

2015-11-14

Now I Get It #1, What Jesus wrote in dust

Hi all,

Barb's dad was legendary for using one word when he meant another, or completely messing up the pronunciation of words he meant to say, which caused great amusement for all.

One time he was working on something and couldn't get it fixed, and I walked up to ask how it was going. "I can't figure out what's wrong, I'm constipated over this whole thing!" he said in exasperation, not realizing he had meant to say "I'm frustrated!" (I think, but we never knew exactly what he meant when he said such things) I just chuckled to myself as he was at that time, my future father-in-law.

Barb inherited that word-mix-up gene which has provided me (and her) no end of amusement over the 50 years we've known each other. (We go back to when we were about 7 years old)

The other day I made some Chorizo (choe-rees'-oh) sausage. Chorizo is a Mexican sausage that is fairly spicy, reddish in color due to paprika and chili powder, and is often served with eggs or chicken. Not trusting sausage in general as I don't want any ears, oinks, moo's or tongues in my sausage (I don't want to taste anything that can taste me back, lol), I make it myself so I know what goes into it. I especially like it with eggs in the morning or I add it to Huevos Rancheros (look that one up if unfamiliar).

The trouble is, Barb can't pronounce Chorizo (choe-rees'-oh). When she asks if we have some, she asks for 'Cho-Zorro', which makes my sausage sound like a 19th century Mexican folk hero who carves a big 'Z' on his meal! (Zorro is a Mexican hero of literary fame, with several movies made about him as well)

Chorizo or Cho-Zorro, we both know we are talking about my home made Mexican sausage.

But that isn't always the case with Bible passages

In this series I will set many passages to their Jewish and Roman culture and history, because many people haven't been taught scripture in context, and therefore believe a passage, let's say, is about 'Cho-Zorro' when in fact it is talking about Chorizo.

What Jesus wrote in the dust

We are told in John 7:2 Jesus went up to Jerusalem to the Feast of Tabernacles. Tabernacles celebrates God living with man and is the last of the 7 Biblical festivals found in Leviticus 23. John 7:37-39:

"On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out saying, 'If any man thirst, let him come to me and drink. He that believes on me as the scripture has said, out of his belly will flow rivers of living water.'" But this He spoke of the Spirit, which those who believe on Him would receive, for the Holy Spirit was not yet given because Jesus had not yet been glorified."

While this is beautiful in its own right, it takes on greater meaning when we understand the cultural context. A ceremony within the Feast of Tabernacles is the "Beit Hashoevah" or "House of the Waterpouring", and it was conducted daily for the full week of the feast.

While sacrifices were being made in the Temple, a group of priests went out the Eastern Gate of the temple to a nearby valley to cut willow tree branches. These branches were believed to be about 25 feet in length (7.5 m) and the priests made a column, each with a branch. As they in made their way to the temple, they walked in unison and swung the branches back and forth as they walked.

This swinging of the branches in unison created a rushing wind symbolic of the Spirit of God. As this was going on, the High Priest and Assistant went out of the temple via the Water Gate to the Pool of Siloam and filled a gold pitcher with water known as "Mayim Hayim", or "Living Water". The Assistant filled a silver pitcher with wine. Note: Silver in the OT always stands for righteousness, gold for purity and holiness.

The priests with the willow branches would circle the altar 7 times as animals were sacrificed, then lay their branches over the top of the sacrifice, forming a tent or sukka over the top. As this happened the High Priest poured out the Living Water at the sacrifice as his Assistant poured out the wine, and the people gathered sang together Isaiah 12:3:

"Therefore with joy shall you draw water out of the wells of salvation." (Hebrew word for 'salvation' used here is Yeshua, for that is what Jesus or Yeshua means).

And that is why Jesus, Yeshua, cried out that He was the Source of the true Living Water on that last day of the feast. To everyone listening, they would have understood He was saying He was that celebration in the flesh before their very eyes. That is why they wanted to arrest Him (7:44), and yet marveled.

But wait, there's more!

During the week long festival of Tabernacles and Living Water, the priests read multiple passages about Living Water, and on the day after the Feast ended which was the 8th day (Shemini Atzeret), there was a celebration on that 8th day called "Simchat Torah" or "Rejoicing in the Torah (Word)".

All week long the whole nation celebrated Tabernacles, living in tents, celebrating God living with man. Everyone of those 7 days they also celebrated that He is the Living Water by the Spirit shown in the wind created by the willow branches, and on the 8th day they tied it all together to rejoice in the Word.

