**Truth Currents** **7-31-20**

 In more than 30 years of pastoral ministry, I am having conversations these days that are different than anything I have ever seen. I see people, some inside my church, many more outside of my church, who are succumbing I think to the temptation to despair. They look at current events. They watch what’s happening on the news. And they just throw up their hands and say, “*I don’t know what to do. I’m not an influencer. I’m not a mover and shaker. I’m not a person of power or influence. And it just seems like the world is spiraling out of control.”*

 The temptation that the enemy sends our way in that kind of moment is a temptation to withdraw into ourselves and just sort of “*go along to get along*.” To let the culture just go its way and we’ll just do our own private thing.

 Actually, that’s not new. It happened 95 years ago this month. Ninety-five years ago in a little town called Dayton, TN there was one of the most significant legal battles in the history of the United States. We call it today the “Scopes Monkey Trial.” But it was simply a trial for a substitute science teacher in the little town of Dayton, TN who intentionally taught the idea of evolution to his students. He did this so that he would be arrested so that the ACLU could have a test case of the Tennessee law that prohibited the teaching of evolution.

 His name was John Scopes and the defense was put on by the American Civil Liberties Union. They enlisted the help of the leading secularist of the 1920’s, a lawyer by the name of Clarence Darrow. William Jennings Bryan, who was a populist Democrat presidential candidate and a conservative Christian, volunteered his services for the prosecution. And what turned into a spectacle was this battle between the “scientific secularist” Darrow and the “Bible thumping” William Jennings Bryan.

 What happened was Darrow only called one witness. He called Bryan, the opposing lawyer to the stand. And Bryan, a layman with no theological education just a simple faith, did not acquit himself well on stand. He didn’t answer Darrow’s questions about the creation of man and other questions that were put to him. And the bottom line is Darrow made his opposition look like a fool. It was the first trial in American history that was broadcast nationwide by radio. People all across the country listened every single day. And as conservative Christianity was ridiculed, as the editorials in major newspapers in major cities across America made fun of Bryan and his Sunday School answers, Christians did something that we still have not recovered from. Conservative Christians said, “*Fine. We’ll withdraw from the culture.”* And they did. And beginning in the late 20’s, Christianity in America became a private enterprise. It became something that was divorced from the public square.

By the time Christianity had been out of involvement of public morals for a generation, we see prayer removed from the school systems. We see the Roe vs Wade opinion in the early 1970’s. And it was really not until the 1980’s, fifty years later that Christians began to say, “*Maybe we made a mistake. Maybe we should be influencers. Maybe we should be speaking truth to power. Maybe we should be involved in the civic life of our country*.”

Well, we find ourselves in the same position that they were in in the 1920’s. Christianity is ridiculed. Christians are made to feel like they are intellectually vapid, that we have nothing to offer. We’re told to sit down and shut up. “*If you want to go to your church and do your thing in private, then you do that*.” By the way, that won’t last.

But, we’ve got a generation of people who say, “*I’m just tired of being in this position. Maybe I’ll just withdraw and I’ll just do Christianity on my own, in private. We’ll just have our church services and we’ll let the world go to hell in a hand basket*.”

That’s older than ninety-five years ago. Actually, there’s a scene in the Old Testament in the book of **1 Kings** with a couple of kings. One by the name of Omri and then his son Ahab, two of the worst kings in Israel’s history, they combined for almost 40 years of terrible leadership in the nation of Israel. But while the kings were bad, the most disturbing part of the story in the Old Testament is that the average person, the regular people, just began to go along with the flow. They trivialized the sins of their leaders and in essence withdrew from speaking truth to power. And they just let the culture drift.

Let me read you a couple of verses in **1 Kings 16**. In verses **29,30** it says:

Ahab son of Omri became king over Israel in the thirty-eighth year of Judah’s King Asa; Ahab son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty-two years. But Ahab son of Omri did what was evil in the LORD’s sight more than all who went before him.

 I mean I guess everybody has to be good at something. And Ahab was good at being the best “worst” king in Israel. He did more evil than all of those who went before him. Now that tells us about Ahab but the next statement tells us about the regular people in Israel. Verse **30** says:

Then, as if following the sin of Jeroboam son of Nebat were not enough, he married Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and then proceeded to serve Baal and bow in worship to him.

What happened was in the king’s sin the rest of the culture just accepted the corruption of leadership. And it continued to cascade downward until he married a woman named Jezebel, who brought all of her pagan gods, all of her false prophets, all of her heathen priests into Israel and completely compromised the spiritual life of a nation.

