

Christ In A Celebrity Culture

By: Keith Keyser

“Now the Jews’ Feast of Tabernacles was at hand. His brothers therefore said to Him, ‘Depart from here and go into Judea, that Your disciples also may see the works that You are doing. For no one does anything in secret while he himself seeks to be known openly. If You do these things, show Yourself to the world.’ For even His brothers did not believe in Him. Then Jesus said to them, ‘My time has not yet come, but your time is always ready. The world cannot hate you, but it hates Me because I testify of it that its works are evil. You go up to this feast. I am not yet going up to this feast, for My time has not yet fully come.’ When He had said these things to them, He remained in Galilee. But when His brothers had gone up, then He also went up to the feast, not openly, but as it were in secret.” John 7:2-10

The modern world is obsessed with celebrity. Scores of newspapers and magazines are devoted to charting the movements and opinions of the rich, talented, and famous. Websites like youtube have become showcases for many internet exhibitionists, who are willing to do seemingly anything in order to gain Warhol’s proverbial fifteen minutes of fame. So-called “reality television” – surely, a misnomer if ever there was one – follows “ordinary” people through both mundane and ludicrous situations in the name of entertainment. Judging by the proliferation of these programs in many countries, there is an insatiable desire on the part of contemporary people to become famous – or even notorious, as long as it gets their name in lights.

From *American Idol* To *Your Best Life Now*

For lost men and women to zealously pursue fame is unsurprising, for they put themselves first and seek glory in this world, not realizing the better glory that Christ offers. Sadly, in many quarters professing Christians have been bitten by the celebrity bug. It is now commonplace to see churches staging publicity stunts to get themselves in the news (one recent example is Mr. Jones of Florida, who publicly burned a copy of the Muslim Koran – a foolish act with tragic and murderous consequences.)¹ Less grandiose, but still gravely in error, are the many preachers who permit a celebrity-status to be conferred on them. Many “Christian” organizations in the multimedia age have become publicity-generating engines for a thinly-veiled cult of personality that promotes the preacher, as much or more, than the blessed Lord Jesus.

At the beginning of John 7, the Lord Jesus’ half-brothers disbelieved in His divine claims, and seemed only to seek earthly glory and advantage trading on their brother’s notoriety. They viewed the Jewish national holiday the Feast of Tabernacles (also known in Hebrew as *Succoth*) as an opportunity for Jesus to “press the flesh,” much like a modern politician campaigning for office. To their way of thinking, His ministry would be furthered by utilizing every chance for public relations work. He rejected this notion, however, implying that they were of a different nature from Him and so could not be hated by the world (v. 7.) They were products of a fallen world and so thought in a worldly manner. He, by contrast, was from above – from the Father –

and so conducted Himself by the principles of the age to come, which are synonymous with the perfect divine will. This led Him to bear witness to the world's evil works, resulting in its hatred of Him.

Divine Time Versus Human Scheduling

The Lord Jesus was following a different timetable that defied fallen logic, and adhered to the Father's purposes. Twice He told His half-brothers that His time had not yet come (the second time, saying "My time has not yet fully come," cf. vv. 6 & 8.) He was drawing nearer to the time when He would go to the cross and accomplish the Father's will regarding redemption. In John 17:1 He said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You." Rather than being a tragic accident of history, His crucifixion was something that Christ approached purposefully and was ordained before the foundation of the world (Acts 2:23; 1 Pet. 1:20.) He willingly laid down His life as a propitiatory sacrifice on the cross (Rom. 3:20-26.)

Intent on fulfilling His Father's purposes, the Lord Jesus was not interested in publicity or the celebrity that it can bring, much less the "results" that might stem from it. If His work were merely about gathering a crowd, He could easily do that. Yet time and time again, the curious public proved fickle – many deserting the Lord Jesus when His teaching became too controversial for their taste (John 6:66.) Despite the multitudes that followed Him throughout His three and a half year earthly ministry, after His death and resurrection His open followers numbered not many more than one hundred and twenty (Acts 1:15.) Numbers fluctuated wildly at different times during biblical history; therefore, they are inaccurate markers of success. True success lies in obeying God's will, as the Lord Jesus always did perfectly.

Christ's example rebukes the vapid notions of prosperity of the contemporary fame-loving culture. He lived for His Father's will, not for His own aggrandizement. His mission led to greater abandonment of human praise and comfort and culminated in the lonely death of the cross. Yet who can fathom the glory that the risen Lord Jesus received from the countless heavenly hosts as He entered into heaven and sat down on the Father's right hand (1 Pet. 3:22.) He who eschewed earthly publicity for its own sake will forever enjoy the worship and acclaim of an innumerable multitude throughout all of the eternal ages to come.

ⁱ For a good recapitulation of the event with biblical criticism of it, see Al Mohler's article, "What He Wanted All Along: The Real Scandal of Pastor Terry Jones," found here: <http://www.albertmohler.com/2011/04/08/what-he-wanted-all-along-the-real-scandal-of-pastor-terry-jones/> Accessed on 4/8/11.