

You're of no earthly value unless you're...

# Heavenly Minded

Vol 5 Iss 1



**Dear Friends,**

The world has been left aghast at the horrible death and destruction brought by the recent tsunami in southeast Asia. Countless stories are being told of people caught completely off guard. Surely our hearts are bowed in prayer for the people afflicted and grateful for those we know who were spared.

And it also gives us pause to consider how the world will view our disappearance in the soon coming rapture. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, we will be gone. America, as a superpower, will likely crumble and be eclipsed by the EU. Israel, who has been so dependent upon the US for moral, military and financial support will turn initially to the EU and its leadership. It may be that the 'Road Map' for peace will be the covenant that will then be confirmed with the world body.

Whatever the case, we are approaching a spiritual tsunami called the Great Tribulation very quickly. It is high time for believers in Christ to be alert and 'to be about the Lord's business'. Whether God has made you a missionary in a foreign land or a prayer warrior in your own 'closet', may you all hold tightly to the Word of God and draw closer to Him than ever. May your faith grow and your love abound. Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together...for the day is approaching. We'd be blind not to see it!

*In Christ's Love, John and Darlene Dickey*



You will keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on You, because he trusts in You.

Trust in the LORD forever, for in Yah, the LORD, is everlasting strength.

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***In this issue...***

Gim'me the Good Stuff Ready? Kings of the East Another Gospel

# Gim'me the Good Stuff!

It apparently really bugged John. How could someone follow the Son of Man for as long as Thomas did and still not believe in His resurrection? Why did he arrogantly insist, “*Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it.*”? What an unexpected contrast, for Thomas had earlier opted to endanger his life and potentially die with Jesus by going to Jerusalem where they all knew His enemies were lurking. In fact, he had encouraged the others to do the same (John 11:16).

But at the very time of supreme exhilaration and joy for everyone else – Jesus had risen! – Thomas needed yet another sign. Granted, he wasn't there earlier when the others got to see the risen Lord. Yet, before he could believe, he HAD to touch and feel, to see with his own eyes – or else. Now, John had believed when he saw the empty tomb holding only Christ's burial clothing (John 20:8). Belief came somewhat easier for him apparently. But a week after Thomas' pouty proclamation, Jesus mercifully granted him his sign. The overwhelmed disciple replied, “*My Lord and my God.*”

Christ then said, “*Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not*

*seen and yet have believed.*”

Now, John must have pondered this for quite some time. This is evident because decades later he used this incident as the prelude into his rationale for writing his Gospel. He wrote in the verses immediately following this incident (20:30,31), “*Jesus did many other miraculous signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.*”

And so, the ‘Beloved Disciple’, very possibly concerned that there would be no more ‘doubting Thomas’”, chose specific signs to form the framework for his divinely inspired account of Christ's earthly ministry. He knew that none of us would have the luxury of the first few – to touch and feel, to see with iris and cornea, what is more real and substantial than anything we ‘normally’ sense.

So why did he choose the signs he did? I'll suggest that they were probably the ones which impacted John the most. They were likely the very ones that birthed and nurtured his own faith and led him to his own soul-saving conclusion at the empty tomb. You see, he came to saving faith without seeing the risen Lord and this Gospel is his testimony. That makes it extremely practical for us and supremely evangelistic. That's why he could attest that, “*these are written that you may believe*” and he may have thought – ‘like I did.’

Thus, we will begin a series to examine each of these signs

confident that if we will listen to His Spirit in the process, we will find greater and greater faith in our Lord.

In Chapter Two of John's Gospel, he recorded an incident in which Jesus turned ordinary water into wine. He concluded with, “*This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him.*” (v11) So this was the first sign and John, being one of His disciples says it specifically led him to believe in Jesus. Let's consider why.

“*On the third day there was a wedding in Cana of Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there.*” (v1) It appears that this took place on the third day after Christ's baptism. Mary was there. Perhaps the parents of the groom or bride or both were close family friends or even relatives. Mary, as we will see, was a key part of this story. She was clearly involved in a supporting role.

“*Now both Jesus and His disciples were invited to the wedding.*” (v2) In the short interval between His public baptism and this event, several devoted men had already begun to follow Him. Some had been disciples of John the Baptist. The fact that Jesus and His disciples were invited means that they weren't ‘crashing’ the party, they were welcomed. So either they all knew the hosts or the hosts were simply being generous and hospitable.

