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ZWTF

Zapping-you Whenever Thoughts Flow

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Only Four Days Left, Part 2

Holding on loosely to bodies,
houses and spouses.

If only four days remain until the snatching away of the body of Christ, then what manner of people ought we be? We ought to be the manner who resist undue upset over the leaves in our gutters, the love-handles on our mid-sections, and the flaws sewn into those God lends us to love.

BODIES

Paul calls these our “bodies of humiliation” for good cause. I have a hard time watching ballet dancers. Most people believe these leaping, elfin performers to be “beautiful,” “leaping,” “elfin,” even “elegant.” I, on the other hand, must avert my eye. I can’t help thinking to myself, *Jesus Christ, these people have arms and legs*. At least rock and roll dancers realize that the best these bodies can do is flail. Not taking themselves seriously is the salvation of those who move to the madness of rock. The doom of ballet is the taking of the human body seriously. The tragedy (or comedy, if you wish to look at it that way) is trying to make a clattering collection of bones and sinews move elegantly. Someone should tell the ballet people that it isn’t working; I don’t have the heart.

Arms and legs throw off our center of gravity. They are so unbecoming future celestial forms. Don’t get me wrong. There is a woman here in São Paulo who sits outside our apartment building voicing pleasantries all day to every passer-by. She greets us each morning with a bright, “Bom dia!” and in the afternoons with an equally effusive, “Boa tarde!” We never see her without a sleeveless blouse. The

reason for this, I suppose, is that the woman has no arms. But this speaks to another point: the only thing worse than having awkward bodily attachments is not having them. It is a lose-lose proposition.

The problem is that I am already anticipating my new body. I think about it every day. You assume this to be a spiritual enterprise, but I doubt it. Otherwise, I would be content. Some days this forward-looking disposition makes it harder to bear the present amal-



gamation of organs and appendages. I always felt sorry for Paul, who was shown the third heaven (including a glimpse of his glorious body, I believe), and then returned to his dump in the swamp. If you believe the bodies of this present humiliation to be elegant, wait until you see the elfin leapers of the next era. They will make the flailers of this dispensation seem like so many upside-down cockroaches.

DRESSING THE CORPSE

There are many beautiful people in this world—pity them. All of what we consider beautiful will pass away. (Israel fell in love with Saul because he was handsome and tall; ask them how that worked out.) I feel sorry for the Hollywood types who fortify their faces, bellies, breasts, legs, and gluteal areas with expensive scaffolding. Their faces and asses are just like the walls of their fake movie cities: one puff of wind, and down they fall. I'm not telling you Hollywood types not to wear makeup. I'm not telling you to surrender your ass completely to the force popularized by Newton. Just stop recon-



structing yourselves with plastic and putty. You're trying to dress up a corpse. Everything is going away. Soon. None of you are managing to look younger. You look like old people *trying* to look younger. No one should act one's age, but looking one's age is safer than Botox and embalming fluids.

THIS BODY OF HUMILIATION

Am I really a future ruler of the universe? A future glorified-one? Really? Then why can't I put on my pants

“Am I really a future ruler of the universe? Then why can't I put on my pants correctly?”

“Come and see this,” one says to his fellow. “Our future boss can't put his pants on.” The other says, “Is that him? The one on his back with his legs kicking in the air?” “Yes,” says the first, “the one uttering strange sayings.” Another adds, “Yesterday, one of these future rulers could not unfasten her bra-strap. I had to turn away.”

SELF-PAY

Remember when Jesus sent Peter to the sea to cast a hook and pull out the first fish that bit? Jesus instructed Peter to stick his finger in the fish's mouth and pull out a coin for the temple tax. The temple tax financed the maintenance of God's sacred dwelling. This tax was a huge embarrassment for Israel. The nations were supposed to maintain the Israelite temple for the sake of their benefactors. In the Millennium, the nations will bring their wealth to Jerusalem to support God's darlings. This is how things are “meant” to be. But of course, everything is backward, “wrong” and humiliating today. I see an analogy here between Israel paying her own temple tax and us maintaining our own bodies.

