



# MINUTES WITH MESSIAH

Volume 6, Issue 8

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

June 2005

## WHICH IS THE HEAD?

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body. (Eph 5:22-23)

These days, perhaps throughout all time, this has been a controversial passage. I don't intend to add to the controversy. At least, I don't intend to do so in the normal thinking on this passage.

The most blatant violation of this passage, however, is not the Women's Liberation Movement. It is not the large percentage of single parent families in America. It is not the henpecked husbands around the world. Instead, it appears that the worst violation of this passage is the elevation of the church over Jesus the Christ. This passage says that the authority in marriage is a reflection of the authority in the church. Christ is the head; the church is the body. Christ is the savior; the church is the saved.

The elevation of the church over Jesus is not new. It is not the result of modernist thinking. In fact, it may be the parent of such thinking. How can we know when a church has been elevated over Christ? There may be several symptoms. Any one of these may be cause for alarm. If more than one is true of a church, it is probably elevating church over Christ.

One symptom is putting church doctrine over the Bible. I regularly have people ask me, "What does the church say about" something? We see churches that publish their own catechism or creed. Instead we should be asking what the Bible says or what Jesus says about those subjects. When someone brings up a scripture that opposes what a church wants to do, which takes priority—the scripture or what the church says? (Even if church and Bible doctrine agree, which is considered more important?)

Another symptom is that members separate church from daily life. "I will get drunk on Friday night, but not on Saturday because I can't be hung over for church." "Church is church and business is business, and never the twain shall meet." Anyone who leaves his Christianity in the church building when he leaves is guilty of putting the church over Christ. This can be at a personal or even a congregational level.

When a church elevates membership, and gaining membership at all costs, they should be worried that they are putting the church over Christ. Does a church advertise that a celebrity is a member (or preacher)? Does the racial or ethnic make-up of the church matter? Even if the who doesn't matter, some churches elevate the how many. A congregation of thousands that don't follow Christ is less impressive than a congregation of five who live for him. Related to this is how the numbers are obtained. Jesus said, "I will draw all unto me." (Jn 12:32) Paul said, "And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified." (1 Cor 2:1-2) When a congregation or a church uses anything but the gospel of Jesus Christ to gain membership, they are elevating the church. Does the church advertise Bible-based preaching, or the gym? Do they emphasize the (entertaining?) method of the teaching and singing, or the message taught?

When facilities become the first priority, Jesus loses that position. Which is more important, a new building or new members? Does the congregation insist on a building, when a storefront or a rented school is more appropriate to their membership and programs? Is the church building only used for Sunday morning, Sunday night, and Wednesday night assemblies (and the preacher's office where he hides)?

The church of Christ (in the Biblical sense, regardless of what name it wears) is just that. The church which belongs to Christ. He is not the Christ of the church. When we make him that we are standing the church on its head.

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# A DELAYED VISIT

Everybody reacts to bad news in a different way. Still, it was a surprise to some of us when the Teacher responded the way he did. It was winter, and we were in the wilderness on the east bank of the Jordan, near where John had immersed many people. The teacher is never hard to find, so it was no surprise when some messengers came to us. They were from our friend Lazarus. The messengers said that he was seriously ill.

The Teacher's response was that Lazarus wasn't sick unto death, but for the glory of God. We didn't understand this last phrase, but we accepted that he knew whether Lazarus would die or not. Still, it was surprising that we waited two more days before setting off for Bethany. As close as Jesus was to Lazarus and his sisters, we thought that he would leave right away, even if he wasn't as sick as the messengers seemed to think.

The Teacher had grown to love this family more than anyone else in this part of the country. When we were down near Jerusalem he knew he had a second family in the neighborhood. At one time he had had to referee between the sisters, but their devotion to him and his teachings had overcome their differences.

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near Bethany in the  
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After two days we crossed the Jordan and were back in Judaea. While some of us had been surprised at the delay, there were others who were surprised at the decision to go. After all, Bethany was about two miles from Jerusalem. The Teacher had recently barely escaped stoning there.

During Hanukkah, the Teacher had gone to the Temple. Some people there had cornered him in Solomon's Portico and demanded to know if he was Messiah. A couple of years earlier Peter had told him that we believed he was Messiah, but he told us not to tell anybody yet. I guess that was still his policy, because he refused to answer them directly. He did strongly hint that he was, however, and for that they tried to stone him. (See "And It Was Winter" in the November 2002 issue.) Some of our group were afraid that they would still try to kill him.