John 8:1-2 tells us after the feast, the next morning, or the 8th day while they were celebrating the 'Rejoicing in the Word' day, Jesus came into the temple and a woman caught in adultery was brought to Him, and He was asked:

"Now Moses in the law commands us that such a one should be stoned to death, but what do you say?" This they said to tempt Him that they might have something to accuse Him. But Jesus stooped down and with His finger wrote on the ground, as though He hadn't heard them."

"So when they continued asking Him, He stood up and said to them, 'He that is without sin among you, let him throw the first stone at her.' And again He stooped down and wrote on the ground. And those who heard it, being convicted by their own conscience, went out one by one beginning at the oldest, even to the youngest, and Jesus was left alone and the woman standing before Him." John 8:5-9

What did He write?

People have asked that questions for centuries, but I think the answer is revealed in the Feast itself. For all 7 days of the Feast of Tabernacles one of the passages read was Jeremiah 17:12-13:

"A glorious high throne from the beginning is the place of our sanctuary, O Lord, the hope of Israel, all who forsake you shall be ashamed, and those who depart from you shall be written in the earth (their names), because they have forsaken the Lord, the Fountain of Living Waters."

The writing of names in the dust of the earth stands in contrast to writing the names of believers in the Book of the Living, and Jeremiah makes the point their names, or their lives, being written in the earth means they are doomed and will be forgotten as easily as a puff of wind blows away the dust of the earth.

This explains why they went out convicted by their own conscience (all who forsake you will be ashamed), from the eldest (who had the most authority, sins, and would have been the ones initiating the execution order for the woman) to the youngest.

But notice the verses right after these in Jeremiah, verses 14-15, for this is what the woman received when Jesus told her He didn't condemn her:

"Heal me O Lord, and I will be healed; Save me, and I will be saved, for you are my praise! Behold they say to me, 'Where is the Word of the Lord?' Let it come to me now."

If that doesn't bring you to awe of our Lord, wait, there's more

The Feast of Tabernacles was also known as the 'Feast of Dedication', the 'Feast of Lights', and 'The Season of our Joy' because Solomon concluded the dedication of his temple at this feast. The custom was to place 4 big lamps in the temple, the main one was called 'The Light of the World'.

That is why Jesus said in John 8:12, "I am the Light of the world". Now His statements about being the Source of Living Water, the Light of the World, and Him writing in the earth seem so much more vivid. Hope that is a blessing to you, I get excited everytime I read those chapters and wanted to share that with you.

Next week, veils, braiding hair, and cutting off the hem of a robe...how exciting! But for now, I'm hungry for some Cho-Zorro. Blessings,

John Fenn

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2015-11-21

Now I Get It #2, Braid, veil

Hi all,

When I pick Chris up from the group home one of the first things he does is reach for my phone because on it I have a play list of children's songs, and as we run errands we listen to those songs. They are from a variety of sources including songs from 'The Sound of Music', 'Mary Poppins', and also Barney, Dora the Explorer, Mickey Mouse, and Christian songs from 'The Donut Man' and others.

One day as he was holding my phone listening to Mickey Mouse and looking at the album cover showing Mickey and his friends, he made this statement: "Look dad, Mickey has ears like you!"

I understood him to be making a joke, saying my ears were big and round like Mickey's, but he could have meant Mickey Mouse has ears like any person's ears. I replied "He does, does he? Mickey has ears like me?" And he replied with a laugh saying, "Yep, uh huh" and laughed, and I laughed with him. I think he was making a joke, but then again...

History, cultural, or God's command?

Both Paul and Peter tell us "All scripture is given by inspiration of God"* and "...holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit." (*II Timothy 3:16, II Peter 1:21)

All scripture was inspired by God, but it doesn't mean all scripture is the command of God. When David went on his rooftop and saw Bathsheba taking a bath*, that is for our information, not a command to do the same. Some is history, some is cultural, some things are for us to live by. *II Samuel 11

Discerning which is which isn't always clear, as when Chris said Mickey Mouse has ears like me - was he saying he has ears like everyone, or my ears are big and round like Mickey Mouse's ears? His laughter suggests the second, but without putting his comment in that surrounding context you might never know.

