

## “The Long View”

I once heard a man named Bob Mumford give a talk called “On the Winning Side.” In it he painted a picture of God and His purposes, and compared that to moving ahead as *giant bulldozer*. Fads and movements come and go, he said, but God’s truth and God’s purposes move ahead, *relentlessly, in unstoppable fashion* – without swaying to the right or left! The bulldozer chugs on!

He was contrasting the eternal purposes of God and God's enduring truths with the ever changing opinions of humans, the passing fads of popular culture, the short-lived philosophies of the day. This whole truth is expressed in a number of ways in Scripture. Psalm 145:13 says, “Your kingdom is an *everlasting* kingdom, and your dominion *endures* throughout all generations.” God reigns sovereign in every generation!

The idea is also expressed in 1 Peter 1:23-25: "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For, 'All people are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord endures forever.' And this is the word that was preached to you." Earthly, fleshly things don't last, but God's Word and truth endure forever. And anything that contradicts it and gets in the way will eventually be pushed aside!

The prophet Isaiah affirmed this when he said, “For the Lord Almighty has purposed, and who can thwart him? His hand is stretched out, and who can turn it back?” (Isaiah 14:27).

Let's look also at Isaiah, chapter 46. This is a marvelous chapter! It was written when God's people were held in captivity in Babylon. Even though the nation had collapsed and many of the people had been taken away into Babylon, God assures them that His purposes have not been defeated.

"Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is no one like me, declaring the outcome from the beginning and from ancient times things not yet done, saying, 'My purpose shall stand, and I will fulfill my intention,' calling a bird of prey from the east, the man for my purpose from a far country. I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have planned, and I will do it" (Isaiah 46:9-11).

God sometimes reaches far out into unexpected places to use people who will fulfill His purposes (e.g. even using pagan kings to accomplish His will). *The bulldozer pushes ahead!*

I think this message is especially pertinent as we come to the end of a year and think about 2024 and the future. Current fads, in vogue human philosophies, popular movements may flourish for a season. But God is eternal. He will continue to forge ahead, fulfilling His purposes. In light of that, the smart thing to do is to get on the bulldozer and be on the winning side – to align our lives with God's eternal truth and purposes! To take *the long view!*

When we live with *the long view* in mind, certain things happen. ***We don't have to get chained to the latest fad.*** In Isaiah 46, the prophet contrasts the *idols* that the Babylonians made and

worshiped with the true God (Yahweh). "Bel bows down; Nebo stoops; their idols are on beasts and cattle; these things you carry are loaded as burdens on weary animals. They stoop; they bow down together; they cannot save the burden but themselves go into captivity" (Isaiah 46:1-2). Bel and Nebo were chief Babylonian gods. They were huge statues, put on floats drawn by oxen or mules. Isaiah mocks the impotence of these man-made gods! Instead of these gods carrying the people, they themselves have to be carried! "Those who lavish gold from the purse and weigh out silver in the scales—they hire a goldsmith, who makes it into a god; then they fall down and worship! They lift it to their shoulders; they carry it; they set it in its place, and it stands there; it cannot move from its place. If one cries out to it, it does not answer or save anyone from trouble" (verses 6-7). How different is the true God! "I am God, and there is no one like me" (Isaiah 46:9).

A lot of people today make gods out of the current pop star, or newest movement to come down the pike, or the latest novelty that excites attention. Think of the fads that have come and gone. How about the *hula-hoop*! Remember the *Mitch Miller sing-alongs* (the words on the TV screen, with the little dot bouncing over the words that are to be sung). *Tiny Tim*. The long-haired guy who strummed a little ukulele and sang like a girl. He was the rage. Tiny Tim, where have you gone? The same can be said of *leisure suits*.....*Cabbage Patch dolls*.....*the Fonz*, .....*go-go boots and discotheques*.....*Tang* (remember that orange drink)!

Most of these are harmless, innocuous. But there are prevailing fads and philosophies that are not so innocent - some that run counter to God's Word and truth. Some years back the book *The DaVinci Code* created quite a stir. It was a novel, written by Dan Brown, but many took it to be factual, and bought into his thesis that the Bible was written by people who deliberately lied and had a political agenda, that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene. Some jumped on the bandwagon and questioned the authenticity of the Bible, and the divinity of Jesus. Many didn't realize that the research and scholarship behind this book was flawed. It was made into a film – fortunately, the movie was a bust. You don't hear much anymore about *The DaVinci Code*.

People who ignore the long view and the eternal truths of God's Word are often prone to bow down before the cultural gods. Today people are getting caught up either in the far left progressive movement – with its cancel culture and radical applications of inclusion, equity and diversity – or the far-right movement, reflected in Christian nationalism or trying to force unreasonably conservative view of morals on a whole society.

