

Better Than Coffee

Do You Need a “Pick Me Up”?

The other day my son was up on our roof. It leaked pretty badly during the winter rains and so I asked him to put on the last coat of sealant to hopefully fix the problem. I got on our ladder, which was really too short for the job, and began lifting the large bucket of sealant up to him. It was heavy, heavier than I expected and to get it to my son, I had to lift it slightly above my head for him to reach it. I did not expect what happened next. The bucket was too heavy for me. Ten years ago it would not have been a problem but now at my age it was. As I stood there on the ladder, the bucket hanging down from my right arm, I grasped I could not do it, which was slightly humiliating for me. There was no one else around to help me. At that moment, it struck me. I was deficient. Has that ever happened to you? You realized that extra effort alone could not get the job done! As I stood there motionless, pondering my plight with my son patiently waiting for me, I did what millions of alcoholics, bankrupt entrepreneurs and doctors operating on hopeless cases have done. I called upon the higher power, not a higher power, but the higher power to help me. Our big idea is simply this. Develop your dependence on Christ for every part of your life.

The past three hundred years have produced tremendous changes in technology and socio-political systems. We have seen the demise of slavery in Europe and the US. Mechanisms are in place, whether they are put to good use or not is up in the air, to end world hunger. Yet a dynamic, destructive trend came out of Europe and made its way into the US, the cult of humanism. It has been marketed as the offspring of optimism. Expressions like, “You got this”, “I can do this”, “It’s all about you”, “We can figure this out” all have sprung out of its theology. The dogma behind the cult of humanism is a belief in a godless world. Now, you may not hold to atheism and could in fact confess that not only God exists, but He rules the universe and still be a practicing member of the cult of humanism. Samson was until the very end of his life. Samson was dedicated at birth to God. An angel of God announced to the woman who would be his mother the expectation of how Samson was to live. **Now see to it that you drink no wine or other fermented drink and that you do not eat anything unclean, because you will conceive and give birth to a son. No razor may be used on his head, because the boy is to be a Nazirite, set apart to God from birth, and he will begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines.** (Judges 13: 4-5 NIV)

A Nazirite was a special class of Jews dedicated exclusively to the Lord who followed a very specific set of guidelines given by God. There were three rules all Jews making a vow of commitment to the Lord were to follow. 1. He was not to ingest anything having to do with grapes, including grape wine. 2. He was not to cut his hair or have it cut. 3. He was not to touch a dead body or even go near one. A Nazirite’s life was not his own; it belonged to God. What Samson gained by being a Nazirite, something unique to him, was supernatural strength. That was in fact stupendous and a wonderful boon for the Israelites in their wars with the Philistines. However, it was Samson’s infatuation with pagan women that was his downfall. His parents begged him not to marry a Philistine woman as it was a direct violation of God’s law, but Samson refused to listen to them and began to practice openly the cult of humanism. His response to their pleading to be loyal to God was quite astounding for one ostensibly dedicated to the Lord. **But Samson said to his father, “Get her for me. She’s the right one for me.”** (Judges 14:3b NIV) Now it must be acknowledged that God used Samson’s ungodly desires to begin a war with the Philistines but in his reply, there is not a hint in it that Samson was acting out of devotion to the Lord. But there is more to his infidelity to God. When Samson was on his way to introduce his parents to the Philistine girl he planned to marry, he came upon a roaring lion menacing him. Samson with his great strength tore the lion apart and then left the dead beast off to the side of the road. Later, on his way to marry the young woman, he found the lion’s carcass filled with honey due to a swarm of bees making the dead body its home. Despite the ban on Nazirites even approaching dead bodies, let alone digging their hands in them, he scooped out honey from the carcass and gleefully ate it. That is the cult of humanism in practice. There is no God in my world, either big G God or little g god.

