

THE GOSPEL MESSAGE

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I'm Sorry. What Was That?

Benjamin Fry

During this quarantine, there have been several things made obvious. One of these is the ability for people to ignore, or choose to not believe, those who are in authority over them. Especially once something has been said often enough, we start to tune it out. One example of this is in the story of the boy who cried wolf. At first when the young man cries out his warning, the town comes alive to protect the sheep even though there is no wolf. He repeats this exercise, and gradually the townsfolk get tired of his antics and ignore him. Then at last the wolf comes, and though the boy cries as greatly as he can, no one pays attention. The warning has come too often, and is never seen as true. The wolf then feasts upon the flesh of the sheep that the boy intended to protect.

This is true of lies, but also of the truth. As Christians, we are the light of the world (**Matthew 5:14**), and the light that we are to shine is Jesus Christ. We should deal in the light and the truth, because it is by the truth that we, and the world, are set free (**John 8:31-32**). The greatest truth is the Lord Jesus Christ and it is our duty to proclaim him to the world. In this, we can see an echo of the calls of many of the prophets of old. They looked forward to the coming of the Lord, but did not see it; now we look forward to the return of the Lord.

Throughout the ages, God has called many messengers to speak to those who are near and to those who are far off. Still today, the Lord calls us to spread his message. There are days and times when we feel unfit for this calling. We do not know enough, we are not eloquent enough. In this we are not alone. Isaiah knew that he was an unfit messenger. Jeremiah protested that he was too young. It is a normal thing for those whom God chooses to feel as though they are not worthy of this calling.

None of us deserve the grace that has been given to us, but our God is a merciful and compassionate God. Each of us are called to proclaim the Lord until his return, but there are also those who are called to be more. Some have extra responsibilities, like elders and evangelists who oversee the church and work of spreading the gospel. To these in particular we can see the role of a watchman, as Ezekiel was called

(**Ezekiel 33:7**). This is not an easy burden to bear, which is why James warns those who become teachers that they will be judged more harshly (**James 3:1**).

Those who proclaim the word of the Lord experience the same difficulty that Ezekiel did. The people would not listen, as the townsfolk would not listen to the boy who cried wolf. But these faithful ministers are not crying wolf to deceive, like the serpent did to Eve, nor are they trying to take advantage of those they oversee. All too often, their message falls on deaf ears. The words God spoke to Isaiah still ring true today: “*Keep on hearing, but do not understand, keep on seeing, but do not perceive*” (**Isaiah 6:9**). In more modern parlance, “I’m sorry, what was that?”

The greatest truth is the Lord Jesus Christ and it is our duty to proclaim him to the world. In this, we can see an echo of the calls of many of the prophets of old.

All too often, we fall prey to the same issues as the ancient peoples. Ezekiel was warned that the people of God to whom he was sent were hard-headed and hard-hearted (**Ezekiel 3:7**). Many people today still fit into that category, both believers and non-believers. As Christians, we should strive to not be like those people long ago, but rather be like the Bereans, who were willing to search the scriptures to see if what Paul preached were true (**Acts 17:11**). It is good to be hard-headed in some situations. The Lord promised to make Ezekiel harder of head than the Israelites he was ministering to!

When the Lord warned Ezekiel about the people, He also said that Ezekiel was not responsible for how the people received his message. Ezekiel is told that it is his job to warn and to give them the word of the Lord. By delivering the

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message he was given, he would save his own soul (**Ezekiel 33:9**). Like Ezekiel, it is not our own words, or our own efforts that soften the hearts of those who listen, rather it is the Lord who does the work. Paul reminds us of this in **1 Corinthians 3:6-7**. Paul planted the word and Apollos watered, but it is from the Lord that the increase comes. We, like Paul and Apollos, are merely God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works (**Ephesians 2:10**).

Even knowing that it is God who takes care of his word, it can be disheartening to have people not listen. It is just about the worst thing for teachers to see no effect from their teaching. Parents may be saddened by their children not paying attention to their instructions. It is a terrible thing to be ignored, especially when you continue to work for the best of those involved. This is why God did not condemn Elijah when Elijah was ready to give up and die, and why the Lord reminded Ezekiel multiple times that he was only responsible for speaking God's word.

