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WHO WANTS FAME?

We common people think fame is a wonderful thing. Some people seek after it. Other people just revere those who achieve it. Even those, though, often think how nice it would be to have fame. Andy Warhol even predicted that in the future everyone will be famous for fifteen minutes. (Oh that some people were only famous that long.)

Being famous is not what is appears. We sometimes think that being famous will get us the best table at the restaurant. We will get invited to all the best (or worst) parties. Everybody will be glad to see us and do anything we ask them to do. How much better would it be in God's sight if we were famous for our righteousness. After all, Abraham had a nation chosen based solely on his righteousness. David had a promise of an eternal line of kings just because he was a man after God's own heart. If we were famous for our righteousness what wouldn't God do for us? Who wouldn't he save based on our righteousness?

Unfortunately for us, that is not how God works. "And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear?" (1 Pet 4:18) Fame for righteousness will barely get us a toe in the front door, and certainly not a corner table. Who are some of the most famous men of the Bible? How about Noah, Moses, Job, Daniel, and Samuel? Would these famous men of the Bible be able to save anyone but themselves? God tells the prophets they could not.

Son of man, when the land sinneth against me by trespassing grievously, then will I stretch out mine hand upon it, and will break the staff of the bread thereof, and will send famine upon it, and will cut off man and beast from it: Though these three men, **Noah, Daniel, and Job**, were in it, they should deliver but their own souls by their righteousness, saith the Lord GOD. (Ezek 14:13, 20)

"Then said the LORD unto me, Though **Moses and Samuel** stood before me, yet my mind could not be toward this people: cast them out of my sight, and let them go forth." (Jer 15:1)

These men were famous for righteousness. Some have made a case that Noah was only seen as righteous

because of the wickedness around him. (They say that "thee have I seen righteous before me in this generation," in Genesis 7:1, implies that he would have been run-of-the-mill in any other generation.) Even so, Noah could only save himself and his family. Moses could bring a generation out of Egypt, but could not keep them from dying in the wilderness. Samuel saw his generation leave God and demand a king. While Job is noted for his patience, some would say he is more famous for arguing with God. As righteous as these men were, they could only truly save themselves. As famous as they were, their fame accomplished little.

Does this mean that all is hopeless? If Moses' or Daniel's presence could not have saved Judah, where does that leave us in our generation? Most of us have no fame, and no righteousness beyond that which is imputed to us by God because of Christ. Is our generation hopelessly doomed? Certainly not.

Even though the fame of these men would not have saved a generation of Israel, some were saved. We only know of two or three people who paid attention to Jeremiah, but that we know of any shows that he did not preach in vain. Even if we were famous, rich, or righteous we could not save our generation. Nevertheless, we can save some in our generation. Fame may not succeed. Righteousness may not succeed. Preaching will succeed. "My word...will accomplish that which I please." (Isa 55:11) Noah could only save eight people, including himself, but look what has come from those eight.

Fame may not be what we expect it to be. So what. We don't need fame. We just need to preach to one person at a time. And each of us is famous enough to do that.

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REMEMBERING WATER GATE

The last day of the Feast of the Tabernacles (Succoth; September 27-October 3 in 2007) is called Hoshanna Rabbah (The Great Hosanna). The name comes from the tradition of reciting Psalm 118:25 (“Save now [hosanna], I beseech thee, O LORD: O LORD, I beseech thee, send now prosperity.”) seven times, as opposed to once a day on the other days of the feast. This recitation is part of a ceremony that dates back at least as far as the return of Israel from Babylon.

The “water-drawing” ceremony occurred on every day of the feast until the destruction of the Temple. A specially-designated priest proceeded to the pool of Siloam. He was accompanied by a crowd of believers, and a chorus of flute players. At Siloam the priest, with much ceremony, filled a special golden pitcher with water. Accompanied by the faithful and the flutes, he returned to the Temple through the Water Gate. (It was from this ceremony that the gate got its name, and the gate is mentioned in the book of Nehemiah.) When he returned to the altar he found two silver basins set up. The wider one was on the east of the altar, and received the drink offerings. The narrower basin was for the water. Several musicians blew *shofars*, the flutes continued playing, and

Pouring the water on the ground was almost the same as denying God’s existence.

the Temple chorus recited the verse from the Psalm as the priest poured the water into the basin. Throughout the feast the chorus recited the psalm once as the priest walked around the altar before pouring the water. On the last day of the feast, much like at the siege of Jericho, the priest walked seven times around the altar before pouring the water. The chorus thus sang “Hosanna” seven times on that day, giving the day the name of “the Great Hosanna.”

