

Staying Positive in a Negative World

BY DAVID POSEY

Someone said, “it’s hard to be optimistic when you have misty optics.” And your “optics” are likely to be fogged if you pay much attention to what’s going on in the world around you. For example, just this past week, we’ve see people praising a mass murderer and dictator — Fidel Castro; we hear that leadership in France is banning a video that supports Down syndrome children, because it might offend women who choose to abort them; meanwhile, we witness another terrorist attack... and the list goes on.

One tempting solution to the problem of becoming negative is to avoid these reports and stories — do not read or listen to news; don’t watch TV; and, by all means, don’t get on social media. There is a huge part of me that desires to stay aloof of what is going on in the cultural. I came this close last week to deactivating my Facebook account, especially after posting a verse (I Peter 2:17) without comment, and getting a response that simply said “NO.”

Ignorance is bliss, sometimes. But ignorance is also irresponsible. Christians don’t live in a monastery. We live in the real world, just as Christians in the first century lived in the real world. We are called to be salt and light (Matthew 5:13-16). We don’t live and preach the gospel in a vacuum; we preach the good news into a world full of bad news.

Ironically, while discussing the work of a preacher with Tyler this past week, we came across a statement in a book we are reviewing entitled “360 Degree Preaching,” by Michael J. Quicke. In discussing the preacher’s responsibility to stay in tune with the secular culture in which the church lives, the author made this point on page 162:

Only when preachers stay alert to the world, in which God’s Word has to be heard, can there be incarnational preaching. If they fail to discern the spirit of contemporary culture, they become false prophets; if they fail to speak words heard in contemporary culture, they become irrelevant prophets.

We might not agree with author completely, but it does remind me of what Jeremiah said, when he talked about those prophets who prophesied only the good things — putting a bandaid on the serious issues facing Judah:

They have healed the wound of my people lightly, saying, “Peace, peace,” when there is no peace.
Jeremiah 6:14

Having said that, we know Jesus didn’t teach social engineering through political means. However, he does expect us to engage society, and teach that the gospel is the only prescription for the disease of sin that plagues the world.

When Paul said that the gospel is the “power of God for salvation” (Romans 1:16) he went on to say in 1:18,

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

Paul then begins a methodical indictment of the culture of his day in the verses that follow. Paul didn't whistle past the graveyard — he confronted his culture head-on. In our day, it's not a matter of Republican vs. Democrat or liberal vs. conservative (someone once observed that liberals are afraid of answers and conservatives are afraid of questions). Some liberals, who are supposedly... uh... "liberal" (e.g., "tolerant") are sending death threats to state electors with a message: "you hateful bigot! I hope you die!" Hmmm...

Meanwhile, some in our society are engaging in identity politics; that is so stupid it makes my head spin. Words that should be used very gingerly, like "racist" and "sexist," have been rendered almost meaningless by overuse — and that's too bad, because there are genuine instances of both in our country. But, when you cry wolf too many times... you know the story.

A study was completed recently which found that the word that best describes the character of those on social media today is "rage." People are upset when they don't get their way. This is especially true after elections in which half the population, at least, is disappointed because their candidate didn't get elected. Why is that such an earth-shattering moment for a person — unless they are giving that person some kind of "savior" status? Time Magazine called Hillary Clinton "an American Moses." What?? I'm so confused: isn't it sexist to use a man to describe her?

**(Full quote below)*

Yet, in spite of all of this discord and hate and overstatement, we are called to joy. Paul — while in prison — encouraged the Philippians to "rejoice in the Lord always; again, I will say, 'rejoice'"! (Philippians 4:4).

It's a mighty challenge to rise above the white noise of the culture and maintain a positive attitude in the face of genuine evil and the foolishness of godless people that are all around us. Yet, that is what we are called on to do.

We are called to confront, but with grace. Paul says, "Speak the truth in love," (Ephesians 4:15). But also, "take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them" (Ephesians 5:11). We are walking a tightrope in our time. We must balance our commitment to unvarnished truth with a commitment to love all people, even our enemies.

What's the key to maintaining that balance? There is only one: keep running the race and keep looking to Jesus (Hebrews 12:1-2). Take our lead, our marching orders from the Captain of our faith. And take comfort in our relationship with him. He tells us, in John 16:33,

I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.

We rejoice in the Lord and we find our peace in the Lord. "Where could we go? You have the words of eternal life," said Peter (John 6:68)

Those who find their peace in Christ may be disappointed when an election does not go their way, but it's a small thing. Their faith and hope resides in Christ. Why? Because life in this world is a fleeting thing but hope is forever. No matter how crazy things become here on earth — and they are getting crazier by the moment — we are confident that God, who cannot lie, will fulfill his promises to us and we will live forever, far away from the lies, hypocrisy and evil that vex our souls today.

So... we take heart because Jesus has overcome the world. And, with psalmist, we can say,

Do not fret because of evildoers,
Nor be envious of the workers of iniquity.
For they shall soon be cut down like the grass,
And wither as the green herb. *Psalm 37:1-2*