There are only two times in the Biblical record that Samson seems to show any interest in God. Once when he was parched after killing a thousand men in battle he prayed for God to provide him water. A second time occurred when at the end of his life after having had his eyes gouged out by the Philistines and his supernatural strength gone because he foolishly let out the secret to Delilah about the requirement to not let his hair be cut, he was chained and made the laughingstock of the Philistines in front of thousands of them. At that time he begged God to give him his strength once more. **Then Samson prayed to the Lord, “O Sovereign Lord, remember me. O God, please strengthen me just once more, and let me with one blow get revenge on the Philistines for my two eyes.”** (Judges 16: 28 NIV)

God granted his request like he did for the water and Samson with supernatural power was able to knock down the main pillar holding up the temple where thousands of Philistines were celebrating and they all along with Samson were crushed to death. Let me show you how the cult of humanism looks. After Samson killed a thousand of the Philistines in battle using nothing but the jawbone of a donkey, he sang a little ditty. **Then Samson said, "With a donkey's jawbone I have made donkeys of them. With a donkey's jawbone I have killed a thousand men."** (Judges 15: 16 NIV) Does it seem odd to you that Samson does not mention at all the greatness of God who provided him with supernatural power to do what he did? He says nothing of the Lord. That is the cult of humanism in practice.

As we prepare to take a closer look at the famous Armor of God passage in Ephesians 6, it is important to give some thought to the short verse the Apostle Paul uses to introduce it. **Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power.** (Ephesians 6: 10 NIV) Another way to translate it would be, **Finally, summon up power by means of the Lord, even in the strength of His power.** This is the antithesis of the cult of humanism approach to life. Rather than ignoring the Lord or acting as if He is not around, focus on Him with all your force of will and utilize His supernatural power to live. Keep your heart aligned with Him and He will infuse you with power and might you cannot ever possess on your own. Let me share two examples of how this is put into practice. Almost three thousand years ago, the king of the tiny nation of Judah faced a terrible situation. The most powerful armies of the region were gathered to fight against little Judah. When Jehoshaphat heard of the horrifying threat to the nation, he went to the Lord in prayer along with all the people of Judah. **"But now here are men from Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir, whose territory you would not allow Israel to invade when they came from Egypt; so they turned away from them and did not destroy them. See how they are repaying us by coming to drive us out of the possession you gave us as an inheritance. O our God, will you not judge them? For we have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon you."** (2 Chronicles 20:10-12 NIV) Here we see clearly the opposite of the cult of humanism, contextual Christianity. It is faith in God practiced in real time. Rather than trying to figure out on your own what you will do and how you will respond to what you face, you zero in on Christ and seek His empowerment, the strength of His might.

Let's consider a rarely discussed moment of contextual Christianity. John and James were inseparable brothers. They managed a fishing business together. James and John at the same time joined Jesus' disciples. In an embarrassing twist they encouraged their mother to promote both of them as chief among the disciples and the ones who would sit at the right and left of Jesus in His Kingdom. **Then the mother of Zebedee's sons came to Jesus with her sons and, kneeling down, asked a favor of him. "What is it you want?" he asked. She said, "Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom."** (Mathew 20: 20-21 NIV) Mark adds to the account by telling us that James and John also asked Jesus if they could sit on his left and right in His Kingdom. Looking back, we recognize how bizarre this request was and might even deem it self-centered. It illustrates though just how close these brothers were, how much James and John were united in spirit. One without the other was unthinkable. But then tragedy struck. **It was about this time that King Herod arrested some who belonged to the church, intending to persecute them. He had James, the brother of John, put to death with the sword.** (Acts 12: 1-2 NIV)

We don't know how this impacted the surviving brother John. How long did he grieve the loss of James? What did it do to his fervor for Christ? The cult of humanism would either bring a shroud of despair or the "shake it off" mentality. For John, who practiced contextual Christianity, he found the strength of God's power, the might of the Holy Spirit upholding him. We know this because John went on to become arguably the most influential of the twelve disciples. His Gospel of John, three epistles and the book of Revelation could be the most important books of the Bible. But that is not the point here. What John clearly discovered in his grief was the power of the might of Jesus who enabled him to not only move forward without his brother but to not live in the fear of suffering the same fate as James and to maintain unflinching devotion to Christ. That is the supernatural working of Christ in you as you turn to Him. Never underestimate the power of God's might in whatever situation you face. Live with Jesus on your mind and the Holy Spirit will make you more powerful and competent than you alone can ever be. Imagine that you are in your new car, and you have pulled off to the side of the road and parked. Before you is fifty miles of highway without curves, and no one is out there but you. Installed on your car is a turbo button that if you push it will enable your car to go from one hundred miles per hour to two hundred miles per hour. Would you push the button to see what your car can do? You have at your disposal all the might of God to empower you to handle what you face. Will you rely upon Him or just ignore His might and live as if He is not there. Here is our big idea. Develop your dependence on Christ for every part of your life. See what He can do with you.