



Minutes With Messiah

Volume 17, Issue 10

Web Site: <http://www.minuteswithmessiah.com>

August 2016

QUALIFIERS

We use qualifying phrases all the time. Sometimes it is for clarity, such as “working dogs” as opposed to “show dogs.” Sometimes it is to express an unlikelihood, such as a “decent Ford vehicle.” In religion-speak we sometimes use qualifiers that are confusing. Are they making a distinction, or are they merely redundant?

One example is a “born again Christian.” When I hear that phrase I want to ask why the person feels it is necessary. Do they think there are two kinds of Christians: born-again ones and non-born-again ones? How does one become a non-born-again Christian? And if there are not two types, then why use the phrase in the first place? All you do is confuse nonbelievers.

The whole issue centers on a phrase Jesus used in talking to a Pharisee named Nicodemus. This man had come to Jesus by night, perhaps out of fear of being seen, perhaps because it was a convenient time to catch Jesus alone. Jesus told him, “Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (Jn 3:3) Later he says, “Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again.” (Jn 3:7)

Notice in this latter verse, Jesus did not consider not being born again an option. There are not two types of Christian, the born again and the not-reborn. There is just the one type.

So why do people use the phrase, and confuse people into thinking there are two types of Christian? And why do they jump on an obscure phrase like this? Why not refer to themselves and others as “disciple Christians” or “witness Christians?” There is more scriptural justification for using those descriptive phrases than “born-again.”

A similar phrase is “a baptized believer.” While there are those who, in the face of all scripture, believe it is possible to be an unbaptized believer, this phrase seems to be more often used by those who don’t believe there is such a distinction. They appear to use the phrase not as a distinction between baptized and unbaptized believers as Christians, but rather between baptized (and therefore Christian) believers and unbaptized (and therefore not yet Christian) believers.

Again, though, why use the qualifier to make the distinction?

On the Pentecost after Jesus died, the people asked, “What shall we do?” Peter answered, “Repent and be immersed, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for remission of sins.” (Acts 2:38) Years later a jailer in Philippi asked it more emphatically. “What must I do to be saved?” (Acts 16:30) Paul’s answer obviously included baptism; otherwise the jailer would have no reason to submit to what he probably saw as primarily a Jewish practice. Both Acts 2:38 and Acts 22:16 associate baptism with forgiveness of sins. Based on those three scriptures, it would be just as logical to speak of a “saved believer” or a “forgiven believer” as a “baptized believer.” We don’t use the first two qualifiers, so why use the latter?

The whole purpose of qualifiers is to make distinctions, but in the church we have no need for qualifiers. On U.S. Navy ships, the only time a person is allowed to wear civilian clothes while underway is for chapel services. This is because “there is no rank in the church;” there is no reason to wear uniforms that may distinguish and divide. Paul said it a different way. “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.” (Gal 3:28) He is not saying that we have to put away all national or biological distinctions in our lives; that would be impossible. Rather, he is saying there is no need for qualifiers in the church. There is not a distinction between Jewish Christians and gentile Christians. We don’t say, “She is a female Christian.” Like “born-again Christian” and “baptized believer,” such qualifiers are unnecessary. So why use them?

Contents

Qualifiers	1
Get More Out of Worship	2
Mothers of Kings	4

All articles Copyright 2016 by Tim O’Hearn unless otherwise noted

GET MORE OUT OF WORSHIP

A man went to buy a used car. On the lot he saw a 2015 BMW 3 Series for \$600. Not being too smart, he bought it. He did think it a little strange that the dealer would not let him take it for a test drive, but he paid cash for it and drove off. After about two blocks he came to a stop sign. That was when he found out the brakes didn't work. The only thing that kept him from running into a car crossing his path was the fact that, before he got to the intersection the transmission fell out and slowed the car down. The poor fellow was a little upset. He walked back to the dealer, told him what happened, and demanded his money back. Of course, the dealer refused. When asked why, he replied, "You got just what you paid for. You buy a year old car for \$600, you get \$600 worth of car." So it is with a sermon as well. You get from it what you put into it. In this day when many leave churches because they "don't get much out of" the singing or the sermon, there are some things that you can do to get "more out of your sermon dollar," so to speak.

