

When Today Is Past

It is always a privilege to step back in history, renew old acquaintances, and reminisce. Some years ago, I went back to the place where I started my preaching career to hold a gospel meeting and it was amazing how much has changed in the 25 or so years since I had preached there (and how much had not). As we drove into Natalia the emotions were both powerful and bittersweet; one can never really “go back,” you see.

Kelly and I had all three of our children in the Natalia area and it was refreshing to see some of those I had taught those many years ago, matured and faithful (2 John 4), even though it was a little unnerving to meet children who were as old as I remembered their parents being when I was teaching them. Another emotion tugged deeply at my heartstrings, too: some had fallen from the faith. The burdens of life had beaten them down and the scars were still tender. So, the thrill of finding the faithful was definitely tempered by the disappointment over the departed. Yes, a lot can happen in 25 years.

I did manage to acquire some insight while there, however. As I spoke to a young man about renewing his dedication to Christ and as I listened to his life-story, I realized that, like the prophets of old who spoke of things they did not fully understand (1 Peter 1:12), I had also preached God’s Word as a young man without the benefit of fully **knowing** the magnitude and reach of these truths. Back then, I had encouraged high school students to be dedicated and disciplined, to keep themselves pure and pray without ceasing, and to focus on service and sainthood because that’s what God’s Truth teaches. As I sat listening to a man who’s past 20 years were not a source of pride, he conceded that he had learned many lessons the hard way. What courage it must have taken to empty a heart of life’s baggage and to commit to right living!

The pearl of insight was in the contrast between those who follow God’s directives and those who do not, and they are as different as day and night; I will be eternally indebted to this wonderful group of Christians. I **understood** even more clearly that doing things God’s way is **always** better, in spite of the momentary hardships that mar our happiness in Christ, **“but the way of transgressors is hard”** (Proverbs 13:15). I could never have imagined how encouraging the faithful could be nor how deeply it would hurt that some had **“forsaken me, having loved this present world”** (2 Tim. 4:10).

In this short vapor of life, where friends and family age and pass, there is no greater goal than to grasp the truths of God and, as our knowledge increases and our wisdom expands, God’s greatness and His eternal love will truly begin to dawn on us when today is past.

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