



# MINUTES WITH MESSIAH

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## SERVING IVE

We're not here to serve I've; we are here to serve God.

Mark McKenzie

When I first heard that statement, I wondered, "Who is I've?" Then I realized what the preacher was really saying was, "We are not here to survive; we are here to serve God." But, then, it might just be correct the first way if you change "I've" to "I've."

Many people serve "I've." You hear it every day. "I've gotta make a living, don't I?" "I've gotta go to the grocery store." "I've gotta answer the phone." (Although that is what answering machines and voice mail are for.) "I've gotta ... whatever." It seems that the "I've" that we serve is one of the busiest entities around. And *so* demanding. Whenever "I've" has gotta to do something, it seems that I am the one expected to do it for him. "I've" has got to do so much that "I" have almost no time to do what I need to do, including talk to God and read his word.

It is important to go to work. "I've" got to make a living and support my family. But, as Michael Medved put it, "Serving the Boss is more important than working for the boss." Of course, they aren't mutually exclusive; you can serve God while working for the boss. The problem is when "I've gotta" becomes the master, and God has to take second place—when making a living is more important than making an eternal life.

A lot of the other things the "I've gotta" do are also important. If one doesn't do the little things that sustain life or make it enjoyable, one finds it difficult to do the more important things. Again, though, "I've" can't be the master. There is only one, and he must not be it.

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For

where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. The light of the body is the eye: if therefore thine eye be single, thy whole body shall be full of light. But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great *is* that darkness! No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the other, and despise the one. Ye cannot serve God and [I've]. (Matt 6:19-24)

Of course, there is an alternative. Since "I've" is so much a part of us, maybe we could convert him. You see, those areas where "I've's" gottas take precedence are those places where we, ourselves, haven't turned our lives over to God. They are those little rooms in our lives that we keep locked, trying to keep God out of them lest he find something he wouldn't like. You know, like when you close the bedroom door so the guests won't see the room you didn't get to clean before they came. If we convert "I've" to God's will, then we don't have to worry about him trying to become the master. He will be serving the same master. "I've" will become one with us instead of working against us.

Once we convert "I've" then we will hear more of "I've gotta read my Bible;" "I've gotta do good to that neighbor I don't like;" "I've gotta do what God wants." Then when "I've" wants to do something, it will be a pleasure to help him. We might even find that God will lend a hand, too.

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# AS A ROARING LION

The lion has long been considered the “king of beasts” because it is so feared by man and animals alike. In recent years the pack hunt has been characterized by some as “cowardly.” The fact that it is the female that does most of the work in the hunt has caused some to call the male lion “lazy.” But throughout most of history, and among those who live with lions, the animal has been king. The range of the Asiatic lion once stretched from North Africa to India, and even into Europe. Accordingly, it is not surprising that the Bible is full of lions, both literal and figurative.

Real lions figure in one of the most famous stories of the Bible—Daniel in the lion’s den. This shows that lions lived and were captured for use in painful executions as far east as Babylon. Essentially, Daniel was one of the first “gladiators” of which we know. He was not the only one to face lions, however. Some did not have as favorable a result to their leonine encounters.

## Facing real lions

Daniel was not the only person in the Bible to face real lions. Some people were killed by them.

A young prophet had gone up to prophesy against the altar at Bethel. He was told to go home by a different route and not eat while in Israel. Due to a lie by an older prophet he disobeyed God. Shortly after he left the prophet’s house a lion killed him. When word came to the old prophet of a dead man in the road with

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an ass and a lion waiting by it, he knew it was the young prophet and fetched and buried his body. (1 Kings 13:24-32)

It was not always safe living next to a prophet. After King Ahab let the Syrian king, ben-Hadad, go after he had been captured, another prophet was sent to prophesy against the king. As part of his preparation, for he wanted to look like a soldier wounded in battle, he asked a neighbor to strike him. When the neighbor

refused, the prophet warned him that a lion would kill him as soon as he left the prophet. When the man left a lion killed him. (1 Kings 20:35-36)

After the fall of Israel the Assyrians repopulated Samaria with people from other lands. When they showed no inclination to obey God, He sent lions among them and they killed some of the people. (2 Kings 17:25-26)

Lions got their share of being killed, too. Samson killed a lion with his bare hands, and then made a riddle about it (Judges 14:5-20). Before facing Goliath, David told Saul that he had killed a bear and a lion in protecting his sheep (1 Sam 17:34). One of David’s mighty men even followed his commander’s example. Among the deeds of Benaiah, the Bible tells of him killing a lion in a pit during the winter snows (2 Sam 23:20-23).