If the latter was the case, they probably had more guests than they had planned for and thus we read in verse three, “*And when they ran out of wine, the mother of Jesus said to*

*Him, “They have no wine.”*

Based upon the comments of the Master of the Feast later, it's clear that Mary had knowledge of the situation that the others who were celebrating did not. Perhaps she was the ‘wedding planner’. In any event, she knew Jesus could handle the crisis. Now, for a wedding in these days to fail in providing all the wine necessary would have been a ‘black mark’ on all the hosts and would certainly show that their generosity was misspent.

“*Jesus said to her, ‘Woman, what does your concern have to do with Me? My hour has not yet come.’*” (v4) “*Some have suggested Mary's concern over the shortage of wine indicates she may have been a hostess at this wedding. The role of hostess at a Jewish wedding [was] usually filled by an aunt of the groom, [thus] this marriage celebration could very well have been that of Mary's nephew — the Apostle John.*” – Courson

If John was the groom, it would explain why he considered this ‘beginning of signs’ as a turning point. John and Andrew were among the first of Jesus' disciples. You see, John the Baptist had pointed Jesus out to them specifically as the Lamb of God – the Messiah. Therefore, to have Him come to this blessed event was a huge honor. But then, to fail in the wine... with the future King of Israel there... let alone the other guests. This was the ultimate humiliation.

“*None but those who know how sacred in the East is the duty of lavish hospitality, and how passionately the obligation to exercise to the utmost it is felt, can*

realize the gloom which this incident would have thrown over the occasion, or the misery and mortification it would have caused to the wedded pair. They would have felt it to be, as in the East it is still felt to be, an indelible disgrace."-- Farrar

And Mary, who already lived some 30 years under the cloud of suspicion that Jesus was illegitimate, could herself only suffer more shame.

Have you ever been at a point in your life when after much personal tribulation, after having those around you put you 'at a distance', after submitting to the Lord's guidance and yet suffering the ravages of a rumor mill as a result... you just want the Lord to set things right?? Surely Mary was in that place. She would have loved some measure of vindication. Perhaps, her Son would now show some masterful gift of leadership, perhaps it was time for Him to show Himself.

Jesus replied tenderly yet firmly. Some have attested that the word He used for 'woman' was a loving term. Others think that is not the case. We cannot hear the tone in His voice and that would be the determinant here. However, what He said after this and what He did spoke volumes. Jesus knew her concern – it wasn't just the wine. She knew who He was and she wanted the world to know as well. Ever tried to nudge God's hand when the time isn't right? Jesus said, 'It's not time yet. It's not My hour.' She sought His glory and possibly her vindication. However, she didn't realize His road to glory led through Calvary.

"His mother said to the servants, 'Whatever He says to you, do it.'" (v5) Now, Jewish moms can be persistent – just ask my kids – ha! But don't you just love the beautiful expectancy Mary had? She was definitely a woman of faith. 'Whatever', in the Greek, means, 'Whatever'. She didn't know what He would do, but she was confident that He'd do something. This is where many of us stumble in faith. If God doesn't do it our way or on our timeline, we simply give up. We need to keep a 'whatever' attitude. No, not like the current trendy, "Oh, WHATEVER!" but the meditation of a submitted, hopeful heart – "Whatever, Lord."

"Now there were set there six waterpots of stone, according to the manner of purification of the Jews, containing twenty or thirty gallons apiece." (v6) These water-pots were to supply water for the washings usual at feasts (see Mark 7:4). The Jews were regarded ceremonially *unclean* if they did not wash both before and after eating. This was done in a formal manner, and was, as with the washing of cups, pots and brass vessels, a ritual observance on which the Pharisees laid great stress. We have an idiom today – I think you've been drinking your bath water! This is kind of what these guests were about to do. However, in figure or type, Jesus was about to turn that which was a part of a dead ritualism into that which gave joy and gladness.

"Jesus said to them, "Fill the waterpots with water." And they filled them up to the brim. And He said to them, "Draw some out now,

and take it to the master of the feast." And they took it." (v7,8) Now if I were one of these servants, my knees would have been knockin'. Jesus didn't tell them what he was doing so for all they knew, they were serving up ritual wash water to the head honcho of the feast. You just don't expect good tips when you do that sort of thing.

