

A TIME OF PEACE

December 19

- Hidden Treasure- the Best gift of All

Dwight Paras

Please read Matthew 11:25-30

Did you react the same way I did? This is meant to be a passage for Advent, celebrating Christmas? Isn't Christmas a joyous occasion? A time of pageantry, cheerful lights, Christmas carols, merry chaos, traditional meals and great memories?

Memories, like fruit cake? I have a very happy memory of Christmas cake! I recall making the batter with my mom and being very discouraged by her continually adding more flour making the mixing harder. But finally it all came together and the reward was the great aroma bursting from the oven of the wood stove. Yes, I'm that old.

But beyond tradition and great memories isn't Christmas about angels, Bethlehem, baby Jesus and Peace and Goodwill to everyone? There seems to be enough movies, stories and examples of self-less giving to make us almost believe that we as humans are basically good.

In this passage in Matthew, Jesus is talking about the greatest gift of all- the Gospel. Now don't get me wrong, I'm not railing against, festivals, celebrations and pageantry. The Bible has much to say about social gatherings. The Old Testament mentions numerous feasts and celebratory occasions that were even required by the Israelites.

Jesus was not against marking celebrations and feasts. Holiday gatherings, celebrations and memories build a pretty strong story in our minds. That story can be a fantasy, partial truth or a complete, solid life-changing truth.

What was the truth Jesus was speaking about here? It is helpful to notice the context in which Jesus speaks. Many of the people that He spoke with did not understand that He was the One sent from God. Even John the Baptist, his earthly cousin, asked Him "Are you the One who is to come, or should we expect another?"

Jesus said that many would not understand Him and His message. And actually, His message would be hidden from many. But not hidden from all. He knew who He was reaching; they were poor and needy in spirit, the humble. Jesus knew something about humanity and He offered His yoke and burden which were light and easy. This contrasted to the yoke and burden of the religious leaders which was hard and heavy.

I believe He was also stating that He knew we humans are built for service. One way or another we put ourselves in servitude to something or someone. Alcohol, mind altering drugs, power, prestige, self or some "influencer". This was true from the very beginning. Adam and Eve were in servitude to God in the Garden. Until, they decided to switch allegiance to a new master- themselves.

Jesus comes with the gift of peace and rest which is eternal life with Him. He comes with a gift that is hidden from the self-sufficient, the worldly wise and the proud. The gift is offered to all. The invitation is "take my yoke upon you and learn of me". Not the cultural message "play nice and be a good person". Not the usual message of unattached "peace and goodwill to all". Jesus never intended anyone to start up a grass roots movement to get Christ back into Christmas

and the commercialization out of it. No, His call to action is "Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind ... love your neighbor as yourself."

So, the message here is not the same as Dickens has Scrooge say "I will keep Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year.". No, we are to celebrate Christmas but not like the culture we live in. When we celebrate, we celebrate with thanksgiving. That as a redeemed child of God you have been given the greatest gift of all; an eternal relationship with the Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God, the Everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace.