

# Gospel Gleanings, "...especially the parchments"

Volume 31, Number 36

September 7, 2014



## He is Alive. What Now?

*And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with graveclothes: and his face was bound about with a napkin. Jesus saith unto them, Loose him, and let him go. Then many of the Jews which came to Mary, and had seen the things which Jesus did, believed on him. But some of them went their ways to the Pharisees, and told them what things Jesus had done. 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. (John 11:44–48, KJV 1900)*

Loose him, and let him go. Martha, Mary, or any of their friends could not raise Lazarus from the dead. They could only grieve his death and bury him. Nor could they in any way contribute to Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. They neither caused his resurrection, nor were they instrumental in his resurrection. Jesus alone was capable of raising a man from the dead. It is sadly common in some Christian circles in our day for sincere believers to believe that they cannot cause the new birth—and they are correct in that point—but they think that they must be “Instrumental” in Jesus bringing the new birth about. If they fail to provide the “Instrument,” they believe that Jesus will not—or cannot—produce the new birth in anyone.

Jesus Himself used the analogy of death and life when teaching on the new birth.

*Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. (John 5:24–25, KJV 1900)*

Based on the stated beliefs of these dear folk, they must be instrumental in bringing an unregenerate person to the point of belief. If they are instrumental in bringing someone from unbelief to belief in Jesus, they believe that Jesus will produce the new birth. Jesus quite clearly contradicts and refutes their idea in this passage. While our friends believe that they are instrumental in producing the new birth, in a manner conditioning the person for Jesus to then bring about the new birth, Jesus says that the believer “...**is passed** from death unto life.” In English, “is passed” identifies a past action now complete, not an action in prospect of occurring or even an action in the process of occurring. When you see a person legitimately believe in Jesus, you are looking at someone who was born again at some time prior to that belief, for at the moment of belief, he is already born again. He has already

passed from death to life. How then did this new birth occur, according to Jesus Himself?

*The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.*

Although human science has not reached the point of sophistication to accept a “Voice print” as binding legal evidence, the unique speech patterns that identify one and only one person as the speaker, it increasingly asserts that our speech patterns are as unique to us as our finger prints. No two people speak with precisely the same voice patterns. Do not miss the point that Jesus did not say, “The hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the words that the Son of God spoke...” **He specifically refers to His own personal voice.** He speaks the words, not a faithful missionary or gospel preacher or praying family member. He alone possesses a voice that has the power to give life to a dead Lazarus or to a dead sinner who has not yet experienced the new birth. It is “...**the voice** of the Son of God” that imparts life to the dead sinner, not the voice of the witnessing believer speaking Jesus’ words. No one possesses “...the voice of the Son of God” other than “**the Son of God.**”

Several years ago, I was listening to John MacArthur on the radio as he explained his personal belief in the exact dynamics of gospel instrumentality in bringing about the new birth. He described a situation in which you enter a room for the first time. You are tired and want to sit down to rest. You see an unoccupied chair. It appears inviting. You look at the supporting framework of the chair, and you reach the conclusion that the chair is quite capable of holding your weight, so you “Believe that the chair will hold your weight,” and you therefore sit down in it. According to MacArthur’s explanation, quite clearly explained in his message, you must see and hear the gospel, and you must so assess its message as to believe that Jesus can save you, so that you in fact make the conscious decision to trust Him—to believe in

Him—before He will actually produce the new birth in you. This analogy flies in the face of Jesus' words in John 5:24-25. MacArthur says that you must hear his sermon and believe it before Jesus will produce the new birth in you. Jesus says that the hearing believer on Him gives evidence that he already possess "...everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation, but is passed from death unto life." MacArthur says you must believe on Jesus first. Jesus says that He must produce the new birth first. I choose to believe Jesus. New birth first; belief follows.

Another advocate of this idea of gospel instrumentality was questioned about the truth-content of what is preached to someone who has not heard the gospel before and who therefore does not presently believe it. This man responded with his—no doubt—sincere belief that, if a person hears about Jesus from a Methodist missionary (God bless the good Methodist folks. We could learn much from them about compassion for hurting people, but their belief is firmly based on the salvation by works teachings of James Arminius, and I believe Scripture teaches that salvation is by God's grace—all of God's grace), the person who hears this representation of the gospel "...will at least go away believing in Jesus." Hmmm. Let's once again consult Scripture and compare Scripture with a man's stated beliefs.

