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ON EATING MATZA

Then Jesus said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. (John 6:53-54)

Not exactly the passage one would expect to start an article for Passover, is it? Yet it may be appropriate on a couple of levels.

At his final Passover on earth Jesus explained what he meant when he talked about eating his body. "And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is my body." (Matthew 26:26) The bread of the Passover represented his body. As we eat the bread in the Lord's Supper we are eating his body, and have eternal life thereby.

When the unleavened bread is broken during the Passover *seder* the Rabbis have decreed that each participant break off a minimum of a *kezayit* in volume. A *kezayit* is defined as the volume of a medium sized olive. Of course some who are more zealous for the observance may choose to break off more than that minimum. I have found this interesting in the light of what I see every week in many congregations of the churches of Christ. Unlike some other Christian groups who hand out an already prepared amount whenever they observe the Lord's Supper, most churches of Christ pass pieces of *matza* (unleavened bread) from which each participant breaks a piece. Many even specify that this is the only scriptural way to do it, since "breaking" the bread seems to be an important aspect of the ceremony. What I find interesting, though, is that most participants seem to break off the smallest piece they can; certainly most don't break off anywhere near a *kezayit*. Rather than eating as much of the flesh of Christ as they can to gain eternal life, many seem to be trying to eat as little of Christ's body as possible. If the amount of eternal life given was dependent on the amount they broke off they might barely get enough to last until the next week. This practice may have originated with the economic desire to save *matza*, and therefore save

money. I am certainly not advocating that we judge others by how much of the unleavened bread they break off. I just find it interesting that many Jews will exceed the minimum during Passover, while many Christians try to reduce the minimum to mere crumbs. Let us hope that, regardless how much of the bread we break off, we never relegate Christ in our lives to mere crumbs.

Another aspect from Passover that relates to the passage we started with has to do with the nature of *matza*. Leviticus 7:12-15 describes the *korban toda*, an offering made when one experiences salvation from a crisis (called a peace offering in the King James Version). This is almost the only sacrifice in which leavened bread is allowed along with unleavened bread. Rabbi Shimshon Refael Hirsch, among others, has said that the two types of bread represent man's efforts (leavened bread) and God's efforts (*matza*) in getting out of the situation. Using this comparison we can see a picture of the Messiah in the unleavened bread of the Lord's Supper. God sent his son to save mankind from its sins. So when we eat the *matza* we are celebrating God's part, the greater part, of our own salvation. We are celebrating the death of Jesus on the cross, without which we would not have salvation. That is why the unleavened bread is the body of the Messiah; without God's intervention on our behalf we would still be lost in sin.

So during Passover this year (which starts the evening of April 16, 2003), and any time we eat the unleavened bread, we should remember at least these two things. Whoever eats the bread has eternal life, and that eternal life is a gift of salvation from God.

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OF BEES AND HONEY

My brother is a beekeeper. I've never seen his hives, but I suspect they are the boxy kind so efficient for collecting honey. Another type of hive is the old, dome-shaped beehive that lent its name to the beehive state, the beehive hairdo, and, in Ireland, the beehive cell popular among the hermits of old. The Bible, though, tells of what may be the strangest hive of all.

A Honey of a Riddle

Judges 14 tells one of several stories about Samson. That strong man had a habit of falling for the wrong women. At this time he had decided he wanted to marry a certain Philistine woman. As he and his parents were going to make the arrangements Samson was attacked by a lion. Bad news for the lion. Samson killed it with his bare hands.

And after a time he returned to take her, and he turned aside to see the carcase of the lion: and, behold, there was a swarm of bees and honey in

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the carcase of the lion. And he took thereof in his hands, and went on eating, and came to his father and mother, and he gave them, and they did eat: but he told not them that he had taken the honey out of the carcase of the lion. (Judges 14:8-9)

Bees, apparently, will build a hive in any convenient place. Most of us know about bees in trees, such as Winnie the Pooh's "hunny tree." The Bible even speaks of getting honey out of rocks (Deut 32:13; Ps 81:16), probably meaning that the bees had made hives in the cracks of rocks in the desert. In this case the hive chose a dead lion, for whatever reason.

