

## **Taking a Bold Stand Against Ungodly Practice**

Let us do an overview of today's lesson and see how it weaves through the OT, NT, Current Events and what today's lesson says to You and Me.

### **A Life Goal:**

Adopting ungodly practices and beliefs can damage our relationship with God as well as our witness for Christ. Can you identify ungodly practices in your lives and communities and ways you can take a compassionate but firm stand against such practices?

Compassion: The deep feeling of sharing the suffering of another in the inclination to give aid or support, or to show mercy.

**What practices in our society's Current Events reveal that our country is on a slippery slope?**

**On March 9, 2006, A few months after Hurricane Katrina, Billy Graham visited New Orleans. What do you think motivated Billy Graham to visit New Orleans at this time?**

Mardi Gras is a celebration that takes place in many countries. The French regions in the United States have Mardi Gras celebrations, most notably in New Orleans where there is traditionally a large French Catholic population. Mardi Gras being celebrated in the French Quarter section of New Orleans at Mardi Gras Point. The celebration was expanded as a French or Catholic celebration.

Mardi Gras celebration is usually held in February or March on the final three days before Ash Wednesday and ends at midnight before Ash Wednesday. Then the fasting season of Lent begins on Ash Wednesday and continues for 46 days and ends at Easter. (40 days not counting Sunday's.) Ash Wednesday is a moving feast and occurs between February 4<sup>th</sup> and March 10<sup>th</sup> each year. Ashes are placed on a persons forehead as a sign of repentance. The ashes come from burned palms from the previous year's Palm Sunday. **(Much the same way when we say we are Christians it's like walking around with ashes on our foreheads, everyone can see our practices.)**

The traditional purpose of the Season of Lent is the preparation of the believer – through prayer, penitence, almsgiving and self-denial. The last week of Lent is the week before Easter which includes Palm Sunday and Good Friday and commemorates the last week of the earthly life of Jesus Christ before his crucifixion on Good Friday and his resurrection on Easter Sunday.

Mardi Gras, Ash Wednesday and Lent therefore are meant to be Godly practices.

With the facts surrounding the Mardi Gras celebration let us look at someone who took a bold stand. Billy Graham walked the streets of the French Quarter on March 9, 2006 and preached a message of repentance and salvation. The night before he had preached the same message to an overflow crowd in an arena there. Here Billy Graham took a bold stand against ungodly practices of the type of Mardi Gras celebrations that have become common place. It was a compassionate stand as he compared New Orleans to Job.

**What connection do you think Billy Graham was making between Job and the situation in New Orleans after Hurricane Katerina?**

Now we know that our God does not tempt us, but we do know that He allows things to happen in our lives for a purpose. In God's Word the account of the suffering of Job are a good example. About Job, God asserted. "He is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil." God said to Satan "His possessions are all yours" and God also said "His body is yours, but you may not kill him." Job lost all of his possessions as well as his ten children, sores broke out over his entire body from the top of his head to the bottom of his feet, he was covered with horrible wounds. His wife begged him to curse God and die. In reading Job 23 we see Job's deep feelings of loneliness.

There are times when we learn Godly practices in the loneliness of our suffering, perhaps our loneliness is a result of health problems, illness of a family member or the loss of a job.

**Have you ever felt loneliness in a time of suffering in your life?**

And so, when Billy Graham visited New Orleans and prayed for the people, we now can look at Hurricane Katerina from a different perspective, not the overall physical damage that occurred but the individual lives that suffered, the people who lost everything and were lonely and hurting.

Was it Billy Graham's prayer (warning) that the people might consider the intent of their practices? Would the people understand that God may allow suffering in order to draw his presence into sharp relief, shading out what they thought was so important and giving the people a greater appreciation for his perfect love and grace.

Compare the New Testament story of "The Sabbath Healing at the Pool of Bethesda" with Mardi Gras.

There was a practice of the sick to lay near the Pool of Bethesda and wait for the waters to move and then get into the pool and be healed by the waters of the pool, there was an invalid laying there one day and as Jesus walked by he saw the man waiting by the pool, Jesus asked the man "Do you want to get well?" "Sir." the invalid replied, I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk."

Later Jesus found this man at the temple and said to him, "See you are well again, stop sinning or something worse may happen to you."

**These sick people would come to this pool area "religiously" to be healed. What kind of practice do you think this was? Do you think it had anything to do with faith?**

**Why do you think Jesus told the invalid, whom he had healed, to go home and stop sinning or something worse might happen?**

Does an ungodly practice mean that you can do it now and then as long as it does not develop into a continual practice?

**There are many practices in the OT that put man on a slippery slope, but let us go way back to the very beginning and look at “The” practice that put man on a slippery slope to begin with.**

God creates the earth and then puts man in the Garden of Eden and hands the keys of His creation over to Adam to work this garden and take care of it and to expand the Kingdom of God, to be fruitful and to multiply – but a dramatic shift takes place when Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command. God had said to Adam “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die.” -- but Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command and ate from the forbidden tree. At the moment of their disobedience sin, sickness, and death became part of man's life on earth.

**God took a bold stand against the ungodly practice of disobedience and escorted Adam and Eve out of the Garden of Eden.**

This practice of disobedience sets the basis of free will for mankind; at this moment in time mankind is in desperate need of a Savior and God sets in motion the first promise of the Messiah. This message of a Messiah is the key to understanding the OT and NT for it is faith in God's Son that is the only thing that can save mankind.

In the OT Era mankind understood this message of the promised Messiah by obedience and faith in God's Word.

**How are You and Me able to understand this message of the promised Messiah?**

Way back in Genesis God gave Adam the keys to His Kingdom and commanded Adam to not disobey Him. God's command to all mankind is that we believe in His Son Jesus. When You and Me put our trust in God's Son then God gives the keys to His Kingdom to You and Me and to all who recognize and believe in His Son Jesus as their Lord and Savior. When we put our trust in Jesus then God gives believers **the power of the Holy Spirit to live with Godly practices** and to take a bold stand against ungodly practices. (1 Corinthians 2:14-16)

(Time permitting)

Lets us close by looking at God's Temple. A temple that God gave detailed instructions on how to build and how to worship there. Let us see if the peoples practices in God's Temple lined up with God's instructions.