

ISAIAH 61:10-11 AND GALATIANS 4:4-7

WE ARE LESS THAN A WEEK AWAY FROM THE NEW YEAR. AND I DARE SAY EVERYONE IS LOOKING FORWARD TO ITS ARRIVAL.

THERE IS PERHAPS A GREATER SENSE OF HOPE FOR 2021 WORLD-WIDE THAN ANY OTHER SINGLE YEAR IN A LONG TIME.

HOWEVER, HOPE THAT DEPENDS ENTIRELY ON HUMAN INGENUITY, WILL, AND RESOURCES IS VULNERABLE TO THE FAILURE OF PEOPLE, INSTITUTIONS, AND GOVERNMENTS.

HOPE FOUND IN GOD, IS DIFFERENT, IT IS NOT DEPENDENT UPON A NEW YEAR, OR ON US. INSTEAD THE HOPE WE HAVE IN THE LORD IS FOUND IN GOD BREAKING INTO TIME TO SAVE US.

A POET NAMED BETH BARNET RECORDED HER OWN PONDERING ABOUT THE BIRTH OF CHRIST, AND WHAT IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN LIKE FROM A HEAVENLY PERSPECTIVE.

SHE WROTE ABOUT JESUS IN HEAVEN, IMAGINING HOW HE BEGAN HIS JOURNEY FROM THE DIVINE COURT TO A MANGER IN BETHLEHEM.

“HE WALKED DOWN THE QUIET WAY OF LIGHT, SOME OF HIS SERVANTS WERE IN A GROUP SINGING, AND HAPPILY WORKING.

HE SMILED. IT WAS A SORROWFUL SMILE, THE KIND WHEN YOU’RE FILLED WITH BOTH SADNESS AND JOY.

HE COULD NOT HELP FROM HAVING JOY, AND YET HE WAS REMORSEFUL.

HE KNEW IT WOULD SEEM LIKE HE HAD NEVER LEFT AS SOON AS HE RETURNED, BUT HE DIDN’T WANT TO LEAVE HIS FATHER.

SO CLOSE WERE THEY THAT THEY DID NOTHING APART FROM EACH OTHER.

HE TOOK ONE LAST LOOK, KISSED HIS FATHER GOODBYE, BID ALL HIS SERVANTS FAREWELL, FOR A TIME.

AND THEN-QUIETLY AND PURPOSEFULLY, AND WITH MUCH LOVE VIBRATING THROUGH HIS HEART-HE STEPPED INTO **TIME**, FOR IT WAS HIS HOUR TO BE BORN.”

YES, WHEN THE RIGHT TIME HAD COME, GOD IN JESUS STEPPED OUT OF ETERNITY AND INTO MORTAL TIME.

TRULY JESUS’ COMING INTO THE WORLD WAS AN ACT OF LOVE AND GRACE THAT BOTH INVADED AND CONQUERED TIME.

THE PASSAGE FROM GALATIANS RELATES THE REASON FOR CHRISTIAN HOPE AND JOY, WHICH SURPASSES EVEN WHAT THE PROPHET ISAIAH EXPRESSED.

IT ALSO CONNECTS US TO THE CONTEMPLATION OF THE PASSAGE OF TIME AND THE CHANGE ONLY GOD CAN BRING.

FIRST WE NEED TO REMEMBER THAT TIME, AS WE KNOW AND MARK IT, IS A HUMAN CONFIGURATION.

OH YES, GOD SEPARATED DAY FROM NIGHT, AND SET UP THE EARTH IN ITS ROTATION FOR DIFFERENT KINDS OF SEASONAL CHANGES.

HOWEVER THE CALCULATION OF SECONDS, MINUTES, HOURS, AND YEARS ARE OF HUMAN, AND NOT DIVINE, ORIGIN.

SURELY THIS IS WHY WE OFTEN GET FRUSTRATED WITH THE TIMING OF GOD, BECAUSE AS PSALM 90 SAYS:

A THOUSAND YEARS IN YOUR SIGHT ARE LIKE YESTERDAY WHEN IT IS PAST, OR LIKE A WATCH IN THE NIGHT.”

