instructions were incredibly complex, and special people were given artisan gifts from God which prepared these workmen for the construction job. Moses followed the pattern carefully; but notice that the pattern wasn't the product. And notice this also ... that the product (the finished Sanctuary) wasn't the point of the pattern. The Sanctuary was itself also a snapshot of a much larger truth which was beyond our comprehension. Look at the Feasts surrounding the Sanctuary. These Feasts appear to have marvelous significance, but they too were not the object; the Feasts also point to a much larger truth.

This world appears to me to offer many "objects" -- "things" -- that are designed to teach us about their Maker and the world in which He lives. The objects are not the thing; they are just the vehicle carrying the map ... to the "thing."

"I don't believe for a moment that there is any present controversy in Heaven regarding whether or not there should be worship of other gods"

The Moral Law -- the Ten Commandments -- on the surface, appear to have been given to keep order among the people. The Hebrews were given instruction regarding how they should behave toward God, and how they should behave toward each other. But if we follow the idea that everything God did and said was giving us humans information regarding the Heavenly Realm, should we not take from the Decalogue a picture of how we earthlings shall understand and live in harmony with the Kingdom of Heaven? I don't believe for a moment that there is any present controversy in Heaven regarding whether or not there should be worship of other gods, or if stealing could ever be a good thing. Wouldn't you agree?

So where are you going with this, Tony? What's on your mind? Well. it's like this:

The world is a beautiful place, with, some would say, many valuable things upon it. But this counsel rings down through the ages:

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." (1 John 2:15).

"Because ye are not of the world, therefore the world hateth you." (John 15:19).

"He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me." (Matthew 10:37).

Evidently, we are to take lessons from the world we live in, but not get attached to it. Love of the world appears to be for God alone:

"God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son ...." (John 3:16).

"A map helps us get around in a strange place"

Let's talk about the above-mentioned maps for a moment. A map is usually a very scaled-down representation of a much larger piece of real estate. A map can be very
basic or quite detailed in composition. We might go traveling, arrive in a foreign country, go to a newsagent or book store and buy a map of the town, the locale or perhaps a map of the entire country. As kids, with that childlike spirit of adventure, we perhaps placed a map of the world on our bedroom walls, telling ourselves that one day we’d go to this place or to that. A map of the world is not the world, just a smaller snapshot of it. A map helps us get around in a strange place.

Wikipedia, the online Encyclopedia, describes a map like this:

“A map is a visual representation of an area -- a symbolic depiction highlighting relationships between elements of that space such as objects, regions, and themes. Many maps are static two-dimensional, geometrically accurate (or approximately accurate) representations of three-dimensional space, while others are dynamic or interactive, even three-dimensional. Although most commonly used to depict geography, maps may represent any space, real or imagined, without regard to context or scale; e.g. brain mapping, DNA mapping, and extraterrestrial mapping.”

I would like to make the suggestion that everything we have a sense to behold is part of an elaborate three-dimensional mapping system telling us something about God and the world He lives in.

The hymnbook is not a ticket to get us through the Gates of Heaven, any more than the sewing or knitting pattern is an article of clothing.

The Bible is not a Passport granting us access to the Kingdom of God any more than the menu is the meal.

The Entire Creation is not the Person of God any more than the manual is the mower.

The Firmament and the Heavens declare the glory of God; but these things are not God, any more than a phone book is the people whose names are printed in it.

“God seems to realize that we are unequipped between the ears to understand the things that have been prepared for us”

All these things, and many, many more, point to something with much more substance. They are designed -- yes, designed -- to teach us something about God. The Hymnbook, the Bible, the Creation -- above and below -- are maps leading us to a knowledge of the Father, the Son and the Spirit, and the world in which they live. So while we enjoy the beauty of the Creation -- and it truly is beautiful -- perhaps we should keep a lookout for Spiritual signposts along the way that will teach us something about the world for which we are headed.

There is a verse in the Bible which asserts that Man has no concept about the world which lies beyond the present borders of eternity. In fact, if you were to take a little time to study out the many images we have in our minds of what we call Heaven, you would quickly see that these pictures we have painted for ourselves are really referring to snapshots of the re-created New Earth, not the Heavenly Realm. God seems to realize that we are unequipped between the ears to understand the things that have been prepared for us on the other side of the veil, so He paints spiritual pictures for us using an earthly palette and paint in the hope that we shall not meet Him as a stranger. This is my present conviction.

And that’s just my take on it ....