



MINUTES WITH MESSIAH

Volume 6, Issue 1

Web Site: <http://www.minuteswithmessiah.com>

November 2004

INTO THE HERD

We should have gotten used to the teacher doing the unexpected, but really never did. Such was the case the day that he got into a boat and asked us to go to the other side of the sea. We spent a lot of time on that water, but cross over to the other side was an uncommon request. We didn't often go there, not to Gadara.

It's not that the people themselves bothered us. It's just that it was so easy to become unclean. If we went over there, we usually packed our own lunches. After all, you couldn't count on getting a kosher meal. This was Gentile pig-herder country.

But we did as the Teacher asked. When we landed some of the people warned us about a wild man in the area. They said he broke ropes and chains like Samson. He didn't live in a house, like a respectable person. He sounded dangerous. So what does the Teacher do but head outside of town, just to the area where the people had warned us against.

As we approached the place, Matthew started to object. He couldn't go there. He was of a priestly family, and we were headed straight for the tombs. Being among the dead would make him unclean. His reservations, though, didn't sway the Teacher's resolve, so even he continued on with us.

We could hear the man as we entered the tombs. Who couldn't? With the screaming and shouting, and the rattling of broken chains, there was such a racket that more than one of us was ready to turn tail, then and there. But the Teacher calmly walked on, until he came within sight of the man.

What a sight he was, too. He was naked from head to toe, but you could hardly notice. His hair was long and tangled. He was covered with dirt; you might say he was clothed with it. He seemed to be going in all directions at once, as if he was being pulled this way and that.

In spite of all this, or maybe because of it, the Teacher walked forward and spoke to the man. He didn't try to soothe him. He said something strange: "Come out of this man!"

When he heard this command, the man screamed. He yelled many things, but one of his utterances really struck me. "What have I to do with you, Yeshua, son of God most high?" We had never seen this man before. Yet here he was, calling the Teacher by name, and calling him

the son of God. A Gentile. Yet this came out of his mouth! We were all dumbstruck.

The Teacher didn't react the way I expected. He just asked a simple question. "What is your name?"

The answer was just as strange. "We," (not I, but we) "are Legion. We beg you, do not send us into the Abyss. Let us go into that herd of swine, over there."

Now, there was a vast herd of these unclean beasts feeding nearby. The Teacher commanded Legion to come out of the man and into the swine. All of a sudden, the whole herd started running as one, down the hill and straight into the water. All drowned.

Several men who had been herding the swine started running toward the town. We knew trouble would soon be coming. Meanwhile, the Teacher took some clothes he had brought along, cleaned and dressed the man. Such a change had come over him that he now sat calmly, awaiting the townspeople. When they arrived and asked who he was he explained everything. He had been filled with many evil spirits, but the Teacher had sent them into the herd.

When they heard this, the men of the town started telling the Teacher what we had been saying all along. Go back home. Get into the boat and go back where we had come from.

When the man heard this, he begged to go with us, but the teacher wouldn't let him. "Go home," he said, "and tell everyone what God did for you." And this he did.

I saw a lot of things in my time with the Teacher. I later saw even greater things than this. But at this time I really began to believe that he was what the devils had called him. He was the son of God.

(Based on Luke 8:26-39)

CONTENTS

Into the Herd	1
What Is Salvation?	2
A House in La Jolla	4

All articles Copyright 2004 by Tim O'Hearn unless otherwise noted

WHAT IS SALVATION?

Back when I was involved in formal debates, I learned that the first requirement of the first speaker was to define terms. If you didn't define terms from the beginning, both sides would present arguments that might have nothing to do with each other. They might even both agree. It would also be possible to creatively define terms, and if the other side did not object to the definition, use your limited definition to exclude the other side's arguments. Understanding what everybody meant by a term was essential. No valid discussion could continue without such definition. It was dangerous to assume that "everybody" knows what is meant by a given word. "Everybody" may be just you.

I have found the same thing true in discussions of religion and the Bible. What one person knows to be true by his definition may not be true by someone else's definition. Then it becomes extremely important to use neither man's definition, but the Bible's. I have come recently to find that this is especially true when discussing whether immersion is necessary, and whether it comes

If there is not something to be saved "from," salvation is universal and meaningless.

before, at, or after salvation. Interestingly, the term that needs definition most clearly is not baptism. To most people it is not part of the argument whether baptism is by immersion or not. The critical definition in such a discussion is what is meant by salvation.

