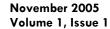


The Smiling Maven

Grace for Grace (John 1:16)

חסד על חסד (יוחנן א'טו)





What About This Mayen? I Don't Know!

In the world, in the church, in my own life, I really don't know what's going on. Jesus is Coming Soon! That's for sure. Jesus is the Messiah—That's for sure. He rose from the dead—that's for sure. He is gracious and kind-That's for sure. Beyond that I really don't know very much.

In 1999 my wife Sandy suddenly and unexpectedly suffered a massive heart attack. After lingering on life support for weeks she departed to "undiscovered country from whose bourn no traveler returns1". Prior to the heart attack, Sandy appeared to have no major medical problems. The attending cardiologist suspected that Sandy had been living with a undetected congenital problem for all of her life. While Sandy was in the emergency room, she told the doctor that she had previously experienced similar pains once before, but they had gone away. The massive heart attack had occurred after a smaller untreated heart attack.

All this could lead to a lot of second guessing, on my part, on Sandy's part, on the Lord's part etc. etc. Why didn't she question the first chest pains? Did I fail as a husband in not making sure that her health was checked? We had been praywanting to follow, and wanting to hear from the Lord; couldn't he have given us a leading concerning her heart? Did we miss it? Yet any attempt to second guess these circumstances leads me to the same place—I don't know. I just don't know! And most likely I don't need to know. Some "deeper" level of comfort has come as I have abandoned myself to not knowing, to not having to know.

Often believers in the Messiah are puffed up with their spiritual understand-True spiritual understanding is balanced in the reality of the difficulties of this earthly life. Things don't always seem to line up. In A Grief Observed, the well respected Christian writer, C.S. Lewis expressed his heart when he was suffering from the loss of his wife. He states "if you talk to me about the consolation of religion, I shall suspect that you do not understand.3" Do you hear what this powerful apologist (Christian defender of the faith) is saying. When it comes to tsouris (grieving, troubles, heartache) our religious jargon, technocratic spiritual language, and pithy statements can easily be outside the realm of true concerned compassion.

Those individuals that were the most comforting and helpful to me in my darkest hours and days were also those who honestly didn't have any deep answers, and didn't attempted to give any answers. We could shrug our shoulders together, and know together that we didn't know.

This has become a rallying point in my life. Jesus is the Messiah. He died for our sins. He rose from the dead and is coming again. Beyond that, I don't know. I don't know what I think that I might know. I can't really explain much, and that's okay. I am learning to live in the grace of "I don't know".



Why the "Smiling Maven"?

'Maven: a person who has special knowledge or experience; expert {Yiddish mevvn < Hebrew מבין?' 'An expert or connoisseur: someone with profound knowledge of a subject.'4 A maven is someone that you go to with a question (on a particular subject) in the expectation that he will have an answer. In practice a maven is often well-versed in a number of subjects. To consider oneself as a maven may be an indicator of pride. I have some experience and expertise in a number of areas, a jack of all trades and master (or maven) of none. Yet there is one thing that I am increasingly convinced to excel in. It is an area that I believe the Lord

wants me to become a maven. That subject or topic is grace.

strong in the grace that is in Messiah Jesus (2 Timothy 2:1). There are many good definitions of grace, of God's grace. Here is one that I believe is an excellent working definition: the smiling face of from New York to become a smiling ex-God's favor. When God chose to send His son, the Messiah Jesus, to die for fall- smiling maven for the true smiling maven en humanity – He was not frowning upon (master) of the universe. us, he was smiling upon us.

