

The Great No Names

‘A French taxicab driver once played a joke on Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. The man had driven Sir Arthur from the station to a hotel, and when he received his fare, he said, “Merci, Monsieur Conan Doyle”. “Why, how do you know my name?” asked Sir Arthur. “Well, sir”, replied the taxi driver, “I read in the papers that you were coming from the south of France to Paris. Your general appearance told me that you were English. Your hair has been clearly last cut by a barber in the south of France. I put these indications together and guess at once that it was you”. “That is very remarkable”, replied Sir Arthur. “You have no other evidence to go on?” “Well”, hesitated the man, “there was also the fact that your hame was on your luggage”.’

Well, that was then. Nowadays, with celebrities galore, even the leaders of the world’s leading countries gain celebrity status to some degree or other. Indeed, for most of them, the question is how to go out and about and *not* be recognized, not be accosted by adoring fans or violent protestors! Sometimes both at the same time! Such people often resort to disguises, or restrict their comings and goings to only places frequented by other rich and famous. Being famous, often by itself, generates wealth, and sometimes that’s all it takes to live a truly pampered, decadent,

lavish lifestyle. The opposite is also true. Witness fellow American, Megan Markle, the, ahem, Duchess of Sussex, Hollywood celebrity, whose marriage to a real royal, the Duke of Sussex, Prince Harry. With their “disagreements” and “disengagement” from the British royal family, they’ve lost some celebrity status and royal cachet; so much so that despite a Netflix series and a sales record-setting tell-all autobiography, some suggest they’re not living as high off the hog as they’d like. Perhaps to keep themselves in the public eye and rehabilitate their image, they seem to have exaggerated a rough taxicab ride in New York City into a harrowing, two-hour car chase to escape menacing paparazzi.

Oh, such is the difficult suffering and anguish of the rich and famous! Not to make light of the real suffering that some heads of state do undergo, often to the point of torture and death when governments change hands, for most of the world’s “great” people, a crisis of their day might be the horrific discovery of a hang-nail. In other words, little or no real suffering at all. At least not compared to the suffering that we read of last week, and here again today in I Peter, as he continues his letter of comfort and encouragement to the Christians undergoing truly harrowing persecution for their faith in the Lord. And it is our fellow Christians’ suffering of today that we must keep in mind as we go about our lives in this wealthy, powerful, and for-the-most-part still free country. Even here in Missouri, we have it better than other places in the United States. Try standing up for truth, the Bible,

and God's commands, and you may find yourself arrested and jailed in Colorado, California, Oregon and other "blue" states. So, many of our family in Christ stay silent, in order to keep their jobs, avoid incarceration, just to keep the peace. Yet there are always more of us than we realize. Though at times we seem to be facing insurmountable odds, against seeming invincible enemies all around, there are way more of us than we can see. Even if all we can see is our lonesomes, if God is with us, and He is, then we're in the vast majority. Nothing can withstand His will for us, the advance of His Church and the spread of His Kingdom.

In Acts 1, we're "introduced" to a "new" apostle. In reading the Gospels, we often get the idea that our Lord Jesus only had twelve, full-time disciples. Why, they're the only ones named. Even so, can you name all twelve of them? I'm sure most of can name Judas Iscariot, the worst one of all, for he betrayed the Lord for 30 pieces of silver! And it's for that that we remember him! Shouldn't we remember the "good" guys and not the bad ones? Well, one good one is first named here in Acts 1:23: Matthias. But not only him, another otherwise unknown brother is first mentioned here as well: Joseph Barsabbas, also known as Justus. Both these men had followed the Lord from the beginning, though not having been specifically singled out by being called by Lord Jesus to become members of the Twelve, the "cabinet" as it were, of Lord Jesus' closest followers. But even among these original apostles, "generals" of the faith they could be termed, there was

still the inner circle of just three disciples, Simon Peter, James and John. Since they're mentioned so often in the Gospels, we have a fairly good idea of what they were like. The other nine disciples we know far less about. Indeed, can you name all twelve original disciples, even if your life depended on it? I'll refresh your memory, though you'll surely forget them again in just a few minutes. They are Simon Peter; the fishermen James, the elder brother, and John the younger brother, both of whom were Lord Jesus' cousins, since their grandmother was apparently the sister of Mary the mother of Jesus; Peter's brother Andrew; Philip; Thomas (we unfairly call the doubter); Bartholomew Nathanael; Matthew the tax collector; James, son of Alphaeus, also known as "the Little", meaning he was probably short; Simon the zealot; Judas Thaddaeus, the son of James; and Judas Iscariot.

Though this list contains twelve names, aside from the most prominent of them, there is some uncertainty regarding their identities. This is largely due to the fact that though the common language of the people was Aramaic, the lingua franca, or the language of commerce and culture was Greek, while the language of government was Latin because the Romans ruled. But the ancestral language of these Jews was Hebrew, which was still used mainly in the Temple and the synagogues and their schools for the religious elite. Thus, most people had multiple names, or one name in multiple versions depending on the language. For example, "Peter" was Peter's Greek name, while Simon, Simeon,

Shimon, was his Hebrew name. But they all are names of the same man. Similarly, the Lord's "name", Jesus Christ, we get from the Greek, but in Hebrew it is Yeshua Messiah, or anglicized as Messiah. Because English translations have always tended to only use the Greek form of personal names, Jewish readers down through the centuries usually have no idea that the people written about in the New Testament were Jewish!

Why bring up all this? Because it all illustrates one very important point. In the selection of a replacement apostle, two people who'd been followers of Christ Jesus from the beginning, and almost certainly among the 70 disciples that the Lord had sent out as missionaries several months earlier, were singled out by name. And we've never heard of them before. But there they were. Faithful followers of Christ. And we don't hear of them, or of many others of the original Twelve, ever again. Some traditions exist of where some of them went and worked until the end of their lives, which, apparently for all of them except John, was by martyrdom. But as we read here in I Peter, dying for Christ is itself a great privilege. But not greater than living a fruitful, faithful life for Him.

The fact is that none of us is more important than any other of us. We each have different roles in the great, glorious Body of Christ. While it's necessary to know the names of some who are leaders, etc., due to their designated-by-the-Lord duties and roles, we're all equally important to Father God. We are all His children, if we have given our lives to Christ Jesus and received Holy Spirit

in being born again to eternal life. There are literally millions and millions, perhaps multiple billions of brothers and sisters in our family. The precious few who have their names mentioned in the Scriptures are there just because they need to be. Think of the many thousands whose names are mentioned, but nothing else is known of them. And even more, of the multi millions whose names are not mentioned at all, but whom we know were there because of the necessary work they performed for the advancement of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, both in the Old Testament and in the New. Each single person was led by Holy Spirit to accomplish what they were destined for. And each one of us will be rewarded for the ways we go about His service now.

Not that Lord Jesus, after He ascended back into Heaven, is sitting around all day just watching us! No. If anything, He is far busier now than when He walked on earth. For now, He is directing and helping all the millions of us currently doing His work on the earth! The Bible says that He prays for each and every one of us every day!! Can we say the same about ourselves for each other? If not, then how can we not be ashamed for letting our Master do more of His work here in our lives than we do for Him? There's a very good reason, actually many, for why He tells us that we must *live*, dwell, in Him every moment of every day. For only then are we listed among the "great no names", whose real name only our Lord knows now, and will be bestowed on us when we receive our rewards at His throne. So praise Him. Daily!

