

SABBATH THOUGHT 2023-07-22—ETERNITY OF INCREASE

May God bless you on His Sabbath day!

One thing is true about this world. Few are perfectly satisfied with their station in life. Those without electricity or indoor plumbing look longingly at houses that have them. People who live in small houses want bigger ones. Workers in cubicles are jealous of those with offices that have a door. Buying used items usually is looked down upon.

I have a nephew who has five trucks for two people. Four of his vehicles are paid off but he has one that is under a loan. He recently found himself in a financial bind. When it was suggested that he sell that one and a couple of others to eliminate the loan and reduce insurance and maintenance costs he did not want to 'lower' his standard of living.

But it is not just the poor. The wealthy are never content either. They buy the largest and most luxurious homes. Since those mansions have the very best of everything, they are only 'satisfied' by buying more mansions with everything. With homes all around the world, they buy personal jets to get there. At some point, they have so many homes that they cannot spend much time in them so they literally become guests rather than residents. When they run out of mansions to buy, they buy multi-billion dollar yachts, and so forth. I would guess Revelation 3:17 popped into your mind.

Why is no one ever satisfied? We put it all down to greed, but is that really it? Such desire only becomes greed when it comes at the expense of other people or with the suicide of morality. Still, why is it that most people are never happy with what they have? This behavior is not evident in animals. They will fight for and defend those things necessary for survival but I am unaware of them being discontented with their lot in life.

On the other hand, humans will literally fight to keep things of little value in the scheme of things. How many have been murdered because they refused to give up their wallet or purse to a thief or a vehicle to a carjacker? Is money worth dying for? Perhaps this was the case with Lot:

GENESIS 19:1-8 And there came two angels to Sodom at even; and Lot sat in the gate of Sodom: and Lot seeing *them* rose up to meet them; and he bowed himself with his face toward the ground; 2 And he said, Behold now, my lords, turn in, I pray you, into your servant's house, and tarry all night, and wash your feet, and ye shall rise up early, and go on your ways. And they said, Nay; but we will abide in the street all night. 3 And he pressed upon them greatly; and they turned in unto him, and entered into his house; and he made them a feast, and did bake unleavened bread, and they did eat. 4 But before they lay down, the men of the city, *even* the men of Sodom, compassed the house round, both old and young, all the people from every quarter: 5 And they called unto Lot, and said unto him, Where *are* the men which came in to thee this night? bring them out unto us, that we may know them. 6 And Lot went out at the door unto them, and shut the door after him, 7 And said, I pray you, brethren, do not so wickedly.

8 Behold now, I have two daughters which have not known man; let me, I pray you, bring them out unto you, and do ye to them as *is* good in your eyes: only unto these men do nothing; for therefore came they under the shadow of my roof.

While his was a huge cultural gulf for me, what is puzzling is why Lot chose to live in Sodom at all. His decision was the result of conflicts between the herdsmen of Abraham and Lot for grazing space and water rights. Abraham gave Lot the choice of the lands of Canaan or the Jordan plains with the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah and he chose the latter. I think it came down to a desire to seek the grander things in life. Lot "... lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered every." (Gen. 13:8). The plain of Jordan was a most appealing place; notwithstanding the wickedness of Sodom and Gomorrah.

But then Lot did something that would put his whole family at risk. Not only did he choose to live in the rich, expansive plains around the river Jordan but he deliberately "pitched *his* tent toward [*next to*] Sodom." (Gen. 13:12) and eventually moved into the city. Why? Perhaps he was looking to up-scale from his tent when he saw the houses there. Whatever the reason, he did this knowing that the residents of Sodom were hideously wicked¹. As strange as it sounds, he referred to those evil men as "brethren" (Gen. 19:7) even though he must have personally witnessed their evil after moving into the city. But still he chose to live there. In the end, his desire for living in a wicked city versus that of his tent caused him to offer two daughters to a rape gang. But, still, his decision cost him at least two other daughters who married local men, and his wife. Even though he escaped to Zoar before the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, he ended up living in a cave because he feared Zoar would be destroyed next. His up-scale life ended up with living conditions worse than his tent.

But the Bible says something remarkable about Lot—he was righteous²! I have to admit this is somewhat hard to understand, but Scripture is plain that his heart was right with God. It seems that mankind has certain desires that are good, but do not always have the best execution. To that point, Solomon wrote something very interesting:

ECCLESIASTES 3:12-13 I know that nothing is better for them than to rejoice and to do good as long as they live. 13 And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labor, it is the gift of God.

