

The Sound of Bells

I've been rather nostalgic lately. I was born and raised in Manchester NH back in '62. One of the familiar sounds in Manchester while I was growing up was the ringing of church bells. To this day, whenever I hear church bells ringing I find myself playing in the back alley as a little kid stopping to listen to the beautiful sounds and wondering what the occasion was. By the sound of the bells it was sometimes easy to figure out if it was a funeral, or a time of celebration. There were even times when the ringing of the bells seemed like they rang in four-part harmony. How creative—and how unique to experience these special sounds as a child—at least these days.

This past week I found myself reading through one of Legard Smith's books, "Meeting God in Quiet Places." If you were looking for a good devotional book, this no doubt would be a good one.

So I've been thinking about bells in relation to the Church. This week was the first time that I ever thought about whether or not bells were even mentioned in the Bible. And, they are—in at least two places. The references to bells are rather brief but carry a rich message worth our time. All I could think about (and hear) after reading these passages on bells was those wonderful bells in my childhood.

The first scripture that mentions bells is the one read in the Scripture reading this morning. It is found in Exodus 28. The bells are mentioned as a part of God's instructions for building the tabernacle and making provisions for worship. Part of this instruction was for the sacred garment that Aaron the high priest was to wear. This garment included a breastplate, an ephod (apron like but more like a skirt), a robe, a tunic and a sash. God makes it clear that the robe was to be blue, with pomegranates (blue, purple and scarlet yarn) around the hem of the robe with gold bells in between the pomegranates. God said that Aaron must wear this when he ministers in the tabernacle.

This garment seems pretty cool. It would be easy to think that along with the pomegranates, the bells would simply be decorative. But when we read on we quickly see that the bells are more troubling than artistic. **The sound of the bells will be heard when he enters the Holy Place before the LORD and when he comes out, so that he will not die. Ex. 28:35**

Wow! Could this really be? Could it be that these tiny little bells would become a matter of life and death?

We must remember what Aaron is doing in the first place. Aaron is the high priest who entered into the Holy Place. What I'm saying is that Aaron actually entered into the very presence of God.

You remember when God called Moses up Mount Sinai (**Ex. 19:20-25**). Then God spoke the 10 commandments. Look at the response of the people when they heard the voice of the **LORD (20:18-21)**.

Aaron was to enter into the presence of the LORD. It seems pretty clear that if any one else were to do this, it meant certain death. What I'm saying is human kind dared not approach the God of all creation. This was also true for the high priest. Even the high priest had to "announce his coming" into the presence of the LORD. And this perhaps is the symbolism of the bells—to "announce his coming." Which is really no different than that of sleigh bells or doorbells. These bells sort of bridge the sacred and the secular—they sort of bridge between the Holy One and the unholy one.

Powerful imagery--isn't it!?

Come with me into the future. More than a thousand years have passed before the Scripture mentions bells again. In Zechariah's prophecy we see bells. Zechariah's prophecy looks forward to a day when the promised Savior of the world would come and change the nature of worship before the LORD. And Zechariah shows that it will be quite the change indeed.

Zech. 14:20 On that day HOLY TO THE LORD will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, and the cooking pots in the LORD's house will be like the sacred bowls in front of the altar.

From the bells on Aaron's robe to bells on horses! What could this change possible mean? Was there no longer going to be a divide between God and man? Was there no longer a "holiness gap?" Could it be that human kind could approach God without fear and trepidation? Could it be that the secular and the sacred had become one? It seems rather mysterious. Bells and sacred bowls, and words saying "Holy is the Lord."

Let's see if we can see what God wants us to see.

Question- do you ever have the idea that you're not worthy of being loved by God? Come on now!! I mean have you ever felt so distanced from his love that it seems he doesn't care that you even exist?

Question- have you ever thought that your whole sense of guilt is something far to great for God to do anything about?

If so, I have some good news! The coming of Jesus--the God-man, has kept us from being at arms length from the LORD.

The role of the high priest is to enter before God's presence in order to bring our guilt and unworthiness before Him. In Jesus (our high priest) this has been completed! Listen--Jesus, who is your high priest and mine has offered himself as our sacrifice.

Heb. 10:8 First he said, "Sacrifices and offerings, burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not desire, nor were you pleased with them" (although the law required them to be made). **9**Then he said, "Here I am, I have come to do your will." He sets aside the first to establish the second. **10**And by that will, we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

11Day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins. **12**But when this priest had offered for all time one sacrifice for sins, he sat down at the right hand of God. **13**Since that time he waits for his enemies to be made his footstool, **14**because by one sacrifice he has made perfect forever those who are being made holy.

15The Holy Spirit also testifies to us about this. First he says:

16"This is the covenant I will make with them after that time, says the Lord.

I will put my laws in their hearts,

and I will write them on their minds." **17**Then he adds:

"Their sins and lawless acts

I will remember no more." **18**And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin. **19**Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, **20**by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, **21**and since we have a great priest over the house of God, **22**let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. **23**Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. **24**And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. **25**Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another – and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Jesus has offered himself as our sacrifice.

-Where we are unworthy/ He is worthy! -Where we are unholy/ He is the Holy Lamb of God

Listen to the potency of the good news:

Jesus has given us unlimited access to the living God. There is never the need to feel that we cannot reach out and touch God. Through the cross, God has already reached out and touched us. Through the cross we can reach out and touch God. At the moment of Jesus' death the curtain of the temple was torn in two. This curtain in the temple once represented the separation of humankind and God, but no longer is this, the case. Through our faith in Jesus we now can enter into the very presence of God. And this, my dear sisters and brothers is good news!

He knows my name

I have a Maker

He formed my heart

Before even time began

My life was in His hands

He knows my name

He knows my every thought

He sees each tear that falls

And he hears me when I call

I have a Father

He calls me His own

He'll never leave me

No matter where I go

He knows my name

He knows my every thought

He sees each tear that falls

And He hears me when I call

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It's great to know that the God of all creation is calling us by name and saying: "How are you? How can I help you?"

When sin and guilt have separated you from God, know that you no longer have to announce your coming, as if to ask for permission to come into his presence. I don't say this arrogantly... But I mean it confidently. I'm confident because Jesus is our announcement before God!

Jesus' death is so paradoxical. In the moment of his death is the moment of greatest sorrow, but-- in to moment of his death is the moment of greatest celebration, and the moment of greatest peace to be witnessed by all humankind.

The death of Jesus was the loudest announcement of bell-ringing the world has ever heard!

The next time you hear church bells ringing may you be reminded that you can joyfully approach the Father and enter into his presence to find help in time of need--or to simply love him and praise him.

Whoever said that nothing's for free, didn't know this story. We have free access through Jesus who restores relationships that God longs for with each one of us today.

Church, let the joy bells within our hearts peal forth with unrestrained thanksgiving!

Peace to you this day.

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