



# MINUTES WITH MESSIAH

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## THE SWORD OF THE SPIRIT

Children like to play fighting games. In my day it was cowboys and Indians. Now that that is a politically incorrect game some play ninja, or knights. Actually, it may be a good thing we played with guns instead of swords, like those games. Once when I ran out of ammunition (caps) I waited behind a corner of the house, and when my older brother came by I jumped out and hit him with the barrel of the gun, just like I had seen in the movies. The resulting cut required stitches, and I couldn't sit down for a while (having been hit elsewhere than the head). Just think. If I had a sword instead of a pistol, what damage might have been done?

I have heard of preachers who would ask the congregation to "hold up your sword." People respond by lifting up their Bibles, or their smart phones with a Bible program on them. It would be more accurate just to stand up. That is because the Bible is not the sword. The sword lives within each Christian.

Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (Eph 6:14-17)

Basic English grammar (not to mention Greek grammar) teaches us that the sword is the Spirit. Note the parallel construction of the various parts of the armor: breastplate of righteousness, gospel of peace, shield of faith, helmet of salvation. Why do people insist then that the sword is the Bible, when in fact it is the Spirit of God? Greek grammar makes this even more clear. Granted, the Bible is the word of God as inspired by the Spirit. But the Spirit, which is the word of God, is more than just printed words on a page or screen. The Spirit dwells in each Christian individually. "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?" (1 Cor 3:16)

If the Spirit is the word of God, and if the Spirit dwells within us, what are the implications? If the word of God is to dwell in us and not just in our Bibles, what does that mean?

One thing it means is that we may be the only Bible some people see. It is easy to ignore the written word. Most people have never read *War and Peace*, *Moby Dick*, or *Finnegan's Wake*. (It took me months to read each, and I still don't understand the last one.) It is easy to choose not to read the printed word. Many people cannot read, or choose not to. It is easier to hear the word read, which is why I am a Bible Ambassador for Faith Comes By Hearing ([www.faithcomesbyhearing.com](http://www.faithcomesbyhearing.com)). But many people may choose not to hear the Bible, either. The one thing they cannot ignore is how a Christian lives. "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven." (Matt 5:16)

Another, related, implication is that we must continually be refreshing the word of God in us. "Quench not the Spirit." (1 Thes 5:19) The Spirit does not always speak to us directly about the will of God. While our consciences can be trained to hear the Spirit, the way the Spirit dwells in us is by our study of, and internalizing, the Bible. We quench (put out, starve) the Spirit by denying food or fuel. That fuel is the knowledge of the Bible. But it is much more. Many people know what the Bible says, and may even be able to quote it, but do not have the Spirit dwelling in them. The Bible is not like *Moby Dick*. Sure, there is a good story in there somewhere. But you can read Melville and forget it. For the Spirit to be effective we must not only read, but understand and practice. One may read *Moby Dick* and never throw a harpoon into a whale, and still get some benefit from the reading. One must put the Bible into practice, however, for the Spirit to dwell in a person. The Bible is not just good stories. It is a way of life. It is the way to life.

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# ***THE METAMORPHOSIS***

Did you ever have a secret that you just could not tell anyone about? One of those burning-in-your-heart, the whole-world-should-hear-about-this secrets? I had one of those for some time. Since the Teacher is no longer with us I can finally tell it. He said I could, after he left.

It all began with a rebuke. We were in Caesarea Philippi, near Mount Hermon. The Teacher had been telling us something about his having to suffer and die, and then be raised after three days. This was the first time he told us this (which he repeated more often in later days). After he told us this Peter took him aside and said something to him. Levi was closest to them, and he says that Peter told the Teacher he would not let such a thing happen, so stop saying things like that. The teacher looked around to see that nobody could hear, made some reference to Zechariah, and then told Peter that he was thinking as man thinks, not as God thinks.

Coming back over to the group of disciples, the Teacher said, "If you want to follow me, you are going to have to give up your own ideas and die on a Roman cross, just like I will." (That elicited a few comments from the crowd.) "What good is it if you get everything you want, but cannot save your own soul? What can you give for your soul?"

I think now that, in part, he was saying that we could not save ourselves, but that he would save us by

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dying on a cross. We did not understand that, then. At the time it sounded like he was preaching against greed. But now that I remember everything he was saying, and in light of subsequent events, he must have been asking us if we could do what he was soon to do? Of course, we could not. He did, though, say that to find life we must lose our lives. It is still hard to understand everything he had to say.