Psalms 104: 20-22 tells us that God personally feeds the lions. “Thou makest darkness, and it is night: wherein all the beasts of the forest do creep forth. The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their meat from God. The sun ariseth, they gather themselves together, and lay them down in their dens.”

Perhaps not in the category of “real” lions, but certainly not totally figurative, would be carved images of lions. Solomon was apparently enamored with lions. He had images of them made on the “molten sea,” the laver of the Temple (1 Kings 7:23-37). His ivory throne included fourteen gold lions, one on each side of the throne and two on each of six steps up to it (1 Kings 10:18-20).

## Negative Lions

Lions are frequently used figuratively in the Bible. Because of their reputations, sometimes the use is favorable, and sometimes unfavorable. It is probably from these uses that we can learn the most lessons.

Twice in the book of Proverbs lions are used as an excuse. “The slothful man saith, There is a lion without, I shall be slain in the streets.” (Prov 22:13; similar is Prov 26:13) If we start imagining lions, perhaps we should see how the writer categorizes us—slothful.

Several of the tribes of Israel were compared, favorably or unfavorably, to lions: Judah (Gen 49:9), Gad (Deut 33:20), and Dan (Deut 33:22). Ezekiel 32 describes the king of Egypt as a lion being hunted and ensnared. Two complete nations were also described as

having leonine characteristics. In Daniel 7, Daniel is given a vision of history to come. He sees four nations pictured as different beasts. The first, obviously Babylon, is pictured as a winged lion which, at the end, loses its wings. In a similar symbol, John is shown another “Babylon,” a beast with the body of a leopard, the feet of a bear, and the mouth of a lion (Rev 13:2). Although many who don’t understand the basics of interpreting prophecy give various interpretations to this beast, in its description and its context John is very clearly speaking of the nation of Rome, which was about to bring severe persecutions on the church. In both these latter cases, Babylon and Rome, it is the destructive power of the lion that is being emphasized. These were nations who would try to wound God’s people, but their power would be broken.

God’s judgement on sinners is pictured using a lion. Amos tells those who do not follow God, but still seek “the day of the Lord,” that the day they seek will be one of death for them, and not of life. In one of the great word pictures of the Bible, he says it will be “As if a man did flee from a lion, and a bear met him; or went into the house, and leaned his hand on the wall, and a serpent bit him.” (Amos 5:19) When God seeks to bring destruction, it can come in many forms, including a lion, and is unavoidable.

The most common figurative use of the lion is to portray evil in general, or evil men. David, who had fought lions, used this picture frequently, such as this passage from Psalm 17:11-12: “They have now compassed us in our steps: they have set their eyes bowing down to the earth; Like as a lion that is greedy of his prey, and as it were a young lion lurking in secret places.” Peter used the lion to describe Satan. “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour.” (1 Pet 5:8)

## Positive Lions

One could get the impression that the lion is to be avoided at all costs. On the other hand, the Bible sometimes uses the lion to portray the positive as well as the negative.

Ezekiel used a young lion as a parable for the nation of Israel (Ezek 19:2-9). Proverbs 28:1 says, “The wicked flee when no man pursueth: but the righteous are bold as a lion.”

When we talk of something being “cherubic” we often think “baby-faced.” Scripturally, however, it would probably better have the meaning “leonine.” Ezekiel and John both picture the cherubim as having the faces of lions (Ezek 1:10; 10:14; 41:18; Rev 4:7). So next time someone calls your young child a

“cherub” you might do better to slap them than thank them.

