

Living on the Edge

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Scripture: Luke 12:32-40 Related comments at www.faithfulperspective.blogspot.com

The rock recording group, Aerosmith, recorded a song and music video several years ago called "Livin' on the Edge." The lyrics to that song in part go something like this:

There's somethin' wrong with the world today
I don't know what it is
Something's wrong with our eyes
We're seeing things in a different way
And God knows it ain't His
It sure ain't no surprise
We're livin' on the edge (You can't keep yourself from falling)

There's somethin' wrong with the world today
The light bulb's gettin' dim
There's meltdown in the sky
If you can judge a wise man
By the color of his skin
Then mister you're a better man than I
We're livin' on the edge. (You can't keep yourself from falling)¹

Where Is the Edge?

Many of us are living on the edge today, and some of us don't know it. Some of us are not sure what it means. For most of us, it means danger, taking risks that most people would not take. I can give you specific examples, but edgy for some of you would not be the same for others, so think about some of the risks you might take or have taken. For many people, the level of risk we are willing to take is governed by the perceived reward. And what about the risks that are thrust upon you by circumstances? The edge can be what we are about to lose; what we are about to sacrifice; the chances we are willing to take. As Aerosmith's song says, things go wrong, and we find ourselves living on the edge with all the fear and uncertainty that suggests. While the circumstances may not be good, we don't often confront them as we should.

We live in a time of great uncertainty. For many here today, uncertainty is not something new. You have lived through uncertain times before. Some of you lived during World War II or subsequent wars. Who remembers the assassination of John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., Robert F. Kennedy? What about the Civil Rights struggle of the '60s and the Watergate scandal of the '70s? The economic malaise of the late '70s and the uncertainty in the '80s that ultimately led to the end of the Cold War? What about war in Iraq, Bosnia, and moral failure in the Oval Office in the '90s. Two more wars in the 2000's and another economic collapse, and we are still reeling from all three. Your anxiety level is high as it should be from such a litany of things wrong with our world in your lifetime and mine.

Most of us look at the economy today and wonder if, both personally and corporately, Americans are at the brink of economic ruin. Some around us are already there. There are families in our church who have to choose between paying the bills and buying food. That should not happen when we have so much. That kind of uncertainty should not exist in the

family of God. That should not happen if we are living on the edge the way Jesus would have us live – the way the passage today clearly specifies.

Living Out Of Fear – “Do Not Be Afraid”

The first words of Jesus in this passage, “Do not be afraid...” are designed to calm our anxiety over things that we feel are so out of control. God has his best set aside for you. Why do you fear? As Jesus gives practical advice here, he couches it in and follows it with an eschatological hope. That is, there is something after this life that he is pointing us toward. We like rewards, so we get excited about that, until Jesus tells us to sell our possessions and give alms or gifts for the poor. (v. 33) Wait! That’s my stuff! I worked hard to pay off the credit cards that bought that stuff. I’m not getting rid of that to help the poor! If you think that way, you have just made a decision to **live on the edge** closest to destruction. When we make decisions contrary to the words of Christ, we should be afraid.

Our Treasure

In the first three gospels, the Synoptic Gospels, one out of every six verses deals with the use or abuse of money. Sixteen of the thirty-four parables that Jesus told deal specifically and directly with money. There are over 500 verses in the Bible that deal with prayer, but there are over 2,500 verses that deal with money. No one who seriously follows Jesus can avoid this subject. In v.34, Jesus says, “Where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.” Have you ever really thought about that? Most of us secure our physical assets in low risk or insured accounts because we do not like risk. It is no sin to accumulate God’s blessings, but we are **living on the edge** when we use those blessings for ourselves alone when so many people are hurting.

Go home this afternoon and look at your checkbook register or your online banking records. **Where your treasure goes, your heart goes with it.** You determine your life’s priorities by the way you spend your time and money. If you are hoarding your treasure, you cannot be sharing the love of God that has been poured out to you through the Holy Spirit. Look carefully at how you are spending your money and on whom.

Why Sharing Is Difficult

In the culture of ‘Me,’ we are careful to keep important papers in a safety deposit box. We lock our doors and become very distressed when items we regard as ‘ours’ are taken by others, either intentionally or inadvertently. We are so self-centered that even the products we use reflect it. We have iTunes on our iPods. We talk on our iPhones and now use iPads. These days, we even spell Wii with two i’s!

Unfortunately, when we lock away our physical assets out of an overwhelming sense of entitlement, we lock away our spiritual assets as well. Understand that our spiritual treasure, like our physical treasure, must be given away to realize its full value or to have any value at all. Hoarding it makes it useless.

If sharing with those in need and sharing in the ministry of God’s church with your time and assets is difficult, there is a spiritual problem which needs dealing with.

In one of his writings Gerard Hughes, asks what you would do if, one evening, there were a knock on the door and, when you went to open the door, there was Jesus standing there. Jesus is grinning from ear to ear and says to you, “There you are! At last I’ve found

you! How wonderful to see you! How much I love you!” And you smile from ear to ear in return, and you invite Jesus into your house.

