

The Bible in Hollywood

Forrest Gump

More than two decades ago I was starting a church and we had about sixteen people attending. There was a ton of excitement about the endeavor, and I was enthused about the fresh beginning. A friend I knew from another church was a leader in a Christian ministry for those struggling with alcoholism and while chatting he told me he was looking for an opportunity to preach. I was an admirer of the ministry he had and so I offered for him to preach for our little church. I assumed my friend would talk about his experience working with those struggling with addictions and share some about the power of the Gospel to change lives. I was wrong. As a young pastor, I failed to recognize the importance of vetting guest speakers and knowing in advance their topics. My friend preached on the prophecies regarding the future of Israel in the Bible. He spoke for an hour and a half. Many times, I thought about abruptly standing up and announcing we were closing in prayer, especially those moments when he paused. My friend kept sharing the same points over and over again and I guess thinking that by repeating himself, he would make his sermon more memorable, he in fact did. But not in the way he intended. After the service, I was confronted by several people of the church who wondered why I let my friend go on...and on...and on. I had no answer. It was not my greatest moment in ministry.

Have you ever done something and immediately regretted the foolishness of it? Perhaps it has taken you years to realize how dumb your actions were. The title character in the movie "Forrest Gump" is a mentally challenged man who plays a part in some of the biggest events of the sixties and seventies. When asked by his young friend Jenny if he is stupid, he replies, "My mama says, 'Stupid is as stupid does!'" We don't like to use the word "stupid" when talking about others, but the Bible certainly tells us much about stupidity. Forrest Gump's mom got it right in terms of how the Bible views stupidity. It does not concern itself with the IQ of people and never criticizes someone for lacking native intelligence. Stupidity in the Biblical sense is having the Word of God and doing nothing with it, not letting its power and direction change your life. The Bible has much to say about what you are to do with the intelligence you have been given. Let me show you what I mean.

Before Saul became the first king of ancient Israel, he was a young man who helped his father breed donkeys, or as the King James Version of the Bible might put it, "raise asses". Apparently, he and his dad were very focused on it. At the time, the most famous person in all of Israel was the prophet Samuel. For decades he led the people. **And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the Lord. The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word. And Samuel's word came to all Israel.** (1 Samuel 3: 20-4:1a NIV) What is more, Samuel directed the army of Israel in its wars with the Philistines. He also was the chief judge of the people and settled disputes over the law; his word was final in every matter. **Samuel continued as judge over Israel all the days of his life. From year to year he went on a circuit from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah, judging Israel in all those places.** (1 Samuel 7: 15-16 NIV) To drive this point home regarding Samuel, when it became clear that Samuel's sons were corrupt and no good and that if something were not done, Samuel's boys would eventually be leading Israel, the key elders of Israel came to Samuel asking him to appoint a king for the nation. They did not form a counsel or hold elections to select the first king in Israel's history, it was up to Samuel to decide if there would be a king in the first place and second, choose the king. Do you see who Samuel was? He was the most important and well known man in Israel.

Now let's take a look at Saul, the herder of donkeys. When the donkeys belonging to his father Kish disappeared, Saul and a servant were sent off to try and find them. The two went all over Israel looking for the missing herd to no avail. Finally they came to a town where the servant knew Samuel the prophet was staying. Saul knew nothing of Samuel. The servant thought Samuel, who was called a "Seer" might be able to tell them where the missing donkeys were. After all, God spoke to him. When Saul walked into the town

where his servant thought the seer was staying, Saul actually came upon Samuel himself but had no idea who he was. **Saul approached Samuel in the gateway and asked, "Would you please tell me where the seer's house is?"** (1 Samuel 9: 18 NIV) Imagine that, running into Joe Biden and asking him if he has seen the president. What? Stupid in the Biblical sense is having the word of God right in front of you and not grasping the simplest part of it. **When anyone hears the message about the kingdom and does not understand it...** (Matthew 13: 19a NIV). Jesus said he holds you accountable for being spiritually "stupid". Let me give two clear examples of this.

When many in the early Church were giving entire fortunes to the Lord to support the ministry, Ananias and Sapphira decided to do so too. However, they pretended that they were giving to the Lord all the proceeds of selling a field when in fact they were only giving part of it as an offering. They clearly had the word of God but were stupid about it. The couple lied to the Church but more importantly lied to the Holy Spirit and the Lord struck them dead. The second example comes from the Old Testament. A great crisis faced the people of Israel. The Ammonites, at the time a mighty nation, attacked them. Jephthah was asked by the Israelites to lead their army and he wanted to secure God's help in defeating the Ammonites. **And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord: "If you give the Ammonites into my hands, whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the Lord's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering."** (Judges 11: 30-31 NIV) I am guessing that Jephthah either thought he had no chance beating the Ammonites or believed it would be his dog or pet goat who would be the first out the door to greet him, but it wasn't, it was his only child, his daughter. What is truly shocking is that despite the Lord's clear command to never sacrifice a human being, he still had his daughter killed as a burnt offering after he came home victorious. How bizarre is that form of religion.? How disgraceful for a follower of God! That is how stupid looks from the Bible's point of view.

There is a fascinating account of what took place on the day of Jesus' resurrection that sometimes gets overlooked. The language found there is shocking when you see exactly what Jesus said. Sometime in the afternoon after Jesus rose from the dead the first Easter Sunday, two of the disciples (not of the twelve but two others) were walking from Jerusalem to the small town of Emmaus. Suddenly Jesus Himself came up beside them but they didn't recognize the Lord for some reason. The two were clearly upset and Jesus asked them what they were discussing. They expressed their shock He didn't know about the recent events, and the disciples told of Jesus' death and their hope that He would be the one to redeem Israel. Stuningly, to those two disciples, some of the women had gone to the tomb and seen angels who declared Jesus was alive. After that, some of the other disciples went to the tomb and found it empty. Of course the two disciples were clearly distraught, but Jesus explained all the Scriptures that predicted exactly what happened to Him. This is what Jesus said of the two disciples. **He said to them, "How foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken!"** (Luke 24: 25 NIV)

Did you catch what Jesus thought of them? The NIV translates the Greek word He uses nicely. But it was not a nice term at all. He calls them "stupid ones" or "dumb brutes". Why did He call them stupid? It is because they did not believe what the Bible said about the Messiah being crucified and then being raised from the dead. The disciples did not believe in a resurrection of Jesus. They thought the world was defined only by science, by what they saw and experienced. The resurrection of Jesus was impossible in their minds and any Scriptures that predicted it would happen went straight over their heads. Stupid is as stupid does. If you do not really believe Jesus is raised from the dead and alive as God and King, you will eventually act like it. You will doubt the usefulness of prayer. You will not make any sacrifices that test your faith. You will count your pennies and give as little to God as you can. You will keep your faith in Christ to yourself and not share with unbelievers the Gospel. And God will call you stupid. There is another way of seeing everything and it is the way the Bible views it. **I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes...** (Romans 1: 16a NIV) But if you believe in Jesus Christ risen, you will believe in praying prayers that require faith in a supernatural God who loves you, you will attempt great things for God because you serve a Lord who is alive!