

GETTING MY ATTENTION

It happens everyday:

The sun rises in the East, moves across the sky, then the sun sets in the West.
In any Almanac, or any Weather forecast, you can see the time of day listed for the Sunrise and the Sunset.

So, it is true, the earth is still, and the sun revolves around the earth!

*"Well, no, the sun does not revolve around the earth.
Actually, the earth rotates and revolves around the sun,"* you say.

That's not the way I see it! As a matter of fact, that's not the way anyone sees it!

The sun rises in the East and sets in the West.
Since the world began, that's what happens every single day.
Why else would everyone call it "Sunrise" and "Sunset",
if the sun doesn't "rise" or the sun doesn't "set"?

*"Well, that's the way it 'looks' from down here on earth.
But, if you were above the earth, you would see the earth rotating,
and you would see the sun at the center of the universe."*

The words "Sunrise" and "Sunset" are words that describe appearance, not reality!

You would agree then,...

What "APPEARS" to be true can actually be "OPPOSITE" of what is true!

FOCUSING MY THOUGHTS

What about life? Your life? My life? Every one's life?

Is it possible that what "appears" to be true for the best way to live your life,
could in "reality" be the "opposite" of what is true for the best way to live your life?
Is it possible that what "appears" to be true for the best way to live your life,
could in "reality" be the "worst" way for you to live your life?

If "appearance" and "reality" are "opposites" when it comes to living your life,
then wouldn't it be better to embrace "reality" and give up on "appearance"?

LIVING A LIFE OF INDEPENDENCE

From our earliest childhood, our memories are of learning and growing up,
learning to become self-sufficient and independent,
doing more and more for ourselves, preparing for being an adult and on our own.

As adults, our thinking moves from being ready to live on our own,
to being successful, to having security, comfort, and enjoying life.

If we can get a good paying job, accumulate some wealth,
enjoy the fruits of our labor for many years, we find some satisfaction in life.

There are some people, though, who look for "short cuts" on the road to prosperity.

Why work hard, day in and day out,
if you can gain some wealth for yourself an easier way,
in a shorter amount of time and with less effort.

Of course, that may involve straying off the path of honesty and integrity,
but who said that "Life is fair"?

After all, "It's a dog eat dog" world out there,
and better to be the "consumer" than the "consumed".
If you have to "step on some fingers of others while climbing the ladder of success",
well, "that's life"!

Is that true? Is that "reality"? Or, is that the way it "appears" in life?
If there are "winners" in life, then there will also be some "losers" in life, right?
So, strive to be a "winner"!

God sent the prophet Micah to confront
some of the wealthy, some of the powerful people in Judah,
who as adults, were willing to take the "short cut" to wealth, to power.
Listen to the words the prophet spoke to them:

¹*Woe to those who devise wickedness and work evil on their beds!
When the morning dawns, they perform it, because it is in the power of their hand.
²They covet fields and seize them, and houses, and take them away;
they oppress a man and his house, a man and his inheritance. – Micah 2:1-2*

Micah describes people who lie in bed at night,
and plot how they can deprive others of their property, their wealth.
Then, when they've come up with a scheme, they do it, because they can!
Through deception, false accusations, bribes, fraud and threats,
they deprive people of what belongs to them.

The call to follow God's Word, – truth, honesty, integrity,
are a "burden", keeping them from gaining more wealth, more power.

Through the prophet Micah, God calls "the mountains", "the hills", to act as a jury,
as God prosecutes His case against His own people, Israel.

"For the LORD has an indictment against His people, He will contend with Israel."

But, instead of sounding like a prosecuting attorney,
the LORD sounds more like the one being accused of being in the wrong,
– like God has no right to question how they are mistreating others.

³*O My people, what have I done to you? How have I wearied you? Answer Me!"*

God is asking, "If I am guilty of depriving you, of what have I deprived you?
How is what I am asking a burden for you? Tell me!"

God then reminds them of the good He has done for Israel:
"Remember when the king of Moab, Balak hired a prophet to put a curse on you?
Remember when I had that prophet, Balaam, actually bless you?
Remember when I brought you into the promised land, into Canaan?
Remember when I made the Covenant with you at Gilgal, to protect you?"

God had blessed Israel! God had been faithful in keeping the Covenant of Blessing!
How could God be accused of depriving them of what is good for them?
How could God's calling them to be faithful to the Covenant be a burden on them?

No! God had blessed them, it is they who have forsaken Him!
God has been faithful to the Covenant, they have been unfaithful!
They have acted out of selfishness,
they have been greedy and have abused their fellow Israelites.

What does God call upon them to do? How can they erase their guilt?
Does God want sacrifices for their sin?

The prophet Micah tells them:

⁴*He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you
but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*

The wealthy, the powerful in the land had taken the "short cut" at the expense of others.
The poor, the weak, the widows, the orphans, unable to defend themselves,
unable to bribe the judges, were like ripe fruit to be plucked and devoured.

To the evil, it **“appeared”** that they were enriching themselves, getting ahead, with no consequences to themselves.
But the **“opposite”** was true!
Ignoring God, abusing their neighbor, they were rotten fruit to be cast down to the ground.

