

Life is Short - Live it Up

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I am a billboard reader. I sometimes tease about Pals being a source of my devotional reading. The Burma Shaves advertising signs of early highway America sounded fun. These were a series of clever signs spaced out along a highway with short sayings and rhymes that all ended whimsically with "Burma Shaves", a shaving cream.

Can you imagine a series of similar signs that end instead with "Jesus saves"? For example, five white signs that read: "You're on your way; This is the day; If You're not ready; Some day you'll pay; Jesus Saves."

Okay, I said I liked those kinds of signs, not that I would be the one to write them.

Recently I saw a store marquee that caught my eye and mind. I am pretty confident that it was meant as an expression of hedonism - a Playboy, "please yourself" philosophy. It was functionally restating of the old beer commercial about only going around once and grabbin' all the gusto you can, while you can.

Being pleasure driven is hardly a new worldview. To quote a verse out of context, the Apostle Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 15:32 that we should "eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die." Chapter 15 of his letter to the Corinthian believers speaks of Jesus' resurrection. If Jesus is still dead, Paul reasons, we have no hope in this world or the next. Therefore, we are wise to be gusto gabbing maniacs.

Back to the sign. Technically speaking, it was a two-clause sermon. It has a clearly stated premise and a well-honed application. What did it say? It boldly informed and advised all who passed by that "Life is Short, Live it Up."

As good sermon critics (in the kindest sense of the word, of course), let us examine this proclamation. As for the first clause, the premise - "Life is Short" - what do we find in the sacred Writ?

"The length of our days is seventy years-- or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away." Psalm 90:10

"Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes." James 4:14

"As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him; for he knows how we are formed, he remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more." Psalm 103:13-16

So, life - earthly life - is indeed short. The premise is granted.

What do we say about our sign arranger's application of that solid biblical truth? Are we wise to "live it up" since life is fleeting? Without trying to play word games, the answer depends on the how you use the word "up." Check out these verses:

"Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things." Colossians 3:1-2

"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God." 1 Corinthians 10:31

"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." Matthew 6:33-34

If, in good Hebrew literary fashion, the word "up" can be taken as a respectful replacement - a reverent circumlocution - for God, then the sign is complete. Life is short, live it Upward, for God. That is great biblical advice indeed, even if it was found in front of a package store.

It is too easy for believers to grouse about the world, forgetting it is the world. They cannot, will not see Up in the word up. But we can and we must. We cannot simply see with seemingly blind eyes. If we do so, we neglect the spiritual sight and insight Jesus has provided by His Spirit to His children.

Like Joseph of Old Testament fame said of his brother's cruelty to him, so too we can say about our sign: they may have meant it for evil (philosophically), but God meant it for good (see Gen. 50:20 and Romans 8:28).

We must learn to see Jesus in our world - even where He is not intended. God will not be without a witness. The sky, the hills, the foliage speak of Him. So too, on occasion, will the world, whether they mean to or not. Will we see Him? Will we help them see Him?

After all, life is short. We must live it Up. (See 1 Peter 4:7-11)

I close with a poem handed to me at recent family reunion. Its author is unknown - to man at least.

"I think that I shall never see,
A Billboard lovely as a tree
Indeed, unless the billboards fall,
I'll never see a tree at all."

Until billboards are no more (can you say "in the Millenium"?), let us keep our eyes open, looking for and towards Jesus. Since the signs are clear, we are wise to remember that life is short. Are you living it Up?

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