

The Beautiful Rope

How exciting it was to be moving into a new house! It just wasn't any house; it was the parsonage of First Baptist Church of District Heights, just outside Washington D.C. Dad and Mom moved there in 1952 when I was only nine months old. The church started in a tent, then moved into a fire hall and finally a new church building was built on Landsdale Street. Situated right next to the church building was the parsonage. It was a beautiful locale carved out of the burgeoning neighborhoods in the dense woods of Maryland. We couldn't wait to move in from our humble abode on Gateway Blvd. As a matter of fact, we did not wait. We moved in before it was finished. One of the last portions of the house to be built was Dad's study. Mom insisted it have windows all the way around to provide dad with all the sunlight affordable, making it most contributive for reading, writing and typing. I remember on one bright, sunny day, I walked up the outside stairs to the unfinished study. There in the corner of the study on the concrete was the prettiest rope I'd had ever seen. I extended my hand to take it and play with it. I was going to jump with it or use it like a whip. I was only six years old and just before I picked it up, something (I now say it was Someone) inside me said, "Don't touch it; go get your dad!" I got my dad and I told him about the pretty rope that I wanted to play with and that I'd never seen anything like it. Dad was smiling, but as he followed me and looked at the "rope." His smile vanished as he said, "Johnny-boy, don't move." He then grabbed a hoe and he struck it and I saw it come to life, although it did not stay alive long. It was a snake! Dad very quickly beheaded this adder. He said, "Son, that was a coral snake!"

There is not a more poisonous snake in the entire North American Continent. I was getting ready to pick it up in a way that would have been perfect for the coral snake to bite me in the soft flesh between the thumb and forefinger. The coral has short fangs and almost needs a gnawing opportunity to lodge his fangs. A six-year boy with tender fleshed hands would have been perfect for him. Also, because the corral bites are more rare than most poisonous snakes there is not as much antivenin ready. If I had been bitten, it most definitely could have been fatal.

Allow me to make some points:

1. We should clear everything through the father.

How controlled my dad was that day! Frankly, Dad was calm and controlled every day. Nothing seemed to rattle him or knock him off his game, not even the most poisonous snake in America! I remember Dad explaining the difference between a king snake and a coral snake. How similar, yet what a difference! Perhaps you've heard the simple rhyme, "Red on yellow, kill a fellow; Red on black, friend of Jack." The coral snake's color red only touches yellow and the scarlet king snake's red color touches his black ribbons.

How important it was for me to clear everything through Dad. I would have possibly gone to heaven before I got to seven! The Lord Jesus gave us the precedent: *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one”* (John 10:27-30). Our Heavenly Father loves us and wants nothing but the best for us. Let us therefore be one with the Heavenly Father in heart and mind. This was the prayer of Jesus, *“And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one”* (John 17:22).

2. Obey God when He speaks.

It was one of the first times I recall God speaking directly to me. Someone once asked, “Does God speak audibly?” I would be quick to answer, “He speaks louder than that.” He will speak to your spirit. *“He that hath ears to hear, let him hear”* (Matthew 11:15). God was not finished with me; He had other plans.

Sam Small, famous Methodist evangelist of the eighteen hundreds tells of a time when he and his boyhood friends had all planned to go to Europe together. It was a lifetime dream now about to come true. Just days before leaving, Sam’s mother said, “Son, please don’t go, I just know something is going to happen.” Sam tried to talk his mother out of this request. He cajoled, pleaded and tried to convince his mother all would be well. She would not hear otherwise. He prayed, talked to God about it and realized that now it was a matter of honoring his mother. He said to his friends, “I cannot go; my mother has asked me not to and I cannot convince her to change her mind.” His friends said, “Sam Small, you are a grown man and here you are tied to your mama’s apron strings!” Sam Small said, “Boys, I know we’ve planned for a long time. But I cannot go now; I wouldn’t cross that ocean for any amount of money against my mother’s wishes.” In a few days, Sam’s boyhood friends sailed. How he longed to go with them. In three days, Sam picked up the newspaper to read that the mighty ship his friends had set sail on, went down in the middle of the ocean. He read the name of one, then two and finally three...all three of his friends died. He crumpled the newspaper and cried aloud, “Dear God, the next name would have been mine.” Sam went down the street on which he was reared. His mother was coming out of the door as he ran up. He took her in his arms, wheeled her about and said, “Oh Mother! I never miss it when I take your advice!” Let us be that sensitive to God’s voice when He speaks! I guarantee, you’ll never miss it!

3. Not everything that glitters is gold.

How beautiful the coral snake was as it lay there glistening motionless in the sun. The colors were brilliant and so inviting. Is this not the way this world tries to tempt us! There is an old saying, “All of Satan’s apples have worms.” It matters not how it seems; in reality, Satan will rip you off, ruin and mock you. He knows your weakness and will attempt to pull you in. *“But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death”* (James 1:14,15). When God speaks of the evil effects of alcohol, He says,

“At the last it biteth like a serpent, and stingeth like an adder” (Proverbs 23:32). Not everything that glitters is gold; as a matter of fact, the temptations of this world are “fool’s gold.” In yet another passage God gives the outcome of one who would not take heed to his father’s voice. *“And thou mourn at the last, when thy flesh and thy body are consumed, And say, How have I hated instruction, and my heart despised reproof; And have not obeyed the voice of my teachers, nor inclined mine ear to them that instructed me!”* (Proverbs 5:11-13).

Is something or someone enticing you to go against God and break the hearts of those who love you and want the best for you? Listen to God. Don’t pick up that rope! Trust and obey Him!

-Pastor Pope-

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