So when Paul says: "...I want women to adorn themselves with proper clothing, modestly and discreetly, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly garments, but rather by means of good deeds, as is proper for women making a claim to godliness...", is that command or culture? We have to understand the context to be able to determine if that was a command or just the culture of the day. I Timothy 2:9-15

In the last several years I've been asked the question about women wearing braided hair many, many times, and always from west African's. The history of it is that several years ago one or more women claimed to have been given a view of hell, and reported they saw women who were in hell simply because they had braided their hair, causing great concern is still being taught to this day.

How do we rightly divide the Word between command and culture?

The foundational understanding is that Christ lives in us - that we are now the temples of God. Paul said "From henceforth I know no man according to man's standards, for if anyone is in Christ he is a new creation*." And he told the Galatians "There is now neither Jew nor Greek, slave or free, male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.* And, "Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything, only a new creation.* " II Corinthians 5:16-17, Galatians 3:28, 6:15-16

That means in terms of what Christ did for us, we are all equal, male and female, from the highest of society to the lowest, we are all equal because we've been saved by the same blood of Jesus and we are new creations in Him.

Therefore there is nothing we can do that can improve on or add to Christ in us. We can't wear particular clothing or wear hair a certain way to improve upon Christ in us. We can't give enough money to improve or add to Christ in us. The Father gave us His Son who now lives in us by the Father's Spirit; What can we ever do that could improve upon or add to that? Nothing. So just live.

But these spiritual truths must be applied within various cultures, which means culturally there may be limits to those freedoms and equalities.

Paul told the Romans* and Corinthians* 'an idol is nothing' but 'not every person has this knowledge', so he said to be considerate of others who are of a weaker faith by not eating food first offered to idols, or have chosen to worship on one day rather than another, or be a vegetarian - not to use our freedom to hurt our brethren for whom Christ also died and rose. Romans 14, I Corinthians 8:4, 7; II Corinthians 10:23-33

So it is he tells the wives in Ephesus not to braid their hair nor wear precious stones, because the custom of the day for women of stature in Roman culture was to braid their hair, and often add braided wigs on top, interlaced with jewels. Sometimes they sewed jewels into their clothing, as is done even today. (The book, "Caesar's Wives" by Annelise Freisenbruch is a good history including cultural use of braided hair/jewels)

Paul was telling the women in Ephesus in I Timothy 2:9-15 to not flaunt their wealth as was the custom of the day, but rather demonstrate their 'spiritual wealth' so to speak in their hearts and lives unto the Lord.

Note: People claim to have all sorts of experiences and claim to have seen all sorts of things, but even if those experiences are genuine, people who are immature of age or character, or ungrounded in the Word, or filled with religious tradition, relate to genuine experiences in the Spirit through the tainted glasses of their age, culture, and religious training. And that's if they are honest!

That's how you get a 4 year old boy saying he saw all people in heaven with wings, or a little girl painting a handsome and romanticized picture of Jesus claiming that is what He looks like - and the little boy agreeing with her. They are kids so they see things through the filter and immaturity of childhood. (The closest I've seen to what Jesus looks like is the reverse image on the Shroud of Turin. He isn't handsome, but is very average looking and has a weathered look about Him.)

Veil and silence?

In I Corinthians 11:1-16 Paul deals with the women in Corinth who are experiencing freedom in Christ to the flaunting of the local culture, meaning they were removing their veils because in Christ they have freedom.

In that day a veil was the equivalent of a wedding ring. It would be like every married woman when attending (house) church, to take their wedding bands off when they came through the door. That would dishonor themselves, their husbands, God, the angels in charge of their marriage and home, the people gathered, and the local custom! Paul said to put the veils back on ladies, though you have the freedom to not wear them.

Three times in that passage he refers to it being a custom, and for them to judge it themselves*. He also tells the wives they may pray and prophesy in the meetings as long as they are properly clothed.* People often forget this fact when they read 3 chapters later and the subject has changed to order and taking turns in the (home) meetings, when he tells the wives if they have questions, for the sake of the flow of the meeting to ask their husbands at home. Some take that to mean women can't speak in meetings - wrong - look at context and culture and history!

We know from Acts 18 that 3 cultures - Roman, Greek, Jewish- were suddenly gathering together in the house of a Roman named Justus, and that led to confusion, thus Paul's instructions about order and taking turns and politeness when a guest in someone's home. *I Corinthians 11: 5-6, 13, 16; 14:26-40

He wouldn't tell them to pray and prophesy in chapter 11 and then tell them they can't talk in chapter 14 - context and culture is everything. That is the same for the passage in I Timothy 2:14-15 when he tells the women not to flaunt their wealth by braiding their hair and wearing a lot of jewelry, and then tells them not to usurp authority over their husbands: Teaching, speaking, and prophesying in agreement with the spouse in marital harmony is fine, but they were abusing freedom in Christ at the expense of local culture, marital peace, and order, and it was hurting them and the spread of the gospel.

