

January 2002: Learning from the Past

by Aaron Greenway

Well, here we are again! We are at the beginning of a brand new year AGAIN! What an incredible opportunity God has given us to live in such a strategic era, a time where hardened people need to hear about Jesus more than ever! As the old Steve Green song goes, "People need the Lord." That is still true! As the Bible tells us, we need to be telling people about the Savior that has changed our lives. Are there people you know and love that need the Lord this year?

A few weeks ago in my own personal study of Matthew, something stuck out to me that I had never seen before. I feel that what I am about to share may help us to see what is really behind the unbelief of the lost. And perhaps this insight will help us to know how to pray for those we have such a burden for in this new year. So, let me take us back to about 2500 years to the rebuilding of Jerusalem. The Jews had just been freed from exile by Cyrus, the Persian king, after the overthrow of the Babylonian and Assyrian empires and had begun to rebuild the temple after which it had been destroyed seventy years prior.

Ezra, the priest, who had assisted in the return and restoration of Israel, finally realized the utter rebellion of his own people, weeping, "O my God, I am too ashamed and humiliated to lift up my face to You, my God; for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has grown up to the heavens" (Ezra 9:6). Ezra knew the Word of God, and to be sure, the prophecies about the Christ from whom the prophet Isaiah had written to the nation of Israel about before and during their captivity.

Four to five hundred years later, the Savior was born. Remember Herod? Who did he consult to

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find out about where the Messiah was to be born? The priests. The priests knew the Messianic prophecies, like Micah, who was also a pre-exilic prophet (Micah 5:2, Matthew 2:4-6). The chief priests, scribes and teachers of the law knew where Jesus was to be born and no doubt, the fact that they knew that he HAD been born in those days had to have been passed down in the Sanhedrin because of the tragic nature of the killing of innocent children.

Fast forward thirty years. Jesus begins His ministry. And after over five hundred years of prophecies about the Christ, after what the pharisees themselves had witnessed in Jerusalem when Christ was born, the question is this: WHY WERE THE PHARISEES SO AGAINST JESUS' MINISTRY? If this was indeed the promised Messiah, how could there have been such a "breach" between the generations of priests before all the way back to the liberation of Israel and the priests of Jesus' day during His ministry?

I believe the answer lies in this fact: Just as Herod attempted to kill the Messiah because of the threat that He posed to his rule, so did the Teachers of the Law try to (and did) have Jesus put to death because He was a threat to their religious institution. The unbelief of the Pharisees was not because they didn't believe Jesus was the Messiah intellectually. They had the prophets! They had their chronicles! They knew that Herod went in search of the Messiah to slaughter Him! This was no surprise!

The reason why the Pharisees rejected the ministry of Jesus Christ was because Jesus exposed them for the frauds that they were. Jesus exposed their sin. And the reason why people today reject the Gospel is for that very reason. Most would recognize that Jesus is the Son of God, that He died on the cross, but they will never receive it because it is a threat to their way of life. Sinners love their sin and want to stay in it! Sinners hate the light. They love darkness, because that is their nature. Only by the illuminating work of the Holy Spirit can a sinner (like Ezra) really see his/her true condition before God.

Even Jesus Himself said that the giving of Parables was not so the Pharisees would believe, but that the truth would be veiled, so they couldn't see it (Matthew 13:11-15; 2 Corinthians 4:3). Only those who were spiritually awake would see it! The Kingdom of God did not come down

with fan fair. Only a few shepherds, kings, and a couple of elderly people saw it. Jesus even told men, women and demons to conceal the fact that He was the Son of God. The truth is concealed today to those who do not believe Jesus for who He is. What can we do in this situation? We can pray that God will lift the veil from the eyes of the people we love. We can pray that God, in His mercy, will enlighten their hearts and show them their need for God. Inevitably, the only way that anyone will put their faith in Jesus Christ is not because they logically see that Jesus is the way. We have seen centuries of history disputing that notion. To them, Jesus is nothing more than a “cramp in their style.” People do not flock to God on their own. Only the Spirit of God can bring them, woo them, draw them and inevitably regenerate them. People do not see God! God has to first see them and then sweep them up into His Kingdom with His love.

For those of us who have been saved by the mighty and wonderful power and will of the Father, through the Son, Jesus Christ and by the Spirit, we have a lot to be thankful for! Where would we be without the cross and the work of the Spirit in our lives? Are there people we know still stuck in the muck of unbelief? Perhaps we could make God’s New Year’s resolution for Him this year, “Lord, this year, I trust you to save my friend.” “Lord, this year in 2002, I trust you to change the citizenship of my son or daughter.” How many of us have burdens for our families, for our loved-ones? The clock is ticking down. But our lost friends are not beyond the reach of God. He is able to save. He is able to change these people!

Who do you want to see born again in 2002?