

# LIVING WATERS NEWSLETTER

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## MISUNDERSTANDING JESUS

We begin this article with a quote from Kagan A. Chandler's book *The God of Jesus*. He wrote: "We find that misunderstanding Jesus is actually a major theme of the Gospel of John. Episodes involving his audience's misinterpretations of his sayings occur in at least fifteen out of twenty-one chapters. Might contemporary audiences be missing his intentions now, just as many did in his own time?" We affirm this is true of the gospel of John but can be said of all the gospels, contrary to statements by popular teachers such as John MacArthur who wrote that there are "unfathomable yet unmistakable doctrines in Scripture," We also affirm that "we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit that is from God, so that we might know the things freely given us of God, which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words" (I Cor. 2:12, 13).

William Barclay in *The Daily Study Bible* wrote: "there are two kinds of misunderstanding. There is the misunderstanding of the man who misunderstands because he has not yet reached a stage of knowledge and experience at which he is able to grasp the truth. There is a genuine inability to understand which is the inevitable result of a lack of knowledge. When a man is in that state our duty is to do all we can to explain things so he will be able to grasp the knowledge which is being offered him. But there is a failure to understand which comes from an unwillingness to understand; there is a failure to see which comes from a refusal to see. A man can deliberately shut his mind to the truth he does not wish to see; he can be deliberately dense toward teaching which he does not want to accept."

## MISUNDERSTANDING THE STATE OF THE DEAD

We begin with the one misunderstanding of Jesus' words that confused the Apostles and has been a theological argumentation throughout the religious world and is avidly argued by many contemporary believers today. That is, the state of the dead. "Then he said to them, 'Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep.' The disciples then said to him, 'Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.' Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought he was speaking of literal sleep. So Jesus now said to them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead...'" (John 11:11-14). Note these Scriptures: Dan. 12:2: "And many of those who *sleep* in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life, but others to disgrace and everlasting contempt." Matt. 27:52, 53: "The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had *fallen asleep*, were raised; and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many." Luke 8:52, 53: "Now they were weeping and lamenting for her; but he said, 'stop weeping, for she has not died but is *asleep*' and they began laughing knowing that she has died." Acts 7:60: (stoning of Stephen) "And having said this he *fell asleep*." I Cor. 15: ver. 6: "After that he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time,

most of whom remain until now, but some have *fallen asleep*," ver. 18: "Then those who have *fallen asleep* have perished," ver. 20: "But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are *asleep*," ver. 51: "Behold, I show you a mystery, we shall not all *sleep* but shall be changed." I Thess. 4:13: "We do not want you to be uninformed about those who are *asleep*, ver. 15:" We who are alive and remain at the coming of the Lord shall not precede those who have *fallen asleep*." II Peter 3:4: "Since the Fathers *fell asleep* all continues as it was since creation." This has been, and continues to be, a confusing belief perpetuated by funeral sermons and tradition.

## MISUNDERSTANDING THE RESURRECTION

Another incident where Jesus was misunderstood is found in all four gospels: That of his resurrection. This is illustrated by his cleansing the temple, recorded in Matthew 21:12-13, Mark 11:15, 16, Luke 19:45-46 and John 2:14-22. The first three gospels record only the fact that he cleansed the temple and drove out the money changers. It is the gospel of John that shows how the incident was misunderstood. "The Jews said to him. 'What sign do you show us as your authority for doing these things?' Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up.' The Jews said it took forty-six years to build this temple, and you will raise up in three days?' But he was speaking of the temple of his body. It was only "when he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he said this; and they believed the Scripture and the word Jesus had spoken." They misunderstood that Jesus was speaking of his resurrection. Three times unbelieving Jews used these words as witness against him before the Council (Matt. 26:6i, Mark 14:58) and then at the martyrdom of Stephen (Acts 6:14), and also by the bystanders at the cross (Matt. 27:40, Mark 15:29).

The other three gospels record the apostles misunderstanding him concerning his resurrection. Toward the end of his ministry Jesus many times warned the disciples about the future suffering he would endure in Jerusalem. He told them he would die and rise again on the third day, but they did not understand. "And he began to teach them that the Son of man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and the scribes and be killed and after three days rise again. And he was stating the matter plainly. And Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. But turning and seeing his disciples, he rebuked Peter and said, 'Get behind me Satan; for you are not setting your mind on God's interests, but man's'" (Mark 8:32,33 also Matt. 16:21). "He was teaching his disciples and telling them, 'The son of man will be delivered into the hands of men, and they will kill him; and when he has been killed, he will rise three days later.' But they did not understand this statement, and they were afraid to ask him" (Mark 9:31, 32). "He said to his disciples, 'Let these words sink into your ears; for the son of man will be delivered into the hands of men.' But they did not understand this statement, and it was concealed from them so they could not perceive it; and they were afraid to ask him about the statement" (Luke 9:44, 45, also Luke 18:34). When

Mary Magdalene reported he was alive and had been seen by her, "they refused to believe it." After that he appeared in a different form to the two of them while they were walking along their way to the country. "They went and reported to the others, but they did not believe them either," Christ "reproached them for their unbelief and hardness of heart" (Mark 16:11-14).

They misunderstood and today his contemporary audiences also misunderstand Jesus' teaching on the resurrection. Early in his ministry he stated: "Truly, truly I say unto you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead (spiritually) will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear shall live...marvel not at this; for an hour is coming when all are in the tombs will hear his voice, and will come forth; those who have done good to a resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to a resurrection of judgment" John 5: 25-29).