SO LET US LOOK TO WHAT PAUL REMINDS THE CHURCH ABOUT HOW GOD DOES THINGS IN THE RIGHT TIME ACCORDING TO HIS CALCULATION NOT OURS.

THE APOSTLE TEACHES THAT THERE WAS ONCE A TIME FOR GOD’S CHILDREN TO LIVE UNDER THE RULE OF LAW.

BUT AFTER THAT- CAME THE TIME FOR THEM TO BE RULED BY HIS SPIRIT.

THUS HE, SUMMARIZED FOR THE GALATIANS THE PURPOSE OF GOD'S LAW, WHICH WAS TO DISCIPLINE, IN THE SENSE OF TEACHING AND CORRECTING GOD'S CHILDREN.

HE ALSO REMINDED THEM THAT WHILE IN THE PAST ONLY THE JEWS AND CONVERTS TO ISRAEL'S GOD WERE HIS CHILDREN- THINGS ARE DIFFERENT NOW.

THINGS ARE DIFFERENT BECAUSE IN THE "FULLNESS OF TIME" GOD SENT JESUS INTO THE WORLD TO SAVE NOT ONLY THE JEWS, BUT ALSO ALL WHO ARE REBORN IN HIM.

GOD, YOU SEE, REMOVED THE BARRIERS BETWEEN JEW AND NON-JEW, MALE AND FEMALE, SLAVE AND FREE-BY MAKING ALL WHO RECEIVE THE GIFT OF FAITH IN CHRIST CO-HEIRS OF GOD'S KINGDOM WITH HIM.

THE IDEA OF THIS HAPPENING AT THE **RIGHT** TIME IS IMPORTANT FOR US TO REMEMBER.

PAUL EXPLAINED TO THOSE WHO WERE DECEIVED INTO THINKING THEY COULD EARN A PLACE IN GOD'S FAMILY BY STRICTLY FOLLOWING THE LAW, THAT IT WAS GOD ALONE WHO SET THE RULES FOR INHERITANCE.

AND GOD, AS PAUL PROCLAIMED, CHOOSE THE RIGHT TIME TO SEND JESUS INTO THE WORLD TO DO WHAT THE LAW COULD NOT, AND STILL CANNOT- DO.

NOT SURPRISINGLY, THERE ARE PEOPLE TODAY WHO WONDER WHY GOD CHOSE FOR JESUS TO BE BORN WHEN AND WHERE HE WAS.

SOME WONDER WHY GOD WAITED SO LONG, OTHERS IF IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN BETTER TO WAIT FOR MASS COMMUNICATION TO BE IN PLACE, SO NEWS WOULD SPREAD QUICKER.

BUT GOD CHOSE TO SEND JESUS WHEN AND WHERE HE WAS BORN, BECAUSE GOD SAW IT WAS THE RIGHT TIME.

A GOOD ANALOGY OF WHAT THE RIGHT TIME MEANS IS FOUND IN THE PROCESS OF BOILING WATER.

THE OLD ADAGE- "A WATCHED POT NEVER BOILS", POINTS OUT THE PROBLEM OF HUMAN IMPATIENCE.

OF COURSE WATER BOILS WHEN IT REACHES THE RIGHT TEMPERATURE, WHETHER SOMEONE IS WATCHING THE POT OR NOT.

HOWEVER, WHEN ONE IS IN A HURRY, IT OFTEN FEELS AS IF THAT RIGHT TEMPERATURE IS NOT HAPPENING FAST ENOUGH.

INDEED, PEOPLE SOMETIMES FEEL GOD WAITS TOO LONG TO GIVE AN ANSWER TO PRAYER OR TO FIX THE MESS THE WORLD IS IN.

SIMILARLY, IN THE PAST, GOD'S PEOPLE WAITED, AND WAITED, AND WAITED FOR THE COMING OF THE PROMISED MESSIAH, BUT JESUS WAS NOT BORN UNTIL GOD DETERMINED IT WAS TIME.

