



Will We Really Be Any Different?

Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, magi from the east arrived in Jerusalem, saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we saw His star in the east and have come to worship Him." When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. Gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born. They said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for this is what has been written by the prophet...Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. (Mt. 2:1-7)

"Look, He is speaking publicly, and they are saying nothing to Him. The rulers do not really know that this is the Christ, do they? However, we know where this man is from; but whenever the Christ may come, no one knows where He is from." (Jn. 7:26-27)

Some of the people therefore, when they heard these words, were saying, "This certainly is the Prophet." Others were saying, "This is the Christ." Still others were saying, "Surely the Christ is not going to come from Galilee, is He? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the descendants of David, and from Bethlehem, the village where David was?" So a division occurred in the crowd because of Him. (Jn. 7:40-43)

Because of the Prophet Daniel, those expecting Jesus to come the first time had something we, who wait in anticipation of His Second Coming, do not have: an exact *date* of the Messiah's arrival. In fact, because of the Prophet Micah, they even knew the exact *place*. Hebrew extra-biblical writings leading up to Jesus' birth are rich in their expectation that the Messiah would arrive exactly when Jesus indeed came. In the years after Christ's crucifixion and rejection those writings are equally rich with consternation, mourning and puzzlement over why the Messiah did not come when and where expected. Hebrew religious authorities became so angry about this that to this day they have placed a curse on anyone who reads that portion of Daniel setting the date of the Messiah's arrival, and have come up with some of the most outrageous explanations which show that their blindness then was but a shadow of what it has become today. It

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is one of the ultimate lessons that *having* the Word can never substitute for *living* the Word. For those who do not believe the Word to the degree that they live exclusively according to it, they will remain blind even when His prophetic Word is fulfilled literally before their very eyes. Once someone starts interpreting the everyday, literal parts of God's Word according to how they *want* instead of accepting it plainly and literally, they will assuredly multiply and magnify their error when it comes to the prophetic portions of God's Word.

In the above passages, look at the contradictions when it came to understanding the truth of God's Word. How could a few Magi see an unmistakable, visible sign in the very sky which every civilization on earth studied so carefully every single night, and yet it goes unnoticed by everyone else? The myriad historical records from individuals and groups around the globe at that time, not to mention our modern prowess at astronomy, confirm there were no supernovas or unusual celestial activity at that time. The signs of the times are only "obvious" to those faithful to the whole of God's Word.

Forty-five years ago, in fulfillment of God's prophetic Word, Israel retook Jerusalem and Christian publishers were bursting with books and conferences on the signs of the times. Today, however, the majority of the church are following teachings and movements which pay little attention, if any, to God's prophetic Word, and those who do mostly get what they know from the popular works of Christian fiction marginalizing it. The chief priests and scribes recited to Herod and the Magi the correct Scripture, but they could not see the sign nor would they act upon it because of their lack of regard for the rest of God's Word. There is a great lesson here teaching that rejection of God's Word in the course of everyday life leads to the inability to discern His prophetic Word even when it is unfolding before one's very eyes, and actually results in one becoming an enemy of Christ. What happened with Herod, the priests and the scribes the first time is happening again.

But look how confused they are in John 7. Jesus comes to Jerusalem during the Feast of Booths (Jn. 7:2), the very feast which is a shadow of the Messiah's Second Coming and establishment of His Millennial Kingdom. They are unclear if they should be looking for "*the Prophet*" or "*the Christ*" and at first some say, "*Whenever the Christ may come, no one knows where He is from*" (Jn. 7:27), but then others, "*the Christ comes from the descendants of David, and from Bethlehem*". (Jn. 7:42) Well, look at how things began at the Feast.

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So the Jews were seeking Him at the feast and were saying, "Where is He?" There was much grumbling among the crowds concerning Him; some were saying, "He is a good man"; others were saying, "No, on the contrary, He leads the people astray." (Jn. 7:11-12)

When there is no grasp of the fundamentals, it is impossible to correctly derive the advanced. Not following the Messiah in all He has done, coming in the character of the Messiah the Son of Joseph to address their sin, it is impossible for them to recognize and accept the Messiah the Son of David represented by the Feast of Booths who would conquer the world and establish His Millennial Kingdom from Jerusalem. They could not reconcile Christ's message of the Gospel ("*He leads people astray*") and His "everyday" activities, so they were incapable of processing the greater prophetic fulfillment of His ministry.

