

Two and two equal 4-ever. 6/8/23.

Sadly, in recent days and weeks, Prince Harry and his wife, Meghan, have made banner headlines with their conflict with the Royal Family in Britain. The most recent I saw was a claim by the staff to Harry and Meghan that they had no idea how the real world works, and were, in fact, delusional.

You may remember that during our Easter period last year I spoke to you about the evidence for the truth of Jesus' death and resurrection, and in doing so, I explained the difference between an illusion, a delusion, and an hallucination.

Just to remind you; the illusion and the delusion are rather close, in that the illusion is

to perceive something that is there, but to misinterpret it; the delusion is to have ideas about something or oneself that are patently not true, and the hallucination is to have a vision or perception of something that is not actually present.

If you are like me you will need examples of each in order to make the meaning crystal clear.

So, before I used a toothbrush as my image; an illusion would be if I held up a toothbrush and you told me you saw it bent or twisted - as in your reflections in a hall of distorting mirrors, or I showed you two parallel lines, but you swore they were coming together.

A delusion would be if I thought I was Napoleon, or that the sun rotated around the earth, or that the earth was flat.

An hallucination would occur if I, personally, saw castles in the sky or a zebra walking down the aisle right now - or a toothbrush floating in the air right beside me.

So it would appear that Harry and Meghan might be suffering from a mixture of illusions and delusions, if they are misinterpreting the 'real world' - whatever that might be!

Our readings today also cover quite a bit of similar ground, and this is why so many critics of the bible jump to such passages in an

attempt to disprove what is written. Let's look at them, and see if we can put them into their proper categories.

First, our passage from Daniel. This is clearly a dream. Daniel actually specifies this at the start of chapter 7, and says that he had this dream and then wrote down the substance of what he saw in it.

Why should anyone have any argument about what he saw? Don't they also have dreams which seem so real that they also write them down? Indeed, Carl Jung, the eminent psychologist went so far as to insist that dreamwork was essential to the understanding of people's personalities.

Throughout the bible we read of characters who dream and see visions of heaven or the future; Jacob's ladder, Joseph's dreams, Samuel's calling, Ezekiel's dry bones, Isaiah's visions of the Messiah to come - so many I cannot enumerate them all here. And I haven't even started on the New Testament.

So let us accept that Daniel had a dream about God and heaven - and why shouldn't he?

Let us move on to the psalm, where we read that God spoke to Moses and Aaron from a pillar of cloud.

Here we have to understand that the author is using some poetic license; there is no passage in the bible where it actually states that God

spoke 'from the pillar of cloud' other than here. If we look back at the context of Exodus 13 and 14, where the pillar of fire and cloud are first mentioned, we understand that these are theophanies - or manifestations of God.

God certainly speaks to Moses (not to Aaron) at times when the pillar is there, but nowhere does it tell us that God speaks from the cloud. There is argument, too, over whether there was one or were two pillars - one of fire and the other of cloud.

I think the text makes it reasonably clear - to me, at least - that there was only one pillar, which changed in appearance from day to night, and in its function according to

circumstance; Exodus 14:24 reads, 'During the last watch of the night the Lord looked down from the pillar of fire and cloud at the Egyptian army and threw it into confusion.'

Note that it is a singular pillar, not 'pillars'.

Also, a verse or two earlier, we read, 'The pillar of cloud also moved from in front and stood behind them, coming between the armies of Egypt and Israel. Throughout the night the cloud brought darkness to the one side and light to the other side; so neither went near the other all night long.'

This seems pretty clear to me that we have but one pillar of both fire and cloud. Given the freakish weather we are having in recent times, I don't even have much of a problem

believing that such a thing could exist. I have experienced sandstorms in the desert and tornadoes and hurricanes at sea - adding a fire storm into the mix would be simplicity itself for God.

Then we come to the New Testament passages.

Peter is at pains to point out that this is an event that happened - not a dream, not a vision, not an hallucination - but an event of reliable substance. He makes emphasis, 'We ourselves heard this voice that came from heaven when we were with him on the sacred mountain.'

This is Peter saying, 'I know you may find it hard to believe, but I assure you it is true; I was there - so were James and John - '...we were eye-witnesses of his majesty.'

Given that James was the first apostle to shed his blood for Christ, in AD 44, we are told, it is unlikely that he would willingly die for a made up story. And Peter opted to be crucified upside down, as not being worthy to suffer the same death as his Lord. These men were not transformed by dreams and visions, they were not seeing things after smoking wacky baccy - these brave men died for their convictions.

Peter underscores the point by saying, 'We also have the prophetic message as something completely reliable, and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.'

Our gospel adds further credibility by acknowledging that Peter and his companions were initially very sleepy, but on seeing the Transfiguration of Jesus into all his heavenly glory, they were rapidly wide awake. "Peter and his companions were very sleepy, but when they became fully awake, they saw his glory and the two men standing with him.'

I could preach another sermon on the supposed significance of the two men with Jesus - Moses and Elijah - but that is not really my emphasis for today, because I want this to be something that engages with your everyday life, and not make it an historical discourse. We can do that another time, if you like. Or you can research it in your bible study group.

Last year, when I preached on this theme, I am fairly certain that I ended with a repetition of the words of God from the cloud that were heard by the three apostles; 'This is my Son, whom I have chosen; listen to him.'

Because I stubbornly refuse to preach the same sermon twice, I cannot end with that same wonderful punch-line this year. Nevertheless, Peter provides one for me in his epistle; having told us that his message is completely reliable, he goes on to say, 'you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts.'

You could take that to mean the second coming of Jesus, but I take that to mean the dawning of realization of the significance of Christ in your lives; that 'Aha!' moment, that epiphany.

Astrologers argue over whether Mercury or Venus is the Morning Star and Evening Star;

some think there are two, and some think that each is both - if you understand me.

In the western sky, at least, it is generally held that the Morning and Evening stars are one and the same planet - and that is Venus. Further east they might argue for Mercury, but for my preference, it is as the goddess of love in classical Rome.

Before you all yell, 'Idolatry!' at me, I want to tell you that the other significance of Venus was that she was the spirit of your kitchen garden before she had anything to do with love. So if your cucumbers aren't growing, you know what to do about it - or perhaps not.

My take-home message today is to let these passages from eye-witness accounts sink deep into your minds, and then into your souls, until you reach that 'Aha!' Moment, when the light shines into your darkness, and the morning star rises in your hearts.

Some of us shouldn't wait too long either; not only is time shorter than you think - but the issue is more important than you often give it credit for.

It doesn't do to 'play' with your faith.