

JESUS CHRIST—A FAMILY PORTRAIT—2**THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE**

*"...then said the Lord, Behold, I will set a plumb line in the midst of my people Israel..." (Amos 7:8)*

**Mary**

One can only marvel at the qualities that must have adorned this Hebrew maiden, who likely was in the early teens. The rabbis placed the minimum age for a girl's marriage at twelve (thirteen for the boy). She exhibited great faith for one so tender (reflect back upon the arduous journeys previously sketched). We are constrained to look closer at Mary under a magnifying lens.

When this Jewish girl was addressed by the angel Gabriel and informed that she was "highly favored" by the Lord God (Luke 1:26ff), she was "greatly troubled" about the nature of the statement. She was both confused and worried. But the angel cautioned, "Fear not" - or more literally, "Stop being afraid." When she was told she would conceive a son, she was puzzled because she had never been intimate with a man (vs. 34).

Mary was instructed that the event would be supernatural. Her response was amazing. First, she acknowledged that she was prepared to be the "handmaid" ("bondmaid" ASV) of the Lord (vs. 38,48), i.e., a slave to do her Lord's will—her own interests thrust aside. Second, she confidently petitioned, "Let it be unto me according to your word." Such a resolution in the hearts of men would be seen in its "full bloom" at the foot of the cross.

It was Mary, with the heart of a fretful mother, who out of frustration rebuked her twelve-year-old boy after he had lagged behind in Jerusalem and made his way into the temple where he engaged the professional teachers in stimulating dialogue (Luke 2:46). "Son," she asked, "why have you treated us in this way? Your father and I have been looking for you with painful sorrow" (vs. 48). The following text contains the first recorded words of the Savior: "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (vs. 49; or, "about my Father's affairs?" - cf. KJV). The questions express some surprise that his parents, at this point, did not fully appreciate the relationship that he sustained in his heavenly Father (vs. 50). Nonetheless, Mary would treasure these things "in her heart" for future reflection (cf. vs. 19). His mother would progressively appreciate his Messianic role, culminating in that day when she watched him die, and a "sword" would pierce through her soul (vs. 35).

There was no intriguing incident near the commencement of Jesus' public ministry. Mary and Jesus, along with his disciples, were in attendance at a wedding in Cana of Galilee. When the wine ran out, Mary approached her son and suggestively said, "They have no wine." What was the motive behind her request? Clearly she wanted her son to ameliorate the embarrassing situation.

But was there more? Did she want him to demonstrate supernatural power? She had not seen such before (John 2:11), but is it not possible that she was aware of Old Testament prophecy relating to the Messiah's miraculous powers (Isaiah 29:18-19; 35:5-6). There is no question but that she was subtly suggesting that her son do something and one must reverently note that she was out of order—as indicated by the Lord's response: "Woman, what have I to do with you?"

In the Greek Testament the language is obscure. Literally it is "What to me and you?" Or, more to our mode of expression: "What do you and I have in common regarding this matter?" He politely but firmly rebuked her. Lovely as she was, she had stepped beyond her place. She realized it; hence, meekly said to the servants: "Do whatever he tells you" (John 2:5). Surely this was a defining point in Mary's thinking.

**Misdirected Family Members**

Later in his ministry, Jesus was teaching near the Sea of Galilee (Mark 3:7). Be-

**WORSHIP: THEN & NOW**

Text: \_\_\_\_\_

I. Our Worship is to be the \_\_\_\_\_

Notes:

II. Our Worship is to be the \_\_\_\_\_

Notes:

III. Our Worship is to be \_\_\_\_\_

Notes:

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**PREPARED AS PAUL**

Text: \_\_\_\_\_

I. Our Study Should be \_\_\_\_\_

Notes:

II. Our Study Should be \_\_\_\_\_

Notes:

III. Our Study Should be \_\_\_\_\_

Notes:

cause of his miracles, a great crowd followed him. After a private time, during which he selected the twelve apostles, he entered a nearby house; but the crowd so thronged the residence that they could not even take time for food (vs. 20). The older translations follow with this rendition: “And when his friends heard it, they went out to lay hold on him” (vs. 21a). Of special interest is the term “friends.” The original text has three words—*hoi par’ autou*, literally, “the beside him ones.” This expression was used in several senses; in this case almost certainly for “family” (cf. NIV; ESV) or his “own people (NKJB). This seems firmly supported by the subsequent context which references Mary and Jesus’ brothers (vs. 31ff).

They attempted to “lay hold on him” because they said, “He is beside himself” - or “he is out of his mind” (ESV; note the word’s contrast with a “sound mind” in 2 Corinthians 5:13). It seems that Mary and her other children (cf. Matthew 13:55) wanted to save Jesus from himself! Did they believe he had lost his balance due to his increasing popularity? Whatever their motive, they revealed a lack of appreciation for the urgency of his mission, and they were fueled by a misguided zeal. The Lord’s evaluation of the effort was most revealing (Mark 3:31-35).