Almost as often as a lion is used to describe evil, it is used to describe God. Isaiah 31:4 says God will defend His people like a lion over his prey, facing down a mob of shepherds (or is that a flock of shepherds?). “Like as the lion and the young lion roaring on his prey, when a multitude of shepherds is called forth against him, he will not be afraid of their voice, nor abase himself for the noise of them: so shall the LORD of hosts come down to fight for mount Zion, and for the hill thereof.” Jeremiah 4:5-8 pictures God going out to destroy nations like a lion making the wild

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country desolate. Hosea (5:14 and 13:7-8) paints a similar picture of God’s wrath on sinners.

One passage about God as a lion should possibly be the motto for every preacher, and even for every one of God’s children. “The lion hath roared, who will not fear? the Lord GOD hath spoken, who can but prophesy?” (Amos 3:8) I am told by those with experience of it that a lion’s roar in the wild can be heard a long distance. Even from a distance it strikes fear in the hearts of those who are out in the open, for they are potential prey. Amos says that such fear is a natural result. Just as natural, he goes on, it is for one who has heard and accepted the word of God to teach it to others. Just as one fears the roar of a lion, one teaches the word God has given him. One problem many of us have is that we only hear lions in zoos. We know the lion is caged, so we don’t fear his roar. In the same way, perhaps, we cage God. His roar is no longer powerful; his gospel doesn’t burn our hearts until it is let out. We are no longer constrained to teach.

Lions are real. In some places in this world lions are still a significant part of people’s lives. We need to realize that lions are real in our spiritual lives as well. We need to avoid the lions of sin. We need to rely on the salvation of the Lion of Judah (Rev 5:5). We need to accept the protection of the lion of God. And we need to sound forth the gospel like a lion announcing his territory. There are lions in our lives. We can’t afford to ignore them. Neither can we afford to use them as an excuse to do nothing.

# DANGEROUS WITNESS

One of the big “buzz words” in religion in recent years has been “witnessing.” We hear of “witnessing for Christ,” “being a good witness,” and living so that others can see our witness.

I know a number of people who have objected to the idea of “witnessing for Christ.” Their main objection is that nobody today can be a valid witness of anything that Christ did or said. The apostles and other New Testament writers could be witnesses because they lived at the same time as Jesus. Unless a person is 2000 years old they can’t be a legal witness. Their testimony is only second hand at best.

On the other hand, most of those who use the term are talking about being a witness not of what Jesus did while he lived as a man on the earth, but what Jesus has done in their lives. Of that they may be valid witnesses, or they may not. If one has not “put on” Christ as the Galatians did, through immersion in water (Gal 3:7), or has not been raised from that immersion to a new life (Romans 6), then their witness could possibly be challenged. They may be able to witness as to the value of living a more moral life, but can not be a witness to the salvation Christ offers, never having availed themselves of Christ’s blood.

On the other other hand, even those who object to the term often use it about some who did not know or see Jesus personally. It is in this sense that I sometimes wonder whether I, or others, would be willing to “witness.” This is the sense that goes back to the original Greek word for witness, the word we call

“martyr.” There are a lot of people who are willing to live like Christ ... up to his last week. They will tell people about Christ. They want to be witnesses in the court of public opinion. If the witness had to suffer the punishment of the person for whom they were witnessing, though, we might have second thoughts.

Eusebius tells of some of these witnesses/martyrs. There were those that were torn by wild beasts. Some had each limb tied to an animal and were pulled apart. One I find particularly difficult to say whether I could endure was the man who was suspended upside down over a fire that was fed with green wood. He slowly died from smoke inhalation, not to mention a massive headache from all the blood rushing to his head. He may not have said a word, but his witness spoke loud and clear.

There is no doubt that many modern “witnesses” would resist “unto blood” (Heb 12:4). There are also probably many, as there no doubt were in the first centuries, who would be “witnesses,” but might balk at being “martyrs.” God commends the former, but condemns the latter. “And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.” (Lk 9:6)

“Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him...Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.” (Rom 6:8,11) What he wants is for us to die first, then we will be witnesses that don’t require a subpoena to force our testimony.

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