

On Becoming a Spectacle

Text: Acts 21:40; Acts 22:14,15; Acts 23:11; I Corinthians 4:9-17; I Corinthians 11:1

I Corinthians 4:9: "For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men." The word for spectacle in Greek is *θέατρον* (*theatron*); this is where we get our English word for "theatre." In Greece and Rome it was the place for public show. It was a place in which games and dramatic spectacles are exhibited and public assemblies held. The Greeks used the theatre also as a forum and public show; metaphorically, a man who is exhibited to be gazed at and made sport of." The English definition of spectacle confirms the same meaning: a visually striking performance or display.

Shakespeare wrote in his play *As You Like It*, "All the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players." Paul was pointing out that God had given him a part to play. And as we study his life, we find he played it well. Then he went on to say in I Corinthians 4:10, "We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised." Earlier Paul said in I Corinthians 3:18, "Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise." Leighton Ford once recalled seeing a man on a busy sidewalk pacing back and forth with one of those sandwich-board placards. On the front was written, "I am a fool for Christ's sake." As he turned to walk the other way, the sign read, "Whose fool are you?" With boldness Paul said in I Corinthians 4:16, "Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me." Later in this epistle Paul clarified in I Corinthians 11:1: "Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ." My father used to say, "Follow me as far as I follow Christ, but no further." The admonition I receive from the Word is that we need to join Paul and the dedicated Christians who are willing to be spectacles for Christ, or in other words, God's theatre.

1. WE HAVE A SCRIPT

Some of our church members may remember our daughter Juliana being involved in our annual Vacation Bible School plays. My favorite role she played was that of Amy Carmichael. She would dress up in the full dress of a lady from India (as Amy did) in order to rescue Indian girls from abusive harm. During one rescue scene, the stage was darkened to create the atmosphere. During that performance she broke a toe and we did not even know it until after the play was over for that day. Her attitude was--the show must go on. Today Juliana is involved in play performances, production and teaching. While preparing the message for today, I called and told her about my sermon idea using the analogy of Paul using the Greek spectacle or theatre. She said this about the Script: "I am pretty strict about the text being 'scripture'—you don't change it or complain about it. For example, sometimes when a scene isn't working, the inexperienced actor will pout, 'my character wouldn't say this.' My response is that your character does say this; you have been hired to figure out why, and then portray that as honestly and sincerely as possible."

The comparison is too important to miss. As Christians, we don't decide what we believe and then go to the Bible to approve our belief system. Our belief system is inextricably tied to the Word of God. We go to the Bible to determine what we believe. If

Timothy 3:16: "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness."

2. WE HAVE A PROTAGONIST

The protagonist is the leading character in a drama. Christ is our theme. His Gospel is our message. I Corinthians 2:2: "For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified."

3. WE HAVE AN ANTAGONIST

An antagonist is a person who actively opposes or is hostile to the protagonist. I Peter 5:8: "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour."

4. THERE IS THE WORLD OF THE STORY

Paul lived in three worlds. First, Paul lived in the Jewish world as the most Jewish Jew in the earth at one time. Philippians 3:5: "Circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews; as touching the law, a Pharisee." Acts 23:6: "But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee: of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question."

Paul lived, secondly, in the Roman world. Acts 22:27, 28: "Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea. And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born."

And then Paul lived in the Christian world. Galatians 2:20: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

5. THERE IS A STAGE

I Corinthians 4:9b: "...we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men." Heaven and Earth are watching us. Hebrews 12:1: "Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us." Esther 4:14b: "...and who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" Mordecai saw the Providence of God at work in bringing Esther into the world for this specific time, for these specific people.

A question should be asked of ourselves. What stage has God set us upon? Read Acts 8:5-7; 26-40. In this passage we observe Philip preaching in Samaria, influencing many people for Christ. He had the miracle touch from the Lord that was phenomenal. Then the Lord ordered Philip into the desert area to minister to one Ethiopian eunuch. Although the crowd was greatly diminished, history tells us that that Ethiopian went back to Ethiopia where a mighty revival took place, which ultimately became a great center of evangelism in the early church. We don't hear any more about the preaching deacon, Philip until thirteen chapters later. Acts 21:8: "And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Caesarea: and we entered

into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven; and abode with him." Just because Philip did not have a starring role after Acts 8, we cannot say he was not playing his part in the Body of Christ. We see that he was busy rearing a family in the ways of the Lord. Acts 21:9: "And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy." Rearing up children to serve Christ is of major importance! Which brings me to my final point.

6. THERE ARE NO SMALL PARTS

My daughter reminded me there is a saying in the acting world, "There are no small parts, only small actors." If an actor feels insulted because his or her part is seemingly insignificant, they are actually reflecting that there is "smallness" in themselves. The playwrights and poets believe that every part is significant to truly make the story. Happy is the Christian who is content with his or her part. I Corinthians 12:18-31 teaches us how the Church functions like a body and every part of that body is important. As a child I remember most of my friends were going into the hospital and having their tonsils removed. I, too, was scheduled to have my tonsils and adenoids removed. At the last moment my mother did not let them. It was interesting to find what many in the medical field deemed to not be necessary, was in fact, given to us by God to help filter poisons introduced into our body. As a result, now the tonsils are only removed when absolutely necessary. Some of David's men were not well enough to go into the fight with David. David allowed them to remain team players by guarding the warriors' belongings while the other men went to battle. When men of Israel won the victory, they were ready to deprive the men who did not physically go down with them into the battle of any reward. King David stepped in and made a law. I Samuel 30:24, 25: "For who will hearken unto you in this matter? but as his part is that goeth down to the battle, so shall his part be that tarrieth by the stuff: they shall part alike. And it was so from that day forward, that he made it a statute and an ordinance for Israel unto this day."

Conclusion:

The world may look at us as spectacles. But our Lord has the ability to make spectacles into something spectacular! Spectacular is defined as dramatically daring or thrilling. Here are Some synonyms of spectacular are: impressive, magnificent, splendid, dazzling, sensational, stunning, remarkable, outstanding, memorable, unforgettable, never to be forgotten.

-Pastor Pope-