

"The Common People Heard Him Gladly"

When Jesus taught in the temple *"the common people heard Him gladly"* (Mark 12:37).

The gospel of Christ is God's power to save all who believe (Romans 1:16), but those most receptive to His message have always been commoners. Jesus even gave thanks to God, saying *"that You have hidden these things from the wise and prudent and have revealed them to babes"* (Matthew 11:25). Salvation is not reserved for the college educated, for captains of industry, or the crowned heads of Europe. The word of God is most appealing to those who prefer simplicity. Paul remarked, *"not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called"* (1 Corinthians 11:26).

That common people could hear Him gladly indicates the Lord spoke to them in a way that was simple to comprehend. He didn't dumb it down for them, but neither did he speak over their heads. The message is meant to be understood, which is why God commanded the prophet Habakkuk to *"Write the vision and make it plain"* (Habakkuk 2:2). When the people of Judah returned from captivity and restored proper worship, Ezra's assistants *"read distinctly from the book, in the law of God; and they gave the sense, and helped them to understand the reading"* (Nehemiah 8:8). Sound doctrine doesn't impress the audience with the preacher's eloquence (1 Cor. 2:1-5); it just communicates God's word in a straightforward fashion. When this is accomplished, common people will gladly hear it.

- by Bryan Matthew Dockens

We "Have A Name"

Concerning the church at Sardis the Lord said, *"I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead"* (Revelation 3:1). Now think, where did they get that "name"?

"Name" is here used in the sense of reputation the popular opinion. But the smallness and insignificance of the cause of Christ in the world at that time negates any suggestion that this was a "name" in the world's Hall of Fame. The world couldn't care less. Yet, someone had to give them that name, and give it such general acceptance as to warrant significance. The Lord certainly did not sanction this appraisal; so we are forced to conclude that their peers, or social circle, gave them their "name".

Other churches, others of their professed "kind", must have talked of their "good works", "wonderful spirit", "liberal contributions" or whatever that generation considered great. It is apparent that brethren of that age were no more qualified judges of what God approves than their current counterparts. Doesn't it shake you? They had a good reputation they got it from their own brethren and it did not amount to a hill of beans (when beans were cheap). No wonder Paul said those who *"measure themselves by themselves, and compare themselves among themselves, are not wise"*.

For the Lord said of Sardis, that Big Name church, *"thou art dead"*. What remained was *"ready to die"*. The *"few names in Sardis"* who had not defiled their garments must have stood out from the rest like a sore thumb - a few cranks or "fanatics" who would not line up with the majority. Perhaps those "on the march" wished them gone, so as to remove that source of criticism and embarrassment, not realizing that they were the last bit of salt in the whole stinking mess.

The majority *"had a name"* - and it seems the "name" was more valued than the truth. Well, we all have a name - of some sort - with both God and man. Our concern for what men think often blinds us to what God thinks of us - and that's what I'd call real near-sightedness. Man, a good reputation is not enough. We've got to consider who gives us our "name".

- by Robert Turner

Trouble on the Farm and in the Church

When I was quite young I learned some important lessons regarding farm work. Mules were my favorite beast of burden (those were the days when there were very few tractors on Missouri farms). But I immediately learned to regard with much awe the hind feet of a mule. Yet the lesson I learned was that -- a mule can't pull while kicking -- and he can't kick while pulling.

Even now, when the mule is almost extinct on the farms, we can learn a lesson in the church from him. In some places brethren fuss and 'kick' so much that they just can't get down to pulling the load of spiritual service to the Lord. But if they can be induced to get busy pulling, they will almost always give up their kicking. Perhaps preachers should be the first to be impressed with the principle we learned from the good ole mule.

- by *Leslie Diestelkamp*

Concerns about “The Powers That Be”

Many are concerned, and with reasonable cause, about the incoming presidential administration and the newly elected Congress. Will their economic policies help or hurt the working man? And, what about their views on national security – will our country be at risk from foreign enemies and terrorists? What will they do in handling the current pandemic? All of these questions, and a host of others, are on the minds of concerned citizens.

Actually, for those who fear God, the greatest concern should be about rules that will affect morality. Will the new president, the prevailing powers in Congress, or prospective appointees to the judiciary enact laws and regulations that promote abortion? Will they further act to 'normalize' same-sex marriage? Will our ability to speak and teach on such subjects be restricted and persecuted? These, and similar moral issues, are causing great apprehension for God's people.

Whatever our concerns may be, the Scriptures provide wisdom and comfort. Never forget that first century Christians were living under the rule of one of the most corrupt governments that ever existed. These Christians were instructed (and so are we) to pray for civil authorities (1 Timothy 2:1-2). They were taught (and so are we) to obey the laws they enact and demonstrate honor to the position of authority they hold (1 Peter 2:13-17). Obedience to “the powers that be” is necessary “for conscience sake” (Romans 13:1,5) – in other words, failing in these matters will make us accountable to God.

The great caveat to our submission to civil government is this: “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). We must teach the lost, condemn sin, assemble to worship, and live righteously even if our newly elected governmental leaders (or anyone else for that matter) tell us that we cannot.

Serious challenges potentially lie ahead for God's people. But even in the face of “tribulation” the Lord gave this promise: “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life” (Revelation 2:10). Think!

- by *Greg Gwin*