

THE PULPIT

ALL CHRISTIANS' FELLOWSHIP INTERNATIONAL

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WELCOME TO THE NEW MILLENNIUM

WHILE THE NEW MILLENNIUM MAY GIVE US CURES FOR SOME CURRENT DISEASES (AIDS, CANCER ETC), WE MIGHT ENCOUNTER NEW MEDICAL PROBLEMS. FOR EXAMPLE, WE MIGHT FIND OURSELVES SEARCHING FOR REMEDIES FOR BACTERIAL OR BIOLOGICAL WARFARE. THROUGHOUT HISTORY, HEIGHTENED TECHNOLOGY HAS MEANT NEW WEAPONS AND NEW WEAPONS HAVE ALWAYS MEANT AN INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF WARS, NOT A DECREASE. THAT'S AN OMINOUS SIGN FOR TODAY, BECAUSE MORE AND MORE COUNTRIES SHOW NUCLEAR CAPABILITY AS TIME PASSES. ALLIANCES SHIFT, BREAK DOWN, CHANGE AGAIN. THE WEAPONS ARE THERE. IT'S MERELY A QUESTION OF WHERE THEY'RE CURRENTLY AIMED.

IF THE PAST IS ANY INDICATOR — EVEN WITH ADVANCED TECHNOLOGY PEOPLE MAY STILL DIE OF HUNGER (DUE TO CORRUPT GOVERNMENTS), COMMIT AWFUL CRIMES AGAINST ONE ANOTHER, AND FALL VICTIM TO ETHNIC HATRED. IT'S APPARENT THAT MANY PEOPLE ALL OVER THE WORLD, FROM ALL DIFFERENT IDEOLOGIES, ARE LOOKING ZEALOUSLY TO THE NEW MILLENNIUM TO USHER IN SOME FORM OF UTOPIA (A SOCIETY WHICH EVERYONE WORKS TOGETHER AND ARE HAPPY). WILL IT? EVEN WITH INCREASED TECHNOLOGY IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM, ITS POSSIBLE THAT HUMANKIND MAY NOT LOOK A WHOLE LOT DIFFERENT... SIMPLY BECAUSE PEOPLE DON'T SEEM TO CHANGE VERY MUCH. WE CAN HOPE THAT WE ARE SPARED FROM BIOLOGICAL OR NUCLEAR WARFARE, OR AN ECONOMIC COLLAPSE, OR SOME OTHER UNKNOWN CATASTROPHE, BUT WHO KNOWS?

CHANGING TIMES AND IMPROVED TECHNOLOGY DON'T REALLY MATTER ALL THAT MUCH IN THE GRAND SCHEME OF THINGS. WHY? BECAUSE OUR BASIC PROBLEM AS HUMAN BEINGS IS THAT WE'VE DISTANCED OURSELVES FROM GOD. OUR GREATEST PROBLEMS ARE NOT PHYSICAL, BUT SPIRITUAL. GOD KNOWS THIS, SO HE PROVIDED A SOLUTION FOR OUR SEPARATION FROM HIM. HE MADE A WAY FOR US TO FIND OUR WAY BACK TO HIM... THROUGH JESUS CHRIST.

LET FAILURE REDIRECT YOU

SOMETIMES FAILURE IS JUST A SIGNAL THAT IT'S TIME TO CHANGE DIRECTION. IF YOU KEEP TAKING THE SAME DETOUR (I.E. INDIRECT AND LONGER WAY TO AVOID A PROBLEM), MAYBE IT'S NOT A DETOUR. IT'S THE ROAD YOU SHOULD BE ON. STOP BANGING ON DOORS THAT ARE CLOSED AND WALK THROUGH THE ONES THAT GOD IS OPENING FOR YOU. IF YOU'RE WORKING IN AN ENVIRONMENT WHERE YOU DON'T REALLY FIT, IT DOESN'T MEAN YOU'RE A FAILURE. IT JUST MEANS YOU NEED THE GOD GIVEN COURAGE TO MAKE SOME CHANGES. RIGHT NOW YOU MIGHT BE STANDING AT A DOOR THAT YOU'VE OVERLOOKED FOR YEARS! ASK GOD TO HELP YOU SEE IT (JAMES 1:5).

