

The Old Hickory Bulletin

Old Hickory Church of Christ

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Rachel Weeping for Her Children

“In Rama was there a voice heard, lamentation, and weeping, and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they are not.” Mt. 2:18

After Jesus was born, King Herod’s fear of the baby called “the King of the Jews” led him - in a fit of selfish rage – to slaughter all the male children 2 years and under. As Matthew writes about it, he was moved by the great grief and mourning in Judea, and he reached back to the time of Jeremiah, where parents grieved for their children who were taken away from them by the Babylonian king.

This has come home to us in the last two days as we hear the news from Connecticut about the horror of another shooting, and all the tragic aftermath. These were senseless and devilish, evil deeds – far beyond our day-to-day barrage of selfish acts, foolish indulgences, and careless injustices. Not since 9/11 have Americans been so gripped with sorrow and grief and anger. Among us here at Calvary Hill, we have so many teachers, principals, and students, so many parents and grandparents. They all hurt because of this. And the families directly affected – God help them all in his mercy and love.

Instinctively, when such tragedies strike, men turn to God in prayer, and reach for one another, sharing the deepest and truest and most God-like features within us. There are no human words that can really comfort those who lost loved ones, and no explanations that do not sound shallow and empty. The only thing we CAN do is be quiet and hold one another, and grieve and pray.

But what a blessing if we could turn to the God of all comfort and hope! If we could hear HIS words in such times! Matthew tells us that in the very days when the Father was unfolding his plan by sending the Savior into the world, for the drawing and cleansing of men from their own evil ways - while the majestic Son of the Almighty God was still an infant – at that very time, other precious, innocent children suffered at the hands of the enemies of righteousness and mercy. The reason that Matthew recalls the passage from Jeremiah is because of God’s promise there to hear the cries and sorrows, and to restore and heal his people, and to be the caretaker of their little ones.

Let us take it from His Word that there is much more than we can see or understand or explain in this tragic, broken world. Let us hold fast what we have confessed – that He lives, that He stands above it all, watching and providing, even though we cannot trace His ways. Let us hold without wavering that He is the God of all love and mercy and right and good. That He loves and holds innocent children in his hands. Of such is the kingdom of heaven. Though they may be taken from us and from this world, they cannot be separated from the love of God (Rom. 8:38,39).

Let this tragedy make us more compassionate and humble, less complaining about our inconveniences, more patient in our own trials, more tuned to the grief of others, more selfless in bearing their burdens, and more concerned for the health of their souls.

Last night I heard Robbie, the father of one of the children speak. It was absolutely stunning. It humbled me. He spoke first to offer comfort for the families of the other victims, AND for the family of the shooter. He

spoke words of grace and forgiveness and dignity, even while he could not hold back his tears. Robbie rejoiced about his little daughter's beautiful life, her sweet character, and her good heart. He said her goodness and character were not due to himself and his wife, but were the gifts of "our heavenly Father". When asked why he was not angry toward the killer [and I have to confess that I have been], he explained how the young man abused the freedom God gave him, and chose to inflict pain and suffering. Robbie emphasized that he just wanted to use the freedom God gave him to console and heal and be a comfort and strength for others.

I do not know any specifics about Robbie's religious affiliations. But we can be sure that this man was touched by the influence of Jesus Christ and his cross. No philosopher, no politician, no king, no religious leader outside of Jesus Christ ever THOUGHT of forgiveness and mercy and love and grace in this way. It only comes from the God of the Bible, and it was written across all time and space in the cross of Christ. We should all kneel down there and through our tears of grief join with him, take our part with Him! (Col. 1:24f).

Then we can go to the throne of grace, and there give honor and glory to the one who planned and unfolded it all, and ask Him confidently. We will find mercy and grace to help us in this time of need, and we will be ready to take, alongside our Lord, our own share of suffering in this world for the sake of his people and his cause.

- Larry Walker, Dec 15, 2012

[Editor's Note: A sobering thought is this: had these children been murdered before they were born, at an abortion "clinic," few would even raise an eyebrow! In 2008, there were 825,564 abortions that were reported in the United States [- Centers for Disease Control and Prevention]. Note that there is no federal mandate for reporting abortions, and some states have chosen not to report (California, Maryland & New Hampshire), which does not show complete reliability of statistics. From the number reported to the CDC in 2008, the average number of such **murders per**

day is a staggering 2,262. You certainly will not get this information from a special edition of the nightly news each evening! -GFS]

Who Selects Your Ties?

Several years ago, A British magazine, Tailor and Cutter, suggested the following guide to be used in tie-buying so as to match the tie to the personality of the wearer:

"Neat patterns are chosen by men modest and careful in thought and action. Stripes are selected by men overwhelmingly conscious of fashion, decisive in action and reluctant to take 'no' for an answer. A single motif is chosen by those who are studious, attentive to detail and efficient. Knitted ties are for the flamboyant, with an eye to color. A plain or single color indicates one who is upright, conservative and careful with money. The bow tie is for the extrovert. However, when women buy the ties instead of men, you can throw out the guide. Women are more likely to buy something that appeals to them regardless of the personality of the man who is going to wear the tie. If someone else picks out ties for you, the ties may not reflect your personality at all. Worse than that, they may misrepresent you."

