

A Lead Mine, 2 Herons and a Party

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CHRIST'S WORD FOR THE WORLD

A LEAD MINE, TWO HERONS, AND A GARDEN PARTY

“Remember now Your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, “I have no delight in them” (Eccl.12:1)

“Remember Him before the silver chord is broken and the golden bowl is crushed, the pitcher by the well is shattered and the wheel at the cistern is broken” (Eccl.12:6).

*O how I love to travel back,
and tread again that ancient track!
Some men a forward motion love,
But I my backward steps would move.*

Henry Vaughan’s “Retreat” (Welsh poet c.1621-1695)

Can you remember seeing as a child those cowboy films when your favourite character rode into a ghost town and that weird feeling that you had of emptiness and desolation? I remember as a young teenager going to a lead mine on the Pennines in Cumbria where my grandfather worked as a miner. It had ceased to operate several years ago. We visited the huge sheds where the rock had been ground, washed and processed to extract the lead. We saw the entrance to the mine with the train lines disappearing into the darkness. The heavy old pit doors had been closed- the mine was unsafe. The tunnel into the mine had been carved out of the rock of the hillside and was dripping water like a leaky bucket full of holes, which made an incessant sound that was magnified by its echoes. We saw the empty miners’ cottages with their doors open to the winds and the rain, and the deep snows of the winter months. The place was derelict and forgotten- a picture of emptiness, decay, and desolation in stark contrast to the early days of last century when men passed through those open doors into the belly of the hillside to work the rock with pick and shovel. Imagine the sound of the splintering

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and the grinding of the rock, the movement of dozens of men and horses and the deep vibrant sound of the engines. And now it was a ghost mine and forgotten; as if no one had ever laboured and sweated there to feed their family and their little ones.

“as a lodge in a garden” (Isa.1:8)

As a child, during school holidays I would go with my grandfather to his work. He was the gardener to a large house that had been part of a vast estate in the Eden Valley. At the bottom of the garden- which held all kinds of fears for me; the gravel path came to an end abruptly with a low wall and then continued on the other side. What was at the other side? The path led to a huge open-air swimming pool. The concrete walls were badly cracked and stained, and the bottom had split badly as if there had been an earthquake and the weeds were growing up from below its broken surface. Turning around there were two herons, standing erect on one long leg with the other one tucked up under their chests and their pointed beaks pointing straight out in front. They reminded me of the two great pillars that stood at the entrance to Solomon’s temple, called Jachin (He shall establish) and Boaz (in Him is strength). These two herons had been cast in some kind of metal, possibly covered in lead, and they were discoloured by the rain and the air and they were corroding, but they still stood elegant, erect and proud. They were sentinels of a pillared stone garden lodge, long forgotten and deserted; invaded, squeezed and enveloped by encroaching weeds, self-setting saplings and wild coarse grass. In my childhood memory this struck me with a sense of loss and empty desolation.

When I look at a painting, I often look for the presence of people. If it is a painting where people should be present I am always disappointed by their absence. The two pictures I have described to you are marked by the absence of living people. In the first one there had been men and women who laboured, slaved, and sweated; fighting for the survival of their own kin and loved ones. One can hardly imagine a day in a long seam underground, crouched and doubled up with a pick, striking hard at the unyielding rock. The filthy and fine rock dust pervading and invading hair, body and lungs. But those days are past and the place is now soundless and empty.

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I was with my grandfather when angina caught up with him as an old man. He would lie for hours at night time in unrelievable pain. I slept in the same bed with him. I felt so deeply for him. As a child I used to read the Scriptures to him nightly- he would never have done that for himself. When he died my world on the inside was smashed and I experienced a long desolation, broken dramatically by the nightly bright shining revelation of Scripture. I was 14 years old.

In the second picture there was wealth, taste, leisure, laughter and it was a long hot summer time of sunshine. Can you hear the outburst of laughter, and the sound of splashing water from the swimming pool? How changed things are now, and how transient they are. Do you remember this verse from Jeremiah?