I used to belong in the camp which subscribed to the notion if we just tell people the truth of how God is presently fulfilling His prophetic Word, they will see the futility of their ways and begin to live a changed, sanctified life. I came to see that I was incorrectly assuming all they lacked was someone to tell them the truth. There are many sincere brethren, websites, ministries and movements who are self-described "watchmen" who are trying the best they can to inform as many as possible of the truth that we are in the Last Days. However, when looking up the word "watchman" in my concordance, it was quite enlightening to see how God applied that word to Ezekiel, one of the most prolific prophets when it comes to the Last Days and the Millennial Kingdom:

"Son of man, I have appointed you a watchman to the house of Israel; whenever you hear a word from My mouth, warn them from Me. When I say to the wicked, 'You will surely die,' and you do not warn him or speak out to warn the wicked from his wicked way that he may live, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity, but his blood I will require at your hand. Yet if you have warned the wicked and he does not turn from his wickedness or from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered yourself.

"Again, when a righteous man turns away from his righteousness and commits iniquity, and I place an obstacle before him, he will die; since you have not warned him, he shall die in his sin, and his righteous deeds which he has done shall not be remembered; but his blood I will require at your hand. However, if you have warned the righteous man that the righteous should not sin and he does not sin, he shall

surely live because he took warning; and you have delivered yourself.” (Eze. 3:17-21)

I would argue that even though God’s watchman is aware of the signs of the times better than anyone else and has the unmistakable ability to properly discern the fulfillment of God’s prophetic Word, the watchman’s *primary* responsibility, whether to the saved or the unsaved, is to first and foremost preach repentance of sin through Christ! Just as the object is not to get unbelievers to simply see what is going on prophetically, but to acknowledge their personal spiritual condition so as to repent and be saved, so it is within the Church to encourage daily faithfulness and rescue the backslidden. One can hold to what will turn out to be the wrong belief as to when the timing of the Rapture of the Church will take place and, hard as it is for some to swallow, their eternal soul is *not* in danger. But fail to ever accept Christ as our personal Savior, fail to live a crucified life and go on living with sin just as before, and we have something which renders any “information” completely ineffective.

I cannot estimate the number of websites, blogs and online forums I have visited where even among participants who all claim the label “Christian” there is more palpable hostility than existed between the Axis and the Allies. (There are Pre-Tribulationists who seem to want some kind of steel cage death match with Pre-Wrath advocates to settle the matter once and for all.) What kind of testimony do we have with either the saved or the unsaved when we think that by yelling, derision, insult and the absence of every characteristic of the fruit of the Spirit, we think we are leading *anyone* to the truth? This is what happens when someone over-emphasizes one truth at the expense of another. In my opinion, what we are seeing take place in these venues is what happens when eschatology is given a higher priority than theology.

In many seminary programs the students are encouraged to develop what has come to be called a “systematic theology”. This is a book-sized endeavor which often dedicates a chapter to each major biblical doctrine. The first chapter is usually titled “Soteriology”—the study and working of salvation, closely followed with the likes of “Pneumatology”—the study and working of the Holy Spirit, “Ecclesiology”—the study and working of the Church, “Doxology”—the study and working of worship, and so forth. At some point, after establishing the most important and fundamental “-ologies”, we come to the chapter devoted to “Eschatology”—the study and working of Christ’s Second Coming.

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An important progression is inherent because if there are errors in one or more of these major doctrines, the flaws spill into and are often amplified within subsequent doctrines. Can someone proclaim the right ecclesiology if they lack a sound understanding of soteriology? If their pneumatology is in error, will they get everything else right when it comes to the Church, worship, etc.? A repeated pattern that has been noted over the years is that errors in one's *eschatology* are a reflection of the errors present in their basic *theology*. When someone has the wrong notion of the biblical working of salvation or the Holy Spirit, those errors come to light in the way that they pollute and undermine other areas. Just as wrong worship ("doxology") reflects wrong theology, so it is with resultant errors in eschatology. In other words, the reason so many were in error at Jesus' First Coming is because they were unfaithful to the most basic requirements of God's Word. Their basic doctrines of theology, which were incorrect, corrupted their subsequent eschatology, which was even *more* off kilter. Their mishandling of God's Word in general had a multiplied, destructive effect on the deeper things, and it is happening again today.