There’s a Washington Post ABC poll recently that tells something that we really didn’t need a poll to tell us. It tells us that 64% of the American public believes most Congressman would make campaign promises they had no intention of keeping. 73% said the majority of representatives would lie if the truth would hurt them politically. And yet, we see across the board it’s almost impossible for incumbents to lose because people keep voting for them.

In other words, we have this kind of cynical attitude in our nation that says, “*Our leadership is corrupt. We know they’re lying to us. The politicians are mostly corrupt. The media is mostly untrustworthy*.” And yet, we still vote for the politicians. We still listen to the media. What that says is that as a culture it’s on us for withdrawing into ourselves and allowing ourselves to just drift down the river in the direction that the culture is taking us. We’ve trivialized sin as though as long as it’s not “on me,” it doesn’t really matter.

Well, in Ahab’s day God raised up one of the most powerful prophets of the Old Testament. His name was Elijah. God raised up Elijah and used him to lead a movement to purge the nation of ungodly leadership, of ungodly spiritual guidance and to turn the hearts of the people back to Him. But Elijah, in all the difficulties of his day, finds himself after some great spiritual victories, he finds himself sitting under a tree asking God to take his life.

You say, “*How can Elijah of all people, think that he just wants to die because things are so bad?*” It’s because Elijah fell victim to the idea that he was the only one serving God. See, that’s the problem with us. We pull back because we think if we speak out on social media, if we talk to our co-workers, if we challenge the assumptions of secularism, people will ridicule us. They’ll turn on us. It’s called the “cancel culture.” And we fall victim to the idea that we can’t do that because number one, we’re the only one. And number two, we tell ourselves all the time, “*Well, I’m no Elijah. I’m not a great man leading great movements*.”

Here’s what God told Elijah when he found himself under that tree just asking to die. He said, “*Lord just take my life, just let me die. I’m the only one in Israel who serves you*.” And God comes to him and says this, “***There are still seven thousand men in Israel who follow Me and have not bowed their knees to the false god Baal.”***

Elijah needed to be encouraged that he was not the only one. I think we need to fight the discouragement, the temptation to withdraw, the apathy that allows us to just sort of drift with the culture, to trivialize sin, to just shrug our shoulders and say, “*Well, you know, it is what it is*.” We need to capture the idea that there are a lot of people still seeking after God, still chasing after Jesus. We are not alone.

It’s easy for us to say, “*Well, I’m no Elijah*.” That’s ok. God raises up Elijahs in His perfect timing. You don’t have to be an Elijah. You just have to be one of the seven thousand who does what’s right, who takes sin seriously, who intercedes at the Throne of Grace for God to move in power in this generation. You just need to be faithful. Quit trivializing sin. Quit allowing our leaders to get away without being spoken to. Quit allowing those conversations at work to go unchallenged. Do what’s right. Be faithful as a people of God. Be one of the seven thousand.

It’s interesting. We’ve got to do two things. Instead of giving up, instead of withdrawing, we need to stand for what’s right. We need to speak truth in every conversation, in each situation in which we find ourselves. We need to stand up for what’s right and speak truth.

And secondly, we need to support each other. You know Ronald Reagan in the 1980’s, he had a saying as the leader of the Republican party. He used to say that the eleventh commandment is “*Thou shalt not criticize your own party*.” I think we need to capture that in a non-partisan way and say, “*You know, right now in the world in which we live, our eleventh commandment is Jesus followers should not criticize other Jesus followers*.”

I’ve been stunned in recent days as the Governor of California has tried to shut down churches. He doesn’t mind protests. He’s not against riots. He just wants to shut down churches. A mega-church pastor issues a statement and says, “*We don’t answer to the state. We will continue to meet*.” And the greatest criticism of that pastor has come from other pastors and evangelical leaders across the country. I’ve been stunned at which side different Christian leaders fall on.

It’s not time for us to press against each other. It’s time for us to understand that we’re a part of the seven thousand. Minority that may be, but with God we can impact this culture. But we got to quit cannibalizing our own people.

The first Great Awakening in America almost didn’t get off the ground because there were pastors critical of the churches that were breaking out in revival. It has always been this way. Let us quit throwing rocks at other Jesus followers because they don’t do this or that exactly the way we would do it. Let us come together and be a part of the seven thousand that have not bowed our knee to the gods of this generation. And let’s rally behind the Elijahs that God raises up. And let’s change the culture.

Ninety-five years ago Christians withdrew and we still haven’t recovered. We owe it to the generations who come after to live the life of Christ on public display in our words, with our actions, and without shame. Get up and get back in the game.

This is Truth Currents.