

CUBA in the Rear View Mirror

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Where can you go and take thousands of dollars of relief aid and the best news in the world that everybody needs to hear and believe, and get thrown out of the country? Unfortunately for me, the answer is Cuba. I had the privilege of being part of a team of men who went there last week with nothing but pure intentions to help people, but we were detained and told to leave the country. Do I blame anybody in Cuba? Not at all, and I have no complaints. This is actually a surprise to myself because I can't remember ever going through such hardship or rejection and not complaining. Perhaps the reason is that before it happened we saw the Lord draw 167 new souls into the kingdom; or maybe it was the obvious continual providence of God that kept blessing us every step of the way. Many times I felt that our guardian angels were at work, and many times prayers were answered in such a way that we knew it was the Lord. A case in point was that when we were taken to the Communist Party Headquarters they collected our passports, and we got in even more trouble because one of us had lost his passport. Our leader prayed that not only would the passport be recovered, but that it would find us. At the time I thought this was a strange prayer, but believe it or not that really happened (I'll explain later).

Acts 4, "We can't stop speaking"

My experience in Cuba can't help but remind me of Acts 4. Peter and the Apostles had been preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ to the people in the streets of Jerusalem, and people had been believing in Jesus right and left. When you read the story in Acts, you can't help but wonder, "Why would the leaders of the country oppose Peter doing miracles, healing people, and saving their souls eternally? How can it possibly be thought of as bad to give people their health back, and give them hope, meaning, and purpose?" As the Apostles were interrogated by the leaders of the country, they asked Peter, "By what authority, or in what name have you done this?" Their question demanded to know why the Apostles did not go through the leaders of the country and conform to their rules, their authority, and their religion. Peter's reply was that they were on trial for doing a good thing for a sick man. Their authority came from a higher authority, "Jesus Christ, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead...and there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven that has been given by which we must be saved." The rulers and elders and high priests who were used to being feared, were amazed "at the confidence of Peter and John". Why were they so confident? THEY WERE DEVOTED TO THE TRUTH AND ENTRUSTING THE OUTCOME TO THE LORD (as I review this story in Acts, I remember the Communist Captain who was interrogating us, and I believe he was also disarmed by our confidence and lack of fear).

The Jewish leaders in Acts 4 conferred with each other in private and asked, "What shall we do with these men? They could not deny that they had done wonderful things for the people of Jerusalem. Nevertheless, the priests were losing control of the people, so they had to order the Apostles to speak no more to anybody about Jesus. After they firmly commanded the Apostles to cease and desist, Peter and John responded in a most unexpected but profound way, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to give heed to you rather than God, you be the judge; for we cannot stop speaking what we have seen and heard (about Jesus)."

When the Apostles returned to their fellow believers, everyone was greatly relieved that worse treatment had not befallen them, so they rejoiced and greatly praised God. It seems that they were also wondering why the government had rejected Jesus, and was now opposing everything that the Apostles were doing. I say this because in their prayer, the Apostles quoted Psalm 2 which was written by David around a thousand years before. David explained why all the "kings and rulers of the earth" were of one mind in opposing the Lord, and being against His Christ. Peter said it was fulfilled at the crucifixion of Christ by some very strange bedfellows—Herod, Pilate, the Romans, and the leaders of Israel. These rulers previously hated and mistrusted each other, but came together against Christ.

Against the Lord and His Christ, Psalm 2

In Psalm 2, David lays out the history of the world for us. Everyone asks, "Why is the world so messed up, why doesn't God do something about it, and when will all the evil end?" David answers all these questions in Psalm 2. In verses 1-3, David said that the human race all together rebelled against God. Mankind wanted its freedom and independence from God. They said in their hearts, "Let us break free of the bonds (the rule) that God has required of us". They saw God's rule as binding and

restrictive and desired independence. In Psalm 2:4-6, David wrote of God's response to judge the rebellion and set His King up on Mt. Zion. In v.7-9, you have the resolve of the Messiah to carry out the plan of God (the incarnation, crucifixion, resurrection, and eventual rule). Ps.2 is ended in v.10-12 with a call to all the world to submit to the Son of God and avoid the wrath to come. Therefore the answer to all our questions about evil is that mankind has rebelled against its Creator, and God has allowed man to spin out of control. We are like sheep without a shepherd heading for a cliff, and following each other over the edge of destruction. Yet God, out of love, has sent His Son into the world to be our Good Shepherd and lead us back to the Lord. Anyone who will follow God's Son will avoid the destruction which is coming.

