

Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

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A Strange Prophet—A True Prophecy

Then gathered the chief priests and the Pharisees a council, and said, What do we? for this man doeth many miracles. If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him: and the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation. And one of them, named Caiaphas, being the high priest that same year, said unto them, Ye know nothing at all, Nor consider that it is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation perish not. And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; And not for that nation only, but that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad. Then from that day forth they took counsel together for to put him to death. Jesus therefore walked no more openly among the Jews; but went thence unto a country near to the wilderness, into a city called Ephraim, and there continued with his disciples. (John 11:47–54, KJV 1900)

In this brief reading, we learn much about the dark hearted state of the Jewish people, at the least their leaders, in the first century. The ordinary priests and Pharisees feared what the Romans would do against them because of Jesus, should He continue in His ministry, especially in His references to His kingdom and kingship. Obviously, they were interested in a way to eliminate this man who increasingly was becoming a problem for them and for their carnal view of their faith. Jesus is always a problem for carnal religion. Caiaphas, if we draw a likely motive from his words, has a solution, cold hearted and wicked, but a solution in his mind. Why should the Jews intervene on Jesus' behalf when the Romans finally give way to their concerns about Jesus and His "Kingdom"? If Jesus offends the Romans, let the Romans have Him.

And this spake he not of himself: but being high priest that year, he prophesied.... If God can speak His words by the mouth of a donkey, as He did in the Old Testament, we should not be surprised that He would also speak by the mouth of a wicked man. (Numbers 22; 2 Peter 2:15-16) On occasion throughout Scripture, God prophesies by surprising and unexpected means and men. Yes, this method represents an exception. Ordinarily, God spoke through His called and faithful prophet. It behooves us to take note of these exceptions—and to follow Scripture in regarding them as an exception, not as the primary and normal means of divine prophecy. God used the man in the office of high priest to utter this prophecy, even though the man grossly dishonored that office. If we hang up our thinking on this point, we shall surely miss the beautiful truth that God revealed in this unusual prophecy. And that truth is the most important point of this prophecy. Its message means that God is speaking something of tremendous value to His people. What is His message, regardless of the man He used to declare it?

...he prophesied that Jesus should die for that nation; And not for that nation only, but that also he

should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad. For whom did Jesus die? The prophecy answers the question. "...that also he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad." John's interpretation of Caiaphas' prophecy reveals two central truths regarding Jesus' purpose and work in His coming into the world; 1) He shall die for others, not for Himself, 2) He shall gather together in one, not in isolated cultural, racial, or theological groups, all the children of God, children who have been scattered by persecutors by their own failures and unbelief, and by false teachers. Further, His death shall not be exclusively for the benefit of Jews only, "...not for that nation only."

Take careful note. John carefully defines those for whom Jesus died as "...the children of God that were scattered abroad." When the angel assured Joseph of Jesus' supernatural conception, he used a similar manner of speech, "He shall save his people from their sins." (Matthew 1:21b) The people whom Jesus shall save by His coming into the world are "...his people." Caiaphas' prophecy as John translated it meant "...he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad." The prophecy does not at all indicate that He would gather those who would, at some future time, make a decision to be a child of God. At the time of the prophecy, in some sense, though obviously not the sense of new birth, these people were already "His people," the children of God." At the time of the prophecy, they were children of God, but they were at that time yet scattered abroad. In fact, John's interpretation states that these children were scattered abroad, past tense. Their scattering had occurred at some past time. He would gather them together "...in one," in Himself.

Contemporary Christianity builds its views of Jesus' death on a strange contradiction. Folks with this view are adamant that Jesus must have died potentially for the benefit of every human being who

ever lived. However, based on its various conditions and prerequisites of human response and behavior, they also openly acknowledge their belief that only a small fraction of humanity shall spend eternity with God in glory because only a few faithfully respond to his “offer.” What is the point? If Jesus died to give everyone an opportunity, knowing that most would refuse or ignore that opportunity, what is the purpose? As God, Jesus was/is all-knowing, so He fully knew from the beginning who would believe in Him and become His faithful disciples and who would not. Why choose a method of salvation whose inefficiency results in actually saving so few people? An engineer would evaluate that system from an efficiency perspective and conclude that it is abominably inefficient. Shouldn’t God, all-wise, and all-powerful, devise a more efficient effective system of saving people from their sins?

This question grows more intense as we ponder the many Scriptures that describe what Jesus came to do—and did—and what He actually accomplished in that work. Consider.

He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities. (Isaiah 53:11)

If Jesus and the Father were fully satisfied with the work that Jesus accomplished, it becomes increasingly difficult to rationalize the idea that Scripture actually describes the number of God’s elect people as a small number, especially as a small number who themselves performed the actual conditions that resulted in their new birth and eternal salvation. In fact, this verse contains a distinct commentary on that point.

I would ask these dear folks “The elephant in the room” question. Is God truly satisfied with the small number of people whom you believe shall actually be saved based on your system of salvation? You quote Scriptures and make impassioned pleas to people that God is not presently satisfied and that he wants everyone to be saved. How can we then rationalize that He saw what Jesus did and was satisfied with its outcome? In fact, the next thought in this same verse makes the very point of the number whom He shall save.