LIVING A LIFE OF INTERDEPENDENCE!

In **“reality”**, God says they would be **“enriched”** ...
as they practiced **“justice”** treating everyone in fairness;
as they loved **“kindness”**, showing compassion to the poor, the weak, the widow, the orphan;
as they lived **“humbly”** before God, and see their relationship with God, not as a **“burden”** keeping them from gaining wealth for themselves, but as the Source of their **“blessings”**.

No of us lives alone, to himself.
Every person lives in the world, and comes into contact and interacts with other people.
No person is independent of every one else, or of God.
Every person is **“Interdependent”** with other people, **“Dependent”** upon God.

*Think of a car. Hundreds of parts have to work together for the car to run efficiently.
What happens when a belt snaps, a connection is broken,
a hose gets a hole or split, or parts wear out?
Yes, parts can be replaced.*

*But what about people? Can people be “discarded” and “replaced”?
You go to the doctor, he examines you, and he says,
“Yes, you need an operation; Yes, you need treatment;
but the expense would be a burden to the insurance company,
to your family, and the recuperation time off from work an inconvenience.
Let’s just terminate you and let a healthy person replace you!”*

People are not inanimate parts in a car, or any other device or machine.
People are created in the image of God, and each person, each soul, your soul, my soul, every soul is precious in the sight of God.
God calls upon us to work together to care for each and every soul in the “Interdependent” human world in which we live.

Jesus, in the beginning of the “Sermon on the Mount”, teaches about **“reality”**, about what **“really”** is **best** for every soul, in contrast to what **“appears”** to be best in the world.

“Blessed are the poor in spirit,... those who mourn,... the meek,... those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,...”

By all **“appearances”**, these people seem to be weak, to need help, to be losers rather than winners.
Yes, but Jesus describes here people who humble themselves before God, knowing they are helpless and hopeless in their sin apart from Him.
They look to God for what only He can provide,
and God, in His Wisdom, His Power, has provided the answer in the cross of Christ,
In Christ they find pardon for their sins, direction from God’s Word, power from God’s Spirit, and confidence in God’s promises.
They live in Peace with God, in Hope for their future, and with Joy in their souls.

*“... theirs is the kingdom of heaven, ...they shall be comforted,
...they shall inherit the earth, ...they shall be satisfied.”*

In **“reality”** these are the healthy souls, the enriched souls, who support others in the **“Interdependent”** world of people around them.

Listen to how Jesus describes them in their healthy, enriched souls:

“Blessed are the merciful,... the pure in heart,... the peacemakers,...”

Are these people in **“reality”** not those who are truly **“healthy”** in their souls, and who in **“reality”** help and support the people around them?
Are these people in **“reality”** not those who **“give to others”**, knowing they are receiving from God what really matters most?
Notice the **“gifts of great value (blessings)”** God gives to them...

“...they shall receive mercy, ...they shall see God, ... they shall be called sons of God.”

Those who look not to the world to enrich them and to serve them, but to God to heal their souls and to empower them to serve Him and others, they are those who in “reality” are “blessed”, as Jesus teaches,
– they are those who have received a valuable Gift from God, a Gift that is theirs now and forever.

**The riches and the power of this world are temporary.
The wealth that God imparts for those who look to Him is theirs now and forever!**

APPLICATION FOR MY LIFE

As the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthian Christians, he wrote about the Wisdom of God and the Power of God.
The people of this world only know what is of this world, only know what they see around them.

They are all so convinced that they are right, that they are wise, because they believe what they see day in and day out.
What do they see? They see **“appearance”**, but are blind to **“reality”**.
They are like the person who sees the sun rise in the east, set in the west, and who concludes that the sun revolves around the earth.

God has revealed His Wisdom in the cross of Christ!

At the cross, all our sins, all our weaknesses, were laid upon Christ.
Christ, God in the flesh, became sin, became weak, and suffered the Father’s judgment against our sin and weakness.
In His Wisdom, God sent His Son into the world, to pay the debt for the sins of the world.
In His Wisdom, God washed away your debt for sin in Baptism, that you may live now and forevermore **“Debt Free”!**
What a Blessing! What a **“Gift of great value”** you have been given from God!

God has revealed His Power in the cross of Christ, and His resurrection!

God’s Power to free mankind from sin and condemnation, came not through an awesome display in nature or on the battlefield.
God’s Power is revealed in the death of His Son to pay our debt.
God’s Power is revealed in the empty tomb, where Jesus’ body was laid.
The Power of God’s Word, joined with water, has washed away your sin, your debt.
The Power of God’s Spirit, gives you a New Life, free from debt, to live as a son of God, displaying the image of God in your words and actions.

To the secular world, Wisdom and Power come with higher education, with wealth, with lofty positions in business or government, when people look up to you.
Like the Israelites of Micah’s day, or the Gentiles of Paul’s day, what **“appears”** to be true is far, far from **“reality”**.

God has revealed His Wisdom, His Power in the cross of Christ!

In “reality” we are to live “Dependent” upon Christ, and “Interdependent” with others!

In this way, as Jesus taught, God blesses His people, and in this way, as God revealed through Micah, God’s people live the blessing.