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CRAZY LOVE - - - Part 1

WHAT IS WRONG WITH US?

What is wrong with us? Why are we such lukewarm, halfhearted Christians? Why aren't we on fire for the Lord, burning with zeal, thrilled with life?

What is wrong with us is that we have a mistaken view of God. We think of God as a kind Being who is satisfied when people manage to fit Him into their lives in some small way. But Jesus never begs us to give Him some small part of ourselves. He commands everything from His followers. Frankly, if your life was not changed drastically when you became a Christian, then there is a real question about your salvation. Were you baptized when you became a Christian? Baptism symbolizes death - Christ's death on the cross and our death to our old life, the life we lived B.C. Paul wrote to the Christians in a church (2 Cor. 13:5) and said, *Examine yourselves as to whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves.....* It's surely time that we examined ourselves - - now, before it's too late.

(I am borrowing extensively from Francis Chan's book, *Crazy Love*, for this article. Francis is the founding pastor of a megachurch, Cornerstone Church in Simi Valley, California, also the founder of a university, and earlier this year he left to be a missionary in Hong Kong. He now lives and works in Sham Shui Po, the poorest area in Hong Kong and the neighborhood where his mother used to do work and ministry in the 1950's. I just read His book again and it shook me up as badly this time as it did the first time.

For many years after I first became a Christian at age 30, and then again after the Lord rescued me from backsliding away from Him, I had such a zeal for God that I would lie awake for hours every night thinking about God and praying for people and feeling my heart burn. I'm still serving the Lord, reading the Bible, obeying anything He tells me to do, but I no longer have that burning heart. God is not happy about it and I am not happy about it. God yearns for us to burn with passion toward Him, because that is how He feels toward us.

Did you see *The Passion of the Christ*? That movie illustrated the passion, the crazy love, that God feels toward you. God is not after servants, He is after sons and daughters who will: *Love the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind and strength*. Jesus said that was the Great Suggestion. No, wait, He said it was the Great Commandment. I have repented and asked God to restore my first love.

Francis Chan's words are not comfortable for us to hear. But he is just quoting the words of Jesus. Jesus' teachings, encouragements, warnings, rebukes, should pierce our hearts like a sword and bring us to tears.

They should shake us and awaken us from our lethargy. Following are insights or my paraphrase from Francis' book, with some of my input added in:)

GOD IS GREATER THAN WE KNOW

Our intellects simply cannot figure God out. We only know Him because He has chosen to reveal Himself to us through the history of the Jews, through the Bible that records that history, and through Jesus Christ who is the subject of that complex history. Consider again what the Bible reveals about God:

God is eternal

When Moses asked God for His name, God responded, *I AM is my name*. (*Yahweh* is "I Am" in Hebrew.) The eternally existent Being. He is, He was, and He is to come. He is the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end.

Later, Jesus claimed that He was Yahweh. He said, *I am the Good Shepherd, I am the door to the sheepfold, I am the manna that came down from heaven*, etc.

When Jesus said, *I Am (Yahweh)*, he was claiming to be God. This is why the religious Jews were incensed and immediately tried to stone Him to death, He was saying that He was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and Moses and David and all their heroes.

Think about God being eternal. Each of us had a beginning: everything in existence began on a particular day, at a specific time. Everything but God. He always has been, since before there was an earth, a universe, or even angels. God exists outside of time, and since we are within time, there is no way we will ever totally grasp that concept.

Please stop here and glorify the eternal God:

But you, O Lord, sit enthroned forever; your renown endures through all generations.....But you remain the same, and your years will never end. (Ps. 102)

God is all-knowing, He is omniscient

Each of us, to some degree, fools our friends and family about who we really are. But that's impossible with God. He knows each of us better than we know ourselves. He knows our thoughts. He understands our actions and why we really do the things we do. He knows when we lie down and when we arise. We cannot escape him. (If He did not love us, this would be an intolerable thought.) When I grow weary of trying to be faithful to Him and want a break, it doesn't come as a surprise to God.

Hebrews 4:13 says, *Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of Him to whom we give account*. The eternal, omniscient God, is watching you and me, not with a frown but with a smile on His face, and He has an individually designed plan for each of us to bring Him glory and to bring us good. Wow!

