

## **SLASH MARKS**

Scattered across the mountainous areas of the United States and Canada are numerous streams and rivers of different sizes, depths and widths. Along the courses of these streams are stretches of relatively flat terrain, interspersed with stretches of steep slope, containing boulders of immense sizes. These stretches of steep incline and boulders cause tremendous violence known as rapids.

Today kayakers and canoers enjoy these streams, even some of the rapids in rafts. Experience from history and Landsat information has largely eliminated avoidable danger, especially from the rapids.

But this relative safety was not always so; in the early days of exploration of this continent by mountain men and trappers, the rivers were not so well known. The first of these men acquired knowledge by virtue of tremendous loss of life, limb and equipment. This produced healthy respect, fear and vigilance, virtues which by any measure have nearly disappeared.

The first men learned the roar of rapids ahead meant trouble, so they went ashore to the nearest bank. From there they traversed along the bank with birch-bark canoe in hand until they saw the end of the rapids. As experience accumulated, these mountain men made axe-marks on trees upstream of the rapids where subsequent travelers could see, take warning and pull to the banks. From there they also traversed the side of the bank until it was safe to put in again. This was called by the early French trappers as a *portage*.

The cut-mark made on the sides of trees was called a *slash mark*.

The fellow at the bow of the canoe was the one responsible for being vigilant, ever scanning the horizon and surroundings for danger in any form. After all, the ones in the canoe behind him were his responsibility. As was necessary, this fellow was to ask, seek, look, even implore to know where he might be in the wrong to avoid loss. That attitude is largely extinct.

Trappers and mountain men knew a slash mark meant the last warning before disaster, and were of a mind-set trained by common sense and experience *to look* for such. Thousands upon thousands of streams and rivers across the continent operated under this simple form of warning. In more remote areas this is still true.

But there are four phases of canoeing, in both calm waters and rapids that are accompanied by declining degrees of attitudes towards warnings.

The earliest phase of exploration by mountain men, who by necessity were extremely vigilant, listened and looked for the sound of danger. They in turn left slash marks for those who were to follow.

The second phase of men consisted of those who followed, equally careful and vigilant, looking for signs of danger. They maintained and improved the slash marks.

The third phase of men were less vigilant, weekend warriors, mountain man wannabees who required the slash mark to be increasingly obvious, enhanced by garish paint, flashing aluminum shard dangling from strings and such.

The fourth phase of men consisted of the careless, assuming, presumptuous partygoers. Taking the canoe from a peaceful stream across stream-bed boulders and mud required too much effort. So these lackadaisical, careless and heedless children continued on until it was too late; the increasing current grabbed them and took them into the stony vortexes below, and the ruin that lay there.

Now this latter phase consists of two sub-phases; the first are the careless and presumptuous, refusing to listen or heed warnings, or better said, mere instances of drawing attention to a matter. The second and final group simply do not care, do not bother to look for a slash mark, nor even know it exists.

By now the reader should be getting the drift of the allegory. An allegory is a string of connected metaphors. Herein, the river is a metaphor of the path of life into which we were born, upon which we float. The canoe represents the life within us; the fellow at the bow is a metaphor of a father, elder and shepherd of his particular sphere of influence, for whom he is responsible.

The slash mark is the Word of the **LORD**, *appropriately* applied when, where, to whom and how. The current is what carries us along, smooth at times, but apt to be turbulent at others. The rapids are metaphors for violent danger and ruin. The portage is a metaphor for detours, often rough, inconvenient at best, draining at worst, personally designed to deliver us from evil. The slash marks were made by those who have gone before us, who paid the price for our safety and well-being. It is the wise man who heeds advice and responds to reproof, but the fool refuses counsel. It is the fool who rushes in where angels fear to tread, and plunges to ruin and destruction.

But the slash mark and portage must be heeded, else danger will engulf us.

- but how can a man see if he won't even look?
- how can a man hear if he won't even listen?
- how can a man be healed if he doesn't realize he is sick?
- how can a man acquire knowledge if he won't admit he is ignorant?
- how can a man learn when he won't even read?
- how can a man turn (repent) when he won't admit he is going the wrong way?
- how can a man turn when he disregards a slash mark?
- how can a man pay attention to slash marks when he doesn't care?

This metaphor of slash marks was presented to me by a new friend. The term unlocked decades of the “rivers, canoeing and rapids” of life. Up to that introduction my perspective was largely 44 years of an obedient but frustrating struggle. *Slash Marks* unlocked the understanding of the purposes of my life, especially a life under the orders of the Commander.

Of the 1000s of streams with their 10s of 1000s of slash marks, I was assigned to one “stream”, which over the years extended from rural KY through southern Mexico into Texas. Paddling in the stream were all my acquaintances along the way.

In what seems to be fanciful, I realize I was the Watchman by the slash mark, the Last Sentry, screaming and waving my arms frantically at those by-passing the Mark, running alongside the bank until finally my screaming was drowned out by the roar of the rapids. Over the years, I watched 50-odd men go over the brink and destroyed in the crushing maelstrom. Once over the brink, there was no remedy. As it is written in II Chron. 36:15-16, “The **LORD**, the God, sent persistently to them by His messengers because He had compassion...but they kept mocking them, despising His words, scoffing,...till here was no remedy.” “Remedy” here means no cure, no deliverance.

