

The Upside-Down Kingdom

In his recent book, "An Hour Before Daylight," former US President Jimmy Carter reflects on his childhood in rural Georgia, his relationship with his parents, and his infamous brother Billy. He writes, "Mama always said that Billy was the smartest of her children, and none of us argued with her." "When the international news media moved into our town during the 1976 presidential campaign, Billy became the center of attention. He drank more, talked more, and saw his deliberately outrageous statements quoted as serious comments ... He was always good for a delightful quote. When one of the reporters remarked that Billy was a little strange, he replied: 'Look, my Mama was a seventy-year-old Peace Corps volunteer in India, one of my sisters goes all over the world as a holy-roller preacher, my oldest sister spends half her time on a Harley-Davidson motorcycle, and my brother thinks he's going to be President of the United States. Which one of our family do you think is normal?'"

- Disciples of Jesus Christ are supposed to be deviations from the norm. We're supposed to mess up the world as it is, draw outside the lines, and think outside the box. For us, everyone else's 'off the shelf' solutions don't quite fit, and normal isn't quite good enough anymore.
- So, the world sees us as 'abnormal' – and we are! Our wisdom doesn't mesh with the world's wisdom because we are wise in the customs, culture and value system of the world that is to come.

1 Corinthians 1:25-31 (KJV) Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. [26] For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: [27] But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; [28] And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: [29] That no flesh should glory in his presence. [30] But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: [31] That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

1 Corinthians 1:25-31 (GW) God's nonsense is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength. [26] Brothers and sisters, consider what you were when God called you to be Christians. Not many of you were wise from a human point of view. You were not in powerful positions or in the upper social classes. [27] But God chose what the world considers nonsense to put wise people to shame. God chose what the world considers weak to put what is strong to shame. [28] God chose what the world considers ordinary and what it despises—what it considers to be nothing—in order to destroy what it considers to be something. [29] As a result, no one can brag in God's presence. [30] You are partners with Christ Jesus because of God. Jesus has become our wisdom sent from God, our righteousness, our holiness, and our ransom from sin. [31] As Scripture says, "Whoever brags must brag about what the Lord has done."

- Jesus completely redefined what it means to be "normal." Everything He taught goes against how 'normal' people see the world and function in their everyday lives. Turning the other cheek, going the second mile, giving away the spare coat, washing the feet of your inferiors, heaping blessings on those who curse you, living without anger, laying down your life ... Normal people have a hard time understanding, much less living, these principles.
- The truth is that Jesus turned normal wisdom upside-down. The truth is that Christians – real Christians – are called to see the world through Jesus' eyes, not from a normal point of view.
- *Jesus once compared himself to a hen and King Herod to a fox. Think about it! Jesus was like the brooding hen, whose chief purpose in life is to protect her young, with just a tiny beak and no talons. About all she can do is fluff herself up and sit on her chicks. She can also put herself between them and the fox, ill equipped as she is. About the best she can hope for is that she satisfies his appetite so that he leaves her babies alone. Meanwhile, King Herod is like the cruel, cunning, crafty fox. Jesus has disciples, but Herod has soldiers. Jesus serves, but Herod rules. Jesus prays for his enemies, but Herod kills his. In a contest between a fox and a chicken, whom would you bet on? And how do you like that image of God?*
- In God's kingdom, the way up is down, the way in is out, the way to be first is to be last, the way to be great is to become the least, the way to be a success is to be a servant, the way to attain is to relinquish, the way to be strong is to become weak, the way to be secure is to become vulnerable, the way to life is through death, and the way to freedom is through total obedience to God's commands. It sounds crazy, but it works!
- *On the way home from church, an eight-year-old boy was sharing with his parents what he had learned in Sunday school. "Boy, was it exciting!" he explained. "Moses organized all the Hebrews into a resistance group. They planned real carefully, and finally broke loose from their Egyptian slave masters. They moved as fast as they could toward Canaan. They drove every kind of SUV they could get their hands on: Expeditions, Navigators, Jeeps, and Hummers." But Pharaoh's army wouldn't give up. They tracked down the Israelites with radar. They exploded missiles all around them and shot at them from jet planes in the sky. When Moses and his people reached the Red Sea, they thought they were finished. There was raging water in front of them and Egyptians behind them. Suddenly, the Corps of Engineers came to the rescue and built a pontoon bridge over the Red Sea and all the fugitives crossed over to freedom. Then, just as Pharaoh's forces were about to go across the bridge, the Hebrews blew it up with dynamite and saved all the people. Then they lived happily ever after in the Promised Land." The little boy's parents were more than just a little concerned about their child's overactive imagination. "Is that really what they told you at church this morning?" they inquired. "Well, not exactly," their son replied. "But if I told you what really happened, you'd think I was nuts!"*

