

THE LONELINESS OF THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED

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Those who have been called apart unto God as ambassadors of His kingdom have always travelled a rather lonely road. The great heroes of faith recorded in the eleventh chapter of the letter to the Hebrews, His representatives in their time, each in their own way trod this road. Abram was called apart from his comfort in Ur to go *“to a land that I will show you.”* That journey was filled with unknowns and ultimately separation from his family. Moses, through his own impetuous actions had to flee to a lonely wilderness for 40 years where he was being prepared to lead God’s people out of their bondage in Israel. It is estimated that Joseph, before he ever enjoyed the position of eminence that he was given in the land of Egypt, spent at least three years in prison after enduring, first, being sold into slavery by his brothers, and later, false accusations by Potiphar’s wife that he was making unwanted advances toward her. Even Rahab, who is almost overlooked in the storyline of Christianity today, walked a very lonely road when she risked her life to give aid to the spies who were infiltrating the city of Jericho for purposes of taking over that city. She betrayed her own countrymen in obedience to a God who was totally foreign to her culture and her experience. And of course our Lord experienced the ultimate loneliness on the road to the

cross where even his closest disciples abandoned him at that moment. Indeed, His words while hanging on the cross, *“Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani?”* suggest that in that moment of his death He has no sense of the Father’s presence.

The Father did not abandon Him of course. Nor did He abandon any of those who have travelled this path throughout history. Nevertheless, those who have been called apart unto God as His ambassadors in this day travel the same road that has been trod by our spiritual ancestors, often including, often, a sense of abandonment from God Himself. Our experiences are varied in their details, but all share in the experience of separation and loneliness.

The Experience of Loneliness

No one can be fully prepared for this road less travelled to which we are called. Those who have grown up and participated in the organized church system have been given a blueprint for the Christian life that is quite different than that life to which the travelers on this road have been called. Our prior church experience has been filled with activities—weekend and weeknight services, committee meetings, Bible studies, choir practices, and a myriad of other activities which leave us with a sense of busyness and accomplishment for what we understand as the kingdom of God. In all of this we have interaction with dozens of fellow parishioners. If our local church activities are not enough, we are given opportunities to attend conferences and other para-church activities. This has given us a sense of fulfillment. More than that, it has provided a model for us of what the dedicated Christian life is supposed to be like. We get the message that if we are not active and in regular face-to-face fellowship with fellow believers there is something wrong.

Those who have been called to the lonely road less travelled find these supports stripped from them. Those who have been called out of the organized church system altogether are usually misunderstood as to their motives. It is assumed that they have been hurt by someone or something in their church experience. Even worse, they have been accused of “backsliding,” heresy, or even losing their faith. Even this is part of God’s unfolding plan for them, as He is preparing them for future misunderstanding and crosses which will be theirs to bear. Those on

this lonely pathway who have not received the call to “come out of her my people,” find themselves marching to a different drummer than the preacher or the church program. Their intimacy with Christ is leading them down a path that is misunderstood by their fellow parishioners and by the leadership of their local congregation. They find themselves disinvited from serving on committees, from participating in Bible studies and all of the other activities that once were so meaningful. Their voice is no longer welcome because more often than not it disrupts the smooth-running bureaucracy that we call the church. Their road is just as lonely as the one who has been called out of the church entirely. They may struggle in this environment for years before they eventually receive a call to come out of the church system entirely, if indeed they are ever called apart from that system.

Those who travel this lonely road cannot share their experiences with but a small handful of individuals whom God has placed in their lives at any given time. There are many who are not able to share the things that God is doing in their lives with *anyone* at least for a season because of the totally “otherness” of these experiences. This was the experience of Mary, the mother of our Lord, who “kept all these things and pondered them in her heart.” The Word that she was given that she, a mere teenager, would give birth to the Messiah, having never been with a man, was a Word that she had to bear alone, except for the witness of Elizabeth who experienced her own child leap within her upon greeting Mary. When she did finally share it with the one with whom she was espoused to marry, we read that Joseph was ready to “put her away” until the angel came unto Him with a confirming Word. Both Mary and Joseph were now travelling down a very lonely road less travelled.

The experiences that God takes those whom He has called apart to this road are varied, but they bear the mark of not being understood by the natural mind. Our experience has been that we have been hesitant to share what is going on within us, sometimes even to each other, because the Word that we receive does not make sense even to us! Furthermore, these experiences do not always come in the form of some verbal Word that is downloaded into our spirit. These experiences may take the form of physical suffering, or actions that we know that

we must take that we know will offend or which do not appear to be right or just. It is very likely that we are not even given any freedom to explain this suffering or these actions to try to help others “make sense” of what is taking place. We must allow others around us, be it loved ones, neighbors or co-workers, to think what they will, and in so doing, suffer their further misunderstanding.