I am advocating that the first step a truly loving and concerned Christian would take in order to not just correct perceived eschatological error but even when just speaking about it in general, is to address the issue of sin and faithfulness. This is exactly what both Christ and John the Baptist did in their earthly ministries: "*Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand*". (Mt. 3:2; 4:17) The biblically attuned watchman always addresses the issue of sin first in order to lay the proper foundation for the prophetic message to follow.

There have been requests to host online discussion groups, to host the dreaded Facebook page, or to provide some kind of online forum permitting feedback. (We actually tried this in the earliest days of the Internet and learned our lesson well.) The Internet is great for presenting announcements and information, but horribly and terribly awful when it comes to personal communication. Someone jumps on with an unorthodox proclamation about some aspect of the End Times, and it is assumed by all parties involved that this is some kind of "discussion" about ideology. In most cases, however, there is a greater underlying issue of sin or theological error needing to be corrected which can never be addressed through an online forum or Twitter for obvious reasons. We whack away at each other on an issue of eschatology when it is actually an extension of a greater error in a more important and fundamental area of theology.

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We need the watchmen to confidently and loudly proclaim the truth, we need the resources we can point people toward to obtain the truth, but we have to ultimately be responsible for pursuing the kind of quality biblical relationships with our local brothers, sisters and congregation by which we help them deal with the fundamental issues of sin and error in their life which is keeping them from the truth. And like it was for those the first time around who recognized and acted upon the signs of their time at the earliest opportunity, clearly will we come to recognize what is now taking place if we allow our eschatology to be first and foremost ruled by sound, biblical theology.

In the Last Days, when what was formerly sealed to all the generations before us, the Prophet Daniel, through whom much of God's prophetic Word was given, was told that understanding and faithfulness would be co-equally important.

*“Those who have **insight** will shine brightly like the brightness of the expanse of heaven, and those who lead the many to **righteousness**, like the stars forever and ever.
(Daniel 12:3)*

The truth is that the very same mistake made at Christ's First Coming is being recapitulated yet again in the shadow of His Second Coming. At His First Coming the lack of faithfulness to the basic doctrines of God's Word resulted in an eschatology wherein they were unwilling to accept a Messiah coming as the “Suffering Servant” who would die for their sins and become the King, Priest and Prophet represented in shadow by the Old Testament. Their lack of adherence to the Word resulted in rejecting what was needed most, so their eschatology turned things inside out. They stopped looking for the Lamb of God who would take away the sin of the world at His First Coming because they only wanted the “Conquering King” of the Second Coming. Their poor eschatology was the inevitable result of twisting God's basic Word so far beyond its original, plain meaning that it warped everything else that followed. They could not see the *deeper* things of God unfolding before them because they were not living according to the *basic* truths of God.

Satan does not want *anyone* to hear the truth in the first place, but once they have, he will pursue every effort to dilute, reinterpret, or spiritualize it away to the point that it is rendered ineffectual. I have come to believe that many, if not most arguments over End Times issues distract us from the more pressing issues of personal faithfulness. What is the value of arguing about the timing of the Rapture with someone engaged in sin or refusing to deal with errors in their everyday life? Just as there are those who by

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engaging in discussions of End Times topics successfully elude ever having to address the issues and effects of personal sin in their life, there are those who would rather argue all things prophetic rather than hold another accountable to the everyday tenets of Christianity. The truth is, where there is the leaven of sin and false doctrine, there will *never* be a right and unpolluted eschatology.

This is why every time Christ and the Apostles teach about the End Times, the admonition is to live a faithful life according to God's Word. The deeper mysteries of the Word only come to those who adhere to the basic requirements which establish the foundation for everything to follow. In the Western world, unlike our persecuted brothers and sisters in most of the rest of the world, we have the luxury to devote time, energy and study to the myriad books, websites and conferences devoted to the Second Coming, but it appears that it often comes at the expense of devotion to the fundamental requirements of right Christian living. I wonder who will *really* be dressed and ready?

They missed Jesus the first go-round because they misapplied the basic things to such a great degree that the Judaism practiced bore little resemblance to the Judaism originally taught by Moses. Jesus is going to be largely missed again a second time because the Christianity practiced by so many today bears little resemblance to that originally taught by Christ and the Apostles to begin with. Dramatic errors in eschatology are the inescapable, inevitable result of the most basic errors in our most foundational theology. A return to practicing the fundamentals of the Word is the surest path to a right understanding of Scripture's deeper mysteries.

In Him,

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