



Minutes With Messiah

Volume 3, Issue 2

Web site: <http://www.geocities.com/riversidecoc>

December 2001

Shamash: The Servant

Perhaps the best known aspect of Hanukkah is the menorah. This is the nine-branched candelabrum that gives the holiday the designation as the Festival of Lights. It differs from the Temple menorah, which had seven branches. Each branch holds a bowl for oil or a candle.

The menorah has eight branches for the nightly candles. The ninth branch, usually raised in the center or off to a side, holds the *shamash* (servant) candle which is used to light all the others. Soon after nightfall on the first night of Hanukkah (after sundown December 9th this year) one candle is placed in the *shamash* holder and one in the extreme right holder as you face the menorah. Light the *shamash*, hold it up and recite the following blessings.

Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has sanctified us through His commandments and commanded us to kindle the Hanukkah lights.

Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who performed miracles for our ancestors, in those days, at this time.

(only on the first day) Blessed art Thou, O Lord our God, King of the Universe, who has kept us alive, and sustained us, and enabled us to reach and enjoy this day.

After the candle is lit, replace the *shamash* candle, still lit. This is followed by the following chant, then presents, games, and singing.

We light these candles to commemorate the miraculous happenings and unbelievable victories experienced by our ancestors in ancient times during this very season of the year. We kindle these holy lights for the eight days of Hanukkah, and we use them to remind us, as we gaze on their flickering flames, that we must give thanks to God for having delivered a mighty army into the hands of a small band and for having delivered an arrogant and wicked tyrant to those who believe in the pursuit of the moral law.

On subsequent nights add a candle so that the number of candles from the right equal the number of the day of the holiday. After the first two blessings are

recited, light the leftmost candle (the newest) and light toward the right until all are lit.

When using an electric menorah, normally for safety reasons, start with the bulbs unscrewed in all holders. After plugging in the menorah screw in the *shamash* light, recite the blessings, and then screw in the appropriate bulbs to light them.

The first candle lit each day, before the blessings, is the *shamash*. This, as has been stated, means “servant” or “slave.” Because it is lit each night before the blessing, and is technically not one of the Hanukkah lights, it would be easy to consider the servant to be “meaningless” because it does not represent one of the eight nights of Hanukkah. It has the lowly purpose of lighting the “important” candles. But without the servant, nothing would happen, the lights of remembrance would never shine.

So it is with us. As we go about our lives putting others first, serving mankind before ourselves, it would be easy to say, “I am unimportant. If only I were a great scholar of God’s word, or a rich philanthropist whose name is on a building, or some other famous person, I could let my light shine.” But we can’t all be famous or “important.” Someone needs to be the *shamash*.

Remember, it is the servant that gives light the longest of all the candles. The lowly servant, without a blessing, is the one that allows all the others to shine. When lighting the menorah, truly the least shall be first.

“Rejoice the soul of thy servant: for unto thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul.” (Ps 86:4)

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Citizen (Candy) Cane

At this time of year, at least in America, one can find candy canes almost anywhere. They may be straight or crook-shaped. They may be peppermint, spearmint, or some other flavor. But you don't even need to look to find them. They are on Christmas trees. People give small ones away. Larger ones can be found near the cash register at almost every grocery or discount store. Before he was diagnosed with diabetes I used to give my father one every year that was about eight inches long and an inch and a half in diameter.

Surely anything this popular has some lessons that can be learned from it. In this case the lessons are about how we are to live as citizens in Christ's kingdom before others in the world.

They are Sweet

A candy cane is almost pure sugar. This accounts for much of their popularity. Regardless of how they are flavored, candy canes are sweet. That is how we should be, as well. God wants us to be sweet—in word and in disposition.

The Song of Songs (Song of Solomon) has long been regarded as a love song between God and his people. It is not always clear of which of the two the verses speak, and this is apt. The bride and

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fish oil?

the groom should be so alike in certain aspects that the same description applies to both. So it may be in Song of Songs 2:3, "As the apple tree among the trees of the wood, so is my beloved among the sons. I sat down under his shadow with great delight, and his fruit was sweet to my taste." And in verse 14 of the same chapter it says, "O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock, in the secret places of the stairs, let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely." God wants us, his

espoused, to have sweet fruit and a sweet voice.

Another place, also attributed to Solomon, speaks about our words. "Pleasant words are as an honeycomb, sweet to the soul, and health to the bones." (Prov 16:24) James concludes a discussion on the evils a man's tongue can do with these words (James 3:9-12):

Therewith bless we God, even the Father; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God. Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter? Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries? either a vine, figs? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.

How would you like to buy a candy cane and then find out that although the first inch of it was peppermint, the second inch suddenly tasted like fish oil? With such a candy cane we could well understand God's words to the church at Laodicea (Rev 3:16), "I will spew thee out of my mouth." I don't think you would buy that brand again. So it is when we have sweet dispositions and sweet words among members of the church but a foul mouth or a sour disposition everywhere else. Not only will God not choose to buy that brand again; neither will our neighbors.