When our bodies are changed, corporeal maintenance issues will vanish. Spirit alone will sustain our lives and frames. As Paul suggests in 1 Corinthians 15:40-41, our bodies will behave more like stars, with a constant, inner-sourced energy. Not a single moment of any day then will solicit preoccupation with toothpaste, deodorant, shampoo, hair gel, dentures, shoes, underwear, underwires, or blouses without sleeves. For now, the present trial demands every ounce (no more than 3 ounces on airplanes, please) of patience we can muster. Each passing day requires a grim maintenance of dying frames. This becomes more difficult as mortality marches on. Decay is a relentless taskmaster. The first day you decide to skip brushing your teeth is the day that seven strains of bacteria muster forces and attack your gums. The day you quit dieting is

correctly? Here I am hopping around in the dark trying to dress. I fall back into the bed because my leg gets caught somewhere between the waist and the cuff of my jeans. *Must life be so difficult?* This is what I ask God, with accompanying expletives. I certainly amuse the celestial beings in attendance.

the day the last fat cell you lost moves back and invites its friends. The day you decide to “just stay in bed,” is the day your body begins practicing for the casket.

DOWN IN THE MOUTH

The deliverance from all this is to care—just not too much. After all, there are only four days left until these bodies of humiliation flash-zap into bodies of glory. (This is how I’m thinking nowadays.) I am not telling you to stop brushing your teeth. In fact, please



NOT.

do brush them. Use soft bristles and employ vertical strokes. Please floss as well—if you don’t mind. The key is: cut yourself some slack. So what if you miss a day or two of flossing? Let the bacteria have fun with their little kingdom for a few days, *then* wreck their castles. My hygienist always says, “Floss every day, twice a day.” I always say, “Of course,” but what I’m really thinking is, “Are you out of your mind? Sorry, Mrs. Goldstein, but I have other things to think about besides my mouth. *You* may think about mouths all the time, but I have other body parts to worry about. God said, ‘Thou shalt have no other gods before me,’ and that includes my mouth. I refuse to make my oral cavity my god. Yes, I will brush my teeth twice a day. Yes, I will scrub my tongue. Yes, I will floss relatively regularly. But enough is enough. May I have my free tube of toothpaste now and go home?”

Don’t get me started on proctologists.

DON’T OVERDO IT

So what if you don’t look as good as you did last year? Of course you don’t. No one does. We are all in the same boat. Not one person on this planet is getting younger. So you have a new wrinkle: big deal. As Italian actress Anna Magnani says, “Please don’t retouch my wrinkles. It took me so long to earn them.” The body you presently possess is not the body awaiting you “up there.” Your new body will be wrinkle-free and permanently pressed.

I am not telling you to stop exercising. Please, do *something*. If, on the other hand, all you can think about is working out, then cut back. My God. Stop flogging yourself. Men, the world will continue upon its axis if your belly is 36 inches instead of 35. Or 45 instead of 44. Jesus is not going to measure your gut at the dais. There are no tape measures or weight scales where Jesus lives. Not one celestial magistrate will care or comment about the state of your hair. Ladies, if you can’t start loving yourselves, it’s hard for other people to love you. Make some reasonable effort to maintain yourself, then forget about it. Eschew obsession. Embrace who you are and what you have. After all, it’s all going to be over in four days. Don’t spend your last four days mourning over something God has meant to be flawed. You are four days away from a full-body replacement. Do something, yes. But then be nice to yourself. Loosen the bonds of disappointment.

HOUSES

Some people think that houses are supposed to be 1) large, 2) sumptuous, 3) uber-clean, and 4) full of stuff. Here in São Paulo, many people walk their dogs on the sidewalks. (This is a related topic; you’ll see.) These dog-owners carry plastic bags with which to pick up their pets’ excrement. Let me ask you: If a space alien were to visit our planet and observe an upright, two-legged creature, a leash, and another, four-legged creature on the other side of the leash walking lower to the ground—and the two-legged creature was following the four-legged creature and picking up its poop: which creature would the alien assume to be the master, and which the slave? Ah. It’s the same with houses. We are supposed to be the masters of our earthly domiciles, but



any space alien looking in would certainly conclude that the owners are the slaves and the homes, the masters. *I am the great and powerful House!* (Insert Oz-like echo here.) We quiver at the voice of the house, and do whatever it says.

STUFF

Instead of getting rid of stuff to lighten life's load, many house-dwellers collect more and more stuff every year (every day, even), with which to cram their dwellings and lives. Some houses have so many knicks, knacks and brick-a-brack on so many shelves and whatnots that the house trembles and resembles a wing at the Smithsonian. Have you ever tried dusting a Hummel—a pricey, world-renowned collectable figurine of which there are dozens? How about sixteen Hummels? I have some past experience in this department. What is it about Hummels that dust is so fond of? I personally would rather give Hummels away as Halloween treats:

Kid: That was an awfully big thud. What was that, a pack of Fig Newtons?