At Samson's wedding feast he used the incident of the honey in the lion to pose a riddle to his

thirty Philistine attendants. He gave them seven days to figure the riddle: "Out of the eater came forth meat, out of the strong came forth sweet." Failure to figure out the riddle would cost them thirty changes of clothing and thirty linen tunics, a fortune in days when clothes were hand-made. As the story turns out the thirty men get Samson's fiancée to learn the answer and give it to them. As a result of their answering Samson, he killed thirty Philistines to get the clothes to pay his debt. He also lets his intended marry his best man instead. (And he didn't learn from the experience, falling for the same trick later with Delilah.)

About now some people are asking what this riddle has to do with us? Some people love to eat honey, but what does it have to do with living for God? That is the riddle for some people.

Our Enemies, the Bees

The Bible has much good to say about honey, but little good to say about those who produce it for us. In fact, every mention of bees other than the one above puts the creatures in a negative light. It is the swarming and stinging nature of bees that caught the attention of the writers of the Bible. It is always the enemy of God's people that is described by comparing them to bees.

"And the Amorites, which dwelt in that mountain, came out against you, and chased you, as bees do, and destroyed you in Seir, even unto Hormah." (Deut 1:44) This was the description of the destruction of rebellious Israelites after the matter of the twelve spies.

"And it shall come to pass in that day, that the LORD shall hiss for the fly that is in the uttermost part of the rivers of Egypt, and for the bee that is in the land of Assyria. ¹⁹And they shall come, and shall rest all of them in the desolate valleys, and in the holes of the rocks, and upon all thorns, and upon all bushes." (Isa 7:18-19)

Even David had nothing good to say about bees themselves. "All nations compassed me about: but in the name of the LORD will I destroy them. They compassed me about; yea, they compassed me about: but in the name of the LORD I will destroy them. They compassed me about like bees; they are quenched as the fire of thorns: for in the name of the LORD I will destroy them." (Ps 118:10-12)

Just as David was surrounded by bees, so also are we. Our bees are not necessarily the nations around us. Instead we are compassed about by those who would tempt us away from God. They present us with what appears to be honey, but in the end all we get is the

stinger. If it was just one bee it would be bad enough, but not necessarily fatal. Instead, though, we are surrounded by a swarm of temptations, of bees ready to sting. Unless one is allergic, one bee sting is an irritation; many bee stings may be fatal.

What can we do to protect ourselves? What does a beekeeper do to avoid getting stung? First of all, he wears the proper protective gear. Paul tells us to put on that protection. “Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.” He mentions several other things, and it would be interesting to compare them to the beekeeper’s gear, but this one thing—our faith—particularly protects us from the stings. It is faith in the death and resurrection of the son of God that nullifies the stings. “O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.” (1 Cor 15:55-56) Jesus took away our sin; he took the stinger out of the bee. There is an old “preacher story” about a man and his son. They were outdoors playing together when the man saw a bee in the vicinity of his son. Knowing his son was allergic to bee venom he grabbed the bee and held it until it left its stinger in his hand; then he let it go. He took the stinger himself to save his son. This is what Jesus did for us in dying on the cross. Our faith, then, keeps us from being stung by the bees of temptation.

The second thing a beekeeper does is apply smoke. This quiets the bees so they won’t sting. Peter tells us there is a way to quiet those that would speak against us. “For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men: As free, and not using your liberty for a cloak of maliciousness, but as the servants of God.” (1 Pet. 2:15-16) As the bees are silenced with smoke, so those who would try to be detractors of Christians are silenced by good lives.

Real Honey

A third choice that Christians have is only to go for the real honey. Temptations may look sweet, but they are mere imitations. The real sweetness, the true honey, is tasted only by following the word of God.

The most common use of the word “honey” in the Bible is the phrase, “a land flowing with milk and honey.” Twenty different verses use that phrase—over one third of all passages using the word. The next most common use is in describing the word or words of God.

