



MINUTES WITH MESSIAH

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WE'RE NUMBER ONE

We live in a world of sports. Americans are passionate about baseball, football, and basketball. Canadians live and breathe hockey, we are told. The British are so into football (what we call soccer in the States) that the sport has caused riots. Indians and Pakistanis stop everything else, and even share space in a pub, during the cricket matches between those two nations. And don't dare get an Irishman started on hurley, football, or Irish-rules rugby. All of these sports have as one goal determining who is the best, who is number one. After a championship (or even before it) you can see people waving giant foam fingers and chanting "we're number one."

Sports are fun. Sport has its place in life. Some even say baseball is life. But sports have this one failing. Very often they are based on a faulty premise: some person or team can actually be number one. Even the mighty New York Yankees may temporarily claim to be number one, but that is fleeting. (Just look at them in recent years.) In sports a number one ranking is for such a short time that it really means very little. There is only one who can lay claim to being number one, and with Him it is a permanent claim.

"Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one: And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might." (Deut 6:4-5) This is the cornerstone of Jewish life. It is repeated several times a day. "The LORD is one."

Generally people look at this passage and take it to mean simply that there is one God. We are to honor no other gods because there is only one God. While this is definitely part of the meaning of the passage, it is not the whole meaning.

The LORD is one. Our God is number one. Not the Yankees; not Manchester United; not the winner of the World Cup, Stanley Cup, Lombardi Trophy, or the World Series. God is number one. He is now and always number one. While that includes the thought that there is no other god like him, it means so much more.

If God is number one, that means that everything else and everyone else is not number one. "Thou shalt have no other gods before me." (Ex 20:3) Since God is number one, that command to the Jewish people is, in one sense, essentially meaningless. Since no other god can

possibly be before God, how could we put someone in that position? That would be like saying the Chicago Cubs are the best team in the past hundred years. You could say that, but you would clearly be wrong. You could say that a piece of wood is better than God, but that would not make it so. The real meaning of this command, then, may be to be real. God is number one, so root for him. Be on his team.

Because God is number one, all creation is subject to him. And because he created all, he is number one. Kind of a vicious circle, that. If you can find anyone that can create like God did, then God is not number one. "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest?" (Job 38:4-5)

More than that, because God is number one, he will win. Life is more than a sport. Life is, so to speak, life and death. It is not a mere game; it is deadly serious. If that is true, it behooves us to be on the winning side. God's side is the winning side. Always!

"If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom 8:31) "Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us." (Rom 8:37) When we are on God's team we can always say, "We're number one, because our God is number one."

Singer JJ Heller planned on a basketball career. She was a star in high school. Everything looked good for a stellar college career. But in her freshman year of college she started missing shots that had been easy for her. That year was a disappointment. The following year she started writing and performing songs in praise of God. Now those hopes for a basketball career have been totally replaced by her singing career. She learned that sports are not number one; God is.

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WE WERE LIKE THAT?

Man is a self-deceptive animal. We can see the faults in others clearly, but have a seeming inability to see the same faults in ourselves. In fact, that which we hate most in others is often that which we would see in ourselves if we but looked. No wonder Jesus spoke of the one who would take a piece of straw out of another's eye when he has a beam in his. (Matt 7:3-5) We do not like to look at ourselves. We are afraid we would be like the giant in a Patricia McKillip story who, when a stone hit him in the eye and turned it inward, "died of what he saw there."

Paul advocated "forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before." (Php 3:13) Nevertheless he also knew there was a time to look at what we had been, so that we could appreciate where we are, and where others could be. Thus he wrote to Titus of the past. "For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another." (Tit 3:3) Maybe it is worth looking at these things, so that we can keep them in the past.

Three children

In the Passover Seder there is a discussion of four children. One of those children is wise, and Paul was

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looking back from the perspective of that wise child. When we have obeyed God, we show a wisdom that even the world cannot understand. Taking that perspective, though, we can look back at the other three children: the rebellious child, the one who does not know what to ask, and the one incapable of asking the questions. Paul first addresses these three children in us.

Solomon spoke in the Proverbs of three kinds of people. The wise man follows God. The fool defies God. The simple has not learned about or from God. When Paul uses the word translated fool here, it is really that latter person that he means. There was a time in all our lives when we were the child that was unwise or unlearned. We did not know what questions to ask.

Sometimes a teacher might ask, after presenting a particularly difficult topic, "What questions do you have?" When the teacher gets no questions, he or she may assume that the class understood the topic fully. What may actually be true is that nobody understood even enough to

be able to frame an intelligent question. All of us have been in that situation in relationship to God. Without even knowing that there is a God, how can one ask how to obey him? If one only knows one aspect of God (such as his vengeance or his anger), how can one ask about the totality of God (his love and mercy)? We were lost, and in sin, but did not know enough about God to ask, "What must I do to be saved?" We were foolish.

At some point, many who were merely foolish hear the right answers, and reject them. This is the child that you teach that one plus one equals two and he tries to make it equal three. They know about God, but choose not to know God.

Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools [not the same Greek word as in Titus 3:3], And changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things. (Rom 1:21-23)

Most of us at some time were rebellious and disobedient before God. That may have only lasted a short while, or it may have lasted years. Many people you know are currently in such a state of disobedience. Even that word implies the knowledge to be obedient and the choice to "dis" God by not being obedient. We knew to do right, and chose to rebel.