JAMES AUDUBON IS CONSIDERED ONE OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST PIONEERS IN WILDLIFE STUDY AND PRESERVATION. FOR ELEVEN YEARS HE WAS A SMALL SHOPKEEPER IN KENTUCKY AND FINALLY WENT BANKRUPT. BUT HE UNDERSTOOD THAT FAILING DOESN'T MAKE YOU A FAILURE; ONLY QUITTING (LEAVING WHAT YOU WERE DOING) DOES. SO OUT OF THE ASHES, HE STARTED TOWARD A NEW GOAL: OBSERVING, DRAWING AND PAINTING WILDLIFE.

EVENTUALLY HE FOUNDED THE AUDUBON WILDLIFE PRESERVATION SOCIETY, WHICH HAS ENRICHED AN ENTIRE NATION. LISTEN TO THESE WORDS: "FOR I KNOW THE PLANS I HAVE FOR YOU, DECLARES THE LORD, PLANS TO PROSPER YOU AND NOT TO HARM YOU, PLANS TO GIVE YOU HOPE AND A FUTURE." (JER 29:11) WHY DON'T YOU TAKE SOME TIME TO TALK TO GOD ABOUT HIS PLANS FOR YOU, THEN LISTEN TO WHAT HE HAS TO TELL YOU?

THE ONLY PLACE TO BE

HIS MARRIAGE WAS IN TROUBLE, AND HIS CONGREGATION WAS WORSHIPPING A GOLDEN CALF. EVEN JOSHUA, HIS BEST FRIEND, COULDN'T DISCERN A REAL MOVE OF GOD WHEN HE SAW ONE. IN A REAL SENSE, HE WAS TOTALLY ALONE. SO WHERE DO YOU GO TO FIND STRENGTH AND DIRECTION WHEN THE THINGS YOU LOVE AND EVEN THE PEOPLE CLOSE TO YOU AREN'T ENOUGH?

HERE'S YOUR ANSWER. "THERE IS A PLACE NEAR ME, WHERE YOU MAY STAND" (EX. 33:21). THE DEVIL WILL DO EVERYTHING IN HIS POWER TO KEEP YOU FROM REACHING THAT PLACE, AND ONCE YOU'RE IN IT, HE'LL DO EVERYTHING IN HIS POWER TO GET YOU OUT OF IT. AND THERE'S A REASON; IN THAT PLACE YOU'LL FIND SOLUTIONS — REAL ANSWERS TO THE STRUGGLE YOU'RE FACING RIGHT NOW. ITS ALSO THE PLACE OF ANOINTING. WHEN MOSES CAME OUT OF GOD'S PRESENCE, HIS WORDS WERE POWERFUL AND HE BROUGHT ORDER AND CLEANSING TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD. WITHOUT IT HE WAS NO DIFFERENT FROM ANYONE ELSE — AND NEITHER ARE YOU!

IN THAT PLACE, HE FOUND REST AND SO WILL YOU. LISTEN TO WHAT GOD TOLD MOSES; "MY PRESENCE WILL GO WITH YOU AND I WILL GIVE YOU REST." (EX 33:14). WHEN WE GET OVERLOADED AND EXHAUSTED, OUR VISION SLOWS DOWN. WE BECOME RESISTANT TO CHANGE AND WE'LL EVEN SHUT OUT GOOD IDEAS, BECAUSE WE'RE DRAINED AND JUST CAN'T HANDLE IT ANY MORE. CHILD OF GOD, GET INTO THAT PLACE WITH GOD! MAKE THE PASSION OF YOUR LIFE TO FIND IT, THE FIGHT OF YOUR LIFE TO STAY IN IT, AND THE JOY OF YOUR LIFE TO MINISTER OUT OF IT. NOW THAT YOU KNOW, LET NOTHING KEEP YOU FROM IT.

MONEY AND MARRIAGE

MONEY IS ONE OF THE MAJOR CAUSES OF FRICTION IN A MARRIAGE, AND IT'S NO WONDER. LIVING IN A WORLD IN WHICH WE ARE CONSTANTLY WORRIED ABOUT TAKING CARE OF OURSELVES, IT'S EASY TO FORGET THAT MARRIAGE IS A COMMITMENT TO FORGET A NEW LIFE WITH ANOTHER PERSON. THE LACK OF TRUST EMERGING FROM SOCIETY HAS CREATED PRENUPTIAL AGREEMENTS (I.E. A WRITTEN AGREEMENT BEFORE GETTING MARRIED) AND SEPARATE BANK ACCOUNTS. THESE UNDERMINE THE COMMITMENT TO A SHARED LIFE WITH A SPOUSE AND ARE CONTRARY TO BIBLICAL TEACHINGS.

