

Christmas Message

What Shall We Do?

Wednesday, December 21, 2005

Luke 3:1-18 (NKJV)

Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, Pontius Pilate being governor of Judea, Herod being tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and the region of Trachonitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene, [2] while Annas and Caiaphas were high priests, the word of God came to John the son of Zacharias in the wilderness. [3] And he went into all the region around the Jordan, preaching a baptism of repentance for the remission of sins, [4] as it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, saying:

"The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
'Prepare the way of the Lord;
Make His paths straight.
[5] Every valley shall be filled
And every mountain and hill brought low;
The crooked places shall be made straight
And the rough ways smooth;
[6] And all flesh shall see the salvation of God.' "

[7] Then he said to the multitudes that came out to be baptized by him, "Brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? [8] Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance, and do not begin to say to yourselves, 'We have Abraham as our father.' For I say to you that God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones. [9] And even now the ax is laid to the root of the trees. Therefore every tree which does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire." [10] So the people asked him, saying, "**What shall we do then?**" [11] He answered and said to them, "He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise." [12] Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, "Teacher, **what shall we do?**" [13] And he said to them, "Collect no more than what is appointed for you." [14] Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, "And **what shall we do?**" So he said to them, "Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages." [15] Now as the people were in expectation, and all reasoned in

their hearts about John, whether he was the Christ or not, [16] John answered, saying to all, "I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire. [17] His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather the wheat into His barn; but the chaff He will burn with unquenchable fire." [18] And with many other exhortations he preached to the people.

Story of a boy in a Christmas play. (From e-sermons.com)

Wally was big for his age--seven years old. Everyone wondered what role the teacher would give him in the annual Christmas play. Especially considering the fact that he was also a slow learner. Perhaps he could pull the curtain. To everyone's surprise the teacher gave Wally the role of the innkeeper. The boy of course was delighted. After all, all he had to learn was one line: "There is no room in the inn." He had that down in no time.

Then came the night for the program. The parents took their places. Every seat in the auditorium was filled. The children entered singing "Oh come all ye faithful." The lights dimmed. A hush moved over the audience. The curtain opened on Scene One. Mary and Joseph entered the stage and walked up to the inn. "Please sir, my wife is not well. Could we have a room for the night?"

Wally was ready for his line. He had rehearsed it all night. He began, there is...and he hesitated. He started over again. There is. . .and again his mind went completely blank. Everyone was embarrassed for him but poor Wally just didn't know what to do. Joseph thought he would improvise and started walking away toward the stable on stage left.

Seeing him walking away Wally in desperation called out: "Look, there's plenty of room at my house, just come on home with me."

That seems a rather delightful twist on a familiar story. Over the years the characters in the Christmas story have become clearly defined for us. The issues all seem so clear cut. Herod was a villain and the wise men were heroes. The shepherds were heroes and the Innkeeper--well, the poor innkeeper has gone down as one of the heavies in the story.

In our minds eye, we envision him as a crotchety old man with a night cap on his head sticking his head out a second story window and tersely shouting: Take the stable and leave me alone.

But perhaps the innkeeper has received bad press. Preachers over the centuries have had a field day with the poor fellow. But was it his fault that the inn was built with twelve rooms instead of thirteen? Was it his fault that Caesar Augustus had issued a decree that the entire world should be taxed? Was it his fault that Mary and Joseph were so late in arriving?

But you know something; this simple little statement about there being no room in the Inn becomes a symbol for Luke. As he writes his gospel it almost becomes a theme. Luke takes this one line, “There is no room in the inn,” and shows us how this phrase was recurrent throughout Jesus’ ministry. The question that Luke leaves for us is--will there ever be any room for him?

We are hearing a lot this year about how the secular world has left Christ out of Christmas. Many of the big department store empires in this nation have substituted “Happy Holidays” or “Season’s Greetings” for “Merry Christmas”. They have refused to use “Merry Christmas” in their advertisements and have told their employees to say “Happy Holidays” rather than “Merry Christmas”.

David Wolbrecht told me that he went to a Home Depot the other night and there was a big sign above the Christmas trees that said, “Holiday Trees”. He went to one of the men who worked in the store and said, “Where are your Christmas Trees?” The man said, “They’re right here. David said, “No, those aren’t Christmas trees. It says “Holiday Trees” and I’m looking for a Christmas tree!

The same thing is over the Christmas decorations. It says “Holiday Decorations”. The big store say that that they don’t want to offend people who are not Christians. What about the Christians?

Everybody knows that December 25th is the day that Christians celebrate the birth of Christ. Why would offend anyone who is not a Christian for stores to call the holiday what it is?

It doesn't offend me when Muslims celebrate Ramadan or when Jews celebrate Hanukah. Why should it offend them when Christians celebrate Christmas?

To leave Christ out of Christmas makes no sense. Christmas without Christ is meaningless.

I read a story some time ago about a pastor who fell asleep in his study on Christmas morning and had a dream about what the world would be like if Jesus had never come.

In his dream he found himself looking through his home, but there were no little stockings hanging on the mantle of the fireplace. There were no Christmas bells or wreaths of holly and no Christmas tree.

He walked out into the street and discovered that there were no churches with their steeples pointing heavenward. He came back into his study but every book about the Savior had disappeared from his library.

The doorbell rang and a young man asked him if he would come and visit his dying mother. The pastor quickly went with the young man to visit his mother. He sat down beside her bedside and opened his Bible to read words of comfort to her but he discovered that his Bible ended with the Book of Malachi. There were no gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. There was no promise of hope and salvation. There were no words of the Savior and he could only bow his head and weep with the dying lady in bitter despair.

Two days later, he stood beside her coffin and conducted her funeral service but he had no words of comfort for the family. There was no message of consolation and no promise of heaven.

