

Newsbytes

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“Let us be alert to the season in which we are living. It is the season of the Blessed Hope, calling for us to cut our ties with the world and build ourselves on this One who will soon appear. He is our hope—a Blessed Hope enabling us to rise above our times and fix our gaze upon Him.” Tozer

'Blessed Ramadan' lawn sign campaign is unexpected success

Interfaith campaign to support Muslims during their holiest month has expanded exponentially in past three years.

By Jean Hopfensperger Star Tribune APRIL 27



National Guard chaplain Philip (Buddy) Winn held a “Blessed Ramadan” lawn sign, which was created by the Minnesota Council of Churches three years ago as part of a campaign to support Muslims.

Minnesota Army National Guard leaders are packing an unexpected item when they head to their annual training camp next month — a lawn sign displaying the words “To Our Muslim Neighbors: Blessed Ramadan.”

The blue signs, part of a campaign launched by Minnesota Council of Churches three years ago, also will be showing up at several thousand churches, individual homes and educational centers across the nation to mark the expected first day of Ramadan May 15.

The campaign’s popularity, including media coverage from as far away as Indonesia, has caught the council by surprise. So did the request by the Minnesota Army National Guard last year for some signs to display at their headquarters — the first such request from an armed service group.

“It’s an opportunity to demonstrate that we support our soldiers, of all religious traditions,” said National Guard Chaplain Philip (Buddy) Winn, who will post a sign at Camp Atterbury in Indiana for the annual training event next month.

“We’re extending good will — from our tradition to yours,” he said.

National Guard Sgt. Alkali Yaffa, one of about 50 Muslims in the Minnesota Guard, called the signs “wonderful.” “Those signs mean that people are celebrating with us,” Yaffa said. “They may not be fasting, but they are remembering.”

The Minnesota Council of Churches launched the Blessed Ramadan campaign in 2016 not knowing what to expect. But the presidential campaign had sparked anti-Muslim sentiment, and this was a visible way for the public to show their support, said the Rev. Jerad Morey, a council programs director.

The first year, more than 2,200 signs were distributed, mainly in Minnesota but also from coast to coast, said Morey. That's in addition to signs that could be downloaded for free off the council's website, a number not tracked.

The humble yard sign soon was showing up on social media and featured in other media ranging from the Voice of America to the Huffington Post to Minnesota news outlets.

About a dozen state councils of churches — organizations that typically represent mainline Protestant churches in each state — ordered them, Morey said. This year, the Councils of Churches in Wisconsin, New York and Oklahoma are new on board.

Ramadan is the holiest month of the year for Muslims, a time of dawn-to-dusk fasting and frequent prayer. It is based on the lunar calendar, and this year is expected to start May 15 and end June 14.

Most Minnesotans don't know a lot about Ramadan, and the signs often open the door to questions, said Winn and Yaffa.

"It spurs conversation," said Winn. "What is Ramadan? Is that when they fast?"

"It's another way to increase understanding among people," added Yaffa. "It's an opportunity for anyone who isn't Muslim to learn what this means." Mayflower United Church of Christ is among the Twin Cities churches that embraced the Blessed Ramadan campaign from the start. It distributed 50 signs the first year and nearly 50 last year, said Belle Scott, who coordinates the campaign.

This month, there's a table in the church hallway on Sundays offering sign-up sheets for the next batch of signs, said Scott. The Minneapolis church also displays the Blessed Ramadan greetings in front of its building, which often attracts attention from cars whizzing by.

"People drive by the church and honk," said Scott. "Some have even called the church and thanked us." In the weeks ahead, the Blessed Ramadan signs will be showing up across Minnesota and sprinkled across the nation. Although they haven't been able to end anti-Muslim sentiments, they are a growing public testimony to Muslims' many supporters. "There will be bright spots across this country," said Morey. "They tell our Muslim neighbors we don't fear you. We welcome you."

(Here's one you won't see at this mega-lib churches: "Infidel's Lives Matter".....MD)

Jesus Was Not a Social Justice Warrior

theconservativemillennialblog.com

"Live to your own convictions."