A HUSBAND'S AND WIFE'S INCOMES IN MARRIAGE SHOULD BE EMERGED AND SHARED. IN MATTHEW 19:6, OUR LORD JESUS SAYS, "SO THEY ARE NO LONGER TWO, BUT ONE FLESH. WHAT THEREFORE GOD HAS JOINED TOGETHER, LET NO MAN SEPARATE." SOMEONE SHOULD BE IN CHARGE OF KEEPING A BUDGET FOR THE HOUSEHOLD, AND WHATEVER FUNDS THERE ARE SHOULD BE HELD MUTUALLY. THIS WILL REQUIRE A LOT OF FAITH IN THE LORD, AS WELL AS YOUR SPOUSE.

WHENEVER FINANCIAL ISSUES BEGIN TO GET OUT OF HAND IN A MARRIAGE, THE FIRST THING TO DO IS TO PRAY ABOUT THEM. THERE IS NO SUBSTITUTE FOR GOD'S ANSWER. SECOND, YOU MIGHT TRY USING A MARRIAGE COUNSELLOR WHO IS TRAINED TO HELP COUPLES RESOLVE ISSUES DIPLOMATICALLY. DON'T FORGET TO ASK GOD WHAT HE WANTS YOU TO DO WITH YOUR MONEY. HE MADE YOU STEWARDS OVER YOUR FINANCES FOR A PURPOSE, SO YOU SHOULD ALWAYS REMEMBER TO ASK WHAT HIS PLANS ARE. MANY BLESSINGS CAN COME FROM APPROPRIATE MONEY MANAGEMENT IN MARRIAGE.

BELIEVE IN GOD

WITHOUT FAITH IT IS IMPOSSIBLE TO PLEASE HIM, FOR HE WHO COMES TO GOD MUST BELIEVE THAT HE IS, AND THAT HE IS A REWARDER OF THOSE WHO SEEK HIM (HEB 11:6). THE LIFE OF WILMA RUDOLPH, THE GREAT OLYMPIC SPRINTER, IS A REMARKABLE STORY OF FAITH. WILMA WAS BORN WITH HEALTH PROBLEMS THAT LEFT HER CRIPPLED. "WILL I EVER BE ABLE TO RUN AND PLAY LIKE THE OTHER CHILDREN?" WILMA ASKED HER PARENTS. "HONEY, YOU HAVE TO BELIEVE IN GOD AND NEVER GIVE UP HOPE," THEY RESPONDED. "IF YOU BELIEVE, GOD WILL MAKE IT HAPPEN." TAKING HER PARENTS' COUNSEL, SHE PAINFULLY STRUGGLED TO WALK.

BY THE TIME SHE WAS 12, TO THE DELIGHT AND SURPRISE OF MANY, WILMA NO LONGER NEEDED HER BRACES. SHE WENT ON TO PLAY BASKETBALL ON HER CHAMPIONSHIP HIGH SCHOOL TEAM AND WIN THREE GOLD MEDALS IN THE 1960 OLYMPICS.

WHEN YOU HEAR INSPIRING STORIES OF FAITH LIKE WILMA RUDOLPH'S, DO YOU SOMETIMES WONDER, "WHAT COULD I ACCOMPLISH IF I TOOK GOD AT HIS WORD?" FAITH IS THE FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLE OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE. IT IS LIKE STEPPING INTO NOTHING BUT LANDING ON SOMETHING. BELIEVING WHO GOD IS, WHAT HE SAYS, WHAT HE HAS DONE, AND WHAT HE WILL DO DEFINES THE KINGDOM OF GOD.

