

Spiritual Considerations...



Selected articles designed to assist in our Bible study and Christian walk.

Dave Phillips, editor

number 42

(The following article is one that struck home with me because of my frustration with the infatuation of society for appearances rather than substance. As familiar as we are with the Lord's declaration to Samuel that "God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7), we are still enamored with appearances. On a recent trip to Vienna, Austria, David Simpson and I stood at the base of the magnificent St. Stephen's Cathedral. It's towering height and elaborate decorations are breathtaking. I could not imagine how the artwork would have been accomplished in 2008, much less in the 1200's when the initial work began. Yet, there is a hollowness that you feel when you walk through the cathedral. So much dedication to artwork, statuary, and architecture made me wonder how much concern there was for feeding the inner soul. When I read the following article by Michael Brooks, I was encouraged to take my eyes off the physical, temporary attractions and continually seek the eternal, silent-but-ever-present God of the universe. DP)

Greater Than the Temple

Michael Brooks, *Forthright – Straight to the Cross*

"Yet I say to you that in this place there is One greater than the temple. But if you had known what this means, 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice,' you would not have condemned the guiltless. For the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath" (Matthew 12:6-8).

Durbar Square in Katmandu is a fascinating place. It is the ancient royal plaza, filled with palaces, temples, fortifications and other masterpieces of historic Nepal. When I visit it, and the Durbar Squares of neighboring Bhaktapur and Patan, I go back in time and wonder at the skills and wealth of those who created them. Of the buildings contained within these squares, it is the temples which are most numerous and most elaborately decorated.

Much of the greatest architecture that man has created has religious purpose. The great cathedrals of Europe, the massive temples of Asia, and the mega-church complexes of America are all beautiful, luxurious and extremely impressive.

The adherents of the religion responsible for erecting one of these structures often visit it on pilgrimage and are inspired to awe and wonder. Even those of other faiths, or no faith, frequently include the most famous and historic of religious structures on their itinerary, and are filled with amazement at their size and beauty.

The Jews of the first century A.D. were justifiably proud of their temple. First built on that site by Solomon almost 1,000 years before them, the original structure was of rare magnificence. It however was completely destroyed by Babylon about 400 years later.

The remnants of Judah rebuilt it upon their return from captivity, but not nearly in such size and luxury as the original. About 500 years later, shortly before the birth of Jesus, Herod the Great embarked upon a forty year long rebuilding project that greatly expanded the temple and added much decoration. It is this third temple which the disciples proudly displayed to Jesus on their final visit to Jerusalem (Matthew 24:1).

Even from the ruins remaining in Jerusalem today, one can readily see that this temple was a wonderful building. The site, containing a whole complex of related structures, comprises almost 40 acres. It sits on a steep hill, which was filled and leveled to create the Temple Mount as it is now called. This fill required retaining walls which were built of quarried stones each of which weighs many tons.

At one corner the wall currently measures almost 100 feet high. The temple itself was elaborately overlaid with precious metals and engraved and adorned by the finest artists available. Even in the classic world of Greek and Roman art, the Jerusalem temple left little to be desired.

But as wonderful and awe-inspiring as this product of human creativity was, it was itself overshadowed by the one to whom it was dedicated. Jesus, the Son of God and the Son of Man, reminded the Jews that the house is not greater than its owner. The temple was a mere reminder of God's presence among his people. He did not live in it (Acts 17:24); rather it was a dwelling place for his name (1 Kings 8:27-29). It is God who was to be glorified by and within the temple.

It is easy for us to replace substance with form. We admire the clothes and ignore the character and worth of the person wearing them. We look at the impressive décor of a house, and overlook the poverty of spirit of its occupants. And we look at the structures and forms of religion, but neglect the spiritual nature and magnificence of God whom we should serve.

In our multicultural, multi-religious world of almost infinite choice it is easy for us to be impressed by rituals, facilities and other externals. We may be drawn to a given religion not so much by its core beliefs and teachings as by its more superficial attractions, such as impressive buildings, or appealing social programs.

Jesus reminds us that the only really important aspect of religion is its object - God. He is far greater than any temple or other created thing (Acts 17:24-26) since he himself is the creator of all. God is eternal, all knowing, all powerful, all loving, perfect in his justice and truth. Let us not be inordinately impressed with, nor inappropriately put off by, the externals of religion. Rather let us be drawn by or through them to a true knowledge of God himself. "You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only you shall serve" (Matthew 4:10).

One of Life's Saddest Stories

Dave Phillips, Germantown

I have been fascinated over recent months to follow the blog update on Randy Pausch, famous professor at Carnegie Mellon University, who died at the age of 47 of complications from pancreatic cancer. Recognized for his jovial, upbeat attitude and stimulating countenance during his final years, he is best known for his "Last Lecture" for students to learn from his experiences. His story is dramatically told in his own words on his blog site, <http://download.srv.cs.cmu.edu/~pausch/news/index.html>. What is sadly missing in his reports, pictures and daily reports is any mention of his spiritual walk with God. Apparently, there was none.

This man was so gifted by God. He designed rides at Disney World and daily influenced the lives of college students with his rare wit and banter that delighted university students. He was blessed with a supportive family with whom he had a tremendous relationship - loving wife, adorable children. Yet, in his last lecture there is no moment that he pauses and encourages them to think about the life which is to come. Instead, everything is focused on memories of how things were prior to his 2006 diagnosis and his death in July, 2008.

Truly, one of the saddest stories in life you'll ever read. What a reminder to us. What legacy will we leave?