That's a line from one of Miley Cyrus's recent hits, "Do What You Want:" a song about the importance of speaking your own truth, living a life that makes you happy, and, quite simply, forgetting the rest. In it we are reminded to ignore the haters, reject bad vibes, and love ourselves. It's a catchy tune that speaks to a deep and universal philosophical truth: you're special, and no one can tell you otherwise.

Oh, wait. No, I got that wrong. My mistake. That wasn't from a Miley Cyrus song. Those were the words of a Christian pastor, teacher of Scripture and evangelist on The View last week. Talking about abortion.

Actually, no. I still got that wrong.

That was a horrendous lie stuttered by a “Christian” “pastor,” “teacher” of “Scripture” and “evangelist” on The Semi-Circle of Ignorant Virtue Signaling last week. Talking about ABORTION.

There.

Carl Lentz joined the The View two weeks ago to discuss his ministry at Hillsong Church in NYC. Lentz has made waves in the secular world for being “not-your-normal-preacher” who has a knack for attracting millennials to church in a time when young people are rejecting religion in droves.

Now, before I go further, let me address two things. One: I envy no one who goes on The View. It is a lion’s den for conservative/Christian values, and we’ve seen at least two people in the last year go on the show to defend said values only to turn in their pro-life cards. And, two: I am thankful for the millennial lives that have been changed by Hillsong’s ministry.** (see note at article end...MD)

Moving on.

Lentz and the hosts covered myriad topics, and then the apparently million-dollar question dropped: “So, abortion isn’t a sin in your church?”

Lentz was awkward. He stumbled a bit, then ultimately answered, “God’s the judge. Live to your own convictions.”

Wait... what?

“Live to your own convictions?” What does that even mean? This, from a pastor whose ministry is allegedly centered on the gospel of Christ? The same gospel which explicitly – and quite terrifyingly – calls its adherents to deny themselves, pick up their crosses, and follow Him? A message that demands nothing less than complete and total self-crucifixion? One that promises hardship and persecution? This can’t be the same gospel I know – the one that teaches us that anything less than total surrender to Christ isn’t Christianity at all. The gospel I know has an apt name for living to your own convictions: sin.

Yikes. Do we really have to talk about that word? It’s taboo—an idea the secular world mocks and much of the Christian world only whispers about in private. It’s easier to believe that right and wrong are subjective, based on your own predilections. That way, we can avoid the awkwardness of telling someone that what they’re doing is bad. If those are your convictions, who am I to say you’re wrong?

Perhaps for most people that’s a fine way to live. Perhaps coexistence is the best atheists and agnostics can hope for. The problem is, for Christians, the Bible doesn’t give such latitude. The standard to which we are held can only be described by another dirty word most people, Christians included, would rather not touch – holiness.

Lentz seemed to, at least temporarily, forget that. “Holy” means “set apart” and his answer to the question of the sinfulness of abortion sounded precisely like the rest of the world. Replace him with Kim Kardashian, and the answer probably would have been the same. I’m sure Lentz has read, and maybe truly believes, what Psalm 139 says about the immediate and inherent value of life at conception. Hopefully, he now realizes that he majorly dropped the ball on this one.

But Lentz’s seeming antipathy toward the evil of abortion reflects a much bigger problem than his apparent ignorance toward the sacredness of human life—a problem infecting the Church at an

alarming rate: *Social Justice Warrior Christianity*.

SJW Christianity, on the surface, sounds like genuine Christianity. It cares about the poor, the oppressed, the lonely and the marginalized. It waves the banners of compassion, generosity and empathy. It claims inclusiveness and unconditional love.

And, indeed, the greatest commandments to which Christians are called are first, to “love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind and strength” and then, to “love your neighbor as yourself.” We are told repeatedly throughout the Bible that love is the defining mark of a true Christ follower.

So, the problem isn't that SJW, progressive Christians are too loving—it's that they've forgotten what true love, as demonstrated by Christ, really is. They've replaced God's rich, expansive definition of love with their own cheap, small version.

Instead of emphasizing Jesus's radical, relentless love that manifests itself in salvation, they promote superficial love that manifests itself almost exclusively in social justice. An SJW Christian refuses to take a moral stance on issues like abortion, homosexuality, transgenderism, welfare and sanctuary cities, because, in their minds, tolerance in these areas is what it means to love like Jesus.