It is important that we trust the Lord to ensure that his word will accomplish his purpose (**Isaiah 55:11**). Our job is merely to warn people of the effects of sin and teach them about the mercy of God. In this way we always be gracious in our speech (**Colossians 4:6**), because on the judgment day we will be responsible for every careless word we have spoken (**Matthew 12:36**). And do not be discouraged because the word of the Lord seems to have no effect when it is spoken, but remember that you are in good company, for in the same manner they treated the apostles and the prophets who came before. The Lord knows those who are his (**1 Timothy 2:19**), and he will take care of them.

May each of us be filled with the Spirit of Lord, the spirit of courage, hope, and truth. May the Lord of peace, give you rest as you continue in him.

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God's Rich Mercy: Manasseh

Joshua Riggins

2 Kings 21:1-18 presents us with the sad history of Manasseh, son of Hezekiah. He became king at the age of twelve, and he departed from every moral instruction his father ever gave him. He offered his son as a burnt offering to a foreign god (verse 6), he put an idol in the house of God (verse 7), and he

seduced the children of Israel to "worship" as he did (verse 9). Manasseh's rule drove God to prophesy the destruction of Jerusalem (verse 14). Manasseh shed the blood of anyone who chose to serve God (verse 16). Josephus noted, "he barbarously slew all the righteous men that were among the Hebrews; nor would he spare the prophets, for he every day slew some of them, till Jerusalem was overflown with blood" (*Antiquities of the Jews*, X.III.1). God responded to Manasseh's refusal to listen. In **2 Chronicles 33:11**, we read, "Therefore the Lord brought upon them the captains of the army of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh with hooks, bound him with bronze fetters, and carried him off to Babylon."

Finally, when life hit bottom, Manasseh prayed (**2 Chronicles 33:12-13**). God responded favorably, "and He received his entreaty, heard his supplication, and brought him back to Jerusalem into his kingdom." Manasseh's heart changed, God offered mercy, and Manasseh responded with sincerity:

He took away the foreign gods and the idol from the house of the Lord and in Jerusalem; and he cast them out of the city. He also repaired the altar of the Lord, sacrificed peace offerings and thank offerings on it, and commanded Judah to serve the Lord God of Israel (2 Chronicles 33:15-16).

In **2 Peter 3:9** we read, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance." Peter reminds us that God never wanted to see Manasseh perish in captivity. Instead, God desired that Manasseh bring before him a broken and contrite spirit (**Psalms 51:17**). When Manasseh presented himself broken, God willingly heard and restored.

Manasseh's repentance is a bit jarring. How could someone so wicked change and God receive him so willingly? Few among the kings of Israel or Judah are described as having such an evil character as Manasseh. However, God received him back favorably. He accepted Manasseh even before worship was restored. God could see the changed heart. Repentance begins in the heart and flows from there into action. No action we do can be worthy of God's mercy (**Psalms 51:16**). God is waiting for the heart of man to turn humbly toward him.

If you are breathing, God wants you to receive his mercy. He is rich in it (**Ephesians 2:4**). He does not exclude anyone coming contritely. "Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" (**Isaiah 1:18**). Come to him sorrowfully and humbly, and he will mercifully restore you as he did Manasseh (**2 Corinthians 7:10**).

In **Luke 15:11-32**, Jesus told us about a son who lost his way. When he came to himself (verse 17), he went to his father and

was welcomed with open arms. This was God's response to Manasseh.

There was another brother in the aforementioned parable who was not pleased seeing his father's favor bestowed on his wayward brother (**Luke 15:28-32**). God extends mercy to the murderer, child molester, thief, and adulterer (e.g. **1 Corinthians 6:9-11**). These individuals cause great pain to their fellow man. In a sense, they cause blood to flow through the streets as in the days of Manasseh. God reminds us, "*the dead can live again*" (**Luke 15:32**). And He charges us with saying, "amen." As our sins of scarlet were made as white as snow, so the rich mercy of God may reach any man.

The record does not share with us how the prophets initially felt about God's restoration of Manasseh. One wonders if they had concerns about Manasseh's sincerity. Like the older brother, it would only be natural to question genuineness in another's repentance. However, Christ reminded us through this parable that our natural tendency to question is not good. Love believes all things (**1 Corinthians 13:7**). God desires our response to the repentant to mirror his response. No condescension. No trepidation. Instead, open arms lifting the humble hearted!

