



# Minutes With Messiah

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## ***THE PLAN OF SALVATION***

Many years ago those in the Churches of Christ would hear a lot about the “plan of salvation.” Usually this was shorthand for the five “steps” people go through in order to be saved: hear, believe, repent, confess, and be baptized. Although it is legitimate to say that one cannot be saved without these five, it might not be proper to call them God’s “plan of salvation.” They may be requirements for or even sequential steps to salvation, but God’s plan is much broader than just how to access salvation. God’s plan existed long before the church. One could even say the entire Bible details God’s plan of salvation, but that plan is even older than the written word. It is, as the saying goes, older than dirt.

Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot: Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you, Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God. (1 Pet 1:18-21)

It would be wrong to limit God’s plan to a series of actions or inactions, because Peter points out that God had this plan for us from “before the foundation of the world.” Because God is outside of time, he knew that when he created time and man that he would have to have a way for sinful man to return to him. He had to plan salvation as soon as he planned creation.

God’s plan of salvation can be seen as far back as the garden of Eden. “I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.” (Gen 3:15) It can be seen in the binding of Isaac (Gen 22), the sacrifices under the Law of Moses (Leviticus 1-7), and in the prophets (Isa 9, 53).

Some make a distinction between the character of the God of the Old Testament (angry) and the God of the New Testament (loving). This is a false distinction. God has been a loving God from the creation. In those cases where he had to punish Israel (or mankind in general), it was because of his love for man. “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth.” (Heb 12:6) God was, in Israel

showing man the sinfulness of sin. “Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his own sight: for by law is the knowledge of sin.” (Rom 3:20) Only in showing the impossibility of man’s saving himself could God demonstrate the need for his plan.

Once God had demonstrated the need for his plan, he carried it out fully. The introduction was necessary to the story, but one does not quit reading after the introduction. God had something better in mind.

But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building; Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us. 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, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance. (Heb 9:112-15)

God’s plan of salvation is not merely “hear, believe, repent, confess, and be baptized.” Rather, it might be expressed as the gospel: Jesus came as a man; he died as a sacrifice for sin; he was buried; he rose from the dead (and was seen by witness); he is coming back to take his people home.

### ***Contents***

The Plan of Salvation	1
Count the Cost	2
What Innkeeper?	4

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# COUNT THE COST

A recent song says that God is my God “whatever the cost.” An older song asks, “Have you counted the cost.” Jesus even spoke of counting the cost of discipleship.

And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king, going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is yet a great way off, he sendeth an ambassador, and desireth conditions of peace. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple. (Lk 14:27-31)

Jesus was talking about forsaking all that one has. In another sense, though, what he asks us to give up may not be anything we wouldn't gladly surrender to him.

## Fear

It has been said that the Bible says not to be afraid 365 times, one for each day of the year. Whether that is

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true or not, it is certainly true that casting out fear is a major concern of scripture. (The phrase “fear not” occurs only 63 times in the King James Version.)

There is a very healthy fear of which the Bible speaks. The psalmist complains that with the wicked there is no fear of God. (Ps 36:1) Paul tells the Corinthians (2 Cor 7:1) to perfect holiness in the fear of God.

Even in everyday life, a certain amount of fear is good. If it weren't for the fear of fire, we would get burned. Many an electrician will tell you that one needs a healthy respect or fear of what electricity can do to you, so that you don't take dangerous risks.

There are, though, fears that are not so good; fears God wants us to give up. “Herein is our love made perfect,

that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.” (1 Jn 4:17-18) There is a fear that paralyzes us, which love removes.

Perhaps the biggest fear that has hindered the spread of the gospel is the fear of what other people will think or do. People are afraid that others will make fun of them, or hurt them, or even kill them. They may even renounce the faith because of this fear. We hear a lot about the martyrs that went to their deaths in the arenas of Rome rather than renounce their faith. We tend to forget that there were many, perhaps even a majority, who chose life, even if it meant denying Christ. It is a very real fear even today, in many parts of the world. All one has to do is watch the news about beheadings of believers. How much less understandable, considering those who give their lives for the faith, are those of us who fail to stand up for what we claim to believe because we are afraid of a little ridicule or rejection.

The cost of discipleship is giving up that fear “So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.” (Heb 13:6) Jesus said this was a fear to give up because of an even greater fear. “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Matt 10:28)

## Worry

Worry is closely related to fear. One difference is that worry or anxiety is a generalized feeling that is usually less intense than fear. Also, fear often has a clear reason, whereas worry is often baseless. Some estimates are that 85% or more of the things we worry about never happen. For this reason, God wants us to surrender our worries to him.

When you get right down to it, worry is a lack of trust. We don't know what is coming in our lives. We worry because we don't trust that God will take care of the situation. When we worry about something we demonstrate that we lack trust (faith). “But without trust *it is impossible to please him*: for he that cometh to God must trust that he exists, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” (Heb 11:6)

Jesus contrasted trust and worry in the passage we call the Sermon on the Mount. He seems to imply that worry is a very human thing, but also a very controllable one.

Therefore I say unto you, Do not be anxious for your life, what ye shall eat, or what ye shall drink; nor yet

for your body, what ye shall put on. Is not the life more than meat, and the body than clothing? Behold the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are ye not much better than they? Which of you by taking thought can add one cubit unto his stature? And why worry for clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. Wherefore, if God so clothe the grass of the field, which to day is, and to morrow is cast into the oven, shall he not much more clothe you, O ye of little faith? Therefore don't worry, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? (For after all these things do the Gentiles seek:) for your heavenly Father knows that ye have need of all these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Therefore, don't worry about the morrow: for the morrow shall worry for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. (Matt 6:25-34)

Some people have made a distinction between worry and "concern." This is really a matter of degree. This concern that allows you to make plans for a potentially non-existent future is just worry turned down low. Jesus does not make that distinction. He says that following him requires trust; not partial trust, but full trust.

