

"Christmas Conflicts ~ Spiritual vs. Material" [12.16.07]

Merry Christmas

This past week I read about a preacher = Pastor Wittenhouse

- He & his family were on vacation driving to their destination, when they witnessed another car going in the opposite direction, losing a piece of luggage from the top.
- The driver of the car had no idea they had lost any luggage ~ kept driving.
- The pastor's family stopped & picked up the luggage - - took it home & rifled thru it to see if they could find any identification.
- All the identification they found was a \$20.00 gold piece inscribed, "Given to Otis Sampson @ his retirement by the Portland Cement Company."
- Well after numerous phone calls & chasing leads; they finally found Otis Sampson ☺ They told him about recovering his lost luggage.
- He told them that there was nothing in the suitcase that he really wanted & that they could throw everything away [except that] \$20.00 gold piece!
- Mr. Sampson called it "...his most prized possession!"
- But when the Pastor sent back the \$20.00 gold piece, he wrote a cover letter telling Otis Sampson about "...his most prized possession = Jesus Christ!"
- One year later ~ the Pastor received a Christmas package.
It was the \$20.00 gold piece & Mr. Sampson wrote,
 - "You'll be happy to know we've now become active members of a church. I want you to have this gold piece. I'm 74 and my wife is 72. You were the 1st one to tell us about Jesus in a way we understood.
 - [Now] Jesus is our most prized possession, too!"

Amazing truth - nothing in this world compares to knowing Jesus!

However, the Christmas season often creates an unnecessary conflict between the spiritual & the material!

If we are not careful...we can easily get distracted; placing our focus more on things than on Jesus' birthday!

This week I learned that the shepherds also faced a conflict between the spiritual & material. Turn w/me to Luke 2!

I. Luke 1: 1 – 20 [1st Christmas]

A. (R) Luke 1: 8

- "That night the...History of the world changed!
- "That night...World history was divided in ½!
 - Strongest evidence that Jesus' actually existed is, the annual calendar!
 - B.C. (before Christ)
 - A.D. (anno domini) "...in the Year of the Lord!"
- Jesus birthday [literally divided] annals of time!

(Let's see what happened that night)

B. (R) Luke 2: 1 – 3

- The purpose of this census was to aid the Roman government in recruiting young men for military service & additionally for tax collection!
 - The government forced Joseph with his fiancée Mary to make a long trip just to pay taxes!

C. (R) Luke 2: 4 – 5

- Notice the irony - Look WHO actually controls all of world history = God!
 - By the decree of Emperor Augustus ~ Jesus was born in the very town prophesied for his birth in [Micah 5: 2]
 - Even though His parents did not live there!

D. (R) Luke 2: 6 – 7

- “That night...Our blessed Savior Jesus was born!
 - History not only changed ~ ~ ETERNITY changed as well!

“That night...”

God continued to reveal His Son; but not to those you might expect!

E. (R) Luke 2: 8 – 11

- Being a shepherd was not a very glamorous job!
 - In that day if you could not do anything else ~ you could always be a shepherd ~ there must have been quite a few of them!
- It's estimated that there were as many as a ¼ of million sheep were sacrificed in the temple @ Passover season alone. Every family was commanded to bring an animal to the temple to offer on the altar.
 - To facilitate this demand the priest provided lambs for purchase @ the entrance of the temple so that worshippers did not have to transport animals from their family homes.
 - So there literally were hundreds of thousands of sheep being raised on the hillsides around Jerusalem = the temple flock!
 - There were 1000s of shepherds employed there to protect these sheep!
 - Being a shepherd was a lowly ~ smelly ~ unglamorous job!
- Isn't that just like God; He chose to 1st announce the arrival of His newborn Son = the humble Lamb of God to simple shepherds who often cared for newborn sheep, who in a year's time would also be sacrificed on the altar!

F. (R) Luke 2: 12 – 14

- [incredible picture] The greatest choir performance in the history of the world performed before shepherds not nobility

The shepherds' lives were noticeably different after this initial encounter with God's mighty angels! After that night; there was something more important in their life than sheep!