The statutes of the LORD are right, rejoicing the heart: the commandment of the LORD is pure, enlightening the eyes. The fear of the LORD is clean, enduring for ever: the judgments of the LORD are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much

fine gold: sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. (Psa. 19:8-10)

My son, eat thou honey, because it is good; and the honeycomb, which is sweet to thy taste: So shall the knowledge of wisdom be unto thy soul: when thou hast found it, then there shall be a reward, and thy expectation shall not be cut off. (Prov. 24:13-14)

Both Ezekiel and John were told to eat scrolls of prophecy. Ezekiel was told it would be as sweet as honey (Ezek 3:3). John was told the same thing, but his scroll turned bitter in the belly (Rev 10:9-10). Sometimes, to some people, the word of God may be a bitter pill to swallow. It may be difficult to accept. But at all times the promise is that it will be sweeter than honey.

Pleasant words (Prov 16:24) and the words of one’s spouse (SOS 4:11) may be as sweet as honey, but the words of God are sweeter still. We enjoy the words of a friend, or even a flatterer. We listen for the words of

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our sweetheart. How much more should we be pleased by the words of our friend and bridegroom, our Lord!

Temptations come, and sometimes they are presented like honey. “For the lips of a strange woman drop as an honeycomb, and her mouth is smoother than oil: But her end is bitter as wormwood, sharp as a two-edged sword.” (Prov. 5:3-4) Too many people think they have tasted honey, when it was just sugar water. Many others have tasted a honey that has been overprocessed and has lost all of its flavor. When one tastes the real honey, however, the imitation loses its appeal, the bland presentation is no longer enough.

We should always wear our protective clothing. We should silence the bees around us. But especially we must eat the real honey. Only then can we recognize the imitations. Only then will honey no longer be a riddle to us.

A DAMNED, GOOD MAN

Over thirty years ago I heard a preacher shock most of the Lubbock Christian College student body when, during chapel, he said, "Cornelius was a damned good man." When we got over the shock of a preacher using such language we realized that he was right. Let me rewrite that with the punctuation in the right place. "Cornelius was a damned, good man."

Look at what the Bible says about Cornelius before Peter preached to him. "There was a certain man in Caesarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always." (Acts 10:1-2) How many Christians would like to be described that way! How many of our neighbors think such a description applies to them. Most people would say that this describes a man that God would not think twice about including in His book of life. In fact, many people say that he already had salvation because all it takes on man's part is to tell God in prayer that you turn your life over to him. And yet God considered that Cornelius was a damned, good man.

Because there had only been Jews in the church for about ten years, many Christians at the time considered Cornelius a damned, good man who could not become a Christian. After Peter preached to Cornelius and Cornelius was saved, many of a party of Jewish Christians that the Bible calls "the circumcision" objected to Peter's actions. This group, who clearly did not constitute all Jewish Christians,

believed that only good, orthodox Jews could be Christians. Cornelius was worse. Cornelius was a damned, good, Gentile man.

When Peter went to Cornelius he repeated the history of Jesus, a history that he said Cornelius already knew. That good man already knew about Jesus the Messiah. He prayed to God and did righteous works. Nevertheless, there was more that God wanted. Until he heard that and obeyed, Cornelius was a damned, good man.

What did Cornelius require in order to become a saved, good man? He needed to put on Christ (Gal 3:27). On the *shavuos* (Pentecost) after Jesus was crucified a number of damned, good Jews asked, "What must we do to be saved?" (Acts 2:37) Peter's response to them was the same as to Cornelius. To the Jewish group he said, "Repent, and be immersed by the authority of Jesus the Messiah." (Acts 2:38) In the case of Cornelius he "commanded them to be immersed by the authority of the Lord." (Acts 10:47) Until that time Cornelius was a damned, good man.

What happened to Cornelius after he was baptized? The scriptures do not say. Did he give up his army job? I don't know. Did he convert a whole century of Romans? It would be nice to think so. There was a whole division of the Roman army who were Christians. All we can be sure of, however, is that after he obeyed Peter's command Cornelius was a saved, good man.

Timothy J. O'Hearn
737 Monell Dr NE
Albuquerque NM 87123