

Tune Out the Jesus Junk

I'm still amazed at the junk evangelists pitch on television.

My alarm goes off at 5:50 sharp every morning, so I drag myself out of bed and head to the garage where I keep my exercise equipment and treadmill. While working out, I often turn on various TV channels to keep track of the early morning round of TV evangelists. I've been producing Christian television programming for 30 years now, and I'm still amazed—and often shocked—at the junk some evangelists pitch on television.

Vials of anointing oil and “miracle water” are still big, as well as prayer cloths, miracle seeds and gimmicks of all kinds—I prefer to call it “Jesus Junk.” One TV prophet will even give you a “personal prophecy” (after you call and give him your credit card number, of course).

How did we come to this? How has the historic Christian faith that defeated the Roman Empire, changed nations and transformed the Western world disintegrated into cheap trinkets and religious trash? We can always criticize the TV evangelists who pitch this stuff (and we should), but the fact is there's an even bigger culprit. Us.

We've created a generation of Christians who look for a magic bullet. That's why people travel thousands of miles, from conference to conference, just to “get a word,” find “fresh oil,” “get the glory” or “catch their blessing.” The truth is, they're looking for the easy way out.

It's interesting that after World II we experienced an age of real miracles in this country. We had amazing prefab housing,

miracle drugs, fast food and space-age appliances, and instant satisfaction was everywhere—and it changed everyone.

It's no wonder that in such a marvelous era "miracle ministries" were born. Men and women such as Oral Roberts, William Branham, Kathryn Kuhlman and Jack Coe ignited a new passion for the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

But now, 50 or more years later, the pendulum has swung so far we've become addicted to the feeling. We've forgotten how difficult living the Christian life can be, and in our pursuit of prosperity and a nice Mercedes, we've lost touch with the years Paul rotted in prison, Peter's horrific upside-down crucifixion, and William Tyndale's martyrdom from being strangled and burned at the stake for giving us the remarkable gift of the English Bible.

Yes, God calls us to live in victory, but real triumph comes from doing battle in the difficult trenches of life. And, frankly, in this post-Christian culture it's not going to get easier.

But research indicates that millions profess Christianity—and yet they know remarkably little about even the basic principles of our faith. As a result, we think The Da Vinci Code is true, wonder if the "gospel" of Judas should be included in the Scriptures and look like fools when we feebly attempt to share our faith with others.

Do I believe in miracles? Absolutely. I also believe handkerchiefs that touched Paul were taken to the sick and they were healed (see Acts 19:11-12). But Paul didn't mass-market them and use them for a fundraising scheme.

I even believe God prospers people. But the Christian faith isn't about chasing a blessing or getting a word. It's about taking up our cross. It's about making the time to study to show ourselves approved. And it's about "[knowing] Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead" (Phil. 3:10-11, NIV).

The next time that TV evangelist pitches his miracle water, prayer cloth or other trinkets, put back your credit card, turn off the TV, pick up your cross and follow Jesus.

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