

“Lunar Landing Artifacts”  
 Sermon for 22 February 2015  
 Texts: Matthew 5:5

Recently a satchel of tools and instruments from the Apollo 11 lunar landing, July 20, 1969, belonging to Neil Armstrong, surfaced. Moon landing conspiracy theorists aside, human beings from Planet Earth visiting the moon is an epoch making event. The contents of this satchel are hard evidence, physical evidence of the accomplishment by NASA. Another recent event is the discovery of what appears to be a page of the gospel of Mark dating from the mid-first century! It is postulated that this hard evidence of the early composition of Mark could be dated as early as 80 AD—although some scholars now allow that the original gospel was written in the 60’s. The gap between the events between occurrence and recording has shrunken immensely, debunking the higher critical assertions of later, say 150-225 AD composition—implying that there were no apostles living when the gospels were imaginatively constructed by non-witnesses. That theory puts the theorists in the driver’s seat which, it appears was the humanistic agenda. The advocates for early composition now have hard evidence, retrieved from the papyrus fragment carefully removed from the funeral wrappings of an Egyptian mummy! My position on when Mark was written is drawn from the Scripture which records the departure of Mark from Cyprus, on Paul’s first missionary tour (Acts 13:13). Mark may have sensed the need of a written record in the outreach to Gentiles and returned to Jerusalem to consult with the living apostles there to authenticate his gospel. The existence of a Hebrew version (Matthew) would have stimulated Mark to do the same for the Greek-speaking peoples. Mark wanted to strengthen the evangelistic efforts; he may not have “abandoned” the mission after all.

This fragment (dateable, extracted from a mummy mask) together with the fragmentary evidence of possible New Testament writings from the caves of Qumran (most of the material in the preserved scrolls relates to the Old Testament documents and establishes the astonishing accuracy of transmission of text over millennia) is hard evidence. If authenticated, this material would be “the testimony of two witnesses,” able to stand up in a court of law! *As it stands, the early composition of the gospel seems on a fast track to dominance over liberal hypotheses.* This would be a score for the veracity and authenticity of Scripture.

As exciting as these developments are, they are nothing compared to the gift of the gospel in Christ Jesus. The One who is saying, **Blessed are the meek, they shall inherit the earth.** (Matthew 5:5) and citing David’s words, **A little while, and the wicked will be no more, though you look for them, they will not be found. But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy peace and prosperity. The wicked plot against the righteous and gnash their teeth; but the Lord laughs at the wicked, for he knows their day is coming.** (Psalm 37:10-13), is far greater than a king operating prophetically some hundreds of year prior! Jesus is the

greatest of all gifts, His gospel is the greatest of all treasures. He is the manifold wisdom of God in the flesh and His coming is the axis upon which the whole universe turns. He changes everything. He did so then, and He does so now.

David promises big changes: **the meek will inherit the land and enjoy peace and prosperity**. However, he prophesies other things, too. First, there is expectation: **A little while, and the wicked will be no more**. Jesus is the beginning of that day, we live in that day. Christ has come and He is coming again. It's a new day that David prophesied and it's a new day that Christ inaugurated. When Christ has returned, **though you look for them, they will not be found**. Then, at that moment, the gospel that David prophesied and Jesus preached will be fulfilled: **the meek will inherit the land and enjoy peace and prosperity**. David also declared **the wicked plot against the righteous and gnash their teeth**. He explains what we are up against in this day, how the wicked hate, plot against and persecute those who trust in God, **the meek; they gnash their teeth**. David equates the meek with the righteous. This is the context which Jesus appropriates to His teaching. We have to have **a righteousness that exceeds that of the Pharisees**. (Matthew 5:20) or **we will not enter the kingdom of heaven (God)**. The gospel is about precisely that; it is about how we obtain the qualifying righteousness.

As believers, we know the good news that salvation is procured for us by Jesus. There is a salvation *accomplished for us* through the life, death and resurrection and that two things follow: the perfect righteousness of Christ is given to all who believe and that, after the ascension, Christ not only sent the Holy Spirit, He intercedes continually for all those who put their trust in Him. Jesus Christ, Son of God, reigns now and forever. He is Lord of all, cosmos and universe, as will become manifest. We are the beneficiaries of His perfect obedience, His eventual rejection by mankind, His crucifixion, death and burial. He came to bear our sins, endured the righteous wrath of God over our sinning and died the death that sin deserves on our behalf and in our place. *There is more to the moral universe introduced by the visitation of the Son of God recorded in the Word of God—both prophetically and in actuality—than we should attempt to address in this brief hour*. Jesus reigns in glory, honor and dominion over all. This is the resume of the Teacher who tells us: **Blessed are the meek, they shall inherit the earth**. (Matthew 5:5)

Jesus took upon Himself the all the sins of the world and gives to all who believe, in exchange for their guilt, shame and regret, the righteousness they need to **stand before God. Repent and believe the gospel**. (Mark 1:14-15) Believe the gospel of God, of Jesus Christ and you shall be saved **because the gospel is the power of God unto salvation**. Let us never be forgetful, or neglectful of this gospel when we present ourselves before the Word to learn of Him, when we engage with Scripture to know the truth. Bring it to class, to the mountain. Let us embrace the resurrection as the seal of divine approval that it is. By raising Jesus, God approved

of the atoning death, the sacrificial significance of Jesus' free and loving death. By His obedience, the penalty was recognized and paid, justice was served in mercy, and the wrath of God over ingratitude, defiance and rebellion (entirely justifiable anger over sin) was appeased. Thereby we are justified, purified, and forgiven. And those same qualities are the nature of the new creature we have become by faith in Jesus Christ. When these regenerate saints hear **Be ye perfect even as your Father in heaven is perfect**, they do not cringe, rationalize or flee because they know **what is impossible with man is possible with God** (Luke 18:27) . . . **with God all things are possible** Matthew 19:26)!

This is much more than appearances or aspirations, more than mere religious-speak to this. Why? Because most of the maladies of the present day church are attributable to our neglect of the gospel. There are several, well-worn pathways to this deplorable condition: 1. Gospel reductionism from salvation to what's in it for me; from a God-centeredness to a man-centeredness; 2. Church deformity wherein genuine believers are mixed with carnal men and women, the latter are both self-deceived and ignorant of the truth. **Come ye out from them!** (2 Corinthians 6:17), Paul cries. Those who want to be comforted in their ignorance and sin, who skim along spiritually with an inflated sense of self-righteousness and false assurance of their eternal security, they want the church to affirm their lostness. "Help us to feel good about ourselves as we are." And so, they seek to conform the church to their cultural values, needs and interests. Making their self-helped and prosperous "converts" fitter for hell than themselves!

The real chore is to make seekers friendlier to the gospel, not to call the gospel to cater to their carnality. The demands of the gospel are radical: die to self, separate from carnality, aim for perfection and purity, trust in Jesus only. Our flesh balks and demands that these terms be reduced to a convenient morality, a thinly disguised accommodation (or capitulation) to worldliness: our ways, our values, and our culture! This is nothing new. This is precisely what many in the Jewish leadership in Jesus day had come to . . . preferring the traditions of men (which they control), to the truths of Scripture (which God asserts). Sinners today prefer their view of their sin, and sinning to God's perspective; but the gospel reverses all that. From God's point of view our sin is the problem. We need both to repent from sin, and to receive the gospel in belief, through grace and divinely bestowed faith.

Preach the gospel to yourself daily, put it in your backpack as you head out to school, go to work or class with the gospel in your grasp . . . always be ready to give a defense for the hope that is in you. Know the gospel is the prelude to making it known! Be both alert and prepared.

Amen.