

May 2, 2010

GOD DON'T MAKE NO JUNK!

“You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.” Galatians 3:26

James W. Moore, in his book *Some Things Are Too Good Not To Be True*, tells the story of Rapunzel from Grimm's Fairy Tales. Do you recall that ancient story? I'll bet some of our children do. A beautiful girl named Rapunzel lives with a wicked witch in a drab and dingy tower. The old witch is holding Rapunzel captive, and to keep the girl “in her place,” the wicked witch does two things. First, she removes all the mirrors from the tower, so Rapunzel cannot see what she looks like. And then the old witch tells Rapunzel repeatedly that she is ugly. In fact, the witch says to her, “Rapunzel, you look just like me.”

Since there are no mirrors in the tower, poor Rapunzel believes it. She can't see how beautiful she is, so she remains a prisoner in the tower – a prisoner of her own supposed ugliness. The witch believes that if Rapunzel is convinced that she is ugly, she will never try to escape.

But then, one bright day, Prince Charming comes riding by on his white horse, just as Rapunzel is leaning out of the tower for a breath of fresh air. Their eyes meet, and it is love at first sight.

“Rapunzel! Rapunzel! Let down your hair,” says the prince. And she does just that: She lets her long, flowing hair hang down from the balcony, and Prince Charming, using her hair like a rope ladder, climbs up into the tower.

As they gaze at each other lovingly, Rapunzel sees in the glistening eyes of her prince a clear reflection of her own face. In the mirror of his eyes, Rapunzel sees for the first time that she is beautiful. And in that moment, she is set free! Free from the tower! Free from the past! Free from the feeling that she is ugly! Then Prince Charming takes Rapunzel into his arms, they parachute onto his horse and ride happily off into the sunset.

Obviously, Grimm's Fairy Tales is not Scripture, but James Moore has done us a great favor reminding us of this ancient tale. The story of Rapunzel does contain good news. In fact, we can use it as a springboard into our text for the day. But first of all we need to ask two questions with regard to this ancient fairy tale. The first one is this: From the standpoint of faith, who is it that tells us we are

ugly? And secondly, into whose eyes may we peer to see ourselves as beautiful children of God?

Let's begin with the first question: Who is it that tells us we are ugly? It may surprise you to know the scriptural answer to that question. **ACCORDING TO PAUL, IT IS THE LAW THAT TELLS US WE ARE UGLY.** Listen to his words: "Before this faith came, we were held prisoners by the law, locked up until faith should be revealed." That sounds like the witch who kept Rapunzel captive, doesn't it? Earlier in this same chapter Paul calls the law "a curse." Why? Why would he say that? Because under the law we are all failures.

Who among us can ever keep the law perfectly? The answer is, none of us. Not a single one of us could possibly fulfill the law's requirements. The law provides for us a standard that is unattainable. And even if we were able to keep the law without any deviation, we would probably be guilty of spiritual pride. We would conclude that we are better than other people - and that may be the deadliest sin of all. It's a lose/lose situation.

Let's put this in concrete language that all of us can understand. Imagine that you have a parent who is both a perfectionist and also very aloof and distant. Can you imagine a parent like that? Some of you had parents like that. So, you have a parent that you want desperately to satisfy but nothing you ever do is quite right. What a downer! And because your parent does not know how to adequately show affection, you have this feeling that you are not only stupid but unacceptable as well. So, no matter what the reality of your situation, you grow up thinking you are both ugly and unlovable.

That is how growing up under the law made Paul feel. Constrained, he says, and confined. Unloved and unfulfilled. Under a curse. Instead of making him more loving and more accepting, it filled him with self-righteousness and resentment. It gave him permission to be cruel toward those who had different beliefs than he did. That happens whenever authentic faith is replaced by legalism. But then something happened in Paul's life that made him realize he wasn't a failure, he wasn't a loser, he wasn't ugly. He experienced the living Christ on the road to Damascus. He heard Christ say, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me?" And something broke within. Suddenly he wasn't ugly anymore.

