

DECEMBER 13, 2009

NO LIGHTWEIGHTS NEED APPLY

LUKE 3:3-18

A CARTOON SHOWS A SKEPTIC SHOUTING UP TO THE HEAVENS, "GOD, IF YOU ARE UP THERE, TELL US WHAT WE SHOULD DO!" BACK COMES A VOICE, "FEED THE HUNGRY, HOUSE THE HOMELESS, ESTABLISH JUSTICE." THE SKEPTIC LOOKS ALARMED, "JUST TESTING," HE SAYS. "ME TOO", SAYS THE VOICE.

THEY CAME TO JOHN LOOKING FOR A NEW START. THEY TREKKED THE LONG WAY INTO THE DESERT, BECAUSE THERE LIVES WERE NOT GOING THAT WELL AND THEY NEEDED TO RECONNECT WITH THE PRESENCE OF GOD. PERHAPS, THEY WERE EXPECTING A QUICK FIX, A DASH OF WATER AND OFF YOU GO, LIKE SO MANY WHO BRING THEIR BABIES TO BAPTISM TODAY. "GIVE US THE GRACIOUS GIFT, BUT DON'T EXPECT ANYTHING FROM US IN RETURN."

PERHAPS, IT IS THE SAME WAY MANY APPROACH CHRIST'S BIRTH. LET'S GET ON WITH THE FESTIVITIES AND GIFTS. LET'S NOT THINK ABOUT WHAT THE BIRTH OF GOD MEANS TO THE WORLD AND LIFE. LET'S NOT THINK THAT THOSE IN POWER, LIKE HEROD, HATE THAT HE IS BORN. LET'S NOT THINK THAT HE WILL EVENTUALLY PAY A STEEP PRICE FOR OUR SALVATION. LET'S NOT THINK THAT ANYTHING IS EXPECTED OF US OR REQUIRED OF US.

HERE AGAIN, THE ADVENT MESSAGES OF THE CHURCH ARE A CORRECTIVE TO AN EMPTY, MEANINGLESS RITUALISTIC RELIGION. AGAIN, THE SCRIPTURES REMIND US TO TAKE A GOOD LOOK AT WHAT IT MEANS FOR OUR DAILY LIVING THAT JESUS HAS COME. LIKE THE SKEPTIC IN THE CARTOON, LIKE THE PEOPLE COME TO THE BAPTIST, WE LISTEN FOR GOD. AT FIRST WE MAY NOT LIKE WHAT WE HEAR, BUT IT FORCES US TO ASK, "WHAT THEN SHALL WE DO?"

WE WANT TO HEAR HOW NICE WE ARE. WE WANT TO HEAR THAT WE ARE PREETY GOOD FOLK. WHAT WE DO HEAR IS JOHN SPEWING FORTH AN INSULT "YOU BROOD OF VIPERS!" THAT'S NOT CHRISTMAS TALK, BUT IT DOES CAUSE US TO SIT UP AND LISTEN. JOHN SAYS, "DON'T THINK FOR AMINUTE THAT YOU CAN RUN AWAY FROM YOUR SINS AND YOUR TROUBLES

AND ALL THE GRIEF IN THE YOUR WORLD. YOU HAVE TO DO SOMETHING. BEAR FRUITS WORTHY OF REPENTANCE. LIVE YOUR LIFE AS IF GOD MEANS SOMETHING TO YOU. DON'T JUST MOUTH THE FAITH, LIVE THE FAITH."

I TIS TO THIS CHALLENGE THAT THE QUESTION IS ASKED: "WHAT SHOULD WE DO?" HOW SHOULD WE ACT? HOW SHOULD WE BEHAVE? OFH MY, IN RESPONSE THE GOOD NEWS OF JESUS COMING, SOMETHING IS EXPECTED OF ME. JOHN TELLS US THAT ONE IS FOLLOWING HIM, THE MESSIAH, JESUS, AND HE WILL BRING A WAY OF LIFE THAT WILL DIVIDE PEOPLE WHO ACT LOVINGLY AND MORALLY FORM THOSE WHO DON'T. HE WILL SEPARATE THOSE WHO DON'T CARE A FIG ABOUT OTHERS FROM THOSE WHO COMPASSIONATELY DUE. HE WILL SEPARATE WHEAT FROM CHAFF.

IN THOSE DAYS, REAPING WAS HARD WORK. TO MAKE IT EASIER, ALL THE WHEAT AND CHAFF WOULD BE PILED ON A BLANKET. THE BLANKET WOULD BE SHAKEN SO THE PILE WOULD FLY UP. THE HEAVY WHEAT WOULD DROP DOWN AND THE INEDIBLE CHAFF WOULD BLOW AWAY WITH THE WIND. JOHN IS TELLING US THAT JESUS' COMING IS GOOD NEWS FOR THE WHEAT. THESE ARE THE PEOPLE WHO TAKE THE FAITH SERIOUSLY AND LIVE IT SUBSTANTIALLY. THAT MEANS THERE IS WEIGHTINESS TO THE FAITH; IT IS FIRM, COURAGEOUS, CONSISTENT, AND LIVE OUT EACH DAY. THE CHAFF IS SUPERFICIAL FAITH. CHAFF BELIVES ONE THING BUT DOES ANOTHER. CHAFF TALKS A GOOD GAME, BUT DOES NOTHING TO TRANSFORM LIFE SO IT CONFORMS WITH THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST. JOHN IS SAYING THAT THE CHAFF BLOWS AWAY. WHEN IT COMES TO FOLLOWING JESUS AND LIVING KINGDOM VALUES, N PO LIGHTWEIGHTS NEED APPLY.

