

Smoky Mountain Reflections, June 2011

Wouldn't it be great to know the future? ...or would it? Well according to Family Radio Worldwide, you will not read this because the world is going to end May 21st. (I wrote this on the 12th of May.) Martin Luther said something with regard to this: "Even if I knew that tomorrow the world would go to pieces, I would still plant my apple tree." Luther understood what it is to trust in God for all things. The desire to know the future is wrapped up in self-centered desires. I would like to submit that a truly satisfied person enjoys reminiscing of the blessings of the past, which can be known. I also submit that a truly satisfied person lives in and enjoys the present for all its blessings. Finally, I submit that a truly satisfied person looks forward with joy to the prospect of blessings to come. The past, present, and future also contain pain and suffering to be sure, but peace and satisfaction that surpasses human understanding is available to all. This does not mean that we as Christians do not participate in the pain and suffering of this world. Quite to the contrary, we simply realize that all in this veil of tears is fleeting and temporary. Eternal and present peace and satisfaction are part of what it means to be a redeemed child of God.

Because of this, we do not live in an *either/or* world but a *both/and* world. What do I mean by this? We as Christians do not live in a world that is either all flowers and roses or all pain and suffering, but a God-pleasing combination of both blessing and suffering. This is a paradox of the Christian existence as both a saint and a sinner that we can enjoy all that this life and the next has to offer while still acknowledging that in this life, we will suffer pain and loss knowing it is temporary. We could also argue that much of our pain and suffering makes the pleasures of life that much more pleasurable because we have a backdrop of pain or suffering to contrast it with. Our lives are full of these "paradoxical appositions" (things that are strangely different and apposed to each other that complement each other). Here are some examples: I have experienced extreme hunger in my life due to intentional fasting or when recovering from surgery, and some of the best-tasting meals I ever ate were simply a broth and liquid meal or just a simple slice of bread or a small sandwich, because my extreme hunger heightened the pleasure of eating. Many times in my life, I have suffered long periods of time away from my loved ones—many times for days and weeks, but over half a year on five occasions. My longing for my wife and children increased the value I placed on these relationships and made for very joyous reunions. The phrase rings very true that "absence makes the heart grow fonder" for any lonely sailor out to sea. God blesses us with a sense of smell that evokes strong emotions—foul odors can make us nauseous while fragrant flowers can brighten our day. There is a strange connection between the sense of smell and memories. I do not like the smell of diesel exhaust but this foul odor always evokes the memory of travel and exploration for me as I have been on many a tour bus in many a country, and these were very pleasurable experiences.

Worrying about or fretting over the future is something that God's word clearly teaches us we should not do. So remember and enjoy the blessings of your past, derive great pleasure from drinking in the miraculous wonders of the present, and gladly anticipate the blessings of the future. Because as a child of God, he has certainly given you your daily bread, will continue to give you your daily bread, and has purchased for you eternal peace with Him with the bread of His body on the cross.

In Christ
Pastor Portier