

ATHREE COINS IN THE FOUNTAIN®

Dr. John Allan Lavender

Mark 8:36

One of Jesus' most effective ways of dealing with people was through the use of stories. He called them parables. Whenever He wanted to set people thinking, He would tell them a story and through it He would always bring out a challenging message.

The interesting thing to me is that He always drew these parables from real life. Instead of using a heavenly story to illustrate an earthly truth, He reversed the process and used an earthly story to illustrate a heavenly truth. He spoke in the language of the people of His time. And His illustrations were built around the day by day experiences of those whom He was trying to reach.

Now, all of this is by way of apology or, better yet, explanation for the source of my title this morning: AThree Coins in the Fountain®. It is my frank and undisguised purpose to use the first few lines of this popular song to illustrate the important options which confront us as we approach the new year.

To me, this is a kind of present-day parable. A parable in poetry. An illustration of the fact that life demands decision. That the world is faced in 1955 with three alternatives, each one in its own way promising happiness. And, as the fountain of humanity, the world must choose which course it will follow. Which alternative it will take.

AThree coins in the fountain
Each one wishing happiness
Just one wish will be granted
Which one will the fountain bless?®

What are the alternative routes to happiness for our world in 1964? Well, as our parable in poetry puts it, there are three coins in the fountain of life and, from these, the world must choose one as truth and cast off the others as counterfeit.

The choice will not be easy. For even when it is a clear-cut decision between good and evil, the counterfeit coins are well shined, and the glitter of their appeal is not to be underestimated. One of them has already claimed the allegiance of a quarter of the earth.

Communism

Of course, most if not all of us here this morning would find little if any appeal in this first coin of the fountain - the coin of communism. In fact, we find it rather hard to believe that anyone would cast their lot with this godless philosophy. But we make a grave mistake when we underestimate the power of its appeal to a great cross-section of the world.

Jesus himself told His disciples that a wise general never goes out to battle until he has an accurate idea of the number and kind of his opposition's forces. And we are very foolish if we fail to intelligently understand the strong appeal that communism makes to many people. Its first appeal is B

Psychological

Man is a creature of both despair and hope. Look at the peasants in Manchuria and China - victimized and robbed for generations! Look at the miners in Peru and Guatemala - toiling in the bowels of the earth for a few pennies a day. Look at the people of Asia, Africa or South America. What future have they? As long as they live, they will be half-starved and naked. Indeed, they are creatures of despair. But they are *also* creatures of hope. For in them, despite their conditions, there is a yearning for some beauty; a hungering for some ecstasy; a persistent dream of a better time that is to come. Therein is the appeal of communism. It comes with a smooth voice, sleek philosophy and glib promises and says, I am the way...follow me!® Its second appeal lies in its B

Promises

What are these? First of all a classless society. We live in America where class means little or nothing at all. The average workman not only feels equal to his boss, but a heap sight better!

But there are many places in the world where class distinctions are stark and real. Go to Europe or Asia or South America for instance and there you will see society split in two with one half riding roughshod over the other. Communism thus has a tremendous appeal in these areas with its doctrine of a classless society: AAll for each and each for all.@

Now it doesn't keep this promise. In Russia today, there are more classes than there are in America. But it makes the promise again and again, and sooner or later, people begin to believe it. Communism is a liar! An unblushing, blatant, flamboyant liar. But mark this point. It is persistent in its lying and, as a result, it succeeds in making converts.

Another promise it makes is that of unlimited prosperity. To the disinherited people of the earth, communism says:

AYou are poor and underpaid. You are living a dog's life. All you get is an occasional bone from the table of your master. But look at the money in the bank. The fish in the sea. The clothes in the stores. The gold and silver in the earth. The fertile and fat fields. We will socialize them all so your home will be warm, your purse lined, your body clothed, your family fed and your old age secure. The government will be your father and your mother...and Santa Claus to boot.@

And this appeal of unlimited prosperity is a welcome message to many people. Its third appeal is in its B

Genuine Achievements

Now, compared with the achievements of American democracy, these look as meager as a pauper's meal. In fact, it is a great embarrassment to Russia today to have to turn to the American free enterprise system for wheat with which to feed its starving people.

