



MINUTES WITH MESSIAH

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I AM NOT DUST

Recently the “9/11 Commission” came out with their report on the terror attacks on the United States a few years ago. Among other things, the commission says that this country is not prepared to prevent another major terrorist attack. This has the legislature of the country so concerned that they are giving up part of what would normally be their summer vacation to consider some of the things in this report, and to try to fix some of the potential loopholes in security. In general, the level of fear in the United States is at its highest since the early 1960’s. Granted, we have not yet started building bomb shelters and stockpiling canned goods (although that did happen for a short while after the initial scare). We don’t have cities building schools underground, as did Artesia, New Mexico, forty years ago. So far, I haven’t heard of schools holding “drop and cover” drills as occurred when I was young. Granted, too, that we are not fearful of atomic bomb attacks as we were then. But the general level of fear is high.

In *Eretz Israel* (the land of Israel), the first and last people off the bus for school outings are armed guards. A wall has been built (illegally, according to the World Court) to protect Israeli settlements from potential attack by Palestinian terrorists. Some Palestinian settlements are grateful for the wall, because they fear attack by Israeli terrorists. Tourists are fearful to travel by rental car because they don’t know when they might accidentally cross into a dangerous neighborhood.

After centuries of hostility, there is no end in sight to “the troubles” in the northern counties of the island of Ireland. (Yes, that was worded very carefully so as not to make it too obvious which side I support.) My younger brother once said, “There have been fewer deaths in ten years of fighting over here than one year on the streets of Detroit; I’m safer over here than” at the University of Michigan. Yet there are still neighborhoods near his home in Belfast that he must avoid at certain times of the year.

I could continue documenting civil, ethnic, or religious unrest in countries like the Philippines, Russia, Indonesia, Nigeria, and who knows how many other countries. But I think the point has been made. This world is full of fear. Countries battle other countries. Races battle other races. Religions battle other religions (or even their own). It is not safe in this world.

God’s chosen people, however, should not be among the worriers. No matter what happens in Israel, or elsewhere, they should know that there is no nation that can stand, or fall, without the consent of *Melech ha Olam*, the King of the Universe. What were the twin towers to God? A speck of dust? No, not even a speck of dust. The prophet Isaiah says, “Behold, the nations are as a drop of a bucket, and are counted as the small dust of the balance.” (Isa 40:15) If the nations, themselves, are as insignificant as the dust you don’t even bother to clean from a scale because it won’t change the weight, then how much less are two buildings in a town in a nation? That would seem to make us people, in Billy Bigelow’s words, “a couple a specks o’ nothin’.” And yet it is not true that “we don’t count at all.”

Although in size we must seem as the Whos to Horton, God cares for us. We could consider ourselves as less than an atom in a drop in the bucket, but God holds us in higher regard. “What is man, that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour.” (Ps 8:4-5) Although the nations are insignificant dust, people are of great importance.

God took a shepherd—a foreigner in Midian—and made him the greatest leader the world has ever known. He turned a shepherd boy into a king. He made the son of an idolater into the “father of many nations.” If he can raise up a Moses, a David, an Abraham from nothing, why should I fear some faceless terrorist? The God of Abraham and Moses and David is my God. Whom do I need fear? If he crowns me with glory and honor, who can take it from me? They can take my life, but they can’t take me.

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CASCADE[®] FOR THE SOUL

Supposedly the cheap soaps used in dishwashing machines leave water spots on glassware. Cascade[®] brand dishwashing soap accurately claims that it leaves no water spots. When dishes are washed using that soap, they generally come out thoroughly clean. We need a spiritual Cascade[®] in our lives.

Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world. (Jas 1:27)

What is the spiritual dish soap that will keep us “unspotted from the world?” We might say that it has three ingredients.

Prayer

We can not keep ourselves from water spots by ourselves. Just as a dishwasher needs soap to help remove spots, we need prayer to help us stay unspotted from the world. The only source of that help is God, and the means by which we request it is prayer.

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bruises from the flesh,
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unspotted.

