

Snapshots

by

Rocky Fleming

“Do not judge by appearances, but judge with right judgment.” Jesus speaking - John 7:25 (ESV)

In chapter 7 of John, we see the same problem occurring with the legalistic, control driven Pharisees and Jesus that we have come to expect. These legalistic Jews could not believe Jesus was truly their Messiah and the Savior of the world spoken of in the scriptures that they carefully poured over, for He didn't fit their expectations. He was not regal enough, nor did He have the pedigree they thought. He did not measure up to their standards of behavior, nor the standards they declared were required for the Son of God. They had taken a couple snapshot looks at Jesus as He related with the people around Him and summed Him up in a hurry that He was not their man. From that point on, He became their enemy, for He also represented a challenge to their authority and their own behavior. Now get this: Because they took a snap shot view of Jesus and didn't really get to know Him, they judged Him as different from themselves, and therefore determined Him an imposter based on their limited perception. Because of this, they missed Him altogether, and missed the blessing that would have come to them.

Have you ever summed someone up quickly with a snapshot view or initial impression, and once that person was boxed into your perception, there was nothing that could get him or her out of that box? Do you have any idea how wrong this evaluation tool is in God's eyes and how flawed it is for living life? Do you have any idea how our life is like a weather climate that is pretty steady most of the time? But as is true with any and every place that has a steady climate, a temporary weather pattern could come through and it could be something completely different. Wouldn't it be unfair to judge a city or region based on a weather pattern that comes through as if that weather is the climate? Wouldn't it be the same to judge someone based on what we obviously see, but do not understand what is going on below the surface of his or her life? Let me give you a real life example that happened to me a couple weeks ago and with this example, hopefully I can transfer the lesson God gave to me about incorrect snapshots that we can sometimes make with people.

I had just finished a little fishing trip not far from our farm. I was driving back by way of the gravel, country road that leads to our farm, while pulling my old bass boat behind the truck. This road doesn't have a lot of traffic, and for the most part there are only a few farmhouses and some cabins tucked into the woods. People stay to themselves and there is a pretty eclectic bunch of people ranging from Buddhists to Fundamental Baptists, to Hindu, to atheists, to Evangelicals, to survivalists. I really don't know for sure all the differences. Even so, it is a peaceful community. As I drove down the road, I noticed a tractor in the middle of the road and it was still running, but no one was on it. I was blocked. The first thought I had was an impatient, *“Whoever did this was very inconsiderate of others! He is so inconsiderate!”*

I looked a little further down the road and saw the old man who drove the tractor and who had left it there. He was throwing rocks. The next thought I had was, *“What is this guy doing? Doesn't he know I don't have*

time for him to take a break and leave his tractor in the way of my progress just to throw rocks? He is so selfish!"

I was able to get around the tractor with my truck and I saw what the old man was throwing a rock at. It was a small dog. The next thought I had about the old man was, *"How cruel that old man is to be throwing rocks at a small dog that represents no threat to him. He is so cruel!"*

I saw the dog get the message from the old man, and he took off running away from him, back up the road where he had apparently come from. When I caught up with him, I saw the little dog run into a yard where a young girl bent down and greeted him with tears and laughter. It was a beautiful reunion. It was apparent that the little girl had been frightened that her dog had run away on a road that could have gotten him run over by a truck, and she was greatly relieved to have him back in her arms. I then thought of the old man who got off his tractor and frightened the dog back down the road to save his life and restore him to his master. I then thought, *"What a kind man he is to have gone to that trouble to do what he did. Not many people would have done that. He is a good man with a good heart!"*

My point with this story is that inside of a few minutes of getting to know the old man better, and what he was dealing with (weather pattern), I discovered that I had misjudged the man three times based on the perceptions I had of him, before I got it right on the fourth perception. I took snapshots of the old guy and never really got to know the kindhearted man he is, for I looked at a few outside appearances of things to evaluate him. Had I not seen the complete picture, I would have judged him completely wrong. Little wonder Jesus told us to not judge others, for we do not have the complete insight to truly know another person, and we will always lack necessary facts.

Have you ever had someone misjudge you like that? I have, and it hurts. It hurts so bad that God allowed me to be misjudged and taste the dredges of unfair criticism so that I could understand that I have hurt people similarly in the past. My grandmother once told me that there is nothing like taking some of your own medicine to understand how bitter it is. God has allowed me to taste some of the bitter medicine that I've dished out, and to also be hurt by it, so He could make me vehemently hate gossip and slander and being critical of other people. He hates it, and I think it is right that we hate what God hates. So, I would greatly caution you to consider how easy it is to fall into a spirit of judgmental-ism, and miss the truth of the real person you did not get to know. We all do it. But God's man needs to make an effort to stay far away from this tendency.

Most of the Pharisees didn't get to know Jesus, and therefore, they missed the blessing of getting to know the King of Kings. It appears that Nicodemus, a Pharisee, did seek to know Jesus more deeply than first impressions, and because of this, he became a believer and follower of Christ and openly identified with Him after Jesus' crucifixion. He was blessed by this revelation and his life and the influence he had for the rest of his life is an example of how getting to know a person better can often be a blessing to us in return. But, it took Nicodemus overriding his initial impressions and trying to go deeper with understanding Jesus to get his insight. What a lesson for us all.

Getting to know a person's struggle in life from their past to their present goes a long way to help us understand why they act or react a certain way. Sometimes just hearing a person's life story helps us become a little more tolerant of their idiosyncrasy, and then to know how to love and appreciate them. Now I'm not

saying that there are not some jerks out there and that we need to hang out with all people. I'm not saying that at all. But, I am saying to not use a snapshot of a person's life as your evaluation tool. Get to know the person better before you consider shutting them out of your life.

Back to my story of the old man: The old man got back on his tractor and waved a courteous "thank you" to me for my patience with him, by allowing him to help the little girl and her dog. I whispered a prayer...

"Lord, I ask You to bless that old kindhearted man, and have someone do something good for him today. And, Oh Lord, ...thank you for reminding me to give everyone an opportunity to show their good side. I had to see all of what he was doing and why he was doing it to get to know the guy better. Who knows, he may have been an angel for that little girl and for me as well, for he taught me a good lesson about life by just watching him serve the little girl? Maybe that is what I needed to see and remember? There are many things that I don't know about people, and I should be reminded that some of those people may very well be messengers from You. The fact is, I might need to remember this the next time I am quick to judge another person, for I might be judging an angel that You have sent to teach me. Help me to remember this Father."

***Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.
Hebrews 13:2 (ESV)***