They are Decorative

Candy canes come in more than just the red and white striped variety. There are red and green, green and white, and probably other colors as well. There are those with the stripes the same width. Others have a wide and a narrow stripe. I have even seen some with wide red and green stripes and a narrow white stripe, or a wide red stripe with a narrow white, narrow green, and another narrow white stripe. They come, as noted above, in straight and crooked varieties. They can be hung on tree branches, stood in cups, given chenille wire antlers and felt eyes so they represent reindeer. They come taped to cards. Almost anything can benefit by being decorated with a candy cane. Can people say the same about us?

Although I have seen Christians decked out in all sorts of ways, from shorts and t-shirt to formal wear, it is not the outward decoration God looks at. Nor, really, do others care much about the clothes we wear when they are looking to us to decorate their lives. What Paul said of women applies to all of us. “In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.” (1 Tim 2:9-10) Peter, also, could have been talking to all instead of just wives when he said (1 Pet 3:4), “But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.” People will look at our good works and quiet spirit more than our good clothes.

Solomon speaks of yet another adornment. “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding. Exalt her, and she shall promote thee: she shall bring thee to honour, when thou dost embrace her. She shall give to thine head an ornament of grace: a crown of glory shall she deliver to thee.” (Prov 4:7-9) Wisdom, the ornament of grace, is spoken of as something we can obtain and wear. It is not something with which we are born or we are not. It is an adornment we develop. How do we become ornamental in wisdom? The wise man speaks to this. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction. My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother: For they shall be an ornament of grace unto thy head, and chains about thy neck.” (Prov 1:7-9) Further he says, “For the LORD giveth wisdom: out of his mouth cometh knowledge and understanding.” (Prov 2:6) The word of God in us is then an ornament of great value.

God made his people, Israel, to be sweet and to be an adornment. “Thus wast thou decked with gold and silver; and thy raiment was of fine linen, and silk, and broidered work; thou didst eat fine flour, and honey, and oil: and thou wast exceeding beautiful, and thou didst prosper into a kingdom. And thy renown went forth among the heathen for thy beauty: for it was perfect through

my comeliness, which I had put upon thee, saith the Lord GOD.” (Ezek 16:13-14)

In truth, we have an even greater adornment. We are decorated beyond all we could have imagined or hoped. It is not the decoration of clothing. It is not even the decoration of good works and a meek spirit, which are important. “I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels.” (Isa 61:10) They may not be red and white stripes, but salvation and righteousness make a better ornament for a person.

The word of God is an ornament of value.

They are Available

If it is December and you are in the mood for a candy cane you don't have to go far to find one. They can be found in almost any store, even some you wouldn't expect. Such ubiquity is the obligation of Christians to be as available year round. We must not follow the example of the hermits and monks of years past. We have a savior, and a world to show him to. We have the ornament of salvation. It would be a shame to hide it.

“For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (2 Cor 4:6)

“Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven.” (Matt 5:14-16)

The world is hungry for candy canes. The ones made of sugar are not very nutritious, but they aren't the ones the world really wants. We are the candy canes of the world. Sweet, decorative, and available, only we have that which will satisfy the hunger of the world, for we are the candy canes decorated with the stripe of salvation.

Born A Slave

Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness. (Rom 6:16-18)

The word [“servants”] in Romans refers to one who is bound to another, a slave. There are two words in Greek referring to a person in slavery. One speaks of a slave taken in war. The other refers to a person born into slavery. The latter is the one used in Romans. (Wuest, *Word Studies from the Greek New Testament*)

Kenneth Wuest’s comment gives rise to some special thoughts about our choice to obey Christ. There are certain aspects of our enslavements that bear special scrutiny.

In the passage quoted above we are described as servants (bondslaves) to either sin or righteousness. We were born into this slavery, first to sin and then to obedience. That is not to say that we were born sinful. A child born to a slave family was destined to be a slave. The enslavement did not start at birth, though, but several years after, when the child was old enough to perform the duties of a slave. Just so, we were born in slavery, but did not perform the duties of a slave until we were able to understand sin. But we are also born

into slavery to obedience and righteousness. A person born into slavery had a special relationship with the master, because he was raised in that household. If that same person was sold to a new master, he was still born a slave but did not have the same relationship to the new master. That is not how it is when we change from slaves of sin to slaves of righteousness. We are born into the new form of slavery. It is more than just a change of masters. It is a new birth into a new slavery. The picture Paul gives in the context of Romans 6 emphasizes this. In becoming slaves to righteousness we don’t just change masters. We change births. We change lives. “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.” (Rom 6:6) When we are born into slavery to Christ we are no longer the same person we were when we were slaves to sin.

Paul says that we may be slaves, but in either case we are unusual slaves. We are born into slavery, but we have a choice. Granted, any slave has a choice. Usually the choice is to obey the master or be punished; ultimately, obey or die. Paul says we have a choice to yield to sin. But in that case it is a choice to obey *and* die. We also have the choice to disobey, but then we disobey and live. If we choose to disobey sin, we choose to be born into a different slavery. This new slavery has choices, too. But in this new relationship the choice is obey and live. What a difference!

We have no choice but to be slaves. We do have a choice as to the master and the wages. Whose slave are you?

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