James was a firm believer in prayer. If he was indeed the brother of Jesus, as many scholars believe, then perhaps his insistence on prayer was a reaction to his former unbelief in the Messiahship of his brother. If he had prayed more when younger, perhaps he would have accepted Jesus as the Messiah earlier. In any case, he says that the wisdom that God gives, which will help us avoid the spots of the world, comes by prayer. “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” (Jas 1:5) This verse even contains a kind of paradox. If you lack wisdom, pray; and God will give you what he has already given everyone. If God gives wisdom liberally to all, how can anyone not have it? Only by having laid it aside. But even then we can go back to God and say, “that wisdom you gave me—I lost it. Please sir, may I have more?” Unlike the master of the poorhouse in *Oliver Twist*, God will give more, and abundantly, no matter how many times we lose our previous allotment of wisdom.

Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms. Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: And the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much. (Jas 5:13-16)

Prayer is appropriate in times of affliction, sickness, and sin. It will raise our spirits, heal our illnesses, and heal us of sin. When afflicted by the world we may be spotted with bruises. The bullies of the world do not like us because we show them what righteousness is, and they are ashamed by the sight. So they bruise us; they give us the spots that they know how to give. Yet prayer will deal with those spots. Even if it doesn't remove the bruises from the flesh, it keeps the soul unspotted. Many of us have been spotted by measles or chicken pox. Some in this world are spotted by AIDS, or (even in my home state) plague, or countless other diseases. Prayer again reduces those spots. Sometimes God may not cure the physical illness, but will strengthen the soul. Most importantly, when we find the spots of sin threatening our spiritual well-being, prayer will remove them more surely than the best dishwashing soap.

Study

There was a company that made bicycles. In each box they placed all the necessary parts. Amateurs would open the box, pour out the contents, and try to figure out how to put them together. Maybe, after frustrating hours of fruitless labor, they would read the piece of paper taped to the front of the frame in each box. The paper contained a simple admonition. “If all else fails, follow the directions.” How do we know what God wants of us, unless we read and study his word?

Paul told Timothy, “All scripture inspired of God is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly furnished unto every good work.” (2 Tim 3:16-17) This is just another way of saying that God's word is the Cascade[®] of the soul. Look at some of the words he uses. Doctrine teaches us what “unspotted” is. Reproof and correction are designed to remove the spots that had already marred our brightness. Instruction in righteousness helps us stay unspotted. Complete and thoroughly furnished represent the condition of being unspotted.

I will grant that Paul was probably talking specifically about the Old Testament scriptures. However, whether he knew it or not, his writings and others also qualify as “all scripture.” The gospels and Acts, the epistles, and the book of Revelation are at least as important as the TaNaCh (the Law, Prophets, and Writings—i.e., the Old Testament) in guiding us toward being unspotted.

In another place Paul tells us not to be drunk with alcohol, “but be drunk with the Spirit.” (Eph 5:18) Later in the same letter he tells the Ephesians that that Spirit is the word of God. (Eph 6:17) My experience with those who are filled with alcohol indicates that they are often spotted. Many times this includes spiritual filthiness, but it can be manifested in physical spots of dirt, bodily excretions, and vomit. Paul says not to be like that. Instead, being drunk with the word of God removes spots. It leads to such fruit as “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self control.” (Gal 5:22-23) Only through study of God’s word do we achieve these; only through study can we know what it is to be clean of spots.

Fellowship

Several years ago I helped coach a San Diego, California, Special Olympics Track Team. During one meet I was on the infield of the track at the final turn, waiting with my group for our first event. The mile competition was being run. One of our team’s older athletes was on the track, and so I cheered him on each of the four times he past the corner where I was standing. After he finished the race, he came up to me and gave me a hug. “Coach,” Frank said, “I was ready to quit on that last lap, but then I heard you cheering me on. I couldn’t quit. I finished the race, and set my personal best time for the mile. If you hadn’t been standing here, I wouldn’t have finished the race.”

Sometimes life is like that mile. We are ready to quit, ready to give in to water spots. But then somebody else says, “You can do it!” Somebody else may say, “I have been there. I’ll help you through.” We need other people. That is why God saw fit to establish the church.

“And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and good works; not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another.” (Heb 10:24-25) What is the purpose of our assembly, our fellowship together? This writer says that it is for encouragement. Not just any encouragement; encouragement to keep oneself unspotted. While the assembly of the church does participate in worship to God, the primary purpose appears to be uplifting one another. Paul said that was one of the primary reasons we sing together. “Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.” (Col 3:16) We sing praise to God, but we

also sing encouragement and correction to each other. Otherwise, we could sit at home and worship God. But that is not what he wants.

