

January 1, 2023

St. Matthew 2:13-18, Galatians 4:4-7, Deuteronomy 29:29

“Events, Time, and Understanding”

- I. Events.
- II. Time.
- III. Understanding.

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Dear Friends in Christ,

Our Gospel text is a hard one. It cuts to the heart. It impresses upon us that traveling with Jesus is not an easy journey. Judas, a thief in the first place, sold out for 30 pieces of silver. A great multitude have sold out for less. For many, walking with the Lord has become a theological smorgasbord of picking and choosing whatever Scripture and whatever worship that avoids sin and makes one feel entertained happy. It seems that Jesus' words are hard to understand: "And whoever does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me (Mt.10:38)."

The Gospel and Epistle lessons for this Sunday after Christmas are the appointed ones. The Old Testament lesson is a personal choice. This first day of 2023 we're traveling through . . .

EVENTS, TIME, AND UNDERSTANDING

I. Events.

Prior to our Gospel lesson we're told "the wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is he who has been born king of the Jews (Mt.2:2)?" "Born king of the Jews" threatened Herod. He was a power-monger and extremely evil. We're then told that after "assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born" (Mt.2:4). They informed him that He would be born in Bethlehem. They quoted from the prophet Micah who prophesied some 700 years earlier: "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel (Micah 5:2)."

We know the account. It's where we find ourselves every Christmas Eve and Day: at the manger, worshiping Jesus, hearing, reading, and singing God's Word. We know the rage of Herod. We know what happened after the Wise Men left, as we're told, "an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, 'Rise, take the child and his mother, and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you, for Herod is about to search for the child, to destroy him (Mt. 2:13)."

Now, let's make sure this is straight with us, because it isn't straight with much of the church today. God entered the lives of Mary and Joseph. He chose them for this setting, before creation. He told them to pack up and head for Egypt because there was a plan to murder Jesus. It won't be a comfortable ride in new car or a fast jet. It impresses upon us what this world is: It is full of rot from sin, including yours and mine!

Then we're told, "And (Joseph) rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt and remained there until the death of Herod. This was to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet, 'Out of Egypt I called my son'" (Mt. 2:14,15). The prophet God used to speak this word was Hosea (11:1). God gave Hosea these words some 700 years before their fulfillment. Our Gospel lesson goes on to report:

Then Herod, when he saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or under, according to the time that he had ascertained from the wise men. Then was fulfilled what was spoken by the prophet Jeremiah: "A voice was heard in Ramah, weeping and loud lamentation. Rachel weeping for her children; she refused to be comforted, because they are no more (vv.16-18)."

Again, this prophecy is from Jeremiah, also centuries before its fulfillment: the mass murder of children. God does not stop the wickedness of man - not yet. The events we've just considered remind us of this world's fallen nature. Humanity thinks it's in control of everything when, in fact, it's in control of nothing. As the Psalmist declared, "(God) rules by his might forever, whose eyes keep watch on the nations - let not the rebellious exalt themselves (Ps. 66:7)." God is over all events.

II. Time.

All this brings us to the issue of time; specifically to our Epistle lesson:

But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive the adoption as sons. And because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, 'Abba! Father!' So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God! (Gal. 4:4-7)."

"The fulness of time" - the day God, who is timeless, established before time began. As the Proverbs say, "The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps (Prov. 16:9)." And, as David declared, "the days that were formed for me were written in your book when as yet there was none of them (Ps. 139:16)." He set the day of our birth. He set the day of our death. He did not promise man a life of earthly prosperity and uninterrupted comfort. As Job stated, "Man that is born of a woman is few days and full of trouble... his days are determined, and the number of his months is with you, and you have appointed his limits that he cannot pass...(Job 14:1,5)." We each live under God's timing.

We know the questions. We've heard them. More than likely, we've echoed them. The "Why is 'this' or 'that' happening?" The "Why did God allow this in my life?" The "When is God going to do something?" And before us stand Mary and Joseph, the couple responsible for parenting the only Son of God; confronted with the movement to murder Him; confronted with a life unlike any parent has ever experienced. And to think, most of the church today is focused on attaining a high degree of happiness and contentment, not in the Lord but with this world! The church is truly troubled!

The purpose of Christ's birth was to redeem us. Again, as our text says, "...God sent forth his son to redeem (to purchase us from death and hell) those who were under the law (that is, trying to keep God's Commandments perfectly but finding it impossible) so that we might receive adoption as sons..." We are heirs of an eternal Kingdom, everlasting joy, to live in the timeless presence of God's love!

Everything Jesus did was set in eternity. We cannot walk away from the reality without hearing, at least, some of the words God gave to Solomon: "For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to mourn, and a time to dance... Eccl. 3:1-4)." And we must hear the words of Daniel: "Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, to whom belong wisdom and might. He changes times and seasons (Dan. 2:20,21)." and we must hear the word of the Lord to the first Disciples: "It is not for you to know times or seasons that the Father has fixed by his own authority (Acts 1:7)." We each live under God's timing.

III. Understanding.

But the questions are still there, aren't they? The "whys". So many things we cannot comprehend. The words of Luther are so very pertinent and critical:

Everything God reveals of Himself transcends man's comprehension; every doctrine, therefore, must of necessity terminate in mystery, and man must humbly acquiesce in having it so. God does not tell men more of His purpose than man needs to know; and just because man's knowledge of what God is doing is always incomplete, His actions will often appear to man to have precisely opposite characteristics to those which He Himself ascribes to them. But in such cases it is man's part to accept God's interpretation in preference to his own. Faith...will wait patiently till contrary appearances dissolve away with the coming of greater light. (Luther's The Bondage of The Will, translated by J.I. Packer & O.R. Johnson, Fleming R. Revell Company, 1957, p.54.)

And that brings us to our Old Testament lesson, Deuteronomy 29:29, the Word God spoke to His church through Moses: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law."

We know the greatest revelation God gave fallen humans is Salvation by grace through faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ. We know that Christ came into this world of dying and death, not to stop them...not yet...but to earn our forgiveness and heaven. As Scriptures promise, we "are saved by grace through faith" in all Christ accomplished through His suffering, death and resurrection. As Scriptures say, "So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight (2 Cor.5"6,7)." The Lord reminds us through Paul, "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways (Rm. 11:33)." Who He is and His ways are never subject to our scrutiny. We must understand this.

Events, Time, and Understanding. They fall under the heading of, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your understanding (Prov.3:5,6)." They remind us that there is just so much time left to reach out to others with the immeasurable love of God through Christ Jesus, our Lord and Savior.

Amen.

Pastor Bill Abbott