

"Think not that I come to destroy the law, or the prophets: I am not come to destroy, but to fulfill." Matthew 5:17

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"And When he puts forth his own sheep, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him: for they know his voice" John 10:4

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## **BEAUTY IN THE BRICK**

Date - January 17, 2009

Scripture - Exodus 1:11 - 14

It's great to be home, it's great to be missed. Being missed is a sure sign of job security! But more importantly, I am ever so grateful for the love and sweetness that is in this place. Margaret and I are most grateful for your continual vote of confidence in affirming our role as under-shepherds of this great work of God.

The conference went well, and as always I learned many new things from so many gifted individuals. This is my first message of this new calendar year. Of course, the benefit of living a Jewish life cycle is that we have many new years to observe and many new opportunities to get things right!

This day's parsha fits so well with some of the thoughts that have been on my heart. Parsha Shemot centers around the difficult days in Egypt after the death of Joseph and of the call of Moses. There is so much that we can take from these sacred and time honored writings—they are ever so applicable to our own congregational situation today.

Let's look at Exodus 1:11-14.

**Ex.1:11** So they put slave masters over them to oppress them with forced labor, and they built for Pharaoh the storage cities of Pitom and Ra'amses.

**But the more the Egyptians oppressed them, the more they multiplied and expanded, until the Egyptians came to dread the people of Isra'el**

**and worked them relentlessly, making their lives bitter with hard labor — digging clay, making bricks, all kinds of field work; and in all this toil they were shown no mercy.**

From the wisdom of the Talmud is this in regards to persecution and adversity.

*There is not a single bird more persecuted than the dove; yet God has chosen her to be offered up on the altar. The bull is hunted by the lion, the sheep by the wolf, the goat by the tiger. And God said: "Bring me a sacrifice, not from them that persecute, but from them that are persecuted."*

Wisdom sayings such as these have long enabled the people of Israel to rise above her many misfortunes over

the course of history. Being chosen does have its many downsides. Being chosen for God's redemptive purposes makes you an instant target of the one who seeks to undermine all that God is doing.

If all of redemptive history, moreover if the redemption of the world hinges on God's covenants with Israel, wouldn't you say that aligning yourself to such a program is vitally important? Couldn't you logically conclude that if you fully buy in, and are active in pursuing the good of Israel that you will be in the cross hairs of the same demonic powers that are out to destroy her? Whether Jew or Gentile, you will become a target!

But rather than viewing yourself as one being a target of persecution, see yourself as one who is willingly desirous to be used of God—as one who desires to be placed on the altar for God's glory and purposes!

Our text is based on the people of Israel becoming a great nation. Through Joseph, the sons of Abraham blossomed in the fertile environs of Goshen. From a family of 70 upon entry to Egypt they would number nearly two million upon leaving! The smelting pits of Egypt multiplied more than just bricks!

So great were the numbers of the sons of Israel that the new Pharaoh became fearful of them and subjected them to heavy burdens and afflictions. Yet, through it all they continued to increase! "But the more they afflicted them, the more they multiplied and grew."

There are many conclusions we can draw from this. First, when God says something believe it. Anyone who acts with hostility against God's intended purposes will fail! Second, when God chooses a people or a person, do not obstruct or impede their progress! And thirdly, the persecution of God's people will backfire against any and all perpetrators! If you seek to diminish their numbers, they will continue to multiply!

If multiplication is the byproduct of making bricks, wouldn't you take pleasure in making bricks? If heavy labors produced desirous fruit, isn't it worth the effort? And, in addition, the bricks being made, the cities being built, were for Egypt and not Israel! Israel was a stranger in a land that was not theirs.

This is "The Beauty In the Brick!" Making bricks and building supply cities can break the back but it can't break or annul God's oath! The new birth in Messiah will not spare you from hard times but it can never mean God's abandonment of those who have been called by His name! Adversity may come and it can break your heart but don't let it break your will! Focus on the fruits that come through hard labor. Focus on God's purposes because it will lead to growth and expansion! We are in a new year and we need to believe God for great things—there's no better time than 2009!

God's kingdom here on earth will take some heavy hits but through it all there will be expansion!

**Isa 9:6 For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.**

There will be no end to the increase of His government or of peace, On the throne of David and over his kingdom.....