"...For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (**1 Samuel 16:7**). Before God saw the change in Manasseh's actions, he saw change in his heart. God's richness can and does work transformation, even for the foremost sinners (**1 Timothy 1:15**).

We who do not see the hearts of men ought to accept repentance in our fellow men. They came before God, and God will be their ultimate judge—he alone tests the heart (**Jeremiah 17:10**). It is not our place to determine the adequacy of another's sincerity. Instead, God calls us to embrace, forgive, and uplift our repentant brethren toward righteousness once more.

For as the heavens are high above the earth, so great is his mercy toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear him. For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust (**Psalms 103:11-14**).

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Too Much Information (TMI)

Michael Allen

TMI: many times this refers to the sharing of private information on social media, things that quite possibly we

really didn't need to know. But I also think that there is a social and religious aspect to TMI. As a society, we have access to a tremendous amount of information, which is great when you are trying to remember something that is on the tip of your tongue. Open your favorite search engine and usually within seconds you can breathe a sigh of relief when you have quickly found that elusive answer. But that same medium that allows us to quickly access information, can, at times, overload us with too much information. And at times it can give us conflicting information, and then it becomes difficult to piece together what is fact and what is fiction.

I feel that we see these same issues in regards to Christianity. One tool that I feel Satan uses to blur the line of truth is the manipulation of the flow of information. Many years ago, during the Dark Ages, they were confronted with a different issue — NEI, or Not Enough Information. In some cases the truth was locked away so that the information that people needed was not readily available to them. Today in many ways our issues are exactly the opposite, as we are confronted by too much information. The truth about what God expects from us can be hidden amongst a mountain of misinformation. Straight-forward issues such as salvation, baptism, and the end of times are often clouded by a myriad of opinions, making it easier for the truth to be lost in the process. Even though we may have access to an unprecedented amount of information these days, I truly feel that when it comes to our salvation, that we always need to return to the source, the Bible. The world is filled with opinions, but truth comes from God.

One of the issues that has always intrigued me from the book of Acts is the type of information that was included by the writer Luke. In some passages, we are given a wealth of details. Yet in other verses, many months and several hundred miles are traversed in a single sentence. More than once I have caught myself thinking, wouldn't it be nice if we had more detailed information from Paul's Third Missionary Journey? Wouldn't it be nice to have a compilation of Peter's efforts after the conversion of Cornelius? And what of the other apostles, evangelists and disciples that we have in Acts? Where did they go? What miracles did they do? What people did they convert? What lessons could they have left for us today? And while at times it may seem as if we have NEI in regards to the early Church, a more accurate representation might be JEI, or Just Enough Information. We may not have every detail that we would love to read about, but God has given us everything that we need in regard to our salvation.

The Bible is not an incomplete document. Some may try and add words, chapters or even whole books to the Bible, but it is not needed. Some may try to read the scriptures with a white

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out pen to remove things they don't personally like or agree with, but that is also dangerous. **Revelation 22:18-19** tells us that we do either of these things at our own peril. A thirst for information is a great thing, but we always need to remember that God has established the boundary line, his word is the only way for us to be saved, and his version is the only source of truth.

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Glory to God!

The church in **Bakersfield, CA** rejoiced when **LydiaMae Fry** was buried with Christ on September 29. A few days later, **Lucy Cantrell** was baptized for the remission of her sins on October 4.

The church in **Vandalia, IA** praised God when **Brighton Ingle** was baptized in the name of Jesus Christ in November.

The brethren who meet on **Prince Road, Alton, IL** gladly welcomed **Stan Eddington** as a brother when he was baptized into Christ on December 10.

Blessed Are the Dead

Marilee Leppin, 84, of Meadville, MO went to be with our Lord on December 1. Sister Marilee was a faithful member of the church in **Meadville, MO**.

Special Meetings

Because of the long-term uncertainties surrounding Covid-19, the church in **Excelsior Springs, MO** has decided to cancel the **2021 one-week meeting** that traditionally takes place in late July. They have committed to hosting the same meeting in **2022**, if God is willing. Your editor knows these are difficult decisions. May God grant us all wisdom and mercy!

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