First Watergate

People of the “baby boom” generation know of the Watergate scandal. What most don’t know is that there were earlier Water Gate scandals. In about 95 BCE one priest, Alexander Jannaeus, poured the water that had been brought through the Water Gate onto the ground rather than into the basin on the altar.

Apparently Alexander was, as his name indicates, partial to the Greeks. He would later probably be considered a Sadducee. As such, he would have supported reforms bringing Jewish culture more into line with Greek customs. This may have been his reason for not fulfilling the water-drawing ceremony.

One of the characteristics of the week of Succoth is that the people are required to carry certain items. “And ye shall take you on the first day the boughs of goodly trees, branches of palm trees, and the boughs of thick trees, and willows of the brook; and ye shall rejoice before the LORD your God seven days.” (Lev 23:40) Traditionally this takes the form of a “bouquet” of palm, myrtle, and willow branches, along with an *etrog*, the fruit of the citron tree.

When Alexander Jannaeus failed to pour the water from Siloam into the basin, but rather onto the ground, the crowd was incensed. They began pelting him with *etrogim* and beating him with the branches they were carrying. The temple guard, who were followers of Alexander, came to the defense of their priest-king. When the riot was over, it is said, over six thousand Jews had been killed.

Why would the people get so upset because he (intentionally) missed the basin in pouring the water? One reason may relate to one of the reasons for the feast of Succoth. It is also called the Feast of Firstfruits. It is a harvest festival. The origin of the water-drawing ceremony may go back to an enactment of a request for sufficient rain for the following season. If so, then pouring the water on the ground was equivalent to asking for a drought during the year that had just started. In an agricultural society it is understandable that Alexander Jannaeus was lucky if he just got away with his life.

A second reason may relate to the symbolism of water. To the Jewish mind, the pouring of water was equivalent to the giving of the *Ruash haKodesh*, the Holy Spirit of God. The prophet Joel had predicted that the Messiah would “pour out” God’s spirit on all people. (Joel 2:28) Isaiah had said, “With joy shall you draw out the wells of salvation.” (Isa 12:3) The ceremony was equal to a promise that Israel would receive the blessings of God’s Spirit. To pour out the water on the ground was to deny that possibility. It was almost equivalent to denying the existence of God. Therefore, the people were afraid that this renegade priest had denied them the rain for their crops and the rain of God’s blessings for the coming year. Furthermore, if this were the same priest that had offered the sacrifice of atonement two weeks earlier, or if that priest were of the same persuasion, this would call into question their atonement for their previous sins. The

people feared for their physical and spiritual lives. No wonder they reacted so violently to this first Water Gate scandal.

Second Watergate

The second Water Gate scandal occurred approximately 125 years later. It is recorded in John 7. It involved a young rabbi named Yeshua (translated Joshua or Jesus). For about three years this young man had been preaching a revolutionary view of the Law. He generally opposed the Sadducees, but never quite agreed with the Pharisees. He was not a Zealot, but drew some of them to him. He was growing in popularity, and the priests, who were mostly Sadducees, had decided that he had to go even if it meant killing him. For this reason it had appeared that he was not going to attend the Feast, although not doing so would essentially destroy his position as a follower of the Law.

Nevertheless, he went to the feast secretly. At least his arrival was in secret. Shortly after getting to Jerusalem, however, he could not resist teaching in the temple courts. Even then the people did not immediately recognize him. When some did, he disappeared before the temple guards could take him into custody. Then came Hoshana Rabbah.

Crowds from all over the world filled the city. The priest went to the pool of Siloam and filled the sacred pitcher. Accompanied by the crowds and the usual flute choir he proceeded upward, through the Water Gate. At the altar he poured the water, accompanied by the temple choir and the shouts of thousands of worshipers.

Then Jesus stood up in a corner of the courtyard. To the assembled crowd he said, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me, and drink. He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." (Jn 7:37-38) Isaiah had said "I will pour ... floods upon the dry ground: I will pour my spirit upon thy seed, and my blessing upon thine offspring." (Isa 44:3) Zechariah had said, "And it shall be in that day, that living waters shall go out from Jerusalem; half of them toward the former sea, and half of them toward the hinder sea: in summer and in winter shall it be. And the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one." (Zech 14:8-9) Jesus had earlier promised the woman at the well a well (Jn 4:14) Now he was promising a river of the Holy Spirit. There was only one who could make such an offer. Jesus was claiming to be Messiah! What a scandalous claim, if he was not Messiah. What a dangerous claim, if he was.