The first occasion of waving my arms was when I was 29. I had been re-born only a little over two years. I was sent 1200 miles with a message of hope, of turning into the Bank, for a man I had known all my life. I left a phone message on Friday night; it was never returned, the message never delivered. Sunday night he was dead at 33. The man was my brother. It'll rip your guts out to walk your mother past her son's casket.

A tough way to start a career.

From a like event some years later I wrote a ditty;

It is far too late when he's 28,  
to find relief for your grief;  
or by his grave your pain to stave,  
for, you see, there are no trades,  
when your son is dead of Aids...

Time and time again this scenario would play out. Over the course of 44 years fewer and fewer of 50-odd men responded, even in the slightest degree. More and more these men at the bow of the canoe waxed angrier and angrier, with death threats, contempt, scoffing, objections, childish self-defense, and finally polite silence and total avoidance.

Each time with my guts in my hand I would traipse the beaten path back to the Slash Mark, *which is the Word*. For it is written, “Therefore we must pay the closer attention to what we have heard, lest we **flow past** and away from it. For if the message declared by the angels was valid and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how then shall we escape if we neglect (flow past!) such a great salvation?”

Hebrews 2:1-3.

In the early part of the 44 years, the fellow in the bow would get mad if you brought attention to his missing the Mark, but occasionally he would cool down and usually make things right.

One such occasion was one where a nationally renowned elder in a large congregation inadvertently made a call for donations (alms) a public display of hubris to the donors, and humiliation to their poorer neighbors seated next to them. After the meeting, I was sent to bring attention privately in a most gentle way, that according to the Word, alms were supposed to be given in secret. Words cannot describe his anger and outburst, but the next Sunday he publicly recanted his error. This latter move revealed his innermost heart. By the way, he was one of the four mentioned below.

***Of the 50-odd men, there have been only four who have turned their canoes to the shore. All of the rest continued over the brink to their ruin and the ruin of their families in the rapids below, all.*** Things don't work out well for those who ignore the Mark.

\*Referring to the central portion of the Bell Curve of the current demographic bulge, a large portion of a generation of abdicating fathers failed to teach their Boomer sons about slash marks and danger (or about much else). Therefore we now have three succeeding generations with the following slash mark mindsets:

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| mid-40s to 70s | a life of ease and complacency, to                     |
| 70s to 00s     | hubris, presumption and carelessness, to               |
| 00s to ?       | nihilism, the latter not even caring...about anything! |

Thus the sins of the (great-grand)fathers have fulfilled the Laws of Requitil to the third and fourth generation, right in front of our eyes. And, the Grapes of Wrath are stored in the fourth.

More than likely I will be re-assigned to another post. Waving my arms and screaming at fools has run its course. In three generations I have plummeted from anger at those fathers who knew better, to overwhelming grief, to dire resignation. It is what it is.

Maybe the new symbol will be an old school bell, pealing to start the Repairing of the Breach...

The rapids **are** immutable; in the end rocks **will** trump soft flesh and careless minds.

The Rock **will** have a few men who have ears to hear and eyes to see.

“And a thousand will fall at your side...”

January 10, 2016

Ben-Issachar

\*Postscript: This comment is not intended to single out the fathers of the Baby Boomers, but to bring attention to what is in front of us. In other words, it is what it is. The abdication of fathers failing to discipline and teach their sons how to make tough decisions, instead allowing them to be pampered, go their own ways with little or no restraints, has occurred throughout history. David's son Absalom is one from the Word; Saul another; George Baldwin and Neville Chamberlain (WW II) and so forth.

But this group of fathers which fathered the Boomers is noted because of the extreme demographic effect on the world, the USA specifically. As noted in the paragraph above, this significant effect has happened before, notably the generation of fathers that went through the Civil war. Their seed *in large measure* (not all) were pampered and allowed to go their own way, "spoiled" to use a familiar term.

In fact, the fruit derived from seed born during this period from 1866-1890s is almost a direct layover to the Boomers and their seed. Abdication, a life of comparative ease, complacency and lack of discipline yields seed with arrogance, presumption and hubris, which in turn yields seed with little care about anything, nihilism and ruin. This triad of the second, third and fourth generation has occurred many times throughout history, but is particularly pronounced after the Civil War and after WW II.

As is expressed well in Strauss and Howe's *The Fourth Turning*, this fourth generation nearly always brings war, or a crisis, winter, as they term the fruit. The Word explains the same phenomenon in its reference to God's requital of the fathers' sins to the third and fourth generation. So this is not a new thing; but it is explained here because the general consensus is that it seems to be just that, a new thing. End \*

A second observation is from the various reactions of the two elders and three middle-aged sons, to whom this paper was submitted.; the elders "heard" my personal agony, pain and anger, but particularly the message. The three sons "heard" the message of the slash marks, not about me personally. Curious.

A third point to be inserted in the P.S. is that of a comment made by my third son, in that due to the excessive rains (in AR), the 100 year-old trees bearing the slash marks have been washed away. No longer are there any marks to say, "Danger!". This same thing happens in real life in the Old Testament, where God removes the Watchmen, because no one listened or paid attention. Ominous.

A fourth and final point is that the seminal behavioral trait of the three generations is a progressively increasing aspect of unbelief. The attitude toward the slash mark becomes increasingly irrelevant to the three generations. Unbelief is a mortal mistake, deadly, ruinous.

Ben