



Minutes With Messiah

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A Time For Rest

It's summer time and typically most of us will take some time off from work and go on a vacation. It is a time to spend doing those things that you might find relaxing, visiting relatives or good friends. It is usually a time to change your usual behavior and just rest. Even Jesus knew that the body needs to rest, either from physical labor or emotional labor.

And he said unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest a while: for there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat. (Mk 6:31).

Have you ever been in such a situation, so busy with "things to do", that you neglect yourself? The quality of your work and life tend to suffer!

Depending on whom you talk to, the word rest may take on different meanings. To the author rest may mean the punctuation marks he has at his disposal to get a point across. The period signals the end of a particular thought. The comma, used at times to separate ideas, gives a chance to stop and consider each of these thoughts. Theologically rest is the promise that God has given to His faithful followers.

Ye shall not do after all the things that we do here this day, every man whatsoever is right in his own eyes. For ye are not as yet come to the rest and to the inheritance, which the LORD your God giveth you. But when ye go over Jordan, and dwell in the land which the LORD your God giveth you to inherit, and when he giveth you rest from all your enemies round about, so that ye dwell in safety, Then there shall be a place which the LORD your God shall choose to cause his name to dwell there. (Deut 12:8-11)

It also refers to reliance on God for our safety.

And Asa cried unto the LORD his God, and said, LORD, it is nothing with thee to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power: help us, O LORD our God; for we rest on thee, and in thy name we go against this multitude. O LORD, thou art our God; let not man prevail against thee. (2 Chron 14:11-12)

In a spiritual sense, rest calls to mind a cessation from the troubles of the world. In music, a rest indicates a period of silence. The length of the rest is indicated by symbol that corresponds to a certain note value. In reading

the psalms we come upon an often confusing word, *Selah*.

Now, someone ask me what this word means; go on, ask! Ok since you insist, I'll tell you...I don't know! No one really knows what this word means.

The psalms were often sung with a variety of musical instruments and often contained instructions as to the tempo or mood of the music. It appears 71 times in the psalms and 3 times in the book of Habakkuk. It usually appeared at the end of a stanza or (in Psalms 55:19, 57:3, and Habakkuk 3:3, 9) in the middle of the verse.

It seems to appear at a place where the author of the piece wants us to stop and reflect on what has just been read (sung). It may be that it appeared at a point where the singers paused while the instruments continued, much like the bridge in some songs.

Do you suppose that this indicates that scripture is meant to be taken seriously? That a mere reading of the words is not enough; that we need to reflect and contemplate what has been written? As serious students of the word of God we may need to practice meditation. Not the metaphysical meditation of the Eastern religions, but a quiet reflection of what we have just read.

It occurs to me that there are times when we need to insert (*Selah*) into our lives! Before saying something that may be hurtful, (*Selah*). Before making any type decision, (*Selah*). As we pray for things, (*Selah*). Before logging on to a certain web site, (*Selah*). And on and on it can go. Take time to reflect not only on what the scriptures say to you but also take time to reflect on how we deal with whatever life throws in our paths. (*Selah*)

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Contents

A Time for Rest	1
The Jesus Meme	2
In the Depths of the Sea	4

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The Jesus Meme

A number of memes are going around the internet properly chastising Republican extremists for opposing programs to help the poor, feed the hungry, and provide medical care to those who need it. Several of these point out that Jesus advocated for just such activities. (At least, that is, he did so on an individual basis, not necessarily favoring government programs that take away personal responsibility.) Some of these memes end with a statement like “Jesus was a long-haired, brown-skinned, homeless, radical Jew.” Is this an accurate portrayal of Jesus?

Whether he was long-haired or not is pure speculation. His hair was probably no longer than any other Jew of his time, and maybe shorter than many of the Pharisees he often opposed. The Roman style of the day could hardly be called long, even by today’s standards. Most extant busts of the caesars show men with a full head of hair, but of a style similar to the shorter styles of today. They did not wear their hair even shoulder length. Most were clean-shaven, as well, although Nero may have had sideburns that were jaw- or neck-length. The Jews, who were forbidden to use razors to cut their hair in mourning (Lev 19:27), possibly wore their hair longer than their Roman invaders, but the typical below-the-shoulders look common to images of Jesus today may be

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people it does.

inaccurate. Most portraits of Jews from the time either indicate hair in the Roman style, but with a beard, or show the men wearing headgear that concealed the hair style. The Renaissance depictions of a long-haired Jesus (and the images on tortillas or toast, on water-stained walls, or in the clouds) are probably incorrect.

