

Bo!

Enter!

Torah:

Exod. 10:1-13:16

Haftarah:

Jer. 46:13-28; (Psalm 77)

Brit Chadashah:

I Cor. 11:20-34 (L); Roman. 9:14-28 (F)

The L-rd's Table

(1) Birds, Demons and Allergies

Do you know how powerful an effect your imagination can have on your life? Let me give you two quick illustrations, then a little orientation on parables, and then onto the first kind of soil. Once there was a man who jumped a train and ended up in an empty refrigerator car. Before they got going again, the crew decided to shut the empty refrigerator car, leaving the man locked inside.

You can imagine his panic as he banged on the door to get their attention, because the car suddenly began to start getting colder. He curled up in a corner during the journey, and when they found him, he was dead. He apparently froze to death, but the temperature in the car was apparently around 50 F (10 C), which is a little chilly, but nowhere near freezing. He was trapped by his panic and his imagination killed him. How's yours doing? Sometimes our imaginations can complicate simple problems and turn them from mole hills into Mount Everest and which may end up killing us.

When I was living in Residence at the University of Calgary, a group of us used to linger over cups of coffee after supper and shoot the breeze. Mostly we were the core of believers which was trying to make a difference in people's lives, but we had such fun that others would often join us. One fun loving little creep, a regular, offered to get me another cup of coffee, since I was in the middle of a rather heated conversation, like you're surprised. When he returned, he sat down next to me and watched as I began drinking the coffee.

He had this evil smile on his face and I knew right away he had done something to the coffee. He laughed when I asked him what he had put in it and claimed total innocence. Now, I was playing my share of pranks at this time, and I thought he wanted to catch me with my guard down. I started to have a funny taste in my mouth and my stomach started to get really upset. He wasn't talking, so I wrestled him to the ground (I was only 22 at the time) and began to pummel him, which I found was usually quite an effective way to encourage cooperation. Don't we have a Leadership Meeting today?

He stuck to his story and was laughing uncontrollably, despite the blows I was raining on his shoulders. I was just considering what effect banging his head on the carpet would have, because I was beginning to feel really dizzy, when he succeeded in dislodging me and with much laughter announced he had really got me that time. Unforgivably, that monster in human form had actually put nothing in my coffee and was messing with my mind – big time. I was both relieved and angry.

He removed himself from further punishment and joined the table in the general merriment and when this included my roommate, I decided that later on, at least he would suffer for this indignity. He did, my roommate, that is. The worst of it was that it took several hours for my stomach to settle down and for my dizziness to go away. My imagination had made me sick, and it took me a few days to enjoy my coffee again. I am still a little suspicious of refills. Are you letting people mess with your mind and spoil the flavour of your spirituality? So, let's talk about another kind of mind game – **Parables**.

Parables are kind of like land mines, designed to capture our imagination and let spiritual truth take root, prosper and wreck some of the resistance to spirituality which our hearts and lives develop in this big bad world where we live. That is why the Bible is full of symbols and pictures, rather than *theological explanations* and *philosophical discussions*. *The Holy Spirit wants to mess with our minds, so that we let His Word mess with our lives and prepare us for the life in the Spirit* – both the one we are called to live day by day, and the one which will come when the L-rd returns. Ouch gadol.

Parables take ordinary things and tell stories which cause us to be drawn in and place ourselves somewhere in the picture, and often we do not like where we end up. My subtitle: **Epiphanies are Time Dated**, has to do with the urgency which Parables cause us to experience. When He taught this lesson, his Apostles came and asked Him to explain the Parable, but probably not so much because they did not get His meaning. Possibly because they wanted to be sure that they belonged to the good soil and were not being dragged away from a fruitful encounter with the Word.

Epiphanies are encounters with the L-rd, like the one which Scrooge had in Dickens excellent Christmas story and are limited opportunities to mend our ways and to avoid the unfortunate consequences of our negative spiritual behaviour. Now I am not saying that we are all evil people, you know, like a shul full of Scrooges and people Jacob Marley – people who don't really get the picture until it is too late. What I am saying that is that the L-rd, in His faithfulness, will send us a ***constant stream of epiphanies*** (Prov. 1:20-23 and 8:1-21) with a firm objective in mind. **He wants to mess with our mind, until we quit messing with His Word.**

Paula recently forwarded an article to me which is ***a rather alarming analysis of the moral and spiritual bankruptcy of a whole generation of evangelical believers.*** Those who claim to know the Gospel and whose lives are called to be examples of the light and salt which G-d's Word brings to our lives, are failing miserably and the guy had the stats to show it – American stats, but I am fairly certain that Canada is not doing any better. Two of the biggest indicators he looked at were **sexual morality** and **financial integrity**, first among young people, with less than 15% of evangelical young people waiting for marriage to become sexually active. Next he looked at tithing and in a confidential survey; he found that only a tiny fraction of evangelicals regularly exercised this spiritual discipline.

