

God's News In The News

Week One Hundred Fifty-Six

Should We Boycott The Chosen?

Boycott's Galore

In recent weeks people far and wide have decided to protest decisions by companies to advertise their support of Gay Pride by offering beer cans with Dylan Mulvaney on it and more recently, selling clothing for men who want to dress as women and the list goes on and on. The way they are venting is to vote with their pocketbooks in the form of what is called a boycott. If recent results are any indication of such retaliation, it is working. Executives have been suspended or even fired and sales have plummeted with stock prices taking a precipitous dive for many of these companies who, as some described as going woke and then going broke. Anheuser Busch, Target, North Face are among the casualties of these boycotts as each are feeling the financial pain of customers not buying their products and even distributors seeing their sales take a nosedive as their customers can't sell their products. It has been a very effective strategy so far.

Interesting Etymology

For those wondering, the term "boycott" originated from a rent dispute as seen in this quote from the web site *etymonline.com*:

1880, noun and verb, "to combine in refusing to have dealings with, and preventing or discouraging others from doing so, as punishment for political or other differences." From Irish Land League ostracism of Capt. Charles C. Boycott (1832-1897), land agent of Lough-Mask in County Mayo, who refused to lower rents for his tenant farmers. Quickly adopted by newspapers in languages as far afield as Japanese (boikotto). The family name is from a place in England.

Don't you feel smarter now? Anyway, the term has a firm place in the global lexicon and hasn't strayed far from its original usage. Famous boycotts range from Rosa Parks refusing to give up her seat to a white man to the various and sundry boycotts against apartheid in South Africa. If you search online, it isn't too hard to get a list of people or groups who decided to say no to things they decried. And today is no different other than the fact that such dissents can get traction much faster with the advent of the Internet. A company can take a hit quicker when people decide they are fed up with anyone or anything that offends them.

It Goes Both Ways

With retailer Target, those who are supporters of the Gay Pride movement, they are threatening a counter-boycott if the merchandise that was at the front of the store isn't moved back. In either event, the stores are going to get lower sales creating a no-win situation as sales suffer from both sides of the argument. The only thing such boycotts against the original boycott create are seeing how much one protest hurts the most. So far, there appears to be a stronger initial blow back.

That may not always be the case and time will tell if new companies supporting Pride Month take significant hits for their support of it as the list of them find their way onto the Internet daily. Add to the list Cracker Barrel which saw rocking chairs for sale with the colors of the Gay rainbow on them. But the one we will discuss at length in this lesson is the popular Christian show by author Dallas Jenkins about the life of Jesus called The Chosen. At the heart of the controversy is a photo from the set of the production where a Pride flag is clearly seen. The subsequent videos and articles were seen online almost immediately which is a testament to the popularity of the show.

Jenkins Responds

As one would expect, Jenkins had no choice but to address the media storm as he had had to do numerous other times when his association with a Mormon production company that literally got the project off the ground and it is safe to say that *The Chosen* wouldn't have been made without that business partnership. In several videos, Jenkins delineates why he is not ashamed of working with Angel Studios which some assert that he is unequally yoked with them. It is, however, his statement that these Mormons believe in the same Jesus as he does that continues to cause many to question his faith, and by extension the content of the show, a show that he maintains is true to the Bible. Another critique are the ads that portray Satan as a bumbling fallen angel which some feel undermines the seriousness of the accuser of the brethren. Then there are the advisors for the show which consist of a Catholic scholar, a Jewish scholar and an Evangelical scholar, a fact that some say is the start of joke with all three of them meeting in a bar. Yes, I went there, but I know many of you were thinking about it. Regardless, the timing of the photo could not have been worse in light of these other boycotts and it has deepened the feeling that there are no places where the tentacles will not reach. But let's get back to that response.

A Decision From The Start

According to Jenkin's video response, he and his wife decided from the start to have a work environment where people's views would not be suppressed or squelched. T-shirts could be worn that were decidedly not Christian as well as social media accounts not scrutinized by those involved in the show from the actors to the technicians. He said that what people wear is not judged nor the political views they hold criticized or checked. He said that he wanted to foster an open workplace which he said was more like a family. So far, according to Jenkins, that's exactly what they have. The Pride flag in question is from a tech who has displayed it from the start of his involvement with the production. Up until recently, it hasn't been an issue. Like I said earlier, the timing couldn't have been worse. He noted that not all the actors share his views of the Bible and even his political persuasion. And, he said that this wasn't going to change even if people start boycotting the show.