“Out comes the best china, the tea and the cake, and you and Jesus have a really wonderful evening. Now, good Christian that you are, you invite Jesus into your life, and you insist that Jesus must stay with you and become part of your family. And that’s when the trouble starts. Before you know it, Jesus has invited the local homeless person to join in with your household. And then, as if that wasn’t bad enough, one day you come home to find that Jesus has invited into your house all the gang members who go around the neighborhood stealing cars and destroying other people’s property.” So what do you do?² You know what Jesus would do: He would love and care for them, and we must find ways to do the same.

People who cannot share with and sacrifice for others have deep-seated problems. If your giving to the work of God and the service of others requires no sacrifice, then you are controlling Jesus, and he is not really living in every part of your life.³

If Jesus’ words do not trouble you, you are in denial and are really living on the edge. I know, I can hear all who you who have been good Disciple students say, “But Jim, we are saved by grace, not works.” And that’s true. But salvation means that Christ comes into our hearts and takes residence there. We become *like* him. That is what it means to be saved. It doesn’t mean we are perfect. It certainly doesn’t mean we have arrived and have become all Christ ever intends for us to be. But it does mean that we are on the path. It means that we have Jesus’ heart for a world in need.

So what?

So, where does this leave us? Should we take all we own, sell it, and give the proceeds to the poor? Then wait for someone else to help us? Although people are sometimes called to give everything, it is our willingness to do so that matters (Remember Abraham and Isaac; The Rich Young Ruler). At the same time, however, we need to take Jesus’ teachings seriously. Here are some simple suggestions that may be helpful in this time of economic uncertainty.

First, learn to live more simply. This is the first step you can take in living more like Jesus wants his followers to live. Live more simply. Live simply so others can simply live.

A resolution came out of a church conference a few years ago which all of us would be wise to heed. The resolution went like this: “We humbly commit ourselves to develop a just and simple lifestyle, and to support one another in it.”

A just and simple lifestyle. Most of us have too much stuff. Some of us even have so much stuff that we rent space in mini-warehouses to hold it all. Does it make us happy? No. We’ve simply become addicted to our stuff and to acquiring more stuff.

Randy Alcorn in *The Treasure Principle* describes our problem like this: “It’s a matter of basic physics. The greater the mass, the greater the hold that mass exerts. The more things we own, the greater their total mass, the more they grip us, setting us in orbit around them. Finally, like a black hole, they suck us in . . . Every item we buy is one more thing to think about, talk about, clean, repair, rearrange, fret over, and replace when it goes bad.”⁴ God is calling many of us to a simpler way of living. That’s where we should begin. Many of us already have too much stuff.

Second, evaluate your giving. Not just to the church, but to every aspect of God’s work including charities and missions. Remember that **our giving is the most accurate gauge of the authenticity of our faith.**

Many years ago, missionary Bob Roberts was a guest speaker in a church. In this service he was sharing his burden for hungry children in the Philippines. Afterward a young boy, about seven years old, came up to him and said, “Jesus spoke to me tonight while you were telling us about the hungry children . . . When you said that for a quarter a day you could feed a child and give him a vitamin, I thought, I’ve got to help. But I didn’t know how I could. That’s when Jesus spoke to me.” The boy extended his hand and said, “This is my shell collection. I believe Jesus wants me to give these shells to help the children.” With those words, he placed the shells in Roberts’ hand. Roberts accepted the shells, but he wondered how they could help hungry children.

A few weeks later, Roberts spoke to another congregation. Reaching into his pocket, he pulled out the seashells and told about that boy and his desire to feed hungry children. At the end of the service, a man approached Roberts and said, “I would like to purchase those shells for \$100!”

Bob Roberts commented, “My freckle-faced friend may never know that his sacrificial offering provided 400 meals for Filipino children. He may not have understood how the Lord would use this small gift to feed the hungry, but he knew God wanted him to give what he had . . .”⁵

Go to the Edge

Aerosmith was wrong. You can keep yourself from falling. God wants us to have a heart to share what we have. In vs. 35-40, Jesus tells his disciples to be ready for his return. He never expected anyone to sell everything and sit idly on a mountain top waiting for his coming. That would betray every teaching Jesus left with us. But he does tell us to be ready, for we do not know when the time will come. We do not know how long we have or how long until Jesus comes again. Therefore, we are called to radical discipleship – the discipleship of JOY – where ‘Jesus’ is first, ‘others’ are next, and ‘you’ and I are least. Going to the edge to meet those living on the edge means we must be willing to live on the edge, too. Jesus is delaying his return so more of us will have the opportunity to follow him (2 Peter 3:9). During these days, we have the opportunity to live out our beliefs in radical, edgy discipleship reflecting Jesus’ love to others. It has taken some radical departures to get us this far from living the gospel message. It will take radical faithfulness to bring us back.

Prayer

Endnotes:

- ¹ www.youtube.com/watch?v=7nqcL0mjMjw Music video by Aerosmith performing **Livin' On The Edge**. © 1994 UMG Recordings, Inc.
- ² *No More Shacks!* (Waco, TX: Wordbooks Publisher, 1986), pp. 38-39.
- ³ David A. Renwick, <http://www.2preslex.org/S020217.htm>.
- ⁴ http://www.foundryumc.org/sermons/Gore_10_19_2008.htm.
- ⁵ Bob Roberts, “Six Small Seashells,” *Mountain Movers*, April 1996.