FURTHERMORE, FAITH IS THE ESSENCE OF THE CHRISTIAN'S DAY-TO-DAY ACTIVITY. PAUL WROTE: "AS YOU THEREFORE HAVE RECEIVED CHRIST JESUS THE LORD, SO WALK IN HIM" (COL 2:6). HOW DID YOU RECEIVE CHRIST? BY FAITH. HOW THEN ARE YOU TO WALK IN HIM? BY FAITH. IN SCRIPTURE, WALKING REFERS TO THE WAY YOU CONDUCT YOUR EVERYDAY LIFE. VICTORIOUS CHRISTIAN LIVING AND SPIRITUAL MATURITY ARE DETERMINED BY OUR BELIEF IN GOD.

WE TEND TO THINK OF FAITH AS SOME KIND OF MYSTICAL QUALITY WHICH BELONGS ONLY IN THE REALM OF THE SPIRITUAL. BUT EVERYBODY WALKS BY FAITH. IT IS THE MOST BASIC OPERATING PRINCIPLE OF LIFE. THE QUESTION IS, IN WHAT OR IN WHOM DO YOU BELIEVE? WE ARE CHALLENGED TO BELIEVE IN GOD AND TAKE HIS WORD SERIOUSLY. THANK YOU, LORD, THAT YOUR WORD STANDS FOREVER IN HEAVEN. I CAN TRUST IN YOU AND YOUR WORD DESPITE MY CHANGING FEELINGS AND CIRCUMSTANCES.

THE FORMULA FOR PERSONAL GROWTH

IF TIME ALONE BROUGHT GROWTH AND FULFILMENT, ALL YOU'D HAVE TO DO IS FIND A COMFORTABLE PLACE, PUT YOUR FEET UP, AND WAIT FOR THEM TO ARRIVE. BUT IT DOESN'T WORK THAT WAY. THE FORMULA FOR PERSONAL GROWTH IS TIME, PLUS TESTING, PLUS GOOD DECISIONS! YOU CAN'T LEAVE OUT ANY PART AND STILL SUCCEED. PSYCHOLOGIST JAMES MARCIA SAYS THAT, IN ORDER TO REACH YOUR PERSONAL POTENTIAL, TWO THINGS MUST HAPPEN: CRISIS AND COMMITMENT.

CRISIS HAPPENS WHEN YOU'RE STANDING AT THE CROSSROADS, 'SWEATING OUT' A CRUCIAL DECISION THAT WILL AFFECT YOUR RELATIONSHIPS, YOUR FINANCIAL SURVIVAL, YOUR HEALTH OR YOUR FUTURE. IN THAT MOMENT, YOU KNOW THAT EVERYTHING HANGS ON MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICE. THAT'S WHEN YOU NEED GOD'S WISDOM AND HE INVITES YOU TO REACH FOR IT (PROV 3:6).

COMMITMENT COMES ONLY AFTER YOU'VE MADE THAT CRUCIAL CHOICE. THEN YOU DECIDE HOW MUCH OF YOUR BLOOD, SWEAT AND TEARS YOU'RE GOING TO INVEST IN PURSUING THE DIRECTION YOU'VE CHOSEN. YOUR CHOICE PUTS YOU ON THE RIGHT ROAD, BUT YOUR COMMITMENT ALONE DETERMINES HOW FAR YOU'LL GO. TO REACH YOUR GOAL, YOU MUST KEEP FUELLING THE DECISIONS YOU'VE MADE WITH DETERMINED FAITH. AND REMEMBER, YOU NEED PATIENCE WHILE YOU'RE WAITING FOR THE PROCESS TO BRING YOU ITS REWARD (HEB 10:36). IT WILL, FOR GOD HAS PROMISED IT.

THE GOD OF THE FOXHOLES

ADMITTEDLY, MANY PEOPLE WAIT UNTIL TIMES GET REALLY ROUGH BEFORE THEY TURN TO GOD. A MILITARY CHAPLAIN FROM WORLD WAR II EXPLAINED THAT "THERE ARE NO ATHEISTS (THOSE WHO CLAIM THAT THERE IS NO GOD) IN THE FOXHOLES." WHEN LIFE IS ROSY, PEOPLE DON'T FEEL LIKE THEY NEED GOD. BUT THAT OFTEN CHANGES WHEN THINGS GET MESSY, WHEN WE REALISE WE'RE IN THE TRENCHES.

