

Scarecrows

By Patrick Swayne

One of the more traditional icons of the autumn season is the scarecrow. A scarecrow is essentially a mannequin made of straw; once made, the straw-mannequin is dressed in clothes to make it look (somewhat) like a farmer. It is then set up in a field of crops, creating sort of a straw sentinel. The aim of course in making and setting up a scarecrow is to scare crows (and other birds) away from crops.

I've never used a scarecrow and have always found it difficult to believe that birds would be fooled by such shenanigans. However, I can understand the logic behind their use: birds eat crops and seeds; farmers scare away birds, keeping them from doing so; farmers cannot always defend their crops; a scarecrow can maintain the constant image of a farmer, doing what farmers themselves cannot do. The hope is therefore that the birds will transfer their fear of farmers to something that looks like a farmer and be scared away.

Scarecrows are not real in one sense of the word, in that they are false imitations of that which is real (farmers). While they are not real, the fear that they are designed to inflict is real. At the same time (and try not to get confused here), the fear that they inflict is not really real, because it is merely self-inflicted – there is nothing really there that should inflict fear, because the scarecrows are not real. As we will see though, birds aren't the only ones potentially afraid of "scarecrows."

When the Israelites first approached the promised land, they found it to be a land exactly as the Lord had described to them; the spies Israel sent into the land noted, "It truly flows with milk and honey" (Numbers 13:27). However, it was clear to those spies that there would be obstacles in between them and their prized possession. Continuing, the spies stated, "Nevertheless the people who dwell in the land are strong; the cities are fortified and very large" (v. 28). These obstacles – the strong people and the large cities – were merely scarecrows. Though they appeared large and looming, the Lord had promised to go with them, and the land was theirs the taking. Unfortunately fear turned into murmuring, and murmuring into disobedience. Scarecrows kept them from the Promised Land.

Jesus, speaking in a parable, once spoke of a man who was given one talent and who faced a similar dilemma. His fear of failure kept him from doing his master's work. He said, "Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground" (Matthew 25:24, 25a). His master replied by saying that since he knew what manner of man his master was, he ought to have put the talent in the bank. Success would have been just that easy, yet the servant's self-inflicted scarecrow kept him from acting. His false fear would send him into outer darkness, where there would be weeping and gnashing of teeth (v. 30).

Simon Peter was once with the disciples on the sea of Galilee, when a tremendous storm arose. Looking out to the sea, Peter beheld Jesus walking across the water toward them (Matthew 14:24-33). Peter looked out at his Master, and begged to be able to join Him out on the water. Christ instructed Peter to come, and, when he did so, as long as his eyes were fixed on Christ, he was able to walk on the water just as Jesus did. Yet even Peter succumbed to a false fear – when he saw the waves he began to doubt and at the same time to sink. Christ rebuked him, saying, "O you of little faith, why did you doubt?"

(v. 31). The waves were but a scarecrow; there was no danger when his eyes were fixed on the Master.

Scarecrows come in all shapes and sizes in our lives, but their goal is the same – to keep us from our goal. Have you allowed a scarecrow to keep you from heaven, your promised land? Has a scarecrow kept you from using what your Master has given you to do His will? Have the crashing waves of the world around you been a scarecrow to you, keeping your eyes from Christ? Remember that along with the unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, **the fearful and cowardly** will have their part in the lake of fire, which is the second death (Revelation 21:8).