

Change of Perspective

Easter Sunday

April 4, 2010

How many of you have ever been to boot camp? I'll bet that was nine weeks you'll never forget. I want to read you a letter that was sent home from boot camp sometime back, to a rural family in the hills of Tennessee:

Dear Ma and Pa,

I'm all settled in and doing far better than I ever expected! I was restless at first 'cause we get to stay in bed till nearly 5 a.m. But I'm getting' so I *like* to sleep late. All we do before breakfast is smooth our cot, and shine some things. No hogs to slop, feed to pitch, mash to mix, or wood to split ... practically nothin'. We even got warm water to shave with. Tell Brother Walt and Elmer to join up quick before all the spots are filled! They take us on marches that are supposed to harden us. We go 'bout as far as to the mailbox, then the city boys get sore feet, and we all get to ride back in trucks. The Drill Sergeant can yell really good; reminds me of the time Jim Jr. came in *third* at the hog callin' contest. I keep getting' medals for shootin'! I don't know why. The bulls-eye is near as big as a chipmunk's head, it don't move, and it dang sure ain't shootin' back like the Higgett boys do. I love the hand-to-hand combat training; but, I got to be more careful ... some of these boys break real easy. I'm not the best in the unit though, Tug Jordan is. I only beat him twice; but, since I'm 5'5" and 116 lbs, and he's 6'8' and near 300, it don't bother me much. Gotta go now. It's time for another *great* meal! Your loving daughter, Alice

Funny how our perspective can change everything! We associate boot camp with brutality and harshness. This letter makes us laugh because it *changes* our perspective (when *Alice* sees boot camp as nothing more than a pleasant change of pace).



Now, think how radically the disciples' perspective of the *crucifixion* must have changed after the resurrection. I'm sure they didn't look back on it as a "pleasant change of pace"! But, they no longer saw the cross as a calamity and a curse and Jesus as its victim. The cross becomes holy because Christ is the victor! Imagine the joy and laughter they must've shared when they were reunited with their resurrected Savior, Messiah, and best friend.

But, while he was *on* the cross what they perceived as *weakness* was actually *perfect meekness*: Absolute power under total control.

But, it was inconceivable to them that this could somehow be part of God's plan. It didn't fit their script! And yet, there's this mysterious moment on the cross when that perfect meekness was perfectly communicated, for those with ears. Can you think of when that was?



It was at the moment of Jesus' deepest suffering. It was three o'clock in the afternoon, three hours after a troubling, inexplicable darkness had settled over the land, and just before Jesus prepared to take his last breath. (*Mark 15:33;37*)

And at the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" – which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" – *Mark 15:34 NIV*

[Aramaic Pronunciation: EE-loh-eye, EE-loh-eye, LAH-muh suh-BAHK-thah-nee]

This simple phrase has been the subject of so much scrutiny. Even some of those present had no idea what to make of it.

When some of those standing near heard this, they said, "Listen, he's calling Elijah." ... "Let's see if Elijah comes to take him down ..." – *Mark 15:35;36b NIV*

They missed the point, as did so many that day. No doubt Jesus is expressing the utter agony and desolation that has overwhelmed his senses. But, did he say this to communicate that God had *abandoned* him to sin (as some theologians contend)?

I don't think so. Whether or not God-the-Father was forced to "hide his face" from God-the-Son (as he bore the guilt and shame of sin for mankind), is a good one for the theologians to debate. I just don't think that's what Jesus is conveying *here*; because, he seems ... *confused*. That's the part that's *always* bothered me.

Why does Jesus ask "Why"? If this was God's plan for the cross all along, wouldn't Jesus have been "in the loop"?!

And, have you ever wondered why *this* is recorded in *Aramaic* and offered with a translation (that was originally in Greek)? Everything else Jesus said from the cross is "pre-translated": "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do." (*Lk 23:34*) "I am thirsty." (*Jn 19:28*) "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." (*Lk 23:46*) "It is finished." (*Jn 19:30*)

Jesus *spoke* Aramaic. And *all* of his teachings and prayers were translated into Greek when the NT was written ... but not *this*. So, why did Mark (*and Matthew*) leave this in Jesus' native tongue? It's such a *great* mystery!