The teacher went on to say that those who are ashamed of him now will not be accepted by him when he "comes in the glory of the Father with the holy angels." Now that was really hard to understand. Obviously he was going to bring an army of angels at some point. We always expected that. Simon the Zealot counted on it. He went on to say that this would be before some of standing there would die. Did he mean that he will be coming back

within a few years to conquer the Roman Empire? Or, looking back, was he referring to his resurrection? Some of us still argue that point. I guess we won't know until the last of his original followers dies.

That, by the way, wasn't the secret. We all knew about all of that. Six days later, though, we were walking along, and the teacher asked everybody to wait for him. He called Peter and my brother and me and asked us to follow him. We were going on a hike up the nearest mountain. Not a hill. A high mountain. The Teacher wanted to climb. We knew he often climbed mountains to pray, so we followed.

We climbed. And we kept climbing. The teacher seemed energized; we just seemed tired. It is not easy climbing a mountain. Unless you have been living in some place like Jerusalem you aren't used to the altitude. Even if you are from Jerusalem you have trouble with a mountain like Hermon. From where we were we could have looked down at Jerusalem like that eagle up there looks down on us. But we followed as best we could. When he finally stopped we were tired. We went to sleep.

Now some might say what followed was just a dream. Some might even say that we were so tired and so high that we experienced a delusion. The problem with those theories is that we all agree that we saw the same thing. This really happened.

Do you remember what happened to Moses on Mount Sinai? The scriptures tell us that when he came down from the mountain his face was shining. The people were so afraid that he had to veil his face until the glow went away. Well, that is just what happened on the mountain. But it didn't happen to us, just to the Teacher. And it was not just his face. His clothes turned whiter than the best bleach on the market could turn them. Looking at him was like looking at the sun. It was a complete metamorphosis into the glory with which he said he would come with angels.

We three awoke. We were aware that we were no longer alone. The Teacher was talking to two other people. I don't know how we knew this, but they were Moses and Elijah. They also were shining. The three of them were discussing the same thing the Teacher had said to us about a week before. They spoke about the death he was going to bring about in Jerusalem.

Two things struck me when I heard that conversation. They were saying that he was going to bring about his own death. Even if it was going to be on a Roman cross, he was going to do something to cause his own death. The other thing was that if we were going to save him from death, all we had to do was keep him away from Jerusalem. Of course, that was easier said than done.

He kept the Law. We had never known him to violate the Law in any way, although he did not always keep the traditions of the Prushim (Pharisees to you Greeks). The Law required that we go to Jerusalem at least three times a year. It was useless to imagine that the Teacher could be kept out of Jerusalem. Still, the thought did cross my mind.

Moses and Elijah started to leave. I suspect that is what caused Peter to say what he did. Maybe he wanted them to stay. Mostly, he just did not know what to say, so he blurted out what came to mind. Peter used to be like that.

“Teacher, it’s a good thing you brought us along. Now you have the physical labor to build three tents; one each for you and Moses and Elijah. Then you can stay here as long as you want.”

Apparently that was just the wrong thing to say. Another voice spoke. It was not the Teacher. It was not Moses. It was not Elijah. It was the same voice some of us had heard when the Teacher had been immersed by John. It was the voice of God. He even started out saying the same thing we had heard then.

“This is my son whom I love.” But then he added, “Listen to him.”

I can tell you we were not ready to listen to anybody. You know how when the scriptures tell of someone seeing the angel of God they fall on their faces? I don’t think they fell any faster than we did. Here is God himself, seemingly rebuking Peter, just as the Teacher had done a week before. I can tell you this; when God rebukes one person, everyone in the vicinity feels the rebuke. We thought we were all going to die. But we didn’t.

Eventually we got up enough courage to look up. There was the Teacher, just as we always knew him. He was alone. In fact, he was touching each of us and encouraging us to get up. It reminded me of the time he had raised that boy in Nain. He had touched the bed they were carrying him on, then spoke him back to life. I wondered if we had actually died and he was raising us from the dead. I don’t think that was the case, but I couldn’t swear it wasn’t.

We started down the mountain. On the way, the Teacher told us not to tell anybody what had happened until after he rose from the dead. Peter was sure not going to tell anybody that God had reprimanded him. My brother and I were too scared to say anything but what the Teacher allowed us to say. I’m not even sure he was telling us not to tell about his transformation. I suspect he was telling us not to tell anybody what we had heard of his conversation. They might get the same idea I had and try to stop him, not understanding the need for his death. Whatever he was telling us not to say, we were sure not going to say anything. At the time I think we were too shocked at what had happened to imagine that anybody would believe us.