But they did it! And how many of Christ's servants need to do the same – no questions, no doubts – just do it. That blessed 'whatever' attitude. That's often when miracles happen.

"When the master of the feast had tasted the water that was made wine, and did not know where it came from (but the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom. And he said to him, 'Every man at the beginning sets out the good wine, and when the guests have well drunk, then the inferior. You have kept the good wine until now!'" (v9,10) Many, many otherwise excellent teachers launch from this passage into the allowance for or the condemnation of drinking wine. Frankly, that misses the point. John presented this sign to promote belief in Jesus as the Christ, not as the basis for a moral posture.

Whether you believe the wine was fermented or not, the fact is that the Master of the Feast immediately recognized it as "the good wine". Jesus didn't just supply wine but "the good wine" and this fellow recognized it immediately. It was distinctively better – the good stuff. This is a principle with all that God does – it's the 'good stuff'. It's

perfect. It's a 'mind-blower'. The lame man jumped and danced; the blind man beheld the Son of God; the demon possessed became a disciple. It is simply the way He does what He does. When He made the world, the scripture says, "Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good." (Gen 1:31) Now, this is really thrilling when you consider the resurrection and our heavenly home!

Thus, "This beginning of signs Jesus did in Cana of Galilee, and manifested His glory; and His disciples believed in Him." (v11) Here's the point of the story – they believed. When John says, "His disciples" he's specifically including himself. And I'll submit that it wasn't simply the fact of the miraculous transformation but the message, the picture if you would, that it portrayed.

You see, John was a fiery idealist. He had evidently been well acquainted with the religious power brokers of the day. When Christ was arrested and taken from the garden of Gethsemane, it was John who got Peter in to the place of inquisition because he "was known to the high priest, and went with Jesus into the courtyard of the high priest." (John 18:15) Yet, having an 'in' with the highest religious authorities also seems to have led him to a disdain for the deadness of their traditions and their hypocrisies.

Instead of following their teachings or aspiring to climb their religious ladder of success, he ended up following John the Baptist who



labeled these guys as poisonous snakes. (Mat 3:7)

So there at the wedding feast were these ceremonial purification jugs – six big ones. Six is the number of man in the Bible and that's appropriate for this whole deal of ceremonial washing was basically an invention of man – a sanctimonious 'enhancement' to the notion of being clean. The Torah contains many references to washing but this ritualistic washing that was in vogue was purely tradition just like the Urchatz and the Rachtzah of the modern Seder (Passover celebration). Jesus and His disciples didn't support it. In fact, the Word says they were accosted by the scribes and Pharisees who said, "Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread." (Mat 15:2)

So the message John saw in the miracle was Jesus taking that which was representative of a dead religious system of man-made traditions and replacing it with that which represents joy.

Ceremonial wash water became "the good wine". To John and to all of us who have been fed up with the deadness of religiosity, whether Jewish or 'Christian', this speaks loudly of Messiah. And the message wasn't lost on John; it resonated in his heart and you can almost sense him dancing in the background – thrilled inwardly. 'Yes! Jesus is the Messiah! His ways are not man's ways. He's not into this religious mumbo jumbo. He's radical! He's real! He can

even turn deadness to joy! Wow! If He can do that to water – He can do it to me!!'

And that's exactly what belief in Jesus Christ does – when He becomes your Lord and Savior, He takes the deadness of a vain life and transforms it into 'the good stuff' of love, joy, peace and their companions. It's the 'good wine' of God's Spirit and only Christ can make it. Jesus isn't asking us to believe in a religious system of traditions. He wants you to believe in Him. There are those who may think 'you've been drinking your bath water' – ha! But you can just tell them it's the new wine of His Spirit.

## ANNOUNCEMENT!

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## Ready?

Fiery idealist that he was, John jumped immediately from the first sign of the wedding wine to a dramatic encounter at the temple in Jerusalem between Jesus and the religious robbers.

"Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. And He found in the temple those who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the money changers doing business." (v13, 14)

The system allowed for the sale of these religious items as part of the officially sanctioned worship. It all started off probably quite innocently but by this time, the pilgrims were pretty much being pillaged by these pious pirates. On top of that, it was the religious officialdom that ultimately benefited from these sales and exchanges of coin.

