



# MINUTES WITH MESSIAH

Volume 11, Issue 8

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

June 2010

## LEAD ON SOFTLY

And he said, Let us take our journey, and let us go, and I will go before thee. And he said unto him, My lord knoweth that the children are tender, and the flocks and herds with young are with me: and if men should overdrive them one day, all the flock will die. Let my lord, I pray thee, pass over before his servant: and I will lead on softly, according as the cattle that goeth before me and the children be able to endure, until I come unto my lord unto Seir. (Gen 33:12-14)

Jacob had just traveled about four hundred miles on foot. He had met his estranged brother, who had once wanted to kill him. Now his brother, Esau, wanted to rush him another hundred or so miles to Esau's home (some say so he could kill Jacob when he was tired and out of the public view). Instead Jacob, now known as Israel, chose to beg that he follow slowly. (In fact he did not even follow Esau at all.) In the excuse he gave, it appears Israel understood something that many of us have a problem learning.

Ever since Dr. Benjamin Spock published his famous book, and maybe even before, parents have been concerned about the development of their children. New parents buy books explaining what to expect in the baby's first year, second year, etc. (By the time the child reaches the teen years, when the parents really need a manual they usually have given up on self-help books.) Many a parent agonizes because the book says a child should be turning over, walking, talking, or cutting teeth by a specific month and their child is a week late, according to the book. They gleam with pride when a child takes its first steps a few days before the book says it should. First-time parents can be very impatient about their child's development. Sometimes people in the church are like those parents. Sometimes we are worse.

Many people in the church don't even look at the book. They expect a newborn child to act like an adult. A person who has had a drug problem is baptized. Some in the congregation expect them to give up the drugs immediately. A person who has barely learned about Jesus is expected to know a long catalogue of obscure sins, and avoid them like the plague. One who has "sworn like a

sailor" is expected to clean up his language overnight, with never a slip up. Jacob admonishes us to "lead on softly" and as "the children are able to endure." Children in life, and in the spirit, are not able to endure what an adult can. "As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby." (1 Pet 2:2) It is important that we let a babe in Christ grow, rather than expecting them to be full grown.

Imagine a parent forcing solid food down a newborn's throat. The danger is that the child will die, if not from the abuse then from malnutrition. A court in the abuse trial is not likely to accept the excuse that the parent thought a newborn could eat steak and potatoes. In the same way, can we expect God to excuse us if we kill a newborn Christian with unreasonable demands? It took us years to learn the books of the Bible. How can we expect a person who barely knows what a Bible is to know how to find any verse at a moment's notice? Why should a new Christian know how to sing all the old standard hymns? And those aren't even things vital to their salvation. If we discourage them in such minor things, and they fall away thereby, can we expect God to hold us blameless?

On the other hand, we should also expect people to grow at a reasonable rate. "For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat." (Heb 5:12) While he was fleeing, Jacob did not ask Esau to pursue him slowly because he was too young to run. Jacob understood proper development. That is something that is hard to master. In dealing with children in Christ it is something, though, that we need to learn like Jacob did.

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# ***REPROVING THE WORLD***

Nobody likes to be corrected. We all like to think we are perfect, or at least right, in almost everything we do. There is a tendency, when corrected, to become defensive. We justify ourselves. We may even retaliate, physically or in kind. Yet all of us have required correction at one time or another. One of the functions of the Holy Spirit is correction.

Nevertheless I tell you the truth; It is expedient for you that I go away: for if I go not away, the Comforter will not come unto you; but if I depart, I will send him unto you. And when he is come, he will reprove the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: Of sin, because they believe not on me; Of righteousness, because I go to my Father, and ye see me no more; Of judgment, because the prince of this world is judged. (Jn 16:7-11)

The word reprove in verse 8 may be translated as “to correct.” It may also be translated “convict.” We may not like to be corrected. We like less to be convicted. That word implies a legal sentence of guilt and the punishment to follow. Although we have all, in God’s eyes, been convicted felons, the anticipated result of the conviction by the Holy Spirit is a complete pardon.

Jesus said the world would be convicted, convinced, or corrected in three areas. He further

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We are pardoned. The record is not sealed; it is expunged.

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explained what he meant, and it may not necessarily agree with how we might interpret his comment.