Many people, especially the Baptists and the "nondenominational" churches (many of which hold essentially Baptist doctrines), will say that they believe baptism is an essential command of God. A common statement of their faith is that one becomes saved, and then if they are not subsequently baptized they are in violation of God's will. One can become saved without baptism, but is sinning if they aren't baptized. Different groups will disagree whether one can stay saved without it, or whether sinning after salvation can cause you to lose your salvation.

Salvation is belief?

Because I wasted considerable time composing e-mails discussing baptism with an individual, I finally asked him what he meant by salvation. Eventually he defined salvation as belief. One is not saved "from" anything, except perhaps unbelief. Once we got the definition out of the way, it became easier to point out the inconsistencies of his position.

If salvation is defined as belief, then the scriptures say that the devil and his angels are saved. "You believe that there is one God, you do well. The devils also believe, and tremble." (Jas 2:19) If salvation is defined as belief, then whether one repents or continues in sin is irrelevant to salvation. But Paul says in Romans 6:1 that we must not continue in sin. Peter contrasts salvation with both unbelief and sin. "And if the righteous be saved, where shall the ungodly and sinner appear?" (1 Peter 4:18)

The interesting thing about defining salvation as belief, or any other way that it is not defined by scripture, is that you can work out salvation to your own desires. If salvation is the same as belief, then I don't have to obey. I don't have to repent. In fact, I can be in the interesting position of being saved while refusing to obey a direct command of God (baptism).

What are we saved from?

Language being language, on the other hand, requires us to follow some basic assumptions about a word. In the case of salvation, we must be saved from something. If there is not something to be saved "from," salvation is universal and meaningless.

So, if salvation is being saved from something, what must we be saved from? Many would say we are saved from our old life. We were sinners, and now we are saved from that life and made to be not-sinners. It has nothing to do with forgiveness of the old sins, but everything to do with how we are to live henceforth. The problem with that definition is that it doesn't negate the necessity for baptism at the moment of salvation. Paul told the Romans that they knew full well that their new life began only at the time they were baptized.

Know ye not, that as many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (Romans 6:3-4)

The transition between Jesus the teacher and Jesus the savior was his death, burial, and resurrection. That, along with the post-resurrection appearances, is what Paul defines as the gospel. (1 Cor 15:1-8) In like manner, the transition between the old life of sin and the new life of following Christ requires a death (to the old life), a burial (baptism), and a resurrection (from baptism) into a new life. There can be no resurrection without a burial. There can be no new life without resurrection. Therefore, there can be no new life without baptism.

Others might say we are saved from a life without Christ. They would say that you first ask Christ to come into your life, then you are baptized to show others that you now are in Christ. Of course, the Bible presents a different picture. “For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus, for as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” (Gal 3:26-27) To be in Christ, to put on Christ, one must be baptized. It is not a work of man, any more than faith is a work of man. Paul even equates baptism with faith. If insistence on baptism for salvation leads to “works salvation,” then Paul says that salvation by faith is a “works salvation.”

Still others, myself included, will argue that salvation should be defined as forgiveness of sins. Why did man need a savior? Because of sin. “For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.” (Romans 5:19) (Read the whole chapter. Paul contrasts Adam's bringing sin into the world with Christ's taking it away.) If Adam had not sinned, Christ had not died.

If we need to be saved to be restored to life with God, then salvation must be from sin. If we are to be in Christ, we must have our sins forgiven. If we are to walk a new life of sinlessness, we must have our sins forgiven. So how do we have our sins forgiven? The Bible only lists one way—baptism. “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ **for the purpose of remission of sins.**” (Acts 2:38, emphasis mine) “And now, what are you waiting for. Arise and be baptized **and wash away your sins**, calling on the name of the Lord.” (Acts 22:16)

If salvation is forgiveness of sins, and if we can be saved without baptism, then we can be saved without having our sins forgiven. To show the error of that reasoning, let me rephrase it. If we can be saved without baptism, then we can have our sins forgiven without having our sins forgiven. Anyone who says you can be saved and then baptized, or saved and baptism is optional, must define salvation in such a way that you can be saved while keeping your old sins.