Appearance

The concept of a long-haired Jesus probably appeals to the anti-establishment mentality of those claiming that he had that attribute. In the 1960s, it was common to hear the rebellious young “hippies” justify looking different by saying, “Well, Jesus had long hair.” That attitude, it seems, is still prevalent

Whether he was brown-skinned or Jewish is not in question. He spent a lot of time outdoors, and so even if he were naturally fair he would probably have developed a

tanned complexion. This is probably not the intent of mentioning his skin color. Possibly it is mentioned in these memes because of some perceived antisemitism or racial prejudice in the people they are supposed to be ridiculing.

The whole point of Jewish history is that the Messiah would be one of them, so his Jewishness was never in doubt. Paul even points out that Jesus had to be Jewish in order to save the Jews. “But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.” (Gal 4:4-5) Even if this were not true, the genealogies in Matthew 1 and Luke 3 conclusively establish that Jesus was Jewish.

Does it matter what Jesus looked like? Obviously to the people who are writing or spreading these memes it does. They clearly want to establish that he was not a typical American Young Republican. But if Jesus were alive today there is a good chance that he would be indistinguishable from the man on the street. The most noticeable thing about him might be his appearance as an Orthodox Jew. Whether he would conform to modern Orthodox appearance might even be in doubt. According to some interpretations, Isaiah said the Messiah would be no different than anyone else. “He hath no form nor comeliness; and when we shall see him, there is no beauty that we should desire him.” (Isa 53:2) (Others take that to mean that he might be uglier than the average person, but beyond that he would not stand out.) Unlike John the Baptizer, who was distinguished by his unusual dress, Jesus dressed, looked, and acted like anyone else of his time.

Radical

Was Jesus a radical? Yes and no. Radicalism, like conservatism or liberalism, is defined in relation to the person using the term. While Jesus taught things that the Jewish scholars might consider extreme in a few cases, most of his teaching was fairly orthodox. His “radical” views of Judaism were actually leaning more to the conservative view. His major objection to the Pharisees was that they took a liberal view of the Law, adding to it rather than keeping to the letter.

Politically, he was anything but radical. He did not advocate the overthrow of the government. He associated with both those who did and those who staunchly supported the status quo (Simon and Matthew). The most radical thing he did was to talk figuratively about eating his flesh and drinking his blood. (Jn 6:53-56)

Homeless

Perhaps the most objectionable thing about these memes, however, is their portrayal of Jesus as “homeless.” The common definition of homelessness is a lack of permanent residence or an individual who lacks housing. The first of those definitions would include those people of means who travel the country in motor homes, or the woman who lives from cruise to cruise on a ship. Those hardly meet the picture of homelessness intended by these memes. The real question, though, was whether Jesus met either of these definitions.

Jesus was an itinerant rabbi, one of many. He spent a lot of time traveling from town to town, much like the circuit preachers of mid-19th century America. How often did he spend the night without a roof over his head? It is hard to tell. Certainly on some of his travels from Galilee to Jerusalem he may have had to camp out occasionally. Most nights, however, he probably found lodging like most other travelers, in an inn or a private home. Unlike a homeless person, though, he had a permanent base of operations that he called home. “And leaving Nazareth, he came and dwelt in Capernaum.” (Matt 4:13) Apparently he had a house where he regularly stayed while in that town (Mk 2:1); some say he stayed in Peter’s house. Even when he traveled he could find a place to stay, such as the houses of Simon the Leper, of Zacchaeus, or of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus.

When we think of homelessness today, we often picture someone begging on a street corner. Jesus, on the other hand, did not have to beg. He and his disciples were supported in their ministry by a number of possibly wealthy women. (Lk 8:1-3) The disciples had enough money that Judas could make a pretty tidy living skimming off the top of the purse. (Jn 12:6) Some might question why he had Peter catch a fish to get a coin to pay taxes if he had money (Matt 17:24-27), but that was probably just to make a point.

Some would point to what Jesus said to a man who would follow him. At first, without looking at the context, this seems to indicate that Jesus thought of himself as homeless.

And it came to pass, that, as they went in the way, a certain man said unto him, Lord, I will follow thee whithersoever thou goest. And Jesus said unto him, Foxes have holes, and birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head. And he said unto another, Follow me. But he said, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father. Jesus said unto him, Let the dead bury their dead: but go thou and preach the kingdom of God. And another also said, Lord, I will follow thee; but let me first go bid them farewell, which are at home at my house. And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plough, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God. (Lk 9:58-62)

As one looks at all the incidents Luke records together, it is obvious that Jesus is addressing specific situations. Some people say they will follow him, and he seems to push them away; others he invites to follow, and they reject him. Luke’s point (and Matthew’s in the same context) is that Jesus wanted committed followers. That he did not have a place to lay his head may have less to do with a permanent address than with the work required.