God is all-powerful, He is omnipotent

Colossians 1:16 tells us that everything was created for God. *For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible,all things were created by him and for him.*

Don't we live instead as though God is created for us, to do our bidding, to bless us, to take care of our loved ones?

Psalm 115:3 reveals, *Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him.* Yet we keep on questioning Him: "Why did You make me with this body instead of that one?" "Why are so many people dying of starvation?" "Why is my family so messed up?" "Why don't you make yourself more obvious to people who need you?"

The answer to each of these questions is simply this: because He's God. He has more of a right to ask us why so many people are starving. As much as we want God to explain himself to us, His creation, we are in no place to demand that He give an account to us.

Did you notice that Jesus never defended himself, never explained himself when people misunderstood his teachings or his actions? God has no obligation to explain himself to you and me.

Job, in the Old Testament, was a godly man, yet he went through horrible suffering: he lost his wealth, his good reputation, his children all died in a tornado, and he was covered with boils and in physical pain. The Bible records that he cried out to God and complained again and again that God was cruel and unfair. Finally, God appeared to Job, but God did not explain anything to him. God said to him, to paraphrase, "Who do you think you are to question me and my ways? Were you around when I created the galaxies and the ocean and the mountains?" When Job's eyes were opened to the majesty of God, he repented and lifted his heart in adoration to the mighty God. At that point, God healed Job and restored to him more than he had lost. But all of that seems to have become irrelevant to Job. The supreme gift that Job treasured above everything was the revelation and relationship with the supreme God of the universe.

All the people of the earth are regarded as nothing. He does as he pleases with the people of heaven and the people of the earth. No one can hold back his hand or say to him: "What have you done?" (Dan. 4:35)

If you and I have a problem with this, then we probably have a humanistic, man-centered theology that is at odds with the revelation of the Holy Bible.

God is loving, fair and just

God is the only Being who is good, and the standards are set by Him. Because God hates sin, He has to punish those guilty of unrepented sin. Maybe you don't think that is fair. But to put it bluntly, when you get your own universe, you can make your own standards. When we disagree, let's not assume that He needs correction or that He has to explain himself to us.

It is really hard for us to comprehend God's hatred for sin. We make excuses like, "Yes, I am prideful at times, and I try to control people at times, and I have a carnal weakness that I can't seem to control, but nobody is

perfect and God understands." We are rationalizing that our sin is OK with God. But God says in Proverbs 8:13, *I hate pride and arrogance.* And He says, *The soul that sins shall die,* and *The wages of sin is death.* You and I are not allowed to tell Him that He should not hate it. He can hate it and punish it as severely as His justice demands.

God never excuses sin. Well, what exactly is the sin that God is talking about? For crying out loud, read the New Testament! Read Jesus's words in the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapter 5 through 7. Read Galatians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Peter, 1 John, Revelation.

Read what Paul says to the church in 1 Corinthians 5: *Don't even associate with anyone who calls himself a brother (a Christian) but is sexually immoral (how many people sitting in church are addicted to pornography or some other sexual sin?) or greedy (a lover of money more than God), an idolater (putting other things ahead of God), or a slanderer (one who talks about other people behind their backs), a drunkard (this surely implies those also who are addicted to street drugs or prescription drugs), or a swindler (the businessman or politician or mechanic or teacher or doctor who cheats his clients or cheats the government). With such a man don't even eat.*

As a former pastor, that little teaching kind of leaves me feeling hopeless. I don't know of any church that lives up to that standard. In fact, it sounds harsh and legalistic and makes me want to run from church and from God. But can we look at it from the perspective of a loving God who yearns for us to cleanse our lives and our churches of sin.....because sin despoils and crushes our lives and pulls us away from the God who loves us?

God never excuses sin. And He is always consistent with that ethic. Whenever we start to question whether God really hates sin, we have only to think of the cross, where His Son was tortured, mocked, and murdered because of sin. Our sin. And whenever we start to question whether God really loves us, we look at that same cross and realize He loves us so much that He took our sin upon Himself and paid the penalty of our sin, so that by faith we can surrender to His will and receive the gift of His righteousness.

INTERLUDE

(This is heavy stuff. Let's take a little break, have a cup of coffee or an iced tea or walk outside and relax.)

