

"NIGHTS WORTH REMEMBERING"

Feb. 24, '91

"IN THE BEGINNING, WHEN GOD CREATED THE UNIVERSE, THE SCRIPTURE SAYS, "HE SEPARATED THE LIGHT FROM THE DARKNESS. GOD CALLED THE LIGHT DAY, AND THE DARKNESS HE CALLED NIGHT". (Gen. 1:4-5)

~~WAS~~ A GREAT EVENT HAS HAPPENED, ACCORDING TO OUR BIBLE, AT NIGHT. THE NIGHTS HAVE GOD'S INSPIRATION AND WISDOM IN THEM. BEFORE THE EARLY DAYLIGHT HOURS WE EXPERIENCE A STRUGGLE, PAIN AND GLORIOUS TRIUMPH OVER DARKNESS FOR US HUMANS AND FOR OUR CREATOR. THE NIGHT STORIES IN THE BIBLE ARE FULL OF INSTRUCTION AND HOPE FOR OUR VERY SOULS. IN THE SERMONS OF THESE SERIES WE WILL CALL "NIGHTS WORTH REMEMBERING," WE WILL LOCATE IN THESE DARK EXPERIENCES OF HUMANKIND A SPECIAL LIGHT THAT WILL SEE US THROUGH AS WELL. WE ~~WILL~~ SEE PAUL IN A SHIPWRECK AND DANIEL ALL NIGHT IN A LION'S DEN. WE ~~WILL~~ GO TO BETHEL WITH JACOB TO SEE THE ANGELS CLIMBING A LADDER TO HEAVEN. YOU AND I ~~WILL~~ MOVE WITH GIDEON UNDER COVER OF NIGHT'S SHADOWS INTO THE CAMP OF THE PHILISTINES.

WE ~~WILL~~ SHARE WITH JACOB THE WRESTLING WITH AN ANGEL BY THE JABOK RIVER IN THE DARK HOURS AFTER MIDNIGHT. THEN, IT IS ON TO HOLY WEEK, WHEN WE WILL MOVE RAPIDLY BY NIGHT AROUND JERUSALEM TO WITNESS THE DEMONIC POWER THAT WORKS AGAINST GOD AT ITS WORST THROUGH JUDAS. LET US EXAMINE AGAIN THE BIBLICAL ACCOUNT OF HOW IT TURNED NIGHT AT MID-day.

THEN, NONE TOO SOON, WILL COME THE GREATEST MORNING OF ANY MORNING EVER. IT IS THE PROMISE THAT THERE WILL BE NO MORE NIGHT. FINALLY, THE PROMISE OF ISAIAH BEFORE THE BIRTH OF THE MESSIAH WILL COME TRUE: "THE PEOPLE WHO WALKED IN DARKNESS HAVE SEEN A GREAT LIGHT."

IT WAS THAT PAINFUL NIGHT WHEN ONE OF JESUS' FAVORITE DISCIPLES, PETER, DENIED HIM. LUKE 22 TELLS US THE STORY OF JESUS' ARREST AT THE GARDEN OF GETHSEMANE ON THE MOUNT OF OLIVES. IT WAS AFTER THE PASSOVER FEAST IN THE UPPER ROOM. AFTER THE ARREST, MOST OF THE DISCIPLES HAD TURNED TAIL AND RUN, BUT NOT BULL-HEADED, LOYAL, SURE OF HIMSELF, AND IMPETUOUS PETER! HE EVEN SHADOWED THE TEMPLE POLICE AS THEY WALKED AROUND THE DARK KIDRON VALLEY AND UP ON MOUNT ZION TO THE HIGH PRIEST, CAIAPHAS' HOME.

NOT AS SCARED OR CAUTIOUS AS HE SHOULD HAVE BEEN, PETER WENT

INTO THE HIGH PRIEST'S COURTYARD TO HEAR WHAT THE VERDICT AGAINST JESUS WOULD BE. THE SANHEDRIN WAS HOLDING AN ILLEGAL TRIAL. THE SANHEDRIN WAS FORBIDDEN BY LAW TO MEET AT NIGHT. PETER WAITED BY THE FIRESIDE WITH OTHER CURIOUS PEOPLE.

PETER DENIED JESUS THREE TIMES. THE FIRST TIME A SERVANT WOMAN RECOGNIZED PETER AS ONE OF THE DISCIPLES OF JESUS. THE SECOND AND THIRD TIMES SOME NEARBY MEN INSISTED IN THEIR RASPY ACCUSATIONS THAT PETER WAS A PART OF THE TWELVE DISCIPLES WHO HAD BEEN WITH JESUS WHEN HE WAS ARRESTED. PETER BECAME LOUDER AND LOUDER IN HIS DENIALS. FINALLY, HE SPOKE THE WORDS: "I DON'T KNOW WHAT YOU ARE TALKING ABOUT!"

IN THE GRAY OF THAT EARLY MORNING, THE BUGLER AT FORT ANTONIA IN JERUSALEM WHERE THE ROMAN SOLDIERS WERE GARRISONED; BLEW REVEILLE, WHICH THE LOCAL CITIZENS CALLED "THE COCK CROW." WITH PAIN AND CHAGRIN, PETER "WENT OUT AND WEPT BITTERLY" IT WAS STILL NIGHT, A NIGHT OF DENIAL AND REPENTANCE.

WE ALL HAVE NIGHTS OF REGRET AND REPENTANCE. PETER HAD NOT PLANNED, LIKE JUDAS, TO DENY JESUS. WE DO NOT EITHER. PETER WAS NOT A PERSON, LIKE THOMAS, WHO WAFFLED BACK AND FORTH. HE WANTED TO REMAIN FAITHFUL AND LOYAL AND STRONG.

BECAUSE WE ARE NOT PERFECT, BECAUSE WE ARE HUMAN, OUR BEST INTENTIONS WILL SOMETIMES NOT BE KEPT EITHER. FOR US CHRISTIANS IT IS NOT SO MUCH WHETHER OR NOT WE HAVE SINNED AND DISAPPOINTED OURSELVES AND OUR GOD, BUT THAT WE PICK OURSELVES UP, EXPRESS SORROW FOR OUR SINS, EXPERIENCE GOD'S FORGIVENESS, AND GO ON FROM THERE. GOD WENT TO THE CROSS FOR THIS VERY REASON. HE KNEW THAT WE WOULD SIN AND NOT ALWAYS BE THE WAY we ought to be.

WHEN THE COCK CROWS IN OUR LIVES, AND WE GO INTO NIGHTS OF DEPRESSION, WE HAVE A BRIGHT LIGHT. IT REPLACES THE GUILT WITH GOD'S GRACE. ITS RAYS BRIGHTEN THE DAYS AND NIGHTS AHEAD AND GIVE US WARMTH AND GUIDANCE NOW AS WELL.

FOR THE DARK TIMES WHEN WE GIVE IN TO ~~SIN~~ TEMPTATION, GO WITH THE CROWD, FAIL TO ACT WHEN WE SHOULD, FORGET OUR MORALS AND ETHICS, LET GREED AND SELFISHNESS RULE, RATIONALIZE AWAY THE SERIOUSNESS OF OUR SIN, AND PERMIT THE ANIMAL IN US TO REIGN, WE HAVE A CHRIST WHO HAS MADE FORGIVENESS AVAILABLE.