The problem is, it isn't.

Jesus was quite scandalous in his outreach to those on the outskirts of society. He was ridiculed for dining with tax collectors. He was criticized for interacting with prostitutes. He touched the untouchable – the demon-possessed, the contagious, the unclean. He looked eyes with people who had known nothing but shame and rejection. He confronted the powerful, chastised the greedy and uplifted the humble. Undoubtedly, Jesus embodied love. In fact, the Bible tells us that He Himself is love: everything that true love is is wrapped up in Him.

But to simply say, “Jesus was loving, and that's all that matters” would be to miss the point entirely. Yes, Jesus was loving, but it's important that we define “love” by His terms, not ours.

To us, in 2017, “loving” people means being nice to them, which means never telling them when they're wrong. Making people feel bad about themselves and their choices is mean, so we don't do it. Next to being a racist, being judgmental is the worst thing you can be. So, we allow everyone to discover “their” truth, and as long as that truth doesn't prevent us from living out ours, we can all get along just fine. This is just as much the mentality of SJW Christians as it is the secular world – the only difference is, SJW Christians do it in the name of Jesus.

Theirs is a very worldly—and convenient—definition of love. And it's not one condoned by Scripture nor reflected in Christ.

In fact, Jesus wasn't a nice guy.

That's right. You heard me. He wasn't nice. Which is refreshing for someone like me, who's always thought that niceness is overrated. Jesus was abrasive. He was brutally honest. He told Pharisees, the holiest guys around, that they were vipers who put on a good show but were nothing more than greedy bastards on the inside. He flipped tables in the synagogue just to say that it's messed up to trade in God's house.

He may have hung out with the sinners and the outcasts, but he didn't coddle them. You know what he had the audacity to do, even in the midst of their own self-loathing and misery?

Call out their sin.

To the adulteress woman? “Go and sin no more.”

The tax collectors, who were cheating people out of their money? “Don’t collect any more than you are authorized to do.”

The prostitute, who washed his feet with her tears? “Your sins are forgiven. . . Your faith has saved you.”

To the paralytic? “Take heart, my son; your sins are forgiven.”

Jesus’s main priority wasn’t to make people feel good, or even to heal their physical calamities, but to save their souls from sin. His was a message of repentance, not niceness.

If all Jesus had done in his life was be nice to people, the Pharisees wouldn’t have wanted him killed. The problem with Jesus wasn’t that he was a good guy, but that he was claiming to have the power to forgive sins. Unless you’re God—and as far as the Pharisees were concerned, he wasn’t—that’s straight up blasphemy. Blasphemy, in Bible times, could get you crucified.

The beef the self-righteous Pharisees had with Jesus is the same beef most people have with Jesus today: He cared about sin.

Jesus’s ministry was an eternal one. While healing people and raising them from the dead physically was an important aspect of his mission, his top priority was healing people and resurrecting them spiritually. That meant calling people away from the sin that entangled them into a life of obedience, of relationship with the Father and, ultimately, eternal life spent with Him. This spiritual about-face that brings life and a new start, Jesus explained, brings death to our old selves and retirement to our sinful modes of operation.

In Jesus, we see that the call for repentance and love are inextricably intertwined.

Somewhere along the way, Christians rejected that. We bought into the lie that the cross of Christ isn’t enough to convince people of the gospel. We began believing that the forgiveness of sins isn’t really what people wanted to hear. Thus came the era of strobe light, skinny-jean clad worship services that look more like a Coldplay concert than church. Sermons began to sound more like motivational speeches than explanations of the gospel.

And, perhaps, at first, our intentions were good. As the concept of religion became increasingly regarded as outdated and irrelevant, the church felt the need to find a remedy. Christian pop was popularized in the 90s, and churches saw this as an opportunity to replace or supplement their outdated hymns with music the kids would listen to. In parallel, the self-help industry was booming, and that philosophy began to characterize our sermons.