When I read this, it occurred to me that there is an important analogy that is suggested by it. The pattern of the lives of some does not always represent what they really are. Their pattern of life (called today, "Lifestyle") often misrepresents them. The reason for this: they allow the views of others to determine their choices in life. Faith and conscience, in the eyes of God, are intimately personal things. The faith of another will not suffice for me. My faith must represent my personal conviction

relative to that which is true and right. The conscience of another person cannot be substituted for my conscience, even though there are many fanatical brethren who seem to think that their consciences should be the consciences of every member of the congregation in which they hold membership. Even "public consciences" - the norm of behavior that is the consensus of society in general - sometimes called, "social conscience," will not do. Conscience must be based upon absolute personal conviction concerning which is right and what is wrong.

All of us like to please our peers; hence we often allow peer pressure to determine the course of our lives. In other words, we are letting somebody else select our spiritual ties. Therefore, our actions do not truly represent our basic convictions. This is a species of hypocrisy in reverse, and it emanates from cowardice. Christians must "dare to be different." They must make their own choices. They must stand on their own convictions. No other course will meet the approval of God. Paul says, "whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). The faith to which he refers is one's personal faith in the rightness or wrongness of any act the Christian performs. A life lived in conformity to what one honestly believes to be wrong will damn his soul whether it is wrong or not. The following poem well expresses what the Christian should do in life:

Paddle Your Own Canoe

*Voyager upon life's sea, to yourself be true;
And where'er your lot may be, paddle your own canoe.
Would you crush the tyrant, Wrong, in the world's
fierce fight?
With a spirit brave and strong, battle for the Right;
And to break the chains that bind the many to the few -
To enfranchise the slavish mind,
Paddle your own canoe. -- Sarah K. Bolton*

Represent yourself as you are. Select your own ties!

- James Adams

“No Room in the Inn”

In the typical Christmas pageant, one of the children will be cast as the heartless innkeeper who refuses lodging to Joseph and pregnant Mary. Most know that there is no innkeeper mentioned in the Bible, but fewer are aware that there is not even an inn described. The view that Joseph and Mary simply arrived late to Bethlehem and accommodations at the local hotel were full is incorrect. The word translated as "inn" is the word *kataluma*, which is used elsewhere by Luke and translated as "guest chamber" or "upper room" (Luke 22:11; cf. Mark 14:14). When Luke wants to speak of a paid establishment (i.e., an inn), he uses a different Greek word, *pandocheion*, as in the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:34). Unfortunately, of the dozens of English translations that I've checked, all translate *kataluma* as "inn" in Luke 2:7 and not as "guest room" (that includes the recent ESV and NET; apparently they are unwilling to buck tradition in favor of accuracy). The result of this mistranslation leads to a different understanding of the story. It's not that Joseph and Mary were late to town, but it's that they were rejected by their family. Clearly they had family members in town, as that was the reason they returned to Bethlehem for the census. That there was no room in the guest chamber for a pregnant woman indicates that they chose not to make room for this unwedded mother. The birth of Jesus in a room where animals lived suggests shame and rejection. Most of what I have described above is the general view of scholars and I find it compelling. But some scholars err in arguing that Bethlehem could not have had an inn. This view has been repeated enough for me to address it. Ben Witherington, for instance, says this:

"It can be doubted whether there would have been an inn in Bethlehem in Jesus' day since it was not on any major road, and inns normally were found only on major roads, especially the Roman ones. (Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels, p. 69)

Doug Greenwold, in the December 2006 Preserving Bible Times Reflection, writes:

"These inns were typically located 16-18 miles apart on major trade routes, the average daily distance traveled by a caravan. Since Bethlehem was five miles south of Jerusalem, it was far too close to Jerusalem for the placement of such an inn. Furthermore, Bethlehem was not on a major trade route so there was little need for an inn."

I'm not sure what qualifies as a "major trade route," but if there was any trade route in the hill country of Judea, Bethlehem was on it. The only way you can say that there was no "major road" near Bethlehem is by saying that there were no major roads in the hill country. But were there no travelers in this area, and were there no traders bringing supplies to Judea and Samaria? Certainly there were.

An understanding of the topography of the hill country will help here. The Judean hills are very rugged as they are divided by deep wadis (canyons) on the eastern and western slopes. Consequently, travelers have always preferred to stay on ridges, to avoid frequent ascents and descents. For this reason, travelers have moved along the watershed ridge, from the time of Abraham until the present. About a decade ago, Israel decided that for political reasons they needed to build an alternate road to bypass the Arab population of Bethlehem. They built a road less than 2 miles to the west of the watershed ridge. Even such a small deviation required that they spend millions of dollars in the construction of tunnels and bridges. Today we can do it; in ancient times, they did not. In short, there can be no doubt that historically any north-south traffic in the hill country passed near to the town of Bethlehem (cf. Anchor Bible Dictionary 5:783).

Furthermore, the argument that Bethlehem is too close to Jerusalem to warrant an inn presupposes that all travelers left from the same point and had the same destination. Jerusalem may have been a major destination of travelers in the hill country, but it was not the only destination.

Travelers could have been going to and from countless villages in the hill country. Some known settlements in the 1st century B.C./A.D. include Hebron, Gabath Saul, Ephraim, Gophna, Sychar, Sebaste. That travelers might stop at any point along the major north-south hill country

route is illustrated well by the story of the Levite and his concubine in Judges 19.

In the end, the argument that there was no inn in Bethlehem in the time of Jesus falls short. Luke, however, says nothing about an inn.

- Todd Bolen

THIS WEEK'S LESSONS: Sunday morning: *“Have You Lost Sight of Your Purpose?”* (text: Matt. 7:21-23); Sunday evening: *“Lessons From the Life of Esther!”*