The purpose of the assembly

The first thing is to realize the purpose or purposes of the assembly of the saints. When you

The writer of Hebrews said the assembly was primarily for others, not for what we get out of it.

understand that, you realize it isn't about what you get out of it at all. It, like so many things, is not all about you.

One of the reasons the church assembles together is to worship God. If one is truly praising God, they don't worry about what they get out of the worship, but what God gets out of it. One of the charges against Paul at Corinth was that he "persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law." (Acts 18:13) As a church and individually, we are to "offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually." (Heb 13:15) If, as is likely, the Revelation is a picture of the church on earth rather than a future in heaven, then the church is full of worship and praise toward God.

That, however, is not the only reason for our assembly. Some might even say that it is not the primary reason. If we are concerned about the sermon, then we are talking about something that is clearly not worship to God, but directed toward the congregation. If we look at the

other things we do in the public assembly, perhaps the only one that is primarily directed toward God is public prayer. Why do we take the Lord's Supper? To "proclaim the Lord's death until he come." (1 Cor 11:26) It is a memory-jogger (internal) and a proclamation (to others), rather than primarily directed toward God. What about giving? In the New Testament, contributions were almost always for a specific purpose which may have brought glory to God, but it was not for God or entirely for the giver. Singing? While many of us like to sing, and get a lot from doing so, our songs are not for the singer. They are for God and for others.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. (Col 3:16)

When the writer of Hebrews spoke of the assembly (s)he said that it was primarily for others, not for what we might get out of it. On the other hand, we may be beneficiaries of the assembly as well, because of what others put into it. "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. (Heb 10:24)

If we are to "get more out of" a sermon, we have to face a couple of facts. One is that not every sermon is about us. Sometimes the message of a preacher is primarily for someone else. That sermon may not be about us at all. If we don't get something out of that sermon it was either not for us, or it was for us and we don't acknowledge our shortcomings. Another fact is that the sermon may be so generic that nobody can get anything out of it. How often do radio or TV preachers go through an entire sermon without once ever referencing scripture? Some sermons are so watered down that the preacher would have been better served to sit down and sing.

The sermon may not be for us to get something out of it. Nevertheless, there are some things we can do to enhance our ability to get out what was meant for us.

Pray

If one invests in prayer, one gets interest. This is a biblical principle that goes way back.

Yea, if thou criest after knowledge, and liftest up thy voice for understanding; If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as for hid treasures; Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. (Prov 2:3-5)

If we pray for understanding, God is willing to give it. James stated it a little differently. "If any of you

lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.” (Jas 1:5)

To get more out of the sermon, however, we should pray for more than just our understanding. Praying for the preacher also helps. Even though he did not preach as we consider preaching today, Paul understood that he needed the prayers of the Christians he knew.

Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints; And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel. (Eph 6:18-19)

Listen

It may seem unnecessary to say, but you will learn nothing from the sermon if you don't listen to it. But this should be active listening. That means more than just staying awake; really listen to what the preacher has to say. Don't just listen in order to argue, or catch the preacher in a mistake. “Receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.” (Jas 1:21) Don't be like the people of Isaiah's time, as referenced by Paul.

And how shall they preach, except they be sent? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things! But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report? So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. (Rom 10:15-17)

What is active listening? It may mean taking notes. It should mean being able to repeat the gist of the sermon after a few hours. In school, if the teacher said something would be on the test we listened more closely. Act if you will be tested on the material, because you will.

Therefore whosoever heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them, I will liken him unto a wise man, which built his house upon a rock: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell not: for it was founded upon a rock. And every one that heareth these sayings of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, which built his house upon the sand: And the rain descended, and the floods came, and the winds blew, and beat upon that house; and it fell: and great was the fall of it. (Matt 7:24-27)

Discuss and Review

The people of Berea were called more noble than those of Thessalonica because “they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.” (Acts 17:11) They

did not just listen and let the preaching go. When they searched the scriptures, it was probably with other people. They discussed what they had heard, and made sure they had heard it right. If we discuss what the preacher has to say (and, again, not just to tear it down), then we not only learn what he had to say, but how others interpret it. Sometimes that discussion may be with other Christians. Sometimes there may be value in discussing it with people who have not obeyed the word. There is value in discussing the sermon with both those who heard it, and those who did not. Differing points of view are always good. After all, “If I know something, I know it; if I share it, we both know it.”