Okay! I didn't get to the cutting of the hem, that and more next week,
Blessings,
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2015-11-28

Now I Get It #3, Friend at midnight

Hi all,

The summer I turned 16 my mother took we 4 kids and my cousin who was also about to turn 16, camping around Europe for nearly a month. Mom had rented a Volkswagen van with a pop-up top and a separate large tent which we 3 boys slept in, while my mom, cousin, and sister slept in the van. We started in Amsterdam and made a loop down to Rome and back - it changed my life.

While visiting the Vatican my cousin wore a pink skirt with a hem that ended above her knees a few inches. Upon reaching the door to St. Peter's Basilica she was denied entrance because her skirt was too short. That was the only 'good' outfit she brought on the trip, and we weren't going to go shopping for something below the knees, but we also didn't want her to have come so far only to be turned away.

At first she was highly, highly offended, but once her temper cooled her anger turned to defiance. She decided she would show them, and promptly pulled her skirt down around her rear end, pulled her blouse out to (barely) cover her underwear, and marched through the door with a skirt well below the knee. Once inside with a turn of her head and sticking out her tongue to spite the guards on the other side of the huge doors, she pulled her skirt up to normal length.

If you were a bystander and didn't know the Vatican rules back then, but was just watching what happened to my cousin, you wouldn't fully understand what took place. There is another story about hemlines in the Bible that doesn't make sense either unless we understand the culture. In I Samuel 24:1-8 David is being chased by King Saul, and he and his men take refuge in a large cave in the wilderness.

King Saul

The king needed to relieve himself so for privacy sought out a cave - but he didn't realize he chose the one David and his men were hiding in!

While King Saul was occupied, David snuck up and cut off the hem of his outer robe, but verse 5-6 says: "And it came to pass afterward, that David's heart smote him (or "David's heart convicted him"), because he had cut off Saul's hem. And he said to his men, The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the Lord's anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, since he is the Lord's anointed."

When you or I read that we see a ruined robe, and we wonder that David was so tender hearted that he felt that bad about it, and we may realize something deeper may be at play but are unsure what. Here it is.

In Numbers 15:37-40 & Deuteronomy 22:12 the Lord commands that they put borders on their garments representing the Word of the Lord, so that whenever they looked at their clothes and wore them, they would remember the Word and know the symbolism of being clothed with the Word. In modern times we think of prayer shawls with their tassels, but in ancient days those were on everyday clothing.

The custom in David's day even to this day in Orthodox funerals, was that at a person's funeral that hem of the garment would be cut off, symbolizing the dead person is now free from the bounds of the Law on earth; they could go on and be with God. David performed the funeral ceremony of cutting off Saul's hem, telling him he is a dead man and go on and die - basically, drop dead King Saul.

That is why David's heart 'smote him' that he had stretched forth his hand against the King, and why if you read the passage, he repented and acknowledged his action to Saul. David respected the anointing, lines of authority, and was quick to acknowledge the sin of his heart by responding to his conscience.

The friend at midnight

Jesus employed many teaching styles to communicate His point, and one of those was to use 2 or 3 comparisons in a row to say the same thing in several ways. This is one example of 3 teachings in a row on the same subject:

In Luke 11:2-5 He gives the disciples a basic outline of a prayer that was in the Old Testament format of the day that we call 'The Lord's Prayer'. It is written in the 'aorist' tense which means it is an ongoing process not a singular event, and it is written as a statement of that ongoing process, though some versions of the Bible have taken it out of the aorist and turned it into a series of singular requests by adding 'Give us...': But this is what Jesus said:

"When you pray say, Our Father in heaven, holy is your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done as in heaven, so on earth. Give us by day our daily bread and forgive us our sins for we also forgive everyone indebted to us, and lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil."

That's it - that is the whole prayer in Luke's gospel. If you re-read that as an ongoing process it becomes a prayer of humility and thanksgiving. As a process the Father is working His will on earth, as ongoing process He daily gives us our bread, as an ongoing process He forgives us as we as part of an ongoing process forgive others, and he always as part of the process of our lives, leads us away from temptation and always delivers us from evil. It's deep if you'll spend time on it.

