



Minutes With Messiah

Volume 20, Issue 9

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

July 2019

BEAUTY AND ASHES

It is strange how changing one word or phrase in a sentence changes the whole meaning. For instance, a national Christian radio station which is “listener supported,” meaning a small percentage of listeners donate so that others can listen, advertises that they are proclaiming the message of Jesus “because of listeners like you.” Instead of “because of,” they probably mean “thanks to” or “as a result of.” Instead they make the (it is to be hoped) mistake of saying “because of.” That phrase implies motivation; it says that they are spreading the word in order to get donations from listeners, rather than out of love for Jesus. Either of the other phrases suggested would imply gratitude rather than motivation. In the same way, several songs played on that station use a phrase that sounds biblical, but in fact changes one word which changes the meaning.

The phrase in question is “beauty from ashes.” There are a couple of organizations to help victims of sex trafficking that call themselves “Beauty From Ashes,” even though their web sites put up the correct quotation. It is presumably from a passage in Isaiah 61:1-3.

The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound; To proclaim the acceptable year of the LORD, and the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all that mourn; To appoint unto them that mourn in Zion, to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning.

The first two verses (not including “beauty for ashes”) were quoted by Jesus in Luke 4:18-19 as referring to himself. Any time a Jew quotes a scripture, though, he is quoting the whole context.

Note that the passage in Isaiah says beauty *for* ashes, not beauty *from* ashes. Other reliable translations use the phrase “beauty instead of ashes.” This is also true about the phrases that follow that one.

What is the difference? Why make a big deal about it? The difference affects how you look at God, and what you expect from Him.

Saying that God will give you beauty from ashes gives a false view of God’s providence. It is the same false

view that makes people use “all things work together for good to them that love God,” (Rom 8:28) to comfort one who is mourning a sudden death of a child or other loved one. It is a doctrine that says that God will necessarily take the evil in this world and turn it into good. It says that anything bad that happens (ashes) will be turned into something beautiful. God can do that, but generally He doesn’t work that way. Adam sinned. From that sin came all sorts of “ashes.” There is virtually no way in which one could say that God made beauty from the fall of mankind. “For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now.” (Rom 8:22) Many a grieving person will testify that God does not make beauty out of their pain.

God does, however, replace the pain to a certain degree. As Isaiah says, He gives beauty instead of ashes, joy instead of mourning, and praise in place of heaviness. Evil happens; it is a result of sin. Sometimes God allows it because he does not control every aspect of life. People suffer as a result of other people’s sins. God does not take that suffering and magically turn it into something beautiful. Sometimes he does nothing about the suffering itself. Instead, he promises that:

Our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal. (2 Cor 4:17-18)

When Jesus said that the passage in Isaiah was fulfilled in him, he was saying that the death he was to accomplish would replace ashes with beauty. We suffer in this world, but that suffering is temporary. This world will be replaced with a beautiful one. Beauty instead of ashes.

CONTENTS

Beauty and Ashes	1
Fake News	2
What Kind of Cleaver?	4

All articles Copyright 2019 by Tim O’Hearn unless otherwise noted. The ideas expressed in these articles are those of the authors and are not to be considered the doctrine of any specific congregation or eldership.

FAKE NEWS

There are many accusations these days that something is “fake news.” Most recently it started with the 2018 U.S. presidential election, and specifically with a bogus news story about Hillary Clinton hiding hundreds of early-voting ballots in a warehouse. After the election it has become the mantra of the opposite political party to apply to any story, real or false, that the leader of the party disagrees with. He has even been labeled as “fake news” actual videos of him saying something he would rather retract. The term “fake news,” though, is not new. It can be traced back to the 1890s. Prior to that time the word fake was not commonly used, so it was called “false news.” There are even “fake news” stories about the Bible.

God Is Dead

The idea that God is dead is most commonly attributed to the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche, but may have been originated by Georg Hegel. Essentially the idea is that the Age of Enlightenment had made rationalism and science to be the ultimate authorities, and so religion—specifically the Christian religion—no longer

The eternal existence of God is taken as a given.

held preeminence in Europe. The idea prefigured the Communist attempts to remove religion from the culture of the Russian people. It was not that God himself had died, because rationalism would deny that He ever existed; rather it was that the belief in God was on its way out. The fear, according to Nietzsche, was that the extinction of Christianity in Europe would be accompanied by a rejection of morality. If European morality is based on centuries of Christian thought, then the death of Christianity should be accompanied by a death of Christian morality.