What is the "good" he mentions? As a noun, Solomon was referring to good works and then enjoying the *result* of good works ("enjoy the good of all his labor"). Having opportunities to do good works is a gift of God because the heart rejoices in the beauty of good. Could it be that what is usually motivated by greed comes from a corrupted desire to do good works that is built into every human being from birth?

¹ 1 Pet. 2:6-8.

² 1 Pet. 2:7.

I do not know with certainty the answer to that question, but I absolutely believe that Satan quite easily twists and distorts anything built into us. God gives mankind a natural desire for good works as well as the results of doing good. This is one of the endearing qualities that are woven into the fabric of each human heart if it is not corrupted by Satan.

Sadly, Satan has been quite successful. Of all beings, he knows better than any how to change good hearts into malice, hatred, and wickedness. He was successful with one third of the angels who saw the face of God continually so, attacks on the frail hearts and minds of people are like shooting fish in a barrel.

I think the natural desire for good works and beautiful things are a gift from God. It really all depends upon priorities. Do we pursue them even if they hurt others or trample on moral absolutes? Why did God give mankind those desires? Solomon pondered these things when he concluded that God put “eternity in their heart” (Eccl. 3:11). But why eternity? Is it just to live forever? I hope it is much more than that. I cannot think of a worse punishment than to live forever doing the same thing over and over and never experiencing nothing new. That is one of my issues with Protestantism. It portrays eternity as the most boring existence that I can imagine. But God has something more in mind. Notice the reason Solomon said God put eternity into our hearts:

ECCLESIASTES 3:10-11 I have seen the task which God has given to the sons of men to be exercised by it. 11 He has made everything beautiful in its time; He has also set eternity in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God makes from the beginning to the end.

This is about the WORK OF GOD who does not only does good works but wants to enjoy the result of His good works. I do not believe that Solomon is referring only to the work of God only in this age even though it says from the “beginning to the end.” It is talking about God making everything beautiful “in its time”! So, what is coming is an eternity OF good works and beauty. These are the “tasks which God has given to the sons of men to be exercised by it”—now and in the eternity to come!

ECCLESIASTES 5:18 Behold *that* which I have seen: it is good and [beautiful] for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it is his portion.

Good works and beauty are our PORTION from God. A wealthy few have tasted of the most beautiful things but they have also reached the limit—they possess the best and there is nothing more for them. How sad. It is like an eternity doing nothing and experiencing nothing new. Wealth will always be insufficient to satisfy those desires:

PSALM 49:16-20 Be not thou afraid when one is made rich, when the glory of his house is increased; 17 For when he dieth he shall carry nothing away: his glory shall not descend after him. 18 Though while he lived he blessed his soul: and *men* will praise thee, when thou doest well to thyself. 19 He shall go to

the generation of his fathers; **they shall never see light**. 20 Man *that is* in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts *that* perish.

Light infers happiness. The wealthy will never have happiness or contentment in this life. The rest of us will never have our desire for good works and beautiful things ever satisfied. This life is too filled with sufferings, too filled with malice and hatred, and too filled with Satan for that to happen. But we have a hope for something SO much greater—there will never be an end to the INCREASE of good works and beauty:

PSALM 115:13-15 He will bless them that fear the LORD, *both* small and great.
14 The **LORD shall increase you more and more**, you and your children. 15 Ye *are* blessed of the LORD which made heaven and earth.

While this is a physical promise, the Bible records a lot about increases from God. His promises are always INCREASING blessings, not just one and done. Physical blessings were **increased** food, children, wealth, etc. Spiritual blessings are **increasing** fruits of the spirit. There are so many verses about the promises of God to increase those He blesses that it is impossible to list them all. (Interestingly, Hosea 4:10 is a curse from God NOT to increase.) Our Father is the GOD of all INCREASE. The eternity to come is not a stagnant life. Our hope is not in the increase of this world—it is in the eternity to come:

ISAIAH 9:7 **Of the increase of His government** and peace **there shall be no end** ... The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

Most translations say *government* (a ruling authority) but the Hebrew word means *empire* or *dominion*. What is the empire and dominion of God? His KINGDOM! It is not referring to a government, but the kingdom of God. It does not say there is no end to the kingdom of God, but there is no end to the INCREASE of it. The kingdom of God is an **ETERNITY OF INCREASE**. Can you imagine a life that never ceases to INCREASE in good works and beauty?

Perhaps that is as close as I will ever get to understanding the “**unutterable** joy” that Peter mentioned (1 Pet. 1:8). To me, that kind of joy cannot be described; only felt. It stuns the mind and stops all rational thought! Senses are overwhelmed! Tears of happiness flow like a river! The heart explodes with emotions never before known! Now THAT is an eternity I get excited about. How about you?

May God’s grace and peace be upon you!

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