



In the celebrity driven popular culture of our day God, through His Son, Jesus Christ is calling us to become anti-celebrities.

The Greatest of All

"Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth."

(1 Kings 17:24, NIV)

Who is Paris Hilton? I wonder how most of us would answer that question? For me, she is clearly a sign of the growing phenomenon in recent years of the *celebutante*, someone who is *famous for being famous*. In this sense, she serves as a living metaphor of the signs of the times and the popular culture in which we live. In today's world, anyone can reach celebrity status. In fact, in a real sense many today are *legends in their own minds*, posting their celebrity illusion (or is that delusion?) on Facebook with status updates, pictures, and profiles that are frankly just *TMI (Too Much Information)* for those of you who are *OOS (Out of Style)*.

The church is not immune from this cultural curiosity of celebrity obsession. We have created our own celebrities in the form of musicians, writer's, pastors, political leaders, and others. But the words of John the Baptist ought to be our guide in these days of celebrity mania. Addressing the concerns of his disciples about the shifting spotlight from his ministry to that of Jesus he said, "He must become greater, I must become less." (John 3:30, NIV)

Serving in the Shadows

John the Baptist was considered by many in Israel to be Elijah, returned from his fiery chariot ride to serve as the forerunner of Messiah. The Jews considered Elijah to be the greatest of all the prophets. I suspect that, like us, when most Israelites thought of Elijah they imagined the *spotlight* events of his ministry; the times he spent in the limelight for all to see. But the fact is that Elijah's time in Ahab's court, Carmel's crest, and Heaven's chariot were mere moments in his twelve year ministry recorded in Scripture. The majority of Elijah's time was spent in the shadows, serving God in unseen ways and unknown places.

Elijah's three year sojourn with the gentile widow and her son in Zarephath is a great example of this. His greatest miracle, raising the widow's son from the dead, took place during the obscurity and solitude of this time. I'm guessing it wasn't a story often shared in the synagogues, because when Jesus shared of this gentile widow woman's faith in his hometown assembly, they tried to push him off the cliff at the edge of town. So much for God trying to teach His people lessons through those who are not members of the household of faith! The fact remains, however, that what was arguably Elijah's most outstanding miracle happened in the strong hold of a demonic pagan god in a relatively obscure town.

The Anti-Celebrity Calling

This brings us to an important truth, and one we would do well to learn in our celebrity crazy culture - Jesus Christ calls us to be *anti-celebrities*.

Jesus both taught and modeled this anti-celebrity calling in his own life. He began his ministry in the wilderness, baptizing in the same area as John the Baptist. He spent most of his time in Galilee, an obscure region located on the borders of Palestine, far from the spotlight of Judea and Jerusalem. He constantly cautioned both his disciples and others who experienced the reality of who he was to say nothing.

In his most famous sermon, *The Sermon on the Mount*, Jesus contrasted the ways of the world with the ways of his kingdom saying,

*“Blessed are the poor in spirit,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
Blessed are those who mourn,
for they will be comforted.
Blessed are the meek,
for they will inherit the earth.
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,
for they will be filled.
Blessed are the merciful,
for they will be shown mercy.
Blessed are the pure in heart,
for they will see God.
Blessed are the peacemakers,
for they will be called children of God.
Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 5:3-10, NIV)*

The beatitudes are referred to in many different ways, but one thing is clear – they are the inside-out, topsy turvy, upside down, black is white and white is black, Magna Carta of the Kingdom of God, and they are a clarion call for disciples of Jesus to become *anti-celebrities*.

Elijah, this wilderness wanderer from Gilead, serves as an example of what God is calling us to become. An insignificant widow, living in the stronghold of a pagan God, was the only witness of a miracle that foreshadows and points us to the greatest event in history, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Just as God poured His life through Elijah and into the dead boy, so does God raise us from spiritual death through Christ. (See Ephesians 2:1-7)

Those days in Zarephath, there were no television crews on hand to capture the scene live, no reporters seeking exclusive interviews, no publishers out to sign Elijah and the widow’s son to book rights. There weren’t even any cell phone cameras or videos that could later be posted on You Tube. There was only a dusty desert prophet, a gentile widow woman, and a young boy to whom God gave new life.

But there in the shadow of Baal's backyard the angels of heaven rejoiced and the demons in hell trembled at the words of a former pagan, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the Lord from your mouth is the truth."

Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mark 10:42-45, NIV)

Think About It

1. Reflect on some ways the celebrity mania of popular culture is seen in churches and other Christian organizations.
2. What are some ways this obsession with celebrities has affected you?
3. Is it possible to harness culture's obsession with celebrities to effectively share the gospel? What are some ways we might do this?
4. We noted that the powerful miracles in Elijah's ministry were only "moments" among the years he served God. How should this affect the way we see our calling as disciples of Christ?
5. Perhaps you have the opposite problem from that set forth in this study. You prefer the shadows, but God, as least for now, is calling you into the limelight. Take some time to reflect, pray, and talk with God about your fears.