



Minutes With Messiah

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THE MOST IMPORTANT DAY

We just finished Christmas in the Christian calendar, and are soon to come upon Easter. In the Jewish calendar, we just had the High Holy Days and Chanukah, and will soon have Passover and *Shavuot* (Pentecost). Other calendars have their special days. Usually they celebrate something in the past. But on God's calendar there is a day that celebrates the present (and perhaps the future), that is more important than Easter or *Yom Kippur*. What is the most important day on the calendar; Today.

O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. To day if ye will hear his voice, Harden not your heart, as in the provocation, and as in the day of temptation in the wilderness: When your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my work. (Ps 95:6-9)

The psalmist saw the value of today. Can we worship yesterday? We can have worshiped. But that was yesterday, not today. Can we worship tomorrow? It is impossible, because we can do nothing tomorrow. By the time we are able to do it, it is today.

Moreover, today is not yesterday. Today, harden not your hearts. When the psalmist wrote this, the wanderings in the wilderness were distant history. If David wrote this psalm, there had been 450 years since the events of which he spoke. That is equivalent, roughly, to the English history of America. That is William the Conqueror to Henry VIII. Yet he says, "Today, harden not your heart." You are not your ancestors. You are not responsible for their sins. Rather, you have to decide your own course. Today.

The writer of the letter to the Hebrew Christians also uses this passage as an admonition. The Israelites who rebelled did not enter into the rest of the Promised Land. Instead, they all died in the wilderness. Should we, like them, die and fail to achieve the rest?

Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of

Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end; While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. (Heb 3:12-15)

Did Israel enter the land? Some did, but not the generation that rebelled. For nearly forty years they wandered until all but two who were over the age of twenty had died. We must not be like them, but we cannot do it alone. This passage says, "exhort one another daily." The danger comes daily. Each person may today choose to believe, or to harden their heart. If we face that choice alone, the danger is greater that we will fall into unbelief. That is why the writer encourages us to help our fellow Christians daily.

This is a practice we have gotten away from. Many see their fellows maybe two days a week. We don't know what our brothers and sisters are going through because we hardly know them. And yet, we are told to exhort them daily, while it is today.

Again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. (Heb 4:7)

He "limits" a certain day. The Greek word is the one from which we get horizon. God has set a boundary on the time we have to believe and obey. That boundary is today. Yes, there may be future todays in which we have the opportunity to believe, but we cannot know that.

What is the most important day on the calendar? It is today, because today is the only day we have. We don't have a time machine that can take us into the future. If we must celebrate a day on the calendar, let us celebrate Today.

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PSALM 69

How does one know when an Old Testament prophecy has a New Testament application? Or even if? Or even whether something in the Old Testament is a prophecy at all? Sometimes these are hard questions to answer. The simple answer is that if the New Testament writers say it applies, it applies. Matthew says over 30 times that something in the life of Jesus happened that it might be fulfilled what was said by the prophet. But even then, some of his references (such as the virgin birth) are so obscure in the original that one would otherwise be inclined to say, "That was a prophecy?" Absent any such confirmatory statement, however, the prophecy would have to have multiple elements that clearly fit. Even ignoring the scholarly arguments over the word "pierced," Psalm 22 contains multiple statements that were clearly fulfilled in the one event of the crucifixion: derision of the Jewish leaders with exact quotation, parting of garments. Most of the Psalms are not generally considered to be prophetic, and yet when one appears to have such elements, how much can one take as predictive? For instance, how much of Psalm 69 refers to the life and death of Jesus? And if it doesn't, what can we learn from it, anyway?

David and Jonah

The most striking thing about the 69th Psalm is its similarity to the psalm in Jonah 2. When most people think of Jonah they think of the big fish. Then maybe they think of his message to Nineveh or his argument with God about his shade. The last thing we consider Jonah to be is a psalmist. Chapter 2 of that book is probably the most forgotten, and yet it is a psalm comparable to those of David.

Jonah's use of nautical imagery is understandable, considering his situation. David's may be less so, but there are distinct similarities that would indicate Jonah was quite familiar with David's psalms. Take a look at the similarities. The parallels are not exact, but neither were the circumstances.

