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When Fables Are Cherished (A Perspective Feature In Focus)

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IN FOCUS

When Fables Are Cherished

The priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day.—Acts 4:1-3, KJV.

“The assertions made by the apostles that they had seen Jesus after His resurrection, and that He had ascended to heaven, were overthrowing the fundamental principles of the Sadducean doctrine. This was not to be allowed. The priests and rulers were filled with indignation, and laid their hands on the apostles and put them in the common prison. The disciples were not intimidated or cast down. . . .

“The angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said, ‘Go stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.’ We see here that men in authority are not always to be obeyed, even

though they may profess to be teachers of Bible doctrine. There are many today who feel indignant and aggrieved that any voice should be raised presenting ideas that differ from their own in regard to points of religious belief. Have they not long advocated their ideas as truth? So the priests and rabbis reasoned in apostolic days. What mean these men who are unlearned, some of them mere fishermen, who are presenting ideas contrary to the doctrines which the learned priests and rulers are teaching the people? They have no right to meddle with the fundamental principles of our faith.

“But we see that the God of heaven sometimes commissions [people] to teach that which is regarded as contrary to the established doctrines. Because those who were once the depositories of truth became unfaithful to their sacred trust, the Lord chose others who would receive the bright beams of the Sun of Righteousness, and would advocate truths

that were not in accordance with the ideas of the religious leaders. And then these leaders, in the blindness of their minds, give full sway to what is supposed to be righteous indignation against the ones who have set aside cherished fables. . . .

“But the Holy Spirit will from time to time reveal the truth through its own agencies; and no [one], not even a priest or ruler, has a right to say, You shall not give publicity to your opinions, because I do not believe them. That wonderful ‘I’ may attempt to put down the Holy Spirit’s teaching.”—Letter 38, 1896 (From *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, pages 69, 70).

Let the Wind Blow

“These days, we are so programmed that God couldn’t break in if He wanted to. During times of worship in many churches, the schedule of songs and hymns is so rigid that nothing, not even God’s Spirit, can interrupt. . . . If God could lead the Israelites for 40 years in the wilderness, can’t He lead us through one meeting, one praise-and-worship time, without a lineup? A basic sign of revival is that the wind is allowed to blow where it will.

“We don’t need technicians and church programmers; *we need God*. He is not looking for smart people, because He’s the smart one. All He wants are people simple enough to trust Him.

“According to 1 Corinthians 14, if meetings are governed by the Holy Spirit, the result for the visitor will be that ‘the secrets of his heart will be laid bare.’ So he will fall down and worship God, exclaiming, ‘God is really among you!’ (vs. 25). This should be our goal. When a visitor comes in, there should be such a mixture of God’s truth and God’s presence that the person’s heart is x-rayed, the futility of his life is exposed, and he crumbles in repentance.”—Jim Cymbala, pastor of the Brooklyn Tabernacle, in *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan Publishing House), p. 134.

A God Called Success

Just as the Israelites were warned not to mingle with the Canaanite gods called Baal or Asherah, we must beware a god of our time called Success. Bigger is not better if it comes at the expense of disowning the truth or grieving the Holy Spirit.

Imagine a basketball court with hoops five feet off the ground. The free-throw line is three feet away. I’ve just made 884 free throws in a row.

My wife walks out to watch and says, “What are you doing?”

“I’m playing basketball. See, here’s the ball, and there’s the hoop on a backboard. The lines are all marked and everything.”

Carol would say, “No, the hoop is supposed to be 10 feet high, and the

line is supposed to be 15 feet away. *That* is basketball. What you're doing is nothing more than a charade."

We have a lot of markings that look like Christianity these days, but we have drastically revised the parameters. People have lowered the standards in a vain attempt to make churches look more successful than they really are. The sermons have to be uniformly positive, and the services can't go longer than 60 minutes. Even then, church is inconvenient to some, especially during the football season. Showing up at church is such a burden that soon people will be faxing in their worship!—Jim Cymbala, pastor of the Brooklyn Tabernacle in *Fresh Wind, Fresh Fire*, p. 132.

A Matter of the Heart

"If love is the soul of Christian existence, it must be at the heart of every other Christian virtue. Thus, for example, *justice* without love is legalism; *faith* without love is ideology; *hope* without love is self-centeredness; *forgiveness* without love is self-abasement; *fortitude* without love is recklessness; *generosity* without love is extravagance; *care* without love is mere duty; *fidelity* without love is servitude. Every virtue is an expression of love. No virtue is really a virtue unless it is permeated, or informed, by love (1 Cor. 13)." —Richard P. McBrien, *Christianity*

Today, January 8, 1996, p. 53.

Ain't It the Truth!

• "The idea that truth is cohesive, that it is out there beyond us to be discovered, that it has universal value and application, is now gone. Everybody is supposed to be entitled to make their own truth guided by circumstance, feelings, and instincts.

• "The idea that searching for truth and building life around it as something that gives meaning and significance to life has been abandoned. We are told today we ought to abandon the idea that life has meaning.

"Everybody's version of truth is supposed to be respected and regarded as equal. And you dare not speak against anybody's personal construction of truth lest you be banded as being intolerant, the scarlet letter of our day."—David E. Thomas, senior pastor of the College Place Village Seventh-day Adventist Church, in "Owning What the World Needs," the Senior Recognition Address of the Class of 1999 at Walla Walla College.

• "The best way to show a stick is crooked is not to argue about it or spend time denouncing it, but to lay a straight stick alongside it."—Ugandan Archbishop Janani Luwum.

• "It is not well for a man to pray cream, and live skim milk."—Henry Ward Beecher in *Life Thoughts*.

*None are so empty as those who are full of themselves.”—Benjamin Whichcote.

Vegetarian Alert

Why do people get nervous and defensive when you say you’re a vegetarian? (Let’s assume you’re sensitive enough not to volunteer that information gratuitously.) Let’s assume you’ve gone out with a group of non-Adventist fellow employees. After you’ve ordered your veggies, a pall seems to descend over the meat menu, and you sit wondering why your vegetarianism is such a big deal.

Columnist Marilyn vos Savant (reputed to have an I.Q. of 270) recently responded to a vegetarian asking your question.

“Humans are highly intelligent, and smart animals are alert to anything unusual in their environment: In short, you’ve disturbed the peace. And then you want special indulgence, which is annoying. (People with allergies, for example need dietary attention: That’s different.) Plus, they now believe—and often rightly so—that you disapprove of their eating habits. What a recipe for trouble!

“So it might help to recognize that an initial negative reaction is perfectly natural. Surely, this is a small price to pay for doing what you believe is right.”

One General Conference worker, invited to lunch with colleagues in a neighboring conference, was told, in a pre-lunch men’s room handwash, “Elder, we want you to feel right at home. You order just what you want.”

When the waitress came to their booth, the locals deferred to their guest. He pondered the menu, and finally said, “I believe I’ll have clams, in the shell, and—let’s see. . . . Give me the economy helping of caviar.”

The locals seemed a bit subdued as they ordered their steaks and salads.

“Is that all?” the waitress asked, as she prepared to leave?

“Just one moment,” the guest said, perusing the menu again. “I’m afraid I’ve overestimated my appetite. Please bring me a vegetable plate.”

And here we are, back to the vegetables. And in this case, it doesn’t seem likely that even Marilyn vos Savant could have salvaged the lunch. As she said, the visitor had disturbed the peace. □

