

Religion: A Leaking Cistern

Jeremiah's Cistern Parable

Stale Water is not the Spring of Living Water!
God is Not a God of the Past but of the Present

The Waters of God flow down from the heavenly "Throne of God."

They flow forth to flood our innermost being.

These waters are not a pond or a puddle.

There are spiritual rivers in depths to swim in.

*The picture of refreshing streams of God are also spoken of in Psalm one
and in the stories of Elijah, Elisha and Ezekiel, prophets of God.*

Come and drink of the waters and be refreshed.

For in these you will taste of heaven's glory.

God has always desired to close the gap between himself and the human family upon the earth. The story of how God has dealt with this objective, makes up the scope and substance of scripture -- the Bible. In a certain place it is written that God was at work in Jesus Christ, reconciling the world to himself.(2 Corinthians 5:19) There is another side of the equation about the matter of knowing God; that there is an ongoing force and authority resisting this program. This resistance too is spiritual, unseen, but none the less potent in its effects.

Just as God uses human resources and requires "a yielded vessel" to minister His grace to others; so also does our adversary. The adversary, likewise, is a spirit being who also works with supernatural powers. God's adversary has an agenda which has been long established. His agenda is not for the good of humanity! This adversary is a killer and a liar. There is no good in him. He is the king of all rebellion and rules over a dominion of unseen spiritual beings who follow his orders. Just as an earthly army has a chain of command, with a strict protocol of duties and responsibilities for each layer of authority; so also do these spiritual armies.

I remember taking an undergraduate course in college in anthropology. I liked the class. It was about all the divergent cultures in the world, how they lived and how their societies were unique to their own living environments. Religion of some kind figured in every culture. Margaret Mead a revered name in cultural anthropology, defined religion as, the "belief in Spirits." Ancient or primitive cultures in some ways have more insight than most of us in the modern 'civilized' world. Where spirituality and belief in the supernatural has all but disappeared, even from religion.

Why do I mention the world of the spirit here? Because religion which does not acknowledge the spiritual forces which are arrayed in the heavens is dangerously ignorant of the word of God. Moreover, a religion which does not recognize active spiritual forces is powerless to deal them. In the spirit world are forces of evil which are positioned to steal from, and to kill and destroy people like you and me. Further, being ignorant of spiritual forces, does not negate their reality nor the consequences of dealing with them in our destiny.

The first of the two spiritual kingdoms is the Kingdom of God where the King of glory is enthroned in a heavenly place; and the second, the kingdom of darkness, where the "god of this world --the prince of the power of the air, the great deceiver, Satan exercises his dominance..

Because we live in a Spiritual world we have to have spiritual knowledge. A secular religion limited to material interests and understanding, speaks to strictly human potential. Secular religion is inadequate to deal with the forces which will impact us for an eternity. We need more than teaching about "goodness" as positive choices or positive social attributes and evil as bad choices which have bad consequences. God is not a God of psychological wellness and feeling good about ourselves, He is a God of spiritual restoration and reconstruction which is forged not by human will, nor human wisdom but by the power of Spiritual life generated by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. When God does the work of renewal it is deep and eternally effectual. If we try to reconstruct ourselves, it is an act of the will and is good only as long as our own energies prevail. The end result of God's hand at work in a human soul surpasses anything that counseling or self-will could ever achieve, Joy unspeakable and full of glory.

RELIGION: LEAKING CISTERNS *"A God of Past Glories"*

The title heading describing cisterns comes from the writing of God through Jeremiah the prophet, He states, "my people have committed two evils, they have forsaken me the fountain of living waters and they have hewed for themselves cisterns which do not hold water" (Jeremiah 2:13). What meaning does that have for us in relation to the question of the detriment of religion? Viewed in a shallow way, we may think the prophet is giving a discourse on the best kind of water supply to have, flowing wells versus stored water; but it goes deeper than that. Speaking figuratively, God expresses this: the worst thing which a people who call themselves God's people can do is to forsake the fellowship and intimate closeness of God's immediate presence (God said He was the fountain of living waters.) and to exchange that intimacy with something totally without freshness, movement, life and vitality. Stored water is still water though it has become stale in time and has lost the zest of freshness. Religiously speaking cistern water might be yesterday's water, or it could last year's water, or even water of many generations past. This kind of situation is bad enough, but God says further, that those cistern also leak and are actually going dry.

The cistern allegory has a wide range of application to religious tradition. The question might be, "How long has the water been allowed to stagnate?" Was it a year ago, a generation ago, or multiple generations ago that the presence of God was manifested and alive in the midst of the congregation of His people. If there is no sense of God living and moving in the center of our lives or our church fellowships, we have evidence that He has been forsaken by a religious people.

Traditionalism thrives on memories of some bygone day, or accounts that God had come by and left an historical token of his glory "way -back- when." That however, is not enough for the people who have deep spiritual needs, who have been wounded, bound, afflicted, imprisoned, enslaved by some lash of oppression. (We speak figuratively.) What force can set us free, what force can soothe or pains and sorrows? What can touch and salve the wounded spirit? It must be something full of life and power and compassion. It must be living fountain which flows from God.

God is always a God of now, not a God of tomorrow, yesterday nor of decades past. He is the I am who Is, now. A grave danger of religion is that it risks the separation of the believer from the present manifestation of a living God. A Heavenly Father who wants to continue to make His presence known to His special people.

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