We are certainly left with the question of “Why?.” Why is it that we are made to suffer in this way? Why would God call me apart from my family, and fellow believers who I know have a love for God? Why would God ask of me things that I know others will never be able to understand? Why this lonely road less travelled?

Why?

The answer to these questions, of course, is as varied as the purposes that God has for each of us. There are, however, a couple of general “themes” that have been impressed upon us as to the purposes of God in taking us down this road less travelled.

Crucifixion of Self

God uses this time of isolation and being misunderstood to accomplish His critically important work in us of stripping and purging us of all self-life. This can be a very discouraging ordeal, as we come into this process having already surrendered our will to Christ. We quite likely have the sense that because we have surrendered in this way that God is now ready to use us for the work that He has prepared for us to do. Then we confront situations that challenge us in ways that we had never been challenged before. We may meet someone who represents a hurt or violation of our person in our past that we thought had long before been dealt with. We may have even forgotten about it. We realize in this interaction with that individual symbolizing the source of our hurt that the offence has not been fully resolved. We find ourselves reacting to this individual in a way that we did not think ourselves capable. The ugliness of our unsanctified soul stares us straight in the face, and we are forced to once again take this issue to the cross and recognize our need of His healing and cleansing in this area.

This work of cleansing is a progressive one. There is still more that must be uncovered and exposed to the light of His presence. This “unpeeling” of the layers of self that have yet to be fully surrendered is much like the peeling of layers of onion. Just when we think that the Lord has finished His painful purging work, still another layer becomes exposed through some situation in which we find ourselves. This is the progressive work that must take place if we are to become fit to rule and reign with Him in the age and ages to come. This is because *nothing* of self, of our flesh, will take part in our co-reigning with Christ. Our task in this process is to simply look that old self in the mirror and recognize it for what it is. Only He can do the cleansing work that will then ensue, layer by layer.

It is important to clarify here that this recognition is *not* a capitulation to Satan’s lie that we are but “sinners saved by grace.” This is a falsehood that has kept much of the church world in bondage over the past 2000 years. We are much more than merely sinners saved by grace. We have been created anew, and Christ now resides within. *Christ* is now our identity. We can acknowledge these strongholds of Old Adam freely and with no sin consciousness whatsoever because we know that *that man* has been crucified and his back has been broken. Indeed, Paul has exhorted us to be dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus (Romans 6:11). Sin has been conquered; this process of exposure and subsequent purging and stripping is but the working out of that which has been accomplished millennia ago. This process is much like a boyhood experience that I recall while growing up on the farm. We had dairy cattle, and during the summer the barn was filled with annoying flies. Every night we would spray the barn to kill the flies. By morning the flies would be dead. But they were still in the barn, laying on the floor. Those pesky flies, though dead, remained there until they were swept out of the barn entirely. So it is with the old nature that haunts our walk. That nature was given the death blow on Golgotha’s hill some 2000 years ago. But the remains of old Adam must be swept out of the barn of our lives daily as God exposes the carcass of that nature in the various areas of our lives. So, rather than being defeated every time the ugliness of that old nature is exposed, we can now rejoice because we know that God is in the process of bringing to completion

and perfection that work which He has begun in us! That work is the perfection of the image of Christ within each of us. What a glorious (though painful) process!

We are Prepared in the Secret Place

We find ourselves at this time in God's great master plan in a place of preparation to rule and reign with Christ in that Kingdom age which is to come. That is a bold statement, but it is the very witness of scripture (2 Timothy 2:12; Revelation 5:10, 20:6, 22:5). Our training does not take place on grand stages to be put on display for the world to see. It takes place, rather, in those out-of-the-way places that appear as nothing, and possibly even disreputable. Joseph's preparation took place in the dank dungeons of an Egyptian prison. Moses' preparation took place in the back side of a desert. David's preparation took place on the side of a hill tending sheep. There was nothing in any of these men's experiences that would give any appearance whatsoever that they were being groomed for the leadership role that they would eventually assume. Even they were not aware of that for which they were being prepared. Nor were any of those around them. When Samuel came to Jesse at the direction of the Lord for purposes of anointing the one who would take the place of Saul as king, David was at first completely overlooked by his father. He was not even invited to the meeting of the brothers for Samuel's review! After reviewing all of Jesse's sons, Samuel asked if there was not yet another son. Only then did Jesse remember David and presented him after calling him in from tending sheep. David's training for this high and holy calling was on the hillside, completely out of public view, where he did battle with the lion and the bear.