I marvel that ye are so soon **removed from him** that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ. But though we, or an angel from heaven, **preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you**, let him be accursed. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed. For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ. (Galatians 1:6-10; emphasis added. A careful study of Galatians indicates that the false gospel that the Galatians believed—and the false Jesus to whom they removed themselves—was in large part a gospel of salvation by works)

Paul says that believing another gospel in effect means that you are "...removed from **him** that called you...." Think of the utter inconsistent absurdity; a false gospel about another Jesus is supposedly capable of producing the new birth, enabling the hearer to go away "...at least believing in Jesus," but Paul devotes an entire New Testament letter to refuting the idea. Do we believe the modern witness, or do we believe the inspired words of Scripture? I choose Scripture.

Almost every time you read in Scripture about the gospel being preached, you will see the hearers

sharply divide into two opposite camps. One group will be convinced by what they hear and believe it. The other group will be more incensed by what they hear and will fiercely oppose it. No one could deny that Lazarus died. Multiple witnesses could give their personal testimony of his death and burial, a burial that lasted for four days. All of these men knew that Lazarus was now alive. He was dead, dead for four days, and now he lives. This fact was not in dispute. It could not be. The question before these men was how. How could this be? How could a man die, much less remain dead for four whole days, and then be brought back to life? One group accepted the evidence and rightly concluded that only God could raise the dead, so Jesus must be God Incarnate, God presently living in human flesh. The other group analyzed the same information wholly in terms of its potentially bad effect on them in the eyes of the Romans.

*If we let him thus alone, all men will believe on him.* So what is the problem? Is this a bad thing? Many very sincere believers get tripped up when they read words in Scripture that, on the surface, sound universal, terms such as we see in this sentence, "all men will believe on him." But notice the very next sentence from the mouth of these unbelievers, "...*the Romans shall come and take away both our place and nation.*" Are the Romans "men"? If "all men" was as universal a term in the Jews' thoughts as some folks try to make it, would not "all men" include Romans as well as Jews? And, if the Romans believe on Him, again, what is the problem? First century Jews imbedded their religious thinking into a myopic perspective that included Jews and only Jews. If they thought or spoke in terms that included more than just Jews, they might logically use such terms as "all men," intending Jews and Gentiles, people of all race, culture, and background, not just Jews. Let's see if Scripture supports this idea.

And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness. (1 John 5:19)

John identifies two groups or classes of people in this verse, "we," and "the whole world." Are believers real human beings? Do they literally live in this world? Or are they mere phantoms who appear to live in this world, but they really don't? Obviously, in this case, the universal sounding term "whole world" refers to a specific class of wicked unbelievers, not to every person in the "whole world" of our created universe, or, for that matter, to the whole of the created material universe. John draws a clear contrast. In his mind, "we" and "the whole world" are mutually exclusive. No one can be part of both the "we" and part of the "whole world." Ah, then "whole world" refers to some group of people, by definition, less inclusive than all humanity. It cannot include the "we" whom John defines as being of God. A careful study of these broad sounding terms in Scripture will consistently

show in the context that the term refers to a defined class of people, not to all humanity. This fact becomes central to our belief when we study passages dealing with the big question, "For whom did Jesus die"? And Scripture consistently teaches that Jesus did not die to give all humanity the opportunity to consider whether they desire to be born again or not. It teaches that all for whom Jesus died shall surely and effectually be born again by the work of God alone, not by any human instrumentality. "...so is every one that is **born of the Spirit.**" (John 3:8b)

I suspect that almost every person who takes the time and interest to read this writing fits distinctly in the category of those men who considered the evidence and believed in Jesus, not in the group of unbelievers who sought to kill Jesus because He performed so many undeniable miracles. And I encourage you, therefore, to examine such Bible passages as John 5:24-25 and 1 John 5:1, concluding with Scripture that your belief is evidence of, not instrumental or causative in your new birth. Jesus alone raised Lazarus from the dead. He personally used the analogy of death and life when He taught on the new birth, something that He taught that He alone brings about. He is our complete Savior, not our salvation facilitator.

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Worship service each Sunday  
Joseph R. Holder

10:30 A. M.  
Pastor