There is a connection between grace in 1. Shakespeare, Hamlet our lives and our capacity to smile. I ² C.S. Lewis, <u>A Grief Observed</u> (Harper Collins. 1961) P. 25 don't claim to smile enough. I am not 4. Yourdictionary.com sure that I could consider myself an ex-

pert on grace. Yet, I have experienced that the Lord is gracious. He has smiled The Apostle Paul told Timothy "Be upon me. In my darkest, my most unfaithful, my most run awayish, rebellious, complaining attitude, Jesus has been gracious to me. By his graciousness to me, I can see God's desire for this Jewish boy pert on God incredible grace. To be, a

- 3. American Heritage Dictionary (Houghton Mifflin Company 1985)

The Home Front

The transition to Zion schools has gone well. Ruthe started her freshman year of high school without any major glitches. She is in accelerated classes and seems to be doing well. She misses her friends from Oshkosh, and spends a lot of time on the internet communicating with them. She looks forward to playing basketball during the winter. She also plans to run track in the Spring. Ruth is continuing to play the piano, and is taking lessons at the Zion Conservatory of Music.

Caleb who is in sixth grade was quite concerned about the transition to Zion Public Schools. He had been in a Christian school in Oshkosh since pre-school. Zion schools have much more of an inner city flavor than Oshkosh. Caleb tends to grumble about school more than Ruthe (where could the grumbling possibly come from?). It wouldn't be a stretch to say he was dreading the first day. His dad was bracing for his reaction when he came home the first day; it could be "dad, I can't take it, I'm not going there, please let's move back to Oshkosh", etc., etc. Caleb came home after the first day, and dad asked, "how was your day?", Caleb responded, nonchalantly, "it was okay". That turned out to be Caleb's response throughout the week, and has continued to be his usual response to a day of school. I am very thankful for that simple "okay". There have been some tough spots, and some struggles with new friends, but all in all it seems to be 'okay'.

Dad is adjusting to the Faith Homes. He misses Oshkosh more than he expected, though the sense that this is the right place for us has not changed. The break from senior pastor responsibilities week in week out has been spiritually needful. Though he often speaks or shares at Faith Home meetings, he is not the Senior Pastor, but just one voice among many ministers. He has also enjoyed a new challenge. A bimonthly newsletter entitled <u>The Smiling Maven</u>. If you happen to see one, you should read it.



The Smiling Maven

This is the first "official" issue of The Smiling Maven. It has been sent to everyone that was on my database/mailing list. The only discrimination that I made in the list was when I could not confirm that the address that I had was current. In that case an issue was not sent. I made no effort to distinguish whether you would smile along with the Smiling Maven.

The plan is for The Smiling Maven to be published bimonthly. The next issue is scheduled for January. The second issue will be sent again without discrimination. However; after the January issue, the Smiling Maven will only be sent to those who have expressed interest.

So, nu, if you want to receive this thing-a-ma-bob of a publication, you need to take the incredible effort and e-mail us at: smilingmaven@yahoo.com If e-mail is not an option, you can write us at 2820 Eshcol Avenue Zion IL 60099.

I struggled with doing this the other way around. Contacting us only if you don't want this. However, I receive enough mail that I don't want, that I didn't ask for, and that I don't even look at. In so many cases I don't want to take the time to contact those that send it and tell them to please stop. I didn't want to add to that conflict for anyone. For that reason, the decision was made to send this only to those that request it (after January 2006).

For those of you who might be on the fence: you're not sure whether the Smiling Maven helps you to smile or not. I'd encourage you to contact us and allow us to send at least a few more issues. Whether you decide to receive the Smiling Maven publication or not, I strongly encourage you to look to the True Smiling Maven of the Universe, the Messiah Jesus. He is the Way, the Truth and the Life. He is a lot more important than this publication, He is actually more important than anything. Nuff said.

Holiday Greetings

Happy Thanksgiving. Merry Messiahmas. Happy Chanukah and Happy New Year. (not in order of importance, but in this year's chronological order).

Though a long dry spell of little correspondence seems to have ended for me, I will not be attempting any type of holiday letter or holiday cards. The next issue of the Smiling Maven should arrive after January 1, 2006.

May your holiday season be abundantly blessed with the goodness of the King of Kings. He truly is the reason for the season, and for every season. It is amazing how the simple testimony of the manger scene resurfaces every year. He really was born and lived among us. Hallelujah! He is the light of the world!

Theology Section

Grace. Gr

References: Galatians, Ephesians, 2 Timothy2. 122 references in the New Testament.