

Hollywood, Yom Kippur and Atonement

I know no one reading this blog today will be shocked to know that there has always been tension between popular culture and biblical culture. What you may not know is that way back in 1927, as movies shifted from silent films to talking movies, the very first movie that was produced with synchronized sound was, in fact, *The Jazz Singer*, starring Al Jolson. It was a movie about a Jewish man who was torn between serving G-D in his synagogue or becoming a jazz singer. I find it interesting that of all the themes that Hollywood could have chosen as their foundational talking movie, they chose one that depicted the struggle between serving G-D and serving the world.

To add to the dynamics of this movie, and the choice of this film to be the very first talking movie, the movie is centered around Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, the day observed in Judaism as the holiest day of the year. It's the one day a year when, in ancient times and the temple stood, the high priest would enter the holy of holies after offering a sacrifice for the atonement for the people of Israel.

As I said earlier, of all the themes Hollywood could have chosen, for Hollywood to choose making a movie about choosing between G-D and money was interesting. But when you add to that the choice to make the movie centered around Yom Kippur, a day focused entirely upon repentance and forgiveness, the choice becomes even more interesting.

When you understand the roots of Hollywood and the spiritual struggle at its roots, it makes sense that nearly every movie and television program since that day has in some way continued to promote the same tension between biblical culture and worldly culture.

If you have not watched the movie *The Jazz Singer*, it is important to note two things. First, the lure of fame and fortune. "Money" was so strong that Al Jolson's character was willing to walk away from his G-D and his family to achieve it. But the second and most important thing to note was that at the end of the movie on Yom Kippur (the Day of Atonement and repentance), Al Jolson's character turned back to his family and his G-D and chose to sing a Hebrew prayer in his synagogue in his father's place. The prayer he sings so beautifully is the Kol Nidre (All Vows), a prayer of forgiveness asking G-D to forgive us for all vows we have made and all commitments we have made in the past year, and restore us to right standing with Him.

Hollywood's very first full-length talking movie was a movie about the battle between righteousness and unrighteousness, the battle between biblical and worldly cultures, the battle between life and death. Yet Hollywood (maybe without even realizing it) shared the Good News of G-D's forgiveness and reminded us that no matter how far away from G-D we have traveled, through a simple, heartfelt, honest and vulnerable prayer asking for forgiveness, we can be restored.

So, as we are in the Days of Awe between Yom Teruah/Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur – a time when we are encouraged to return to our G-D and King – I want to remind you of two things: 1) Yeshua shared the same message as the movie *The Jazz Singer*, as we read in Matthew 6:24 (TLV):

"No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will stick by one and look down on the other. You cannot serve God and money."

And 2) through true repentance, as we read in 1 John 1:9:

"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."
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