Psalm 69	Jonah 2
Save me, O God; for the waters are come in unto my soul. I sink in deep mire, where there is no standing: I am come into deep waters, where the floods overflow me. (vv. 1-2)	For thou hadst cast me into the deep, in the midst of the seas; and the floods compassed me about: all thy billows and thy waves passed over me. (v. 3)
Deliver me out of the mire, and let me not sink: let me be delivered from them that hate me, and out of the deep waters. Let not the waterflood overflow me, neither let the deep swallow me up, and let not the pit shut her mouth upon me. (vv. 14-15)	The waters compassed me about, even to the soul: the depth closed me round about, the weeds were wrapped about my head. I went down to the bottoms of the mountains; the earth with her bars was about me for ever: yet hast thou brought up my life from corruption, O LORD my God. (vv. 5-6)
I am weary of my crying: my throat is dried: mine eyes fail while I wait for my God. (v. 3)	I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the LORD, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice. Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight; yet I will look again toward thy holy temple. When my soul fainted within me I remembered the LORD: and my prayer came in unto thee, into thine holy temple. (vv. 2, 4, 7)
They that hate me without a cause are more than the hairs of mine head: they that would destroy me, being mine enemies wrongfully, are mighty: then I restored that which I took not away. O God, thou knowest my foolishness; and my sins are not hid from thee. Let not them that wait on thee, O Lord GOD of hosts, be ashamed for my sake: let not those that seek thee be confounded for my sake, O God of Israel. (vv. 4-6)	They that observe lying vanities forsake their own mercy. (v. 8)
But as for me, my prayer is unto thee, O LORD, in an acceptable time: O God, in the multitude of thy mercy hear me, in the truth of thy salvation. (v. 13)	But I will sacrifice unto thee with the voice of thanksgiving; I will pay that that I have vowed. Salvation is of the LORD. (v. 9)

David and Jonah were facing trials that seemed beyond bearing. The specific cause of Psalm 69 is not given, but it is clear that David was dealing with betrayal from those close to him. He was being hounded near to death. Jonah was facing a betrayal of a different sort. He was being asked to preach salvation to the people who had killed some of his own neighbors. In a sense he felt betrayed by God. Nevertheless, both realized that their salvation, physical and spiritual, would only come from God. From the depths of despair they cry that they might not drown.

This shows that some parts of the psalms are universal. They have meaning for people in similar circumstances. Does that mean, however, that parts of them cannot be specific? Hardly.

Save from my Enemies

The bulk of the remainder of Psalm 69 continues the prayer for salvation from enemies. It moves away from the nautical imagery, and becomes more straightforward.

First David lays out his complaint. His enemies speak against him without cause. Verses 7, 8, 12, 18-20 tell of the effect of their reproaches. Even his family is against him, and he feels it like a man in mourning. Nobody seems to be on his side. He looked “for comforters, but I found none.” (v. 20)

Because of this he calls on God to avenge him. Some people have trouble with psalms like this one. “Let their habitation be desolate; and let none dwell in their tents.” (v. 25) “Let them be blotted out of the book of the living, and not be written with the righteous.” (v. 28) They feel that David is asking God to take vengeance on his behalf out of proportion to the crime. Some other psalms are even more explicit in what the psalmist wants done to his persecutors. What people fail to remember is that David is asking for vengeance because of his position, not from personal spite. “For they persecute him whom thou hast smitten; and they talk to the grief of those whom thou hast wounded.” (v. 26) In this case he is asking God to take vengeance on those who add to the vengeance of God, those who rub salt into the wound. In other psalms he asks God to punish because they are attacking God’s anointed. He is calling God to defend his own honor, not David’s.

Verses 29-36, the end of the psalm, sing the praises of God. David appears to be saying that if God defends his own name, others will see it and glorify Him. If David, even in these circumstances, can “magnify him with thanksgiving,” then “the humble shall see, and be glad.” (v 32)

Nor is David alone in his praise. “Let the heaven and earth praise him, the seas, and every thing that moveth therein.” (v 34) This praise will result in the salvation of the inhabitants of the land of Judah. It can be extended,

though, to all who praise God. “Salvation is of the LORD.”

