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What a Wonderful Idea!

Barry Fike

What a wonderful idea it was! After years of bitter opposition, good King Hezekiah decided it was time for God's people to once again begin acting like God's people and observe the Passover together (2 Chron. 30).

It had been a long time, too long, since the people of Israel and Judah had done anything together but fight. Hezekiah decided that it was time to put up the sword and pick up the plow shear. What a kind idea to propose to a people who, only a few years before, had taken away two hundred thousand captives from Judah. Fancy suggesting that they throw open wide the gates of Jerusalem to people who had been so cruel! Talk about loving your enemies....

The letters went out to all Judah and Israel, via messenger, saying,

Return to God and he may return those captured that are presently in Assyria. Don't be as stubborn as your fathers. That's why God dealt with them so harshly. Come and worship God together with us that his anger might turn away from you. You, your brethren and your children shall find compassion from one who is gracious and merciful (2 Chron. 30:6-9).

What happened? "...they laughed them to scorn, and mocked them" (v. 10). A few came, a noble lot, from

Israel. All of Judah assembled with them to keep this most solemn occasion reminding them of God's providence and watchful eye that faithful night in Egypt when the blood of the innocent saved a guilty nation. The result was glorious! Things went so well the first seven days that they continued it for seven more (v. 23). Thousands of animals were given for sacrifice and all assembled rejoiced greatly.

So there was great joy in Jerusalem; for since the time of Solomon there was not the like in Jerusalem. Then the priests the Levites arose and blessed the people: and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to his holy habitation, even unto heaven (vs. 26,27).

If it doesn't make tears come to your eyes, it should. Oh, to have been a part of that wonderful feast. One people praising one God with one voice! "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Ps. 133:1). Is it any wonder that honest men have always wanted unity among brothers and sisters of like precious faith? The joy and peace of such is only surpassed by abiding in the Father's presence in the mansion he has built for us.

But what of those in Israel that laughed and mocked? It was just a few short years later that they fell into the hands of Shalmaneser, king of Assyria, and were led away into cap-

tivity (2 Kings 17). Had the people of Israel accepted Hezekiah's invitation for *unity* and turned from their sins, God would have saved them as he saved Jerusalem. *But they did not accept it!*

In the church today there is a cry for *unity*! The cry is for one people to praise one God with one voice! Yet, I hear mockery made of these efforts. With accusations of "unsound doctrine," fun is made of those whose hearts daily ache with concern for the divided state of a body Christ died for. If only those brethren could understand the "great joy" to be found in true unity. What peace and happiness is found when brethren separated are once again brought back together as Jacob and Esau were: Once at variance with each other and now solidly locked together in brotherhood under one head.

Can we not sit down as brethren and open our hearts to God, allowing *his spirit* to produce *his unity*? (Eph. 4:4). Let us lay aside all the titles, creeds, doctrines, and party loyalties and let those who accept Christ as God's Son love each other as the Master prayed we would do (John 17). In such an effort, our voice and prayer will be heard amidst the mockery of those of little faith. Let the critics laugh while those of a sincere and contrite heart learn to accept imperfect sinners, like themselves, with an imperfect theology. May God grant us deliverance instead of the destruction!

Barry Fike—Rockford, IL. **IMAGE**