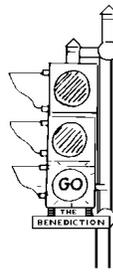


The Benediction



August 1, 2006

THE JOURNEY

When I was small I heard the story of how native Americans trained young braves for endurance. The brave would take a mouthful of water before running a great distance. At the end of the distance he would spit out the water as proof that he had not swallowed.

I could never do that. Without a drink of water to relieve thirst I would never make the journey.

THE WALK

It is a long walk.
Daddy told me about it.
Mama's been there.
Grandpa made it long, long, ago.

I've not made it yet, but I will--
it's so long, takes so much time, just
haven't gotten around to it yet.

THE PIT

There is a walk that takes one high above the pit. It is a steady walk, a sure walk. I must walk it carefully, for I must not fall into the pit. For there are lions in the pit.

THE HOLE

Having done this iniquitous thing, I sought counsel. *"An abominable thing! By it you have placed yourself into the hands of the enemies of the Lord. Now, just as you have done that contrary to what you knew to be right, you must pursue with all diligence the straight and narrow that you might again face the Most High: as you have digged yourself into this pit, you must now dig your way out; for only then will the Lord God accept you."* The advice seemed right so I began to dig myself out of the pit.

But the more I dug, the deeper the hole.

So again I sought counsel, from another. *"You have received proper counsel. It was by your determined will of rebellion that you dug the pit for yourself, and it must be by your determined will of obedience that you now deliver yourself. Do not grow weary. For in right doing you will be delivered if you faint not. Though it seem a strange thing, continue to dig."* So I dug on.

And after a time, I was again disillusioned with my progress and sought other counsel. *"You have done right in seeking counsel and in questioning counsel which seems not right. Now, I pray thee, as you dig, heap your digging into an incline that in time it will enable you to walk out on level ground. Let faith meet with my words and do not tarry, for I have spoken the word of God."* And again I began to dig.

It was a tedious process. But unlike the prior times I approached the surface and stepped out in pride. But it was a big hole, and in my journey around it I slipped and fell in losing my shovel. Unable to find the shovel I searched the bottom of the pit for the incline: I would deliver myself by my incline once more.

The incline was almost worn away, yet it was enough to allow me to crawl out. Again I began my journey to the Lord that we might be reunited. And again I slipped and fell into the hole. But this time I searched the bottom of the pit in vain, for the incline was completely worn away. Finding neither the incline nor my shovel, I began to dig with my hands. The nails of my fingers wearing away by toil, my hands became bloody.

There was great pain as I dug on through my sweat and blood. And it became apparent that I could dig my fingers to nubs and yet not deliver myself.

THE HOLE

continued . . .

Humbled into a bloody huddle in the hole, I wept. *"Oh Lord I have tried in vain to make myself worthy. Time and time again, I have failed. Why have you not allowed me to come to you when I desire so badly to serve you, to be in your presence, to worship at your feet? I am unable to do more."* And with that uttering, I was swept up out of the pit. I was faced in His direction, with the pit immediately behind me. I was given instruction to neither look nor go in that direction ever again, for as surely as I did I would remember how I had on my own climbed out and I would think of my power and in time I would fall again to the salvation of men.

NOTHINGNESS

— Jeremiah 10:3-5 (KJV) For the customs of the people are vain: for one cutteth a tree out of the forest, the work of the hands of the workman, with the ax. {4} They deck it with silver and with gold; they fasten it with nails and with hammers, that it move not. {5} They are upright as the palm tree, but speak not: they must needs be borne, because they cannot go. Be not afraid of them; for they cannot do evil, neither also is it in them to do good.

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