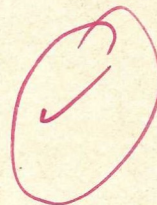


The Last Word

JAMIE BUCKINGHAM



Last November I sat cross-legged on the cow dung floor of a tiny hut in a Chitwan Tharu tribal village in Nepal. The natives had killed a bony old rooster in our honor. They served him—all of him—in a yellow and greenish mixture of rice and herbs. Fortunately it was extremely dark in the dung hut and we could not see what we were eating as we shoveled it, with our fingers, into our mouths.

The three Americans in the group—and I was one of them—did a lot of joking and laughing. We had to—just to keep from gagging. We asked God to “bless every bite” and claimed the Scripture in Mark 16 about eating poison. But you see, we could joke because we knew that in a few hours we’d be back in the mission plane on our way to Kathmandu. And the following week we’d be back in the Promised Land of America.

Halfway through the meal I looked up at the tiny, half-naked shriveled woman who had prepared the food. I could barely see her face in the dim light of the hut, but it was aglow with love. It had cost her family a month’s wages to prepare this “feast” in our honor—and here we were laughing.

Suddenly I didn’t see a simple tribal woman with a ring in her nose. I saw Mary pouring out the perfume on the feet of Jesus. I saw the widow drop-

ping her mite into the treasury while Christ watched from the shadows. That dark-skinned, bare-footed woman had been touched by the hand of God. She was rich beyond measure. While I, who was about to fly back to my two-story house in Florida, was a pauper by comparison.

I let my mind drift back to my visit in a swamp slum in Bangkok the week before. We were being escorted by the wife of an Australian missionary and after we returned to the van it was obvious the young woman was badly shaken. And who wouldn’t be? The conditions were indescribable. Tiny hovels of scraps of tar paper and bamboo thatch. When it rained, as it had in torrents those last few days, the people simply sat and shivered like animals in the forest. The children waded through mud and feces to the little shack provided by the Catholics and World Vision as a school. Even there, though, the drinking water in the large clay pots was filled with twisting worms and amoebae.

We sat silently in the van, waiting for the rest of the party to slog their way out of the swamp. After a long silence the young missionary wife said, to no one in particular, “It makes you grateful for where you were born.”

The pretty Thai nurse who had ac-

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accompanied us into the watery hell, answered softly. "Yes, I'm grateful I was born here in Thailand."

I wanted to weep. Had the missionary not said it, I am sure I would have—and branded myself as the Western Chauvinist I actually am.

Unfortunately, we Americans have a way of equating financial prosperity with spiritual righteousness. Our big churches, great crusade meetings, million-dollar budgets, and the God-is-blessing-us-because-we-had-1,000-in-church-yesterday syndrome seems to have replaced the spirit of the One who had no place to lay his head.

It was Francis McNutt, a soft-spoken Dominican priest who remarked at the recent World Conference on the Holy Spirit in Jerusalem, "If Jesus were on earth he couldn't attend this conference. He wouldn't have the money—that is, unless he were invited as a speaker."

Everyone laughed. Again I wanted to cry.

One of my Southern Baptist friends says the two primary questions at the Monday morning ministers' meeting are "Jahave?" and "Jaget?" How many did jahave in church yesterday? How much money did jaget? That, too, is hilarious—if you can stop weeping long enough to laugh.

It's almost as sad as the common practice among Christian leaders of giving preference to the rich and famous. "Sit thou here in a good place—on the platform, in the best hotel, up in first class—and maybe you'll throw me a sop in return." (When was the last time you heard a sermon on James 2:1-18 or 5:1-11?)

The most shocking revelation American Christians can receive is that it is possible to be supernaturally prospered by God and still be out of his will. We have a way of equating prosperity with God's approval; which is why a church can persecute Spirit-baptized believers and still enjoy a huge budget and a ripe harvest of new members.

How can this be? Well, because God lets it rain on the just and the unjust. He loves his persecutors just as much as he loves those who love him. And he blesses his Word—even when spoken by a jackass.

Americans, lest they forget, need to

remember the wilderness of Sinai. Here three million Jews were protected and provided for by God—for forty years. There was manna from heaven, protection from snakes, water from rocks, and clothes that never wore out. Yet they had missed God's divine intent for an entire generation. They were a dying people.

The blessing of God cannot be equated with Cadillacs or even three meals a day. It comes only as Christ transforms the inner person into a creature of love, joy, and peace. It's available for all, even if you live in a cow dung hut. α



David Barnard is widely known in America and 10 other countries of the world for his ministry of the Holy Spirit.

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