But it's not too different today. No, I'm not referring to the Christian Booksellers or recording artists et al (though you could really get me going on that point). Rather, we find far too many ministers who are simply employed – doing what they do because they like 'Christian employment' rather than obeying a calling from God. Thank the Lord for the many who are genuine in their service!!

"When He had made a whip of cords, He drove them all out of the temple, with the sheep and the oxen, and poured out the changers' money and overturned the tables. And He said to those who sold doves, 'Take these things away! Do not make My Father's house a

house of merchandise!'" (v15, 16)

Jesus wasn't perturbed at the sale so much as the locale – His Father's house. On a second round a few years later, He did the same thing and said, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a 'den of thieves.'" (Mat 21:15)

This radical cleansing impressed John as well as the other Gospel writers. It seems he was ready for a 'fire-brand' Messiah. He was a 'son of thunder' (Mark 3:17) and he was ready for a religious storm. John was zealous for the things of God or so he thought. He was ready for some zeal. Holy scriptures pertaining to such passion were easy for him to recall and believe.

"Then His disciples remembered that it was written, 'Zeal for Your house has eaten Me up.'" (v 17) Christ's holy attitude struck a cord with John. It was the kind of thing that the Baptist would have done. But something was about to transpire that he wasn't ready for.

"So the Jews answered and said to Him, 'What sign do You show to us, since You do these things?'" (v 18) 'Oh boy, another sign!', John may have been thinking.

"Jesus answered and said to them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.'"

"Then the Jews said, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?'" (v 19, 20)

John wasn't ready for this. What was Jesus saying? This conundrum stuck in his mind for years and it may even have been a 'hard saying' for him. The water into wine sign led him to believe in Jesus as the

Messiah, but he may have really struggled with this one. He wasn't ready for it.

And it is the same for us today. I submit that most of us come to faith in Christ not being ready for all He has to say. There are verses in the Bible which pose contradictions to our desires or experience or rationale. Consequently, we try to interpret them to fit our vision or we simply put them in the 'not sure about this one' bucket. Many times it's not because we don't want to believe it; we're just not ready to believe.

Jesus never explained this saying to his disciples privately like He did the parables though He did tell them later that He had to die and be resurrected. But even then, they didn't get it. It may have been just too big a pill to swallow.

*"But He was speaking of the temple of His body." (v 21)*

This was the revelation that explained it all. Keep in mind, John wrote this retrospectively. At the time, he was as clueless or faithless as everyone else. He had to go through some things first before he could understand and/or believe this saying.

*"Therefore, when He had risen from the dead, His disciples remembered that He had said this to them; and they believed the Scripture and the word which Jesus had said." (v 22)*

Remember, the Gospel of John is one large lesson on believing. In this segment between signs, he is teaching us that it is critical to believe not only in Jesus as Christ but to believe all that He has said for the two beliefs are usually

segregated in the minds of believers. Additionally, he is teaching us that we are sometimes not ready to believe all that He's said and this can create a dilemma. It wasn't until after the resurrection that John believed the scripture and the saying of Jesus. In like manner, many of us struggle with portions of the Bible – we shouldn't, but we do. For example, there are some who will not believe in the literal second coming of Christ until after the fact.

Now, a 'ready mind' is one that is taught of the Holy Spirit and knows that the Word of God is true whether or not it compliments our understanding. Such a mind is willing to believe. You see, there are some things that He has said that we're often just not ready to 'digest'. But we should never abandon what we do know and believe for what we don't understand or struggle with. We must remain willing to believe, for in due season, when we are ready to believe and/or understand, like John, we will look back and say, "Wow, now I get it!"

At the foot of the cross, John still didn't get it and it was a dark, dark day. But in the empty tomb only a few days later, it all became much clearer.

You can believe ALL that Jesus said, ALL the scriptures, with absolute confidence. If some things are still a mystery or 'rub' you or humble you or are contrary to your natural thinking – hold on. Remain a ready (willing to believe) mind. You won't be disappointed. The Holy Spirit never said, "Oops". You can trust Him. You can believe ALL that He's said.