When he went on to analyze the ***entertainment/marketing approach*** which many mega churches adopt to attract new members (**maximum benefit for minimum effort and only token commitment**), I was both in agreement with him and also wanted to contradict his findings. Why? Well principally because a statistician is often someone who has their head in an oven and their feet in a freezer and who concludes that over all, they are okay. We do live in ***an era of spiritual compromise and great moral degeneracy***, but for us the great tragedy is that it is apparently worse among those who claim to be born again Christians – **with many of our young people fornicating and lots of our financially well off salary earners wallowing in greed and materialism.**

Now, I would agree that **the greatest barrier to the Gospel has always been believers who act like pigs, wolves and dogs, rather than like sheep, doves and eagles.** If the enemy can destroy our spirituality, which is the foundation of our testimony, then the way we live, shuts up the doors of the Kingdom to genuine seekers, and also prevents us from entering in. But, I do not think the problem would be solved by raining down sermons of fire and brimstone on believers, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. **We do not want to go from turning sinners off to scaring them away.**

We need to pay attention to some of the principles of successful marketing and not let the enemy take over the creative genius of our modern society and mess with the minds of this latter day generation all the way to hell. And here I am talking about both science, which includes technology, and the arts, which sometimes includes the massive entertainment industry and which blares at us 24/7 in our homes, in our cars, and even in elevators, restaurants and in that most delicate of places, the dentist's chair. **We are under a constant barrage of carnal propaganda aimed NOT primarily at the world, but at those who should belong to the world to come – that's us, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.**

So what's the solution? Blow up our TVs and smash our radios? Avoid shopping centres and wear earplugs in restaurants and in elevators? No, that would just isolate us from the battlefield and prevent us from developing an **immune system resistance** to the triple spiritual assault of the enemy of our souls. Let me briefly speak with you about this and then I want to close and celebrate our monthly reminder of the forgiveness which is ***the key to true spiritual vitality in the big bad world where we live, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.***

I called this meditation: **Birds, Demons and Allergies**. The stubborn spirit we want to harvest is each one of us, but the harvest is only possible if we are able to face down, resist and overcome the wiles of the enemy, and of his ***triple pronged attack*** on our souls, our lives and our community, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile. The lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh and the pride of life (I John 2:15-17), or put another way, the devil, the flesh and the world. Our imagination, our lifestyle and our community involvement – all of these are under constant attack and the Parable begins with the first round of this assault on the fortress of our spiritual vitality (2 Cor. 10:3-5), and personally, I think it's for the birds (loosen up, laugh a little). I know it was a "cheep" remark, but let's move on.

We live in a **post Judeo-Christian society** which believes passionately in **evolution, in life on other planets and politically correct sexual freedom** of the worst kind. We bow to the dictates of the high priests of science and fill our lives with the technological wonders their diseased minds are crippling the ecology of our planet with. We are the **worst polluters** in history and probably create more junk daily than the whole world produced in a year, two hundred years ago. And yet we fervently believe in the **bright future** of mankind and are convinced we live constantly on the edge of deeds of great pith and moment (that's Shakespeare for earth shattering discoveries which will save the planet, cure all disease and bring wealth and happiness to every boy and girl in the world – that's for Jack).

So, what do we do? We buy, we indulge, we pollute and we worship at the altar of a luxurious lifestyle which the Bible clearly describes – but not in a good light. You see, we begin to look like the great **whore of Babylon**, with some **Sodom and Gomorrah** thrown in for good measure. And all we want to do is to spend, to invest, to borrow and to entertain ourselves to death by the way we eat, and by the way we sit around hypnotized by Hollywood and her technological henchmen in Silicon Valley.

The enemy is doing such a great job that we live in Mordor and think we're just building a better Hobbit land for our children. And the solution is so simple that, with the world we miss it by light years. **It is the seed we need**, because our lives are the soil and G-d wants to be the gardener of our souls. There is nothing wrong with material prosperity, or with the bright lights and the musical wonder of entertainment and the arts. **The problem lies in the heart, and in the imagination.**

We are being told to eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die, but **the enemy doesn't finish the story. Generation by generation and person by person, we will all stand before the Judge of the Ages and have to give an account for the contents of our hearts and what we have given our lives to.** I want to deal with other aspects of this satanic seduction as we go through the series, but I want to close with a picture, so I can plant a land mine in your souls – ***one that will shipwreck the enemy as he sails in to conquer and occupy your spirituality.***

Every day and in every way, we are all packing for our final journey. What are you filling the suitcase of your heart up with? Probably we all need to be **constantly repacking.** ***Packing and repacking should be the most important priorities and activities of our lives, daily, weekly and constantly.*** Where we are in the world is not our big problem, and what is going on in our lives is only part of the problem. ***It is what is going on in our hearts and what we are cherishing in our hearts that concerns the Shepherd of our souls and those pesky birds that are always pecking at our spirituality.*** **What are the birds pecking at in your life and what are you doing to drive them away as you learn to send down roots into what really matters?** Epiphanies are time dated, because the birds want to eat your spirituality and make you allergic to the things of G-d.

Let's pray and then we will examine our hearts and chase a few birds away, and renew our taste for the things of G-d, to the Jew first and also to the Gentile.