



Minutes With Messiah

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ANOTHER TRANSLATION

Many people today subscribe to an interpretation of certain scriptures. This interpretation generally did not exist until the middle to late 1800s, and yet people buy into it as if the apostles believed and taught it. It is based on a literal interpretation of the Revelation, a failure to consider the historical contexts of Daniel and Matthew 24, and a belief that Old Testament prophecies that were fulfilled two millennia ago still await their final consummation. This interpretation goes by a number of names: Premillennialism (which truly does date back to the first or second centuries), Dispensational Premillennialism (which is the 1800s version), Rapture theory. I do not intend to address the whole doctrine at this time, as other articles in Minutes With Messiah have done so to one extent or another. I just want to look at one passage, and see if there are other ways to interpret it, besides the one held by this interpretation.

And Jesus answered and said unto them, Take heed that no man deceive you. For many shall come in my name, saying, I am Christ; and shall deceive many. And ye shall hear of wars and rumours of wars: see that ye be not troubled: for all these things must come to pass, but the end is not yet. For nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilences, and earthquakes, in divers places. All these are the beginning of sorrows. (Matt 24:4-8)

These were the first recorded words Jesus used in response to the apostles' questions about the timing of the destruction of the Temple, the sign of his coming, and the end of the world. And in this passage we see that part of the problem with the interpretation of the Dispensational Premillennialists may be predicated on questions of translation.

The disciples had asked him three questions as if they felt they were related. The first is pretty clear. When will the Temple be destroyed, as Jesus had just predicted? Since we now know that it was destroyed in 70 AD, and has yet to be rebuilt, we can assume that Jesus' answers to the other two questions also relate to that date. But the questions seem to refer to a different time. "What are the signs of your coming, and of the end of the world?" Obviously the earth was not destroyed in 70 AD. Obviously (to some) Jesus has not "come" again, after his

ascension in 32-34 AD. At least, those would be obvious based on the common translations into English. An equally valid, if not more valid, translation would be, "What is the sign of your presence and the end of the age?" Calling it the end of the world (cosmos) is much different than calling it the end of the age (eon). Could it be that they were simply asking that if the Temple was to be destroyed, how would they know that Jesus would be with them, even though it was clearly the end of the Mosaic era? This seems to make more sense in the light of the context.

In answer, Jesus says that it would be easy to deceive people at the time of the destruction of the Temple. There would be war, famine, and natural disasters all through the world. "These are the beginning of sorrows." Now some have pointed out that, contrary to current doctrine, these signs were not to immediately precede the end. They are the *beginning*, not the end, of sorrows. That might even be a valid refutation of premillennial doctrine. However, there is another possible translation. "These are the origin of sorrows." It may be that Jesus is telling them the obvious: bad things happen, and the result is sorrow. Because of the sorrow generated by these things, the disciples might doubt his "presence." He goes on to show them that in spite of the reasons for sorrow, they can see the destruction of Jerusalem coming, and the fact that most were able to escape that destruction would be the sign of his presence. What appeared to be sorrowful for others need not be sorrow for them.

That is a lesson that applies even today. Other than that, though, there appears no reason to believe that a prophecy that was fulfilled within thirty years should apply to our future.

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BE CAREFUL HOW YOU HATE

It seems one of the hardest things to avoid in life is *chillul HaShem*, bringing discredit upon God. Of course, some people are going to take anything we do and turn it against God. There is not much we can do about them, but we don't need to actively help others give God and his followers a bad name. It seems in recent years that some Christians have chosen to do just that.

A case in point surrounds a recent law in Indiana. Almost half the states have laws protecting business owners from lawsuits because they stand by their religious principles. Many in these states (including my home state of New Mexico) are unaware that these laws exist, because they are very specific and rarely invoked. The Indiana law is broader than most, and some people claim that it specifically discriminates against one group. (It doesn't.) Soon after the law was signed into force in Indiana, groups in and around the gay community launched a campaign of misinformation that, mostly, was intended to discredit Christians, the Bible, and God. The problem is that many Christians have chosen to react in a way that throws gasoline on the fire.