## **Of Sin**

We like the idea of convicting the world of sin, when the sinner is someone else. Someone cuts us off on the road, we want that person convicted of reckless or inattentive driving. We hear of corporate misdeeds and we hope that the perpetrators are convicted and spend years in prison. Sometimes we even define things as sins worthy of conviction that God never addressed. There was a time that some churches, especially in the American South and Southwest, would call dancing, smoking, and “mixed bathing” (boys and girls swimming in the same pool) sinful. Granted, smoking is bad for a person; it takes some twisting of scriptures to call it an outright sin. Some would even distinguish sinful dancing (waltzes, the

twist, etc.) from non-sinful dancing (line dances, square dancing, ballet), without any real scriptural backing for making such distinctions. Yes, we like convicting others of what we call sins.

Jesus, however, said that he would convict the world of sin based not on what people did but on what they did not believe. He will convict or correct the world because of sin simply based on whether or not they believe on Jesus.

The whole world is guilty of sin. “Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.” (Rom 5:12) We are already convicted, whether we know it or not. The punishment for sin is slated for all men. In one sense, Jesus convicted every one of us by living without sin. Because we sin, we do not measure up.

Believing on Jesus changes all that. Anyone who does not put their trust in him remains in sin. For everyone else there is a pardon. One who is guilty of a crime, and convicted in a court of law, faces three options. One is punishment. This may be reduced by clemency on the part of the court or government, or it may be reduced because of mitigating circumstances; nevertheless, punishment is the most common option. After a certain period of time a convicted person may be granted a parole. This is a conditional release based on certain promises by the parolee. A person who is paroled retains a record of conviction for a crime. The third option is pardon. When a convicted person is granted a pardon they no longer have to say they were convicted. It becomes as if the conviction, and perhaps the crime, never existed.

Pardon is what we are afforded by the death and resurrection of Jesus. Those who believe on him are free from any conviction for sin. The record is not sealed, it is expunged. God says that we are like his son, sinless. But the fact that some people are without sin automatically convinces or convicts those who have not received a pardon. It emphasizes their condition. Because they choose not to accept the terms of pardon they become aware of how truly sinful they are.

Someone might argue that the world’s lack of faith means that they are not convinced that they have sin. In fact we see the opposite. People may not admit that there is sin. They may not admit that they have sinned. But they know there is sin, and where they stand in relation to it. Whenever anyone reacts negatively to the life of a Christian, they are proving that they are convinced of their own sinfulness. Otherwise, why would their reaction be so strong? The fact that people choose not to believe truly convicts them.

## Of Righteousness

How do you convince someone that there is such a thing as righteousness? How do you show them that righteousness is a good thing? How do you show them that they may not be righteous? As importantly, what is righteousness?

Righteousness is keeping the laws and commands of God. It is being in a right state with God.

With that definition in mind, then there may be some difficulty in convincing the world of righteousness. If one does not believe in God or in following his commands, then it is difficult to prove that those commands are good, and to be followed. Even if you show that the performance of God's laws is good in principle, they are not going to accept them as the laws of God, but merely as humane or beneficial acts. It may be possible to show a person that something is good, but more difficult to show that person that it is righteous. It may have its benefits, but until one does something because it is from God then it is not righteousness.

How, then, does Jesus' going to the Father convince the world of righteousness? What does not seeing him any more have to do with righteousness?

That is really the crux of the gospel. Jesus dying on the cross, rising from the grave, and being seen afterward by witnesses is the gospel.

For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures: And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve: After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. (1 Cor 15:3-8)

The ascension of Jesus into heaven is the only way to convince men of righteousness. To be aware of righteousness one must be aware of God. To be aware of the benefits of righteousness one must be aware of the forgiveness of God. The resurrection of Jesus proves the existence of God, for only God has the power to raise one from the dead. The crucifixion proves the forgiveness of God. "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (Jn 3:16)

For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh: How much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God? (Heb 9:13-14)

Jesus proves righteousness. His death, resurrection, and ascension to the Father prove that God exists. If God exists, then righteousness exists. Good deeds become more than deeds that are merely good; they become acts of obedience to God.

## Of Judgement

There was an episode of "Happy Days" in which Fonzie was teaching Richie to stand up to a bully. He told him that all it took was for him to stand his ground and feel like he could beat the bully. In the end, however, he realized that he left out one important point. You have to have shown in the past that you are willing to actually hit the bully.