## China and the Kings of the East

*by Dr. N. W. Hutchings*

The status of the church and/or Christian missions in China is directly related to the political and economic past.

Going back into history four thousand years, we find that China was ruled by emperors in succeeding dynasties. To name just a few of these dynasties: Song, Tang, Qing, Ming, Zhou, etc. Emperors ruled by provincial, city, or war lord alliances.

In the nineteenth century the Roman Colonial powers of Europe, plus the United States, discovered China to be a land of golden commercial opportunity. Commercial land holdings and enclaves were established on the mainland. China neither needed nor wanted little that was manufactured or grown by Europe or the United States. In order to prevent a huge balance of trade deficit, Spain began to sell opium to the Chinese. England followed in the opium trade market and soon Chinese men became drug addicts in increasing numbers. In 1839 Lin Zexu pleaded with Queen Victoria to stop the opium traffic to China, and warned: "Your Majesty has not before been thus officially notified, and you may plead ignorance of the severity of our laws. But I now give my assurance that we mean to cut this harmful drug forever" Europe demanded more and more tea, silk, and spices, but the only thing England had to trade that the Chinese wanted was opium. A series of opium wars ensued in which kegs of opium were thrown into the sea from British ships. This eventually led to the Boxer Rebellion in which Christians and business representatives were killed or held prisoner. England, France, and the United States sent armies to

the rescue, captured Beijing, and burned much of the Summer Palace.

Out of the confrontations between China and the West, which the West always won, the French, British, and the United States received land and trade concessions in Shanghai and at other ports. The British also received a 100 year lease on Hong Kong (1897-1997).

In the wake of the Occidental commercial expansion also came Christian missionaries. The main religions of China had been Buddhism and Daoism. ...Christianity became widely accepted and churches were founded. However, some prominent Chinese, possibly influenced by cultic doctrines, seized upon the new converts to promote their own political programs. Hong Xiuchuran, who declared himself to be the brother of Jesus, started the Taiping Rebellion which raged between 1850 and 1864. The goal of the revolution was to free women and promote the kingdom of heaven on earth. Approximately 20 million were killed in this rebellion. To put the casualties of this civil war into perspective, this would be more than twenty times that of the number of Americans who were killed in all of the following wars: Revolutionary War, War of 1812, Mexican War, Civil War, Spanish American War, World War I, World War II, Korean War, Vietnam War, Persian Gulf War.

If the nineteenth century was traumatic and turbulent to China, the twentieth century was even worse. Greed, corruption, and foreign vested interests so weakened the rule of the Quing (Ching) Dynasty that it was unable to govern. Sun Yatsen, in the revolution of 1911-1912, overthrew the last emperor. The new George Washington of China desired to establish some form of a republican political entity. He was a professed Christian, yet he was practically

deserted by the church and the governments of Europe and the United States, who waited to see if China really wanted a democratic form of government. Sun Yatsen could not wait, so he turned to Russia and the new communist regime of Lenin. In Sun's army there were two young rising stars, Chiang Kai-shek and Mao Tsetung. Chiang was sent to Moscow to be schooled as to how communism could be brought to China. However, Chiang had a Christian wife, and he himself professed to be a Christian. There was nothing in communism to Chiang but chaos and evil. Mao, possibly to please Sun, espoused communism, and China was again embroiled in a long civil war.

In 1950 the churches of China were confronted with a government like that of Russia hostile to all religions, and especially Christianity. In order to survive as a collective entity, many churches throughout the nation formed what is known as the "Three Self Church Alliance." The meaning of the name of the new association tried to convey that the churches in the alliance were self governing, self supporting, and self motivated. All foreign identifications or ties with Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Catholics, etc., were immediately severed.

No system of political communism has survived for more than seventy years without imploding from within. In 1965 Mao found his economic policies failing, his critics increasing, and his policies of encouraging women to bear more children producing him with an additional 300 million young mouths to feed, house, and educate. He offered to resign but with Mao gone the entire government would fall. So Mao was convinced that it was a remnant of the capitalists, religionists, and counterrevolutionaries in China

that were causing his problems. For the next ten years the rivers of China ran red with the blood of millions as the so-called Red Guard pillaged, murdered, raped, and burned. Even the Three Self churches were closed. Pastors and church workers were killed, sent to prison, or sent to labor camps. It is probably conservative to say that at least 50 million died in this unspeakable period of hell on earth.

