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A NEW NAME

Before I was promoted to Chief Petty Officer (CPO) in the Navy, I had to take a class orienting me to the complexities of my new role. Advancement to CPO is not like advancement to any other military paygrade. The uniform changes from the “cracker jack” blues or whites of a lower enlisted man to the khaki uniform like those worn by officers. The responsibility increases immeasurably more than the pay does. The respect given by subordinates increases more than that given in a comparable advancement in the other armed forces. We were told that we no longer asked for days off; we told our superiors we were taking a day off and listened for objections. The greatest change, however, was explained by one instructor. “After your advancement, your first name is no longer Tim. It is now Chief.” That new name has even carried over into civilian life. Even people with whom I work that were in the Navy, even for a short time, call me Chief.

A change of name with a change in status is not a new or unfamiliar thing. In many western cultures women have been experiencing just that for years. It is still common for a woman to take her new husband’s last name. In Genesis we read of several people whose names were changed, such as Abram/Abraham (Gen 17:5), Sarai/Sarah (Gen 17:15), and Jacob/Israel (Gen 32:28). Some people had their names changed when they were moved to a new country. (See Daniel 1:7 and Esther 2:7). Simon was given the name Peter (Lk 6:14), perhaps in the hope that he would live up to his new name. Shaul, the persecutor of Christians, adopted the name Paul when he became one. To this day converts to Judaism take a new name after their immersion. Likewise the Pope of the Roman Catholic Church takes a new name when he attains that status.

Even cities are subject to name changes. One may visit St. Petersburg/Petrograd/Leningrad or Byzantium/Constantinople/Istanbul. They even wrote a song about that latter change. In the Bible one city went by the name Salem. For a while it was called Jebus or Jebusi. Finally it became known by a combination of those names, Jerusalem. (It is also called Zion, but that may never have been a formal name of the city.) Isaiah prophesied that it

would receive at least one more name change. “And the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory: and thou shalt be called by a new name, which the mouth of the LORD shall name.” (Isa 62:2) John writes that it has figuratively received that change. “And the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God” (Rev 3:12) This would indicate that the spiritual kingdom represented by Jerusalem has undergone a change in status. No longer is it the center of a limited, physical nation of God’s people. Now the New Jerusalem, the church of the Messiah, is the center of a broader, spiritual kingdom. It has the promised new name, and its inhabitants have the name of God.

We, the members of the church which is the New Jerusalem, are also given a new name. We receive that name on a figurative white stone. “He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.” (Rev 2:17). When we become part of New Jerusalem we bear the name of God, and a new name. “And I will write upon him my new name.” (Rev 3:12). Collectively, the church received a new name shortly after it began. “And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.” (Acts 11:26) Individually it appears that we also receive a new name. That new name represents a change in status. No longer do we bear the guilt of sin. We are now called holy. No longer are we slaves, but children. Sometimes it takes a while to get used to a new name, but in this case it is worth it.

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FOUR CUPS

Wherefore say unto the children of Israel, I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians, and I will save you out of their bondage, and I will redeem you with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments: And I will take you to me for a people, and I will be to you a God: and ye shall know that I am the LORD your God, which bringeth you out from under the burdens of the Egyptians. (Ex 6:6-7)

During the Passover (Pesach) Seder (April 12 in 2006) participants drink four cups of wine. This practice is based on the scripture above. Four promises; four cups. There are various practices related specifically to the four cups. For instance, wine is used when possible, to symbolize the freedom being celebrated by Pesach. A certain amount per cup is usually specified. In some traditions children are not given the cups until they are old enough to listen to and understand the Passover story. The leader pours out drops of wine from one of the cups at the mention of each of the plagues. A fifth cup is poured for Elijah, either at the beginning or toward the end of the

God relieves not only of burdens, but also of the prospect of burdens.

evening. However, each cup holds a significance that outweighs all of these other considerations.

I Will Bring You Out

The first of God's four promises is that he will bring his people out from under their burdens. At this point he is not necessarily promising to bring them out of Egypt. That is the next promise. Even before saving them from slavery, though, he promises to bring them out. What is the significance of this promise?

God has never promised to do things our way. Most people who are enslaved would ask God to remove them from slavery. When possible he may do just that. But that doesn't mean he has to. It may be that God needs you to remain a slave. It may be that, as was the case after the American Civil War, freeing all the slaves would put them in an economic hardship. Slavery was an evil, but unemployment and starvation were also evils that resulted from mass emancipation.

In this promise, God says that even if he were to leave Israel in slavery, he would still bring them out

from under their burdens. Even if they had to remain as slaves of Egypt, they would still be under God's protection. Their burdens would be lessened.

Centuries later a student of the great Rabbi Gamaliel, one Rabbi Shaul, understood just this promise. "Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called. Art thou called being a slave? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather. For he that is called in the Lord, being a slave, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Messiah's slave." (1 Cor 7:20-22) It doesn't matter if God keeps you in human slavery. He will free you from your burden, if not your slavery.

This is a great promise, for there is one burden that everyone bears. There is one burden that must be removed regardless of a person's social, economic, or physical status. Whether slave or free, male or female, everyone carries the guilt of sin. God doesn't offer all of us a "small fortune." He may not even offer freedom from sickness or pain. He does offer freedom from sin.

Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. (Rom 5:12, 18-19)

I Will Save You

Now is when God promises to save Israel from bondage. The difference is significant. A burro (donkey to those outside the Southwestern United States or Spanish speaking countries) may be relieved of his burden at the end of a trip. What does he then have to look forward to? Another burden on the return trip. In contrast, what God is promising here is like putting the burro out to pasture for the rest of his life. He is relieved not only of his burden, but from the responsibility of ever bearing burdens.

