



Christmas – Glory in the Highest

Hello everyone. Welcome to “Notes from the Presence.” The Christmas story always amazes me. Every year a seasonal theme seems to stick out to me. This year is no exception. For the past few days, the words of the angels as they sang to the shepherds has been playing over and over in my heart.

Luke 2:13-14 (NKJV) *And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: “Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!”*

In context, I have been pondering one of the major differences we find in the heart of God between the Old and New Testament. It is the issue of judgement and how God deals with sin and sinners.

In the Old Testament, sin was dealt with in a harsh way. In general, God would set down a governing law, and then uphold it with a "blessings and curse" penalty system. In other words, if people would live righteously, they would fall under God's blessing mandate. By contrast, if they would sin, they would fall under the curse. Today, many of us still love to tag onto the old spirit of Law when it comes to dealing with sin.

Falling under the curse was a scary thing. God would warn His people of impending doom time and time again. He would send prophets and seers to bring messages of "repent or face dire consequence." The people of God would heed the warnings for a while, but eventually turn away from God and end up in captivity of some kind. These captivities were unusually harsh. The judgement of God under the Law was ultra severe. Sometimes entire cities were wiped out. Fire and brimstone was rained down, famine was released, the earth opened up and swallowed the rebellious, rain was withheld, crops were eaten by insects, sickness and disease were inflicted, the earth was covered by a flood, God struck down and killed certain people, and captivity and war was brought on.

I would like to say something about these scenarios. The truth is that for almost 4000 years our world was governed by this type of "blessing and curse" system. Yet, I am amazed that with all of the bad things that happened to the unrighteous, people still turned away from God. In fact, it seems as if they turned away in droves. The conclusion: harsh judgement and condemnation of sin here on this earth does not work as a deterrent to the sinner. In fact, in the end, God's chosen people were so far away from Him that they were dragged off to captivity and decimated for hundreds of dark years. Even with all of the warnings of fire and brimstone and the likes, people were no more inclined to turn towards God. For 4000 years God operated and judged under this system of Law and it amounted to disaster on our part. Friends, let me say again, it didn't work. It ended up badly.

Now let's turn the pages of our bible to the New Testament. I am going to be a bit controversial here today, but God is now working under a new system of judgement. Are the results more positive in our world? I am not certain but I think possibly so. God's new system is called the system of Grace. There is sooooo much division over this issue right now that I almost hate to bring it up. However, we need to keep in mind the ineffectiveness of the previous system. Also, there is no hybrid between the two. You can't keep parts of the Law system that you like, and then take the parts of Grace that you fancy and put them together. I often hear people talking about how God is going to judge a certain country or city, how He is going to send a hurricane, or disaster to wipe out certain people who are evil. Friends, this is not God's heart. Jesus illustrated God's change in perspective on this type of scenario with the following words:

Luke 9:53-55 And they (the Samaritans) did not receive Him (Jesus), because He was traveling toward Jerusalem. When James and John saw this, they said, "Lord, do You want us to command fire to come down from heaven and consume them?" But Jesus turned and rebuked them, and said, "You do not know what kind of spirit you are of."

John 8:7-8, 11 He (Jesus) straightened up, and said to them, "He who is without sin among you, let him be the first to throw a stone at her." Straightening up, Jesus said to her, "Woman, where are they? Did no one condemn you?" She said, "No one, Lord." And Jesus said, "I do not condemn you, either. Go. From now on sin no more."

Matthew 5:44-45 But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

With these words and many more, Jesus shed some light on a new direction in dealing with sin. For almost 4000 years, judgement reigned supreme. Now, we live in an era

where grace reigns supreme. Eventually judgement will return to our earth. For seven years judgement will be so severe that if the days are not shortened, no life will remain on our planet. However, right now, we live in a grace filled era.

Back to the song of the angels ... "*Glory to God in the Highest, and on earth* (here is the good news!) *peace, goodwill towards men.*" God is now in a mode of goodwill towards our planet and towards humankind. It is quite a switch from the judgement of the old system. Now He sends sun and rain on the just and the unjust. Think of the word "goodwill" for a moment. God is good by nature and He has chosen for a time to extend His good will towards our planet. He extended a system of judgement for centuries and people still turned away from Him. Now He is extending His goodwill towards us.

Friends, if you know of someone who is hard hearted and far away from God, please do not pray that they come to the end of themselves or fall into dire circumstances. If you pray like that, you do not know what spirit you are of. In our current era, there is a new way with our Father. It is summed up by the words of Paul.

Romans 2:4-7 Or do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance? But because of your stubbornness and unrepentant heart you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God, who will render to each person according to his deeds.

Friends, wrath will still happen, but it is now stored up for the day of judgement when God will make everything just again. For now, God will be good to your hard-hearted friend. We may wish for Him to be mean, but God's kindness and goodness is what now leads people to repentance. Meanness was administered for 4000 years and people turned far from God. Now goodness is released until people are so overwhelmed by God's goodness that they turn to Him. Also, and in the mean time, we need to refrain from judging so that we ourselves will not be judged.

Thanks for reading today. Jesus is real and He has MUCH goodwill towards you.