On January 14, 1996, the communist Central Committee criminalized all Christian activity outside the Three Self Church. The rules governing even the state controlled church in China are as follows:

1. Christian believers must fervently love the People's Republic of China, support the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party and the Peoples Government, uphold the unification of the motherland and the harmony among ethnic groups, and work steadfastly on the road of socialism.

2. Christian believers must strictly abide by all the laws, regulations, and policies of the Communist Party and the State, and strive to be patriotic and law abiding citizens.

3. Christian believers must actively work to increase the material wealth and cultivate the spiritual morals of the socialist civilization. They must comply with the government's labor codes and strive to contribute to the development of the "Four Modernizations."

4. A permit must be obtained from the county Religious Affairs Bureau in order to establish religious meeting points. No unauthorized meeting points are allowed.

5. Christian believers must actively cooperate with the government to carry out thoroughly the Party's religious policies to the letter. They shall not persuade and force others to believe in Christianity. They shall not

brainwash teenagers under 18 with religious beliefs. They shall not bring children to religious activities.

6. One should see a doctor for medication when sick. Christian believers must not resort to prayer alone for healing so as not to endanger people's health and lives.

7. Christian believers shall not preach their religion outside the church buildings and specific places which have been designated for religious activities. They shall not preach itinerantly. They shall not receive self proclaimed evangelists into their homes, churches, or meeting points.

The China of 2000 was not the China of 1980. In just 20 years cities have been rebuilt and modernized; elevated highways roar into major cities. Shanghai is building 3,000 new skyscrapers, thousands of new high rise apartments, 50 to 90 story hotels, new and modern airports, new jumbo jets, etc.

China is filling the world with consumer goods. The major portion of consumer goods and clothing in the United States is now made in China via American supervision with American money.

The factor that motivated the opium wars with China was a balance of trade problem. China has not changed. China does not want our produce or our products. Our yearly balance trade deficit with China is now \$84 billion a year. Europe, Canada, Israel, and dozens of other world nations also have a Chinese trade deficit. A large percentage of the wealth of the world is being directed into China. Most of this wealth so far is being used to move China into the 21st century as an economic power. Now, much of this wealth can be directed into the military. Hong Kong and Macaw have been returned to China; now China wants the return of

Taiwan. Even newspapers in China now predict a war with the United States. China cannot match (yet) the U.S. in modern weapons and technology. For example, the U.S. has 18 times as many nuclear missiles. What China has many more times of is men. According to Revelation 9:14-16, an army of 200 million soldiers will cross the Euphrates from the East to fight at the battle of Armageddon.

According to Revelation 16:12, this gigantic army will belong to the "kings of the east" and advance over a prepared way. According to an Associated Press news release dated April 24, 2001, China has already signed a trade alliance treaty; the Bangkok Agreement, with India, South Korea, Laos, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh. Pakistan, Vietnam, Myanmar, and Nepal have indicated they will also sign this treaty and become part of the alliance, which would encompass over half the earth's population.

We already have the Arab alliance of nations; the revived Roman Empire of Europe; the Russian bear is growling again; and now the Kings of the East.

*"He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:21).*

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(Editor's note: Over 70% of the merchandise in Walmart stores is from China now. In addition, China is presently negotiating with Canada and Venezuela for huge oil contracts both of which are primary US sources. Much of the production in China for export items is made by Christian prisoners of the State. *This article was edited to reduce its length.*)

## **Another Gospel**

by Chuck Missler

*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.*

Galatians 1:9

As we've said in our previous two issues, the popular but shamefully blasphemous novel by Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*, has raised many troubling questions, particularly among the less informed, and with a major motion picture in the works, this subject will be a popular topic of conversation for months to come.

In his novel, Dan Brown attempts to support his outrageous notions by using allusions from the *Gnostic Gospels* and twisted distortions of the early church councils, all of which raise serious questions: What makes us so confident that our Bible is what it purports to be? How *do* we know? What about these "missing" books of the Bible?

