

On Any Given Day...



KEY ISSUES

On any given day, as God's gaze scans the earth, I can only imagine the sights He sees and the emotions these sights stir in our Creator. I once saw a book of paintings by Pieter Bruegel (the Elder), a 16th century Flemish painter. Bruegel's style is fascinating and captivating. His canvases are a riot of color and activity – scenes of incredible detail and vibrancy. Each painting captures a story – or the intersection of many stories – as the figures go about their daily lives. Is this how God sees the affairs of men and women as we go about our business on any given day?

I can go to *earth.google.com* and call up an image of a specific neighborhood, zoom in, see the image displayed on my laptop. Through the ingenuity of satellite technology and the world wide web I can visit the devastation of Hurricane Katrina or the lush vegetation of the Amazon rain forest or a building in downtown New York. Is this how God sees?

Christians often spend a lot of time anticipating heaven – the streets of gold, the mansions, the crystal sea, the people and the conversations we might have. How we would love to have a glimpse of our eternal home. But we often don't think a whole lot of the view from the other side - the view of earth from heaven. Maybe we're so focused on our responsibilities, our families, our churches, our jobs, our good works, that it doesn't seem to matter very much what God sees or what He thinks of what He sees.

I'm reminded of two verses way back in Genesis. The first one is God's concise description of the works of Creation. "God saw all that he had made, and it was very good." Gen. 1:31 NIV Then, some years later, in the days of Noah, God had a different take: "The Lord saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The Lord was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain." Gen. 6:5-6 NIV

So, on any given day of the 21st Century, what does God see as He casts his glance about the earth? Does He remember that the creation was very good? Does He remember those walks in the Garden with the first man and woman, when all creation was in harmony and perfect order? Is His heart grieved by the Bruegel-like images of war and poverty and injustice?

Scripture tells us that God doesn't see as man sees, from the outside, but rather God sees the heart (Matt. 23:28). It might be easy these days to get discouraged, to become weary of doing good. It might be tempting to sit back and rest and wait for God to come and bring His judgment on the earth. But God warns us against this very thing. We are to finish the race.

Consider this sampling of facts, taken from www.earthfromtheair.com/:

- * Half of humanity lives on less than \$2 per day.
- * People in rich countries, a mere 20% of the total human population, eat 45% of meat and fish consumed in the world.
- * 90% of the world's population has never made a telephone call.
- * Over the past 10 years, public aid to development has dropped by 29%.
- * 1 out of 5 adults cannot read or write; 98% live in developing countries and 2/3 of them are women.
- * 110 million children (1 out of 5) do not attend school.
- * In the world, over 300,000 children are soldiers, many are under 10 years old.
- * Today the atmosphere has the capacity to absorb only one third of the CO₂ that we produce each year.
- * 20% of the world's population does not have access to safe drinking water.
- * On average, a North American uses 600 litres of water per day; a European, 250; an African, 30.
- * Over 1 billion people lack decent, basic shelter.
- * 826 million people are undernourished
- * Every day 30,000 children die from illnesses that could be cured or prevented.
- * World military expenditure: \$798 billion.

What does the good news of the gospel look like in light of all this? Jesus came to earth for one reason: redemption. He left his disciples with one task: reconciliation. Paul summarizes this for the believers in Corinth. Read 2 Cor. 5:18-21. This is no time for hand wringing or for lamenting the sorry state of the world. We must keep our focus. We must live lives worthy of the calling we have received to be Christ's ambassadors. There is much work to do and truth to be lived.

The United Nations has identified eight Millennium Development Goals which address some of the worst inequities in the world, but the goals will not solve the problems and many regions are not on target for reaching them. The Micah Challenge, based on Micah 6:8, is a challenge to Christians, churches and Christian organizations to get involved in these issues and to hold their governments accountable to the commitments they have made to reduce extreme poverty.

Where is the church? Most denominations, including our own, are involved in ministries of Relief and Development at home and abroad. The Sharing Way is doing great work in a variety of settings: relief, aid, community development, micro-business, leadership development, etc. Canadian Baptist Ministries is exploring ways to increase our effectiveness in advocating for the poor and disadvantaged. The Baptist World Alliance is involved in hands on projects to help the poor as well as in research initiatives to ensure that our efforts are well directed. There is a growing realization that justice, environmental, and humanitarian issues are opportunities for us to demonstrate the truth of the gospel – the good news that God has not forsaken humanity. Reconciliation is ours. The Kingdom of God is near!

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For information on the Millennium Development Goals see: www.un.org/millenniumgoals/
For information on the Micah Challenge see: www.micahchallenge.ca/