



The Cud...a little something to chew on.

December 7, 2008

Everything Can Change

Lately I keep thinking of the old Don Henley lyric:

"In a New York minute, everything can change".

A moment and a few words are all it takes to reshuffle the whole deck in one's life.

"Congratulations, you got the job."

"I now pronounce you husband and wife."

"You're pregnant."

"Your baby has Downs syndrome."

"There's been a car accident."

"Your daughter has been deployed to Afghanistan."

"Your son has been arrested."

"Your husband has a tumor."

"Your wife needs a bone marrow transplant."

"We're downsizing and we have to let you go."

"No, that's not the price of a double mocha latte - that's your 401K."

The abrupt changes are the most unnerving ones. I think that's what makes the current economic nose-dive so jarring. Some people say they saw it coming, but few would claim to have anticipated the magnitude of the downturn or the accelerated rate of the descent.

The daily headlines are increasingly ominous, and the details behind them take your breath away. It's as if the world is experiencing a sudden change in cabin pressure - and now everyone is scrambling to find that safety information card the flight attendant said was located in the seat pocket in front of you.

One moment you're cruising along at 35,000 feet, seat back, tray table down, watching the (thankfully) edited version of *Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants 2*.

And the next moment the plane is pitching, rolling and dropping like, well the stock market. The cabin is dark, people are screaming, luggage is ricocheting, and the guy next to you has grabbed your oxygen mask because the guy next to him grabbed his. You can't catch your mask or your breath, and it occurs to you that you're going to die watching the sequel to a movie about a pair of globe trotting jeans, and you never even saw the original.

A person of faith is not immune to the disorientation of sudden trauma. A little panic is a normal, and not necessarily unspiritual response to circumstantial inversion. Eventually though, after your stomach settles and the vertigo subsides, the follower of Jesus Christ has a sober responsibility to regain his or her bearings. It's our duty to realign ourselves mentally, physically and emotionally with the horizon of truth.

We must, if you will, put ourselves back in touch with reality.

Reality (or truth) can be described as "the state of things as they actually exist." And for the servant of Christ, reality is ultimately defined by Holy Scriptures and then ideally, embraced by faith. My senses and feelings are unreliable guides to truth. "For we walk by faith, not by sight" (2 Corinthians 5:7). What I construe to be real and true must be rooted in God's revelation rather than in my circumstances.

Circumstances change, truth does not. My solvency, my health, my retirement plan - are all subject to the "New York minute" potential. But the underlying and ultimate realities are constant. God's word and God's promises don't fluctuate.

Staying in touch with reality - let's call it Christian sanity - requires biblical understanding and operational faith. Ignorance and unbelief put me at odds with the world as God created it, and make me no more realistic than a child playing imaginary games.

What I don't know *can* hurt me. What I don't apply *will* harden me.

Here's a common delusion: People say, "The current recession will teach us to depend more upon the Lord." That notion is pure fantasy and divorced from biblical reality. Why? Because no one chooses whether or not they will depend on the Lord. There is no other option for the creature but to depend on the Creator. "In Him we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28). We are utterly dependent, whether we recognize it or not.

Jesus tells us that "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Matthew 4:4). Loosely translated: A good diet and plenty of exercise is not enough to keep you alive. If you're alive it's because God says, "Today you live". Regardless of your cholesterol levels. And when God says, "Today you die", you're through. That's biblical reality.

"He makes the rain to fall on the just and the unjust" (Matthew 5:45). The Lord is everyone's provider. Believers and unbelievers alike depend on the Lord. What distinguishes them is which of the two acknowledges that fact. "What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?" (1 Corinthians 4:7)

We don't learn to depend on God, we only learn to acknowledge our dependence upon Him. The difference is more than semantic. If you believe you have the option to depend or not to depend on the Lord, you will operate under a false sense of your own autonomy. And autonomy is a myth of Satanic proportions.

These are tumultuous times. Unsettling and uncertain.
What we claim to believe is being revealed and tested anew.

Our "sanity" and faithfulness will depend on our ability to subject our feelings to our faith. Biblical assertions must override our knee-jerk perceptions and emotions. We must allow the Scriptures to interpret our circumstances rather than allowing our circumstances to interpret the Scriptures.

Yesterday you had money in the bank. Today, not so much. Your circumstances have changed, but reality is the same. You're no more dependent today than you were yesterday. You just perceive it differently. You feel it today, in a way you didn't yesterday.

Perceptions are powerful, but not always dependable. Marketing gurus have long recognized that perceptions are more powerful than reality. The battle is rarely for the best product but rather for people's *perception* of the best product. Most would agree that the stock market is driven as much by fear as it is by the fundamentals.

Let's revisit our bouncy flight analogy and consider how two different passengers might have two different responses to air turbulence.

The inexperienced flyer feels a few big bumps and immediately turns a whiter shade of pale, chokes the armrest and concludes death is imminent.

He perceives a greater danger than really exists. The frequent flyer, having been bounced around for years, knows that turbulence has never killed anyone and nods off to sleep. His only fear being that he might wake up in a pool of his own drool.

The same circumstances produce a different emotional response based on the perceived danger. And the perceived danger is directly related to each person's understanding of the realities of air turbulence.

The white-knuckle flyer would have been helped by a little instruction about the "truths" of turbulence. But even with that understanding, he would still have to put his faith in those aerodynamic principles.

Understanding and faith are keys to maintaining our grip on reality, both in the air and in this life.

The difference between the white-knuckle Christian and the resting (drooling) Christian, is their understanding and faith in the realities of God's character and His word.

Easier said than done. It's alarming how quickly we can lose our grip on biblical reality. Our culture denies it, the Church distorts it, and our circumstances obscure it. Fear and anxiety will shout down the Spirit at every opportunity.

One remedy to consider: We can learn to speak to ourselves more than we listen to ourselves.

The Psalmists were particularly good at this. They were constantly telling themselves what they believed to be true and real in the face of contradictory events. "My enemies surround me. My friends have forsaken me. But God is mighty. God is my shield. God will defend me."

"Why are you in despair, O my soul? And why have you become disturbed within me? Hope in God, for I shall again praise Him, for the help of His presence" (Psalm 42:5).

In times of change and loss, we should speak to our hearts more than we listen to our hearts. We should be reminding ourselves of the great truths and promises of God, rather than listening to the alarms of men and the anxiousness in our guts.

These are opportune times to demonstrate our faith in the reality of Jesus Christ. These are the days when the world should be asking us to give them an answer for the hope that is within us (1 Peter 3:15). And while we can still take steps to prepare for a potential famine without betraying our faith and hope; our prayer should be: "May those who fear Thee see me and be glad, because I wait for Thy word" (Psalm 119:74). In a New York minute, everything can change. But "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, yes and forever...For as many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes" (Hebrews 13:8; 2 Corinthians 1:20).

For that day,

David