



Minutes With Messiah

Volume 21, Issue 8

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

June 2020

HIDE AND WATCH

The George Seuratt painting *A Sunday Afternoon on the Island of Grande Jatte*, which is housed at the Art Institute of Chicago, is a pointillist painting about 6.8 feet high and 10.1 feet wide. It is so large that to take it all in you have to stand practically at the other end of the room in which it is hung. Imagine, then, trying to look at the painting from only a couple of feet away. All your eyes can really comprehend are a couple of feet square of what look like random dots on the canvas. This is essentially what the prophet Habbakuk saw of history; just a tiny portion that was virtually unrecognizable as anything. Yet the message of his prophecy is, "hide and watch."

The nation of Judah was in trouble. They had stopped following God, and as a result He was bringing the Chaldean army against them.

I will work a work in your days, which ye will not believe, though it be told you. For, lo, I raise up the Chaldeans, that bitter and hasty nation, which shall march through the breadth of the land, to possess the dwellingplaces that are not theirs. They are terrible and dreadful: their judgment and their dignity shall proceed of themselves. (Hab 1:5-7)

The prophet did not understand. Here was one of the most wicked nations of his time, about to destroy the nation of Judah. How could God stand by and watch that happen?

Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity: wherefore lookest thou upon them that deal treacherously, and holdest thy tongue when the wicked devoureth the man that is more righteous than he? (Hab 1:13)

Judah, for all its wickedness still professed a belief in God. They were hardly righteous, but they were certainly more so than the Chaldeans. Surely God could not use a more wicked nation to punish His people.

At the start of what we call chapter 2, Habakkuk says he will stand upon a watchtower and see what God will say to him. He will hide and watch. And that is what God wants him to do, because he is about to explain himself.

For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry.

Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by his faith. (Hab 2:3-4)

God says wait. You don't see the big picture, Habakkuk, because you are standing too close. What you don't see is that the Chaldeans will also be punished for their wickedness. They don't realize that they are merely a tool in the hand of God. In their pride they will be brought low. "But the LORD is in his holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before him." (Hab 2:20)

What God told Habakkuk about Judah and Babylon applies today. Too often we are standing too close to the picture to see the whole thing. We see a dog, and miss all the people in the painting. We see the wicked seeming to prosper, and the righteous suffer.

God told Habakkuk first of all not to compare one person to another. Don't say that the Babylonians are more wicked than the Judeans, so it isn't fair to use them to punish. Likewise, we must not compare our righteousness to that of others. After all, we have no righteousness of our own without Jesus. "For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him." (2 Cor 5:21)

Beyond that, we do not know what God is working in the big picture. All we see is our own little corner, but God says to hide and watch. He is working in ways we cannot comprehend. We may not always be able to step back and see more of the picture, but just seeing a small part we know that the larger picture is there.

And we know to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose, that all things work together for good. (Rom 8:28)

CONTENTS

Hide and Watch	1
Perambulation	2
Social Distancing	4

All articles Copyright 2020 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.

PERAMBULATION

It seems that more people are out walking than in recent memory. Running and bicycling are good pastimes, but walking has had a resurgence in popularity recently. Sometimes it may be for health; other times it may just be to get out of the house. One doctor went so far as to say that he could solve the epidemic of childhood obesity through the simple expedient of requiring all children to walk to school, no matter how far they lived from that school. Many cities have installed biking/walking paths

Besides the obvious advantage of potential weight loss, walking has many other advantages. It is low-impact, and therefore good exercise for those with some knee or ankle problems. It allows a person to connect with their surroundings, seeing a variety of flowers, or lizards and roadrunners, or maybe even a deer or coyote in some areas. The health benefits are far greater than mere weight loss. It also allows a person to travel from one place to another without the potential pollution of using an automobile, albeit much slower. And unlike traveling in

God provided that they could go through on foot, and without even getting their feet wet.

an automobile, two or more people can actually converse with each other safely on a walk.

The Bible has quite a bit to say about walking. Some of it is actual and some metaphorical.