As the Lord's prayer reveals the goodness of the Father and His ongoing involvement in our lives, Jesus immediately follows that with a parable to show what the Father is NOT like in verse 5-9 called 'The Friend at Midnight':

"Then He said to them, Suppose one of you has a friend and goes to him at midnight and says to him, 'Friend, lend me three loaves, for a friend of mine has come to me from a journey and I have nothing to set before him'. And from inside he answers and says, 'Do not bother me; the door is locked and my children and I are in bed; I can't get up and give you anything.'"

I tell you even though he will not get up and give him anything because he is his friend, yet because of his persistence he will get up and give him whatever he needs. So I say to you, Ask and it will be given to you. Seek, and you will find. Knock, and it WILL be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives; and he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, it will be opened."

Jesus is saying that on a friend to friend basis here on earth, it sometimes takes persistence between friends to get what you need, but that is not the case with the Father: Ask and you receive, seek and you will find, knock and He WILL open for you.

To make His point more clear in case anyone has any doubt, Jesus continues with a 3rd point:

"Now suppose one of you fathers is asked by his son for a fish; will he give him a snake instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, he won't give him a scorpion will he? If you then being basic evil men know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him?"

Notice how He started with the Father in the Lord's Prayer, switched to the stubborn friend to show what the Father is not like, then returned to the goodness of the Father by pointing out earth-dads and their goodness to their children, sandwiching the stubborn friend in between 2 teachings on the goodness and giving of the Father.

The theme this week has been one of heaven and one of earth

The Father's goodness and David's sensitivity to his heart and the things of the Spirit are related. David had already been anointed to be king, but Saul was the current king and David once convicted of what was in his heart, responded to do right even at the risk of losing face and possibly, his life.

David wrote in Psalm 110, which starts in verse 1 with: "The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool." The Lord (Father) said to my Lord (Christ), sit at my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool."

Because David knew the Father and how Christ would be seated until all was made subject to Him, David having crossed the line in his heart with Saul, repented to wait for his own turn to be king. Because He knew the Father he was sensitive to the things of the Spirit. Know Him! Talk to the Father conversationally, then listen for His quiet response, often without words, but communicating volumes.

I'll wrap up this series next week with talk of a white stone and more, until then, blessings,
John Fenn

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2015-12-05

Now I Get It #4, White stone

Hi all,

This autumn we took a trip with others to visit friends in house churches in the US area called 'New England', which is the far northeast section of our country. On our last day we stopped by a favorite spot, the Lobster Shack on Two Lights Road, Cape Elizabeth, Maine. I don't eat lobster or their kind, which I call 'insects of the sea', but Barb likes their lobster roll and the setting is right on the edge of the rocky coast.

I picked up my hamburger and iced tea, and stopped at the little corner table where they had condiments, all in little packets in small compartments on the table; ketchup, mustard, mayonnaise and lemon juice. I put 2 packets of lemon juice from that compartment for my tea on the tray, and walked to our table.

I tore open a packet of lemon juice and squirted it into my tea, and then picked up a second packet, tore it open, and squirted the contents into the tea - but to my surprise the packet I thought was lemon juice, was

actually mustard! After some laughter I realized the heavier mustard would hopefully settle to the bottom without mixing with the tea, so I proceeded to drink my tea throughout the meal and forgot about the mustard lying in wait to ambush me at the bottom of the cup.

Sure enough, that last gulp of tea was pure mustard, and I laughed again though I nearly choked on it, and it sure cleared my sinuses!

Appearances can be deceiving

It looked like normal tea, but appearances can be deceiving if you didn't know what was added. Similarly, we have a situation in Matthew 8:5-12 that has caused believers a lot of anxiety because it looks like one thing at first glance, but when you check all the 'ingredients' within the story, the real flavor comes through.

Jesus is approached by a Roman Centurion saying this: "Lord, my servant lies at home in bed paralyzed, and is in terrible pain." To which Jesus replies: "I will come and heal him." But the Centurion said "Lord, I am not worthy that you should come under my roof. Just give the order, and my servant will be healed."

This is where many fail to notice the context and understand the culture of the day. This Centurion was not Jewish, yet a believer in Jesus, and understood His authority. When he asks Jesus to just issue a command for healing the Lord makes note that a Gentile can have faith too:

"Truly, truly I say to you, I have not seen such great faith in all Israel. And I say to you, that many will come from the east and the west (from Gentile nations), and shall sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But many of the children of the kingdom (Israelites) will be cast out into outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth." (v5-12)

Jesus' reference to 'many will come from the east and from the west' refers to Gentile people coming into the kingdom, as this Roman stood before Him, while children of the kingdom (Jews) will be cast out. We might say it this way; '...children to whom the kingdom belonged but they rejected' will be cast into darkness...