Without Christ there is no promise of eternal life.

You take Christ out of Christmas and you have nothing. Take Christ out of the world and there is no hope.

You can put up all the light and sing all the secular songs. But Santa Claus and Frosty the Snowman and Rudolf the Red Nosed Reindeer cannot help you.

Jesus Christ is the only one who can change your life and give you His joy and His peace. It's meaningless without him.

We get upset when the owners of the big department stores tell their employees not to say "Merry Christmas". We say that they are leaving Christ out of Christmas. But what about the rest of us? We may say "Merry Christmas" to our friends but is Christ really Lord of our lives?

John the Baptist was the cousin of Jesus.

He was commissioned by God to announce the coming of the Messiah. Isaiah called him

Isaiah 40:3 (NKJV)

**The voice of one crying in the wilderness:
"Prepare the way of the Lord;**

How do we prepare the way of the Lord in our lives?

Tonight, I want to point out three things that John said to the people to whom he preached.

1. If you have wealth, share it.

Luke 3:10-11 (NKJV)

So the people asked him, saying, "What shall we do then?" [11] He answered and said to them, **"He who has two tunics, let him give to him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise."**

Christmas is a time of sharing and giving.

- We give gifts to each other.
- We drop money into the Salvation Army kettles.
- We write checks to worthy projects.
- We give food to the hungry.
- We make an end of the year contribution to the church.

Sometimes it almost more than we can do but we do what we can because Christmas helps us see beyond ourselves to the needs of others.

I read about one person who sent this letter to the pastor after receiving a letter from the church asking for a donation.

“Dear Pastor,

In reply to your request to send a check, I wish to inform you that the present condition of my bank account makes it almost impossible.

My shattered financial condition is due to federal laws, state laws, county laws, corporation laws, mother-in-laws, brother-in-laws, and outlaws.

Through these laws I am compelled to pay a business tax, amusement tax, head tax, school tax, gas tax, light tax, water tax, sales tax, even my brains are taxed.

I am required to get a business license, a dog license, a car license, a driver’s license, not to mention a marriage license.

I am also required to contribute to every organization or society which the genius of man is capable of bringing to life. Women’s relief, unemployment relief, every hospital and charitable institution in the city, including the Red Cross, the Purple Cross and the Double Cross.

For my own safety I am required to carry life insurance, property insurance, liability insurance, accident insurance, burglar insurance, business insurance, earthquake insurance, tornado insurance, flood insurance, unemployment insurance, fire insurance and disability insurance.

I am inspected, expected, respected, dejected, rejected, examined, reexamined, informed, reformed, summoned, fined, commanded, and compelled until I supply an inexhaustible supply of money for every known need, desire or hope of the human race.

Simply because I refuse to donate something or another, I’m boycotted, talked about, lied about, held up, held down, robbed until I’m ruined.

I can honestly tell you had not the unexpected happened, I could not include this check.

The wolf that comes to so many doors now-a-days, just had pups in the kitchen. I sold them and here's the money."

Have you ever felt like that?

I know that I have. It seems like every time I turn around someone is demanding money, especially this time of year. And yet, Christmas is all about giving.

John 3:16 (NKJV)

For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.

That's the greatest gift the world has ever known!

And it's a gift that must be passed on. Christ has come into our lives giving us His unmerited love. Every thing we have is a gift from Him and His plan is for us to be givers. Why? Because that's the way we receive! Jesus said....

Luke 6:38 (NKJV)

Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you."

Paul said....

2 Cor. 9:6-8 (NKJV)

But this I say: He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully. [7] So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. [8] And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work.

That's a wonderful promise! And it's to all who are cheerful givers. Your receiving is based on your giving and your enjoyment of Christmas is proportional to the joy you bring to others.

John said, "If you have wealth, share it.

2. John's second prescription for preparing for the Lord's coming is, "If you are in a position of trust, honor it."

Luke 3:12-13 (NKJV)

Then tax collectors also came to be baptized, and said to him, "Teacher, what shall we do?" [13] And he said to them, "Collect no more than what is appointed for you."

Tax collectors were despised by the Jews. They collected taxes for the Roman government and many of them if not almost all of them were very unethical. The Romans government told them to collect a certain amount that went to the Roman government, but then they added extra fees that they kept for themselves. They got rich off of the poor.

John didn't tell them to give up their jobs, someone had to collect taxes, but he told them to be honest. They were in a position of trust and so they needed to honor that trust.

If you want to be ready for the Lord's coming you must be honest and ethical!

I don't care if you are a doctor, lawyer, auto-mechanic, plumber or a preacher. God knows what you do and He expects you to be honest.

If you are in a position of trust, whether it is in business, government, church, or within your own home, honor it. Live a trustworthy and honest life.

3. Thirdly, if you have power, don't abuse it.

Luke 3:14 (NKJV)

Likewise the soldiers asked him, saying, "And what shall we do?" So he said to them, "Do not intimidate anyone or accuse falsely, and be content with your wages."

In other words John said, "Don't abuse your power." Don't abuse the position of authority that God has given to you.

We all have some kind of position of authority.

- A parent has power over a child.
- An employer has power over an employee.
- A teacher has power over a student.
- A pastor has power over the pulpit.
- A police officer has power to enforce the law.

John says, “If you have power don’t abuse it.”

It is so easy to begin to think of yourself as more important than you are. Paul warned us not to do that. He said...

Philip. 2:5-9 (NKJV)

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, [6] who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, [7] but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. [8] And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. [9] Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name,

Follow the example of Christ. He had it all and yet He willingly laid it all aside in order that He might come to earth and be the Savior of the world.

In these final few days before Christmas, let’s remember the reason for the season. Let’s keep Christ in Christmas and let’s make sure that we are preparing for His soon return.

Give invitation!