

HEAVENLY GRAFFITI

There is a part of us that is also timeless, made up from the original breath of God. It has always been aware of and desired immortality. It is why we create. So that when we die, something of us will be left behind. Our children are our fleshly attempt at immortality. Fame is fleeting, but the most famous among us are assured that when they die, they will live on for a time in the memories of those around them. We build, we work, we dream, and in all of this, we seek to endow our temporary existence with eternal significance. This is why children, and those not so young, write on walls. “My existence matters” is the primary message behind graffiti.

Jesus wrote in the dirt while contemplating the trap set before him. An obvious trap. The naked bewildered woman flung down before him had been taken in the very act of adultery. Two people guilty of death, but only one brought before him for judgment. The other had been a tool, used to set up the situation. The woman was an expendable pawn. They were willing to murder her for a chance to wash their hands of Jesus. If He let her go, they would declare before all the Jews that He scorned the Law and the teachings of Moses. If He agreed that she should die, they would kill her and tell the Romans that He had commanded her death and let them deal with Jesus. The desire for revenge upon Him was not tempered by mercy or compassion for her. He knew it, they knew it, and worst of all, she knew her life was over. So soon, so sudden, so shocking. While she groveled to hide and they glared their hate, He paused to write in the dust. There has been a lot of speculation over what He wrote. Only He and she saw it. But we can offer several intriguing possibilities.

He might have easily written, “Jesus was here”. It would have been as appropriate as any other stranger stopping to write, “Kilroy was here”. We write on walls to record the existence of our passage through time. So that something will have been changed as a result of our having been. When we cry out to the universe, “We exist!”, and the answer comes back, “So what!”, that answer is unacceptable. What He left in the dust might have been simply His name, if for no other reason than to see something in the present world changed.

Jesus might have written His name because He simply thought ahead. He knew a time was coming when the sins of man would be judged by mercy and not by law. He knew that soon He would be free to write His name upon the hearts of men. Not bound by time, He was about to violate the ordinances of the current dispensation with an untimely application of grace. So He stooped and wrote. He knew what changes would come about as a result of His existence. Ahead of His time, He might have written His name where the hearts of men not only had, but would come from. The dust of the earth.

A second possibility was that He was writing a little memo to the Pharisees. A long time ago, though they would have used the stones on Him if He had claimed it, He had written a little note to their esteemed Moses. That time, He had written it in stone. He knew what they had forgotten. He remembered that the original note had only been ten commandments long, not the 600 or so precepts that their pastor, Moses, had needed to add for situational clarification. The core intent of the Law had long been lost in thousands of years of court decisions and hair splitting. Indeed, it had degenerated into a tool of power the priesthood merely used to control the lives of others. It is possible that Jesus simply pointed out their shame in that matter by writing once again, the original commandments He had given them. They were, after all, claiming His words as justification for murder.

Those accusing her thought the Law gave them authority and power over her life. That must have offended the God that had formed her. Her life and its purpose was in His hands. The third possibility is that when He wrote, He wrote “made in heaven” and the message was for her alone. The best person to restore damaged merchandise to a like new condition is the manufacturer. Having sole power over her life and death, He might have wanted her to know the source of His claim upon her. So that when

He said “Neither do I condemn thee, go and sin no more”, she would know that He had the right and the ability to make her anew.

A last possibility, of course, is that He wrote nothing. Just stirred the dust while thinking of how low He would be brought in order to end such nonsense as was occurring before Him. Perhaps in His mind, He was being crucified and cheating time again with His offer to the thief. The deaf have a curious sign for Jesus. With one finger of each hand, they touch the palm of the other hand. A visible reminder of the price paid for salvation. The only scars left in a body otherwise glorified. As with the thief, He loved the woman enough to extend His blood forward in time and cover her against judgment. It was an untimely application of mercy. When He knelt in the dust He created her from, maybe He knew it was just one more instance.

Where love caused God to stoop to our level.

STUDY QUESTIONS

1. Do you agree that graffiti is a cry for significance or a small attempt at immortality? That its primary message is, "Hey! I matter?"
2. Do you think that our desire for immortality comes as a result of the breath of God being used to bring us to life?
3. What do you think Jesus might have written? Try to put yourself in His shoes at that moment.
4. The Law commanded that both parties to the adultery die. Have you ever wondered why the man involved was not also brought to Jesus?
5. Does it seem sometimes that our existence does not matter to anyone, not even to God?
6. If God could enter your world and leave a specific message for you that would undeniably convince you that you are dear to Him, what would that message have to say?
7. When people examine your life to see who has been there and influenced it, can you be sure that the name of Jesus will be written there?
8. There is an old saying that "power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely." Is that what had happened to the Pharisees? Were they all bad? Do you think that some truly felt they were serving God to the best of their ability? How often do we use the truth, as we understand it, as a weapon against those who do not agree with our theology? What message would a god of compassion write to us?
9. Isn't it humbling to consider that the God who made us loves His creation enough that when we come before Him broken, He chooses to repair us rather than discard us? What would our relationships and friendships be like if we adopted the same policy when others disappoint us?
10. Why do you think He added to his proclamation of mercy by commanding, "Go and sin no more!" Do you think He does the same thing when He shows us mercy?
11. How uncomfortable does the image of our God, scribbling in the dirt, make you? What would you have thought had you been in the crowd, aware that some thought this was the Messiah, and seen Him do that? What if you were a Pharisee? What if you were the woman, waiting for the pain of the first of many impacts?