

A Wasted Life: A Myth Based World View

What Is Real?

When I was a kid, I came upon Greek mythology. Although I was a voracious reader, the Greek myths did nothing for me because they just seemed silly and if I were to spend any time thinking or reading about God, I wanted it to be the real one. One of the tragic aspects to World War II was that it probably could have been prevented if the leaders in the free world had not believed in the myth that Hitler was not a danger to their countries and could be placated if reasonable people worked with him. Neville Chamberlain, as prime minister of England famously believed that peace negotiations with Hitler would be fruitful. In fact, despite the fact that Germany in a hostile takeover annexed Austria and then demanded that part of Czechoslovakia be turned over to Germany because of the large number of Germans living in that part of the country, Chamberlain was convinced that Hitler would take the path of peace after he met with Hitler in Munich in 1938. In fact, Chamberlain returned to London after signing an agreement with Hitler allowing Germany to take over the section of Czechoslovakia he wanted, bragged to the British people that he had negotiated peace for England and Europe. Crowds cheered him. It was of course a myth. When Hitler in turn invaded Poland, Chamberlain discovered Hitler was a liar and he never intended to maintain peace. Chamberlain had believed in a myth. A myth is a perception of life that is not based in reality, and many believe in myths, thinking they are wise and perceptive, but they aren't. Here is the big idea. Truth cannot be shaken and our confidence in truth is due to our confidence in Christ as Savior.

John 5 begins with the strange account of a disabled Jewish man who believed in a myth. **Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. Here a great number of disabled people used to lie — the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?" "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me."** (John 5: 1-7 NIV) The pool was large and may have been fed partly by a spring that periodically bubbled up and that was the basis of the myth the "invalid" and others held to as a key to being healed. It was thought that intermittent bubbles were a sign of God making the pool for brief moments a way to be healed. Some seemed to think the bubbles were due to an angel splashing the water as a sign to jump in the pool to be cured. This was of course a myth and was theologically an absurdity but nonetheless it seems at least this one man believed the myth.

Jesus did not bother to correct the man's odd belief; He rather gave him a reason to step into the light and discover Jesus was His savior. **Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.** (John 5: 8-9a NIV) It is inspiring to read of the man's response to Jesus' command. Rather than complaining that he was unable to walk, he simply got up and as he did so, he discovered he was healed by Jesus. It took faith on his part, perhaps just a small amount of faith, but faith nonetheless to do as he was told and to his amazement I am sure, he was cured. The account should have ended with the healed man praising God and following Jesus, but it did not. It is in fact historical and real life does not go as we expect. **The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat."** (John 5: 9b-10 NIV) These Jewish critics were basing their disdain for the man carrying his mat on a modern for that time, commentary on the Bible. It was not something God developed; it was the work of Jewish theologians who wanted to make into law their beliefs on how the Bible should be followed. In their imagining, it was a violation for anyone on the Sabbath to pick up something as heavy as a mat and move it somewhere else. The Mishna became a new mythology of the Jews, a manuscript that purported to tell everyone how God wanted them to live. Jesus obviously just ignored it because He was the one who told the man He healed to carry off his mat. A myth is a myth even if it is newly developed and accepted by all.

The Bible is littered with accounts of those who have taken to heart myths. The great Samson, chosen by God, believed the myth that when illicit desire is gratified, life is upgraded. Why else would he reject the clear Word of God and chase after a pagan prostitute for sexual gratification? **One day Samson went to Gaza, where he saw a prostitute. He went in to spend the night with her.** (Judges 16: 1 NIV) Later, his lust led him to Delilah, the pagan temptress who seduced him and brought about his downfall by selling the secret of his great strength to the Philistines. **Some time later, he fell in love with a woman in the Valley of Sorek whose name was Delilah. The rulers of the**

Philistines went to her and said, "See if you can lure him into showing you the secret of his great strength and how we can overpower him so we may tie him up and subdue him. Each one of us will give you eleven hundred shekels of silver." (Judges 16: 4-5 NIV) How many billions of people over time have thrown away the value of their lives because they believed in the myth, "when lust is gratified, life is upgraded." This myth has led to the scourge of alcoholism, drug abuse and the brokenness sexual immorality has brought.

Here is another myth illustrated in the Bible. Jesus told a parable of a rich farmer whose land produced an abundant crop; one so great he believed it would make him wealthy enough in his old age that he wouldn't have to work.. But such would not be the case for him. **"But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' 'This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."** (Luke 12: 20-21 NIV) Many believe in the myth, "My life belongs to me and I can do with it as I please". No, God will hold you accountable for how you have lived and what you have done with what He has given you. Nothing is farther from the truth that you have actually earned what you have. Everything comes from God, your talents, your background that has built up your abilities, your health and even your life. It is a myth to believe you can do whatever you like and God will not make you liable for your actions. Greed is simply the determination that what I have is mine and the Lord has no say over what I do with it. I love the scene in an animated movie where the seagulls all scream, "mine, mine, mine" whenever they spot some bit of food. How many people believe the myth, "My life belongs to me, and I can do with it as I please". It will be tragic for them when they find out it isn't true.

The people of Jericho believed a myth that many cling to today. "I can resist the will of God because He can't stop me." They had a great walled fortress that they believed could protect them from the army of Israel. The people of Jericho had heard of the great miracle of God parting the Red Sea and they were deathly afraid of the Israelites and the God leading them. So, they locked the gates to their walled city and hoped they could be protected from the power of God. We know of course what happened. The LORD had the army march around the city on six consecutive days and then on the seventh day, the Israelites blew their trumpets and shouted together. **When the trumpets sounded, the people shouted, and at the sound of the trumpet, when the people gave a loud shout, the wall collapsed; so every man charged straight in, and they took the city.** (Joshua 6: 20 NIV) Of course, the city of Jericho had no defense that could withstand the will of God and that is true for every one of us. We pray, "God's will be done" and it will, even if we think there is no God, even if we believe He won't intervene. He is the Lord of heaven and earth and not even Satan can stop Him in the end.

There is one more myth to share. It is the myth that "Death is all there is." Thomas held to this myth. What else can explain his reaction to the report of his fellow disciples that they had all seen Jesus raised from the dead? **Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."** (John 20: 24-25 NIV) Of course Thomas the next Sunday discovered that the myth was as false as the belief that the moon is made of green cheese. It is hard to make someone see that a myth is not true, but Jesus did it. The Bible asks this question. **"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"** (1 Corinthians 15: 55 NIV) Why are we so afraid of death? It is illogical. God has already proven that death has been conquered by Jesus and we have no reason to fear it. That does not mean we seek it out because it is still an enemy, but we must never be dismayed by death. Here is something that you must hold on to like your most precious treasure. You may be going through it right now and troubles may seem to have wrecked your life, but they have not. You are, when your faith is in Christ for your salvation, surrounded by victory, engulfed in victory, on the pathway of victory. **But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.** (1 Corinthians 15: 57 NIV) Let's return to the big idea. Truth cannot be shaken and our confidence in truth is due to our confidence in Christ as Savior. Never lose hope because victory is assured for you and that my friend is the truth.