Actually on foot

Let's face it; the Bible was written before the advent of cars or bicycles. If a person wanted to get from one place to another the choices were limited: on foot, on a beast, or (if you were rich enough) by wagon or chariot. It would be understandable, then, that the Bible would not often specify walking as the means of locomotion. It was just assumed that everyone walked unless another method was mentioned. You are more likely to read about someone riding a camel or a wagon, usually over long distances, because that went against the norm. One could almost assume that if another means of transport was not mentioned, then walking was the default. That would seem to indicate, for instance, that Jesus and his many followers walked from Capernaum to Jerusalem and back, a one-way distance of almost eighty miles. So when the Bible specifically says someone went on foot, it may be considered to be significant.

One of the greatest migrations in history was done on foot. At the beginning of the exodus from Egypt, Moses gives a count of "about six hundred thousand on foot that were men, beside children." (Ex 12:37) Years later one of the psalmists makes a point of saying that they went through the Red Sea on foot. "He turned the sea into dry land: they went through the flood on foot: there did we rejoice in him." (Ps 66:6) Perhaps his point was that they were able to go through the sea on dry land, but imagine what would have happened if they had to go through in boats. It would have been a predecessor of Dunkirk, except that even fishing boats were not available. Therefore, God provided that they could go through on foot, and without even getting their feet wet. God moves in mysterious ways, even if we have to go afoot.

Jabin the king of the Canaanites oppressed Israel for twenty years. His army included nine hundred chariots of iron. Against this army, God called Barak to fight. (Judg 4) Barak was uncertain about facing such a formidable foe, and demanded that Deborah the prophet go with him. God gave the Israelites a resounding victory. Deborah composed a song to memorialize the battle. In that song she says,

And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah; even Issachar, and also Barak: he was sent on foot into the valley. For the divisions of Reuben there were great thoughts of heart. (Judg 5:15)

Ten thousand inexperienced men on foot battled nine hundred iron chariots and a multitude of soldiers, and won. The Israelite soldiers must have felt like that lone man in Tiananmen Square facing down the tanks. But they won. If God can do that, what can't he do for us? We may feel like we are on foot against a massed armor battalion of sin, but God says that one man on foot can do anything.

Jesus wanted to mourn the death of John Baptist. To do so, he went by boat to a deserted place. He thought that by doing so he might get time away from the crowds so he could grieve. He was wrong. Even though he had taken a boat, people "followed him on foot out of the cities." (Matt 14:13) Some of them were sick or lame, which would make a foot journey even harder. They were determined to follow him. In a later incident, they came for the food, but this time they had no expectation except to be healed and to be taught. Jesus did feed the five thousand plus, miraculously. But that was not why they came. How many people today would walk five to ten miles (much less five to ten blocks) to hear the words of Jesus? If your car breaks down, is that an excuse to miss the assembly of the church? Would we even walk that far for healing or a free meal? More than once, people walked a distance while Jesus took a boat. May our faith be great enough to take such a walk, if need be.

Abraham was a rich man, with many camels. He could travel just about anywhere he wanted by riding. When God told him about the land he was to possess, however, God said, "Arise, walk through the land in the length of it and in the breadth of it; for I will give it unto thee." (Gen 13:17) The measure of his inheritance was determined by where his feet actually touched the ground. Maybe we have lost a sense of possession and familiarity with our surroundings because we do not walk. Some people only know their neighborhood through the window of a car, and only the street to get in and out. Those of us who walk not only know our neighborhoods, but sometimes even our neighbors. Walking gives us opportunities for evangelism that don't happen in a car.

Peter walked on water, but Jesus did it first. (Matt 14:29) Several people who were healed of lameness got up and walked. There is even one record of a dead girl walking. Well, at least she had been dead, but after Jesus revived her she walked. (Mk 5:42)

After Adam sinned, there is an interesting walk. "They heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day." (Gen 3:8) Neither the English nor the Hebrew makes it clear whether God was walking, or (to be grammatically correct) it was the voice walking. This ambiguity leads to the other type of walk.

Figurative walking

Walking can be literal or figurative. Did God, or His voice, actually walk in Eden? When "Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years," (Gen 5:22) was he actually accompanied by God in a physical form? A large number of references to walking in the scripture are clearly or most likely figurative. For instance, in the books of the Kings, various rulers were said to have "walked in the way of" Jeroboam, sin, their fathers, or David. "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3) Figuratively walking with someone is a very strong way of indicating where they stand.

