

Sermon – 05/10/2008 am

Walking In the Dark

Study Text: Ephesians 4:17-19

Have you walked through an art gallery lately? Have you seen the paintings which cost over a million dollars? I could walk through the gallery and not tell the difference between a painting costing a million dollars and one costing ten dollars. My appreciation of paintings is quite superficial. I have not sought to understand the artist or the message he is trying to convey. In fact in my ignorance I might be so bold as to suggest some improvements to his masterpiece.

Many people walk through this world with the same ignorance that I walk through an art gallery. They see marvellous things, the moon and the stars, the trees and the flowers, the birds and the animals, and even their own reflection. Yet their appreciation of this beauty is superficial for they do not know the One who created all things. They do not understand the purpose for which all things were created. They walk in this world; they wander from birth to death, ignorant of the meaning of life because they choose not to know their Creator.

Paul began this chapter of Ephesians urging the Christians to walk worthy of their calling in Christ Jesus. He was writing this letter to a largely Gentile church, to people who had once lived without hope and without God in this world (2:12). They once walked in the futility of their mind (4:17).

But they were saved from such a life by Jesus Christ. They now belonged to Jesus and were members of the church, which is his body. From life in the church, from exercising their spiritual gifts in the building up of the body, Paul now comes back to this subject of walking worthy of their calling.

This passage begins with 'therefore'. It follows on, and is a consequence of, being a new creation in Christ Jesus and of belonging to him. It is the practice that stems from the doctrine. It is not just Paul's idea of how we should walk. He writes *I testify in the Lord*. He is solemnly declaring what God commands. He is speaking with apostolic authority. You should no longer walk as the Gentiles; you should no longer live as you once did.

Hard Hearts and Ignorant

Is life meaningless and futile? It is to those who have no hope and walk in darkness. The Ephesians once lived such a life. Men in Athens lived such a life. Paul found philosophers pondering the meaning of life and looking for new things to add some meaning to life (Acts 17: 21). Their life was held together by new things, new thoughts, and new ideas. Did you once live like this? Was your great hope in getting new things and more things in this world? At least the Athenians looked for new ideas. Today we look for new things and go into to great debt to get such things.

The Greeks had their idols, as do millions in the world today. They fashion some material into a god, take it home to worship, and later cast it aside for another. Others do not make idols but worship themselves. They give themselves up to sensuality, to indulging the flesh. They live to get drunk, they live for sex, for food, or for their next adventure. The Athenians Paul met were respectable men as are many who live in the futility of their mind today.

Paul was disturbed at seeing these men worshipping idols. Years ago I was disturbed seeing a science professor feeding and worshipping a holy cow. Today I am disturbed when I hear of learned men looking for the 'missing link' of human evolution, and of men talking about billions of years and seeking to create life. I am disturbed at the number of people who believe whatever these experts say and follow them in this futility of the mind.

Why do we find so much futile thinking? If we read on in this passage we will find out. It comes about because of the hardness of the heart, or as we have in the NKJV *blindness of the heart* (4:18). We could turn this verse around to say a hard heart leads to ignorance, which results in alienation or separation from God, which in turn leads to a darkened understanding. It becomes a vicious circle or a downwards spiral. Futility leads to more futility. Men do not want to face the truth; they do not want to admit their foolishness.

How can this cycle be broken? The only hope men and women have is for God to bring them back to himself. God must break their hard hearts just as he did the heart of the apostle Paul. Paul was a learned man; he excelled at law. But he was confronted by the truth of the resurrection. He could no longer deny the reality that Jesus lives. He went on to say that all he had previously learned and believed and taught was rubbish or dung.

It is not easy for a person to admit the futility of all they once believed. But in the power of God people today are realising that their idols are hollow, and that the theory of evolution is a sham. May it be that Jesus would move many more to admit that their idols and their theory of human evolution are but dung.

Hard hearts, proud hearts, hearts impervious to the revelation of God in the creation and in Jesus Christ lead to minds filled with one thing only and that is ignorance. It is this ignorance that leads to futility. Ignorance leads men to worshipping the creation rather than the creator. Ignorance leads to men looking at the sun, or at mountain and saying this is god.

In India some men go up into the Himalayas to find god. They go to the rivers and the sea to find god. Others turn to philosophy to find god. In western society people turn to science to find god. In their ignorance they worship science rather than the creator who made everything that scientists study. Such is the futility of the modern mind.

God's invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood from the things that are made (Romans 1:19). But people do not see God's hand in the creation and they do not seek him. Rather their thinking becomes futile and their understanding darkened. Those who seek after God will find him but people do not do that. With proud and ignorant hearts they worship anything and everything but their creator.

Imagine walking through an art gallery and finding people down on their knees worshipping the paintings. Imagine the curator saying of an artwork 'this just appeared one day – we do not know who painted it or how it got here'. Would you believe such a tale? Yet millions believe that the most beautiful and marvellous handiwork of all, the universe itself, just happened. There was no mind, no intellect behind this wonder and beauty, just a big bang. Such is the darkness and ignorance that clouds the human heart. Men who claim to be wise, women who claim to be rational and reasonable have no better understanding than the big bang theory and the idea that life emerged from some primeval soup.

How encouraging are the words of the Lord found in Ezekiel – *I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you. I will take your heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a*

heart of flesh. I will put my Spirit within you and cause you to walk in my statutes (Ezekiel 36:26).

Alienated from God

A proud and ignorant heart, a heart that ignores God's revelation of himself and worships created things, incurs the wrath of almighty God. Men and women make themselves enemies of God through such ignorance. It is the height of ignorance, and arrogance, for the clay to say to the potter 'why did you make me like this', or even further to say the potter does not exist and that I made myself.

What would you say of a child that says to its parents 'you are not my parents; I was born through my own power. I do not need you. I will live as I like'? That child is ignorant and heading for disaster. It will soon be living on the streets. It will soon be begging for food. But who can help such a child that refuses to acknowledge its parents and continues to walk in ignorance? Who can reconcile this child with its parents?

Thanks be to God that while we were sinners, while we were enemies of God, that he reconciled us to himself in Jesus Christ. Like the Ephesians we once walked in ignorance, we once had proud hearts and were alienated from God. But that is not the case now is it? We have been reconciled to God. We call God our Father. We now worship him as our maker. This total change of heart, this great awakening, has come about in our life because of Jesus. We no longer walk in futility but in hope and understanding of who we are in the sight of God.

Callous Conduct

When they lived without God they had no hope. They once lived without direction; they lived without any moral compass. They lived to please themselves. They lived to satisfy the desires of the flesh – sinful flesh. They lived to gratify their senses rather than glorify God.

The outcome of a futile mind is corrupt living. They became callous, given to sensuality and to greed. They no longer felt shame as their conscience was dulled and became insensitive. They lived without any concern for personal standards or social sanctions.

Idolatry, greed, drunkenness, adultery, pornography, homosexuality and the like marked, or rather marred, the life of some in the Corinthian church before they were washed in the blood of Christ and became holy unto him. It was the same in the church at Ephesus. What about today? What do you see as the way of life for many today? Our daily newspapers are filled with accounts of these sins.

But you who belong to Jesus, you who are washed in his precious blood are to walk that way no longer. You do not walk in the dark, you do not walk to gratify your senses but to please the Lord who saved you. You are not without hope but have an eternal hope in Jesus Christ our Lord. Walk worthy of your calling in Christ.

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