But, compared with the conditions that existed under the Czars, the achievements of communism

are tremendous. Now I know, and you know, these advances have come at a great and grim price in human freedom and dignity. But we are fools if we do not face the incontestable fact that communism has produced some genuine achievements. The fourth appeal of communism lies in its --

Demands

With real insight into human nature, communism sees that discipleship for a great cause is never secured by making small demands. So what it asks of its followers is drastic. It does not seek to console, amuse or flatter its members as the Christian church often does. Without apology, communism says to its would-be followers: AGive me everything. I want your time, your money, your will, your brains - even your soul!@

It says: AGo everywhere, pioneer, adventure, exploit, convert the world. Be prepared to endure loneliness, persecution and pain. Take up your cross and follow me.@ It is a staggering demand which communism makes of its converts. But part of its appeal lies in the absolute and unconditional surrender which it requires of its devotees.

So there you have it. The appeal of communism. This first coin in the fountain of life. And is it not plain to you that this is nothing less than a religious faith for those who follow it?

Oh, if we limit our definition to mean only the worship of some deity, then communism does not qualify because it denies the existence of God. But, if by religion we mean that cause to which an individual gives his heart and soul and life, that belief or set of beliefs which motivate his thoughts and actions, then communism is a religion. A Godless, atheistic religion.

What are the attributes of the Christian religion for instance? Well, they are a God, a Messiah, a shrine, a Holy Book, a gospel, a social objective, a proselytizing passion and a world mission. In the light of these, look at communism.

A God - it has Karl Marx.

A Messiah - it has Kruschev.
A Shrine - it has the tomb of Lenin.
A Holy Book - it has Das Kapital.
A Gospel - it preaches the dictatorship of the proletariat.
A Social Objective - it announces the classless society.
A Proselyting Passion - its zealots rush across the nation.
A World Mission - it is unrestrained by national, racial or
hemispheric boundaries. Its cry is: AWe go into all the world.@"

This is the first coin that our world must examine. To be sure, it has little appeal for us here in Chicago. But, none the less, it is the second greatest enemy to the soul of our world today.

Materialism

The greatest enemy to our national and international welfare is the second coin in the fountain of life. It is much more devastating in its appeal than communism. Because it does not say: AThere is no God.@" It does not cry: Areligion is the opiate of the people.@" Rather, it says with a flurry of self-righteousness: ACertainly there is a God! Everybody knows that!@" And then it adds in a whisper, ASo what?@" as it proceeds through life as if the God it says exists does not exist at all!

This second coin is the one that many respectable people in Chicago will strive to claim in 1955. There are many who will give their whole lives for it. It is called: Materialism.

This, too, is a religion of sorts. Along with communism it has all of the components of a religious faith.

Its God - is the almighty dollar.
Its Messiah - is the self-made man.
Its Shrine - is an altar constructed of TV sets, electric
stoves, mink coats and Cadillac cars.
Its Holy Book - is the credit rating of Dunn and Bradstreet.
Its Gospel - is the law of supply and demand.

It=s Social Objective - is to keep up with the Jones=.

Its Proselyting Passion - is to get as much as you can and to keep what you get.

This is the new Paganism. The new idolatry. For it does the same things the Christian world does - only for different reasons. It has retained the outward form of things, but emptied them of their content and meaning.

For instance, the Christian world recommends fasting. The modern world fasts too, only they call it dieting. It is not their purpose to make the soul beautiful, but to make the body beautiful. The Christian world recommends examination of one=s conscience, and the modern world does the same - only they call it psychoanalysis. The purpose is not to find peace of soul, but to find a kind of peace of mind by sublimating all sense of guilt.