This is not to say that Jesus did not care for the homeless. He did. The biggest class of homeless in his day would have been widows and orphans (of which he was neither). As one who followed the Law of Moses perfectly, he would have kept its injunctions to care for these people. “Ye shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child.” (Ex 22:20)

When thou cuttest down thine harvest in thy field, and hast forgot a sheaf in the field, thou shalt not go again to fetch it: it shall be for the stranger, for the

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fatherless, and for the widow: that the LORD thy God may bless thee in all the work of thine hands. When thou beatest thine olive tree, thou shalt not go over the boughs again: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. When thou gatherest the grapes of thy vineyard, thou shalt not glean it afterward: it shall be for the stranger, for the fatherless, and for the widow. And thou shalt remember that thou wast a bondman in the land of Egypt: therefore I command thee to do this thing. (Deut 24:19-22)

The other common class of beggars, though not necessarily homeless, were the physically handicapped (which, for purposes of this analysis, would include the demon-possessed). These people may have had a place to live and even family to help them, but were unable to earn a steady income because of their disability. We rarely see Jesus handing out money to these people. Instead, he did what he could that we cannot today; he healed them. He “taught them to fish” in the manner of the current proverb. By healing them, he made it so they could learn or practice a trade and so give up begging. This is the ultimate way to help the homeless and the beggars.

Those, though, who would call Jesus homeless have a political agenda (of which he may or may not have approved), one which requires that they misrepresent Jesus for their own political ends. Misrepresenting Jesus by choice may not be an enviable position to be in.

In the Depths of the Sea

When I was in the U. S. Navy I was assigned as personnel office supervisor on a ship that had been newly commissioned. That meant that my office mates were the first to permanently use the personnel office onboard. Shortly after I checked on board, we began our first deployment to the Western Pacific. After we got underway, we noticed some things about the office that just were not going to work for us. We had an extra desk, and the filing cabinets were down the middle of the room. I got permission from our Personnel Officer to make some modifications. Since everything on a ship is fastened down in case of rough weather, that meant we had to cut one desk off the deck and move it. Then we had to cut the filing cabinets free, move them where the desk had been, and have the welders secure them to the deck. That meant we had a desk floating free to get rid of. That posed a problem. The office was one deck below the main deck (the one open to the ocean). The passageway outside the office was narrow. The desk was big. We tried for over an hour to figure out how to maneuver the desk out the door, turn it, and take it up the stairs (ladder in Navy-speak). Nothing doing. It appeared that when they were building the ship they lowered the furniture in and secured it before putting in the deck above. What to do? One of my workers came up with the idea of cutting the desk in half; we weren't going to use it anyway. He went to one of the shops and got a power metal saw, and we cut the thing down the middle. That was just enough to get it out the door and up the ladder. That night, two of my Personnelmen carried each half up to the deck and back to the stern. They notified the watch on deck what they were doing so he wouldn't call "man overboard." Then they

threw each half of the desk over the side. So somewhere in the Pacific Ocean, between San Diego and Honolulu, there are two halves of a big metal desk sitting at the bottom of the ocean. They are probably the basis for a coral reef by now.

Whenever I read Micah 7:18-19 I think of this incident. God is speaking to Israel through the prophet, but could be speaking to us all.

Who is a God like unto thee, that pardoneth iniquity, and passeth by the transgression of the remnant of his heritage? he retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in mercy. He will turn again, he will have compassion upon us; he will subdue our iniquities; and thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.

I think of that desk and what a splash it must have made going into the water. Then I think of my sins, and realize how great they are. Before God, even one sin is like that desk. All my sins must be huge to him. And yet, "thou wilt cast all their sins into the depths of the sea."

That is what Jesus did by dying on the tree. All of my sins have been made to disappear into the deep.

Only about six people actually remember the incident with the desk. We are the ones who cut it up and threw it overboard, plus the young sailor on the watch that evening. As far as we are concerned, that desk is gone. We never saw it again, and don't expect to. God doesn't even remember throwing our sins into the sea. Unfortunately, we tend to remember, and sometimes to remind him. Our sins, though, should be like that desk. Out of sight forever, at the bottom of the sea.

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