

What Really Matters?

Today we are inundated in the media with the report that Michael Jackson and Farah Fawcett have died. They both rose to stardom from the heartland of our country, one from the south (Texas) the other from the north (Indiana). In the history of our country, we have heard and shall continue to hear of people from humble roots rising beyond their normally limited field of influence into iconic proportions. Whether they liked it or not, these two became role models of the youth culture of their generation. Girls throughout the country combed their hair like Farah and boys imitated Michael's "moon walk". Now they are gone and I believe it is a timely moment to ask ourselves, what did they leave behind and what do you want to leave behind?

Allow me to make a contrast. Recently Sandra Benny passed. She and her husband were involved in Christian counseling for several years. Jim and Sandy were our chaperones on the night I presented my wife Barbara her engagement ring. Jim and Sandra met when they were attending Bob Jones University and after an old fashioned love story, they married and remained faithful to one another until she passed from this earth. I do not know the current statistics, but as of January 2007, no less than 2,000 couples found shelter in their counseling ministries and, as a result of the Binny's ministry, chose to honor God and save their marriage. Sandra was a wonderful wife, mother and even as a youngster in my mother's-in-law Sunday School class, a wonderful Christian.

A few days ago I was preaching at Peach Tree Road Baptist Church in the Atlanta, Georgia area. On the docket singing just before I spoke was the southern Gospel group, The Henson Family of Kingsport, Tennessee. One very important member of the group was missing, the twenty-nine year old son, Micah Henson. Micah died a couple of months ago. In public, Micah was quiet, until he sang. He sang with great enthusiasm and his gift of songwriting was more than a blessing...it was ministry. Let me share with you some of the words of one of the last songs he wrote: "If I could say one thing, it'd be that He's the best thing. If I had only one word Jesus, would be heard. If I had but one breath, I'd use it to praise Him with. If this were my last day, I'd shout 'Jesus' all the way. If this were my last mile, I'd spend it praising Him awhile. For He is really all that matters; when this thing is over, we've crossed death's cold waters, we'll see more clearly - see that really He's it."

Four people died. Two lived for all that this world had to offer, two lived for the kingdom of Heaven and the glory of God. Two were prolonged illnesses, two were sudden passings. Life is so fragile; we often have no idea when or how it is going to end. Micah touched a truism with his song All That Matters. In view of recent events, allow me to remind us all of two principles of life that really matter.

1. It is more important to know how to live than how to make a living.

Dr. Bob Jones Sr. often said at the university he founded, "We are not trying to teach these students how to make living, we are trying to teach them how to live, because if we can teach them how to live, they will make a living."

On the eve of the Battle of Manassas (Bull Run), Lieutenant Sullivan Ballou, wrote, in the event of his death, to his wife some precious words. He in fact, died in the battle. He wrote, "I would have liked to have seen my two sons grow into honorable manhood..." A dying wish for sons to live in honor from a man about to die in honor. What a goal for all of us, to live and die in honor. I think of the motto of West Point, "Duty, honor, country". I think of one of the mottos of the Reformers, "Soli Deo Gloria" (For the glory of God alone). Living honorably; being responsible in our life and all for the glory of God. This is the way to live! "...*That in all things he might have the preeminence*" (Colossians 1:18).

Some will live and die having left broken hearts from their immorality. The Bible says of a person who threw his character to the wind in adulterous misbehavior, “*A wound and dishonour shall he get; and his reproach shall not be wiped away*” (Proverbs 6:33). Others will live and die with those who knew of their moral testimony and were blessed and challenged to live the same way themselves, “*Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies*” (Proverbs 31:10). “*Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her*” (Proverbs 31:28). This is how to live!

2. Only one life, it soon will be past; only what's done for Christ will last.

This is a saying I have heard all my life. I believe it now, more than ever. “*Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is*” (I Corinthians 3: 12, 13). The foundation Paul was referring to was the Foundation Stone, yea, the Rock of our Salvation, Jesus Christ! If we present unfaithfulness, unrepentant sin and disgraceful lifestyles through our lifetime, we are building our life with wood, hay and stubble. At the Judgment Seat of Christ it will disintegrate and we lose reward. If we live faithful, sanctified, full of grace lives, we are building with gold, silver and precious stones.

The Rajah (in India, one who ranks as a king or prince) was on a cross-country tour. He stopped his caravan and dismounted his elephant to speak to one of the citizens of his district. As he approached the poor man, the poor man cursed him with every step, thinking to himself, “Why does the Rajah stop to talk to me? He has everything; I have nothing.” The Rajah, observing the peasant eating his meager bowl of rice, requested, “Give of thy rice to the Rajah.” The serf grumbled to himself, “He mocks me. He should be giving to me, not me giving to him.” The man then lifted his rice to the Rajah and the Rajah took one grain of rice. Again the question came, “Give of thy rice to the Rajah.” Reluctantly, the pauper lifted his bowl and the Rajah took another grain of rice.” After pulling the bowl back quickly as if to protect his remaining rice, the King sadly inquired, “Only two grains of rice for the Rajah? Only two grains of rice?” After saying this, the Rajah turned and walked back to his caravan. With every step he took, the poor man cursed him under his breath, “The Rajah who has everything expected me to give him something more...from me, he who has nothing.” As the Rajah rode away, the poor man noticed something shining in his bowl. He looked furiously, dumping the whole bowl onto his step and carefully examining each and every grain of rice. And to his frustration and deepest regret found only two...two gold nuggets, the size of two grains of rice. With agony, he threw his empty bowl in the air while clutching pitifully two gold nuggets and cried to the top of his lungs, “Oh, I wish I had given my all to the Rajah! I wish I had given my all to the King!”

You no doubt, have already made the application. When it has all been said and done, only one life, it soon will be past, only what's done for Christ will last. “*Labour not for the meat which perisheth, but for that meat which endureth unto everlasting life, which the Son of man shall give unto you: for him hath God the Father sealed*” (John 6:27).

- Pastor Pope -

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