

Obedience

Sometimes it's hard to tell from a made up story and/or history. I'll give you an example. John Gerstenlauer forwarded me this little piece of "history" that I've been questioning since I've received it. I think there might be a problem here.

The Pillsbury Doughboy died yesterday of a yeast infection and trauma complications from repeated pokes in the belly. He was 71.

Doughboy was buried in a lightly greased coffin and dozens of celebrities turned out to pay their respects, including Mrs. Butterworth, Hungry Jack, the California raisins, Betty Crocker, the Hostess Twinkies and Captain Crunch. The grave site was piled high with flour.

Aunt Jemima delivered the eulogy and lovingly described Doughboy as a man who never knew how much he was kneaded.

Doughboy rose quickly in show business, but his later life was filled with turnovers. He was not considered a very smart cookie, wasting much of his dough on half-baked schemes. Despite being a little flaky at times, he was still a crusty old man and was considered a roll model for millions.

Doughboy is survived by his wife Play Dough, two children, John Dough and Jane Dough, plus they had one in the oven. He is also survived by his elderly dad, Pop Tart.

The funeral was held at 3:50 for about 20 minutes.

In this morning's Scripture reading in Ex. 25:10-22 we see the beginning history of the Ark of the Covenant. But this is a history that is rich and vivid and worthwhile for us to look at and will, I believe encourage our faith.

The Ark of the Covenant was this box almost four feet long (45-50 inches) and a little more than two feet wide and a little more than two feet deep. It was made of wood and covered with pure gold. The lid was made of solid gold and was called the mercy seat. Two cherubim (the sole exception to the ban of graven images) were at both ends of the Ark, facing each other while their wings touched each other. This Mercy Seat was the throne of God. All of this was made under Moses and was a symbol of God's presence among the Israelites.

The Ark shows up a lot in the Bible. The Ark went from Sinai to and through the wilderness wanderings. When Israel entered the Promised Land under Joshua, the Ark was kept at Shiloh until the time of the Philistine's battle with Israel, in which the Philistines won and took the Ark.

You can read the story in 1 Samuel 4-7. The short story is when the Philistines captured the Ark, and put it into Dagon's temple--a funny thing happened. The next morning Dagon is fallen over on his face before the Ark. So the Philistines pick him back up and set him in place only to find the next morning that Dagon is once again on the ground but this time with his head and hands broken off. The Philistines were plagued with tumors and all kinds of trouble because of the Ark. So they returned it to Israel, to the village of Kiriath-jearim (1 Sam 6:21- 7:2), until David came to get it and to place it in Jerusalem and later is placed in Solomon's temple.

The history of the Ark of the Covenant is woven throughout the lives of the Hebrews. The Ark provided the presence of the Lord. The history of the Ark showed the importance of having God with them and the danger that comes from using God or carrying him around. The Ark emphasized that God was with his people and that God was over and above his people (it was obvious that God was not in the box!). The Ark was the symbol (not the reality) of God's presence. The Ark was not a good luck charm or some kind of magical thing that could somehow be used to manipulate God. God cannot be contained and God cannot be manipulated.

A gift that God gives to us is prayer. Prayer is another way for us to have contact with God.

But there is a wrong way to pray: "O Lord, won't you buy me a Mercedes Benz! My friends all own Porches. I must make amends! Worked hard all my lifetime, no help from my friends. O Lord, won't you buy **me a Mercedes Benz!**" [Janis Joplin]

This seems to be funny and we see easily that it's absurd to pray like this. But the parabolic potential for this prayer is great. It seems that when people want something--I mean if they get desperate enough to want something they can't seem to get so easily, they pray to God. But in between, during those times that they are satisfied with life (at least for the moment), they don't want anything to do with God.

For many people in the world, all they know about God is that when you're stuck, or when you really want something that's hard to come by, pray! When you're really scared, pray! When life is not going well, pray! But when things seem to get better they forget God. They forget to pray.

Some of the most religious places that I know of are battlefields. You'll hear more passionate prayers in foxholes than in most churches.

As Christians we don't find ourselves deliberately going to dangerous places so that we can be involved in real heartfelt prayers. What most Christians do is go to church where prayer is common and where it is a safe and a predictable place to be.

As Christians, we want our faith to be stable and not one filled with fear (like in a foxhole). But the question this morning is, "Can't we have a faith that has a sense of stability as well as a spirit of passion?" I mean how is it that we get the maturity to keep our feet on the ground while retaining a childlike faith to do what God tells us too?

Psalm 132 is just one of those Psalms that helps to develop life under the reign of God and Christ. Psalm 132 is a Psalm of obedience. More specifically it's a Psalm about David's obedience. It's about how David promised God. This Psalm shows David's obedience as lively and passionate. It is an obedience that responds in faith, which is rooted in the historical facts of the past and reaches into the promise of the hope that God gives.

Psalm 132

Obedience has a history. The first part of Psalm 132 is that part that keeps our feet on the ground. It's that part that looks back. Psalm 132 looks at the single event of the Ark of the Covenant, and reminisces. **Vv. 6-8 We heard it in Ephrathah, we came upon it in the fields of Jaar 7 "Let us go to his dwelling place; let us worship at his footstool-8 arise, O LORD, and come to your resting place, you and the ark of your might.**

We've looked at the history of the Ark, but this Psalm doesn't retell the history, it only remembers it. There's enough in the Psalm to trigger familiar memory for the people. The mere mention of the Ark brings with it rich symbolism of God, and his presence. Knowing about the Ark was everyday stuff for Israel. It was as common as the Cross is to the Christian.

