

The Real Thing

My sidekick, Ben Baldus, who traveled with the Sermon on the Mount team, has taken up with a friend of mine, Doug Millholland, the head trainer at the Waggoner Ranch in Texas. The Waggoner Ranch, home of some of the most notable Quarter Horses in history and boasting over a half million acres, is the largest in Texas. In effort to stay up with current markets, they are making serious effort to upgrade their training and show stock, however, one of the larger sources of income for Waggoner Ranch is their ranch horse sale. For many years the average ranch horse being less refined and polished and fit than a show horse, would only bring a small portion of his true worth. However in more recent years, dissatisfaction with show ring performance has given much rise to a more usable horse referred to as the 'ranch horse.' There are now ranch horse rodeos, ranch horse world championships, where employees of ranches compete as teams resulting in some pretty high priced horses in this market.

Perhaps it is the extreme extravagance and cosmetic appearance of horses, that gave rise to the desire for that which is authentic and genuine over that which is contrived and artificial. It has been well recognized that many horses that do well in the show ring would not last a day on a real ranch. Horses that are very showy and exciting to watch cutting cattle, working cattle in a show context, wouldn't last a day wasting the kind of extra effort if they had a full days work to do. Some horses could lope all day and go no where, which reminds me of some people who could talk all day and say nothing. The horses that reach high selling prices in these sales are not always the prettiest. They may have a blemish or two, be of more rugged bone, or less fitted for the show ring; however, when put through their paces, they know well how to perform for their cowboy, to get the chores done, and do the best job with the cattle. These horses are said to 'have a handle' on handling herds.

This reminds me of a thought from our Lord who said that the first shall be last, and the last shall be first. It is human nature to overlook the common, plain, and blemished for that which is perfect and beautiful and 'successful.' However, the emphasis of God's Word seems to put more value on a real working horse than a show horse. 1 Peter 2:4 refers to us as stones, which have been rejected by men, but are choice and precious in the sight of God. It is much like a skilled craftsman, seeing the rough exterior of rock or wood, having an ability to see its potential and inward beauty. Even the angels got in on this act when they looked on man and wondered how God could ever do any good work through them. When such rough resources are placed in the hands of a master craftsman, they become precious and living and acceptable sacrifices to God. The angels get great delight when they see a drop of grace applied to the selfish heart of a human and watch it blossom as though it was magic.

Not only is the original appearance deceiving, but also is the process. That which often produces strength, endurance, and calluses are often formed from that which is soft, inadequate, and even blistered in the process. Hebrews 5:13 speaks of one who partakes only of milk and is not accustomed to the Word of righteousness, nor able to ingest meat. He is weak and flabby. 2 Thessalonians 1:4,5 says, "We ourselves speak proudly of you

among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure.” This is a plain indication of God’s righteous judgment, so that you will be considered worthy of the Kingdom of God for which you are suffering. Verse 11 and 12 says, “To this end we also pray for you always that our God will count you worthy of your calling and fulfill every desire for goodness in the work of faith with power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ would be glorified in you.” **The implication is certainly one that we are made worthy of our calling through the sufferings, difficulties, and exercises of life.** In fact, both Romans 12:2 and 1 Peter 2:5 refer to this as merely an acceptable sacrifice or reasonable offering. It would only be reasonable that the trainer would develop the muscles and skills and potential of the horse that he might be a worthy and acceptable partner in a difficult task. It would be the natural process of a skillful artisan to polish, rub, form, and cut that he might bring forth a raw product into that which would be worthy of his name.

Why does this process seem so difficult? First of all, as a Christian that has been made alive by the Word of God we are looking for a land and a result that is not going to be found here on earth. We are citizens of Heaven and everything that we are involved in temporarily is flawed or short-term at best. I remember the story of a missionary returning home who was greeted by a huge fan fair and parade, only to realize that the president was also on the boat and the real fan fair was for him. When he stood there alone, the crowds having departed, feeling sorry for himself, he then was prompted with the thought, “You’re not home yet.” Our suffering is for a season, they are for the development of an eternal weight of glory.

Just as God used the plagues and judgments on Egypt, more to prepare Israel than Egypt. So too, we have this same need for muscle building and endurance in the preparation of the coming of our Lord. John the Baptist was the one who told us to make straight the way of the Lord. Thus it remains appropriate that we are to strengthen the hands that are weak and the knees that are feeble and make straight paths for our feet so that the lame which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed (Heb. 12:12,14) When it comes to our day of presentation, may we more resemble the qualities of a proven ranch horse, than a mere show horse.

Written by Dr. Lew Sterrett, Executive Director of Miracle Mountain Ranch Inc.