Fear not believers - Jesus was not talking about believers having an uncertain future - He was talking about Gentiles who like the Centurion, would have faith in Christ, and come and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom, while many to whom the kingdom belonged, are cast out due to unbelief in Him.

Stand up, or sit down?

In Acts 7:55-60 Steven is on trial before the elders of Israel, which comes to an abrupt end when Steven is rushed upon and taken outside the city and stoned to death. The whole of chapter 7 is devoted to his trial which seems to be moving along at a crisp pace, only to end so suddenly. It makes the reader wonder what happened to cause such an abrupt and tragic conclusion?

"But he, being filled with the Holy Spirit, looked steadfastly into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God. And said, 'Behold! I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.'" Then they cried out with a loud voice and stopped their ears, and ran upon him with one accord...and they stoned Stephen...And he kneeled down and cried with a loud voice, 'Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.' And when he had said this, he died."

Clearly the turning point was when he told the elders he saw The Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. But why?

It is because the Jewish culture of the day taught that God will stand up when He judges mankind, based on Isaiah 3:13-15: "The Lord stands up to contend, and stands to judge the people. The Lord enters into judgement with the elders of His people and their leaders....why do you beat down my people, and grind the faces of the poor says the Lord of the armies..."

Stephen was merely telling them what he saw - Jesus had stood up to judge the elders because they were bringing Steven to trial for his faith. THAT is why they were incensed. The idea THEY, the elders of Israel, were being judged...

The point I want to bring out is this; When Stephen asked the Lord to dismiss charges against them by asking 'Lay not this sin to their charge', the Lord would have sat back down, and on that last day the sin of murdering Stephen will not be brought against them. We have amazing authority before the Lord when it comes to forgiving and releasing a person from their sins against us.

White stone

In The Revelation 2:12-17 Jesus has a message for the disciples in Pergamos. He commends them for not compromising their faith though they live in the main city for emperor worship, but also says there are those in their midst who like Balaam did to Israel, have put a stumbling block before the believers in that they hold to the teaching of the Nicolaitans, which He says, He hates.

Early church fathers say a leader in the church named Nicolas was the source of the heresy, and the word Nicolaitan means 'power over the people' and when combined with the Lord's example of Balaam who devised a seducing of Israel, we see the teaching of leaders having power over people is a seduction the Lord hates - it leads to 1 voice speaking to the people to tell them what God is saying, rather than staying with New Testament truth of Christ in each believer and therefore equality among the disciples.

Jesus tells the believers in the Nicolaitan teaching to repent, and for those who "...overcomes, I will give him the hidden manna to eat, and I will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no one knows except him who receives it."

The hidden manna is a reference to heaven, for you may recall part of the manna Israel found in the wilderness was put into the Ark of the Covenant to be preserved forever by His presence. The Lord is telling the over-comers they will be with Him in heaven itself, the true Holy of Holies.

What is the white stone?

Jesus links the giving of a white stone with the eating of hidden manna. In Roman times white stones were used like business cards, and sometimes as a ticket to get into a Roman event. But the most common use was that when someone took in a stranger for the night, that person upon leaving, would give their host a white stone with that person's name and address on it, so that if they ever come to their city, they would have a home away from home, a place to stay, eat, spend the night.

Jesus said He would give them such a stone. Jesus is saying essentially, "I've made my home in your heart, and now I'm giving you a personalized ticket to gain entrance to my home, for you are in my heart." The fact He personalizes it so that only He and they will know what is on the card, shows us how intimately He knows us, to put a sort of 'code' on that stone only He and we will know. Amazing grace!

The theme for this last in the series is as you can probably tell, assurance of salvation, assurance of our home in heaven. From the Centurion who is no doubt one of the many Gentiles coming from the east and west to sit down with Abraham, to Jesus sitting down as we ask Him not to hold the sins of those who sin against us to their charge, to promises of eating heavenly food and gaining entrance with a ticket so personal only He and you will know what is written thereon - we have an exciting future!

As Ephesians 2:7 says of the Father's good intentions towards us: "That in the ages to come He will clearly show the immeasurable and unsurpassable riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.."

New subject next week, until then, blessings!

John Fenn

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