



Change Hurts Like Heaven

Jesus was the master of 'jugular vein' communication, 'chain saw' illustration and 'brass knuckle' application

Editorial cartoonists who seek to capture our imaginations on the central pages of the daily newspaper are brilliant communicators. With a turn of a pen and the mixing of images, this form of political satire thrusts truth in our face with all of the tact of brass knuckles or a Black and Decker chain saw. This method of communication is intentionally grabbing and assaultive. It is even fair to say that the editorial cartoonist, at times, runs the risk of personally offending the reader in order to drive a point to the heart with graphic clarity.

Jesus was a great editorial cartoonist – not with pen and paper, mind you, but rather with words and phrases of incisive precision. He was the master of jugular vein communication, of chain-saw sermon illustration, of brass-knuckle sermon application.

When it came to clearly challenging people like us to change at the very core of our being, Jesus selected three images that shock even the 20th-century American culture familiar with George Lucas and Steven Spielberg special effects. Just imagine the impact these same visual images that the Nazarene carpenter employed in his sermons must have had on a culture like first-century Israel, which was not yet numbed to oral power by movie-style special effects.

In Christ's own words, root-level change of our lifestyles and innermost character is likened, in Matthew 18:9, to "gouging out and throwing away" our own right eye; in Matthew 18:8, to "cutting off and throwing away" our foot or our hand; and in Matthew 10:37-39, to volunteering for our own horrid execution.

To put it in more familiar terms, we are portrayed by the carpenter from Nazareth as the surgeon and the patient of our own amputation. If that is not graphic enough, He then draws the lines of our lives as if we are both the executioner and the condemned at our own self-crucifixion.

In short, as the Jesus of the Bible traces truth about the nature of real life-altering change (which He called by the much misunderstood and avoided word "repentance"), He appears to use images carefully calculated to shock.

Might He have wanted to grab our attention by the throat and pin us against the back wall of life to warn us never to underestimate the pain of change? Could this be an aggressive assault on a culture that flees pain by careful control in every sphere of life? We seek control in everything from economics to the temperature of air to the fat content of our bodies and even the language that must be politically correct. It seems everything is designed to be benign and insipidly painless.

In the face of this, Jesus of Nazareth tells us that true heavenly change will be marked by the gut-wrenching agony of self-surgically dealing with all that is wrong in our lives. It is as if He has leaned out of heaven to tell us not to be surprised when true Christianity is marked by pain.

All of this makes me wonder: When was the last time for the love of God, for the good of my wife and kids, or the health of my own inner life, I aggressively addressed change that I needed with such unvarnished, blood-and-guts aggression? When was the last time that I embraced deep spiritual trauma that must have felt as welcome to my own devotional life as a chain saw is welcome against the bark of a tree in order to rip something from the forest of my life?

I truly believe the carpenter from Nazareth wanted us to know that change would "hurt like heaven," which may *seem* to hurt more than hell because heaven wants me to change deeply in order to be like my Lord. And frankly, hell doesn't care if I ever change at all.

Perhaps this is why Paul, in Ephesians 4:22, warned us to put off our old man which "is being corrupted by its deceitful desires." Perhaps he knew that we would deceive ourselves by a desire to escape the sharp edge of much of what Jesus taught. It is a profound and important truth: We are not deceived if we are aware that we have been fooled.

Thus, conned by our own desires to avoid pain, we flee the depth of repentance necessary to be fully conformed to Christ and even preach sermons that endorse and encourage such flight. Perhaps it is time to embrace the blade that is borne by the Savior for our good and His glory.

—Joseph V. Novenson
from *World*, October 9, 1993, p. 26

See also . . .

You Can Change . . . One Step at a Time at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/You%20Can%20Change.pdf>

Becoming a Christ-like Servant at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Becoming%20a%20Christ-like%20Servant.pdf>

Is Dying to Self Really Necessary at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Dying%20to%20Self.pdf>

Living by Feelings or Living by Faith at

<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Living%20by%20Feelings%20or%20Living%20by%20Faith.pdf>

Spiritual Realities Before and After Receiving Christ at

<http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Spiritual%20Realities%20Before%20and%20After%20Receiving%20Christ.pdf>

Perspective Change at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Perspective%20Change.pdf>