

You've Got to Pay the Man

Marshall Keeble liked to use an illustration that involved a person going into a grocery store to shop. He said in that store you can walk through all of the aisles, pick up as many items as you want and put them in your cart but if you want to leave the store with the items you selected, before you leave, "You've got to pay the man." In other words, the cashier is going to take account of what you have in your cart.

So many times people don't want to be held accountable for their actions. They want to blame someone else for their woes. In their minds their troubles have come about as the result of mistreatment by parents, unfairness by employers, misunderstanding by spouses, unreasonable demands by the law, etc. These individuals lose their jobs, see relationships severed and even land in jail and it's always someone else's fault. They are ever the victim and never the cause of their sorrows.

Granted, there are indeed times when one's troubles are brought on by the actions of others. Joseph's life is a good example of this (Genesis 37ff). His brothers delivered him into slavery. Potiphar's wife lied about him and he went to prison. He interpreted a dream of Pharaoh's butler and asked the butler to remember him when he was reinstated to his position in Pharaoh's court, but the butler forgot about him. He was innocent in all of these situations and yet he suffered. Then of course there's Jesus as another example of one whose suffering was brought on by others. Peter wrote of the Savior, "Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth." (I Peter 2:22).

There is one significant difference between Joseph and Jesus as opposed to those who blame others for their troubles. That difference is that both Joseph and Jesus continued to serve God faithfully during life's challenges. Rather than blame God or others for their situations, they chose to honor God and trust Him. We recall how each time Joseph was faced with his difficulties, he was delivered by God and in fact rose to greater prominence as a result of overcoming those challenges. Satan thought he could discourage Joseph. Joseph refused to renounce God. God blessed Joseph.

Those who choose to blame others for the condition of their lives would do well to remember that there is coming a day in which each of us will no longer be able to attempt to place the blame on others. Paul wrote, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." (II Corinthians 5:10). In Romans 14:11-12 he wrote, "For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God." The great judgment scene of Matthew 25:31-46 shows each accountable individual gathered before the King of kings to answer for his or her earthly life. No one will be exempted. No one will be overlooked. No one will be excused. All will be judged. All will "have to pay 'the man.'"

We must all prepare now for eternity. This preparation includes learning how to take responsibility for our actions. It includes recognizing when we've done wrong, admitting the wrong and repenting of the wrong (Luke 13:1-5). The world may not consistently hold us accountable for our actions. There may even be some enablers out there who support those who harbor the victim mentality. But there is coming a day in which each of us will be required to give an account for our lives. Let us learn now to be accountable for our actions so that through the blood of Christ made available to us by means of our obedience to His Gospel we can be ready to meet the Lord in judgment.

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