LISTEN TO HOW ANOTHER MINISTER EXPLAINS IT: "THERE WAS ONE TIME, A RIGHT TIME IN ALL OF HISTORY WHEN ALL THINGS WERE PERFECTLY RIGHT FOR JESUS TO BE BORN..."

GOD DIDN'T MAKE THE DECISION TO SEND JESUS ON THE SPUR OF THE MOMENT.

HE CAREFULLY ORCHESTRATED THE EVENTS AND NATIONS TO PREPARE FOR THE INCARNATION OF CHRIST."

THIS WAS WHY, AT THE RIGHT TIME, JESUS WAS BORN UNDER THE LAW.

HE WAS BORN INTO A JEWISH FAMILY AND LIVED ACCORDING TO THE TORAH, WHICH IS BIBLICAL LAW.

THE GOSPEL OF LUKE RECORDS JESUS BEING PRESENTED IN THE TEMPLE AS AN INFANT, WHICH FULFILLED THE LAW, THUS DEMONSTRATING JESUS WAS RAISED UNDER IT.

THIS IS IMPORTANT. BEFORE, JESUS CAME GOD GAVE HIS PEOPLE THE LAW TO BE LIKE THEIR TEACHER OR OVERSEER TO GUIDE THEM UNTIL THEY BECAME HEIRS WITH CHRIST.

JESUS' LIFE MODELS FOR US THE PERFECT FULFILLMENT OF GOD'S LAW.

AND YET, EVEN WITH CHRIST'S PERSONAL EXAMPLE, WE ARE UNABLE TO DO PERFECTLY WHAT HE HAS DONE.

THANKFULLY, JESUS IS AS MUCH DIVINE AS HE WAS HUMAN- AND SO HE WAS ABLE TO PERFECTLY FULFILL GOD'S LAW ON OUR BEHALF.

THIS MEANS THAT JESUS, THROUGH HIS LIFE, HIS SACRIFICIAL DEATH, AND HIS RESURRECTION, INITIATED A NEW ERA IN WHICH WE CAN INHERIT THE BLESSINGS OF HIS PERFECT LIFE.

HOWEVER, THIS DOES NOT MEAN ONCE WE ARE SAVED GOD'S LAW HAS NO MEANING FOR US.

THE LAW'S PURPOSE IS STILL TO SHOW US GOD'S WILL, ONLY NOW WE HAVE THE RIGHT TO DECIDE HOW TO FOLLOW IT.

AND WE DO THIS WITH THE HELP OF THE HOLY SPIRIT, GIVEN TO US WHEN WE ARE ADOPTED INTO GOD'S FAMILY.

IN JESUS, OUR CREATOR ENTERED EARTHLY TIME TO BECOME ONE OF US.

HE LIVED THE KIND OF LIFE IN RELATIONSHIP TO HIS FATHER WE ARE MEANT TO LIVE, BUT NEVER DO.

STILL, GOD'S SPIRIT HELPS US TO LIVE ACCORDING TO JESUS' EXAMPLE FOR HE SHOWS US HOW TO LIVE ACCORDING TO GOD'S WILL.

ANNE GRAHAM LUTZ WROTE A POEM, CALLED "JUST LOOK TO JESUS", WHICH HELPS TO EXPLAIN THIS.

THE POEM SAYS: "DO YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT IS ON THE MIND OF GOD? THEN LOOK AT JESUS.

DO YOU WANT TO KNOW THE WILL OF GOD? THEN LOOK AT JESUS.

DO YOU WANT TO KNOW WHAT IS IN THE HEART OF GOD? THEN LOOK AT JESUS!

JESUS IS THE EXACT REVELATION OF WHAT IS ON THE MIND OF GOD, AND IN THE HEART, AND IN THE WILL OF GOD!"

THE SAVIOR HIMSELF SAID AS MUCH WHEN HE TOLD HIS DISCIPLES IN JOHN 14:7- "IF YOU KNOW ME, YOU WILL KNOW MY FATHER ALSO."