Since Nietzsche’s formulation of the philosophy in print, others have taken a more literal view of the phrase. If God ever existed, which is questionable in their minds, then science has literally killed Him. This is, of course, a paradox of atheism because it denies the existence of God by accepting his existence. An earlier version of this was the Deism of many of America’s Founding Fathers. That philosophy did not go so far as to say that God was dead, but simply that He stopped caring about the world after he created it.

In either case this may be considered fake news. In the latter case, believers in God (Christian, Jewish, or

otherwise) know by faith that God is eternal, although atheists might compare that statement to some of what is called fake news today. In the former case, it is clearly fake news.

Rationalism, humanism, and several other -isms have had a significant influence in the past two or three centuries. They have made inroads into the faith of many people. It may even appear that scientific atheism or scientific agnosticism predominate in Western thought today. Nevertheless, faith in God has not died out. After the attacks of 9/11 there was a rebirth of Christian belief in America, even if it was short-lived. The Communists tried to wipe out religion in the Soviet Union, with limited success. Many of the common people still continued to believe, and when their Orthodox church buildings were destroyed or turned into museums, they found other places to assemble. After the fall of Soviet Communism, many of the former republics have found a rebirth of Christianity. In Ukraine, for instance, the public schools are teaching Bible and administrators say that is because it is the only source for moral teaching. (In that they prove Nietzsche’s worst fears about the decline of Christian thought.)

To those of faith, there is no greater statement than that of Genesis 1:1. “In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth.” The eternal existence of God is taken as a given. Going to the other end of the Bible, God’s eternity is again manifest. “I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.” (Rev 1:8) God is, by nature, eternal. It is impossible for God to die because He is superior to death.

Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. (1 Cor 15:24-27)

God is alive. Anything else is fake news.

Paul vs Jesus

In recent years some have proclaimed the news that Paul taught a different doctrine than Jesus taught. Hence, the Christianity practiced in most places today is not what Jesus intended and is, therefore, heresy.

One web site consulted listed 24 supposed points at which Paul contradicted Jesus. A few were based on someone else’s faulty interpretations of what Paul wrote.

Some are based on faulty translations of what Paul wrote, or of what Jesus said. Others claim Paul contradicted Jesus, but showed no passage in which Jesus said what they claimed he said. (Example: Paul claimed to be an apostle but Jesus [somewhere, but they don't say where] said there would only be twelve apostles for perpetuity.) Most of this site's examples simply take two statements out of context and compare them, like the proverbial comparison of apples to oranges.

The argument some make is that Jesus never said anything about some things Paul states as doctrine. "Jesus never spoke about homosexuality." "Jesus never spoke about gay marriage." (In fact, he did speak about marriage as being between a man and a woman—Mark 10:6-8) "Jesus never said women could not be preachers." There are two fallacies to this argument. The first is that Jesus was primarily teaching Jews, who already opposed homosexual acts and women taking authority over men in the worship; he had no reason to bring up these topics to most of his audiences. The more important fallacy is that you cannot prove a negative. Just because we have no record of Jesus saying something does not mean he did not say it. After all, in Acts 20:35 there is a quotation attributed to Jesus that is not found in the gospels. Even the apostle John admitted (Jn 20:30) that not everything about Jesus was written down.

But what does the Bible say about Paul's teaching? It says that the apostles that followed Jesus every day for three to four years agree that Paul's teaching was not something new or heretical.

"When James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship." (Gal 2:9) Some might argue that Paul is spreading false news himself; but the apostles he mentions were still alive and John even worked in the area to which he was writing. If this were false, they could have proved it to be so—and didn't.

But we don't have to rely on Paul's account of himself. We also have the testimony of Peter.

Account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you; As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction. (2 Pet 3:15-16)

Note that first of all he considers Paul a brother in Christ. Then he says that Paul wrote according to wisdom given to him; wisdom which Peter appears to believe had God as its source. Finally, he calls Paul's writings "scriptures," comparing them to other sacred writings.

Peter, Paul, and (by inference) John have only one term for the idea that Paul changed Christianity to fit his own prejudices. That term is "fake news."

A Missing Day

This piece of fake news would be included as something funny if it weren't that some people still believe it. The following story, in some form, has been around since the late 1800s, but the use of computers was added around the 1960s.

