

Adventures in Missing the Point: Sin 11-9-08

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 4:7-11, 16-18

7But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us. 8We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; 9persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. 10We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. 11For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus' sake, so that his life may be revealed in our mortal body. 16Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. 17For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. 18So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

I know that we have recently heard Steve talk about playing dartball and his frustrations with coming close but not succeeding. I would like to take a little time this morning to put my two cents in about dartball. This is a game that you could say oh well, it is just a game. You could stand up in front of that board and launch the darts around and never get a hit. You might think that you can just laugh it off and it will be ok. Those of you who are thinking this right now I am guessing are the ones who have never played this game. There is literally something that happens when you grab those darts in your hand and stand at that line to throw. Whether you are motivated by the fear of what the others will say if you miss the board completely, whether it is a deep seeded competitiveness inside of you, or whatever, you are trying to get a hit with all you are. When it does not work out you are crushed and immediately feel horrible and wonder how you could have ever thrown the dart that poorly. Let me tell you that it is very easy to miss the mark over and over and over again.

This is not unlike what our lives as Christians are like. We have decided that because of our faith we are going to try to hit the mark that God has for us. We are going to grow in

our faith and it is going to be fun, and awesome, and then we are never going to have in problems anymore. All of our friends and family will share the same beliefs as us.

Everyone we know will look up to us, it is great! Right? Oh, I must be talking like a person who has never tried it because actually when we step up to the line of life and take aim at being Christian, we fail time after time after time. The good news is that we try hard. Oh do we try hard. Whether motivated by fear of what people will think or by our love for God and what God has for us, we try hard to live as Christians. We study the Bible, we read books about Christianity. Today there are over six million books about Christianity in print. Yet, we still fall short.

Tony Campolo, in his response to Brian McClaren's chapter on sin in *Adventures in Missing the Point*, talks about how the journey of life gives us the challenge to improve as individuals. He agrees that we are going to sin but suggests that we should sin less even though we are not sinless. He writes that "each of us should be able to say, "While I'm not what I should be, I certainly am not what I was... Granted, we should not measure ourselves against others-but we should be taking stock of ourselves continually to see whether or not there is some growth in us." We must continue to take aim at getting better and hitting the mark. Continued participation in church events, missions, bible studies, youth group, are all ways to help grow.

Another aspect of life in which we may need to grow is how we deal with other people when they fall. We have a tendency as Christians to condemn others fairly quickly. Both Campolo and McClaren write about this in the chapter on sin. Campolo tells a story in which he was to speak at a conference and right before he spoke someone made a comment stating that we must distance ourselves from people like Jim Bakker. These

comments made Campolo mad and when he got up to speak he said, “The difference between Jim bakker and the rest of us is that they haven’t found out about the rest of us yet. This is no time to distance ourselves from Jim Bakker, but to acknowledge that what was in him is in us all. The line that separates good from evil does not separate one group of people from another, but runs right down the middle of each of us. Each of us has a dark side-and if the truth were known, each of us would have to run away and hide.”

You see, there is truth to that. We are quick to thank God that we are not like other people. I am reminded of the story in Luke of the Publican and the tax collector which reads like this in the message: 9-12He told his next story to some who were complacently pleased with themselves over their moral performance and looked down their noses at the common people: "Two men went up to the Temple to pray, one a Pharisee, the other a tax man. The Pharisee posed and prayed like this: 'Oh, God, I thank you that I am not like other people—robbers, crooks, adulterers, or, heaven forbid, like this tax man. I fast twice a week and tithe on all my income.'

13"Meanwhile the tax man, slumped in the shadows, his face in his hands, not daring to look up, said, 'God, give mercy. Forgive me, a sinner.'"

14Jesus commented, "This tax man, not the other, went home made right with God. If you walk around with your nose in the air, you're going to end up flat on your face, but if you're content to be simply yourself, you will become more than yourself."

McClaren focuses on this theme in his chapter on sin. We often want to judge others and to gossip about what has been done. McClaren writes about how St. Augustine handled a

situation in which a monk was found in an immoral relationship. To defuse the temptation to gossip Augustine used a verse from the Bible in his sermon which read, “ Besides everything else, I face daily the pressure of my concern for all the churches. Who is weak, and I do not feel weak? Who is led into sin, and I do not inwardly burn? So then when we see others fail we must remember that we, too, are temptable and we can also fall. There is a weakness in each of us that can cause us to be temptable. The key is finding how to survive through our weakness. My mother had breast cancer a couple of years ago. She had the mastectomy. She has had the reconstruction surgery. She has lived through many physical and health issues. Now that her cancer is gone she carries around the title of “Survivor” and she is definitely that. I think that there has to be a little survivor in each of us. Otherwise we may be swept up in our weakness to sin. We must long to be able to say, I was weak, but I survived. I want to leave you with the Scripture lesson for the day which is from 2 Corinthians 4:7-11, 16-18.

We must not distance ourselves from those who fall and we must claim that we have survived when we make it through and grow through our struggles in God’s grace.