A FRIEND EXPLAINS HER PATH TO GOD LIKE THIS: "I THOUGHT I WAS A CHRISTIAN BECAUSE I WENT TO CHURCH ON SUNDAY, BUT I HAD NO IDEA WHO GOD WAS. I SPENT MOST OF MY TIME GETTING DRUNK, HIGH, OR TRYING TO FIND SOME WAY FOR SOMEONE TO LOVE ME. I WAS DYING INSIDE AND HAD NO CONTROL OVER MY LIFE. IT WAS WHEN I REALISED HOW MUCH I WANTED MY LIFE TO END THAT I KNEW WHEN I WENT AWAY TO COLLEGE I HAD TO FIND SOME HOPE. IT WAS THEN THAT I ASKED GOD TO COME INTO MY LIFE. HE HAS SHOWN ME LOVE, SECURITY, FORGIVENESS, SUPPORT, COMFORT, ACCEPTANCE AND A PURPOSE FOR LIVING. HE IS MY STRENGTH. AND I WOULDN'T BE HERE TODAY IF WEREN'T FOR HIM."

WHO KNOWS WHAT WILL HAPPEN IN THIS NEW MILLENNIUM? MANY MAY FEEL LIKE THEY'RE IN A FOXHOLE. LIFE CAN BE A BATTLE. AT THOSE MOMENTS WHEN THE HEAT IS ON, WE OFTEN REACH OUT TO GOD. THAT'S OKAY, BECAUSE GOD, THE CONSTANT, IS THERE AND ACTUALLY WANTS TO BE INVOLVED IN OUR LIVES. HE SAYS, "I, EVEN I, AM THE LORD; AND THERE IS NO SAVIOUR BESIDES ME. TURN TO ME AND BE SAVED... FOR I AM GOD, AND THERE IS NO OTHER."

BUILDING UPON THE ROCK

ARE YOU BUILDING UPON SOMETHING IN YOUR LIFE? BELIEF IT OR NOT, EVERY PERSON IS BUILDING UPON SOMETHING. EACH OF US HAS A FOUNDATION, SOMETHING WE'RE PUTTING OUR HOPE AND FAITH IN. MAYBE IT'S OURSELVES — "I KNOW I CAN MAKE MY LIFE A SUCCESS IF I TRY HARD ENOUGH." OR A LIFESTYLE — "IF I CAN MAKE ENOUGH MONEY, LIFE WILL BE WONDERFUL." OR EVEN A TIME PERIOD — "THE NEW MILLENNIUM IS GOING TO CHANGE THINGS."

GOD HAS A DIFFERENT VIEWPOINT. HE SAYS IT IS SHAKY GROUND TO PUT OUR HOPE AND FAITH IN OURSELVES, IN OTHER PEOPLE, OR IN ANYTHING THIS WORLD OFFERS. INSTEAD, HE WANTS US TO TRUST IN HIM. HE SAYS, "EVERYONE WHO HEARS THESE WORDS OF MINE, AND ACTS UPON THEM, MAY BE COMPARED TO A WISE MAN, WHO BUILT HIS HOUSE UPON THE ROCK. AND THE RAIN DESCENDED, AND THE FLOODS CAME, AND THE WINDS BLEW, AND BURST AGAINST THAT HOUSE; AND YET IT DID NOT FALL, FOR IT HAD BEEN FOUNDED UPON THE ROCK. AND EVERYONE WHO HEARS THESE WORDS OF MINE, AND DOES NOT ACT UPON THEM, WILL BE LIKE A FOOLISH MAN, WHO BUILT HIS HOUSE UPON THE SAND. AND THE RAIN DESCENDED, AND THE FLOODS CAME, AND THE WINDS BLEW, AND BURST AGAINST THAT HOUSE; AND IT FELL, AND GREAT WAS ITS FALL."

IT'S WISE TO HAVE GOD INVOLVED IN OUR LIVES FOR THOSE TIMES WHEN THE CATASTROPHES COME. BUT GOD'S INTENT IS FOR US TO HAVE A MORE ABUNDANT LIFE NO MATTER WHAT THE CIRCUMSTANCES ARE. HE WANTS TO HAVE A POSITIVE INFLUENCE ON EVERY AREA OF OUR LIVES. WHEN WE RELY UPON HIM AND HIS WORDS, WE ARE BUILDING UPON THE ROCK.

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