That is not to say that Israel was allowed to retire to the desert and watch movies all day. They still had responsibilities. The difference was that these responsibilities were laid upon them by their freedom rather than their bondage. They still had to work to live, but they didn't have to live to work. They still had to surrender to the Master of the Universe, but they were freed from the taskmasters of the world.

In this, too, Israel is a picture for all of us. Slavery, in a sense, is a fact of life. The difference is that

servitude to God is not slavery in the same sense as other bondage. God does not treat his people as slaves, but as if they were free. Our only choice is who our master will be.

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. I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness. (Rom 6:16-19)

God would rather treat us as family, even though we have no choice but to be slaves. "Therefore thou art no more a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Messiah." (Gal 4:6-7) Through our faith in God's Messiah we have received adoption as children of God. That does not absolve us from responsibility. Rather it changes our responsibility, and our attitude.

I Will Redeem You

Luke indicates that the cup Jesus used for what became the Lord's Supper was at least the second cup. (Lk 22:17-20) Moreover, he specifies that it was the "cup after supper." This cup of redemption is the first cup after the meal and the eating of the *afikomen*, a piece of unleavened bread previously separated from the rest as a sort of "dessert." Based on Luke's description of the events of that last supper, this would most likely be the one Jesus used to institute the Lord's Supper. There are a couple of reasons that this would be appropriate.

This cup is called the cup of redemption. God promised to redeem Israel "with a stretched out arm, and with great judgments." When redeeming (buying back) an object we might be familiar with great judgements. Whether it is a judgement of a pawnbroker or of a court, we can understand that somebody has to set the value of that being redeemed. But what about an outstretched arm? One possibility is that God is saying that he redeems his own without holding back. Rather than hesitantly offering the price, he holds it at the end of a fully extended arm. He did not hold back even the blood of his only-begotten son.

But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come...Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. (Heb 9:11-12)

The more common meaning of an outstretched arm implies power. Although the second cup is known as the cup of the plagues, it is that power that preceded the redemption. It was the power of the last of those plagues

that broke the resistance of the Pharaoh. And it is the power of resurrection that confirms our redemption.

I Will Take You

One of the complaints of the Israelites in the wilderness was, "Did you bring us out here to die?" What good is a God who can free his people from slavery, but then forgets them? That was the error of Reconstruction America. Slaves were freed, but then there were no jobs, no help, no comfort, and no franchise. Fortunately, our God is not like that. When he freed his people he promised to take them to him as a nation. This he did three months later at Sinai.

For about ten years after Jesus died, the church consisted only of the descendants of those God took as his people at Sinai. Then Peter went to one outside that fellowship and opened the door to the Gentiles. That same Peter quotes Haggai, showing that he now takes anyone

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who follows him as his people.

But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light: Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy. (1 Pet 2:9-10)

That Rabbi Shaul, mentioned earlier, wrote to a body of God's people in Corinth. In doing so, he made reference to Pesach on more than one occasion. Once he wrote about the Messiah being our Pesach lamb (1 Cor 5:7-8). At another time he made reference to the Seder.

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread. (1 Cor 10:16-17)

Paul uses this phrase "cup of blessing," which commonly referred to the first of the four cups. Thereby he equates the Lord's Supper to the entire Pesach Seder. All four of the cups, all four of the promises, are to all who believe. We have more than just redemption; we have the other cups as well.

I AM AS NOTHING

“All nations before him are as naught.” (Isa 40:17) On the face of it, this scripture is saying that God is great and the nations are but a mere speck in importance compared to him. If God chooses to set up a nation or bring one down, that is his prerogative. The United States may seem great now, but should learn the lessons of Rome, Persia, Greece, or Great Britain. Years (or months) from now, God may have used that nation for his purposes and given them to another nation. Certainly this was what Isaiah, or God through Isaiah, had in mind.

I heard a different interpretation, however. It makes sense on a national or personal level. It is unquestionably scriptural. If all before God is as naught, the closer before him we are, the more as naught we are.

In America, and many places in the world influenced by American thought or money, the most important letter in the alphabet is “I.” Whether *yo*, or *ich*, or any other first person pronoun, people tend to think that the world centers around them. The problem with this, besides being an essentially childish characteristic, is that this makes too many centers. A regular circle can have but one. The more “centers,” the more distorted the circle becomes.

Using that circle analogy we can see that the circle becomes more perfect as each of the centers gets closer to one point. When they all gather at that one point, it once again makes a perfect circle. So it is with God. The farther we are from him the more distorted our lives become. When I have “my way,” it conflicts with what another perceives as his way. It may even conflict with yesterday’s or tomorrow’s “my way.” When something happens to change my center, the

circle gets distorted.

God has set a standard. He is the standard. “Be ye holy; for I am holy.” (1 Pet 1:16) He is the center of the perfect circle. What he desires is that we approach that center, that our lives may be harmonious. The more we are like him, the less we concentrate on “I.”

Jesus is one example of this. Although he is everything he was as nothing. In the garden he prayed, “Not my will but thine be done.” (Lk 22:42) “He was despised and we esteemed him not.” (Isa 53:3) That is just how he wanted to be. He would rather be “as naught” through being close to God.

Paul put it a little differently. Yet what he said to the Galatians means the same thing.

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me. (Gal 2:20)

How, then, do we come more before God? David said, “bring an offering, and come before him: worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness.” (1 Chr 16:29) The offering he wants is ourselves. “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.” (Rom 12:1) “Wherewith shall I come before the LORD? What doth the LORD require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?” (Mic 6:6,8) Justice, mercy, and humility. These don’t sound like the words of one who is self-centered.

If our lives are hidden in Christ, how can we live the life of “I?” The more we are “as God,” the more we are “as naught.”

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