“The harvest is past, the summer is ended, and we are not saved?”
(Jer.8:20)

Walk back up the garden path and you will soon see opened up before you beautiful laid out lawns, lavish rose beds fragrancng the air; and topiaried box trees- shaped like barley sugar sticks, but wide at the bottom and reducing to a point at the top. When they are freshly cut with the garden shears they also send out a fragrance which is much earthier. And here the owners of the large house held garden parties in the hot summer - time. I was present at one, but tucked away in the background out of sight, because I was only the little helper of my grandfather who was the gardener.

There is a similar picture to my first picture in the last chapter of Ecclesiastes (Ch.12). I preached on this chapter as a young Bible college student on my first evangelistic mission on a housing estate in Aberdeen, Scotland. We began our mission and on the first night we had a hall packed to overflowing with about 200 children- (panic for us who had never conducted a Children’s Mission before)!

I preached my message on the first Sunday of the Mission from Ecclesiastes Ch.12. I set aside time to prepare my message and I can recall the special moment when I sensed the presence of Jesus in the room. I was surprised how I struggled the next

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day in delivering my message. From there I went alone on my motor bike visiting isolated farms and homes in an area called "The Cabrach," near Huntley further north. It was a desolate place and had not been visited by a colporteur selling Christian books for over 20 years. I doubt in the last 40 years whether they have had another visit. I would like you to read this chapter from Ecclesiastes and then read Revelation (Ch.18) where I was reading this morning- this reading started me thinking along the lines of what I have just written

The world will one day soon experience the apocalyptic events depicted in the Revelation- all the foundations and structures that make life possible, successful and enjoyable will be broken up and destroyed and the wrath of God will be unleashed on those who blaspheme His name as they find no relief from His inescapable judgments. Heaven will be barred to them (Rev.21:27). Jesus said those who enjoyed the good things of life and did not share them with the poor and marginalized will exchange their riches for eternal torments (Lk.16:24).

We are experiencing in some small measure the desperate attempts of world leaders and financiers to save their nations from economic meltdown. They are hopelessly plugging up new and more costly holes as they emerge. The Bible says this is only the beginning of man's troubles, "but **the end** is not yet" (Mat.24:6). Visualize the unfolding disintegration of Babylon- it will happen in one hour! God has already fixed that strategic and timely moment: "when the hour is fully come." All that this earth valued and fought for will be lost forever, never to be retrieved- destined for destruction. There will be no bail out from the World Bank- it also will be lost. But there will be a party and it will take place in the summertime (Mat.24:32). It will be for us.

Jesus will come again and then it will begin. There will be a Garden Party (actually the Wedding Feast of the Lamb: Rev.19:9) and there will be laughter and gaiety that will be in sharp contrast to all the desolation and decay of the past. The Bible says: "Behold, I will make all things NEW (Rev.21:5). The presence of Jesus keeps all things in a perpetual state of being new. Jesus will come for me as a little child standing at the edge of this multitude of the redeemed and take my hand and bring

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me right into the centre of this happy gathering. There are no people at the edges or on the outside looking in on this party. The loving Jesus pulls in everyone into the centre of His warm lovely presence. All the guests are the friends of the Bridegroom.

All my holy dreams and longings will be fulfilled as I walk in this garden with Jesus. The fragrance that was poured on Jesus from Mary's broken flask filled the room with its fragrance (see Song of Songs 1:12); but it was only in anticipation of a heavenly and holy fragrance that came originally from Jesus' broken body on the cross. This fragrance will fill the corridors of heaven for all the future eternities of God. It emanates from the holy Person of Jesus Christ.

It is total joy and complete fulfillment to be the "friend of the Bridegroom" and to feel the warmth of His hand as mine is enclosed in His. Jesus described this holding of hands as eternal security: "And I give them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of My hand" (Jn.10:28). Now I understand what Jesus meant when He said we must become as a little child to enjoy the Kingdom of God. Jesus holding my hand will be a part of the joy of heaven.

What would you say about starting the party now?

I will look out for you there (I'm talking about the party).

D.Harrison (India- Nov. 2008)

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