THE PURPOSE OF THIS KNOWLEDGE IS TO OPEN US UP TO GOD'S WILL AND GOD'S LOVE.

IT IS TO TEACH US THAT BECAUSE JESUS TOOK OUR SIN UPON HIMSELF-WE CAN BE FORGIVEN AND BECOME RIGHT WITH GOD AGAIN AND AGAIN IF WE REPENT.

THIS FORGIVENESS IS THE KIND OF HOPE AND JOY CHRISTIANS ARE GIVEN NOT JUST FOR CHRISTMAS OR THE NEW YEAR, BUT EVERY DAY OF EVERY YEAR.

IT IS THROUGH JESUS IN FACT, WE CAN BE CLOTHED, AS ISAIAH PROCLAIMED, WITH THE GOD-GIVEN GARMENTS OF RIGHTEOUSNESS AND SALVATION.

IT IS THROUGH JESUS THAT EVERY TIME IS THE RIGHT TIME FOR US TO TRUST IN GOD'S LOVE AND MERCY.

NOW AND ALWAYS IS THE RIGHT TIME FOR US TO REMEMBER AND TAKE TO HEART THAT GOD KEEPS HIS PROMISES.

INDEED, IT WAS TO FULFILL A PROMISE- THAT GOD SENT HIS SON INTO THE WORLD SO THAT RIGHTEOUSNESS AND PRAISE WILL SPRING UP BEFORE ALL THE NATIONS.

SADLY, NOT ALL PEOPLE, NOR ANY GOVERNMENT REALLY SEE GOD'S RIGHTEOUSNESS, OR SINCERELY PRAISE HIM FOR HIS GRACE AND LOVE.

HOWEVER THE PROMISE IS THERE THAT WHEN THE RIGHT TIME COMES ALL THE EARTH WILL JOIN WITH ALL OF HEAVEN TO DO SO.

IN THE MEANTIME, WE WHO ARE SAVED BY CHRIST ARE BROUGHT INTO AN INTIMATE RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD.

AND, WE ARE INVITED TO JOIN OUR VOICES RIGHT NOW IN THE SONG OF PRAISE TO THE LORD.

TRULY, WE CAN PRAISE GOD FOR THE RELATIONSHIP WE HAVE WITH HIM AND ONE ANOTHER THROUGH CHRIST.

THIS RELATIONSHIP WITH BOTH ITS RESPONSIBILITIES, AND ITS BLESSINGS ARE WHAT WE CARRY WITH US, NOT ONLY AS WE STEP INTO A NEW YEAR, BUT ANYTIME AND ANYWHERE.

LET US PRAY:

GRACIOUS GOD, WE GIVE THANKS THAT YOU HAVE SHOWN US, IN THE PERSON OF YOUR SON-JESUS, A NEW WAY TO LIVE.

YOU HAVE Poured YOUR LIGHT INTO THE WORLD AND HAVE ASKED US TO LIVE IN THIS LIGHT, RATHER THAN RUN AND HIDE IN THE DARKNESS OF DOUBT AND DESPAIR.

WE TRUST IN YOUR PROMISE TO LIGHT OUR WAY- ALL THE DAYS OF OUR LIVES- WHEN WE PLACE OUR TRUST IN YOU.

STRENGTHEN THIS TRUST, WE PRAY, AS WE PREPARE TO CLOSE OUT THIS YEAR AND STEP INTO THE NEW ONE.

GIVE US THE FAITH AND THE COURAGE WE NEED IN THE TIME TO COME, AND EMPOWER US TO BE WITNESSES TO CHRIST.

WE PRAY FOR AN END OF THE PANDEMIC AND A HEALING OF THE NATIONS.

AND WE PRAISE YOU FOR FULFILLING ALL OF OUR PRAYERS, AT THE RIGHT TIME, ACCORDING TO YOUR WILL. IN CHRIST'S NAME WE PRAY. AMEN.

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