To understand what's going on here, we need to stand for a moment at the foot of the cross (along with the disciples) in their valley of despair, and examine our surroundings.

He's been on the cross for six hours, and he's at death's door. The people have been mocking him and hurling insults. His bones are out of joint from the constant strain. His heart is slowing – he can barely fill his lungs. To breathe he must raise himself on the nail in his feet. And the last of his strength is steadily giving out. His tongue feels like dry clay from breathing in the dust. Dogs lap at the blood and fluids pooling on the dirt. A band of Roman soldiers surround him, waiting for his death. And to pass the time, they gamble for his clothing. This is what the disciples are experiencing.

But now, we must also understand the way they handled scripture. They only had the Old Testament. Copies were scarce so they memorized large portions. And Chapter and verse numbers weren't added yet. So when they referred to a specific passage they called it by its title (which was the first line of the passage itself). For instance, what we call "Psalm 23", or "The 23rd Psalm", they would've referred to as, "The Lord is my Shepherd".

And if you jump back just one more Psalm, you come to what we would refer to as "Psalm 22"; but, what they knew immediately as: "My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?" (*Psalm 22:1a*) It's a prophetic Psalm, written by King David, 1500 years before Jesus was born; 800 years before the Romans *created* crucifixions. It's not a Psalm of *abandonment* but a Psalm of *triumph!*

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? Why are you so far from saving me, so far from the words of my groaning? ... All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads: "He trusts in the LORD; let the LORD rescue him. ... I am poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart has turned to wax; it has melted away within me. My strength is dried up like a potsherd, and my tongue sticks to the roof of my mouth; you lay me in the dust of death. Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet. ... They divide my garments among them and cast lots for my clothing. But you, O Lord, be not far off; O my Strength, come quickly to help me. – *Psalm 22:1-19 NIV condensed*

And from here the Psalm moves from lament to praise for what God is about to do and the deliverance he's about to provide. David's conclusion: it only *appears* that God has forsaken him!

For he has not despised or disdained the suffering of the afflicted one; he has not hidden his face from him but has listened to his cry for help. ... All the ends of the earth will remember and turn to the Lord, and all the families of the nations will bow down before him, for dominion belongs to the Lord and he rules over the nations. ... Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord. They will proclaim his righteousness to a people yet unborn – for he has done it. – *Psalm 22:24-31 NIV condensed*

As Jesus presses against the nails and hoarsely whispers, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" he's simultaneously identifying with the suffering in the Psalm, *and* proclaiming its fulfillment!

But, there's still something more. Although Jesus taught and prayed in Aramaic, he quoted scripture in *Hebrew*. But here, at the end, he breaks convention and quotes scripture in *Aramaic*. And it's so unusual that the writer's preserve it in Aramaic.

It's as though, in his final moments, Jesus wants his disciples to perceive that he's not just quoting it ... he's *becoming* it! He's living it out, right in front of their eyes! If only they could see it, this is absolute power under total control.

Three nails pierced him but they didn't hold Him. It was obedience to God and love for us ("a people yet unborn") that held Him in place.

Just the night before, after Peter brandished a sword and loped off an ear in a misguided attempt to defend him, Jesus had said:



Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels? But how then would the Scriptures be fulfilled that say it must happen in this way? - *Matthew 26:53-54 NIV*

Peter thinks they're failing; Jesus knows they're succeeding!

You know who had the greatest change of perspective while Jesus hung on that cross? The thief next to him; there were two, and they began by mocking along with all the spectators.

In the same way the robbers who were crucified with him also heaped insults on him. - *Matthew 27:44 NIV*

But, during the course of those six hours, something gripped one of the men. Maybe he was a Jew. Maybe he knew Psalm 22. Whatever the case, he went from taunting to trusting. And he tried to quiet his fellow-robber, saying:

We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man has done nothing wrong." Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise." - *Luke 23:41-43 NIV*

This guy begins the day thinking, "So, this is where it ends." And he ends the day thinking, "So, this is where it *begins!*" Funny how our perspective can change everything!

The prayer of Psalm 22 had been waiting for Jesus for over 1000 years. And just moments after being called out it was fulfilled. And three days later it was confirmed. Christ had conquered sin and the grave for all those who would but embrace him.

So ... what's *your* perspective on that?