## Hatred

Most Christians will say they have surrendered their hatred. Some will admit that their former lives were characterized by hating themselves and others. Those are probably the ones who have most given up hatred. Many Christians still hang on to their pet hatreds, however.

We say to "hate the sin, but love the sinner." Unfortunately, in the past few years many have driven others away from Christ due to an actual or perceived hatred of the sinner. It is fashionable among Christians today to be openly bigoted against Muslims and homosexuals. Even some who make a living preaching the gospel of love have been known to misquote the Koran to encourage hatred of Muslims in a way that they would decry if the same tactic were turned on them. Others treat homosexual behavior as an unforgivable sin; choosing to believe that they need not teach the gospel to such people because they are somehow undeserving of God's forgiveness. These attitudes have possibly done more in recent years to hinder the gospel than anything else.

Sometimes we even feel that hatred is justified. Militant Muslims are killing Christians, therefore it is only right that we feel the same about them. When we take that attitude we are forgetting what Jesus said in Luke 6. We

are quick to remember verse 27: "But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you." What we forget is that a few verses before (verse 22) he said, "Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you." In the later verse he tells us to love even those that have mistreated us. Part of the cost of discipleship is surrendering our hatred and replacing it with love.

## Sin

The most obvious cost of discipleship is giving up sin. For some this may even be the most expensive cost. Some people may be willing to give up fear, worry, and hatred, but want to hold onto their pet sins. Of course, the obvious reason for following Jesus is salvation, and salvation means forgiveness of sins. (Although one person once concluded that salvation was merely being saved from not being saved, not willing to admit that immersion

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was for forgiveness of sins.) We want to be forgiven of sin in order to go to heaven. It's just that some people want to be forgiven of some sin, and keep others.

There are some people who are perfectly willing to surrender and do their best to sin no more, but are unwilling to surrender past sins. They know they are forgiven for sins they commit after becoming a Christian, but delight in bringing up those sins of which they were forgiven previously. There is nothing wrong with using your former life as an example; there is something amiss when you refuse to accept that your past is forgiven.

The cost of discipleship is surrendering sin. It is not easy. Sin seems to couch at our doors; but we must master it.

Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. (Rom 6:11-13)

Jesus asks us to count the cost of being his disciple. Considering the things we have to surrender, is it really that costly? It cost Jesus his life; in comparison we are just giving up pennies a day.

# WHAT INNKEEPER?

We have just gone through the Christmas season. It is supposed to be a time of love and goodwill, whether or not one believes Jesus was the Christ. It is amazing, though, how judgemental people can get at this time of year. Not in the arguments about the separation of church and state. Nor even in the discussions between secularists and religionists. Rather, some people get very judgemental just reading the story of the birth of Jesus. They make judgements about a person not even mentioned in scripture, based on one small verse: “And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn.” (Lk 2:7)

There are a number of songs that mention “the innkeeper,” usually in a negative way. At least two songs written from the innkeeper’s viewpoint (*Rest* by Jason Gray, and *No Room* by Todd Agnew), picture the man as too busy or too misguided to care for a poor pregnant girl at his door. Others paint a man who is just uncaring.

Since there was an inn, it makes sense there was an innkeeper. It is also reasonable to believe that that position was held by a man. Nevertheless, the scripture makes no mention of him, or of any conversation or confrontation between him and the couple from Galilee. Was he even aware of this couple seeking room, or had he hung out a “no vacancy” sign? The biblical story does not say.

Why do we posit a man, and then portray him as cold and uncaring? Why not make him compassionate? If there is a conversation between the innkeeper and the young couple, why cannot we assume it went something like this.

It was a difficult time, but it only made for a good year for the keeper of the inn in Bethlehem. The emperor had declared that everyone must return to his family

village to be taxed. That meant an unusually busy year at the inn. People had been coming in all summer, and now in early fall it seemed everyone was coming to beat the winter. On top of everything else, it was time for one of the big assemblies in Jerusalem. All the inns in the big city were booked, and people were spilling out to the surrounding town, even Bethlehem, five miles away. Of course, an increase in business meant the innkeeper had to be more watchful that his guests not be robbed. Then one afternoon (why do we assume it was night?), a young couple from Galilee stopped at his door. The woman was obviously with child. (If we must be unkind to the man, maybe we will allow him to wonder why they waited until near her due date to make the trip.) He wanted to help, but there were two considerations. His inn was just too full, and even if it hadn’t been, it was not an appropriate place to birth a baby. The inn was noisy and full of rough men, even at the quietest of times. Then a solution came to his mind. The inn was a two-story structure, with the rooms above and the stable below. The stable was full, too, with all the animals belonging to the guests; but it would be quieter and more comfortable for this couple. And if the weather did turn cold, it was probably warmer than the main floor of the inn. He offered them a corner of his stable, and may have done so for no charge, seeing their poverty and her condition. While they were staying there, the woman had her baby. The manger made a better crib than he could have otherwise provided. He was delighted to have helped. That was what he had gotten into the business for, in the first place.

We should look for the good in the story of the greatest birth in history. Actually, we should assume the good at all times. How wrong of people to be so judgemental of a man they make up. (Now look who’s being judgemental.)

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