First, it must be established that homosexual acts are a sin. The Bible is very clear about this. It was so in the Law of Moses. "If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an

so. Lacking any record of his addressing the issue of homosexual acts, we have to rely on those whose mission was to teach.

Greater Sin?

With that said, it seems that many Christians forget some important points. One is that homosexual acts are a sin, but no more so than many other acts that people don't get up in arms about. With the number of unmarried girls in the church getting pregnant these days, and the number of unmarried boys getting them that way, perhaps we should be more concerned with teaching our own children that fornication is a sin. We have heard of cases of embezzlement, adultery, and even murder by Christians (most noticeably by preachers). We brush these off entirely, or show righteous indignation for an hour or a day. Then we turn around and shout against the sin of homosexual acts.

Sin is sin. We recognize that. But some would classify sin, not as mortal and venial but as unforgivable and normal. The same passage that says that those who commit homosexual acts will not inherit the kingdom also says that those who damage someone's reputation by calling them names are just as guilty. Yet how many who object to gay marriage throw around epithets about those same people? "Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye." (Matt 7:5)

The issue is not just one of homosexual acts or gay marriage. The problem arises any time we classify one sin as greater than another. There have been congregations that have, at least by their actions, considered being an unwed pregnant girl an unforgivable sin. Some have even gone so far as to extend that same attitude to the child that was born of such a situation, even though the child has no choice in how or when (s)he was conceived. Even if fornication were unforgivable, which it is not, the child has done nothing worthy of our disapprobation.

"A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another." (Jn 13:34) In the context, Jesus was speaking about love between the disciples; nevertheless, the command to love goes beyond only the believers. "For if ye love them which love you, what reward have ye? do not even the publicans the same? And if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others? do not even the publicans so?" (Matt 5:46-47) The command to love is a command to be like God. When we fail to show love, even to sinners, we are no less sinners than they.

The command to love goes beyond only believers.

abomination: they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them." (Lev 20:13) This is in a context that also condemns adultery and incest.

The apostle Paul addressed it to the Corinthian church, which seems to have had a broader spectrum of problems than most churches. "Do you not know that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor male prostitutes, nor men who sleep with men, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Cor 6:9-10)

Some, perhaps accurately, claim that Jesus said nothing about the issue. They miss two vital points. Not everything Jesus said is recorded for us; and what Jesus said to the Jewish people was not his mission. What he said was important, but what he did was immensely more

Building a Hedge

Then some people try to include in their objection to certain acts the right to object to a certain class of people. Most notably, the “cake” issue. Nobody argues that a preacher has the right not to perform a gay wedding, just as a Catholic priest has the right not to perform a non-Catholic wedding. Few even argue that a baker or caterer has the right not to put a message on a cake that they consider objectionable, whether it be a gay sentiment or an anti-Semitic or profanity-laced sentiment. The problem is that some have taken it farther, and said that they shouldn’t even bake a cake for a gay couple. Even in the Chick-Fil-A flap a couple of years ago, the founder of the company never advocated not selling to an openly gay person. That is not a protected right.

To be fair, the cake issue has probably been blown out of proportion by those who are trying to say they are being discriminated against. Still, there are those who would say that baking a cake, or at least decorating it in a certain way, is participating in the wedding, and so they build a hedge around the possibility of looking like they approve. Preaching such a wedding, or possibly even catering it, might be objectionable. To what degree, though, should one go to avoid the appearance of approval? If one objects to the consumption of alcohol, one should not work in a brewery, or as a bartender. Should such a person object to working in a factory that makes glass bottles or aluminum cans because of the possibility, or even certainty, that those containers would be used to hold alcoholic beverages? Do those who choose not to drink insist that our teenagers not work as baggers for a grocery store because of the likelihood that they will have to carry alcohol to someone's car?