The Church moved away from fire-and-brimstone and legalism into a more dynamic, gracious, full view of the Christian life. But, like most good things, that trend soured. We now have what seems like a significant portion of Christianity that looks so much like the world that they may as well call themselves agnostic: it preaches a superficial, prosperity gospel Christianity that has no root in the actual gospel. It is more motivated by social justice than salvation.

Here’s the truth: the gospel doesn’t need our help. The cross of Jesus doesn’t need for you to make it cool. The gospel is dynamic yet unchanging, moving yet immovable, relevant yet timeless. In God’s

economy, repentance, obedience – and, yes, holiness – will never go out of style. The 2,000-year-old news of salvation is the same exact news people need to hear today. Plain and simple.

If Jesus were here now, in the flesh, do you know what he'd say to advocates of abortion? It wouldn't be, "live to your own convictions." It'd be, eyes full of compassion, "go and sin no more."

That is love. And that's what true Christians are called to—nothing less.

****editor's note: Hillsong does not teach sound doctrine. There may be those genuinely saved at and through Hillsong, we don't know. But Hillsong is nothing if not a millennial blind spot, as evidenced in this article. But it's still a worthy article.....Mare**

Mole Rats Help Archaeologists Discover Davidic Dynasty City

By Adam Eliyahu Berkowitz April 30, 2018

"But a shoot shall grow out of the stump of Yishai, A twig shall sprout from his stock." Isaiah 11:1 (The Israel Bible™)



King David fresco by Tarquinio Ligustri (1603).
(Renata Sedmakova / Shutterstock.com)

Archaeologists, aided by burrowing mole rats, discovered a large building in the valley below the hills of Hebron attributed to the kingdom of Biblical King David. The discovery is a milestone in the ongoing debate over the veracity of Biblical King David as a historical figure with most archaeologists now looking to the Bible as having a factual basis.

"Until 25 years ago no one doubted that King David was a historical figure," Professor Avraham Faust, director of the archaeological dig, told Breaking Israel News. "In the last 25 years or so, however, David's historicity, and especially the size of his kingdom, are hotly debated".

"The new discovery at Tel 'Eton, located in the Judean Shephelah to the east of the Hebron hills, seems to suggest that the highland kingdom controlled larger areas than some scholars believe", Faust added.

The dig, led by Professor Faust of Bar-Ilan University, is at Tel Eton, in the valley near the Hebron hills. The city that once stood at the site has been identified by scholars as Eglon, a city which, according to the Bible, fought against the Israelites as part of the five Amorite kings coalition and was later listed as part of the tribe of Judah.

This was the portion of the tribe of the Judites by their clans...Lachish, Bozkath, Eglon. Joshua 15:20,39

The discovery has become part of an ongoing dispute among archaeologists about whether King David actually existed as a real historical figure or whether he was just a mythological figure existing only in the pages of the Bible.. The finds from Tel 'Eton, recently published by Faust and Yair Sapir in the journal Radiocarbon, led the authors to claim that the city was once part of David's kingdom. The structure was dated to the 10th century – the time in which King David was supposed to have ruled

according to the Bible – on the basis of radiocarbon dates of samples from the floor make-up and from the foundation deposit. After describing the building and the reasons that led them to date it to the 10th century BCE, Faust and Sapir wrote:

“This has bearings on the date in which social complexity evolved in Judah, on the debate regarding the historicity of the kingdom of David and Solomon.”

Dr. Faust explained how they came to this remarkable conclusion.

“We, of course, did not find any artifacts that said ‘King David’ or King Solomon’ but we discovered at the site signs of a social transformation the region underwent, including the construction of a large edifice in a plan known to archaeologists as ‘the four-room house’ which is common in Israel but is rare to non-existent elsewhere. This seems to indicate that the inspiration or cause for the transformations are to be sought in the highland. The association with David is not based on any archaeological evidence but on circumstantial grounds only. Since the source of the change seems to be in the highlands, and since it took place at the time when David was supposed to have existed, the link is plausible,” Professor Faust told *Breaking Israel News*. “Moreover, the changes are consistent with larger regional changes, all connected with the highlands, and all taking place at a time the Kingdom of David was supposed to have to spread into this region”.