Earth's history in a nutshell

Francis Chan writes: Suppose you are an extra in an upcoming movie. You are part of a scene where hundreds of people are milling around. When you view the scene you see the back of your head for less than a second. So on opening night you rent out the theatre and invite all your friends and family to come and see the new movie about you. After the movie, people will say, "You're an idiot! How could you think the movie is about you?"

But many people, even many Christians, are even more delusional. Consider the movie of life....

God creates the world. Were you alive then? Did you help set the sun in the sky, a huge nuclear furnace that contains more than 99.6% of all the matter in the solar system (the planets, moons, etc.)?

God created human beings in his image, but the humans rebelled against God (who, if you haven't figured it out yet, is the main character in this movie.) So God floods the earth to cleanse it and make a fresh start.

God picks out a 90 year old man to be the father of a nation, then along come Moses, Joseph, David, judges and prophets. The movie is also not about them, it is about God who created them, picks them, directs them and works miracles through them.

Then, the climax: The Son of God is born among the people whom God still somehow loves. The Son teaches His followers what true love looks like, then He dies, is resurrected and goes back up to be with God.

The last scene is the Throne Room. We can read about it in Revelation 4 and Isaiah 6. Isaiah and John can't really describe the glory of God on His throne. John describes flashes of lightning and rumblings and peals of thunder coming from the throne, and before it are seven blazing torches and a sea of glass that looks like crystal. There are also four six-winged beings with eyes all over their bodies and wings who proclaim, *Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come!* Here before the throne every being worships God who sits on the throne, for He alone is worthy to be praised.

From start to finish, this movie is obviously about God. He is the main character. How is it possible that we live as though it is about us? Frankly, you need to get over yourself. That might sound harsh, but it is the truth.

Fifty years or so from now

In fifty years or so from now (give or take a couple of decades), no one on earth will even remember you. Everyone you know will be dead. Certainly no one will care what job you had, what car you drove, what school you attended, or what clothes you wore.

To be honest, it doesn't matter what place you find yourself in right now. Life may be pretty good for you or life may be very tough and everything feels like a struggle. **Your role in this movie is to love God and glorify Him and allow your brief life to point to Him. This is His movie, His world, His life, His gift.**

Dear friends, if God doesn't have first place in your heart, ask Him to forgive you. Ask Him to give you a burning heart of love for Him. I exhort you, reason with you, plead with you, beg you. Now, before another day passes.

MISSION TO JUCHITAN

(It has been several years since I have made a mission trip, and I miss them terribly. They were really difficult and stressful and the most fun I ever had in my life. In looking through my ancient files, I came across my report of a trip to Southern Mexico. This trip was made in the fall of 1996, 24 years ago, and I am only sharing a part of the report:)

After our seminar in Tuxtpec (Toos-te-pec), we left at 5:00 AM on Thursday to drive to Juchitan (Hooch-e-tahn) which is way down next to Guatemala. We arrived at a large preaching center at 11:15 AM where the service had already started. Ford Wilson preached for an hour, Pepe Quiroz for an hour, and I for an hour. This was followed by personal ministry until it was time for supper and the evening service.

When it was my turn to preach at 8:00 PM, the auditorium was already pretty full; but as I spoke truck loads of Mexican and Indian people (this area is heavily Zapotec Indian) started arriving and crowding in. So many Indians came that we started translating first into Spanish and then into Zapotec. A fascinating experience! (I learned a Zapotec greeting: "Diuxi cundaya li" - "God bless you." It pleased the Zapotecs much when they were greeted that way. So I am on the way to mastering my 3rd language.)

By the end of the service about 450 people were crammed inside, and the invitation was directed toward having the people repent and renounce the evil strongholds in that area: involvement with shamans (witch doctors), dedicating their children to idols (fostered by the corrupt and idolatrous popular religion), and much sexual abuse of children. The Holy Spirit fell once again, but in a different way. The people stood and started crying out to God for mercy and deliverance, weeping and wailing - - and it went on and on with a spontaneous brokenness and appeal to God for mercy and healing. The resulting thunderous sound reminded me of the Scripture that says the sound of the multitude before the throne of God "was like the sound of many waters." It was awesome. Only God could have initiated such a thing.