With the exception of the Jewish religion every pagan religion in existence, including the occult, reincarnation believers, and new age thinking, believe in some form of life after death. The belief in life after death has replaced the scriptural teaching of the resurrection. When the church preaches that the dead go on living after death either in heaven or hell it negates the need of a resurrection. As a result of this teaching there is a general neglect in today's preaching and teaching on the significance of the resurrection, giving attention to it only during the Easter season. Perhaps the reason for this neglect is our denial of death as our enemy. In the secular world the death of the unborn (abortion) and death of the aged (euthanasia) is using death as a friendly way to solve our social problems. In the church it has become a door to a better life and is therefore glorified in song and sermon, especially funeral sermons, and has given so much attention to death and dying we have ignored life and living, living in the power of the resurrection. The problem the Apostles faced was not that people did not believe in life after death, rather they could not believe the resurrection. The book of Acts is a message of the resurrection. The resurrection of Christ assures us of his presence and gives purpose to life (2:24, 33: 3:24,26). It proves the word of God is true (2:23-36; 13:30-37), and shows the futility of natural thinking (3:14,15). It is the resurrection that shows God demands repentance and judgment (17:30-32). In Acts the resurrection is the driving force behind the growth of the church. Jesus is alive. He has ascended and God has made him both Lord and Christ. He has thus sent the Holy Spirit, the very presence of God, into the world. It is the church, the body of Christ, that has this message to proclaim as the answer to our needs.

Too long the church has looked upon and emphasized its weakness and has failed to realize its strength. The Apostle reminds the Ephesians to "be strong in the Lord and the strength of his might..." (Eph. 6:10). This strength is "in accordance with the working of the strength of His might which He brought about in Christ when He raised him from the dead and seated him at His right hand..." (Eph. 1:19, 20). Our strength is resurrection power made available to us by his ascension. The cross has become the focal point of the church to the extent that the resurrection and ascension has never had much meaning to the average Christian. Take a look at a modern hymnal. There will be many more songs about the cross than the resurrection and none on the ascension. It is in his resurrection that we have life and in his ascension that we have power. We need to wake up to this fact and stop whining about how the world is treating us (taking away prayer in schools and the ten commandments off the wall etc.). Big deal! There is in Madison's words: "A wall of separation between church and state." In 1973 Oz Guinness published a book entitled *The Dust of Death* in which he shows that the "dust of death" was slowly settling over the Western culture. So he charts the journey of a generation out from the technological wasteland and into the

Promised Land of radical living...out of the culture of Eastern religion, psychedelic drugs and the occult and into a third way. In the last sentences of the book he shows this third way to be found in the resurrection "that blasts apart the finality of death to provide an alternative to the sifting, settling dust of death and through a new birth open the way for a new life." The church needs to wake out of the dust of death and live in the joy of life.

## MISUNDERSTANDING PARABLES

Mark 4:10' 11: "The twelve began asking him about parables. And he was saying unto them, 'to you has been given the mystery of the kingdom of God, but to those who are outside get everything in parables, so that while seeing they may see and not perceive, while hearing they may hear and not understand, otherwise they might return and be forgiven.'" (also Matthew 13:11-17). The multitude could not understand his teaching concerning the kingdom. To them it was a mystery. Jesus quoted Isaiah 6:9 describing their hardness of heart. He then said the mystery of the Kingdom had been revealed to the Apostles but hidden from the general public. Jewish historian Alfred Edeersheim in *The Life And Times of Jesus The Messiah Vol. I* states: "The designed effect of the parables was to complete that hardening, which in its commencement, had been caused by the rejection of what they had heard." Albert Barnes in his *Notes on the New Testament* wrote: "The Pharisees, and Jews generally, were not prepared to receive the system, and would not have believed it, and therefore he purposely employed a kind of teaching which was intended for his apostles only."

## MISUNDERSTANDING TRUE DEFILEMENT

Mark 7:15-23: "There is nothing outside a man which can defile him if it goes into him; but things which proceed out of the men are what defiles him.' when he left the crowd and entered the house, his disciples questioned him about the parable. And he said to them, 'Are you lacking in understanding also? Do you not understand that whatever goes into a man from the outside cannot defile him, because it does not go into his heart, but into his stomach, and is eliminated?' And he was saying, 'That which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man. For from within out of the heart of man, proceed evil thoughts, fornication, thefts, murders, adulteries, deeds of coveting, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride and foolishness. All evil things proceed from within and defile the man.'" (Also Matt. 15:10ff. We might add to this Matthew 5:27: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'; but I say unto you 'that anyone who looks at a woman with lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart.'"

## MISUNDERSTANDING HIS LAST WORDS FROM THE CROSS

Matthew 27:46-50: "About the ninth hour Jesus cried with a loud voice, 'Eli, Eli, Lama Sabachthani?' that is 'My God, My God, why have You forsaken me?' And some of them standing there, when they heard it, began saying 'This man is calling for Elijah'...but the rest of them said, 'let us see whether Elijah will come to save him.' And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice and yielded up his spirit." It has been difficult to understand how Jesus was forsaken by God. Hebrews 2:9 states that Jesus "tasted death for every man." God told Adam, the first man, "In the day you eat thereof, you will surely die." Adam ate, but he lived 930 years before he died, that is before he died physically. He died spiritually the day he ate as God said he would die. He was separated from God on that day. But died physically 930 years later. Both spiritual and physical death was passed to all men. Jesus had to taste both spiritual death (be separated from God), then die physical death.