

ISAIAH 63:7-9 & HEBREWS

THE MONTH of JANUARY IS NAMED AFTER A ROMAN DEITY JANUS WHO IS PICTURED WITH TWO FACES, ONE LOOKS FORWARD AND THE OTHER BACKWARDS.

IN A FEW DAYS JANUARY 1 ARRIVES AND WITH IT A NEW YEAR. WE OFTEN LOOK BOTH WAYS AS ONE YEAR ENDS AND ANOTHER BEGINS.

THE PASSAGE FROM ISAIAH IS DOING SOMETHING LIKE THIS. IT LOOKS BACKWARDS AT WHAT GOD HAS DONE, AND ENCOURAGES HIS PEOPLE TO LOOK FORWARD AT WHAT GOD IS DOING, AND WILL DO.

THE CONTEXT IS THE RETURN OF THE JEWISH PEOPLE FROM EXILE. THIS WAS THE ANSWER TO THE EXILES' HOPES AND PRAYERS.

BUT THEY RETURNED TO A CITY IN RUINS, SO GOING HOME DID NOT MEAN THEY WERE RETURNING TO THE WAY THINGS WERE.

IN FACT ISAIAH IN THE SURROUNDING PASSAGES REMINDS THEM ABOUT GOD'S PUNISHMENT OF THOSE WHO FORSAKE HIM.

BUT HERE IN THIS READING THE PROPHET ALSO ENCOURAGES THEM TO REBUILD THEIR LIVES.

HIS MESSAGE IS NOT JUST ABOUT PHYSICAL REBUILDING, BUT MORE IMPORTANTLY THEIR SPIRITUAL LIVES.

HE REMINDS THE PEOPLE OF GOD'S SALVATION, SAYING IT WAS BY GOD'S OWN HAND THEY WERE RETURNED, AND WOULD PROSPER-IF THEY REMAIN FAITHFUL.

THESE WORDS WERE A NECESSARY REMINDER TO INSPIRE THE PEOPLE TO CONTINUE TO LOOK TO GOD.

VERSE NINE IS A KEY VERSE IN THE MESSAGE BECAUSE IT FOCUSES ATTENTION ON GOD'S ACTION.IT SPEAKS OF GOD'S LOVE AND CARE FOR THEM.

SPECIFICALLY, THEY ARE TOLD GOD DID NOT SEND SOMEONE ELSE TO ACT ON HIS BEHALF, BUT CAME HIMSELF.

THESE WORDS OF ENCOURAGEMENT WERE ESPECIALLY NEEDED BECAUSE THE JOY OF RETUNING HOME HAD GIVEN WAY TO DISAPPOINTMENT.

THEY FELT LET DOWN. NOW THEY WERE BACK, BECAUSE THINGS WERE NOT BE THE SAME AS WHEN THEY LEFT, AND THIS WAS UNEXPECTED.

IT IS HARD WHEN EVENTS OR CIRCUMSTANCE WE ANTICIPATE FALL SHORT OF WHAT WE HAVE IMAGINED.

FOR EXAMPLE, ON A MUCH, MUCH SMALLER SCALE, SOME PEOPLE FEEL A LITTLE LET DOWN CONCERNING CHRISTMAS.

A FEW, MAY FEEL LET DOWN ON CHRISTMAS DAY IF THEY DID NOT RECEIVE A HOPED FOR GIFT.

BUT EVEN WHEN THE DAY GOES WELL, AFTER CHRISTMAS IS OVER CAN BE A KIND OF ANTI-CLIMAX FOR US.

THINK ABOUT IT-THE WEEKS LEADING UP TO THE BIG DAY ARE FILLED WITH ACTIVITIES AND ANTICIPATION.

THEN AFTER A CHRISTMAS WORSHIP SERVICE OR TWO, THE OPENING OF GIFTS, AND A MEAL, IT IS FINISHED.

AND MANY MAY FEEL THEY ARE IN A KIND OF LIMBO BETWEEN THE DAY AFTER CHRISTMAS AND NEW YEARS EVE.