Jesus did not die to save anyone

What is more, anyone who says that you can be saved without being baptized is saying that Jesus did not

die to save man. Man can be saved without the death of Jesus Christ. Now I can just hear the collective gasps and objections of people around the world. After all, isn't the whole point of Christianity that Jesus came and died to save people? If you can be saved without Christ, why would he have died? You might just as well be a Buddhist, a Muslim, or an agnostic. No Christian that I know would say that Jesus died for nothing. Yet by their definitions of salvation, that is just what they say.

Jesus died to take away sin. That was the purpose of his death. Without that death, there is no forgiveness of sin.

For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh, how much more shall the blood of Christ...purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? ... So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many. (Heb 9:13-28)

The writer of this beautifully constructed argument contends that the reason Jesus had to die on the cross, the reason he had to shed blood, was sin. Since blood is required for remission, then the only reason for

The Bible lists only one way to have our sins forgiven—baptism.

Jesus' death was forgiveness of sins. Since the only way to have our sins forgiven is to be baptized, to replay his death and burial and resurrection, then to say that we can be saved without baptism is necessarily saying that we can be saved without Jesus having died.

If salvation is anything other than forgiveness of sins, then Jesus died for some other reason than to save us. If, then, Jesus died for some other reason than salvation, then the Law of Moses and the animal sacrifices going back to Cain and Abel are all meaningless. The Law, according to the author of Hebrews, was a shadow of the true substance. If the substance is not salvation, then the shadow is false. If the shadow is false, the Bible is false and unnecessary. If the Bible is unnecessary, then faith is also false. If faith is false, then it fails to save, regardless of how one defines salvation. Now we get to the real point. If one does not define salvation as forgiveness of sins, it doesn't matter how they define it. It is all an illusion. If one, necessarily, defines salvation as forgiveness of sins as the Bible does, then one must define salvation as coming not before or after, but at the point of, baptism.

It is all in the definition.

A HOUSE IN LA JOLLA

A preacher friend of mine once told about a visit he made to a man's home in La Jolla, California. First, you must understand that La Jolla is known for expensive homes and rich residents. It is to San Diego roughly what Beverly Hills is to Los Angeles. As the preacher came up to the house he noticed a luxury car in the driveway. As he approached the door he could see, through a large picture window, a living room full of expensive furniture. This appeared to be the quintessential La Jolla home. Once he got inside, however, he realized that it was all for show. The owner of the house lived on a pallet in the bedroom. The closet may have been filled with expensive suits, but the other furniture in that room was a box for a table. The man had to look like a millionaire, but could barely make the payments on the house and the car. He didn't need a health club membership; he stayed thin through near starvation. The man was, by strict definition, a hypocrite, an actor.

What could make a man live like this? What compelled him to put up such a front, when he could have afforded to live comfortably? I don't know. I can guess, though, that he regarded more of what people thought of him than anything else. He wanted to be seen by men, no matter what the personal cost.

Jesus talked about people like that. There were some in his day that considered what men saw more important than what God saw.

But all their [the scribes and Pharisees] works they do for to be seen of men: they make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments, And love the uppermost rooms at feasts, and the chief seats in the synagogues, And greetings in the markets, and to be called of men, Rabbi, Rabbi. (Matt 23:5-7)

Actually, this attitude is not all that uncommon. The degree may differ from person to person, but most of us care what others think of us. If we didn't, the world would be full of unkempt, uncouth, uncaring people. Some terms used for those that don't care what others think of them are antisocial, autistic, and psychopathic, depending on cause and degree. We need to worry about how we appear to others. It is what keeps most of us from stealing, and a host of other sins.

What Jesus objected to, though, was not the normal concern for our appearance. What he condemned was excess. You see, what matters most is what God thinks of us. When we put other people in God's place, God doesn't like it. He told the Israelites not to put anyone in His place, because he was a jealous God. (Ex 20:4-5) He wants the best for us, and the regard of men is less than the best.

Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them: otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven. Therefore when thou doest thine alms, do not sound a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, They have their reward. (Matt 6:1-2)

The real difference is the reward. That man in La Jolla had his reward. He had the admiration of men, and could hope for no more. After all, he strove for no more. What man can give doesn't last. Celebrity is short-lived. On the other hand, when we put God where he belongs, and seek his approval, the rewards are permanent and eternal. Why should we seek the lesser reward? Why look only to the short future? God has so much more for us.

Timothy J. O'Hearn
737 Monell Dr NE
Albuquerque NM 87123