

Yuillogistically Speaking

A Worthy Setting

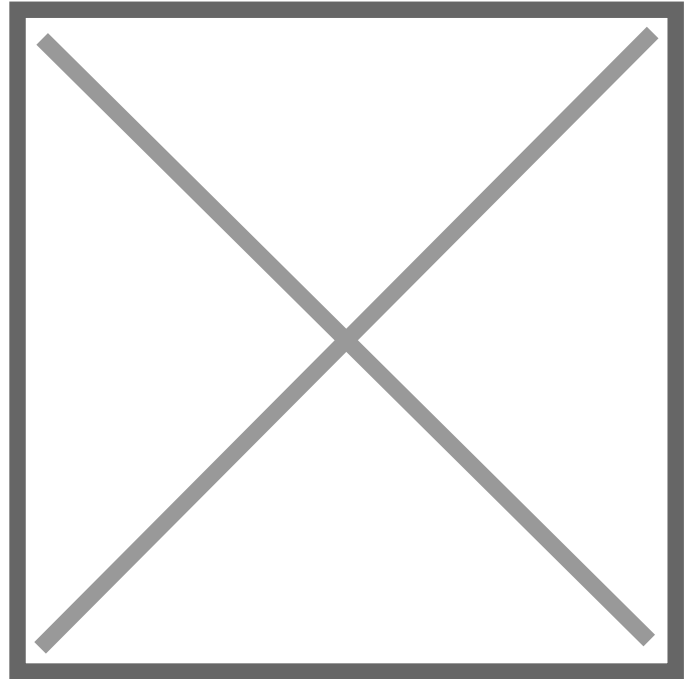
Just a couple of weeks ago I fulfilled a lifelong dream and visited the Grand Canyon with my wife, Margaret, and our daughter, Jenni, who was over on vacation from England. I don't know whether I'm becoming cynical in my old age, but I went with the thought at the back of my mind that I might be just a little disappointed. Could it really be as wonderful as all the photographs I'd seen would suggest?

I'm delighted to tell you that the Grand Canyon is everything I'd hoped. There can be no more awe-inspiring sight in the natural world than this geological wonder. Throughout the day, as the sun moved across the sky, the pattern of light and shade changed with constant variety and endless surprise. The walk down the Bright Angel Trail into the canyon was one of the most exhilarating experiences of my life. The walk back up, on the other hand, was one of the most exhausting!

But the most moving experience of all came when we made our way to Desert Point at dusk and watched the sun set over the western rim of the canyon. We stood and spoke in reverent, whispered tones to complete strangers, united with them in a moment of profound awe at the fierce colors and magnificent beauty of the dying day.

Oddly enough, however, my most abiding memory of the visit is not the beauty of the canyon itself, but the use to which it was being put on the day after our visit. Just in case you're confused by that statement, let me explain. On the grassy stretch by the south rim of the canyon—the bit where most tourists go—I noticed that some workers were building a platform. It was clear, not only from the yards of heavy-duty cable strewn around the dozens of TV cameras pointed at the structure, but from the elaborate drapes being fixed around the edges, that this was no ordinary platform, and that whoever was about to stand on it was no ordinary mortal.

Overcome by my natural curiosity, I asked one of the workers what it was all about. His answer was curt and to the point, and he never missed a blow with his hammer as he said, "The President and Vice-President of the United States of America will be here tomorrow." The work he was doing and



the one for whom he was working were too important for him to spend time in small talk with an inquisitive tourist.

Of course, I made sure that I watched TV the following day and, sure enough, there on the news were Bill Clinton and Al Gore, standing on the platform and declaring their environmentally friendly policies with one of the supreme wonders of the world as a backdrop. In this age of the sound bite and the photo opportunity, some smart PR people had clearly done their work well in choosing and setting the scene so that the President and his words would have maximum impact on the nation at large. Even the Grand Canyon had taken second place to the most powerful man in the free world and had served to enhance his image and his message. The filming and presentation were done so cleverly that our instant reaction was not, "What a wonderful sight the Grand Canyon is," but "What a presidential figure Bill Clinton is."

I don't much like it when people tell me the moral of a story. It's usually a bit like explaining a joke—the point is lost. However, on this occasion I couldn't avoid reflecting on the incident, and I can't resist spelling out the moral. Every Sunday I enjoy the magnificent music of the Pasadena Tabernacle Band and Songsters; every Sunday I seek to preach the eternally relevant word of God with all the clarity and conviction I can muster.

But all these things serve only as a platform and backdrop to the presence of the One who is more important than anyone or anything else. If people leave at the end of the service saying, "Wasn't the music wonderful," or "Wasn't the worship group superb," or even, "Wasn't the preaching powerful," then the focus has been in the wrong place. But if they leave saying, "Isn't Jesus Christ a wonderful Savior," we will have gotten it just right. If the President of the United States of America deserves a worthy setting, the King of Kings deserves no less.