And that brings us to our second question: **INTO WHOSE EYES CAN WE LOOK TO SEE THE BEAUTIFUL CREATION WE WERE INTENDED TO BE?** Paul writes: "Now that faith has come, we are no longer

under the supervision of the law. You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus.” Did you hear that? In Jesus Christ we are all sons and daughters of God. We are not losers at all. We are not unlovable at all. In fact, because we have met the Master, we are really quite beautiful.

Antonio Sanchez was only five years old when he was sent to a Mexican prison for juveniles after allegedly murdering his baby brother. Tony’s parents, who had beaten him with chains and tortured him with fire, deserted him and disappeared after telling police he was the killer. In prison other inmates taunted him with the word “murderer” and sometimes abused him. He had to fight for food.

No one seemed to care what happened to Tony, until Carolyn Koons, an American professor, heard his story. She battled bureaucracy and a corrupt prison warden for almost three years to secure Tony’s release and adoption at age twelve; but her real struggles had only begun. Somehow she had to meet the needs of a boy who still stuffed rolls into his pockets because of past hunger, who lashed out at others because of his emotional scars, and who seemed enticed by every wrong because of his unbridled life.

Tony Sanchez was not initially drawn to his new mother. In fact, he seemed more drawn to trouble than anything else. He accused her frequently of not loving him and taunted her with “I won’t obey you or anyone.” Carolyn never stopped barbecuing those juicy hamburgers he craved, never quit hugging him, and never ceased rescuing him from fights.

Carolyn had almost despaired of Tony ever bonding to her. But then Carolyn got a big surprise; Tony made an unexpected speech at his junior high graduation. In almost a stutter he said, “I want to thank my mom for adopting me and bringing me to the United States.” Then with tears streaming down his face, he yelled, “I love you, Mom. I love you. I love you.”

Why did Tony love the woman who adopted him? It was because he could look into her eyes and see himself as someone of worth, someone of beauty.

You and I both know that this is the greatest and most fundamental need of all humanity. Something or someone has told us that we are unacceptable, unlovable, or unworthy. In Paul’s case it was the law. When we have a low opinion of ourselves, we have a tendency to lash out at others. We have a tendency toward the destructive and the inferior. What we need more than

anything in the world is to look into the eyes of Jesus and see ourselves as we really are: sons and daughters of God.

But there is one thing more to be said from this text: **WE CAN BEGIN LIVING THE CHRIST LIFE TODAY.** Paul says, “Now that faith has come, we are no longer under the supervision of the law. You are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus, for all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”

Notice that Paul says, “Now that faith has come.....” That’s important. We can truly believe in ourselves only if we believe in God. We can truly see ourselves as beautiful only if we see our reflection in the eyes of Christ.

If we take that step of faith, however, tremendous powers are unlocked within. Once you take that step, it doesn’t matter whether you are Jew or Greek, slave or free, male or female, black or white or Hispanic. You know who you are and you know your life matters.

I like something that Dr. Robert Schuller says in his book *Reach Out for New Life*. He notes that Michelangelo attempted 44 statues in his life, but he finished only 14 of them. You are familiar with some of them. But the 30 he did not finish are interesting too. You can see them in a museum in Italy.....a huge chunk of marble from which he sculpted only an elbow or the beginning of a wrist. Another shows a leg, the thigh, the knee, the calf, the foot – even the toes. The rest of the body is locked in the chunk of marble. It will never come out. Another reveals a head and shoulders, but the arm and hands are still frozen inside. “Could this be true for you?” asks Dr. Schuller. “Of all the tragedies in life, the greatest is for a person to live and die and never come out of himself or herself – never to realize the possibilities hidden within.”

Herb Barks conveyed the truth of today’s message with this poem:

“Believe it, you are a real find, a joy in someone’s heart. You’re a jewel – unique and priceless. I don’t care how you feel. Believe it. God don’t make no junk!”

My friend, I want to give you an invitation. I want to invite you to look into the eyes of Christ by faith. I want to invite you to see reflected there the beautiful you that you were intended to be. And then I want you to go forth from this place today to live the dynamic Christ life. And remember – it doesn’t matter who you are or what your background is, you can begin living the Christ life today.