Another illustration of this tendency is furnished by our movie world. Hollywood is fascinated by the cross of Christ. Just as the Christians are, but not for the same reason. To Christians, the cross is the prelude to an empty tomb. To the Hollywood producer, it is a prelude to a full purse and bulging pocketbook. The cross is good business, as witnessed by the fact that the major money-makers among recent movies have all been movies based on religious themes.

Materialism, you see, is the almost perfect counterfeit to genuine Christianity. But a counterfeit it is! It tries to have Christianity without Christ, Godliness without God, and peace without repentance of sin. And because it seems so innocent, it is so deadly. We can see the glaring weaknesses and the Godless religion of communism. But when we see a fellow neighbor who is respectable and claims to believe in some sort of AHigher Power@...when we see that sort of a Ajolly good fellow@ drive off in his Lincoln Continental...dressed in his \$200 suit...passing up church for a day at the club...it cannot help but make the average fellow wonder if maybe there isn=t something to this business about Aeating, drinking and being merry, for tomorrow you may die.@"

And yet, our very preoccupation with material things is the greatest enemy to America today. I say this with all of the earnestness I can muster. If America falls, it will not be because of political pressure or military attack from without. It will be because of moral decay within. It will be due to the fact we have given our whole attention to material things. While we have fed, clothed and pampered our bodies, we have ignored our souls.

Now I am not suggesting, even for a moment, that we turn back the clock and replace our tractors with hand plows and our power looms with spinning Jennies. But what I *am* suggesting is that our moral and spiritual lag be redeemed. Increasing material powers are not safe unless there are proportionate gains in improving the spiritual side of man.

A drunken man on foot is dangerous; but behind the wheel of a car, the danger is multiplied a thousand times.

An angry man can work damage through his fists; but the danger becomes a calamity if the two fists hold a bomb.

Enlarged powers spell enlarged peril IF, and that's a mighty big if, the soul does not also grow. Our world can endure for a time without new inventions, but it is doubtful if it can endure for long without a new awakening of the spirit.

What, then, is the answer? Well, there are three coins in the fountain, and the final one of these is the only one that not only promises but produces happiness. It is the coin of

Christian Faith.

While communism places its emphasis upon the rights and powers of the state, Christianity places its emphasis upon the value of the individual. While communism says that people are only a body and that we should take care of *it*, Christianity says people have an immortal soul and we must take care of *it*.

While secular materialism places its emphasis upon the acquisition of material things, Christianity answers:

AWhat shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his soul.@

Materialism measures people by what they have; Christianity measures them by what they are. It makes it clear that we must keep Athings@ at a distance. That we may be *in* the material world but not *of* it. We place living ahead of his life. His life becomes lost in his livelihood and he is absorbed or conquered by the things he owns.

Yes, there are three coins in the fountain of life.

Communism, which says: AWhat=s yours is mine, I=I take it.@

Materialism, which says: AWhat=s mine is mine, I=I keep it.@

And Christianity, which says: AWhat=s mine is yours, I=I share it.@

The communists are right when they say this world needs a revolution, but not their cheap kind which merely transfers booty and loot from one man=s pocket into another. The trouble with the communism revolution is that it isn=t revolutionary enough. It still leaves hate in the heart of men.

What our world needs in 1955 is a revolution Christian style. A revolution which will purge out of human hearts the pride and covetousness, the lust and anger which are the roots of all our problems.

Which lays the issue squarely at your door. For the revolution this world=s needs must begin in the individual before it can spread to society. We cannot have a better world until we have better people in it. Which means the choice is yours. In the last analysis, you are the world. You are the fountain. And you must decide which course you will follow. Which coin *will* you bless?

AThree coins in the fountain
Each one wishing happiness
Just one wish will be granted
Which one will the fountain bless?@

Make it mine! Make it mine! Make it mine!