- Here's one better than that: Picture the very Son of God, sent to earth, born of a prince and princess under the dazzling white dome of a beautiful palace. He is wrapped in the cleanest of linen, attended by the greatest physicians in the land, and presented to the world in a royal blue, gold embroidered baby bathrobe at a star-studded ceremony that becomes the media event of the century. Musicians from around the world write songs to commemorate his birth, and they hit the top of the airplay charts overnight because everyone loves him so much. Every politician and king on the planet take time out of running their countries to make a pilgrimage to the place where this wonderful ruler is born, so they can pledge allegiance to him. "Glory to God in the Highest" quickly becomes the new greeting of choice in all languages around the world. What? You don't remember it that way? But if I told you how it really happened, you'd think I was nuts!
- When Emmanuel (God with us) came to earth, He literally turned things upside down. God in a manger – that's not normal! And because the world is so 'normal' they rejected Him outright.

John 1:10-12 (KJV) He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. [11] He came unto his own, and his own received him not. [12] But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:

- The more you live life on God's terms, the more the world will look on you as abnormal. The more you read the Bible, the more the Bible reads you. The more status Jesus has in your life, the more you'll upset the status quo. The more Jesus becomes your Prince of Peace, the more you'll disturb the peace.

THE WORLD: God helps those who help themselves.

THE BIBLE: When we were powerless, Christ died for the ungodly.

THE WORLD: We look on the outward appearance.

THE BIBLE: But the Lord looks on the heart.

THE WORLD: Seeing is believing.

THE BIBLE: Unless you believe you shall not understand.

THE WORLD: Don't let them see you sweat.

THE BIBLE: When I'm weak, I am strong in the Lord.

THE WORLD: He who dies with the most toys wins.

THE BIBLE: We look for a city whose builder and maker is God.

THE WORLD: Power lunches, power salesmen, power principles.

THE BIBLE: We preach Christ and him crucified.

- The concept of a crucified God was deemed so offensive, so crazy that Christians were accused of madness for even suggesting the idea. That's why it was 500 years before any images depicting Jesus on the cross began to appear. God on a cross – that's not normal! But it was at Golgotha where the greatest defacement of beauty, the greatest graffiti scribbled on God's goodness, became the Mount Everest of beauty.
- The number one problem God has with the church today is that it often becomes numbingly 'normal' – when it is supposed to be abnormal. The world is not supposed to understand our lifestyle, our dedication, our enthusiasm, or our worship. When they do, something has gone terribly wrong and we have failed them!

Ezekiel 22:26 Her priests have violated my law, and have profaned mine holy things: **they have put no difference between the holy and profane**, neither have they shewed difference between the unclean and the clean, and have hid their eyes from my sabbaths, and I am profaned among them.

Ezekiel 44:23 And they shall **teach my people the difference between the holy and profane**, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean.

Profane (Hebrew "chalal") – "to make ordinary or common, to normalize, to wound"

- The greatest indictment against the modern day Apostolic church is that there is often little difference between the "holy" and the "normal" (profane). When we can figure every service out in our natural mind, we automatically figure God completely out of the equation!
- Kid at Vacation Bible School: "Can we sing that song again? Hallelu, hallelu, hallelu, hallelujah, Crazy the Lord!"
- Call me crazy, but I'm still crazy enough to believe that ...
Jesus loves me, this I know
The B-I-B-L-E, yes that's the book for me
What can wash away my sin, nothing but the blood of Jesus
Jesus is the sweetest name I know
Oh I want to see Him, look upon His face
Because He lives, I can face tomorrow
Amazing grace, how sweet the sound, that saved a wretch like me