"WHAT THEN SHOULD WE DO?" NOTICE THAT EACH GROUP IN THE CROWD GETS AN ETHICAL, LOVING ACTION TO PERFFORM. TAX COLLECTORS WHO WERE KNOWN TO SKIM PROFITS AND SOAK THE POOR HAVE TO STOP. SOLDIERS WHO WERE KNOWN TO TAKE WHAT THEY WANTED BY FORCE FROM THE POPULOUS, NOT ONLY HAD TO STOP, BUT BE SATISFIED WITH THEIR LOT. NOT ONLY DID EACH GROUP HAVE TO DESIST IN THEIR SINNING AND THEIR MISTREATMENT OF OTHERS AROUND THEM, THEY HAD TO CROSS OVER TO THE EXTRA MILE. GOT MORE MONEY THEN YOU NEED, FORK IT OVER FOR THE GOOD OF OTHERS. HAVE TOO MUCH STUFF, SHARE WITH THOSE WHO NEED.

A LOT OF TIMES PEOPLE MAKE THE FAITH SO SPIRITUAL THAT THEY FORGET THE BASICS. WE ARE CALLED TO BE CHRISTIAN HEAVYWEIGHTS EACH AND EVERY DAY. WE LOVE. WE PRAY. WE READ THE BIBLE,. WE GIVE. WE MAKE AMENDS. WE FORGIVE. WE TRY TO ADVOCZATE FOR JUSTICE AND PEACE. WE TRY TO PUT AWAY THE SELF-INTEREST THAT SEEMS TO RULE THE WORLD FOR JESUS' SAKE. WE NEED THE SAVIOR TO DO THAT. WE CANNOT DO IT WITHOUT HIM.

SCRIPTURE SAYS: "SO WITH MANY OTHER EXHORTATIONS, JOHN PROCLAIMED THE GOOD NEW TO PEOPLE." YEA, GOOD NEWS TO THE WHEAT, BUT NOT TO THOSE WHO BELIVED THAT NOTHING WAS EXPECTED OF THEM. WE KNOW THAT SOMETHING IS EXPECTED AND IT CAN BE SUMMED UP IN JOHN'S MESSAGE TODAY. THE THREE "R'S" OF REPENTANCE IN PREPARATION FOR CHRIST'S BIRTH.

REMORSE- WE HEAR JOHN. HE IS TELLING US TO LOOK AT OUR LIVES AND IDENTIFY WHERE WE FALL SHORT REGARDING LIVING THE LOVE OF CHRIST. WHO ARE WE AT ODDS WITH? WHO HAVE WE NOT FORGIVEN? WHO HAVE WE NOT PRAYED FOR? WHOSE NEED HAVE WE NOT MET? WHERE HAVE WE NOT BEEN GENEROUS AND GRACIOSU? QUESTIONS LIKE THAT

REARRANGE-THIS IS GOOD NEWS BECAUSE WE DO NOT KEEP RECYCLING THE SAME SINS AND BEHAVIORS. WE STOP DWELLING OVER AND OVER ON OUR SAME FAILURES OR THOSE OF OTHERS. CHRIST COMING IS ABOUT CHANGE. IT IS ABOUT TRANSFORMATION AND A SOUL OVERHAUL. NOT OUT OF GUILT AND DREAD AND FEAR, BUT BECAUE WE LOVE JESUS AND WANT TO LIVE OUR BEST FOR HIM.

REJOICE-THERE IS NO GREATER JOY IN THIS WORLD THAN TO OVERCOME OUR ERRORS, FEARS, AND TO BE ABLE TO UNSTICK THE INNER PLACES WHERE WE ARE STUCK.

REMORSE, REARRANGE, REJOICE—IF WE HAD BELIEVED THAT THE COMING OF JESUS EXPECTED NOTHING OF US, WE WOULD HAVE BEEN RELEGATED TO OUR OWN WAYS. THAT WOULD HAVE LEFT US IN A SPIRITUAL RUT. FOR WHAT IS MORE EXHILERATING THAN LETTING JESUS REFRESH OUR SOULS AND LEAD US TOWARD LOVE AND HOPE. BE GLAD TO BE STRUGGLING WITH FAITH. BE GLAD THAT JESUS PUSHES US, SOMETIMES AGAINST OUR WILL, TOWRD A BETTER PLACE. BE GLAD HE WAS BORN.AMEN

