**IGNORANCE IS BLISS**

***Idioms With Spiritual Applications (#1)***

I love idioms. I said idioms, not idiots. An idiom is a phrase that makes a point while not intending to be taken literally. To say, “She is happy as a clam” means she is smiling from ear to ear, just like the mouth of a clam when it is open. To say, “pass the buck” or, “the buck stops here” means to either reject responsibility, or accept responsibility, for a duty. It was taken from 19th century American cowboys who sat in saloons and played poker. They seldom trusted the dealer, so took turns dealing by sticking a knife into the wood table with a handle made out of a buck’s horn. When it was your turn to deal they passed the “buck” until it stopped with you.

There is an oft quoted line from Thomas Gray’s poem *Ode On A Distant Prospect At Eton College*. It goes like this, “Where ignorance is bliss, Tis folly to be wise.” We usually hear it in its shortened version, “ignorance is bliss.” Most folks take that as an excuse to be lazy and uninformed, allowing you to blissfully ignorant of details that will lead to stress. I suppose in some cases that is certainly true. Mr. Gray was a poet, classical scholar and professor at Pembroke College in Cambridge, England back in the 18th century. He was obviously not advocating ignorance. He was speaking in that poem of the innocence of childhood. As a little boy he was blissfully ignorant of all the heartache and problems of his world, therefore lived the carefree life of a child.

When my children were 2, 5 and 7 we took them to Disneyworld. They had the time of their life enjoying all the rides, plays, parades, sights and sounds of the Magic Kingdom. But what about dad? Well, I was fretting over such things as the credit card bill when I got home, or making sure they were all within sight, or were keeping their hands inside the ride at all times. I was wishing I was Peter Pan singing, “I don’t want to grow up.” The knowledge of adulthood shakes up our childhood ignorance-is-bliss fantasy.

Ignorance is defined as “a lack of facts or knowledge.” Yes, the idea that sometimes it’s better not to know the truth might be liberating when you’re eating the Very Cherry Ghirardelli Chocolate Cheesecake at the The Cheesecake Factory. (Spoiler Alert: One slice is 1,160 calories. Oh, did I ruin your ‘ignorance is bliss’ moment? I’m terribly sorry. Forgive me.)

For example, Jesus warned us “*Do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things; sufficient for the day is its own trouble*” (Matt. 6:34). If we really knew for certain what was coming tomorrow we would be a basket case with anxiety. Sometimes it is true, ignorance is bliss, so God leaves us ignorant to bring us some level of peace. A case in point, what if you knew the exact day you were going to die? If you were king Saul it would terrify you, knowing tomorrow you would be killed in battle (1 Sam. 28:19). But if you were apostle Saul (i.e. Paul) you would know a crown awaits you (Phil. 1:21; 2 Tim. 4:6-8).

But when it comes to working out your salvation (Phil. 2:12), ignorance is not bliss. Paul stood facing the large assembly in the famous amphitheater in Athens called the Areopagus. He preached a magnificent sermon to show the folly of idolatry, and the greatness of the True God in whom they lived, moved, and had their being. He then concluded his eloquent oration with these words, “*The times of this ignorance God overlooked* (I love the KJV here – “*God winked at*”), *but now commands all men everywhere to repent*” (Ac. 17:30).

Standing before God at Judgment every single one of us will be held accountable for the things done in this life, whether good or bad (2 Cor. 5:10). Crying out, “Lord, Lord” and then claiming we did many good things in His name will not cut it with Christ the Judge. He will reply, “*Depart from Me, you who work lawlessness*” (Matt. 7:21-23).

Christ said there are “*many*” who think they are saved, but in fact are ignorantly lost. The vast numbers who would check off the boxes below are staggering to my soul.

\_\_\_ Judaism (14.7 million / 0.18 % of world)

\_\_\_ Buddhism (500 million / 5% of world

\_\_\_ Hinduism (1.2 billion / 15 % of world)

\_\_\_ Secular Humanism / Atheism (1.2 billion / 15% of world)

\_\_\_ Muslim (1.9 billion / 25% of world)

\_\_\_ Christianity (2.4 billion / 31 % of world)

Paul stood in that amphitheater pleading to these Athenians, “*I believe in all things you are* *very religious*” (Ac. 17:22). He exhorted them to cast off their ignorance and turn to God in repentance. He knew, and we know, that a man who is honestly ignorant, but presented with the truth, will either cease to be honest, or cease to be ignorant. Paul, when he was confronted with the truth of Christ’s resurrection, ceased to be ignorant.

To his deep sadness he found some who “*mocked*” the very idea of a resurrection and judgment day. But to his great joy he found some who were willing to give him another hearing, along with some who fully believed, repented and became Christians. Among this number was a man named Dionysius, and a woman named Damaris. I can’t wait to meet them in heaven. I will run to shake their hand and hug their neck, for they are my heroes. To these serious students, ignorance was not bliss, but a curse. May the Lord increase their tribe!

The prophet Hosea, like the apostle Paul, cried out to his audience, “*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge*!” (Hos. 4:6). Ignorance kills! A child wearing mouse ears and riding and singing “It’s a small, small world” is a wonderful memory from Disneyworld. We parents envy their “ignorance is bliss” fantasy. We know one day they must grow beyond such innocence and face the cold, hard reality of life. Sadly, they will one day become sinners like us and need to hear these haunting words, “*The times of this ignorance God winked at but now commands all men everywhere to repent*.”

God winks no more, but is looking us straight in the eye and saying, “Repent.”

- Rick