“The association with the highland kingdom, as well as the time of the change, are the main discovery, and if someone thinks that there was no King David, that person should come with a different name for the highland king in whose time the region was incorporated into the highland kingdom,” Professor Faust added.

This connection between the Bible and archaeology made by Professor Faust can be problematic, as Dr. Eilat Mazar, a prominent Israeli archaeologist, explained.

“Archaeology does not begin with a belief and the Bible and then a search for proof,” Dr. Mazar told *Breaking Israel News*. “We first find evidence and then try to understand the truth behind the evidence.”

For the most part, evidence of Biblical events is lacking, Dr. Mazar noted.

Nonetheless, Dr. Mazar uses the Bible as a resource to guide her work. This has set her at odds with many other Israeli archaeologists who reject the validity of this technique.

“We can use the Bible as a source to guide our search, but we cannot use the Bible as proof,” Dr. Mazar said. “But conclusions are drawn after a very long and thorough process of proof. After proving the connection using archaeological methods, the Biblical connection can now be brought.”

AnaRina Heymann, director of Jerusalem Watch and the outreach coordinator for the City of David, frequently encounters skeptics who question the historical validity of King David.

“Until 1993, there was no way we could prove that King David existed,” Heymann told *Breaking Israel News*. “That was when archaeologists discovered the Tel Dan Stele.”

The Tel Dan Stele, currently on display in the Israel Museum, is a broken stele (inscribed stone) discovered in 1993 during excavations at Tel Dan in northern Israel. It consists of several fragments making up part of a triumphal inscription in Aramaic, left most probably by Hazael of Aram-Damascus, an important regional figure in the late 9th century BCE. The inscription boasts of victories over the king of Israel and his ally the king of the “House of David”. It is considered to be the earliest accepted

reference to the name David as the founder of the Kingdom of Judah.

“The Tel Dan Stele absolutely one hundred percent proves that King David existed,” Heymann said. “It refutes any claim that King David was merely a story.”

If verified, Tel Eton will be the second major archaeological site attributed to King David. In 2007, Yosef Garfinkel of the Hebrew University found a large military fortress at Khirbet Qeiyafa approximately 20 miles southwest of Jerusalem. He eventually dated the fortress to the early 10th century BCE when King David is thought to have ruled over Israel concurrent with the structure at Tel Eton.

Professor Faust noted that the site at Tel Eton indicates a level of social complexity, indicating the society at the time was complex politically. The archaeological site covers 15 acres, making it the third largest in the Judean region behind Jerusalem and Lachish. When Professor Faust’s group first began excavations, they discovered fortifications, suggesting the regional importance of the site. Most of the buildings at the dig were from the 8th century BCE, several hundred years later than the period of King David. But further studies suggested the site had a much more ancient history.

The archaeologists recently announced the discovery of a new structure at the top of the tel (an artificial mound formed from the accumulated remains of civilizations that existed on the same site for hundreds or thousands of years) that was notably well-constructed, suggesting its role as a regional administrative center.

“The building was nicely executed, including ashlar stones in the corners and openings,” Faust said in Popular Archaeology. “Hundreds of artifacts were unearthed within the debris, including a wide range of pottery vessels, loom weights, many metal objects, botanical remains, as well as many arrowheads, evidence of the battle which accompanied the conquest of the site by the Assyrians.”

Researchers believe the city was destroyed by King Sennacherib and the Assyrians in 701 BCE.

The ashlar stones, finely cut and squared-off masonry, were the earliest examples of such masonry found in Judah. The structure was built on a deep foundation, indicating a high level of sophistication.

While exploring the foundations of the structure, the archaeologists discovered a pottery bowl which they believed was an offering to God as a supplication for protection of the building, something archaeologists have encountered before in more ancient digs. This type of foundation offering enabled the researchers to date the building to Canaanite Bronze Age and early Iron Age, and to the 10th century at the latest.

The researchers were aided by mole rats, burrowing rodents that live in the region. Archaeologists have little idea of what lays underground when they begin digging and many hours of meticulous work may be spent in a fruitless effort. By sifting through the earth brought to the surface by the burrowing rodents, archaeologists can glean clues about what lays below.