CUISINE REPORT

I have reported previously about eating crocodile (tastes like chicken), squid (tastes like rubber), cactus (tastes like green beans), and chicken's feet (tastes like crocodile). Here's another report to arouse your envy: On a Sunday morning I was scheduled to have a morning of rest, but a pastor asked me to go to his small mission at Tijuantepec which was about an hour away near the Pacific Ocean. There were ten people in the congregation, and after the message we ministered personally to each one. In appreciation, one of the men gave me a sack of eggs, still hot from being soft-boiled. I mentioned that they were small and was told that they were huevos tortugas, or sea-turtle eggs. We took them home and ate them. With guidance from my Mexican hosts, I broke 3 into a cup, squeezed in a half-lime, a generous dash of Tabasco sauce, and had it with toast.

Muy rico! But I felt bad to learn later that sea-turtles are on the endangered species list and harvesting their eggs is against Mexican and U.S. law. Let's not say anything about this.

WILDLIFE AND INSECT REPORT

Southern Mexico is tropical and beautiful but inclined toward many species of poisonous snakes, many types of lizards (some poisonous and many harmless varieties crawling on the inside and outside walls of every church, house, etc.). In one home where we stayed, I looked up while taking a shower and saw a large, muscular spider on the ceiling almost above me. The window to the flower garden was open. I didn't know if it was poisonous, but I knew if it jumped on me I would hurt myself badly. By the time I got out, dressed and back with a broom it was gone, leaving me feeling very insecure about using that bathroom.

In Tuxtepec we stayed in a hotel, old but clean. In the mornings I would drink my coffee on a veranda overlooking a broad river, watch the rain pelt in sheets into the chocolate colored water, and watch flocks of white cranes fly upriver. The only negative was that Ford was attacked by bed bugs in his room and his ankles were covered with inflamed welts, dangerous if they get infected. They apologized and sprayed his room. There is also some type of mosquito down there that leaves their little black stinger in your skin which you have to dig out so the bite won't fester.

Thus ends the wildlife and insect report.

MORE MINISTRY

Israel Quiroz was my translator at our last church meeting, which was in a very poor village with dirt streets (mud because of the rain) where there is much crime and violence. I was surprised to find a large sanctuary with an extremely high roof and a dirt floor. The roof was made of tin, which is the norm, but it creates a sound problem when it rains. The roof/ceiling was some 40 to 50 feet high which helps with the tropical heat. (I told them it was so high that clouds could form inside.) The seats were wooden benches and plastic chairs.

The congregation of over 400, mostly Zapotec, were beautiful and spotless. The men wore silk shirts and sat on one side, while the women in their beautiful multi-colored woven blouses and vests and jet black hair sat on the other side.

Just as I started preaching and got to a serious part, I looked out the back of the church, where the double doors were open to the street, and a herd of cows went past the opening. It tickled me and I looked down to keep my composure. When I looked up again an ox-cart was going past pulled by two Brahmin bulls with big humps. I tried not to laugh, but then I looked up and three little pigs ran past the door! (I am not making this up.) I gritted my teeth and looked down and tried not to lose control. I'm sure the people thought I was pausing to pray, and I was!

At the end of this service, we prayed for 80 to 90 people. We just laid hands on them, anointed them with oil and asked God to set them free. Almost all seemed to be touched and healed of a great variety of emotional and physical sicknesses. At least many of them reported that pain and symptoms left them.

All of this is a great mystery to me. At times I start doubting that these "healings" are actually happening, but as we return to the Bible school and certain churches, such as Steve Wilson's church, year after year, we have learned in some cases that God had indeed touched, healed, broken curses and set people free, sometimes with dramatic and far-reaching consequences. At times people have even reported that the consequences of our breaking witchcraft curses and generational curses have even reached to other members of their family in distant cities.

This is incomprehensible to me, but of course it is God doing it. He loves people, and if we give Jesus our five loaves and two fish He can multiply it and feed a multitude. He gets all the credit and all the glory while we get the blessing and fun of watching Him do His stuff. Hallelujah!

I would like to thank each of you for your support of this ministry. If any of you want to receive tax credit for your financial contributions, you may send them to:

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