Naturally the people were divided in their reaction. Some asked if he was "the Prophet," meaning Elijah coming back to announce Messiah. Others said, "No. He is not Elijah. He is Messiah." Still others called the temple police.

The chief priests (Sadducees) and the Pharisees, in a rare agreement to work together, argued from a lack of knowledge of scripture. They did not know of the birth of Jesus in Beit Lechem. They only knew him as a Galilean, and ignorantly stated that no prophet was from Galilee. (They apparently forgot Jonah, or ignored him because he was a prophet to the gentiles.)

What was the cause of this second Water Gate scandal? Some might say it was ignorance, or greed, or a desire for power. Perhaps it was all these. Mostly it was fear. Some of the people were afraid that this man who claimed to be Messiah might not be that one. Others were afraid that he might be Messiah.

Jesus had promised the Holy Spirit in abundance. The poor, the downtrodden, the truly faithful had been looking for just such a promise. Every time Israel changed political hands they looked for one who would take them out of their poverty and pain. The faithful few waited constantly for Messiah. (Many Jews today have entirely given up on his coming.) An Egyptian claimed to be Messiah, and led some away, only to fail in his promises. (Acts 21:38) Then, as now, many claimed to be Messiah.

Jesus had promised the Samaritan woman a well; now he was promising a river.

While Jesus offered proof, many were afraid that he would again disappoint them.

Others were afraid that he truly was Messiah. They were afraid they would lose their power. They were afraid they would be shown to be charlatans. They were afraid that God just might be telling the truth, and they doubted the scriptures. They were afraid they might have to change their lives.

The attitudes shown in this second Water Gate scandal continue even to today. When we preach the gospel, many are afraid to believe. The wonder, "what if it is not really true? Then where will I be?" They ignore that they would be better off, lie or truth. Others are afraid that Jesus is God's son. They are comfortable in their sin or their complacency. They are afraid that they will have to change. They are right. To believe that Jesus is Messiah requires a change. It involves a new life (Rom 6).

As we preach the gospel of the Messiah we have to take these attitudes into consideration. Even now we must remember the lessons of Water Gate.

IF IT'S FREE

There is a commercial for a certain brand of fish oil capsules. In it they offer a free bottle of their product to anyone who calls in to place an order. This is clearly so people will try their product and, hopefully, call back to order more. During some testimonials in the ad, one woman makes the ridiculous statement, "If it's free it must be good." In fact, they even repeat her comment at the end of the commercial. Some people may actually fall for that ploy. What does the price of a sample have to do with the quality of a product? Absolutely nothing! They could just as correctly, and obnoxiously, say, "If it's free it must be December." It would make as little sense. The one has nothing to do with the other.

A case could be made, however, that God says the reverse. "If it's good it must be free." We even write songs to say that. "The Best Things in Life Are Free." "The things that I prize like the stars in the skies are all free." (from "I Got Plenty o' Nuthin'", updated to Standard English) We consider that it is only cynics who say there's no free lunch.

James tells us, rather, that "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning." (Jas 1:17) If it is from God it is, necessarily, good, It is also a gift, and therefore free. Does God sell water, as man does? No. "He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." (Matt 5:45) With God there is no argument over water rights, as between Texas and New Mexico. God doesn't bottle fresh air and sell it for a price. He did not create Adam and then sell him the breath of life. Men may take some things that are bad and make them free, but God takes everything good and gives it to us free.

Since everything good from God is free, the greatest gift must also be so. What man needs most is reconciliation to God. God gives it freely, both in the sense that he gives it without limit and the sense that he gives it without price.

Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come. But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many. And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification. For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.) 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. (Romans 5:14-18)

Some people say that grace is the free gift of God. Not Paul. He says here that righteousness is the gift, and it is given because of grace (God's good pleasure). Through Christ we have that righteousness imputed to us because our sins are forgiven. We may "come boldly to the throne of grace" (Heb 4:16) because Jesus is our High Priest who has offered atonement for our sins.

Oh, the gift of righteousness. If it's good it must be free.

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