So it is with all who are on this lonely road as they are being prepared for *their* place in the Kingdom which God is even now establishing. Each of us is facing our own lions and bears in the wilderness in which God has placed us for this time of preparation. These are not experiences that are deemed holy or even particularly spiritual, if they are even noticed at all by those around us. Even we cannot often understand how our seemingly undignified and even humiliating experiences could possibly be the training manual that God is using to train us up for His

glorious Kingdom purposes. Indeed, the very process of purging that we have just described, ugly as it often is, is part of this preparation. We must know that all of these experiences are being used to prepare us for the roles for which we have been destined in His kingdom. We must walk confidently in that knowledge, even though this is often a solitary walk.

Public Recognition of Our Calling May Get in the Way of the Purposes of God

It is endemic to our old Adamic carcass to desire recognition for what we do, regardless if that is in the secular or spiritual arena. We put together resumes so as to highlight our work and volunteer experiences in a way that places us in the best possible light. Our egos are boosted when we are given awards or otherwise publicly recognized for our good works and accomplishments. On the other hand, when a fellow worker who has less experience and (in our opinion) has less of a work ethic is promoted over us, we feel slighted and possibly even angry. These are all natural responses originating from the haunting memories of our soulish Adamic nature.

These same soulish desires invade our spiritual lives. Our flesh nature loves to be recognized as a “spiritual” man or woman. We find great enjoyment in being asked to lead a Bible study, speak at a prayer conference or any myriad of gestures recognizing our spiritual stature. We have observed this craving for recognition even among many of those who are a part of what some have called the “sons of God” movement. They eagerly anticipate the manifestation of the sons of God, that glorious day for which the apostle Paul tells us that all of creation is groaning. Many believe that this is a time when the sons of God will finally be recognized by the entire creation for the special position that they have as sons of God. There well may come a time of such public recognition, but we would strongly declare that such acknowledgment will not take place until we have been thoroughly purged of all soulish desire to be recognized!

Those who have been called to this lonely road less travelled typically do not have the satisfaction of being recognized—at least by the world and most Christians—as spiritual giants. They cannot be, because such recognition would get in the way of God’s ultimate purpose for calling them to this road in the first place.

These are called to do and to say things (or refrain from doing and saying things) that will never be understood by any, except the most spiritually mature who themselves have been taken down this lonely, undignified road less travelled. In many cases, God has given revelation of truths through these experiences that are regarded as heresy by the church at large. These are truths that must be carefully guarded and shared only as the Spirit of God so directs. To do otherwise risks impeding or delaying the purposes of God in and through us.

There is possibly no clearer example of this in scripture than we find in the early life of Moses. Moses was born of a Hebrew mother, but from the time of his infancy was raised as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. While he enjoyed the privilege of royalty, Moses came to recognize his Hebrew roots. We are not told just how he came to recognize this, but that he did is made clear in an incident that took place when he was a young man. He came upon an Egyptian beating one of his Hebrew countrymen. In his zeal, Moses killed the Egyptian. He no doubt believed that he was acting righteously, and his motive was to protect his countryman, one of God's chosen people! He did it in his own soulish zeal, however, not at the directive of God. Unbeknownst to Moses, two Hebrew men observed the murder and confronted him about it. Rather than applaud him for it, as Moses might have expected, his fellow Hebrew said, in effect "Why did you kill this Egyptian? Who made you a prince and a judge over us? Are you going to kill me as well?" At that moment, Moses knew that he had been outed. He fled to the wilderness, and he would be constrained from leaving that desert for 40 years until God had thoroughly purged him of all of his soulish zeal. It was here that God now was doing His secret work. Not even Moses was aware of what he was being prepared to do.

While we do not know how long it would have been until God would have delivered the Hebrew people from Pharaoh's clutches had Moses not been so impulsive, these chosen people of God would find themselves in bondage for another 40 years. The point of this illustration from scripture is that God's work must largely be done in secret even as it was eventually for Moses. Even Moses was not aware of that for which God was preparing him during those 40 years in the desert. Likewise, we are not fully aware of what He is doing or preparing us

for. To *presume* that we know, as Moses seemingly did when he killed the Egyptian, is to invite consequences that may only frustrate or delay the very thing for which God is preparing us. We are learning to be content in this hidden place, not presuming that we know what God is doing, and certainly not announcing our presumptive notions to a world which could not possibly understand the purposes of God that He is sharing with us through the circumstances that He brings our way.