HOWEVER IN THE CHURCH, CHRISTMAS IS NOT YET OVER. WE ARE STILL IN THE CHRISTMAS SEASON AND WILL BE UNTIL EPIPHANY ON JANUARY SIXTH.

SO LET US NOT YET LEAVE CHRISTMAS 2019 BEHIND, BECAUSE CHRISTMAS, IN THE RELIGIOUS SENSE, REALLY ISN'T OVER.

WHILE LOOKING AT SOME CHRISTMAS SONGS ONLINE, I CAME ACROSS ONE I HAVE NEVER HEARD BEFORE.

IT WAS WRITTEN BY STEVE HAUPT AND CHRIS LOESCH, AND THEY TITLED IT: "WHERE IS THE LINE TO SEE JESUS?"

THE SONG TIES THE ANTICIPATION OF THE HOLIDAY WITH REAL PURPOSE OF CHRISTMAS CELEBRATIONS.

IN DOING SO, THE MESSAGE OF THE SONG ALSO TURNS OUR ATTENTION TO WHAT JESUS MEANS FOR US AFTER CHRISTMAS. LISTEN TO THE WORDS:

"CHRISTMAS TIME WAS APPROACHING, THE SNOW IS STARTING TO FALL.

SHOPPERS CHOOSING THEIR PRESENTS, PEOPLE FILLING THE MALL.

CHILDREN WAITING FOR SANTA WITH EXCITEMENT AND GLEE, A LITTLE BOY TUGGED MY SWEATER, LOOKED UP AND ASKED ME:

WHERE'S THE LINE TO SEE JESUS? IS HE HERE AT THE STORE? IF CHRISTMAS IS HIS BIRTHDAY, WHY DON'T WE SEE HIM MORE?

AS I STOOD IN AMAZEMENT AT THIS MESSAGE PROFOUND. I LOOKED DOWN TO THANK HIM, HE WAS NO WHERE AROUND.

THE LITTLE BOY AT THE MALL MIGHT AS WELL HAVE HAD WINGS, AS THE TEARS FILLED MY EYES, I THOUGHT I HEARD HIM SING.

WHERE'S THE LINE TO SEE JESUS? IS HE HERE AT THE STORE? IF CHRISTMAS IS HIS BIRTHDAY, WHY DON'T WE SEE HIM MORE?

WHERE'S THE LINE TO SEE JESUS? HE WAS BORN FOR ME. SANTA CLAUS BROUGHT ME PRESENTS, BUT CHRIST GAVE HIS LIFE FOR ME.

IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE, AT THE SOUND OF HIS TRUMP, WE'LL ALL STAND IN LINE AT HIS THRONE.

EVERY KNEE SHALL BOW DOWN, EVERY TONGUE WILL CONFESS, THAT JESUS CHRIST IS LORD.

WHERE'S THE LINE TO SEE JESUS? HE WAS BORN FOR ME. SANTA CLAUS BROUGHT ME PRESENTS, BUT CHRIST GAVE HIS LIFE FOR ME."

THE SONG REMINDS US, WHILE THE HOLIDAY OF CHRISTMAS ON THE WORLD CALENDAR IS OVER-THE MEANING OF CHRISTIANS ISN'T.

SOMEONE ELSE MADE THIS PROFOUND OBSERVATION ABOUT CHRISTMAS, WRITING:

"THE REAL GIFT OF CHRISTMAS IS THE ABILITY TO START ALL OVER WITH A NEW PAGE IN THE CALENDAR OF OUR LIVES."

THE LETTER TO THE HEBREWS REMINDS US ABOUT THIS VERY THING.

IT DESCRIBES GOD'S PURPOSE IN SENDING JESUS INTO THE WORLD AS ONE OF US.

JESUS IS DESCRIBED AS THE PIONEER, OR AUTHOR OF OUR SALVATION.

A PIONEER IS ONE WHO BLAZES THE TRAIL SO OTHERS CAN FOLLOW. AND AN AUTHOR WRITES THE STORY.

JESUS INDEED OPENED THE WAY FOR OUR SALVATION AND WROTE US INTO HIS STORY, AS BROTHERS AND SISTERS, MAKING US ANEW AS CHILDREN OF THE FATHER.

