Chase God and Find Yourself

Psalm 119:43-45

One of my mother's favorite artists was Walter Jackson. Walter Jackson sang the song "I've Never Been to Me." He sings of having pleasure but never finding joy. He sings of all the things he has experienced but they never brought him fulfillment. When we read the lyrics we discover a man who lived for himself and now he wants to counsel someone who appears to be making the same mistake he made years ago. Walter Jackson sings these words to the lost and the searching.

Hey mister, hey mister, I just want a dime
Cause I need a cup of coffee and a moment of your time
I can tell you're raising hell the way I used to do
I wish someone talked to me as I want to talk to you
I've been to Georgia and California and anywhere I could run
Stole a woman in Tennessee and we made love in the sun
But I ran out of places and friendly faces because I have to be free

I've been to paradise but I've never been to me
Thanks mister, thanks mister, but please don't walk away
Cause I have this need to tell you why I'm all alone today
I can see so much of me still living in your eyes
Won't you share a part of an old man's heart on the day before he dies
Cause I've been to China and Asia Minor on any ship that would sail

Made some noise with good ol' boys and we wrecked the southern jail

I've seen the best man crawl and some teardrops fall
There ain't nothing I didn't see
I've been to paradise but I've never been to me
I've been to marriage, children crying for someone they couldn't find
Never knowing that I was searching for things I left behind
I thought my heart could wait but I learned too late only love can make people free
I've been to paradise but I've never been to me.

Walter sings of a man who has pursued a life of self-gratification only to discover how empty his life was. He was searching for fulfillment; he wanted purpose and learned it could not be found by living for himself. This man, like everyone, was searching for something deeper than the physical, the sensual. He was searching for something that would touch the very core of his being. He knows something is missing, he's just unsure of what it is.

As I read the lyrics I can't help but think of another person who was searching for something he already had. As we read the Prodigal Son parable in Luke 15:17 we realize that his transformation was a product of what he had experienced. Walter Jackson's song "I've Been to Paradise But I've Never Been to Me" and The Prodigal Son parable serve as examples that sometimes the things we are searching for are right in front of us all along. Sometimes people go to great lengths, traveling far and wide like both of these men did searching for something exotic, only to discover it was always present within us or within our reach.

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The Prodigal Son's journey into the far country mirrors the man in Walter Jackson's song. They both were searching for what they thought was missing in their lives. For one it was at the end of his life; the other at the point of desperation that they came to themselves and discovered the peace and freedom they had sought all along.

When Walter sings "I've Been to Paradise But I've Never Been to Me" he is expressing an awareness of the loss and emptiness he feels. Both men are slowly discovering that pleasure will never bring joy. Pleasure will always be temporary. The reason it will always be temporary is because it originates from the outside of us**.** Pleasure is always influenced and determined by our surroundings, achievements, relationships, and material possessions. Joy is a spiritual quality that flows from our relationship with God. Joy resides and remains within us, even during challenging times. Joy is not dependent upon external circumstances. Happiness and pleasure are like a wave that rises and falls. Joy is an anchor it keeps us steady even in the storms of life.

There is sadness in Walter Jackson's song. Because he makes his discovery on the eve of his death. He spends his life chasing rainbows. Only to realize at the end that he has missed out on what truly matters. He had never been to himself. He never discovered the person God intended him to be. He realized at the end there was something more, but the chance to achieve was no longer available to him. It had passed him by. He never allowed the love of God to enter his life. He allowed the love of things, the love of pleasure, and the love of the world to enter and control his life. Only to discover how fleeting and empty all of those adventures were.

As tragic as the gentleman was in Walter Jackson's song, he did learn, albeit at the end. He did discover that love is the essence of freedom. Love is the essence of joy and peace. A relationship with God brings both. The Prodigal Son learned in the middle of a pigpen. Amid his deprivation, he came to himself. When he had fallen as far as he could fall, he came to himself. God will let you fall so you will seek to discover Him, bring Him into your life.

It was not until the Prodigal Son submitted, not until he surrendered, repented, and acknowledged his mistakes that he understood true love and freedom. Love is giving someone the freedom to fail. Freedom is having the capacity to choose success or failure. Both of these men found love and freedom in the arena of God's obedience and surrender. Freedom is found in seeking God's will and precepts. "I will walk at freedom: for I seek thy precepts."

Blessings,
Pastor Gool