Tuesday's Touch

...from Pastor Ed ...March 17, 2009

The Train

These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came, they might have had opportunity to have returned. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he has prepared for them a city. ... Hebrew 11:3-6

I love railroads. I'm not sure why, other than the fond memories of my dad's American Flyer around the Christmas tree as a kid in the 50's. The technical or historical facts and figures about trains are not of particular interest to me. It's more of a nostalgic/aesthetic pleasure. Although railroads were created to move passengers and freight from one place to another, my only interest in them lies in the discrete elements of tracks, trestles, locomotives, and railroad cars, themselves. I find an interesting parallel to this as I observe various churches and individuals.

The "Gospel Railroad" was designed by the Great King to transport people from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City (my apologies to John Bunyan.) As it traverses geography and time it passes through many depots taking on passengers. At times only a few board. At other times, multitudes seem to press into the passenger cars. And, occasionally, no one leaves town. But, with no uncertainty, the train is ever moving forward with one purpose and focus- to bring those on board to the final destination where all shall see the beauty and glory of the King.

Beneath the train are the tracks of truth which guide it safely through the wilderness toward the Celestial City. Jump the tracks, and disaster ensues. A mighty locomotive, the Holy Spirit, powerfully moves the train along these tracks of truth toward the glorious city. Without this engine, no matter how much activity is going on inside the train, it goes nowhere.

Now, I have observed that a peculiar thing happens among the passengers. For some the paramount focus and interest seems to be, not the glorious destination, but rather, the various elements of the railroad itself. Like me, they are enamoured with tracks, engines and cars, more than where the train is actually going.

One group spends most of its time admiring the tracks of truth. They know every detail of every rail, tie, and spike. I have even known some to disembark the train to camp out beside the tracks, lecturing to anyone who will listen regarding the fine workmanship displayed in them, or debating whether the left rail is better than the right.

Others are infatuated with the engine. All they care to talk about is the power and thrill they receive as that mighty locomotive puffs and blusters and rattles across great mountain passes. And they find themselves quite bored when they must traverse long stretches of straight track over flat terrain, longing for the excitement of more overt demonstrations of power.

Still others love to enhance the environs of their Pullman cars. No labor or expense is spared in the decorating or in the modernizing. Some strive to make sure that the entertainment in their coach is second to none, so that even those who have no real interest in the King are happy to get on board.

But there is another group, usually in the minority, who are seated in the observation deck with gaze fixed upon the glory just beyond the horizon. They seem to be genuinely and humbly thankful to the King for the tracks, the locomotive and the cars that bear them ever closer to Him. Their activities are consistently focused on declaring the glories of the King to bystanders along the way, and encouraging the other passengers to come up and fix their own sights on the glowing horizon. But these are criticized for being so heavenly minded that they are no earthly good. They are exhorted to 'lighten up' and take more interest and pleasure in the sights and sounds around them presently. Their detractors are unaware that those above are much better equipped than they to enjoy the present things freely given. But the weightier concern of these glory-gazers is for the people perishing without, or the passengers of pleasure within who will soon jump train and return to the City of Destruction.

Now, there is only one train out of town- and the town's burning. But entrance must be by way of the cross-shaped door with hearts fixed upon the King of Glory. All others will prove to be temporary passengers. And, sadly - sooner or later – they will disembark before that final stop.

Blessed King of Glory,

May truth be to us always sweet and precious as a manifestation of the matchless beauty of your Person. Grant to us the full measure of Thy Spirit to move us along these tracks of truth, ever closer to you, and ever more fruitful unto your glory. Cause your churches to be vessels of your preeminence and presence, never supplanted by culture, glitz, academia, or entertainment. Let our eyes be fixed on that glory beyond the cross, just over the horizon.

Longing to behold You,
Amen

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