

Craftsmanship

The winter of 1498 was memorable for its bitter cold. The city of Florence, Italy, was blanketed in snow, and Michelangelo Buonarroti's heart was as heavy as the gray clouds that dipped low and blocked out the sun.

The Grand Duke of Florence, Lorenzo de' Medici, had been the young artist's benefactor. It was this great supporter of the arts who had given Michelangelo the numerous slabs of marble he needed to refine his incredible talents. But before Michelangelo was able to create his masterpieces, the old duke died, and his son, Piero, had no use for a sculptor on the payroll. So the great artist's talents were put on the shelf, and Michelangelo sat and waited. That is, until a few days before a great party at the new duke's palace.

In what looked like an incredible answer to his prayers, Michelangelo was summoned before Piero. He'd never been to the palace, even when the grand duke had been alive, and he hurried down the streets, past the guards, and in to see Duke Piero.

While he was afraid to believe it, the rumor circulated by the servant who came to fetch Michelangelo was that he was being commissioned to carve a great statue! At last!

When Michelangelo arrived at the palace, he was ushered into a large room where not only Duke Piero de' Medici but also a crowd of the duke's friends awaited his arrival. He was indeed told that his services as a sculptor were needed by his new patron. All he had to do was to go down to the garden, and he'd find all the white marble he needed to make a masterpiece for the duke's party.

Can you guess by now what the duke was actually asking Michelangelo to do? All the white marble in the garden was... snow. Perhaps the greatest sculptor of all time had been brought to the palace to create a snow sculpture for a royal dinner party!

Just imagine for a moment what was going through Michelangelo's mind as he walked from the room and down to the garden. If it had been me, I'd have been furious. What an embarrassment! What a colossal waste of time -to put all that effort into something that would melt as soon as the sun broke through the clouds!

Michelangelo could have stormed out or at least left the duke's presence with an angry, unwilling heart. Instead, he simply went to work. Hour after hour he gathered snow and packed it tightly into a great mound. Then, at last, he began to carve.

Working from the top down a head appeared, and then shoulders, limbs, torso, and legs. A figure was emerging from the white snow that would be viewed as a joke by Duke Piero and his guests, and then melt away in no time.

Yet still, Michelangelo worked. That's because he had decided in his heart that even if all he could do was make Florence a more beautiful place for a few hours -he would put all his heart into carving that block of snow. And then it came time for Piero's party.

The guests arrived. The snow carving finally was unveiled... and instead of laughter came breathless silence. The duke and his guests were staring in awe and amazement at the figure in the snow that seemed able to breathe and walk and even sling a rock at a giant.

The Duke was silenced by the tireless efforts of the young artist who had created a masterpiece of the Biblical David made of snow.

Then, amazingly, that statue turned to marble. Not that hour, of course, for it wasn't magic. But in the days that followed, Michelangelo's David was replicated in marble -given to him by none other than Duke Piero himself. This priceless work has drawn millions of people to Florence since it was unveiled -all because Michelangelo was willing to carve something of beauty out of snow....

(The above story is paraphrased from John Trent's "The Light of Home".)

As the snowflakes were to Michelangelo, so we are to God. So many days in our brokenness, we bring Him seemingly valueless snowflakes. In humility and in trust, we submit our frailties to the Master Craftsman's hand. By His strength alone, we walk away from the process in sheer amazement that He can accomplish something of eternal value with our availability. I look at the "Billy Grahams" and "Mother Teresa's" of the world and see fine marble sculpture. I turn to the mirror and see so little to place in His hands. Someone once said, "God doesn't need our ability, He needs our availability." I like that. It gives me hope. One thing we can be sure of. Give God snowflakes or give Him premium marble raw material, you can be certain that He is at work in you and me and He has a plan for our lives. "For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10)

Psalm 51 gives me great comfort. "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit. A broken and a contrite heart, God will not despise."

The other side of the coin is just as certain. When I put myself ahead of God and vainly attempt to accomplish goals for my benefit, my success is as vain as sculpting sand castles on the edge of an incoming tide.