Me: Bye-bye Little Girl and Two Geese! Bye-bye Sad Boy With Umbrella!



“THE LINE FORMS ON THE LEFT”

Speaking of furniture, some people spend hundreds and thousands of dollars for very large and heavy items on which to sit. Then they haul the things into their dwellings. (Or, should I say, five men, two pulley systems and a large elephant haul the things.) I know some people who, after they have purchased these expensive and cumbersome sitting pieces, cover them in plastic to keep people from sitting on them. Remember that line from the theme song of the '60s television series, “The Addams Family”?



*Their house is a museum,
When people come to see 'em
They really are a scr-eam;
The Addams family.*

For many, their house is practically a museum. When people come to see 'em, these people are escorted to every room by the owners/tour guides. If the owner is on the ball, he/she will hand out explanatory pamphlets with titles such as, “Why We Used Blue Italian Tile for the Master Bath, Not That Anyone Could Possibly Care” and “This Closet May Actually Be Bigger Than Your Living Room.” Some rooms are so precious, there is velvet roping at the door. “And *this*,” says the owner/tour guide, “is the guest bathroom; no one will ever use it; please notice the gold flushing mechanism above the appliance that no human shall ever sully—and the soap dish.” The soap dish contains round hard balls of sculpted soap. Guests are informed: “The orange soap-ball contains a scene from the Sistine Chapel! The yellow one has a duck!”

Don't get me wrong. I love pleasant surroundings. If you are able to maintain a well-groomed home without losing your peace, then please do. No one loves a mess. But when the house becomes a god, it's time for change.

CARPET BOMBING

I remember shopping for carpet for our living room in Ohio. It is nice to walk on a soft floor, but the subdivision of life known as “Carpeting” (notice the uppercase “C”) is overrated. When you are in the market for “Carpeting” rather than “carpet,” you know you're in trouble—and so is your credit card. (Appreciate floors for what they are: things that keep you from standing in the basement. Isn't

that good enough? Apparently not.) The choices at the carpet store were debilitating. There were way too many choices. I never knew there were so many kinds and swirls and mattings and materials and kinds and plushes and shags and kinds and colors and underpaddings of carpet. I wanted to say, “Let’s just buy some carpet and go get a hamburger,” but of course this is not how it works during an eon when houses own their dwellers, rather than vice-versa.

CALL THE LANDLORD

Owning a home was spiritually debilitating to me. I cannot recommend home ownership. Few people have the discipline to run their homes; their homes usually get the best of them. What good is a house when you’re so stressed maintaining it that you can’t enjoy it? Or maybe you can enjoy it for five minutes after dusting the Hummels—or until some insensitive visitor steps on the carpet or—“For the love of Jesus what are you doing!”—uses the soap. The temptation to live *for* a house rather than *in* one is deadlier than the Ebola virus. It is certainly more widespread. To avoid this snare, I recommend renting. When something goes wrong with your rental place, you simply call the landlord, then go out for a hamburger.

I love how Israel traveled in tents in the wilderness. I speak of this often because I can’t get over it. Israel kept moving. They didn’t have time to obsess over their living quarters. This is how we are meant to live: light and mobile. Be ready to leave in an instant, because that’s what’s about to happen. The Israelites always had their bags sitting at the front tent flap. When the pillar of cloud or fire moved, so moved the Israelites. God gave them no time to amass stuff—a blessing in disguise.

SPOUSES

Love your husband, love your wife. Resist obsessing over your marital union. Simply enjoy and respect one another. There is no such thing as a perfect union of two people, whether husband or wife, sister or brother, mother or child. I am afraid that the Christian religion has crafted yet another false god, this one presiding over the perfecting of earthly relationships. With expectations so high, we cannot but fail. Fighting this battle debilitates us for anything else in life. I give you weddings as Exhibit A in the “overkill” department that hamstring couples out of the gate.

“TIL THE WEDDING DO US PART”

Weddings are no longer simply events, but an industry. Our culture, obsessed with ostentation, presentation and perfection, has bred the wedding planner. When I first heard that such an occupation existed, I was so surprised that I spilled punch on my tuxedo and forgot the lyrics to “Love Shack.” Weddings have become so complex that two people can no longer handle the killing details. Can’t we simply rest for a day and savor the thought of a life together? No; the wedding planner is texting again, this time with a question about the cake. Yesterday, it was the font for the invitations. Tomorrow, it will be shoes for the bridesmaids.

