



# MINUTES WITH MESSIAH

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## GOD'S GOOD GIFTS

Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. (James 1:17)

Whatever gift we receive from God, we should be able to say it is good and perfect. I have heard the above scripture applied to good weather, good jobs, good friends. While God may give these things, it is not such things that James is talking about here. After all, he "sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." (Matt 5:45)

James is talking about spiritual things, not physical. He contrasts the good and perfect gifts with lust begetting sin which begets death. It is valueless to compare a good job to sin and death. Instead, the good gifts of God relate to salvation. In this case, he even describes the good gifts in verse 18. "Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures." What is good is God's begetting us as firstfruits. It is our salvation.

In other scriptures we find reference to God's gifts to us. While these gifts are spiritual, we must distinguish between them and what Paul calls "spiritual gifts" in 1 Corinthians 12-14. Those gifts were from God, and were indeed good. However, they were not "perfect." They were temporary, limited, and for a specific purpose. The spiritual gifts of healing, prophecy, and speaking in human languages not learned in the normal way (tongues), were primarily for the preaching of the gospel until it was in a completed, written form. Once the New Testament was completed (I believe that is what Paul meant by "that which is perfect" in 1 Cor 13:10), the miraculous gifts were no longer necessary. Those gifts were temporary. In 1 Corinthians 13 he says the miraculous gifts were to cease. They were incomplete (imperfect).

They were also limited. Not every person had all of those gifts. It is likely that there were some who had none of them. On the other hand, God does give gifts that are to every one of his people, and that are lasting.

The first such gift is faith. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God." (Eph 2:8) Some (many) say that grace is the gift of God. By definition, it is a gift, but this passage doesn't say so. The immediate antecedent of "it" is "faith." Those who know grammar know that means that

faith is the gift in this passage. We are saved by grace, but it is through the faith which God grants us. How does God give us the faith to access his grace? "So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God." (Rom 10:17) God's gift of faith is not arbitrary or irresistible. It comes from knowing the scriptures. Faith is God's gift for the effort we put into learning his word.

A second perfect gift is salvation. Paul calls it justification and righteousness.

(For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.) Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. (Romans 5:17-18)

Paul says in verse 15 that the gift comes "by grace." It is not grace, but results from it. Because of God's favor, even when we did not deserve it, God sent his son to die that justice might be served (justification) and we might be forgiven (righteousness). It is a good and perfect gift, because it makes us good and perfect.

The third gift from God is really not another, but is essentially one with faith and salvation. That is eternal life. "The gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom 6:23) What could be more good and perfect than to spend eternity, beginning right now, with the one who is himself the model of good and perfect? "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Matt 7:11)

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# Peter Says

Tim O'Hearn

Now there was a man, a long time a - go, Who talked to some folks a - bout Je - sus. And those who were there on that Pen - te - cost Said, "Tell me, now where does that leave us?" But Well, Pe - ter still speaks to peo - ple to - day; You'll hear him. The gos - pel's him speak - ing. Yet you will go on and walk in the path That on you its ha - voc is wreak - ing. We But there will be some who lis - ten to him, The one, or the two, or five hun - dred, Who know that their life is bur - dened with sin, Who see how through life they have blun - dered. Some

most of the crowd who heard Pe - ter speak His mes - sage re - jec - ted, don't you see; But some men were pricked and soft - ened their hearts, A few men in thou - sands a mere three. And peo - ple go on to choose our own way, Just like that old crowd who heard Pe - ter. We are what we are, and will be some more: The gos - sip, the li - ar, the cheat - er. Still peo - ple will ask, like oth - ers be - fore, The ques - tion their heart has been bring - ing: "What then must we do sal - va - tion to know?" The ques - tion down through a - ges ring - ing. And

*Chorus*

Pe - ter said:  
Pe - ter says: Re - pent then and be im - mersed. Ev - ry one of you do it, And your sins will be dis - persed, The spir - it be add - ed to it.  
Pe - ter says:

3

Since Pentecost (Shavuot) is June 2<sup>nd</sup> of this year, I thought this an appropriate month to first publish this song. Although I have arranged it throughout for four voices, it is perhaps best sung as a solo with accompanying voices only in the chorus. Each of the verses may be split into two, thus giving the song six verses with chorus after each, but I prefer that it be sung as written. The verse is based on Acts 2, and the chorus is verse 38 of that chapter.

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# ***CHEER HIM ON***

In my early years as a Special Olympics track coach I knew an athlete named Frank. He was one of the few who enjoyed running the mile (which has since been reduced to 1500 meters). In California the athletes rotated from event to event in their age groups. When Frank was scheduled to run the mile, the age group I was coaching was setting up at the last turn, preparing to be called for the 100 meter run. Every time the mile runners came around that turn, therefore, I would cheer them on. As Frank came around the fourth and final time, I stood on the infield at the turn, encouraging him to run hard to the finish. After the race was over, Frank came up to me. He said that he was ready to quit at that final turn, but he heard me cheering him on so he finished the race. He ended up setting his personal best time for the mile.

Although the apostle Paul, being a Pharisee, probably never competed in the Greek games because he would have refused to run nude, he was a fan of racing. He would have understood the relationship between my encouragement and Frank's good finish. In fact, he even wrote about it.

Wherefore, seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us. (Hebrews 12:1)

Racing in front of a cheering crowd is fun. They talk about the "loneliness of the long-distance runner." The sprinter, or even the miler, gets to run in front of people. How much more encouraging it is to run before a crowd of runners! When the people in the stands know what you are going through, their cheers are so much more meaningful. That is why older Christians need to mentor young people. That is why

people who have struggled with addictions are best suited for counseling those who are exhibiting addictive behaviors. We need each other. We can only run for ourselves, but we need the encouragement of the "cloud of witnesses" in the crowd of supporters.

Encouragement from others, as in Frank's case, may make all the difference between giving up and doing your best. If we don't have someone to tell us to keep going we begin to feel like Elijah in the wilderness. "And I, even I only, am left." (1 Kings 19:10) Elijah was told that he was actually one of seven thousand, not one of one. We are the same. No Christian should ever be alone. That is the purpose of the church.

Some people think the church is only for assembling together to worship God. While we do worship God together, that is not the main reason to assemble together. Indeed we find that there is a more important purpose of our assemblies. That purpose is to be the crowd to cheer somebody to the finish line.

And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works. Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching. (Heb 10:24-25)

Frank told me he was ready to quit until he heard me encouraging him onward. How many of those who worship at home without assembling with others end up failing to cross the finish line? We have no way of knowing. We do know that many have finished only because of the encouragement of the assembled saints. Yes, you can worship alone. But then you may not be encouraged. Worse yet, how many Franks will not finish because they didn't hear from you?

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