NOTICE HOW IN VERSE ELEVEN IT SPEAKS ABOUT JESUS' ATTITUDE IN BECOMING A MAN AND SANCTIFYING THOSE WHO BELIEVE IN HIM.

"FOR THIS REASON JESUS IS NOT ASHAMED TO CALL THEM BROTHERS AND SISTERS...."

THINK ABOUT THAT STATEMENT A MOMENT-JESUS, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS, GOD INCARNATE, EMANUEL, CHRIST THE LORD-IS NOT ASHAMED OF US SINNERS.

FURTHERMORE, BECAUSE OF HIS LIFE AND DEATH JESUS IS ABLE TO HELP US TURN THE PAGE OF THE CALENDAR OF OUR LIVES.

HE REWRITES FOR US OUR PERSONAL AND FAMILY HISTORY IN A WAY NO ONE BUT GOD CAN.

AND THE WAY HIS DID SO WAS BY COMING INTO THE WORLD AND INTO OUR LIVES LIKE US-AS A BABY, WHO WOULD GROW UP AND DIE FOR OUR SAKES.

THIS IS WHY WE CELEBRATE HIS BIRTHDAY ON CHRISTMAS- BECAUSE HE GAVE HIS LIFE FOR US.

INDEED HE LOWERED HIMSELF TO BECOME HUMAN, SO BY HIS LIFE, SUFFERING, DEATH, AND RESURRECTION WE CAN RECEIVE THE REAL GIFT OF CHRISTMAS-NEW LIFE IN HIM.

LIKE THE WORDS OF THE SONG REMIND US-“WHERE’S THE LINE TO SEE JESUS? HE WAS BORN FOR ME. SANTA CLAUS BROUGHT ME PRESENTS, BUT CHRIST GAVE HIS LIFE FOR ME.”

YES JESUS GAVE US A GIFT NO ONE ELSE COULD, HE DID NOT COME TO SAVE OUR PHYSICAL LIVES, LIKE SOME SUPER HERO, BUT OUR SOULS-OUR TRUE LIFE.

THUS HE FULFILLS, THE PROPHECY, IN A MORE POWERFUL WAY THAN ISAIAH OR THE PEOPLE TO WHOM HE WROTE COULD HAVE IMAGINED.

REMEMBER THE PROMISE OF ISAIAH 63:9:“IT WAS NO MESSENGER OR ANGEL BUT HIS PRESENCE THAT SAVED THEM, IN HIS LOVE AND PITY HE REDEEMED THEM; HE LIFTED THEM UP AND CARRIED THEM ALL THE DAYS OF OLD.”

THE VERSES THAT FOLLOW SPEAK OF THE REBELLION OF THE PEOPLE AFTERWARDS.

THIS TOO REMINDS WHY JESUS CAME TO EARTH AS A BABY, SO HE COULD DO FOR US WHAT WE CANNOT DO FOR OURSELVES.

HE SHARED OUR FLESH AND BLOOD, OUR HOPES AND DISAPPOINTMENTS, OUR JOYS, SORROWS, AND TEMPTATIONS. BUT HE REMAINED WITHOUT SIN, HE REMAINED FAITHFUL TO GOD’S WORDS AND WILL FOR US, BECAUSE WE CANNOT DO IT PERFECTLY NO MATTER HOW HARD WE TRY.

THUS JESUS MADE ATONEMENT FOR OUR SIN BECAUSE HIS LOVE IS SO GREAT THAT HE HUMBLED HIMSELF SO THAT HE COULD LIFT US UP AND CARRY US HOME.

A PASTOR NAME MARILYN MURPHREE SAYS JESUS “PUT HIS LOVE ON THE LINE” FOR US.

JESUS CAME TO EARTH TO KNOW AND UNDERSTAND OUR TROUBLES AND STRUGGLES IN A PERSONAL WAY.

BUT HE WAS NOT MERELY AN OBSERVER, HE DID NOT SIMPLY EASE-DROP ON OUR TROUBLES, JESUS PITCHED IN TO HELP US.

