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The Rogues and the Regulators

If you be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are you; for the spirit of glory and of God rests upon you; on their part evil is spoken of, but on your part He is glorified. --1Peter 3:14

Since *TIME* has distinguished Ben Bernanke with its annual “Person of the Year” award, we can only say....Really? Surely there must be a dozen other public figures that for good or ill would edge out the nonplussed Federal Reserve Chairman? More than a year ago, we wrote about one of them (*What a difference a day makes*, 09/2008). What prompts us to think of Sarah Palin again, is the peculiar title of her recently released runaway best-selling book, Going Rogue.

Webster says a *rogue* (noun) is “a playfully mischievous person.” As an adjective, the term can be construed “no longer obedient, belonging, or accepted and hence not controllable or answerable; deviating, renegade: a rogue cop.” *Rogue*, to be sure, has never been a term of endearment to the ears of the just—illustrated by a colorful story of a frontier county “gone rogue.”

One of the roughest places in early America was Logan County, Kentucky. Historian Peter Marshall, Jr., says, “Technically, it was under United States law, even before Kentucky was admitted to the Union in 1796. The trouble was, no one on the frontier was designated to enforce the law, with the result that, as Congress would state, ‘the immunity which offenders experience attracts as to an asylum, the most vile and abandoned criminals, and at the same time deters useful and virtuous persons from making settlements in such society.’ (Think San Francisco). “Logan County attracted so many murderers, horse thieves, highway robbers, and counterfeiters, that it was nicknamed **Rogues’ Harbor** by the outlaws who fled there to escape justice back east.”¹

That isn’t to say there were not at least some virtuous people living in the region that planted a few tiny churches and tried to deal with the lawlessness. Peter Cartwright, a local who grew up in Logan County, recalled that “Those who favored a better state of morals were called ‘Regulators.’ But they encountered fierce opposition from the ‘Rogues,’ and a battle was fought with guns, pistols, dirks, knives and clubs, in which the Regulators were defeated.”

In the course of time, God raised up a Scotch-Irish Presbyterian preacher, and put it in his heart to move to Rogues’ Harbor. James McGready was a tough, yet plain-spoken man, who wore buckskin breeches like any other frontiersman. And he didn’t hesitate to tell anyone who would listen, that experiencing “new birth” was both necessary and urgent. While it is said McGready painted a picture of heaven and its glories in such a manner that many who heard his messages longed to be there, he also, like Jonathan Edwards, portrayed hell and its horrors so disturbingly, that people would “tremble and quake, imagining a lake of fire and brimstone yawning to overwhelm them...”

As the Lord is wont to do, He raised up three small congregations (home groups) for McGready in 1797, a year before he arrived. They were located on three rivers; the Muddy, the Red, and the Gasper. McGready asked his new flocks to consider a covenant, part of which read:

When we consider the Word and promises of a compassionate God, to the poor lost family of Adam,

we find the strongest encouragement for Christians to pray in faith –to ask in the name of Jesus for the conversion of their fellow men...With these promises before us, we feel encouraged to unite our supplications to a prayer-hearing God, for the out-pouring of His Spirit, that His people may be quickened and comforted, and that our children, and sinners generally, may be converted.

Covenant signers agreed to pray every Saturday evening and Sunday morning and to devote the third Saturday of each month to prayer and fasting. Rev. McGready made it clear that the focus of this concerted prayer campaign was for the Lord to cause a religious awakening in the county.

Within a year, things began to happen. Some of Logan County’s most notorious sinners became ashamed and wept bitterly. But McGready told his folks that these were but “a few scattering drops before a mighty rain...” Indeed, there were a lot more drops in June of 1800 as more than five hundred people showed up for the quarterly communion services at the Red River church, including other ministers who had heard that, like the Book of Acts, the Holy Spirit was being poured forth. Some traveled more than one hundred miles to be in attendance. On the last day of the four-day celebration, the dam seemed to break as the floods of salvation swept the assembly. Many were crying, “What shall we do to be saved?”

Later that summer at Muddy River, Rev. McGready experienced similar crowds and results, leading him to issue an appeal for those planning to attend the Gasper River four-day sacramental meeting to bring wagons and supplies. It was sound planning because *ten thousand* showed up! (The biggest city in the state, Lexington, more than a hundred miles away claimed fewer than eighteen hundred inhabitants).

Among the many preachers who came to experience the outpouring, was Rev. Barton Stone who served two congregations halfway across the state in Bourbon County. He was not disappointed. As word of the revival fires spread to neighboring states, Rev. Stone returned home to Cane Ridge with plans to organize a camp meeting for the following summer.

Days before his “camp meeting,” wagons began arriving. Trees were felled, benches fashioned, and no-less-than seven platforms were erected around the perimeter of the clearings to accommodate a host of Presbyterian, Baptist, and Methodist evangelists who had been invited to preach. But, no one knew that more than *twenty-five thousand* were coming. America’s Second Great Awakening was about to unfold.

An interesting assessment of the Cane Ridge revival came from Dr. George Baxter, a skeptical Presbyterian minister at Washington Academy in Virginia who traveled to Kentucky later that year to see for himself. It was his express purpose to debunk the stories he had heard. But, following is what he reported and subsequently published in the *Connecticut Evangelical Magazine*:

The power with which this revival has spread, and its influence in moralizing the people, are difficult for you to conceive, and more so for me to describe...I found Kentucky, to appearance, the most moral place I have ever seen. A profane expression was hardly ever heard... Never in my life have I seen more genuine marks of that humility which...looks to the Lord Jesus Christ as the only way of acceptance with God.

Those who call these things “enthusiasm,” ought to tell us what they understand by the Spirit of Christianity...Upon the whole, sir, I think the revival in Kentucky among the most extraordinary that have ever visited the Church of Christ... This revival has... confounded infidelity, awed vice to silence, and brought numbers beyond calculation under serious impressions.

In post-modernity, opposition to any movement bent on confounding infidelity and silencing vice, is still formidable, except that now, the virtuous are the *rogues* and the imprudent the “regulators.”

Even so, *Great peace have they which love thy law: and nothing shall offend them.* --Ps 120:165

Rick Forcier

¹ Marshall, Peter, Jr./Manuel, David, *From Sea to Shining Sea*, Fleming H. Revell, Grand Rapids, 1986, pgs.60-63