Brown's distortion of history is rampant throughout his novel. He assumes that Constantine made Christianity the state religion of the Roman Empire-rather, he simply granted freedom of worship in his Edict of Milan in A.D. 313. It was a subsequent successor, Theodosius (379-395), who made Christianity the state religion in 381. Brown's Constantine "upgraded a mortal Christ to deity," and "secured male dominance and suppression of women"... "converting the world from matriarchal paganism to patriarchal Christianity." He insists that Constantine canonized selected favorable Gospels from "more than 80 available." His deliberate distortions are, of course,

contradicted by clear historical records.

### **Council of Nicaea**

The Council of Nicaea was convened in A.D. 325 with 318 bishops to settle disputes about Christology, not to dispute or modify the "canon." ("Canon," meaning standard, refers to those Scriptures that were accepted by the early churches as God-breathed, or inspired.) The principal precipitating issue was between Arius and Athanasius. Arius argued that Jesus was simply a created being. He was a great communicator and was causing deep disputes throughout the Empire. Athanasius argued for the full deity of Christ and was clearly vindicated by the proceedings of the Council (as exemplified by the famous Nicene Creed).

### **Brown's Version**

"It was at the Council of Nicaea in 325 that Church leaders decided by vote to make Jesus divine...Until that moment in history, Jesus was viewed by His followers as a mortal prophet."

And, according to Brown, it was a "close vote"! According to him, the presently accepted Gospels were selected from "more than 80" available. All of this is deliberate misrepresentation to support his attack on Jesus Christ and His church.

Twenty rulings were issued at the Council of Nicaea and the contents of all of them are still in existence: not one of them involved issues regarding the canon.

As for the vote that was finally taken, only 5 out of 318 dissented; only two of those refused to sign the resulting resolutions, which

reaffirmed the deity of Christ, not issues regarding the canonical Gospels.

If Christ was not fully God, then God was not the Redeemer of mankind.

*For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him:* Colossians 1:16 (Also, see Jn 1:1; Rom 9:5; Heb 1:1-8; etc.)

During the 1st century-two centuries before the Council of Nicaea - even before the end of His earthly ministry, Christ's divinity was already being acknowledged, as evidenced by Thomas: "My Lord and my God!"

During the 2nd century - still a hundred years before the Council of Nicaea - we have ample quotes from the early church fathers:

Ignatius, Bishop of Antioch (A.D. 110): "There is One God who manifests himself through Jesus Christ his son"; "Son of Mary and Son of God...Jesus Christ our Lord...God Incarnate...Christ God," etc.

Polycarp of Bishop of Smyrna (A.D. 112-118), in his letter to the church at Philippi, assumes the divinity of Jesus, His glorification, etc.

Justin Martyr (~A.D. 150): "being the first-begotten Word of God, is even God"; "...both God and Lord of hosts."

Irenaeus (~A.D. 185): "our Lord, and God, and Saviour, and King."

Clement of Alexandria (~A.D. 200): "truly most manifest Deity, He that is made equal to the Lord of the universe; because he was His Son."

Another of the often-overlooked rebuttals to those who deny Christ's claim to deity were the persecutions in Rome, and the voluntary martyrdom of the early Christians for their refusal to worship the emperor. Their martyrdom was a result of their exclusive commitment to Christ as God.

### **How We Got the New Testament**

The New Testament was canonized in the 1st century while the apostles were alive and all facts could be checked out (Lk 1:2; Acts 1:21,22; 1 Jn 2:3). It was endorsed by Christ in advance (Jn 14:25-26) and was considered a "more sure word of prophecy" (2 Pet 1:16-19).

### **The Process**

Letters were received and then circulated by the early church, and a growing group of them became recognized as authoritative (Apostolic) and in harmony with accepted doctrine. All 27 books were accepted by the end of the 1st century and every New Testament book was cited as authoritative by a church father within one generation.

### **The Gnostic Gospels**

The term "gnostic" refers to *gnosis*, or knowledge. However, here it refers to the concept of hidden, secret, or special knowledge. The Gnostics were a growing problem in the early church and many of the New Testament epistles, as well as the numerous quotes from the early church fathers, were in rebuttal to the several heresies promoted by the Gnostics.

(In fact, Paul's second letter to the Thessalonians was a response to a forgery being circulated as if from him.)

