

“The Gospel of Jesus’ Wife?”

James 5:13-20

If you read my newsletter article for October, some of what I will say will be old news. Regardless, all of this is “old news.” Have you heard the stories in the media of possible evidence that Jesus had a wife? I am sure you have heard in the news that they found a piece of papyrus making this tantalizing suggestion. They call it “The Gospel of Jesus’ Wife”, because they clearly wanted to make some news. It is a small fragment, smaller than the new iPhone 5, written in Coptic (an Egyptian language). The fragment is suggested to be from the 4th Century containing a few words which refer to Jesus, his mother, his disciples, and most tantalizingly, “my wife.”

I do appreciate that, with this announcement, they actually released a copy and translation of the text. A few years ago, when the Gospel of Judas was big news, the promoters of it must have been embarrassed to release the actual text. Because when I finally saw it for the first time, I laughed. These early Gnostic stories are just insane – to the point that I don’t know how anyone could believe that they are a part of historical reality.

So I do appreciate that most scholars have been responsible with pointing out that, even if this new text is authentic, it says nothing about

Jesus. But they gave it the name they did because they wanted to make some news. It is a scrap of papyrus written in Egypt by Gnostics around the 4th Century. This was not written by Christians, just like the Gospel of Thomas, or the Gospel of Mary, or the Gospel of Philip, or the Gospel of Judas, the list goes on and on.

There is no need to get worked up about whether or not Jesus had a wife. The Bible is very clear about who Jesus was, the Son of God, and the reason that He came – to be that final Lamb of sacrifice on the altar of the cross; to defeat sin, death, and Satan so that you can live.

Questioning this because of this scrap of papyrus would be like suggesting that we don't celebrate Christmas this year because the Jehovah Witnesses say we shouldn't. If you want to find Gnostics in the modern world: Jehovah Witnesses and Mormons are prime examples. They have lots of similarities, and like the Gnostics, they want to be perceived as Christian, even while they deny the truth of Christ.

There are many scholars who doubt the authenticity of the fragment because there is no evidence about the discovery of the text. Where it came from and who owns it has not been disclosed. And because the dating of Coptic handwriting is very imprecise, it is suggested that [extreme caution should be used in dating this fragment](#). (If you are reading this online, you may follow this link to an interesting article).

There are also serious questions about the size and shape of the fragment. Unlike all other randomly preserved fragments of papyrus from the 2nd-4th century, this fragment is almost perfectly symmetrical. It's a

rectangle. The top of the fragment has been sliced off, and both the left and right edges have been broken off in remarkably straight lines. The words immediately following the words 'My wife' happen to be missing and some suggest this might not have been accidental, but perhaps edited in order 'to maximize profit'?" Read more at

<http://concordiatheology.org/2012/09/the-gospel-of-jesus-wife-now-what/>.

Regardless of the authenticity, the unfortunate side of this revelation is how it is portrayed in the media. As I stated earlier, the name "The Gospel of Jesus' Wife" is a problem. One, it is a fragment smaller than an iPhone, not a Gospel. Two, it is not about a supposed wife. It is Gnostic nonsense and should be dismissed as being less than nothing.

The world of archaeology is filled with discoveries that support the biblical account of history, but you will never hear about that on the news. They only love stories about Jesus that chip away at the truth. The great thing about truth is that it is absolute and unchangeable. The same is true of God. With "news" of this "discovery," nothing has changed. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

We hear James speak of those who wander from the truth and the great and mighty work it is for someone to bring them back. The Gnostics started in the Christian community and then went another direction with their "hidden knowledge". They wandered away from the truth.

Our Scripture readings today are full of such examples. Moses had to deal with the "rabble" among the children of Israel who grumbled and complained against God. Oh, how they wandered away again and again.

But when you read the Scriptures, what does God keep doing? He sends His prophets. He sends His judges. He finally sends His Son.

The children of God wander away. This seems to always happen. What also always happens is that God is always seeking out His children. It is always His desire to bring them back. The father of Gnosticism is Simon the Magician from Acts 6. He tries to purchase the power of the Holy Spirit from Peter. Peter calls him to repentance. Simon repents, but then, we read from history, he wandered away once again.

There is nothing new under the sun. All of this is “old news.” The fact that the world hates Christ and wants to chip away at His reputation is “old news.” The fact that most of God’s children have wandered away from the truth is “old news.”

Like every generation, I know we want to think that we have it harder than others in regard to life in the church – “Oh, for the good old days.” I challenge you to find any generation of the church that did not struggle with these same questions. I challenge you to find any generation of the church that did not have the children of God wandering away. Your task in this generation is the same as every generation. Your task is to seek them out, bring them back, and save their soul from death. That is what the people of God have always done.

The news of this fragment I consider to be less than nothing. Tell me of someone who wandered away from the truth of Christ, who has been brought back and now lives under the grace of Baptism – that is newsworthy. It is your joyful task to go out and make some news. Amen.