Take a moment & note the changes that took place within the shepherd's lives!

II. [Noticeable changes in shepherd's lives

A. 1st change = their values changed that night

- 1st, they made a definite choice to pursue God above all else!
- (R) Luke 2: 15 – 16
- [Pay attention] CONFLICT now enters the shepherd's story
 - Should they leave their material livelihood (job) or go in search of God's son?
 - Part of their job description was "never to leave the sheep unattended."
 - That's what they were paid to do!
 - If they left the flock a wild animal could come and devour some, or rustlers could come in & steal some!
 - They took a big risk leaving their flock - - if they were caught they would lose their jobs (means of supporting themselves)
 - It would have been e-z to wait until morning [3rd shift over] surely the baby would be there in the morning!
 - According to the text - - it does not appear that they struggled too much @ all with their decision!
 - They had seen an angel - - they had heard from God!
 - Some things are more important than sheep!
 - [Practical application] WHAT do you really want in life?
 - Many people who weekly sit in the pews never really decide what they want!
 - Dabbling in both world's (material vs. spiritual) & happy in neither one ☹
 - Jesus said, "...no one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one & love the other or you will be devoted to one & despise the other." Then He added, "You cannot serve both God & money."
 - You've got to make a choice, as to which is going to be your God!
 - ☺ One indecisive counselee was once asked, "Would you rather be poor & happy or rich & miserable?" He thought for a moment & said, "I'd rather be semi-rich & slightly moody." ☺

- What do you really want in life? Do you want more STUFF - - more TOYS - - more PRESTIGE; go after it with all your whole heart!
 - Stop making yourself miserable by claiming to be Christian & half heartedly coming to worship.
 - Jesus said, "I'd rather you be hot or cold."
- BUT, if you want to know Jesus intimately ~ you want the forgiveness of sins, [the promise of eternal life] then go after that with all of your heart!
 - Don't be enamored with STUFF & envious of people who have more;
 - [Don't forget] there are some things more important than sheep!
- King Solomon [wealthiest man who ever lived] once wrote in Proverbs 8,

"Choose (God's) instruction instead of silver, knowledge rather choice gold, for wisdom is more precious than rubies and nothing you desire can compare with her."

B. 2nd change = their conversations changed [that night]!

- I'll tell you something else that happened to the shepherd's that night; they deepened the topic of their conversation!
- (R) Luke 2: 17 – 18
- Notice - on the way home that night they did not stop and talk to some friends about the price of wool - - talk about unnecessary taxation!
 - NO, they talked about what they had witnessed ~ God sending His baby boy to earth - - long awaited Messiah - - Life's never going to be the same!
- [Practical application] Are you going to spend your whole life...every conversation talking about trivial matters?
 - This doesn't mean we can never talk about skeet shooting or childbearing or current events [these things are important]
 - Somewhere along the lines we need to make a shift = begin talking about salvation in Christ - - the promise of heaven - - the 2nd COMING
- You will discover suddenly relationships will go deeper!
- JESUS says, "Blessed are you when you hunger & thirst for righteousness for you will be filled."

C. Final change = their comfort zones changed [that night]!

- One final change I noticed about the shepherds; they got out of their comfort zones and searched for the Christ-child!

- The shepherds left their routine of taking care of the sheep & went to search where the baby Jesus was;
- (5) ideas to get you & your family out of your comfort zones @ Christmas
 - #1 bring your family to Christmas Eve service 4:30 – 6:00 – 7:30 instead of just watching the Grinch who stole Christmas ☺
 - #2 instead of just reading to your family The Night before Christmas this year add the Nativity story in Luke 2!
 - #3 may mean you make a cake – decorate it with candles [you will only need 2007] Sing Happy Birthday to Jesus ☺
 - #4 before opening gifts under the tree ~ say a prayer this year & thank God for how good He is!
- #5 follow the example of the shepherds!
 - (R) Luke 2: 19 – 20

Let's worship JESUS = the newborn King!