

“Hope amidst Darkness and the Shadow of Death”

Hope Incarnate (Pt. 1)

December 3, 2017

Matthew 4:15-16 “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—¹⁶ the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.”

—How important is it to have a good understanding of humanity and the setting of earth, in order to really understand this whole Christmas Story and the Gospel Story it is attached to?

EXPLORING this ‘DARKNESS’

Palestine in 6BC

“Jerusalem’s population of 200,000 to 250,000 ...the great palace was the residence of King and Court with all their following and luxury ...the learned academies were filled with hundreds ...large warehouses in Jerusalem, industrial centers from busy Galilee, the markets of Jerusalem thronged with noisy sellers and bargaining buyers ...Galilee sent not only its manufacturers but its provisions: fish, fruit, known for its lusciousness, oil, grape-syrup, and wine. ...we read of at least seven special markets: those for cattle, wool, iron-ware, clothes, wood, bread, and fruit and vegetables. ...Business was also done in the restaurants and wine shops, of which there were many; where you might be served with some dish: fresh or salted fish, fried locusts, a mess of vegetables, a dish of soup, pastry, sweet meats, or a piece of a fruit-cake, to be washed down with Judeaen or Galilean wine, Idumaeen vinegar, or foreign beer. ...from these busy scenes we turn to the more aristocratic quarters of the Upper City, tenanted by another class. ...there were two worlds in Jerusalem, side-by-side. On the one hand was Grecianism with its theatre and amphitheater: foreigners filling the court, and crowding the city; foreign tendencies and ways from the foreign King downwards. On the other hand, was the old Jewish world, overshadowed by Temple and Synagogue...” Alfred Edersheim, “The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah”, p. 82, 83, 91

— The Dark Days of That December

- **It was 'politically & nationally DARK' ...**
 - Jewish Life under Roman Occupation
- **It was Religiously Dark for Israel ...The Corrupt Condition of Worship**
 - Jerusalem's Temple
 - Herod the 'Jewish King'

Matt 2:1-6 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, ² saying, "Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him." ³ When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; ⁴ and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. ⁵ They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet: ⁶ "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."

Matt 2:13-15 Now when they had departed, behold, 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." ¹⁴ And he rose and took the child and his mother by night and departed to Egypt ¹⁵ 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."

"His tenuous hold on power — a single misstep and he could have lost everything — may have contributed to the paranoia that led him to execute so many, including his own children. Jesus was born during the reign of Herod (Mt 2:1), who, near the end of his life, gained eternal infamy by

having the baby boys of Bethlehem put to death (Mt 2:16). Caesar Augustus is reported to have once made the pun that he would rather be Herod's pig (in Greek, hus) than his son (huios), a reference to the fact that as a nominal Jew Herod at least had scruples about killing pigs — if none about executing his own family members.” (From the Archeological Study Bible - ‘Understanding Herod’)

— **Dark Days of THIS December**

...Just an hour's drive from Galilee—Syria

...The Warlords of Africa, the Drug Cartels of Mexico, the Terrorist Networks of the Middle East, the Mafia Networks of Organized Crime—these are All the Products of DARKNESS! ...Even Religion mixed with oppression, control, and criminality—The Nature of Darkness Has Not Changed Much!!

...as is the 'Herod-Like Ruler' of N. Korea and an underworld culture that abuses and oppresses women!

- Human Trafficking is a \$150 Billion industry
- The Korean 'Comfort Women' of WWII
- Modern Sexual Harassment

Darkness is NOT a Yesterday Problem or an Ancient Problem or an Uncivilized Problem!!

“...the scale and scope of evil has increased in the modern world. To anyone who thinks deeper than the morning headlines, the atrocity of September 11 forms part of the wider record of the dark catalog of human evil in modern history and pales beside the worst of the evils. The Ottoman massacre of 1.5 million Armenians in WWI and the Rwandan and Sudanese massacres in the 1990's in which nearly 3 million people died are like a pair of bookends that frame the twentieth century as the most murderous century in all history. ...Leaving aside the 100 million human beings killed in the century's wars, more than 100 million more were killed by their fellow human beings in political repression, massacre, and genocide.” Os Guinness, “Unspeakable”, p. 4

“Cambodia’s Pol Pot slaughtered 2 million people—a quarter of his nation’s population ...Stalin murdered 30 million ...Mao 65 million ...the 3 or 4 million victims of the current civil war in the Congo...” Os Guinness, “Unspeakable”, p. 42-44

ENCOUNTERING LIGHT and HOPE

Matthew 4:15-16 “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles—¹⁶ the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light, and for those dwelling in the region and shadow of death, on them a light has dawned.”

- This dawning of the light reveals important elements of the nature of what needed to happen in order to save man from this Darkness:

Matt 1:18-23

v. 18, 20 ... “she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit” ... “that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit”

v. 23 ... “Immanuel (which means God with us)”

- The Story of the Incarnation is a Story of INTRUSION ...an Intrusion that Educates us about Our Current Condition AND Our Means of Hope!!

(1) Darkness cannot 'self-generate' light ...and humanity cannot generate its own Savior! ...We cannot Self-Fix this Darkness!
(A quick theology of 'darkness')

Rom 1:21-23 For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened. ²² Claiming to be wise, they became fools, ²³ and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles.

Eph 4:18 They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, due to their hardness of heart.

John 3:19-20 And this is the judgment: the light has come into the world, and people loved the darkness rather than the light because their deeds were evil.
²⁰ For everyone who does wicked things hates the light and does not come to the light, lest his deeds should be exposed.

John 12:46 I have come into the world as light, so that whoever believes in me may not remain in darkness.

2 Cor 4:6 For God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

Be Informed by the Christmas Story (this "Dawning of Light" into the realm of Darkness) ...This creates quite a Different Starting Place than: The Human Potential Movement ...the PMA Movement ...the Self-Help Movement ...the "If You Just Educate People Movement"

...The problems in the Herod's of the World isn't education or human potential —it is DARKNESS!!

(2) *The God who intervenes is the God of 'miracles'—i.e. the God who uses unlimited and unconfined and unearthly powers to bring Hope Into Our Lives ...the Virgin Birth!*

- *God creates and acts with powers that are 'unscientific'*

(3) *The Nativity, the Incarnation is the 'Dawning of a Hope that We Cannot See'*

...This Long-Awaited Messiah—"just came out of nowhere"!!!

Romans 8:19-25 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³ And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

— ***The Reality of This "Nativity Scene" is not just something we commemorate once a year—it is something we are living every day!!***
...as ancient Palestine 'Groaned' under the weight and burden of corruption, abuse of power, human depravity, and the brokenness of a world outside of Eden, and it waited for 'hope to emerge' from outside of itself and its own abilities to save or deliver ...and So We Wait!

...BUT, are we waiting for a 'hope that we cannot see'? ...a hope from another realm, a hope that must 'appear out of nowhere'! A hope that is not the product of our own resources, our own efforts, our own intelligence... a hope that emerges into our lives at just the right and appointed time, that comes from the wisdom, initiative, and provision of the Father!!

...But why am I still groaning (v.22)???

- *We are still groaning, because we still live in a realm of DARKNESS!*
- *We are still groaning, because we're still waiting for everyone to get on the Redemption Ambulance! (v. 19-23)*