But Is He Right?

That is the question, isn't it? Well, maybe it shouldn't be, but it is a fair criticism. If you are in charge of the production, you would think the rules you set should be ones that reflect your Christian views or, at the very least are neutral. A great deal of the places I've worked at have policies in place where your workspace should be free of controversial or offensive displays and should only be work related. Hanging a cross right-side up or upside down would get you written up and actually could eventually get you fired. Controversial dress would do the same. And if you were vocal about your political persuasion, this too would get you in hot water at some point. Neutrality was the standard and I had little or no problem with that as long as I wasn't asked to do anything immoral or unbiblical. If you wanted to get paid, you towed the line. And critics of Jenkins now are wondering why he couldn't just tell this contractor that the flag needed to be removed as this was a Christian production.

The Content Isn't Affected, So Far

Jenkins has adamantly stated that he and he alone is responsible for the content of the show and that he is firmly an evangelical in his view of the Bible and that isn't going to change. All of these other things are distractions and he has vowed to never compromise the Biblical message with the shows they produce. He walks a fine line as he weaves the retelling of the life of Jesus using a paintbrush dripping with literary license, but he's not the first to do so, and certainly won't be the last. I for one have done no less in my portrayals of the life of Peter who I

endeavored to bring to life over the span of a 14-week series my pastor preached. Did I fill in some stories with what I thought Peter said? You betcha. And I, like Jenkins had no problems doing so as long as I didn't contradict the Bible account. So far, I haven't seen anything that makes me question that standard in spite of some of the many criticisms I initially had, criticisms that were subsequently resolved by realizing my perceptions were not based on Scripture, but what I was told about the events depicted. Jenkins and his writers skillfully and artfully have done a masterful job of bringing the Gospels to life, addressing topics that are touching people where they live and impacting generations of people the church isn't reaching. To deny the way this show is changing lives is shortsighted in my opinion. And therein is the rub. What are we to do with the Pride flag on the set, the assertion that Mormons believe in the same Jesus, et al?

Jenkins And The Show Aren't Perfect

That standard is left for Jesus and His word. Jenkins is taking arrows for his work environment decision which could have been avoided and no one would have thought the worse for him doing it. He could have said that the production is Christian in nature and that those involved should refrain from outward shows of opinions contrary to the Bible, or just say that they keep those opinions to themselves just like any other job does. He didn't and to say that it is no issue misses the point. Hindsight is 20/20 they say and perhaps a different approach could have avoided this firestorm. If, however, this allows him and other believers a chance to openly witness then the trade-off is worth it. Jenkins didn't make that part of his mea culpa though and I think it would have helped his case. Again, he's not perfect and he believes that the family feel the cast and crew have as a result of this open work environment is worth it. I can only take his word for it. It is easy for me to be an armchair quarterback and I fully admit my opinion is from one not in heart of the fire.

Should We Boycott The Chosen?

I suppose I should address this since it is the title of the lesson, right? My feeling is that we shouldn't. None of the concerns voiced come close to superseding the immense impact the actual show is having on our world. People who have no clue about Jesus or the Bible are watching and it is changing their lives. It is bringing to life the greatest story ever told and that is main thing. Imperfect people working on a project with high spiritual impact is not new. It happens every Sunday in church and while we can refine the process and avoid mistakes, as long as the Gospel is proclaimed and Jesus is lifted up He will draw all men to Him. All these things people are seemingly outraged at will amount to wood, hay and stubble in the end. Rather than boycott this phenomena we should support it. Rather than publicly berate it, we should embrace it as long as it stays true to the Bible and so far, it has. And we should keep Jenkins and his team in prayer as they are doing the best job they can, warts and all with the task of making the Bible come to life. Are there more mistakes to be made? As long as humans are involved, yes. But let us extend grace to Jenkins in the same measure as we have been given it. I for one am not throwing the Chosen under the bus. I suggest you do the same.