*For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but*



*after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables. 2*

Timothy 4:3

A large number of spurious documents emerged during the centuries following the ministries of the Apostles and were universally rejected by the early church. Copies of a group of these were found at Nag Hammadi (in Egypt) dating from the 3rd and 4th centuries, and these are uncritically accepted by Brown as accurate. These include *The Gospel of Thomas, The Gospel of Philip, The Gospel of Mary, The Gospel of Truth*, and about four dozen others

They are not "Gospels" at all, but rather speculative opinions, totally devoid of any verifiable facts. Furthermore, they were written under false pseudonyms in an attempt to gain legitimacy. The early church rejected any documents under pseudonyms as being inconsistent with the concept of God-breathed inspiration.

Lastly, they were all written centuries *after* the Gospel period - in contrast to the contemporaneous eyewitness accounts in the New Testament - and make no pretense of being actual records of events - in fact, they are *anti*-historical rather than simply *non*-historical!

In particular, Brown leans on *The Gospel of Philip* and its out-of-context fragmentary reference to a kiss - in which Jesus ostensibly kissed his other students as well - but this still suggests nothing about marriage or any sexual innuendo. Brown leans on a word in the "Aramaic" (although *The Gospel of*

*Philip* came to us in Coptic!) that he maintains means "spouse." The word actually happens to be a loan word from the Greek: *koinonia*, which can mean companion, as in fellowship, etc.

*The Gospel of Philip* makes no reference that supports any of Brown's contentions. But even if it did, it would be **irrelevant** since it was written more than two centuries after the Gospel period, under a pseudonym posing as someone he wasn't. No serious scholar can take it seriously as having any historical merit.

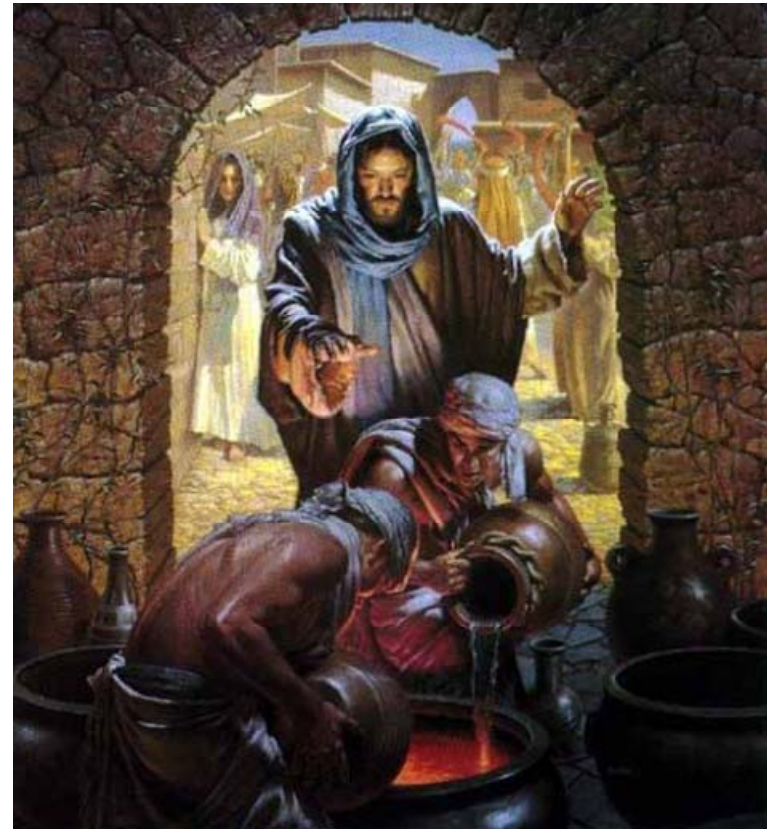
(Many would seem to accept Napoleon's cynical perspective: "What is history, but a fable agreed upon?")

The popular novel is, indeed, malicious, deliberate fiction - posing subtly as factual - and is clearly, itself, a fulfillment of prophecy:

*Even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction. And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of. And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: 2 Peter 2:1-3*

But it can also be a blessing by causing serious Christians to "do their homework" and find out just how the Bible came into being and the process by which the New Testament achieved codification during their early years.

*For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you. 1 Corinthians 11:19*



*Water to Wine by Morgan Weistling*