Mention the cross to a Christian and they know instantly what you're talking about. The mere mention of the cross brings memories of the divine Son of God, **[Phil. 2:6-8] 6Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, 7but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. 8And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!**

The mere mention of the cross brings memories of Jesus' life and his being buried in the tomb for three days (as he said). Our memories are provoked to think about his glorious resurrection and his ascension to heaven. When the Christian hears about the cross, the Christian is reminded that we have been saved from the pits of hell (our sin puts us there) and are promised a life in heaven with God (because of his righteousness and grace.). Just the mere mention of the cross conjures up all of these memories!

This is what happens in the Psalm. The mere mention of the Ark and what David did in getting the Ark from that backwoods village and how David was determined to put the Ark at the center of Jewish life (Jerusalem) brings not only memories, but rejoicing.

6 We heard it in Ephrathah, we came upon it in the fields of Jaar: David gets word that the Ark is in Kiriath-jearim and David promised to get it and bring it to Jerusalem. David gathers his people and says: **7 "Let us go to his dwelling place; let us worship at his footstool-** So David gets the Ark and brings it to Jerusalem. And David and the people worship and celebrate before the Lord (the Ark). **8 arise, O LORD, and come to your resting place, you and the ark of your might. 9 May your priests be clothed with righteousness; may your saints sing for joy."**

David also worshipped before the Lord. **2 Sam. 6:14b-15** says: **14 David... danced before the LORD with all his might, 15 while he and the entire house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouts and the sound of trumpets.**

This Psalm sings about memories. Remember that these are Psalms of Accents. These are songs that were sung by Jews who went up to Jerusalem in obedience to God. These people are not the first to be obedient. For the road they travel on to go up to Jerusalem is also the road the Ark had been carried before an expectant people. This Ark had been carried in good and bad ways. It had been carried in fear (like our prayers...help me!); This Ark was carried superstitiously as some kind of secret weapon against the Philistines, which ended poorly. And this Ark was carried into Jerusalem

as David and the people of Israel celebrated and danced before the Lord. This Psalms shows how obedience is turned into worship!

Obedience has a history! We cannot simply rely on our own experiences to know how to live. To mature, we need to look at the history of God and his people.

What would you think about a statistic that gave a lengthy description of what the average American thinks about broccoli--but then found out later that the stats were based on what one person thought, who had only seen broccoli but never even tasted it? You would reject the findings. Yet for many people (Christians) they rely on this kind of evidence on far more important matters in the life of faith. Matters like unanswered prayer, or God's judgment, or God's forgiveness and salvation. The problem is that many people only consult themselves. But we need other experiences.

We need the experiences of other brothers and sisters in the church. We need the experience of our biblical brothers and sisters.

I like Eugene Peterson's reflection here: "A Christian who has David in his bones, Jeremiah in his blood stream, Paul in his fingertips and Christ in his heart will know how much and how little value to put on his own momentary feelings."

There's value in remembering Biblical experiences. A Christian with poor memory of the bible has to sort of re-invent the wheel--for life! A Christian with a good memory avoids falling into old sins and knows how to maneuver through difficult situations.

Psalms 132 helps us to remember and to keep our feet on the ground. But it also helps us get our feet off the ground as well. History with God gives us something to stand on. But God is always calling us to act on his promises. The 2nd part of Psalm 132 sort of launches us in the air. It gets us to think about the future. So as we think about acting on the promises of God we anticipate the future of faith.

v. 12 The LORD swore an oath to David, a sure oath that he will not revoke: "One of your own descendants I will place on your throne-12 if your sons keep my covenant and the statutes I teach them, then their sons will sit on your throne for ever and ever."

Here is where the Psalm transitions to what has happened to what will happen.

Obedience is fulfilled by hope. The Psalmist says **vv. 15-18 I will bless her with abundant provisions; her poor will I satisfy with food. 16 I will clothe her priests with salvation, and her saints will ever sing for joy. 17 "Here I will make a horn grow for David and set up a lamp for my anointed one. 18 I will clothe his enemies with shame, but the crown on his head will be resplendent."**

None of what the Psalmist mentions here is separate from actual history. It lines up with the history of what God does with his people. A person with a good memory recalls how in those years in the wilderness God gave water from the rock, and manna on the ground, and quail from the skies. God is active... **v. 15 I will bless her with abundant provisions; her poor will I satisfy with food.**

Also, no other people on the planet knew about God's salvation more than Israel. From Moses song on the edge of the Red Sea and Miriam and the other woman with their tambourines in hand singing and dancing and praising God....To the sounds of the trumpets that shook and tumbled the walls of Jericho,...to the incredible songs of David that many of us still sing today... joy has overflowed

because God saves! **v. 16 I will clothe her priests with salvation, and her saints will ever sing for joy.**

We are obedient because God tells us that evil will be defeated and that righteousness (God's righteousness) will win the day. **17 "Here I will make a horn grow for David and set up a lamp for my anointed one. 18 I will clothe his enemies with shame, but the crown on his head will be resplendent."**

So Psalm 132 gives us hope. And hope puts wings on our obedience. Obedience is not finding a couple of commands and obeying them. Obedience is about believing God. It's about believing what God did in the past and believing God's promises for our future.

Obedience has a history and obedience is fulfilled by the hope of what is to come. Psalm 132 reminds us that we need roots in the past to give obedience something to stand on and it reminds us that we need a vision of the future so that we can have direction and goal. Neither of these lives on their own. They are connected.

Mature obedience has a strong sense of the past and has an excitement about the future. A Christian who stays put is no better than a statue. A person who just leaps all over the place is under the suspicion that he is not a man, but a jumping Jack! Obedience is a combination of both a good memory of what God has done and a lively hope of his promises for our lives.

Prayer

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