Instead of focusing on his command not to tell anyone, though, we mainly heard that bit about rising from the dead. What could that mean? Since we were confused we asked something else. When you don’t understand, change the subject.

“You are the Messiah. Why, then, do the scriptures say Elijah must come first?”

“Elijah did come first. They treated him badly, just as they will treat me badly. They killed him; they will kill me.”

We finally understood something the Teacher said. He was talking about John. But then, maybe we already knew that. Maybe that was why we brought up that particular question. Since we had just experienced something like what had happened when he was immersed by John, maybe we were thinking about John and made that association ourselves. Nevertheless, the Teacher was bringing us back to a discussion of his impending death.

It has been a few years since those events happened. After the Teacher died and rose again we did tell some people about it. Apparently some of those people talked to a man named Paul who has recently started

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I don't think anybody in the scriptures fell on their faces faster than we did.

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telling people about the Teacher. Apparently he is using this incident to teach people about the Way. Some people say he is telling people that their lives need a metamorphosis similar to that experienced by the Teacher. Nor is he wrong. The Teacher was transformed into a glorious appearance. When we follow him we must all be transformed in the same way. With some it may be more obvious than others. Look at Peter. On the mountain he was rebuked for his impulsive speaking. He is still somewhat impulsive, but now he thinks before he speaks. Now he has truly become a leader. Some even say my brother and I underwent a similar transformation.

Ultimately we will all undergo such a metamorphosis. After all, these bodies of ours are of this earth. This earthly body will be discarded, and we will be transfigured into a heavenly body. Like a butterfly, we will undergo the metamorphosis. Like the Teacher, we will be transformed into glory.

That was not an easy incident to keep quiet about. Maybe you can see why I am so glad to be able to tell it now.

*(Based on Matthew 17, Mark 9, Luke 9, and Romans 12:12)*

# ***A RELATIONSHIP***

There is a buzz word popular in many circles today. That word is “relationship.” People talk about their relationships with relatives, friends, and even strangers. Psychologists and psychiatrists especially try to understand us in relation to our relationships. The word has come to mean a sexual liaison, licit or illicit, between two people. Instead of what we used to call an affair, people are in a relationship.

The word has even crept into the religious vocabulary. Songs on Christian radio stations emphasize having a relationship with Christ. Christian writers and speakers are talking about how to better our relationship with God. It seems a natural consequence of the “let Jesus come into your life” movement. We are expected to have an intimate, familial relationship with Jesus, and if we don’t have that relationship then something is supposed to be missing in our spirituality. We are supposed to love God and Christ. After all, the greatest command, according to Jesus and rabbis before him, is “thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might.” (Deut 6:5) There is a big difference, though, between loving God and being in love with God. We are commanded to love in the sense of seeking the highest good for another (the Greek word that is “agape” in Latin spelling). The idea of being in love, though, bears a strong emotional content. We can love our neighbors without being in love with our neighbors. We should love God, but need not base that love on our own changeable feelings and emotions. God does not change, and our love for God need not be based on our changing chemical makeup.

God does want a relationship with his people. Christ wants a relationship with those who would follow

him. That relationship, though, may not be exactly what the current trend seems to think it should be.

The book of Judas (commonly called Jude in English Bibles) was probably written by one of the physical brothers of Jesus. “Jude, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James...” (Jude 1) If anyone had a right to brag about his “relationship” with Jesus, it would have been Judas (not Iscariot). He grew up with Jesus. Even during the time Jesus was wandering the Holy Land preaching he had regular, loving interactions with Jesus. He does not, however, refer to this relationship when addressing his letter. He mentions he is the brother of James, who was a leader in the Jerusalem congregation. In contrast, he calls himself a servant of Jesus Christ. His relationship to Jesus was that of a servant to a master, not a brother to a brother.

When the gospel writers speak of Jesus during the time before he revealed himself with power at the resurrection they use various phrases, often simply calling him Jesus, and sometimes Lord. In all of the books of the New Testament outside the gospels, the most common phrase (occurring 150 times) is “Lord Jesus” or “Lord Jesus Christ.” It seems that even those who had spent years with Jesus, and had the right to some familiarity, become very formal. Peter and John, two of his closest friends on earth, write about “our Lord Jesus Christ.” Whatever their “relationship” might have been on earth, once they realized fully who he was the relationship became that of servant to master, subject to king.

We should have a relationship with Christ. However, it appears that relationship is one of submission, not familiarity. God wants our obedience, not our friendship.

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