

Coach House Church BEACONS

AN ELEPHANT AND A RESCUE PLAN

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We recently helped with planning a wedding. It took time and effort and conversations that went: 'so what else do we need to think about?' There are so many elements to creating the great day, to making sure everything runs smoothly, that it is as good as it could possibly be, so that everyone is relaxed and can enjoy every moment, creating memories to last a lifetime. The current situation, with only 15 guests able to attend, didn't seem to lessen the amount of planning needed – however many guests are invited, there is still a photographer, a car, a cake, music, flowers, confetti, food and drinks and the bride and groom.

No matter how many elements we include in the wedding, whether simple or extravagant, we know that the most important aspect is the declaration of love made by the couple, the act of two becoming one and showing respect for and trust in each other. The day is important but the bigger picture is much more important, how two people, supported by their trust and faith in God, surrounded by family and friends, can grow together in their relationship.

The whole is greater than the sum of the elements, as Aristotle once said. This principle is important when we look at the bible. We can take elements of the bible separately maybe because we find some parts easier to read, simpler to digest, more in line with our thinking. We may leave out parts which seem trickier to understand or don't seem to make so much sense on first reading. The problem with taking parts separately is that we can lose the sense of the bigger picture. What is the bible really about?

To illustrate this, there is an Indian fable about 'Blind men and an elephant' and there is a poem written by John Godfrey Saxe (1816-1887) which takes you through the story. In essence, the men each meet an elephant down by the river. They have never seen an elephant so make their judgement on the part they can touch. One man touched the side and said it's like a wall. Another found the tusk and

described it like a spear. Another discovered the trunk and declared the elephant was like a snake. Next, there were legs like a tree trunk and ear like a fan. Finally, the man found the tail was like a rope. The end of the poem states:

*And so these men of Indostan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right,
And all were in the wrong!*

The problem was that they were all making statements out of context. They all had part of the information and not the whole.

If I just read Leviticus, I could say the bible is full of rules. If I read Judges, I would be in fear of some of the harsh acts that took place – tent pegs through the temple to name but one. However, the whole bible is not just rules and judgements, although there are elements of this. There are 10 commandments handed to Moses by God, rules to order our lives by. And the bible talks of a day of judgement. But the whole story is God's rescue plan, according to Billy Graham:

"God undertook the most dramatic rescue operation in cosmic history. He determined to save the human race from self-destruction, and He sent His Son Jesus Christ to salvage and redeem them. The work of man's redemption was accomplished at the cross." ~ Billy Graham

John chapter 3 says:

16 "For this is how God loved the world: He gave[g] his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. 17 God sent his Son into the world not to judge the world, but to save the world through him."

There is a video by Dr S M Lockridge that you can find online called 'That's my King!'. Have a listen to it. He goes through the names, titles and descriptions of Jesus, the son of God. At one point he says 'He's indescribable' which is not quite true as he spends at least 3 minutes listing the attributes of Jesus. Yet we know what he means in that no single set of words can do justice to explain and reflect just who is: Jesus the son, God the father, God the Holy Spirit. The three dimensions to a whole God which I can't even begin to explain here. It is certainly a mystery that we will understand fully one day in the future.

So, in the bible, we find that God as a whole is described in lots of different ways. He has many names and titles. Why is this? I think it is because there are so many aspects to his character that a single term wouldn't suffice. Our language is not sufficient enough to be able to paint a picture that gives clarity to the whole and can only do this in parts at a time : God is judge, Saviour, Messiah, creator, friend, Lord, Father, Master, comforter... to mention only a few. Further, the Jewish people who dare not utter God's name directly, used phrases instead: God Almighty (El Shaddai) and The Everlasting God (El Olam) as well as God is my provider, God is my shepherd, God is my peace and many others.

The good news is that we can explore God in bitesize chunks by considering one aspect of his character as he comforts, forgives, provides our needs. However, we need to remember the whole picture alongside this. Max Lucado, a pastor and author says:

"For all its peculiarities and unevenness, the Bible has a simple story. God made man. Man rejected God. God won't give up until he wins him back. God will whisper. He will shout. He will touch and tug. He will take away our burdens; he'll even take away our blessings. If there are a thousand steps between us and him, he will take all but one. But he will leave the final one for us. The choice is ours. Please understand. His goal is not to make you happy. His goal is to make you His. His goal is not to get you what you want; it is to get you what you need."

- Max Lucado

The whole story is God's rescue plan for us and we have the choice to make the final step. Revelation 3:20 invites us in:

20 "Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends.



MELANIE JACKSON



Coach House Church

leadership@coachhousechurch.org // 0161 432 5604

the coach house church, 222 wellington road north, stockport sk4 2qn