The story is that NASA has discovered a missing 24-hour period in the past. This was puzzling until someone who had read the Bible pointed out that Joshua 10:12-13 said that, in answer to Joshua's prayer, the sun stood still for "about a day." That seemed to account for all but 40 minutes of a day, when the person remembered 2 Kings 20:8-11, where Hezekiah asked the Lord to make the sun go back ten "degrees." Ten degrees out of 360 degrees is 40 minutes. Therefore science has been able to prove the miracles of the Bible.

There are several things that show this to be false. The most telling is that the story began long before NASA

You cannot prove a negative. No record that Jesus said something does not prove he didn't.

or computers. Then there is the question of why scientists would be looking backward to establish future positions of celestial bodies. But there are more telling scriptural reasons to deny the accuracy of this story.

Joshua 10 does tell the events around a battle with the Amorites, and that Joshua commanded the sun and moon to "stand still" so the Israelites could complete the destruction of the opposing army in daylight. The problem is determining how long "about a day" is. How did someone determine that "about a whole day" is 23 hours and 20 minutes? Almost every translation of the passage uses the word "about," even though the Hebrew word means simply "whole." When it is used to speak of a "ram without blemish" no priest would allow an "about unblemished" sacrifice. The only way the story could determine the instance in Joshua is to work backward from a faulty determination of 20 minutes in 2 Kings.

But about that. Where the King James Version uses the word degrees, the literal meaning is steps. Presumably time was told by the shadow on a certain staircase. Since we don't know how long a "step" was, we can't determine an accurate period of time. Even if it were a circular sundial, ten degrees could at best be an approximation.

It would be nice to believe the news that scientists proved at least two miracles of the Bible. On the other hand, where then would be faith? And where do you put your faith? In the Bible, or in fake news?

WHAT KIND OF CLEAVER?

English is a strange language. Words don't always mean what they appear to mean. For instance, you can not be compatible and incompatible at the same time (or you can have inert gasses such as argon and neon, but there are no "ert" gasses). On the other hand, gasoline is flammable and inflammable. You cannot untie your shoes unless they are already tied, but when you thaw a steak from the freezer you are also unthawing it. There is another whole class of words, called contranymy, in which the same word may mean one thing, or its exact opposite. Take that word, unthawed. It can mean something that has been unfrozen or something that is still frozen. It depends on the context. A fast boat can be a speedboat or a boat tied securely to a dock (or a speedboat tied securely to a dock). You can dust a cookie with powdered sugar (apply it), or dust the counter to remove the excess sugar. A handicap in sports may be an advantage to provide equality, or (in general) a disadvantage causing inequality. To strike is to hit something, unless you are playing baseball when it means you missed an attempt to hit the ball. Then there is the old joke where, when someone stumbles, you wish them a nice trip. The King James Version of the Bible uses one particular contranym, and the context alone tells you which meaning is intended, unless you know the original languages.

And he shall cleave it with the wings thereof, but shall not divide it asunder: and the priest shall burn it upon the altar, upon the wood that is upon the fire: it is a burnt sacrifice, an offering made by fire, of a sweet savour unto the LORD. (Lev 1:7)

The priest was to divide the bird presented as an offering. Perhaps for that purpose he would use a cleaver.

In a different command (Gen 2:24), a man is to leave his parents and cleave to his wife (although they may presumably live with *her* parents). It may be that "Lizzie Borden took an axe and gave her mother forty whacks" (although she was, incidentally, acquitted of doing so), but it is not likely that God expects a man to do that to his wife. Rather, he is to adhere to her.

In the King James Version, most instances of the word cleave have the meaning of clinging to something. "Cleave unto the Lord." (Deut 4:4) "Let my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth." (Ps 137:6) "Cleave to that which is good." (Rom 12:9) There are several more examples, including two quotations of the Genesis 2 passage.

Only a few passages use the word in that form. "Thou didst cleave the earth with rivers." (Hab 3:9) "The mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west." (Zech 14:4)

There are, however, many passages using various forms of the word. Animals that have cloven hooves are unclean to the Jewish people (Lev 11). The past tense of the verb can also be a noun. The hooves of a pig are cleft, and Moses was hidden in the cleft of the rock (Ex 33:22). The latter context makes it clear that it was where a rock was split rather than where two rocks were joined.

This article is intended simply as a matter of interest; however a valuable point could be made. Context may make it clear which meaning of a contranym is intended. Nevertheless, this shows the difficulty of translating the Bible into English. That makes it more important that you use a reliable translation as opposed to a questionable one.

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