

Good News for Troubled Times

Part 3

Current events in our economy and workplaces call for extraordinary ministries - which must adapt quickly, as need arises. I offer no easy answers or magic. In all things, my goal is to point to Jesus, who holds each of us in his more than capable hands. May the following article encourage you; may your local church offer you a safe place to receive encouragement, prayer, fellowship and support.

For the greater glory of God, I offer a Revised Part 3 in my series of five articles, which I think will serve people better than what I had originally planned:

Part 1 *Overworked and Overstressed*, the story of Naaman (2 Kings 5: 1-14)

Part 2 *When the Bottom Falls Out*, God's message through Isaiah (Isaiah 40: 21-31)

Part 3 - revised *God's Opportunities, New Directions and Beginnings* (John 3:14)

Part 4 *Why Have You Forsaken Me*, holy ground (Gospel stories of Jesus' crucifixion)

Part 5 *Stewardship*, living and doing by God's values (thematic)

Part 3 *God's Opportunities, New Directions and Beginnings*

Every problem is God's opportunity. Every dead end is God's new direction. Every setback is God's new beginning. For everyone, these three Biblical and historic points offer us encouragement and guidance. Many stories make these points - indeed, the whole theme of Lent, Holy Week and Easter proclaim the points with drama and power! But, there is a line from Jesus' teaching that succinctly and helpfully summarizes them. Jesus said (John 3:14), *Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up.*

Jesus was retelling a story, deeply ingrained in Jewish memory. Moses had freed the enslaved Israelites from Egypt, and led them to a land on their own. On the way to their Promised Land, the people passed through an area with poisonous snakes. Snakes bit many of them, killing them. So, the people went to Moses, and read him (and God) the riot act. Why had Moses and God brought the people to this awful place? In turn, Moses had a 'meaningful discussion' with God. What Moses saw were problems, a dead end and setbacks. What God saw were opportunities, new directions and a new beginning.

God told Moses to make a staff of bronze. The staff symbolized God's and Moses' leadership and authority. Next, Moses must make a snake of bronze and wrap it around the staff. The snake symbolized evil's attempts to trap and control the staff. Then, God told Moses to tell the people: 'look at the bronze snake and staff, and you will be healed.'

God took a problem, dead end and setbacks, and turned them into their opposite. God's creativity took what was destructive and turned it, 180 degrees, to its divine opposite. And all of this, God did on a national scale, the hard way - one person at a time!

Jesus referenced the Moses story in his teaching, but its meaning would soon become more immediate. God would soon take hatred, the cross and death and turn them, 180

degrees, into resurrection, reconciliation, and God's greatest demonstration of love. Good Friday would be God's Friday - not evil's. Easter Day would triumphantly speak against the evil at work in God's Friday.

God's ministries through Moses and Jesus make the same point. This is God's world, not evil's. We experience problems, dead ends and setbacks because, like Moses and Jesus, no one is immune from suffering. But, what Moses and Jesus proved for us is: evil shall never have the last say, or be the final authority in our lives. Every problem is God's and our opportunity. Every dead end is God's and our new direction. Every setback is God's and our new beginning.

There are three Testaments, I believe: the Old, the New, and the Now. The Now is the stories of God working in our lives, today. So, whether we are talking about God's work in the wilderness, or the cross on Calvary, or our wounds in the workplace, what God offers us is as real as what God delivered, centuries ago. In the Old, New and Now Testaments, God is the same God, whose presence and power will work within us.

As we offer our 'snake bites' from the workplace to God, may we hear and choose to receive God's promise to help US, too. As God acted in the past, God is still acting, today, and will continue to act, tomorrow. Thanks be to God!

D. Browning
March, 2009