In response the Teacher said, "We have to walk in the daylight. If we walk at night we will stumble." He was always saying something strange like that. It made some of us think. It just confused others. Then he told us that Lazarus was sleeping.

Somebody said, "If he is asleep then he must be getting better. His fever must have broken."

The teacher said, "I'll be more plain. Lazarus is dead."

You could have knocked us all over with a feather! Had the teacher been wrong? Had Lazarus been on the verge of getting well, but then had a setback? Surely if he knew Lazarus was dying he would have left earlier. He clearly wasn't worried about being stoned.

But the shocks were still coming. The Teacher then said, "I am glad for your sakes that I wasn't there, to the intent that you might believe. Nevertheless, let us go to him." That almost sounded like he was blaming us for his not leaving earlier. He could be difficult to comprehend at times.

Still, Thomas spoke up and said, "Let's go with him. If we die, we just die with him."

That sealed it. We all went with him to Bethany. Naturally, it took a few days. At least we had been in the Jordan Wilderness and not home in Capernaum.

By the time we got to Bethany, Lazarus had been in the grave four days. The family was sitting Shiva, and many people had come from Jerusalem to be with them. Not only did the Teacher love them, so did many others.

Before we even got into town Martha came running out to meet us. She accused the teacher, saying, "If you had been here my brother would not have died." He responded that Lazarus would rise again. Martha wondered that he would try to start a theological discussion now, when her brother was lying in his grave and she needed comfort. She was to realize soon that this was no mere discussion about Pharisaic philosophy.

After Martha went back to the house, the Teacher sent for Mary. He waited for her where Martha had met us. Soon Mary came to him. A lot of people were following her. Some said they thought she had been going to the tomb. Instead she had come to him at his bidding. Not surprisingly, when she first saw him she said the same thing her sister had. "If you had been here he wouldn't have died."

This time the Teacher just asked to be shown where the body had been buried. He had seen her weeping, and those who were with her. Everyone saw his compassion as he wept with her. If anyone doubted how much he loved this family, they could see it now. Many commented on it long afterward.

Some, though, thought the same thing the sisters had. The Teacher had healed many people in Galilee. He had even healed some in Judaea. People knew he could have healed Lazarus. They were murmuring this as we walked to the tomb. I don't think they were accusing him. I think it was more like they were wishing he had gotten there in time. It was only we who had been with him that knew that he could have been here, but didn't come right away.

Soon we came to the tomb. Since we hadn't gone into town it was fairly close. In Capernaum we often had to cut into the rock to bury people, or even buried them in the earth rather than a tomb. Jerusalem, though, and its environs, had many caves. It was not unusual for somebody to be buried in one of them. Sometimes a rich man might even plant a paradise, a garden, around the cave he had bought for his tomb.

Lazarus had, like so many in this area, been buried in a small cave. A boulder had been rolled in front of it and painted white. After all, the priests needed to know where the bodies were buried so they could avoid the area. They couldn't perform their duties if they had been too close to a dead person. After the flesh had decayed, residents of this area had adopted a practice of collecting the bones into a small stone box, or ossuary, and putting it to one side of the tomb. That way the tomb could be reused if necessary.

The teacher asked that the stone be rolled away. Martha, who was always the practical sister, said, "Rabbi, he has been buried four days now. Surely he stinks. You don't want to do this."

The teacher reminded her of their discussion earlier. We had thought they were discussing in the abstract. However, he now said, "Didn't I tell you a few minutes ago to trust me and you would see God's glory?" He then pointed to two of our group to roll the stone away.

How can I ever forget what happened next? Instead of just looking into the tomb as we all expected, the Teacher yelled with a loud voice, so everyone could hear him. Now most of us had heard that voice before. It was the voice he used when teaching large crowds. Next to a rock or mountain for a sounding board, it was a voice that could carry over a large area. Sometimes, when we got too close while he was teaching we even felt like it was a voice that, under the right circumstances, could be heard all over the world. He began praying, saying "Father, thank you for hearing me. I know you always do, but I say it now so that these people will know that you sent me." We certainly weren't expecting what he said next, though. He called to Lazarus in the tomb just like he would call him out of his house sometimes to go on a walk. "Lazarus, come out." And you know what? Lazarus came at his bidding, just as he had done so many times before.