The best thing that can happen at a wedding is if the bride trips on the runner at the back of the church. As soon as perfection goes out the stained-glass windows (the sooner the better), the couple has a chance (albeit slim) for a meaningful experience. I love it when the flower girl and the ring bearer run up the aisle. I don’t like seeing any of these children throw up—but I don’t dislike it either.



The wedding (any wedding) is more tightly choreographed than *The Sound of Music*. The couple has no idea what is happening. They stand and stare in a state of exhausted shock. They can’t even hear themselves repeat their vows. All they are trying to do is not screw up. (Little do they know that they’re working against themselves.) Wedding ceremonies undo what God has already done. Let no ceremony put asunder what God has already joined. God creates husbands and wives, not the state. God sends a man and a woman on their way to happiness together, not a ceremony. I say, just start living Ephesians, chapter 5. Pronounce yourselves husband and wife before God,

and get on with it.

How can you live Ephesians, chapter 5 when you're at Bed, Bath & Beyond choosing between 56 colors of towels? How can you live Ephesians, chapter 5 when you're practicing the ceremony (everything has to be perfectly executed) the night before? How can you live Ephesians, chapter 5 when you are counting how many steps you're supposed to take to the altar, how you're supposed to stand, where you're supposed to stand, who you're supposed to stand with, what you're supposed to say, and why you can't kiss your bride until the self-appointed "man of God" tells you to?

"Who gives this woman to be joined to this man?"

Who cares? Just give already!

My remedy to this madness is multifarious yet painfully simple: Trash tuxedos. Banish the bridesmaids. Tell the best man, "It's off." Oust the organist; fire the florist; furl the satin runner; expel the self-appointed "man of God"; tear all invitations in two. At the reception: cancel the coleslaw; drain the punch, implode the cake. Tell the photographer to box it up and go home. Now perhaps everyone who cares can simply be informed of the couple's joyous decision to live in accord with Ephesians, chapter five, and send them \$100 for a practical piece of light furniture. There is no such thing, in the Bible, as a wedding ceremony. Those ancient celebrants threw a party at the consummation of the couple's marriage (that is, when the couple had sex)—and that's it. Nothing wrong with that; much to commend it.

HUMOR YOURSELVES

I highly recommend that husbands and wives spend much time laughing—with and at one another. No one is perfect, right? With that information in hand, laugh at rather than fight foibles. Weaknesses can be extremely funny. We take ourselves too seriously; this is the biggest mistake of our lives. You cannot imagine how much time can be potentially wasted by somber self-inspection. When we stand before Christ, expect the following query from the throne: "Why did you take yourself so seriously?" This is not to say that life and relationships are trivial. But appreciate the difference between a thing *being* serious, and *taking* that thing seriously. By their very nature, life and relationships are grave. Two people joining their lives weighs more than a sofa. That's what it *is*. It's *serious*. Now, don't compound and complicate that by taking it seriously.

The heart of my message is: *cut each other slack*. Stop



looking for The Perfect Experience. Enjoy flaws and foibles. When imperfection raises its ugly head, pop some corn and chuckle in its face. There is nothing funnier, to me, than strained perfection slipping on a banana peel. Some may call it "pathos," but I call it hilarious. Laughing at imperfection devitalizes it. I like to think I am pretty good at laughing at myself. If I'm not, then someone else will do it for me. I may as well get a jump on it.

THE ERA IS LIMITED

This "cutting slack" in the husband/wife relationship is, surprisingly, the recommendation of the apostle Paul. Paul's recommendation in 1 Corinthians 7:29-31 not only saves husbands and wives great pain, but mollifies other of life's stresses:

Now this I am averring, brethren, the era is limited; that, furthermore, those also having wives may be as not having them, and those lamenting as not lamenting, and those rejoicing as not rejoicing, and those buying as not retaining, and those using this world as not using it up. For the fashion of this world is passing by.

The main points here are: 1) "the era is limited," and 2) "the fashion of this world is passing by." These points reflect the title of my message: "Only Four Days Left."

That the era is limited means that there is not much time left. That the fashion of this world is passing by means that all of the things we deem important in this life are not so important compared with our impending life. We are about to get out of here. This being so, we must loosen our grip on all things earthy and look heavier into heaven.

None of this world's materials accompany us into the next world. Paul hammers home this point in 1 Timothy 6:7—"For nothing do we carry into this world, and it is evident that neither can we carry anything out." This is why the apostle writes in 1 Corinthians 7:30-31, "And those buying as not retaining, and those using this world as not using it up."