Or, they are letting the cultural icons - movie stars, TV personalities - dictate how they dress and what they think and believe. Harry Denman is one of my Christian heroes. He was an evangelist who for years headed the Board of Evangelism in the Methodist Church. I heard him preach and tell of the time he was waiting for a plane at an airport, and they announced over the PA system that a famous movie star was in the airport. People crowded to the place where she was. He said something like this: "People rushed from all directions to see her, all except old Harry Denman. I just stayed put. Why should I want to see her, when she was living such an immoral lifestyle." See, the drummer Harry Denman marched to was the Lord of eternity, not the gods and goddesses of the moment.

When we take the “long view” we can be saved from getting caught up in every passing fad or worthless movement that comes along. Dr. Harry Emerson Fosdick, many years ago, said, “There is an everlasting right to which our nations, our businesses, our racial relationships, our schools, our churches, and our personal lives must be adjusted if salvation is to visit us.” So, before you give yourself over to the latest fad or philosophy.....*stop*.....take the long view and ask, “Is this consistent with God’s Word and truth?” Because if it isn’t, it isn’t going to endure! “The grass withers, and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever” (1 Peter 1:24-25). *The Divine Bulldozer keeps chugging along!*

Also, taking the *long view* can teach us this: ***Be patient. Don’t fret. God knows what He is doing and He is fulfilling His ultimate purposes.*** The historian, Charles A. Beard, once said, “The mills of God grind slowly, but they grind exceedingly small.” What’s he saying? Years and time have a way of sifting out what is true and what is false, what is of God and what is not of God. God doesn’t overlook or miss a thing! So, learn to be patient, and wait as God’s mills grind slowly away. (*Bulldozers don’t travel 80 miles an hour*).

2 Peter 3:8 says, “Do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day.” For God to “hurry up” might mean it takes him 500 years to accomplish something rather than 1,000 years! Often, we can’t even see God working out His purposes *in our lifetime*. They may be completed long after we’re dead and gone! So, don’t fret. Hold to the long view, because God knows what He’s doing and God *will* accomplish all he has set out to do! *The bulldozer chugs away!*

And then, taking the *long view* can remind us of this: ***Before you sell out to the moment, think through the long-term results.*** I suppose one indication that our human nature is fallen and sinful is how prone we are to be short-sighted and only think about the moment. It’s like Esau in the Old Testament, who traded away his birth right and its long-term value for a pot of stew because he was hungry!

As a society we are marked by the desire for instant gratification, a think-of-the-moment, immediate satisfaction. An apt symbol of this is the credit card, the charge card. We can get what we want right away, even if we don’t have the money. Just charge it. The average credit card debt per household right now in the U.S. is about \$6,365. Of course, that includes many who have no credit card debt. So, if we would look at the average credit card debt only of those who have *any* credit card debt, it would be much higher! And so, the instant gratification turns to long-term misery, trying to pay off credit card amounts at obscenely high interest rates. Buy it now. Do what feels right for the moment – don’t think of the future.

The words of a popular song say, “It can’t be wrong when it feels so right.” But it *can be wrong* even though it feels so right! One careless act that seems so right and feels so good can blemish one’s name and reputation, ruin one’s career, tear a family apart, put a life in jeopardy.

Pastor and author Charlie Shedd told of a Christian friend, an athletic type guy, witnessing on the beach at Ft. Lauderdale. One of the college students comes up to him with a T-shirt bearing this

message: “Stamp Out Virginity.” What do you say to that if you're this Christian man, trying to witness for Christ? Well, this Christian guy says, “Hey, that’s cool, man. Really cool. I’ll tell you what to do with that shirt. You just go home and put that in the dresser drawer. You keep it nice and save it. When you get married, and have a little girl, wait till your daughter is old enough for her first date, and when that guy calls at your door for your daughter. Then get that shirt out and put it on!” Great response! Remember, before we sell out for the moment, think over the *long view*. What might be the consequences of my actions a year from now, 5 years from now, 20 years from now?

One closing thought. ***Holding to the long view can give us hope.*** It's very easy, as we look at what's happening in own personal life, or in our nation and the world, to fall into despair. The bad things that happen to us and our family sometimes seem overwhelming; we look at the world and it looks like the terrorists and violent people are winning; politicians argue and debate while our country flounders. There's not much reason to smile and have hope these days, is there?

But go back to the text in Isaiah 46: “I am God...declaring the end from the beginning...my purpose shall stand, and I will fulfill my intention...I have spoken, and I will bring it to pass; I have planned, and I will do it” (Isaiah 46:10-11). That's God's promise to us! God is establishing a kingdom. A kingdom of *love...and goodness...and truth*. And when the final chapter in the human drama is written, God will have the final word. He's the Winner. You can book it!

Align yourself with God's good purposes. Get on the winning side, and you and I will have hope! Because no matter how dark the situation, how puzzling the twists and turns of human history, how silent God seems to be for the moment, *the Bulldozer with God in the driver's seat chugs along, pushing aside whatever gets in the way of where God is going. And nothing's going to stop it!*

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