

Becoming What We Think  
October 9, 2011

If stress reveals the truth about one...if we discover our 'real selves' when the 'chips are down,' then Israel is in TROUBLE as we encounter them here in the 32<sup>nd</sup> chapter of Exodus. Just six weeks beyond the crossing of the Red Sea. Even less since the beginning of Manna's rain...when their charismatic leader has withdrawn to meet with God and seek their future..."COME, MAKE US GODS WHO WILL GO BEFORE US"

And even Aaron, Moses' brother and mouth piece, carves out a Golden Calf and says, 'Here, Israel, these are the gods who brought you up out of Egypt.' REALLY!?! "Tomorrow we celebrate!" COME ON!?!

The celebration has all the excitement and pageantry of a Frat House Party on Homecoming Weekend.

Where does all this come from if not from the Pagan world that is swirling around them? But, before we travel too far down the road of community disgust, let us ask ourselves to what we turn when crisis comes our way? When that exciting future becomes the 'daily grind.' Where do we look for guidance and support?

That is Jesus' challenge to the religious leaders of His own day. What is the center of your faith? Are you among those invited to the banquet of the Kingdom, but are too busy to be bothered? Are you looking right at the in breaking reign of God and seeing only 'business as usual?' Maybe you are stuck there with Euodia and Syntyche in disagreement, which is quickly becoming disagreeable to all. And before you say glibly to yourself, 'why is it always the women?'...be reminded that it isn't.

If you can look honestly at your own heart and you do not like what you see, then hear Paul's closing comments to this congregation so close to him.

"My brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and my crown..."  
**RESOLVE YOUR CONFLICTS WITH A GRACIOUS GENTLENESS.** "Let your gentleness be evident to all...rejoice in the Lord always." The word for gentleness here bears some attention. Others have translated it softness, patience, forbearance, modesty. It is that mindset which is willing to take a step beyond justice, for it understands that justice alone is not always the most appropriate response. It is the one who knows when to relax justice enough to include mercy.

As oil increases the surface tension of water and can calm a restless sea, this gracious gentleness puts the other at ease. It can open the opportunity for resolution by creating a change of heart in one who has been wronged...

Joy, remember is not the same as happiness. Joy is not dependent upon circumstances. It is deeper. For the Christian, Joy is dependent upon the abiding awareness of Christ's presence.

**REFUSE TO LET ANXIETY OVERCOME YOU BY STAYING IN TOUCH WITH GOD.** Have you ever been caught in a rip tide? I love the Ocean surf. I love to play in it, splash in it. I love to body surf the breakers. Among treasured memories is a family trip to a camping ministry conference in Florida where the boys and I body surfed in the warm Gulf waters. It was on another trip to the warm Gulf waters that I had my rip tide experience. A group of youth from various churches in the Ritzville community had just spent the week at an orphanage in a Mexican border town. Just back in the States where one could drink the tap water and shower without bleaching your hair, we hit the beach to celebrate.

Doug and I decided it would be fun to head out beyond the breakers where we could paddle around and feel the swells, maybe surf our way back. We were having great fun when I noticed that I was drifting not back toward the beach, but farther out. "Hey Doug, let's head back in," I shouted as casually as I could. After just a few minutes it was obvious we just weren't getting anywhere. There was, I confess, a moment of panic as the beach began to look far away and I could feel my arms growing weary. "Hey, let's head for the point," I shouted, remembering wisdom I had heard somewhere, that to get out of a rip tide, you swim parallel to the beach until you begin to feel the waves pulling you toward shore. "The waves look better over there." "Cool, shouted Doug," and we were off, soon gliding in with the breakers. Anxiety can feel much like the undertow of a rip tide. We lose stability. Our goals, which once seemed comfortably close are suddenly slipping beyond us. A little anxiety can be exhilarating, like the gentle tug of the waves at the edge of the beach. But it can quickly become disabling if we allow its waves to wash over us. Staying in touch through prayer and petition is like keeping our connection to our power source, our source of wisdom and experience. And the discipline of finding something for which to be thankful can melt away panic's grip.

**REFOCUS ON THAT WHICH IS LIFE GIVING!** "Set your mind on that which is true, noble, right, pure, lovely, admirable, excellent or praiseworthy." What a litany of life-giving words! In the same way that turning one's head to the side when behind the wheel will cause the unpracticed driver to swerve in a new direction, focusing our attention on that which gives life will help direct us away from that which is undermining our faith. Those things, which fill our minds, occupy our time; soon take command of our lives. Be smart; fill your mind with those things that give life and hope to you and those around you! We fill our cars with the best fuel and use the best lubricants if we want those automobiles to last. We purchase quality feed for our pets. We serve healthy meals to our families...do the same with your spirit. If your self-inventory finds you struggling, try a few of these vitamins for the soul. Truth may convict you, but God's truth will also set you free, keep the cancer of sin from spreading. That which is noble calls us beyond ourselves, challenges us to do things we might think impossible. The right thing is sometimes not the easy thing, but when we stand there we stand with Bonhoeffer who could say even on his way to the gallows, "This is the beginning of life for me!" Purity is often looked down upon by the world around us, but it is surprising how riled folk will get at the thought of even the tiniest bit of arsenic in the drinking water. Purity protects. A lovely day, song, painting, setting warms our hearts and helps our spirits soar. That which we admire captures our attention and if it is worthy of our attention will lead us along pathways God would choose for us. Excellence breeds' excellence, inviting our best effort.

We will become like those things with which we fill our minds....Challenges often will reveal the truth about us...But if we do not like what we are seeing. If current reality is not getting us where we want to be...we can invite change by making different choices. Resolve conflicts with gracious gentleness. Refuse to let anxiety overcome you. Refocus on that which gives life!