

Worms And Snakes

“But I am a worm, and not a man; a reproach of men, and despised by the people.”
Psalm 22:6

If you were to get a group of people together to talk about their dreams, it would be a big discussion. Our aspirations know few boundaries. Our desires take us to lofty places. One fact is certain: No one in the group would admit to the hope of someday becoming like a worm. We never think of going down, only up. When Jesus hung on the cross, He cried out a phrase found in Psalm 22:1, “My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?” A few verses later these words appear: “But I am a worm, and not a man.” If you really let the passage sink in, its significance will be striking. You will discover the difference between rising up to defend yourself and the beauty of being crushed and broken before God.

I believe the root cause of much of the unrest between brethren is that we have not yet learned how to become broken. Are we so concerned with being taken advantage of that we miss the opportunity of divine service to which we have been called? How many times have you determined that nobody is going to step on you? It is very interesting that David chooses to call himself a worm. When you step on a worm, what happens? You do not hear a sound. Not a peep of protest. The worm is crushed and that is the end of it. Isaiah 53:7 declared that Jesus would go to the cross like a lamb to the slaughter. He would go in silence, without protest. The Lord fulfilled that prophetic utterance. A worm never protests; a worm does not fight back. A worm does not find ways to escape a crushing blow from above. As common as worms are in the dirt, they are as rare and precious as fine diamonds in the church.

Unfortunately, there is another creature that more commonly represents our reaction to circumstances which we do not like. The snake is the opposite of the worm. If you surprise a snake, it strikes. If you challenge a snake, it strikes. If you step on a snake, it strikes. A snake’s primary goal is self-preservation. If you step on a snake, it will writhe, twist, and strike until it has killed or injured its assailant enough to get away. It is amazing how much like snakes we are when we strike back at someone who tries to get the better of us! Jesus said, “And if any man will sue thee at the law, and take away thy coat, let him have thy cloke also” (Matthew 5:40). How similar to snakes we are when we are determined to maintain our position! How unlike worms we are when we writhe and strike back after being mistreated!

As someone who lives in an affluent society, you are frequently in a power position. This is why it is critical that, as a follower of Christ, you understand what occurred when Jesus washed the disciples’ feet (John 13:3-5). Our Lord proceeded in washing His disciples’ feet knowing God had given Him everything. It was from a position of power and strength that He was compelled to take on the role of a servant. Being a worm requires the power of God because to achieve “worm” status you have to give up the world’s standard of strength and position. This is impossible in the flesh because we are snakes, waiting to strike.

The Bible reveals that the disciples had already eaten supper by the time Jesus washed their feet. Apparently there was no servant to wash their feet when they came into the house as was customary, so, instead of washing each other's feet or even washing their own feet, they went to the table unwashed. John 13:4 says that Jesus rose from supper and washed their feet. The Lord did what none of them was prepared to do. It is always true that there is no one closer to men than the man who is close to God. It is also important to note that Jesus was not washing the feet of beautiful saints. From a worldly standpoint they were a selfish, self-centered bunch who would not even stand by Him in His hour of need. Yet, Jesus was acting toward His disciples as God acts toward us, and as we are expected to act toward others. Jesus saw His disciples for what God had called them to be, not what they presently were. This is the perspective of true greatness and it can only come from a position of godly power.

When you consider your brothers and sisters in our congregation, are any of them undeserving of your service? When you think of the ugly and selfish impulses of people, do any names come to mind? How long is your "unlovable" list? These are people whom God is asking you to see as He sees them. These are the people whose feet Jesus made an example of; the very feet He wants you to wash. When Jesus cried to His Father, He was not answered. At the defining moment of Jesus' obedience, God closed His ears to His only Son and Jesus was crushed like a worm. He was slapped. They spat in his face until it ran down his cheeks. A crown of thorns was pressed into His scalp, and ultimately He was abandoned by His disciples. At the point He needed them most, He was forsaken. He was so broken and weak that Simon had to carry His cross to Golgotha. There was never any doubt that Jesus possessed the power to save Himself. But instead, He submitted to the point of death and yielded to the purposes of His Father. In turn, God raised Him up.

If we allow God, like Jesus, to work into us the idea of humility in the face of persecution and unfairness, it would be revolutionary. We would gain a worm's-eye view of what God wants to teach us concerning His kingdom. Look at how much power Christ possessed! At the moment when the Lord might have been tempted to have supreme pride, he demonstrated supreme humility! Likewise, if God gives us power through His word and we still have revenge and personal agendas in our hearts, we will use that power selfishly and misappropriate it. God wants leaders who can be servants, not children who are power-hungry. Qualifying for leadership takes you in only one direction — down. God will raise those who have humbled themselves in His time and in His way.

Before we can become a servant and a bridge between brethren, we must humble ourselves. If God is going to use us as bridges in problems within the church, there is something you must understand about bridges. Bridges, if they are to be used effectively to span the chasm, are to be walked on. Jesus became the great bridge between God and man. He honored His Father and exemplified the lifestyle we should follow. He was walked on. Likewise, if you are going to be used by God, you will be walked on. Think of the honor of being a bridge for, and to, God! However, we must be willing to be walked on and walked over to take man to the Father. We need to submit our shoulders to Jesus, to become the foundation to hold up those who are in need.

God wants to hold up His children as examples to the world. He desires and loves our love and attention. We ask for so much and give Him so little!

I believe that in these final times on earth we must inventory ourselves and discern the way Jesus looks at us. He has the power to stop every mistreatment we receive just as He possessed the power to avoid death on the cross. However, we know this is not His way. Why? Because we are being trained to be His servants, slaves of God. As worms, we do not fight back. We remind ourselves that God is available 24 hours a day to hear the cry of those who are seeking Him. Wherever you are, God will take your brokenness and make something beautiful.

Jesus died for people. The thing that He is now enthroned for is people. He gave up all He owns for people. When are we going to wake up? We are the people whom God wants to use to reach others. We have to change! And as we change and become more Christlike in our character, we can change others. Changed people change people! Others can only be changed by the degree that we ourselves are changed. Take God at His word, and take Him seriously. When we really meet Jesus and allow ourselves to be crushed as we model His example, the impact will change the world.

Adapted from Wellington Boone