-Wayne Jackson  
*to be continued*

**THE UNBELIEVER’S PSALM**

“I have no Shepherd, I constantly want. Discontentedly I graze in parched fields; I can find no water to quench my thirst. My soul is weary: I wander in the paths of sinfulness, seeking pleasure. When I walk in the darkness of danger and death, I am afraid; I am all alone. No power or principle gives me comfort. There is no nourishment to strengthen me against my enemies. There is no ointment for my head. My life is empty. Even though God’s goodness and mercy have been available all the days of my life, I shall be banished from the house of the Lord forever.”

**DON’T STOP THE PLOW TO KILL A MOUSE**

An old cartoon showed heaven turning plows and two big mules hitched to each plow. Both teams were standing idle while one plowman held up a mouse he had killed as the other looked on admiringly. This is a good illustration of doing first things first. Let the less important things wait while the more important things are done. Stop quarrelling over non-essentials and join in the fight for the weightier matters of the gospel.

CONSEQUENCES OF A SINFUL NATURE

Does or does not man have an inherent sinful nature? Many would adamantly affirm “yes” as their thinking and convictions have been influenced by Augustine’s and later Calvin’s doctrine of total hereditary depravity. Some would say “no,” but their excusal of sin because we are, after all, “just humans,” would state otherwise. However, any sincere student of the Bible should have very little concern with the views of men, especially those of such men as Calvin and Augustine; but should, rather, have a greater desire to arrive at the conclusion warranted by the truth of scripture.

God has always held man in high esteem. It seems obvious from His creation of man in contrast to His creation of all animals (of which man is not) that man is an exalted being when compared to the animal kingdom. One of the primary differences between man and animal in creation was the provision of free will. Man has free will; the ability to reason and act according to logical thinking—animals do not (at least not in the same capacity). It is the case then, that because man has the freedom of choice that when sin is committed, it is committed in accordance to that free will, and not any inherent nature with which man was plagued. Therefore, when God created Adam and Eve and placed them in the Garden of Eden, at the time of their creation they were innocent, therefore free of sin. Similarly, then, when each subsequent soul enters life at birth, they enter in a state of purity, for which reason Jesus would command that in entering the kingdom we must “be converted, and become as little children” (Matthew 18:3). If we do, in fact, have a sinful nature, of what benefit does becoming as little children actually reap? The Biblical position, proven by this fact as well as a host of others in Scripture, is that man does not have a sinful nature, but any sin committed, is in fact, the result of free will. One avenue, though, of great benefit in concluding the same is not only knowing the affirmative position of the Bible, but knowing the consequences of any alternative positions. If any false doctrine has unbelievable and unacceptable consequences it is the deadly doctrine of “the sinful nature.” What are just a few of these?

If man does in fact have a sinful nature, it would automatically conclude that **God is unjust**. How can such be concluded? Because the only way man could have an innate and overwhelming unktion to sin outside any realm of free will is if God created him that way! When God created man, any programming that was done was done by God. And keep in mind that man was programmed to perform certain tasks outside of the realm of free will. For instance, I do not have to remind myself every few seconds to breath. My body has been programmed to automatically perform that function. And if I try to overrule that programming and hold my breath, I could do so even to the point of passing out, but when I pass out guess what my body is going to immediately start doing—it will automatically begin breathing once again. Why do I have such a “nature?” Because God gave it to me when I was created. Any programming that I have came from God, and if I have been programmed to sin (which is exactly what a sinful nature means) then that came from God too. But how could God on one hand create me with the urge and nature to sin but on the other hand command me to abstain from sin? To do so would be unjust, and that is a very serious consequence of a sinful nature. How many advocates of such would like to put their name to the affirmation that God is unjust? I imagine none. But that is exactly what such a doctrine implies. The Bible, though, affirms something very differently. As early as Deuteronomy 7:9, Israel was being reminded that God is “the faithful God, which keepeth covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations.” Would God have been faithful to them in punishing them for their sins if they literally had no choice in the matter? Certainly not, but He would have rather been quite unjust in His dealings with them. It has been, is, and will forevermore be the truth that “there hath not temptation take you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it” (1 Corinthians 10:13). If, though, I am programmed to sin because of some nature that is within me, then I have no way of escape because I am automatically bound to yield to that temptation. And if I do not have a way of escape, in contrast to Paul’s statement, then, also in contrast to Paul’s statement, God is not faithful. That is a statement I reject; but one that is a consequence of the very serious and deadly doctrine of a sinful nature. So, does man have a sinful nature? No, because to so state would be to state that God is in fact unjust.

*-continued next week*

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