

Complex Martyr Complex



A thought-provoking article from Acts 29 by John Bryson entitled “Learning to be Miserable.” Here’s an excerpt:

“Don’t be a whiner, quitter, or baby and quit pouting or being surprised about “how hard” it is to do what you are doing. Of course it is. You are limited as a fallen human in a fallen world. Learn to cultivate and create...all the while, being miserable. If you can thrive and stay on mission, especially through the worst of circumstances, you are preparing to be a game changer, a true leader, who can adapt, adjust, and endure.”

Now I get what is being said. Life wasn’t meant to be easy, my friend. And much of ministry is slog work for Jesus. And this is Acts 29 macho rhetoric, which has it’s value.

But, seriously – be “miserable”? I know what’s it like to be miserable in ministry, to be depressed, in a hole, clinging to vestiges of faith to get through each day. And while that may be a necessary season of the shadows of death to die to self and learn some humility and dependency upon God – I don’t think it’s healthy to *aspire* to it.

The danger is that you end up sanctifying such a fear of being a slacker that you generate a culture of striving, desperation, and a glorification of leaders-as-martyrs. I’ve been in those rooms where pastors compare “hours-worked-per-week” with unholy (and somewhat Freudian) bravado.

Bryson does offset it with his last sentence: “Jesus is still

our perfect rescuer and our relentless pursuit of Him is still our greatest joy.” But it seems antagonistic to the rest of his article. I couldn’t help correlate it to the curse of Jeremiah 17:5-6. Misery is a curse, not a blessing, or a necessity here:

*Cursed is the one who trusts in man,
who depends on flesh for his strength
and whose heart turns away from the LORD.
He will be like a bush in the wastelands;
he will not see prosperity when it comes.
He will dwell in the parched places of the desert,
in a salt land where no one lives.*

To honour God, ministry has to be work-from-rest, the fruit of worship, a hope, a trust, a joy – with no worries, and green freshness.

*But blessed is the man who trusts in the LORD,
whose confidence is in him.
He will be like a tree planted by the water
that sends out its roots by the stream.
It does not fear when heat comes;
its leaves are always green.
It has no worries in a year of drought
and never fails to bear fruit.*

Misery happens, for sure, and the faithful push through it. But we must learn to have faith, not learn to be miserable.

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