

History in the Sand

A couple of days ago, I decided I had waited long enough to do a little planting in our backyard. I went to a place best suited for some backyard horticulture, the old in-ground sandbox/fort where our kids spent countless hours playing. While digging in the ground I came to a sudden, almost sacred pause as I held bits and pieces of small toys our kids played with in their childhood. As I held Mickey Mouse and GI Joe remnants, I saw the kids' smiles and heard their laughter. I am reminded of the poem by Elisabeth Akers Allen, "Backward, turn backward, O Time in your flight; make me a child again, just for to-night." Well, I didn't go all the way back to my childhood - I went back to my young adulthood and my children's childhood. On the top of the ground I saw evidence of my grandchildren's playing, but going beneath the ground I found the history of the preceding generation.

Many years ago I recall Dad taking me to the place where they lived in the rural area of Big Sandy, Texas. We got out of the car and scavenged around his old home place where he was born in 1913. Soon we came to a small old wagon wheel rim. Dad picked it up, dusted it off, then with a child-like smile and twinkle in his eye, he said, "This was my favorite toy." Now I had a hard time thinking of an old rusty wagon wheel rim as a toy, but Dad continued, "I would take a stick and push this up and down that old dirt road." Then he illustrated by grabbing a fallen limb from beneath a tree and pushing the wheel. He nostalgically took the wheel back to our home in Florida where it sat as a memento of days gone by, unearthed history that provoked the best possible memories.

People take courses in college to prepare themselves and then often spend the rest of their lives as archeologists, digging up ancient civilizations to know more about our past. As we examine the history in the sand, we discover:

1. The way we lived.

The deeper we go beneath our earth, the older the civilizations. If we go to Europe, we will dig down and find the Saxon influence; deeper yet, the Roman influence and deeper still the Greeks. Layer upon layer showing how life was lived. We will see the food we ate sometimes preserved in airtight jars. In some of the tombs of Egypt they have found beans that date back to 2000 years BC. Scientists have planted and actually grown them today! Not only do we see what we ate, we see how our food was prepared. We see the houses we lived in, how they were built from the materials used and the tools used to build. We find the history in the art, who the people were at war with and the very weapons used when fighting these wars. We even find the remnant of the ancient games that were played. We find touching artifacts of jewelry given to loved ones, frescoes of beloved children and beds shared by husbands and wives.

The deeper into the earth we go, the less likely we are to find human remains, unless preserved by the natural phenomenon of peat, ice or volcanic ash or by man-made means such as mummification. In the natural state, man's body returns to the earth. The Bible declares in I Corinthians 15:47, "*The first man is of the earth, earthy...*". Genesis 2:7 says, "*And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man*

became a living soul.” Notice these references: Psalm 104:29: “...*thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust.*” Ecclesiastes 3:20: “...*all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again*” Ecclesiastes 12:7: “*Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.*” Isn’t it amazing that the stuff man makes often lasts longer than he does. Now the statement I just made is only partially true. Man’s body deteriorates, but the soul and spirit live on and a resurrection body is given later. Paul said in II Corinthians 5:8, “We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.” II Corinthians 5:1, 2 says, “*For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven.*” With this sobering truth in mind we are reminded of Hebrews 9:27, “*And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.*” This will segue into our next point - history in the sand tells us:

2. For whom we lived.

As we dig deeper in our earth we will find temples of worship to false gods such as Zeus or Jupiter, Aphrodite or Diana. We will find icons of these false gods as well. Although not categorized as gods, we will find the ruins of debauched cultures that worshiped materialism, sex and violence. Dead men do speak in what they leave behind in the sand. In contrast we may go deep into the earth and find primitive artwork of the fish symbol (an early Christian symbol) and of crosses. These were carved by the Christians in catacombs. You will even find instruments of torture and death as well as coliseums where these same Christians died for their faith. We cannot hide whom or what we believed in. Recently my wife and I visited our local museum and viewed a portion of the Dead Sea Scrolls, artifacts of the testimony of God’s Word living beyond the worshipers.

Here’s a good question: if you walked out of your house, just as it is, without moving or changing anything, and someone else were to excavate the site five hundred years later, would they be able to tell if you were a Christian? Jesus said, “...*for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth*” (Luke 12:15). He also said, “*For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?*” (Matthew 16:26). The history in the sand also says:

3. Life goes on.

In Great Britain there are roads that have been used since the days of Roman occupation. Through the centuries, they have been paved over with rock, gravel, more rock and eventually concrete and asphalt. It was discovered on one ancient road still being used, the pavement would not hold any longer due to the years of road beneath that continued to deteriorate and crack the new pavement. So, the only way the English government could find a solution was to bring the road back to its first state. This required extensive stripping. Road after paved road was peeled off until finally coming to the original dirt the road had been built upon. The stripping took so much money, that Britain was going to have to

wait until more moneys could be accrued and allocated to this extensive project. While they were waiting, spring came. The ancient road began to bloom with the most beautiful flowers! These flowers were not native to Britannia. Further research discovered that these flowers were from seeds that had fallen centuries earlier. The roads were covered with flowers native to the Mediterranean world brought over from Rome. Flowers planted many years ago were blooming again. All that was necessary was to remove the stuff on top.

Even better than discovering old toys in the sandbox dig is unearthing the faith, held to by our spiritual ancestors. I say to this modern generation, try it yourself. It will work! The seed of life is still there! *“And he said unto me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord GOD, thou knowest. Again he said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O ye dry bones, hear the word of the LORD. Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live”* (Ezekiel 37: 3-5).

-Pastor Pope-