

## MISERY OR MAJESTY?

Dr. Fred Fourie ~Sunday, December 31, 2006

*For surely*  
**I KNOW THE**  
**plans**  
*I have for*  
**YOU,**  
 says the  
*Lord...*  
**TO GIVE YOU A**  
**future**  
 WITH  
*Hope.*  
 Jeremiah 29:11. NRSV

**Jeremiah 1:4 -10** Now the word of the LORD came to me saying, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations". Then I said, "Ah, Lord GOD! Truly I do not know how to speak, for I am only a boy." But the LORD said to me, "Do not say, 'I am only a boy'; for you shall go to all to whom I send you, and you shall speak whatever I command you. Do not be afraid of them, for I am with you to deliver you, says the LORD." Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth; and the LORD said to me, "Now I have put my words in your mouth. See, today I appoint you over nations and over kingdoms, to pluck up and to pull down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant."

**John 15:12 -17:** "This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are

my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father. You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

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In today's scripture we heard Jeremiah describe how the Lord God called him and sent him to speak God's words and to bring a positive message to a negative world. From John's Gospel we heard the message that Jesus appointed us to bear fruit that will last. He calls us, not like servants, but as friends and commands us to love one another, to go into the world and to bear fruit. Positive messages from yesteryear!

Many people simply do not look at life in such a positive manner at all. Many believe that they are born losers and expect that only bad things will come their way. Some time ago, a young man went to the wealthy part of town and knocked on the door of an expensive home seeking odd jobs to earn money. The owner was able and willing to part with a few dollars, so he instructed him to paint the porch using the green paint that was stored in the garage. A few hours later the young man, covered with green paint from head to toe, returned to get his pay. As he pocketed the \$50, he said, "By the way sir, that's not a Porsche - it's a Ferrari!"

Now, someone may hear this story and think, "It could happen, and if so, it will happen to me." Regardless of what bad happens, there's always someone who knew it would! Many people have a, "I'm born to loose" attitude. They can only think of themselves in a negative way. That could be an indication that for them life is generally more one of misery than one of majesty. Let me explain. In Sweden there is a saying that in every man there is a king, and in every woman, a queen. There is a way to respect and speak to a per-

son so that they realize their self-worth and uniqueness. Do so, and you will be amazed to see their inner majesty stepping forth.

Many people are more familiar with the misery, unfortunately, than with the majesty of life. They struggle through life with "a little child from their youth" who follows them around and says to them, "you are going to lose, you're too fat or too skinny, you're dumb, you're nobody or you will never amount to anything" Oh, when that happens, see the misery of being human. The awful agony of self-rejection! Many people fail in life because they grew up with a poor self- image.

There are those who are failing in almost everything they do because of an inability to accept themselves as who they really are. They go to extremes to avoid having persons dislike them. Any small word of criticism is taken as a personal affront. They isolate and insulate themselves emotionally from others. They dare not let anyone penetrate the facade that they have constructed. **They fear that others might discover that they are, in fact, human! ☺**

Do you get the picture? That is exactly what life does to some of us. Even worse, that is what we often do to ourselves. **And are we miserable!** Some are even self destructive. Some feel that they are somehow obstructed from being what God created them to be. **When that happens, it is all misery to be human!**

The language of faith is different and leads us to feel different about ourselves. Just listen how the prophet Jeremiah was inspired for life while he was still only a child. He writes, 'The Lord said to me, I chose you before I gave you life, and before you were born I selected you to be a prophet to the nations.'" **Before you were born I selected you.** What an awesome statement in its philosophical, theological, moral implications and awesome in its practical implications for our daily lives.

**At the point where my misery is touched by our loving and understanding God who expects so much of me, a complete change takes place! There my misery is transformed into majesty.** Much later Jesus put it this way. "I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last, so that the Father will give you whatever you ask him in my name. That is the good news ~ that is the story of our faith. We matter. We are worth something. **Let nobody say that we are nobodies.** The Psalmist says that we were created as the crown on God's creation. The heart of the Christian Gospel is that Jesus Christ willingly surrendered his life **to open doors of real life** to us. ["I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly." John 10:10]

Through the writings of **Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, the famous Russian author, the world became** aware of the forced labor camps of the GULAG where millions were imprisoned and many political prisoners died a horrible death. **Solzhenitsyn was condemned to forced labor and only barely escaped with his life.** Later, in 1970, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature and exiled from the Soviet Union in 1974. He wrote that one day, while he still was a prisoner in that Soviet labor camp, **the hopelessness** became just too much to bear. So he placed his shovel down and sat down, prepared to be bludgeoned to death by the first passing guard! As he sat waiting, head down, **he felt a presence.** Slowly he lifted his eyes. Next to him stood a fellow prisoner, an old man with a wrinkled utterly expressionless face. Hunching over, the man drew a stick through the sand at Solzhenitsyn's feet, **deliberately tracing out the sign of the cross.** As Solzhenitsyn stared at that rough outline, his entire perspective shifted. He knew he was merely one person against the all-powerful Soviet empire. **Yet in that moment, he also knew that the hope of all humankind was represented by that simple cross.** Through its power anything is possible. Solzhenitsyn slowly got up, picked

up his shovel, and went back to work -- not knowing then that [his writings on truth and freedom](#) would one day inflame the whole world and combat human cruelty everywhere.

[Such is the power of faith.](#) Such is the power one person can have when she or he realizes that his or her life really does matter. Jesus said, "[You did not choose me, but I chose you](#)". It is **wrong** for you and me to think that we are nobodies and that we cannot make a difference.

On this final Sunday ~ the last day of 2006 ~ we are also thinking and planning for a promising 2007. Once again, **our choice will be between Misery and Majesty.** If we fail to draw upon the resources of our faith, this world can become a very lonesome place and misery **looms!** Through our faith in a loving God who knew us even before we were born **majesty beckons.** When faith resurrects the Majesty deep within us, the king or queen deep within us responds and comes forward. It is then that we discover that our lives really do matter. We can make a difference!

"I said to the man who stood at the gate of the year; Give me a light that I may tread safely into the unknown. And he replied, Go into the darkness and put your hand into the hand of God. That shall be to you better than light and safer than a known way!"

Minnie Harkins

"I need your presence every passing hour  
I need your grace to foil the tempter's power  
Give me your love, my guide and stay to be  
Through cloud and sunshine, O abide with me

I fear no foe, with you at hand to bless;  
Ills have no weight and tears no bitterness;  
Where is death's sting? Where, grave, your victory?  
In life ~ in death, O Christ, abide with me."

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May God bless you and yours in the New Year; may God's spirit be your guide and may you experience the Majesty of the assurance of your faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior!

**AMEN**

**PRAYER** [Faithful God. Thank you that the Majesty of being human is fully ours when we consciously live in the presence of God. Be with us, also at times when we face Misery and are tempted to lay the shovel down. Let us then also become aware of you presence – as we do right now! You have indeed called us by the name – we are yours!](#)

**AMEN**