Have you ever heard a professional wailer scream? Not wail, like in a house. Scream, as in fright. Unfortunately, I was standing next to one. When she saw Lazarus coming out of that hole, she practically deafened my left ear.

Lazarus came out of that cave, wrapped in a shroud, with his face covered with the usual separate cloth. The Teacher told a couple of us to get the grave clothes off of him. I was one who helped. After all, I had to get away from that screaming mourner. The funny thing was that Lazarus didn't stink. The grave clothes did. But he showed no sign of having been dead.

A lot of people came to see Lazarus. I think more came to see him now that he was alive than had come to sit Shiva when he was dead. Of course some of the unbelievers wanted him dead all over again. Fortunately they couldn't get to him. Unfortunately, or so it seemed at the time, they soon got to the Teacher.

Not two months later, as Passover was approaching, Mary poured some expensive ointment on the Teacher, and wiped it with her hair. When Judas objected the Teacher said that she did it because he was

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about to die. Maybe it had been left over from Lazarus' burial. I don't know. I do know that within a week the Teacher was dead, betrayed by that same Judas who had objected to the anointing. Not only that, but within a week and a half, the Teacher was with us again. Less than two months after he raised Lazarus, he raised himself.

Now we understood what he had said. For our sake he had delayed. He did so in order that we would see God's glory, and be prepared when he came back to us. Lazarus spent four days in the grave. The Teacher did him one better. He was only there for three.

*(Based on John 10 through 12, and Luke 10)*

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# ***THE BEGGING FOREIGNER***

The highlight of the holiday of *Shavuos* (Pentecost, which is June 13 in 2005), at least since there is no Temple to which to bring the first fruit offering, is the reading of the scroll of Ruth. There are several reasons for this. Perhaps the primary reason is that Ruth was allowed the gleanings of the field of Boaz, and the law that allowed that was directly associated with the law of *Shavuos* (Lev 23:17-22).

Rabbi Yehuda Prero gives another reason the book is read on *Shavuos*. The Law of Moses was given on that day. Among the laws was a restriction on men of certain nations entering into the assembly of the Israelites. "An Ammonite or Moabite shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to their tenth generation shall they not enter into the congregation of the LORD for ever: Because they met you not with bread and with water in the way, when ye came forth out of Egypt; and because they hired against thee Balaam the son of Beor of Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse thee." (Deut 23:3-4) Ruth was a Moabitess. Tradition says she was a princess of Moab. Rabbi Prero proposes that Samuel (who is commonly credited as the author of the book) wrote it to show that King David was legitimately entitled to the throne. The passage about Moabites not being allowed into Israel, the book points out, was prohibitive of *Moavi* (masculine) and not *Moavis* (feminine). By the strict interpretation of the Oral Law, David was legitimate because Ruth was allowed to marry into the nation.

By now many of my readers are probably saying, "That's nice, but what does that have to do with me?" Perhaps it is just an obscure point, some ephemera I picked up along the way. Perhaps, though, it says something about Pentecost for Christians.

I have previously written about how Ruth was a picture of Israel and their acceptance of the Law. (May, 2001) Perhaps she is also a picture of those of us who are not Jewish and of our acceptance as people of God.

It doesn't matter to God that Ruth was a Moabitess and a woman. She showed the desire to follow him and the traits he desired in his followers. "Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free: but Christ is all, and in all." (Col 3:11) Ruth shows us that God can make whatever he wants of us, regardless of our circumstances. One year she was a Moabitish princess begging grain. Shortly thereafter she was the "Mother of Royalty." God is less concerned with our past than with our future. "Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? ... And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God." (1 Cor 6:9,11)

It is probably significant that the church of Christ was first preached on *Shavuos*. Just as the first covenant was confirmed on that day, so was the greater covenant also. Although Cornelius, the first non-Jewish Christian, didn't come in for about ten years, and we don't know what date Peter preached to him, he represents the completion of that first *Shavuos* after Jesus died. His eligibility was reflected in the same gift given to the apostles on Pentecost. That gift signified the new covenant with the Jews and now with non-Jews. "But ye are a chosen generation, ... Which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God: which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy." (1 Pet 2:9-10)

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