

MOSES . . . and his recurring challenge
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(Exodus 32:26)

The camp of Israel was in an uproar, and the noise of the ribald shoutings echoed far up the mountain side. Around the golden calf naked men and women heedlessly danced in reckless abandon. High on the hillside, Moses listened and said to his servant Joshua, "it is not the voice of them that shout for mastery, neither is it the voice of them that cry for being overcome: but the noise of them that sing do I hear. And it came to pass as soon as Moses came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf, and the dancing: and Moses' anger waxed hot . . . And when Moses saw that the people were naked . . . he stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the Lord's side? let him come unto me" (Ex. 32:18-26).

The Challenge of Moses

And immediately all the sons of Levi moved toward their revered leader. "And he said unto them, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbour. And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses" (vv. 27, 28). Thus ended one of the most tragic days in Israel; but before the shadows finally obliterated the scene, certain things had become evident. (i) The people who had sinned had not done so ignorantly. The absence of Moses did not provide an adequate excuse for wilful disobedience. (ii) The people who had abstained had not done so accidentally. To refuse to conform to the popular idea was to invite persecution. Such action demanded great courage. (iii) The execution of justice was not done sentimentally. Men were commanded to slay members of their own families. True religion demands that God be first in all matters. The challenge of Moses split the camp into two sections.

The Challenge of Jehu

An ominous sombre silence had settled on the city; the streets were empty; it was the calm before the storm. The fiery captain Jehu had developed a great hatred of idolatry, and the worshippers of Baal were frightened. Jezebel remained in her palace, and smiled. Other men had found her charms to be irresistible; Jehu should be no exception to the rule. "And when Jehu was come to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she painted her face, and tired her head, and looked out at a window." Her bewitching face and coquettish manners were meant to ensnare the brave reformer; but he refused to be deceived. His challenging cry rang through the street: "Who is on my side? who? And there looked out to him two or three eunuchs. And he said, Throw her down . . . and he trode her under foot" (2 Kings 9 :30-33). And once again three things became evident. (i) No man can be on two sides at the same time. (ii) No man can be truly on God's side and remain hidden. (iii) No man can be truly on God's side unless he openly fights against evil. A pretty face can never disguise a foul heart when a man of God is the detective!

The Challenge of Christ

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Ecclesiastical arrogance began to appear when John said unto Jesus, "Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbad him, because he followeth not us" (Mark 9 : 38). Who was the unknown healer? That he knew and preached the correct message no one can doubt, but the disciples were unduly disturbed because he had "not joined their church." He was an upstart! It was like his cheek to imitate people in holy orders! Master, we told him to stop! "But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man who shall do a miracle in my name, that can lightly speak evil of me. For he that is not against me is on our part" (vv. 39, 40). Let us consider three vital features. (i) The followers of Christ are never confined to a single select band. (ii) An unashamed confession of Christ is the hallmark of true devotion. (iii) The true follower of Christ will be loyal even when his Lord is apparently absent. We are glad the Lord dealt with his belligerent disciples, for true ordination comes from God. Sometimes He uses the well-known ministers-the Peters and Johns of His followers; and sometimes He uses the unknown fellow who lives in the other street. Does it matter-so long as souls are healed in the Name of Jesus?

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