The apostle is not telling anyone to refrain from purchasing, or to stop using the world's goods. Re-read the passage. He is addressing those who *are* buying, and those who *are* using the world. His advice is not to stop buying, but to stop retaining. It is not to quit using, but to quit using up. In other words, hold on loosely. Buy stuff, but then be prepared to quickly surrender it. Loosen your grip. Don't hoard. Keep visiting Krogers and Wal-Mart, but resist a stranglehold on the products purchased there. Otherwise, your possessions risk becoming more important than your expectation of soon meeting Christ. If you pay too much attention to *things*, your life's goals (getting stuff versus looking for Christ) will become unhealthily disproportionate.

Use the world, just don't use it up. Have a good time with the gifts God gives, but don't drain the well. Don't overly strain at "sucking the straw." We've all heard kids at restaurants slurping up the last drops of chocolate milk or soda through a straw. The sound is maddening. Don't do that. Drink the whole glass, but quit before things get ugly.

HUSBANDS AND WIVES

Surely Paul does not recommend holding on loosely to those we love. Oh, yes he does. This is what he means by, "Those also having wives may be as not having them." Paul is not telling anyone not to marry. Neither is he suggesting that those having wives ought to discard them. (This passage applies as well to wives having husbands.) Paul's message is the same here as elsewhere: *hold on loosely; cut each other slack*.

At the return of Christ, the distinctions of male and female disappear (Galatians 3:28). If "male and female" is four days from extinction, how should we be treating our spouses? For one thing, we should enjoy one another in

the "male/female" capacity while we can. Further, let's concentrate on all the good things about our loved ones, and let the not-so-good things fall away. With so little time left—and such an expectation as ours—it hardly behooves us to strain at the gnats of infirmity. Remember? We are supposed to laugh at these. So let's love one another without casting nooses upon one another. This era is limited.

WHERE I STAND

If the male/female arrangement were God's perfect design, it would continue into the next eon. That it is abolished at the coming of Christ proves the arrangement to be a temporary expedient for our growth and maturity, and our training in love. Once we see it this way, life's struggles lessen. Freed from the burden of perfection, we can now fully enjoy and embrace the few moments left in mortal bodies. So love deeply, but loosen the grip. Lay a stranglehold, instead, on the One coming to perfect and raise us: our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

LAMENTING AND REJOICING

"And those lamenting as not lamenting, and those rejoicing as not rejoicing" (1 Corinthians 7:30). Here, Paul promotes an even life experience. Here, he weans us off emotional roller-coasters. Paul does not deny lamenting. His exhortation is to stop lamenting so deeply. A parallel passage would be 1 Thessalonians 4:13, where Paul unveils the snatching away. He does not want the saints ignorant concerning those who are reposing (that is, dead), "lest you sorrow according as the rest, also, who have no expectation." It is not that we are to stiff-arm sorrow, but rather we are to sorrow differently than the world. The world has no expectation. We, on the other hand, know that we shall eventually join our departed loved ones in God's due time. Our sorrow is thus modified by this happy expectation.

It's the same with rejoicing. While we ought to be rejoicing, we ought not to be rejoicing "as the rest."

You have seen the reaction of those winning merchandise on "The Price is Right." They practically lose their minds. It simply cannot be that any of these winners are chosen by God as members of Christ's body. It simply cannot be that any of them enjoy a celestial expectation. Judging by their behavior, they are but rank and file members of the human race, with no expectation other than eating, drinking, and winning washing



machines. We are not to rejoice as these. A member of the body of Christ, winning a car on this terrifying show, would merely nod in appreciation. His arms would stay crossed in front of his chest, and only the barest of grins would disturb his lips. He may be snatched away at any moment to be seated at the right hand of God among the celestials—how *could* this person, then, possibly jump in the air and squeal at the sight of a newly-acquired car?

MILD AND QUIET LIVES

Paul prayed for us to lead mild and quiet lives (1 Timothy 2:2). Instructing us concerning this, the apostle says: 1) live simply—1 Timothy 2:2, 2) hold on loosely to people and things—1 Corinthians 7:29-31, 3) inhabit your bodies, but stop them from owning you —Romans 8:12-13, 4) live somewhere, but keep it from possessing you—1 Timothy 6:5-9, and 5) love someone, but never expect perfection from flesh and blood—Philippians 3:3.

Let us all look to heaven, then, with happy hearts, anticipating the deliverance of our bodies, our allotment among the celestials, and our face-to-face meeting with our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. —MZ