

Enough with this Forgiveness Nonsense Already!

I needed a provocative title because these thoughts are provocative on so many levels, not the least of which is the fact that I loyally support my Dallas Cowboys even though I reside in a sea of green and white. So, please believe me when I say that I am genuinely happy for Eagle quarterback Michael Vick who, after serving 21 months for his part in an interstate gambling operation revolving around dog-fighting, seems to be making the best of a new start. I am happy for him that he has people in his corner helping him to make the most of that new start. In the same way I am happy for Josh Hamilton of the Texas Rangers for overcoming substance-abuse demons to become the AL MVP – just as I am happy for any character from any walk of life that receives the opportunity *to begin again* and makes it work.

In fact, these musings have less to do with Vick, Hamilton and their ilk than they have to do with our cultural ideas about *forgiveness* and *redemption*. Regarding Vick, I listened and processed as one sports journalist/talking head declared: “I have forgiven Michael Vick.” I wasn’t sure what audience reaction he was shooting for. I hope it wasn’t “How magnanimous!” because all I was good for was “How irrelevant!” After all, it was neither that sports writer nor his beloved Yorkie that got tossed into a ring with a snarling pit bull.

You must realize, my friend, that for every athlete or actor who turns his or her life around after crashing and burning, there are hundreds of thousands of non-celebrities in our prisons, who arguably have committed lesser crimes, whose lives will never be the same again. They will struggle to find any gainful employment. In fact, they will be branded for life in numerous capacities, and frankly, we won’t care. After all, that’s how justice works. They brought it on themselves. And forget those who have committed crimes. Is there anyone who is now invisible ... forgotten ... dead to you because he or she somehow acted out against you?

So, does it sound too jaded of me to suggest that a person’s potential to achieve redemption for wrongs committed against society might be somewhat proportionate to that person’s capacity to entertain or amuse some segment of society? After all, are not our *jesters* and *buffoons* among the highest paid people in our modern culture? And yet, how often do the exorbitant incomes of these characters confuse them into thinking they are qualified to lecture the rest of us on our politics or sensitivities. It kind of makes me pine for the good old days when if a *jester* or *buffoon* got too mouthy, the king would simply say, “Off with his head!” But, I digress.

Are we really even able to process forgiveness and redemption when one person’s capacity to generate income for a business or to entertain a segment of society gives him or her such a leg-up on others who could use a little forgiveness and redemption?

Let me really tell you about forgiveness. Let me really tell you about redemption. Let me really tell you about mercy. It begins when a man comes to realize that ultimately his sin has estranged him from God, the source of life.

Once you were alienated from God and were enemies in your minds because of your evil behavior ... – Colossians 1:21

As for you, you were dead in your transgressions and sins ... – Ephesians 2:1

Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight ... – Psalm 51:4

What to do when there is nothing that can be done to breach my estrangement from God. I cannot get back into His good graces by entertaining or serving Him. In fact, I have no capacity to serve Him at all unless He repairs me and makes me fit for His service. In my helplessness, I can only hope that He will act. Praise God, He already has.

⁶You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. ⁷Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous man, though for a good man someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. – Romans 5:6-8

Because God acted when we were powerless to do so, the verdict that resounds throughout the cosmos and into eternity is this:

... as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us ... – Psalm 103:12

and ...

For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more." – Hebrews 8:12

© 2010 by R. Karl Crouch, 551 Abbeyville Road, Lancaster, PA 17603