HE CAME TO OUR AID IN A SURPRISING WAY-HE BLAZED A TRAIL FOR US TO FOLLOW, AND HIS SPIRIT HELPS US ON OUR WAY.

REV. MURPHREE SHARES A STORY THAT OFFERS AN EXAMPLE OF THIS.

ONE WINTER, LONG AGO, DURING A TERRIBLE BLIZZARD IN NORTH DAKODA, A DOCTOR RECEIVED A PHONE CALL ABOUT A BOY WITH A HIGH FEVER WHO LOST CONSCIOUSNESS.

THE DOCTOR WAS AFRAID TO GO OUT IN THE STORM, BUT HE WENT ANYWAY.

THE ROADS WERE NEARLY IMPASSABLE, SO HE STOPPED BEFORE HE LEFT TOWN AND GATHERED SOME MEN TO CLEAR THE ROAD IN FRONT OF HIS CAR.

THE MEN DID THEIR BEST BUT BECAME TOO EXHAUSTED TO DO ANY MORE ABOUT HALF WAY TO THE BOY’S HOME.

SO THE DOCTOR BORROWED A HORSE FROM A FARMER AND WENT THE REST OF THE WAY.

WHEN HE FOUND THE BOY HE SAW HE WOULD LIKELY DIE IF HE DID NOT GET TO THE HOSPITAL IN TOWN VERY SOON. THE DOCTOR CALLED THE TOWN COMMISSIONER ASKING FOR HELP, SINCE THE SNOW WOULD HAVE BLOCKED THE ROAD TO TOWN AGAIN.

THE MAN SAID, HE WOULD TRY, BUT THERE WAS NOT MUCH HE COULD DO.

EVEN SO THE DOCTOR GATHERED THE BOY IN HIS ARMS AND ROAD BACK TOWARDS HIS CAR.

WHEN HE ARRIVED, HE FOUND, TO HIS SURPRISE, HIS CAR WAS CLEARED OFF, RUNNING AND WARM INSIDE.

HE ALSO SAW THE ROAD CLEARED OF SNOW AS FAR AS HE COULD SEE.

THE MEN THERE EXPLAINED PEOPLE HEARD, ON THE PARTY LINE, HIS CALL TO THE COMMISSIONER.

THEY GATHERED WORK PARTIES OF MEN AND BOYS ALL ALONG THE ROAD TO TOWN TO KEEP IT CLEAR ENOUGH FOR HIM TO GET THE BOY TO THE HOSPITAL.

THUS, TOGETHER, THEY SAVED THE BOY'S LIFE, BY NOT MERELY LISTENING IN ON THE CRISIS, BUT DOING WHAT THEY COULD TO HELP.

IN A MUCH GREATER WAY, GOD DOES NOT JUST LISTEN IN ON OUR PRAYERS, OR COMPLAINTS. NOR DOES GOD MERELY WATCH US FROM A DISTANCE.

INSTEAD, GOD CAME TO US IN JESUS, UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL AND CLEARED THE WAY FOR US.

NO, THIS DOES NOT MEAN WE WILL ALWAYS BE SAVED FROM TROUBLE, OR SORROW, OR PAIN, OR PHYSICAL DEATH.

BUT IT DOES MEAN GOD, IN CHRIST, AND WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT PROMISED TO NEVER FORSAKE US.

HE ALSO PROMISED AND TO BRING US HOME TO HIMSELF. JOHN 14:3 RECORDS CHRIST'S PROMISE:

“AND IF I GO TO PREPARE A PLACE FOR YOU, I WILL COME AGAIN AND WILL TAKE YOU MYSELF, SO THAT WHERE I AM, THERE YOU MAY BE ALSO.”

PERHAPS THIS IS NOT EVERYTHING WE MIGHT HOPE FOR, BUT IN THE BIG PICTURE OF OUR LIFE'S STORY IT IS WHAT WE NEED MORE THAN ANYTHING ELSE.

LET US PRAY:

SERMON SUMMARY- ISAIAH 63:7-9 & HEBREWS 2:10-18

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