Still others may have been foolish, and even may have gone through the rebellion, but they still do not obey God even though they might like to. These are the people who have been taught that they are no worse than some Christians. They have been told that everyone is going to heaven (or that everyone will die and that is the end of it). They may even have been told that God chooses who will be saved and who will be lost, so they don't need to do anything. There are any number of other lies that they may have been told. They think they are safe, and don't need to do anything or change their lives in any way. The devil is a great deceiver, and these people have been greatly deceived.

One thing is notable about all three of these people. Paul says that they are all lost. One need not be in open rebellion against God to fail to attain salvation. There are many who think they are saved or are not in need of salvation that will find that they were wrong. Even those who don't know what questions to ask need to learn the right questions, or they will fail to meet God's expectations.

The wrong master

Whether we like it or not, we are all slaves. Nobody is truly independent and free. Everyone is subject to a master. Sometimes we are lucky enough to choose the right one. Paul, in writing to the Romans, assumed correctly that all were slaves.

Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves slaves to obey, his slaves ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But God be thanked, that ye were the slaves of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. Being then made free from sin, ye became the slaves of righteousness. (Rom 6:16-18)

Slavery is a fact of life. Sometimes we make choices that more obviously enslave us. Sometimes those things that we seek for “good” purposes (escape from pain, fitting in with our peers) end up physically enslaving us. At other times the master may be less obvious. Ideally, we choose God as our master and don’t worry about the pain other masters can put us through.

There was a time, and for many still is a time, when we were slaves to “various lusts and pleasures.” Paul uses two different words here, and they are a matter of degree. Most of us know that we can be slaves to lust. This is any desire that is so strong that it causes us to take action to fulfill that desire. Have you ever just wanted to buy something so badly that you would do anything to do so? Have you ever “just had to have that piece of chocolate?” (Now you’re getting personal!) That is lust. We understand slavery to such a strong desire.

Who, though, is a slave to pleasure? Aren’t we supposed to be happy? Did not God make things pleasurable so we would partake in them? Pleasure, after all, is not as strong a desire as lust. Yet, when fulfilling our pleasure comes before pleasing God, then we are slaves to pleasure. When we put our own interests above those of others just so that we can feel good, we are slaves to pleasure. We must put our desires in second place, so that we are not enslaved to them.

I hate you

The last grouping Paul lists is all related to our displeasure with others. In that sense, they may even be an extension of our slavery to lust and pleasure. We dislike others because they threaten our status quo or they have something more than we have. This is the group that we like to think we never participated in. After all, we have never been really hateful to people, only mildly so. We have never wished anyone else were dead, just that they suffered a minor set back. We don’t wish bad on a person, we just wish they were not quite as well off as they are.

Malice could as easily be translated as evil. It is the lack of all goodness. It is opposing someone else just

because it seems the right thing to do. Most of us have never experienced pure malice. We just have had it in a mild form. Envy is that hatred of someone else because they appear to be better or have something better than you. Envy may even be one cause of people’s opposition to God. They envy the life a Christian lives, but rather than follow that life they oppose it with everything they have.

The last couplet is interesting because it may even be mistranslated in the King James Version of the Bible that was quoted above. Instead of “hateful, and hating one another” a more modern translation might accurately say “being hated, and hating one another.” Is that one reason many people are so full of hate; they feel like they are hated? Perhaps it could be said that hate, like physical abuse, is a self-perpetuating cycle. When all one receives is hate, that is all they know how to give. When those that should love them project hatred, they begin to believe hatred is a form of love. Malice, envy, being hated, hating others. It is a cycle that must be broken.

Fortunately, Paul says that all of these things are in the past, for those who love God. We can break the cycle. We can change masters. We can become wise. “All with the swiftness of putting on” (in Shakespeare’s words). That is, all in the swiftness of putting on Christ. After

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looking backward in Titus 3:3, Paul looks at the present.

But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life. (Tit 3:4-7)

Our past is not necessarily our present or our future. While we may be the most self-deceptive animal, we are also hopeful. God has given us the power to choose our way. God has given us the power to choose his way. We can break out of the deception, throw off the rebellion, choose love, and choose God as our master.

“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)

I AM SECOND

The Riverside church of Christ in Albuquerque, New Mexico holds an annual youth rally, Spiritual Explosion. This song was written based on the 2010 theme, "I Am Second."

The musical score is written for piano in 7/4 time. It consists of three systems of music. Each system has a treble and bass staff. The lyrics are written below the treble staff. The score includes triplet markings (indicated by a '3' above a bracket) in both the treble and bass staves. The lyrics are as follows:

I am sec-ond, I am not mine. I put your needs far a-bove me. An-y glo-ry I will de-cline.
I must nev-er be num-ber one. I will put oth-ers be-fore me. I must not leave God's work und-done.
God should al-ways be in first place Be-cause of what he's done for me. He has giv-en me all his grace

My God is mas-ter of me I am sec-ond, I am not first. Through the best times and through the worst
More of Him, and not more me. I am sec-ond, I am not first. Through the best times and through the worst
And now he watch-es o'er me. I am sec-ond, I am not first. Through the best times and through the worst

I've a God who's first in my mind, And I know that he loves me.
My ex-am-ple is God's own son, Giv-ing life to re-store me.
I am liv-ing in his em-brace. He will nev-er ig-nore me.

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