

## **On Trying To Reach Heaven And To Find Happiness By Some Other Way**

(the warning given in the story of the Tower of Babel).

What is without doubt one of man's most consistent tendencies is to try to reach heaven and to find enduring happiness by self made means which either ignore or bypass the teaching of the Lord and the necessity of living according to the Ten Commandments. Morally, politically, and spiritually, history has known, and we know today, of instances where political, moral and social systems have been brought forward and advocated and tried to do this. They have been hailed for their promises of Utopia and happiness, though they have ignored and bypassed the fundamentally necessary things which bring these things about.

As much as this is done on a large scale, and can be seen to be present in various teachings, doctrines and philosophies, this tendency also manifests itself at a personal level. For the truth is, we individually share the tendency of mankind as a whole; the tendency to think we shall find and know enduring, long term, and eternal happiness apart from the Lord, and we can reach heaven apart from ordering our lives according to the teaching He has given us.

Since the tendency is universally shared and present with people everywhere it does not surprise us to find instances of it in the Biblical record, or to be confronted with it as something which exists within ourselves. We remember how it was when the going got tough in the wilderness, they made a substitute god, a golden calf; for which there was much enthusiasm because it seemed to hold out the hope of an easier way and the promise of objectives being achieved on the basis of far fewer demands on the people. Later, false prophets were allowed to flourish and are known to have been encouraged, because their smooth talk and accommodating attitudes made things easier, doing away, as they did, with the demanding standards of the Lord's truth and teaching.

At first it seems of only passing interest and dismissed as an ancient tale or legend, the story of the Tower of Babel enfolds within it the whole mechanism of this tendency we have been talking about - the tendency to find happiness and to reach heaven, or to try to do so, in our own way and according to man-made systems of thought, by passing the Lord's way and the importance and necessity of obeying the teaching he has given us.

Fallen man tends to think and wants to believe, there is and must be, some other way. This is especially so when self, and a looking to self, is in possession of him.

"Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As men moved from the east ..." (Genesis 11:1) They journeyed from the east. What does the east bring to mind? It brings to mind the rising of the sun. It is invariably used throughout the Word to denote the Lord, who in the spiritual world, appears as the spiritual sun. The Garden of Eden was situated in the east towards Eden. And what is meant there is a state of mind very close to the Lord.

But here we read of people journeying from the east; withdrawing from the presence of the Lord. In other words, a falling away from more exalted states such as what happens when people allow themselves to be drawn away from Him and into the land of Shinar, or Babylon, the well known Biblical symbol of self love and self intelligence.

And what happens when we come into Babylon? What is the tendency which comes to the fore during those times when we are being swayed and influenced by the love of self? It is surely, as is depicted in the story, to want to substitute what is man made and humanly derived for what is Divinely given; to take bricks instead of stones and slime instead of mortar; to bring forward excuses, rationalizations, theories and reasonings in place of the teaching of the Lord.

What is spoken of here is one of man's most consistent tendencies. And this is what the story is designed to warn us about. Spurred on by self love and self gratification we are so prone and ready to set aside the teaching that the Lord has given us and to substitute theories and reasonings which are all of our own making. And at the same time we are confident that we shall find happiness and a kind of heaven.

Much in vogue in recent years has been the teaching of 'situational ethics'. A case where what is humanly derived has been substituted for what is Divinely given. Where bricks have been introduced in place of stone, and slime instead of mortar. And yet people have thought to find happiness and a kind of heaven in such theories.

However, this tendency also manifests itself at a personal level and within our own individual experience. For we too, when swayed and influenced by the love of self, tend to put aside the teaching of the Lord and to replace it with reasonings of our own making.

When we have been hurt or offended, for example, our first inclination is to put aside the teaching of the Lord concerning forbearance and forgiveness, and to replace it with such reasonings as would justify revenge and retribution. We think to take matters into our own hands. And spiritually, we find ourselves in the land of Shinar, or Babylon, erecting a system of thought and reasoning out of unregenerate attitudes which we foolishly believe are a solution to the problem.

The Tower of Babel represents man's effort to build his own heaven, his own destiny, his own faith. It pictures the attempts of man to devise his own systems and to fix his own standards, setting aside the teaching of the Lord. It speaks of the danger of those reasonings which come to us when we try to excuse or to justify what is disorderly and evil. It warns of the foolishness of thinking we will find heaven on the basis of what we think and feel rather than on the basis of what the Lord teaches and reveals.

As in the story, this can only end in disillusionment and failure. If we are going to leave it to men to fashion and to set the standards of our morality how can there be in the end, anything other than confusion and bewilderment? Different people speaking different languages, one advocating one thing and one another? At the commencement of the story "the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech" - a statement which speaks of the harmony of thought and ideas when people are close to the Lord and willing to humble themselves before His teaching. But once they move away from Him and start journeying from the east; once they start substituting their theories and ideas, taking bricks instead of stones, fastening on falsities instead of on truths, things become a shambles and no one knows where they stand.

This is also so in the case of our own lives and experience. Where people are close to the Lord there is a pulling together and unspoken harmony. But when they move away from Him and enter upon states dominated by the love of self and concern for self, there is confusion and misunderstanding. Harmony goes out of the window and we find ourselves speaking totally different languages.

"I tell you the truth, the man who does not enter the sheep pen by the gate, but climbs in by some other way, is a thief and a robber" (John 10:1) Why a thief and a robber? Because he takes from the Lord and ascribes to himself the power to find happiness and reach heaven. He also takes from the Lord and ascribes to himself the right and authority where the setting of standards and the integrity of conduct is concerned.

You may remember the description of the Holy City, New Jerusalem, in the twenty first and the twenty second chapters of the Book of Revelation and how it is that on each of the four walls there are three gates into the city, twelve in all. "There were three gates on the east, three on the north, three on the south and three on the west". What they signify are the means of entrance into the Church and into heaven. Truths which introduce - different truths according to the different needs and capacities people have. "The twelve gates were twelve pearls, each gate made of a single pearl". The entrances into the Church and into heaven are different, yet common to them all is an acknowledgement of the Lord (which acknowledgement is the pearl of great price) and an acceptance of the truth He teaches. "I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture". (John 10:9)

We strike out for alternatives and yet there are none. We wonder like Naaman of old if the rivers of Damascus, Abana and Pharpar, are not better than all the waters of Israel. But they are not. Substitutes and alternatives come to nothing. It is the Lord alone who has the words of eternal life and whose ways are the key to all human happiness.

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