The Realm of the Spirit is by Nature Hidden

The realm which those who walk by the Spirit inhabit is, by its very nature, hidden from those who walk by the flesh. Jesus established this truth with His disciples when they asked Him the meaning of one of His parables. He said to them, *“Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God; but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand”* (Luke 8:10). Jesus did not intend for the realities that He was sharing with His disciples to be understood by those who did not have ears to hear. These truths were not intended for them to hear. Paul also understood this principle clearly:

For what man knows the things of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so no one knows the things of God except the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. These things we also speak, not in words which man's wisdom teaches but which the Holy Spirit teaches, comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know [them], because they are spiritually discerned.
(1 Corinthians 2:11-14).

The natural mind is simply not capable of understanding the things of the Spirit; as Paul says, they are foolishness to him. Even more, the things of the Spirit are often *anathema* to the natural mind. When one of Jesus' followers responded to His call to follow Him by asking Jesus to allow him first to go bury his father, Jesus' response must have seemed absolutely abhorrent: *“...let the dead bury their*

dead.” How reasonable should it have been for Jesus to tell the man, “*Surely, go tend to your father. Your family needs you. Then come follow me.*” Such a response would have made sense to one steeped in Jewish tradition in which family was regarded so highly. Jesus’ response, however, defied the understanding of the natural mind. Similarly, when Jesus said, “*If any [man] come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple*” (Luke 14:26), it would have been regarded as scandalous! Family and lineage were highly revered in Jesus’ day—even more so in that day than in our own, and we know that this saying of Jesus is a stumbling block for the natural mind in our own day. Jesus was calling His followers into an entirely different realm that is governed by, and can only be understood by the mind of the Spirit.

This principle is most vividly captured in the story of Hosea. Hosea was married to Gomer who, according to the account was “a wife of whoredoms.” She was unfaithful to Hosea. Hosea’s *agape* for Gomer drove him to pay 15 pieces of silver to redeem her from the man she was living with—all of this, of course, at the command of the Lord. Hosea’s actions would not possibly be understood by the culture around him, nor by the religious leaders of the day. According to the law, Gomer should have been put away, possibly even put to death for her actions. But Hosea was not operating according to the law of Moses; he was responding to the law of the Spirit, which bade him take back Gomer. All of this, of course, was a prophetic intercession on Hosea’s part on behalf of God’s heart for His wayward bride, Israel. God was using Hosea for a hidden purpose of reclaiming Israel, and ultimately His entire creation unto Himself. Hosea’s countrymen, and the religious leaders of his day could not possibly have understood Hosea’s actions.

God is calling a Hosea company in this day who are willing to walk in places that do not make sense to the natural mind, and especially not to the religious mind. They will not be understood for it, and will probably be vilified for their actions and experiences. Indeed, even they will often not understand it as they are going through these circumstances. This is a company which walks by faith, not by sight or natural understanding.

Walking the Lonely Road by Faith

This road less travelled will not be understood by the world around us. It will often not be understood by our closest friends—even and especially by those who have been indoctrinated by that system of religion we call “Christianity.” Indeed, even we will not understand many of the experiences that we encounter on this journey. We are called to walk this road by faith—not by sight; not by properly adhering to orthodoxy; not by studying the Bible and rigorously obeying all of its commands. This rather lonely walk of faith will require listening intently to the Spirit of God within, and responding to Him, the Living Christ who dwells within us. As we do, we will know the joy and the peace within that is abiding, despite the rejection and chaos around us that this obedience to the Spirit of God would seem to bring. There is a purpose in all of this that even we do not fully understand with our natural mind, but can only grasp by the Spirit. This knowing by the Spirit is what Abram experienced when he left Ur. It is what Hosea knew when he took, and finally took back, Gomer to be his wife. It is what the disciples knew when they left all to follow Jesus, an obedience that would take them to their own deaths. It is what Paul knew when he was maligned by the law-abiding Judaizers, and when he was stoned because the message that he was preaching seemed so outrageously heretical to the Jewish power structure in the cities in which he was sent. It is this same road to which we have been now called. It will look different in the details for each of us. But we can say with assurance that it will be misunderstood, probably maligned, and for much of the time a lonely road less travelled.

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