

JESUS CHRIST—A FAMILY PORTRAIT—3**THE PLEASANT VIEW PLUMB LINE****Unbelieving Brothers**

The events of the seventh chapter of John's Gospel transpire in the autumn prior to the Savior's death the following spring (7:2). The Lord was teaching in Galilee, for it was not safe in Judea; the Jews there were plotting his fate. He knew he soon must die, but his "hour" was not yet come.

The feast of tabernacles was approaching and there would be vast crowds in Jerusalem. The half-brothers of Jesus therefore took it upon themselves to challenge him to go into Judea. The purpose would be "so that your disciples also may behold the works you are doing" (vs. 3). John unhesitatingly reveals that "his brothers did not believe on him (vs. 5). The verb is an imperfect tense, suggesting that their unbelief was ongoing. Moreover, that chilly and distant "your disciples" clearly implied they were not in that category. What, therefore, was their motive in this dare that he not remain "in secret," i.e., in the more obscure Galilee; rather, he should advance "openly" into Judea?

Some suggest these brothers wanted to put the Lord to the test for their spiritual benefit. "If" he truly could perform the "works" which he claimed, and of which others spoke, let him "manifest" himself in the most public way. Note that hypothetical "if" (vs. 4b). Thus, if he could demonstrate his miraculous works on the **Judean** public, these brothers likewise would be constrained to believe and therefore be counted among the disciples.

Others suggest that the motive was more crass and grandiose. Though they did not endorse his Messianic claim, clearly crowds thrust themselves upon him wherever he went. Why not then go where the greatest concentration of the populous would be—at Jerusalem for the coming feast? Perhaps he would be proclaimed as a great political leader of sorts, just as had been attempted a few months earlier (John 6:15). If so, as brothers, they might share in the resultant benefits of royalty.

Whatever the motive, it appears to have been less than noble, illustrating the Savior's earlier observation that a prophet is not honored in "his own house" (Matthew 13:57). At least, however, they had not disowned him. There still was hope, as later events would demonstrate.

Lenski makes an important observations when he addresses the testimony of the brothers' unbelief. A fabricator of the narrative certainly would have eliminated such an embarrassing fact as this, or modified it in some way, so as to nullify this rather negative detail in the ministry of Jesus. The fact that it appears in its unvarnished frankness in strong evidence of the integrity of the sacred narrative (1943, 532).

When the disciples met in the upper room following the ascension of Christ, both Mary and Jesus' brothers were present (Acts 1:13-14), and the whole company was in "one accord," and in prayer. Clearly the brothers had **abandoned** their unbelief. What could have effected such a dramatic change? Obviously the Lord's **resurrection** from the dead! (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:7). James later became a prominent influence in the Jerusalem church (Acts 15:13,19), and composed the epistle that bears his name (James 1:1). Another brother, Judas (Jude), penned the next-to-last book of the New Testament.

At the Cross

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

SEEKING THE OLD PATHS

Text: _____

I. The _____ of the Old Paths

Notes:

II. The _____ of the Old Paths

Notes:

III. The _____ of the Old Paths

Notes:

A MERRY HEART

One Sunday morning, the preacher noticed little Johnnie was staring up at the large plaque that hung in the foyer of the church. It was covered with names, and small American flags were mounted on either side of it. The seven-year-old had been staring at the plaque for some time, so the preacher walked up, stood beside the boy, and said quietly, "Good morning, Johnnie."

"Good morning," replied the young man, still focused on the plaque.

"What is this?" Johnnie asked.

"Well, son, it's a memorial to all the young men and women who died in the service."

Soberly they stood together, staring at the large plaque.

Little Johnnie's voice was trembling and barely audible when he asked, "Which service, the 9:45 or the 11:15?"

A priest who has spent a fruitless day fishing picked out three fat fish in the market. "Before you wrap them," he said to the store manager, "toss them to me, one by one. That way I'll be able to tell the monsignor I caught them and I'll be speaking the truth."

Of all the family members, Mary alone was at the cross when her son died. No sons stood by to embrace a sobbing mother; no daughters to encourage a pierced heart (cf. Luke 2:35). Only a sister, Salome, and a nephew, John. (There are three lists of the women who were at the cross [Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40; John 19:25]. A comparison of these leads to the probable conclusion that Mary's "sister" is to be identified as Salome, the mother of James and John [Barclay 1959, 29-30].) But of the **inner** family, only Mary was rugged enough to go all the way. What a tough woman of fortitude she had become!

Significantly, the Lord did not commend the subsequent care of his precious mother to his brothers, which is perfectly understandable in view of their lack of faith thus far (cf. John 7:5). Surely this is one of those undesigned coincidences that stamps the biblical record with the ring of authenticity.