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted. Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. (Gal 6:1-2)

Here Paul specifically addresses the need for fellowship in keeping the spots at bay. By oneself, it is easy to err unknowingly. Over time a person may start doing things that he can justify to himself. If he has to justify himself to others, he must examine himself more closely. Furthermore, another person may be able, as Priscilla and Aquila did with Apollos, to expound “to him the way of God more accurately.” (Acts 18:26)

This kind of fellowship should not—must not—be limited just to the assembly of the church. We spend far more time in the world than in the assembly. That is the time we need the fellowship more. How often are we tempted during the assembly of the church? How much more often are we tempted outside the assembly! In

The purpose for our assembly is encouragement.

America especially, we have relegated our fellowship with others of like faith to a few hours on Sunday and maybe an hour or two during the week. We need that brother or sister on the unexpected corner, shouting encouragement. Otherwise we give in and get spotted.

These three methods for keeping unspotted may be progressive, or they may be equal in value. Without prayer and study, fellowship tends to lose its power. Without fellowship, one may miss something in God’s word another will see. Prayer is a collective and individual thing, both at the same time. We need all three ingredients to make up our Cascade[®] for the soul.

New Web Site Address

The masthead of this issue has my new web site address, www.minuteswithmessiah.com. The older address, minuteswithmessiah.tripod.com, will continue to work. In addition, I am phasing out my other site, www.geocities.com/riversidecoc, at the request of the elders of the Riverside congregation. The questions from the “What Does the Bible Say About..?” portion of that site are now available on the Minutes With Messiah site.

ROOM AT THE INN

Several years ago I was travelling from the Chicago area to Carlsbad, New Mexico. We had left later than expected, and we arrived in Joliet, Missouri, at about one o'clock in the morning. This is not the best hour to try to find a room in a town seventy miles from anywhere on a busy highway. After three motels we began to feel like Joseph and Mary, who found no room at the inn, and thought we might have to stay in a stable. We finally found a room available at the fourth motel we tried. It wouldn't have helped to have reserved rooms before we left Chicago, because most places will not hold a reservation that late at night.

God is a different kind of innkeeper. You see, he never has to put up a "no vacancy" sign. That is because he has made reservations for all his people, and the reservations are good forever. God has "begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, **reserved in heaven for you.**" (1 Pet 1:3-4)

If someone told you that he had made a reservation for you for the penthouse of Trump Tower in New York City, and that all expenses were paid, would you take him up on the offer? Some people would. Many would not. They might have many reasons. Some would be too busy. Others just wouldn't believe in such a windfall. Yet more would think they didn't deserve it, or just wouldn't fit in with that lifestyle.

It is the same with God's reservation in heaven. Many people don't believe in it. Some think they are not worthy of it. Some are just too lazy, or set in their ways, or busy to take God's offer. Many say they will take him up on it, later. Jesus predicted these

and other reactions.

And when one of them that sat at meat with him heard these things, he said unto him, Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God. Then said he unto him, A certain man made a great supper, and bade many: And sent his servant at supper time to say to them that were bidden, Come; for all things are now ready. And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto him, I have bought a piece of ground, and I must needs go and see it: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have bought five yoke of oxen, and I go to prove them: I pray thee have me excused. And another said, I have married a wife, and therefore I cannot come. So that servant came, and showed his lord these things. Then the master of the house being angry said to his servant, ... none of those men which were bidden shall taste of my supper. (Lk 14:15-21,24)

The thing is, this reservation has been made, but there is a time limit to accept it. That limit is called life. Once this life is over, the reservation is cancelled, like when you get to the hotel too late. The chance is gone. "Exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin." (Heb 3:13)

That reservation in Trump Tower does nobody any good if they don't travel to New York and check in. God's reservation goes unused if you don't accept it. To do so, you must believe in the reservation, and in the Innkeeper who holds it. (Heb 11:6, Gal 3:26) You must check in. (Gal 3:27) Then you can enjoy. After all, heaven is better than the penthouse at Trump Tower.

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