



Prez Release

Sanitary Conditions? Late October 2004

Recently I landed at Denver International Airport. The pilot informed us there had been a breach of security in the airport. All passengers had to return to the main terminal and be re-scanned through security checkpoints. Because we were in a plane and had not been in the terminal we were declared “sanitary.” We had not been in the terminal when the breach of security occurred; therefore we avoided the huge delays.

Being described as “sanitary” is certainly curious. I was always getting filthy as a child and rarely passed the clean scale with my mom. Today, white shirts are like magnets for every type of sauce and gravy splatters. But usage of the word “sanitary” intrigues me as it was used at the airport.

In day-to-day life there is little that is “sanitary.” Avoiding our culture’s massive influence is nigh unto impossible. To stand outside the tragedies, challenges and good times of life is not only impossible, it can be destructive.

For example, the Darfur region of Sudan is a current hotspot of ethnic and religious tension. Here is one of the less than “sanitary” spots on planet earth. It is not secure; it is dangerous. The wave of ethnic hatred and religious prejudice has come together to produce tragedy for hundreds of thousands and hopelessness for generations yet unborn.

Several years ago I met a Christian from this region whose tearful request for prayer has stirred me ever since I heard it. I was with a group of African believers including Christians from Sudan. We fasted a noon-day meal and were praying that efforts to evangelize Muslims would be empowered by the Spirit. As we prayed, the Sudanese brother got up and tearfully spoke. He asked our indulgence, but he had nothing but hate in his heart for Muslims. He admitted he was wrong, but said he could not break the stranglehold hatred had on him. He recalled how he, as a Christian, was hunted down “like a dog.” When Muslims came to his village they would kill the men by throwing grenades into their houses. He then lamented over the women and children left uprooted who ended up in Muslim “re-education” camps to be raised as Muslims.

It was one of those moments where my whole Christian experience simply had no explanation or consolation for this brother. I knew that if I were in his circumstances, I probably would see the world quite similarly. All we could do was cry with this brother—let him express his anger and together throw ourselves on the mercy of God.

That experience has haunted me for years. I don't know if that brother is dead or alive, but I do know, it is into our "un-sanitary" world that Jesus came to reveal most fully what God is really like. If God went to such lengths to create a doorway to redemption, then somehow I believe the un-sanitary conditions of the 21st century are still the place where God can show Himself clearly and understandably.

The tragedy of Darfur, the grief-stricken lament of the Sudanese Christians, the bomb-targeted church in Iran, Pakistan and Iraq are the places that our faith is most seriously challenged. I have no short-term solution to these dilemmas—I do know that from an eternal perspective—being made "sanitary" is an eternal work that only God can accomplish. It is in that long-view of eternity that we must face the Darfurs of this age... broken...humble...yet hopeful!

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