The Stooges Go to Cuba

Our one week trip to Cuba was filled with roadblocks, mishaps, bad rooms, bad food, equipment failure, and 400 miles of bad road in a crowded car. After this road trip that loosened my cavities and stiffened my back, we arrived at our hotel to find out they had no record of our reservations. We had a fax from them confirming our rooms, but they didn't care. After a long wait, they came up with a room for us in what we found out later was the condemned section of the hotel. We should have been tipped off when we got on the elevator and our floor's number wasn't on the board. I knew for sure when the door wouldn't close, the ceiling was caving in, it had no lights, no water, and no plumbing. If the Communist party really wanted to hurt us, they should have left us in that room instead of running us out of town. Nevertheless, the faith, love, flexibility, and unselfish actions of our 12 man team made it more than bearable. During seven days of problems, I can honestly say I never heard any complaining, and never saw any selfish actions from any of these men. HONESTLY, CAN YOU EVER RECALL A WEEK IN YOUR LIFE THAT NO ONE EVER COMPLAINED OR ACTED SELFISHLY?

One of the guys on the trip asked me if I would be willing to go back on another missions trip to Cuba. After reflection, the answer is yes. Where else can I experience such loving unselfish behavior, true fellowship, and know that I am serving God as He uses me to save many needy people?

The Fruit of the Spirit

It is very rare to experience Christians manifesting the fruit of the Spirit on a widespread basis over a prolonged period of time. This was one of the benefits of our trip to Cuba. Twelve guys lived by faith and exhibited the fruit of the Spirit for an entire week. No matter the problem or mishap, we all had, "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control" (Gal.5:22). This is interesting phenomena that with hardship came joy, with rejection came peace, with problems came patience, and with provocation came self control. Give me those twelve guys living by faith and exhibiting the fruit of the Spirit and I will go back to Cuba or anywhere else. Most importantly, give me the God who loves and blesses us, the Savior who died for us, and the Holy Spirit who guides and teaches us, and I will go anywhere.

Consider it all Joy When You Encounter Trials (James 1:2)

Many times in Bible studies I have quoted these passages to people who ask questions like, What good can possibly come out of this difficulty?, or Why does God allow evil? Our experience in Cuba proves up Romans 5:3-5, "we exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings perseverance, and perseverance proven character, and proven character hope, and hope does not disappoint...". I experienced perseverance, I saw proven character at work, and I know the hope that does not disappoint; because as we were floundering around with difficulties and problems, God was blessing us just as Paul said, "because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."

How do I know God was with us and blessing us? For starters, He used us to present the Gospel to hundreds of people. Then He provided for us wherever we went (most of the time we didn't know where we were). Our prayers were always answered. We spent most of a day detained at the Communist party headquarters being interrogated, yet everyone was patient and joyful. We somehow found our way (w/o an interpreter) from one end of the island to the other. To tell you how poor our language skills were, I was the best Spanish speaker in the group--no telling what I was really saying in my broken Spanish, but it worked. One night we were lost and couldn't find a hotel in the wee hours and were about to give up, when some kid on a bicycle said with hand signals to follow him. After winding around dark alleys and back streets, he delivered us to a nice hotel. When we finally arrived back in Havana we faced the problem of the lost passport. We stumbled into a hotel unannounced with no reservations. Believe it or not, as we stood at the desk begging for rooms, the guy who lost his passport noticed a large wallet on the rear table right in his view. It was his wallet with his passport in it. Someone had found it a week earlier and just put it there that day. Just like we prayed--it found him.

Summing up an adventurous week, I would say we saw God do some wonderful things using us as His servants, and we had great comradery between 12 guys who were "walking in the Spirit". Any troubles we encountered were just a part of God's blessings on us, so what is left to say but PRAISE THE LORD.

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