Thus we have it. In a rather abbreviated fashion is a biographical portrait of the family of Jesus Christ. As one inspects the linguistic imagery, he is filled with amazement and joy at the details revealed.

-Wayne Jackson

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF A SERMON

Several universities have experimentally demonstrated that we remember only about half of what we hear (some say 10% of sermons). To get more out of sermons, remember these suggestions:

- Get a good night's rest on Saturday. Dull minds are found in exhausted bodies. Listening is work. It increases the heart rate, increases blood circulation, and raises the body temperature.
- Get rid of distractions. If easily distracted, move closer to the speaker. Do not play with the cute little child in front of you. If you must be doing something with your hands, take notes.
- Learn to concentrate. You can think four or five times faster than the preacher can speak. Use the extra time to weigh what he says. Review what he has already said; anticipate what he might say next. Did he offer Scriptural proof for his point? If you disagree, what arguments does he offer to change your mind?
- Don't allow the mind to wander down a "rabbit trail." Let menu-planning, business deals, lesson plans, and fingernail filing wait.

CONSEQUENCES OF A SINFUL NATURE—2

If man is the heir of a sinful nature, implied, too, is the fact that **God is unrighteous**. In what manner may such be stated? When God created man, what is recorded about the manner after which man was formed? “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” (Genesis 1:26a-27). In what way are we as mankind created in God’s own image? Coffman stated that the likeness of man to God is seen in such areas as “freedom of will, moral responsibility, intellectual achievement, and creativity” (Commentary on Genesis, pg. 39). Does anybody question the similarity in moral responsibility, intellect, or creativity? No credible religious figure does. But fix attention on the similarity in “freedom of will,” because if man is born with an inherent sinful nature, he has no free will but is wholly inclined toward sin. If that is so, and man is created in God’s own image, that, too, would imply God’s own guilt in being wholly inclined toward sin! Would anybody care to affix their name to such an affirmation? The obvious fact set forth in scripture is that God is perfect (Matthew 5:48), meaning He is without sin by nature. For man to be made in God’s image, he too must have been made without sin, entering into sin only after submitting by free will. It is clear that the Calvinistic doctrine of a “sinful nature” is blatantly contradictory to both God’s own nature and Divinely established truth; because if man is inherently inclined to sin, then God must be unrighteous.

If man has the sinful nature claimed by many in the world, then concluded also is the fact that **God is unsuccessful**. At what has God been unsuccessful? To answer, one must only ask what God’s foremost purpose toward man has been. On one occasion the Pharisees asked why Jesus was eating with publicans and sinners, to which Jesus responded: “They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick. But go ye and learn what that meaneth, I will have mercy, and not sacrifice: for I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Matthew 9:12-13). Later, to Zacchaeus, Jesus would state His purpose as: “For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which is lost” (Luke 19:10). Who is it that was lost? The whole of mankind among whom sin was a problem (Romans 3:23). Why did sin cause mankind to be lost? John recorded about heaven that “there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie” (Revelation 22:27). Why? Because sin cannot dwell in the presence of God. Sin, literally, separates man from God (Isaiah 59:2) and any time sin has entered His presence, He has dispelled it. Therefore in the end, any who are found guilty of sin will be dispelled from His presence because they will not be able to abide in His eternal presence (Matthew 25:41,46). But some will say that that is where Christ’s sacrifice comes into effect, and those who otherwise are guilty can be made innocent. What, though, is one of the requirements of any who would be cleansed by the blood of Jesus? “I tell you, Nay: but, except ye repent, ye shall all likewise perish” (Luke 13:3,5). Outside of a person’s willingness and ability to repent, no forgiveness can be forthcoming. However, if man has an inherent sinful nature, as is claimed, then he is wholly inclined toward sin, and thus does not have the capability of repenting. Repentance is the act of both inwardly and outwardly turning from sin. How, though, can one inclined toward sin by nature be expected to turn from sin? If such is true, even God Himself does not have the power to save man according to His current means of salvation! Would anyone wish to step forward and affirm that God is unsuccessful in His attempt to save man? Then they must also step back from affirming an alleged “sinful nature,” because it concludes that God is, in fact, unsuccessful in such.

It is easy, and common, for people to affix their allegiance to a denominational belief based on tradition or popularity without ever considering the authority for or consequences of such. While many others could be cited, hopefully these few implications of an alleged “sinful nature” illustrate just how erroneous and evil it truly is. Be assured that in His love, God created man innocent and with freedom to choose the direction of their lives; and when we fail, He is both “faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).