...by his knowledge shall my righteous servant justify many; for he shall bear their iniquities.

How many people does God’s “righteous servant” justify by “his knowledge”? The verse qualifies the number as “many;” yet you say the number is few, in fact, minuscule. “Many” is not all; Scripture does not teach universal salvation of all humanity. Hell shall be occupied. However, “many” is also not a minuscule few either. How do you explain this contradiction between the number whom you claim shall be saved and Scripture’s emphatic assertion

of “many”? In harmony with Isaiah’s prophecy, John writes a relevant commentary to the number and even the constitution of those who actually enjoy heaven.

And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation. (Revelation 5:9) After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb. (Revelation 7:9-10)

After going into some detail regarding the hundred forty-four thousand who were sealed, John introduces this infinite number, a number “...which no man could number” who came from “...all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues” who stood precisely where we would expect to see God’s redeemed, “Saved” people, singing the glorious song of “Salvation to our God...” False teachers often obsesses about the finite number, 144,000, who were sealed, but John will not stop with them. He goes on to emphasize the infinite number that cannot be numbered by any human effort or scheme, and they all praised God for salvation. Honestly now, does this sound as if God shall have only a small fragment of humanity in heaven praising Him throughout eternity?

Where in Isaiah 53:11 do we find the idea of an offer of salvation, or the idea of merely giving everyone a “Chance”? God’s righteous servant, Jesus, God Incarnate, **actually, factually justifies many by actually, factually bearing their iniquities.** His death, the theme of this whole prophetic chapter, does not merely give people a good opportunity, a “Chance,” or a generous and sincere “Offer” to be saved. It factually, literally “justifies many” by His “bearing their iniquities.” Praise God for salvation accomplished!

Occasionally, folks who hold these views will try to split hairs and say that Jesus actually removed all the sins of all humanity with one exception. He didn’t die for the sin of unbelief, and, unless you believe, you shall die alienated from God because of your sin of unbelief. Where in these verses do we see any indication, however remote, of an exception? It simply isn’t there, “...he shall bear their iniquities.” Is unbelief an iniquity? Indeed it is. Then He bore that sin as well as all their other sins. Consider Matthew 1:21. Is unbelief a sin? Of course it is a sin. Where in “...he shall save his people from their sins” do we find any basis whatever for an exception? There is none. In our study passage, the true meaning of the prophecy is not that Jesus would give all of “...the children of

God that were scattered abroad” an opportunity to accept Him and thereby gain salvation, but that “...he should gather together in one” all of His children.

Based on the consistent teaching of Scripture, unbelief consistently disqualifies a person from God-glorifying discipleship. It dishonors God, and it brings the Lord's severe chastening on His children who refuse to believe Him and His glorious work, but, friends, the Lord's chastening brings pain and a painful reminder of our disobedience, urging us to repent. It does not bring death to the child! What kind of parent, under the guise of chastening, murders his child? A despicable parent, not the loving and merciful Father and Savior of His people that we see in Scripture.

The prophecy shall not be complete, fulfilled, until Jesus actually, factually gathers “...*together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad.*” After something more than two thousand years, visible Christendom is more scattered, more divided by variations in belief and in practice, the form and manner of public worship, than ever. Despite Scripture's description of the gospel as bringing God's children together, public Christianity becomes increasingly splintered and divided. A simple observation; some of the messages that are declared as being the gospel are obviously not the gospel, in that they do not bring God's people together; they separate them. Sadly, a significant number of messages openly declare that, if we do not believe exactly as they believe, and perform our Christianity as they teach us to live it, we are not children of God at all. How obviously this kind of narrow belief contradicts John's description of those who sang salvation's glorious hymn in heaven. I preach most Sunday's to a small congregation, but I preach a gospel that declares for any and all to consider. Belief of my sermon does not define who is going to heaven and who is not. My God's family is broad and wide. Its tenets fully and gloriously—mercifully and lovingly—embrace God's people across this globe in every culture, language, and family. And there is coming a day when we shall all join together in one voice and one heart, praising our God alike for His loving, merciful, and gracious deliverance. Friends, we shall all join together in singing that glorious hymn. By God's grace, I shall continue to preach that theme till I preach my last sermon.

When shall this prophecy realize its fulfillment? And I echo Scripture's glorious good news. There is coming a day, a day like no other day that ever dawned. In that day, God's creation shall be shocked by a shout that it never heard before. No ear shall fail to hear that shout. Even those who died across the centuries shall hear that shout, and its power shall bring them back to life and out of their graves. And, finally, at long, but glorious last, the prophecy, Jesus' death and His full and complete bearing of “His people's” sins shall be realized. All the children of God who were

scattered abroad by Adam's sin, by never-ending human folly, by false teachers, by their own failure to grasp, believe, and rejoice in Jesus and what He did for them, shall then “...be gathered together in one,” in their glorious, reigning, and victorious Savior. And Scripture punctuates this comforting truth.

...and so shall we ever be with the Lord.
Wherefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:17b-18)

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Worship service each Sunday
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.
Pastor