Two passages

That leaves two passages that are generally taken to be prophecies of the Messiah; one because it is descriptive, and one because it is quoted as being Messianic. It could be said that the whole psalm describes the reproach of the Jewish leaders endured by Jesus, and is entirely about the Messiah. That may be true, or it may be a bit of a stretch. Without a specific passage later saying “this is about Jesus” we cannot be certain. But we can be certain about portions of the psalm.

“They gave me also gall for my meat; and in my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.” (v. 21) While none of the gospel writers specifically mention this passage,

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every one of them mentions that Jesus was given vinegar to drink while on the cross. It seems such a small detail, yet all four writers mention it. They clearly had this verse in mind as they observed his suffering.

For the zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me. (Ps 69:9)

This verse is quoted in two different contexts to prove that Jesus was the Messiah. The first had to do with an incident in the Temple at Passover. Jesus observed those who bought and sold in the Temple, made a scourge, and drove them out of the Temple, bankrupting the money changers. John says, “And his disciples remembered that it was written, The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up.” (Jn 2:17) The disciples saw this event as a specific fulfillment of prophecy.

Paul takes the other half of the verse to apply to Jesus. In Romans 15:1-4 he advocates doing good for others without concern for oneself. Do good for the sake of doing good, because even Jesus did not please himself, but “the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me.” It did not matter how much people reviled him, he would do the right thing. Even when that right thing meant his death on a stake.

This is a marvelous psalm, in part because it does specifically speak of the Messiah. But its prophetic portion is small compared to its prayer to God. It is worth praying, whether any or all applies to Jesus, because we all need God’s salvation.

I SAW AN EMPEROR

Near the beginning of the Revelation we find the letters to the seven churches of Asia Minor. As we read through them, many people pick out the most prominent thing to remember about each. For instance, we may remember that the letter to the church at Philadelphia has nothing negative to say. On the other hand, it seems that everyone knows that Laodicea was a lukewarm church. We forget that there were promises made to the Laodiceans that would repent. As with the promises to the other churches, these are pretty significant.

If any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. (Rev 3:20-21)

One has to keep in mind who it is that is making the promise. This is not some minor dignitary. This is the King of kings and Lord of lords speaking. In the letter he calls himself “the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God.” (Rev 3:14) Nor is the invitation for a single meal and a photo op on the Throne of God.

The king’s table was no small thing. On any given day there might be hundreds of guests. Just the list of daily provisions for Solomon should indicate how many people he hosted.

And Solomon's provision for one day was thirty measures of fine flour, and threescore measures of meal, Ten fat oxen, and twenty oxen out of the pastures, and an hundred sheep, beside harts, and roebucks, and fallowdeer, and fatted fowl. (1 Kings 4:22-23)

Solomon’s guests included some permanent guests, such as the sons of Barzillai (1 Kings 2:7), as

Mephibosheth had been continually at David’s table. (2 Sam 9:13) Nehemiah hosted more than 150 people daily. (Neh 5:17)

Now it might be an honor to be a one-time guest at the king’s or governor’s table, but it was more so to eat at the table continually. Such was the honor afforded to Jehoiachin by the new king of Babylon. He took Jehoiachin out of prison and elevated him to permanent guest. (2 Kings 25:27-29) This is the honor afforded to those who hear the voice of the beginning of the creation of God.

Beyond eating at the table, though, the king offers another honor to those who overcome. “To him... I will grant to sit with me in my throne.” You don’t even have to resort to a knowledge of grammar to realize this is more than a one-time thing. “Even as I... am set down with my Father.”

Jesus told the apostles that “in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.” (Matt 19:28) According to Revelation 5:11, the angels are around the throne and worship the one on the throne. So this promise to the faithful of Laodicea is significant. They are to sit on His throne. That means they are greater than the apostles and worshiped by angels. The faithful sit with Jesus on his throne, continually.

In the late 1970s I had the opportunity to be in Tokyo at the Imperial Palace on the day Emperor Hirohito celebrated his birthday. We crowded into a courtyard, thousands at a time, and the emperor made a brief appearance on a balcony behind bullet-proof glass. Then we were all herded out so more could come in. I have seen an emperor, but I will sit on the throne with the King of Glory, the Emperor of all emperors.

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