And now, Israel, what doth the LORD thy God require of thee, but to fear the LORD thy God, to walk in all his ways, and to love him, and to serve the LORD thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, To keep the commandments of the LORD, and his statutes, which I command thee this day for thy good? (Deut 10:12-13)

Did Israel walk in God's ways? Not always. God knew that they would "walk after other gods, and serve them, and worship them." (Deut 8:19) Sometimes they did more than walk; they ran. "Their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed innocent blood." (Isa 59:7)

There was a time that we walked, but not with God. Some people are still in that state.

And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins; Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now

worketh in the children of disobedience. (Eph 2:1-2)

Peter expressed a similar thought. He even specified ways that people walked that were sin.

For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries: Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you. (1 Pet 4:3-4)

Paul was an advocate of exercise. While this was true in the physical sense, it was even more true in the spiritual realm. "Let us walk honestly, as in the day." (Rom 13:13) "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit." (Gal 5:25) "Walk worthy of God." (1 Thes 2:12) Just as the young girl was raised from the dead by

Figuratively walking with someone is a very strong way of indicating where they stand.

Jesus, Paul says we can die and walk a new walk.

Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (Rom 6:3-4)

Sometimes it is nice to take a walk by yourself. You are able to relax, to clear your mind of negative thoughts, and to prepare yourself to get back into a world of people. It is also nice, though, to be able to walk with a companion. Sometimes you talk about things. Sometimes one person calls some interesting or beautiful thing to the other's attention. Or sometimes you just keep each other's company in silence. The apostle John apparently liked to walk with company.

If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. (1 Jn 1:6-7)

How can two walk together if they are not wanting to go in the same direction? "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked." (1 Jn 2:6)

Those who walk tend to encourage others to walk. They know the benefits of walking, and think others should enjoy those benefits. John felt the same way. "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth." (3 Jn 4)

SOCIAL DISTANCING

Typecasting can ruin a career. Although Anthony Perkins did some marvelous work after 1960, he will always be thought of as Norman Bates in *Psycho*. Because of his success in *Dracula*, and his heavy eastern-European accent, Bela Lugosi fought unsuccessfully throughout his life for roles in movies that were not of the horror genre. Arnold Schwarzenegger had moderate success in his two comedies, but he is still considered strictly an action-adventure hero. In the opera world, it is even more broadly stated: basses are always villains or old men. In the Bible, one city has been typecast in a role related to imprisonment of the apostle Paul. After all, every Bible school student knows about the Philippian Jailer, but they forget about Lydia. Philippians is remembered as one of the “prison epistles.”

In a time when much of the world has been in, or is coming out of, physical isolation, maybe the city of Philippi, and Paul’s letter to the church there, is of increasing relevance today. A city long associated with Paul’s isolations may actually go against type. After all, it is not that Philippi was, like Ossining, Leavenworth, or San Quentin, equated with being a prison city. It is just coincidental that two of the three associations with Paul relate to his imprisonment. (The third association is their generosity in supporting Paul while he worked in Corinth, as mentioned in 2 Corinthians 8.)

Paul’s first isolation relative to Philippi came in the city itself. (Acts 16) Paul had cast a spirit of divination out of a young girl, making her employers angry. Since he was Jewish, and Philippi at that time had banned Jews from practicing their religion in the city, Paul was cast

into prison with his companion Silas. In this first instance of Philippian isolation, what was their reaction? It was one that we in the age of Covid-19 are urged not to do: they sang. More specifically, “they sang praises unto God.” And so, that is the first thing we should do in this time of isolation. We should praise God. Now, Paul and Silas only had some prisoners and a jailer to hear them, but we have various forms of social media that we can use to praise God.

The other isolation related to the Philippians was Paul’s Roman incarceration. Understand that Roman prisons were not like American prisons. The government did not pay for prisoner upkeep. If you did not have friends to provide food and other necessities, you starved and were cold. It is in such circumstances that Paul wrote what many consider to be his most hopeful letter. It is from prison that he wrote “do all things without complaining or disputing.” (Php 2:14) He wrote about hope. “If I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all.” (Php 2:17) And, of course, who can forget “Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice.” (Php 4:4)

Even the strictest orders for social distancing are nothing compared to Paul’s imprisonments. We may not be able to assemble as we would like. We may face certain restrictions that are annoying. We may even face some shortages of what we consider necessities, although many in the world might consider them luxuries. Nevertheless, our attitude should be that of Paul. Social distancing does not distance us from God. If anything, it should draw us closer, and in that we can rejoice.

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