Jesus occasionally called the devil "the prince of this world." (Jn 12:31; 14:30; and the passage in question) The devil is that bully. He was in the habit of making men do his will instead of God's will. He used any means to get man to follow him. As long as he continued to get away with his bullying, mankind could say there was no

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The resurrection proves the existence of God. The crucifixion proves the forgiveness of God.

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justice in the world. So justice happens to some people, but unless the bully is brought to justice, there is truly no justice.

That is why Jesus said that the world would be convinced of justice. That is how the world would be convinced of justice. The bully had to be judged. One we could see that God has the power to judge even the bully, then we can recognize the possibility that there is justice in the world.

Some people teach that the devil is currently in charge in this world. They say that because Peter described him as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour (1 Peter 5:8) he must still be the prince of this world. While he does prowl about like a lion, he is a toothless lion. If he is a prince, he is a deposed prince. He has been judged, convicted, and chained. (Rev 20:1-3)

Because the devil has been convicted and his power limited or broken, the bully has met his judgement. There is justice in this world. Jesus convinced the world of justice because he met the terms of justice. He paid the penalty for sin, and in so doing he judged even the one who had been prince of this world.

Maybe nobody likes to be corrected. The wise man accepts correction, even if he does not like it. The world has been corrected. Now it is just a matter of seeing who is wise in the world.

# ***FLEE AS A BIRD***

What is it about mountains that make them so popular? I know that Chris and I love Ponderosa Christian Camp. There among the trees, down by the stream, surrounded by the quiet, we find it very peaceful. A lot of you share that same sentiment. It is a wonderful place to relax and meditate on just how awesome God is.

Mountains have been popular for a long time. Jesus often retired to a mountain top to pray. It was on a mountain that Moses met with God and obtained the Law that was to govern Israel for hundreds of years. Later, from a mountain top Moses was allowed to view the Promised Land. Elijah learned how to listen to God on a mountain top.

From around 1810 to 1840 “mountain men” roamed the Rocky Mountains trapping beaver and selling the furs. There were solitary men who for whatever reason sought the privacy that the mountains could provide. They are often depicted as clad in buckskins, with a coonskin cap. They more often than not, carried a Hawken rifle (black powder) and a large Bowie knife (scalpin’ knife). The romantic figure of such men, who were honorable and with a strict code of honor, who were always willing to help a neighbor or even a stranger in need, was somewhat true. As in any society there were those who were less than honorable. They did live in the wildness, some remained there for life while others retired as farmers or business men. However, for the most part they were employed by the fur companies. They often hunted in groups, reported to the head of the hunting party, called a “boowsay” (a corruption of the word bourgeois). It might interest you to know that one of the large fur trading centers was in Taos, NM. The fur trade dropped off when the beaver hat went out of style in and around 1830 and ceased altogether around 1840.

David could have been classified as a “mountain man” given all the time he spent there fleeing from King Saul. Like the modern day mountain man, David’s life in the wilderness was beset by many hardships. David lived far from men and probably found many paths that would later help him in the battles he fought.

In Psalm 11 we read of how David reacted to King Saul’s constant harassment. David’s friend and advisors told him he should hide until the trouble was done. Yet David realized that there was really nowhere to hide. He realized that he possessed the ultimate in protectors, Jehovah. The best place to be was next to God. To flee to a place of refuge was to show fear and mistrust in God.

“He would rather dare the danger than exhibit a distrust in the Lord his God.” (Spurgeon) Proverbs 1:7 tells us that the best advice comes from God, Proverbs 1:8-9 tells us that parents can also be sources of wisdom, and on occasion good friends can help (Prov 27:9). However, we must take advice that doesn’t come from the Lord, with a grain of salt. Advice that tells us to trust in ourselves and not God should be avoided (Ps 56:11). God provides help in His own way (2 Chron 14:11). Adversity makes us take a look at what we believe (Ps 11:3). God will never fail us (2 Tim 2:19)!

If you must flee to the mountains, do it to see the grandeur of God’s creation. Flee there to meditate on His will for you. Flee there to escape the heat of the day. Trust God to be near wherever you are when trouble comes. “In Jehovah do I take refuge: How say ye to my soul, Flee as a bird to your mountain.”

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