Discussing a sermon on the same day helps to reinforce it in your mind. Reviewing it days later tests its sticking power. If you took notes (or a recording), review those. Some people keep a notebook of sermons so they can review them weeks or even months later.

Don't just listen in order to argue, or catch the preacher in a mistake.

Some sermons are preached for a specific time and purpose. Even so, if the sermon was based on scripture, as it should have been, there may be some nugget that can be taken from it later.

Use it

Perhaps the most valuable way to get more out of a lesson is to put it into practice. It can hardly be said that there is value in an item of clothing that is stored away in the closet and never taken out. That item might as well not exist. So it is with a sermon or other lesson; its value is only apparent when it is put to use. A photograph is better than a mirror because of its permanence.

But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass: For he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed. (Jas 1:22-25)

One gets more out of a sermon when one invests in it. The servants in the parable were blessed for taking what was given to them and making more money. The one who took the money and did not invest it was cursed by his master. It really is more important to put the sermon into ourselves than to get something out of it emotionally. After all, it is not all about you.

MOTHERS OF KINGS

Bathsheba. Naamah. Maachah bet Abishalom. Azuba bet Shlhi. Athaliah bet Omri. Zibiah of Beersheba. Jehoaddan of Jerusalem. Jeholiah of Jerusalem. Jerusha bet Zadok. Abi bet Zachariah. Hephzibah. Meshullemeth bet Haruz. Jedidah bet Adaiyah. Hamutal bet Yirmahu. Zebudah bet Pedaiyah. Nehushta bet Elnathan.

Hardly a Hall of Fame of characters in the Bible, although some are better known than others. One was known to be generally good; one was known to be wicked. Most are just named in the scriptures and little is known about them, except perhaps by the reputations of their sons. For these are the mothers of the kings of Judah, from Solomon to the exile in Babylon.

When people complain, incorrectly, that women are hardly mentioned in the Bible, they forget (or never knew) that the books of the Kings and Chronicles make a point to mention the names of the mothers of all the kings except King Ahaz, who was extremely wicked. The Chronicles do not list the mothers of kings after Hezekiah, but they are listed in the book of 2 Kings. Interestingly, after Jeroboam the authors do not list the mothers of any of the kings of the northern tribes of Israel.

Mothers play an important role throughout the Bible. We have the stories of women who were barren for a long time, and eventually became mothers (Sarai; Hannah; the mother of Samson; Elizabeth). Other mothers figure prominently, like Eve, Leah and Rachel, Naomi, and (of course) Miryam (Mary) the mother of Jesus.

Why all this interest in mothers, since Mother's Day in the United States was months ago? Perhaps it is

because my mother passed from this life a couple of months ago, to await the resurrection at the return of Jesus. (1 Thes 4:16-17) If it weren't for her influence in my life, I would probably not have been publishing *Minutes With Messiah* for the past seventeen-plus years. Mothers have a profound influence, good or bad. My mother's influence can certainly be seen in me.

One of the great commands of God, repeated both to the Israelites specifically and to Christians, is, "Honor your father AND your mother." (Ex 20:12; Eph 6:2, emphasis mine) Paul points out that it comes with a promise of long life.

One of the writers of Proverbs gave advice to men about the kind of woman they should look for in a wife. Among other qualities, he listed, "Her children arise up, and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praiseth her." (Prov 31:28)

Not every mother is perfect. Not every mother is even good. Nevertheless, we are to honor them.

My mother was deserving of honor. She stayed faithful to her husband for over 53 years of marriage. She raised three sons who all turned out pretty good. One of the best tributes to her recently came from one of the elders in the congregation where she and I worshipped the last several years. She had been legally blind for a while, and did all of her reading, including daily Bible reading, by audio. This particular elder commented that although she never brought a Bible to classes, her knowledge of the scriptures was outstanding. She would probably be embarrassed by my saying this, but she was a woman of great price.

Timothy J. O'Hearn
737 Monell Dr NE
Albuquerque NM 87123