Illustration: On 9/11 the United States became a nation given to prayer! Unfortunately, this transformation was short lived, but this is what happens when pressures are brought to bear! The book of Acts is a living proof that the greatest time of growth and expansion came at the height of persecution! It came when Messianic Jews led by the Spirit and power of God turned Jerusalem upside down! I remind you that this was the original "Baal Shuvah" movement (return to Judaism).

And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved. Acts 2:47

God is equipping us even now to be comforters, to be carriers of hope to those who have none! We are the "bricks" God will use to build with! In dark days many will be looking to God, many will make decisions to serve Yeshua! Yeshua warned,

**Lu. 21:12 "But before all these things, they will lay their hands on you and will persecute you, delivering you to the synagogues and prisons, bringing you before kings and governors for My name's sake.**

**Lu. 21:13 "It will lead to an opportunity for your testimony.**

**Luke 21:19 "By your endurance you will gain your lives.**

Mankind is given many magnificent endowments that set us apart from the animal kingdom. We are builders and makers, we have an ability to invent, create, and innovate. Some build structures, homes, cities, roads, and innumerable gadgets. Others build in a more metaphysical way. They build by structuring words in prose and poetry, in pigments on parchment and canvas, in sound and note so as to communicate and idea or emotion.

But regardless of the kind of builders we are, we all desire to build a life! In the building of a life we have many choices before us. We can choose to build our lives by material pursuits or spiritual pursuits. We can choose to be selfish or altruistic? Or, we can make the ultimate aim of our building to create a dwelling for God! This constitutes the devoting of our life to the fulfillment of God's will as revealed to us in Scripture!

As I see it we have two bricks to build with, those which are man made and those that are God given! As followers of the Messiah, as those who truly have the indwelling of God's Spirit, we are empowered to do more than simply develop this world! God has imparted to us the ability to create potential where no such potential exists! This is what vision does! This is what faith is!

**Heb 11:1 Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen. For by it the men of old gained approval.**

Therein is the "Beauty In The Brick!" While laboring making bricks and building store cities for Pharaoh, behind the scenes and unknown and unrecognized by the people, God was also building a people! These were humble beginnings, but God was building a people, a mighty people that would be His messengers! He desired this people to bring a message of hope and redemption—a message rich in substance, a message of meaning and purpose! These humble beginnings obscured the spiritual realities not known or seen by the naked eye!

The making of bricks was not fun, in fact it may not even feel very rewarding. Most humbling too, in the making of bricks, the sole beneficiary of all your hard work seems to be the people oppressing you! It can be downright frustrating! Serving the Lord has its frustrations. We get agitated when unanswered prayer conflicts with our personal timetable. We question and second guess when results fall short of expectations. We feel a sense of betrayal when we see many in the world prospering in doing evil whereas we languish in doing things right!

Aside from our feelings and our raw emotions, aside from the things we can observe in the physical, God is moving behind the scenes in awesome ways and we must partner with Him by laying ourselves outstretched on His altar for service!

Like the making of bricks, as humbling and degrading as it was, Joseph got the ball rolling! Why was he betrayed and sold into slavery? Why was he victimized by Potiphar's wife and forgotten in prison? What about the famine that threatened the sons of Israel with extinction? Behind all these scenes and episodes God was active and upholding His covenant to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob!

It is no different for you and I. Be as the dove, the lamb, the bull and the goat—place yourself on the altar for His purposes! Allow me to paraphrase the words of Yeshua:

**Luke 9:23 "If anyone wishes to come after Me, he must deny himself, and take up his "bricks" daily and follow Me.**

He says further:

**John 12:25 "He who loves his life loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it to life eternal.**

**John 12:26 "If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me; and where I am, there My servant will be also; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.**

**John 12:27 "Now My soul has become troubled; and what shall I say, 'Father, save Me from this hour'? But for this purpose I came to this hour.**

Too many have the mistaken idea that if a situation is uncomfortable it can't be God's will. Name me any great prophet, priest, king or emissary that had it made in the shade! Yeshua taught of the merits of self denial, the very traits and character demonstrated by Moses and the prophets—these were the things that catapulted them the real greatness! They took the resources God gave them and created something beautiful, dynamic and vibrant.