As a granddad of 8, believe me, I have piled and shaped many a shovelful of beach front sand. Like the countless, fleshly indulgences that surround us and lure our time, talents and treasures, the sand castles of sordid gain vanish painfully in the ever-devouring tide of futility, leaving not even a trace of the labor of the mind and hand that built them.

A laborer brings his hands to the job. An artist brings his hands and his mind. A craftsman brings his mind, his hands, and his heart. I love to build and do life with three remarkable friends. Richard Parton is a heavy equipment operator. Byron Joplin is a framer. Jerry Nichols is a mechanic. All three men are craftsmen and close friends. Their hands, minds, and hearts come to work everyday using the talents God has given them to "build the Kingdom" for God's glory.

The Master Craftsman gives them fulfillment. Their significance comes from the hand of their Sculptor to whom they each say, "The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; my God, my rock, in whom I have refuge, My shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge." (2 Samuel 22:2-3)

Mark these Key Words: God Jesus

Old Testament Viewpoint

Psalms, 139:1-4,16-18; Psalms, 16:11; 1 Samuel 13:14; Exodus 6:12

Psalms, 139:1-4,16-18 O LORD, You have searched me and known me. You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you understand my thought from afar. You scrutinize my path and my lying down, and are intimately acquainted with all my ways. Even before there is a word on my tongue, behold, O LORD, You know it all.

16 Your eyes saw my unformed body.
 All the days ordained for me
 were written in Your book
 before one of them came to be.
 How precious to me are Your thoughts, O God!
 How vast is the sum of them!
 Were I to count them,
 they would outnumber the grains of sand.
 When I awake,
 I am still with You.

Psalms, 16:11 You will make known to me the path of life; in Your presence is fullness of joy; in Your right hand there are pleasures forever.

1 Samuel 13:14 "But now your kingdom shall not endure. The LORD has sought out for Himself a man after His own heart, and the LORD has appointed him as ruler over His people, because you have not kept what the LORD commanded you."

Exodus 6:12 But Moses spoke before the LORD, saying, "Behold, the sons of Israel have not listened to me; how then will Pharaoh listen to me, for I am unskilled in speech?"

New Testament Viewpoint

Ephesians 2:10; John 3:17-18; Acts 9:3-6; II Corinthians 1:4; John 13: 37-38

Ephesians 2:10 For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

John 3:17-18 "For God did not send the Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him. He who believes in Him is not judged; he who does not believe has been judged already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God."

Acts 9:3-6 As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but get up and enter the city, and it will be told you what you must do."

II Corinthians 1:4 Who comforts us in all our affliction so that we will be able to comfort those who are in any affliction with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.

John 13: 37-38 Peter said to Him, "Lord, why can I not follow You right now? I will lay down my life for You." Jesus answered, "Will you lay down your life for Me? Truly, truly, I say to you, a rooster will not crow until you deny Me three times."

 **OBSERVATION: What is God saying?**

1) Just as you are, you are God's "workmanship". You are "fearfully and wonderfully made". What does that mean to you?

2) God is a whole lot more interested in our availability than our ability. He's a whole lot more concerned with the intentions of our heart than the perfection of our product! (Good thing!)

A. Describe David's shortcomings and failures: _____

B. Describe Peter's shortcomings and failures: _____

C. Describe Paul's shortcomings and failures: _____

3) How does knowing how greatly God used these three in spite of their failures encourage you today?

4) What do the passages say to you about your gifts and talents and God's plan for your life?

5) In II Corinthians 1:4 God says He always uses our pain, failures and scars to make us more effective in ministry. How do you see Him using yours?

MY PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS: *What else of significance do you see God saying in this passage?*

APPLICATION: *How does this passage relate to me today? What changes does it bring to my life?*

LOCKER ROOM: *How did you measure success before you sold out to Christ? How do you measure success today?*

MEMORY VERSE: Ephesians 2:10

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them.

My Prayers

A

Adoration: Father, today I praise You for...

C

Confession: Father, please forgive me for...

T

Thanksgiving: Father, today I'm thankful for...

S

Supplication: Father, the people & things that I wish to pray for today are...