Choosing not to participate in sin is proper. Each person may even choose to what extent their actions may be considered participation. But in our objections we must be consistent, open, and (above all) loving. We cannot object to participation in one sin while affording the same participation to another. If we let our beliefs be known, the odds are we will not be asked to participate in a particular sin. (Most people who object to gay weddings will never have to worry about turning down an invitation to one.) The way we express our desire not to participate may be as important as the reasons for that choice.

Overstepping Boundaries

The biggest issue, though, is that Christians are bringing discredit on God by overstepping another, scriptural boundary. We can point out that sin is sin. We can even discipline sin within the church (but usually don’t). Where there are man’s laws against certain sins, we can even step in and try to prevent others from committing those sins. For the most part, however, our authority in correcting sin is limited to the church.

I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person. (1 Cor 5:9-13)

It is in overstepping, even trampling on, this boundary that we can be said to be responsible for much of the negativity toward God and the church. Which is the greater harm: building a man-made wall to avoid any appearance of participating in a sin others are bent on

In overstepping, even trampling on, one boundary we can be said to be responsible for much of the negativity toward God and the church.

committing anyway, or driving those people away from any possibility of repentance by our actions? "So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow." (2 Cor 2:7) If Paul is so concerned about driving away one already in the church, how much more would we be guilty if we drove away one who otherwise might be brought to the Lord?

We can, should, must identify sin as sinful. We must care enough to warn others about the consequences of their sin. It is our obligation to try to prevent sin within the church, but it would be a full-time job to try to prevent unbelievers from sinning. It is a full-time job just to keep ourselves from sin. Our obligation is to teach others that sin separates them from God, and that God has provided forgiveness through his Son. We may even choose not to participate in sin (1 Pet 4:4). We must, however, be careful that we don't sin by bringing God's name into disrepute by our actions or our attitudes. Especially by our attitudes.

TWITTERPATED

#Everybodyisontwitter. Or at least it seems like everybody, except a few old fogeys. Twitter, and its accompanying hashtag, has become the social media of the attention deficit generation. If it cannot be reduced to 140 characters, it is not worth mentioning. And yet, everything from breakfast (#Cheerios) to fashion is worth mentioning. (#brownshirt #bolotie #fedora). Star Wars nerds know of the Clone Wars. Twitter nerds are familiar with tweet wars. In New Mexico one such war made the news, when the television show “Better Call Saul” (a spin-off of “Breaking Bad”, which took place in Albuquerque) moved its location temporarily to Omaha. That set off a twitter war between the Omaha and Albuquerque minor league baseball teams. If Twitter is ubiquitous, how would we reduce something important, like the gospel, to just 140 characters?

To start, we should define the gospel. Paul did it in a few more than 140 characters.

Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; By which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. (1 Cor 15:1-8)

To Paul the gospel was the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus, and the fact that there were witnesses to the resurrected Christ. To that, some would add that he ascended to heaven, but is coming again to take us to be with him. (1 Thes 4:15-18) That part of it is also good news.

The group known as We Care Ministries has reduced that much of the gospel into five symbols. The symbols below appear in tattoos, on utensils of daily life, and sometimes in the sand along beaches or in the snow.



Another consideration might be that where there is good news, it is often considered good because of its contrast with bad news. The bad news, the necessity for the gospel is sin. “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: 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.” (Rom 5:12, 18) In that sense, then, sin is part of the gospel, not because it is good news but because it is the reason for the good news.

Now that we have defined the gospel, it should be easier to reduce it to a Twitter feed. Below it is reduced to 61 characters that you can copy and paste into your Twitter account. That leaves 79 characters for further explanation, like maybe a link to this page on www.minuteswithmessiah.com.

#gospelinatweet #sin #Jesus
#deathburialresurrection #comingagain

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