Our parsha has valuable behind the scenes details of Moses. What a great example of self denial and what a great example of God moving behind the scenes. Moses was set adrift on the Nile, adopted by Pharaoh's sister, but nursed and reared by his own family! He grew up in the court of Pharaoh replete with all its amenities but God put a burden on his heart to go to his own people who were being oppressed. What were his choices? The King's court or the brickyard? Which one was more comfortable? He chose the brickyard. Why? Because he had a burden and a vision!

I just love this insight from the Brith Hadoshah, found in Acts 7:23

**"But when he was approaching the age of forty, it entered his mind to visit his brethren, the sons of Israel.**

**Moses lived in Midian for 40 years, all the while feeling helpless, powerless, in regards to the burden of his heart to free his people. And he says as much, "Who am I, that I should go to Pharaoh, and that I should bring the sons of Israel out of Egypt?"**

**There was an irreversible, irrevocable desire within his heart to take action, but how? He was just one man against the world! For him to think any other way would be folly but with God all things are possible! (And we all know the end of the story!)**

**Illustration: The other night I was watching America's Funniest Home Videos, and one cut featured a big black bear running toward a farm house toward the chicken coop. There was a chicken outside the coop (had to be a free range bird). This little chicken began squawking and took after that big old bear! This chicken chased the bear back into the woods! Hey, sometimes cats chase dogs, and girls chase boys-(look what Margaret did to me!)**

**Let us pursue the vision before us. Don't be discouraged, daunted, dismayed, downcast and devastated by the things in the natural that seemingly never change. Behind all these scenes is a covenant keeping God who is orchestrating miracles that defy our limited human understanding! Let's believe for a great outpouring of His Spirit upon us in this new year! There's no better time than 2009! Find the "Beauty In The Brick!"**

**In closing, I direct your attention to Genesis 11:3. Originally, the survivors of the flood would quarry stone as a building material. But when it came to building this grand "city and a tower whose head reached to the heavens," someone had a creative idea:**

**They said to one another, "Come, let us make bricks and burn them thoroughly." And they used brick for stone, and they used tar for mortar.**

**This is the first making of bricks and its purposes were not for the glory and goodness of God, it was all about the prideful vanity of men. In Egypt, Israel was making brick to feature the splendors of Egypt and feed the ego of Pharaoh.**

The "Beauty in the Brick" is in the recognition of God's sovereignty over the affairs of men, that He is true to His purposes. The "Beauty in the Brick" shows too the resourcefulness and creative gifts God bestows upon the sons of men. Things get ugly fast when we take what God gives and use it for reasons other than to honor him, when we are taking credit for something He did.

The people replaced "stone", for "brick". The "stone" was a material that God provided whereas brick was man made. We serve a Messiah whom the prophetic writings describe as a "stone." Moreover, He is the chief cornerstone, the grand omniscient architect of all things! In Daniel He is this mighty hammer that crushes the might of the world powers:

**Dan 2:34** "You continued looking until a stone was cut out without hands, and it struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and crushed them.

**Dan 2:35** "Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were crushed all at the same time and became like chaff from the summer threshing floors; and the wind carried them away so that not a trace of them was found. But the stone that struck the statue became a great mountain and filled the whole earth.

From the 118<sup>th</sup> Psalm, that great Messianic psalm:

**21.** I shall give thanks to You, for You have answered me, And You have become my salvation.

The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief corner stone.

This is the LORD'S doing; It is marvelous in our eyes.

And lastly, in Acts 4:8-13 is a stirring challenge Shimon Kefa gives to the religious community in Jerusalem regarding Yeshua. The leaders of our people were agitated over a man who was healed. He lays out for them and for us, the real foundations for life.

**Act 4:8** Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers and elders of the people,

if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man has been made well,

let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead--by this name this man stands here before you in good health.

"He is the **STONE WHICH WAS REJECTED** by you, **THE BUILDERS**, but **WHICH BECAME THE CHIEF CORNER stone**. "And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has been given among men by which we must be saved."

Now as they observed the confidence of Peter and John and understood that they were uneducated and untrained men, they were amazed, and began to recognize them as having been with Jesus.

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