

## GOT A PLAN? GOD DOES

THIS IS EPIPHANY OF THE LORD SUNDAY. EPIPHANY IS A MOMENT IN WHICH YOU SUDDENLY SEE OR UNDERSTAND SOMETHING IN A NEW OR VERY CLEAR WAY.

IN OUR CHURCH YEAR, WE CELEBRATE THIS AS THE TIME THE WISE MEN FOUND JESUS, THE TIME WHEN WE OBSERVE AS A CHURCH THE COMING OF THE WISE MEN AS THE FIRST REVEALING OF CHRIST TO THE GENTILES AND IS CELEBRATED CLOSE TO JANUARY 6<sup>TH</sup>.

IN TODAY'S GOSPEL READING THE STORY OF THE WISE MEN AND HEROD BOTH SEEKING JESUS FOR DIFFERENT REASONS IS TOLD. WE CAN SEE THAT MANY PLANS WERE DISRUPTED, CHANGED, AND THWARTED BY A MAN TO CARRY OUT HIS OWN PLANS OR BY GOD TO SEE A PLAN THROUGH FOR THE BENEFIT OF MORE THAN JUST ONE OR A FEW.

WHAT DOES TODAY'S READING TELL US ABOUT OUR OWN PLANS, AND GOD'S PLANS? WHAT PROBLEMS CAN WE FACE EVEN WITH GOOD INTENTIONS? HOW DO WE DISCOVER GOD'S PLAN FOR US? WHAT PART DO OTHERS "PLAY" IN **OUR** PLANS? THERE ARE MANY MORE QUESTIONS WE COULD COME UP WITH FOR SURE, BUT ON DINNER DAY WE DON'T HAVE THE TIME, DO WE?

ONE DETAIL WE MUST DEFINE IS WHAT EXACTLY IS A PLAN? A WAY TO DESCRIBE A PLAN *IS A PROPOSAL FOR DOING OR ACHIEVING SOMETHING*. A PLAN CAN ALSO BE A DECISION ABOUT WHAT ONE IS GOING TO DO. AFTER ALL, HOW MANY TIMES HAVE WE HEARD COMMERCIALS ON TV, RADIO OR RECEIVED THOSE LARGE POSTCARDS IN THE MAIL ABOUT INVESTMENT PLANNING? NOW MANY OF US MAY ARGUE THAT WE ARE PAST ANY PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE, HOWEVER, FOR US AS DISCIPLES OF CHRIST WE HAVE A QUITE DIFFERENT "LONG TERM INVESTMENT" TO PLAN FOR! IT IS AN INVESTMENT THAT WE CARRY THROUGH WITH UNTIL THE LAST BREATH WE TAKE. INVESTING IN PEOPLE BY SERVING IS SOMETHING WE ARE NEVER DONE WITH, WHETHER IT BE FAMILY, FRIENDS OR EVEN STRANGERS. JESUS, OUR EXAMPLE, SHOWED US FROM THE CROSS AS HE TALKED TO A TOTAL STRANGER NEXT TO HIM!!!

OUR PLANS - GOD'S PLANS, IS HE REALLY CONCERNED WITH ME? WE HAVE CELEBRATED THE BIRTH OF JESUS, GOD IN THE FLESH DWELLING WITH US, THAT DOES NOT SOUND LIKE A GOD NOT INTERESTED!!!! EACH TIME WE ACCEPT HIS INVITATION TO COMMUNION, WE ARE ASSURED IN THE READING OF THE LITURGY OF THE INVITATION BY CHRIST, AND FORGIVENESS PROVING GOD'S LOVE FOR US.

AGAIN I ASK, ARE THOSE THE ACTIONS OF A TRINITY OF GOD THE FATHER, HIS SON JESUS CHRIST, AND THE HOLY SPIRIT THAT DO NOT CARE FOR US? WE CAN MOST ASSUREDLY LIVE IN KNOWING, NOT JUST HOPING, THAT WE ARE LOVED AND THERE ARE PLANS FOR US, **IF WE CHOSE TO LIVE IN THEM**. THERE ARE A NUMBER OF VERSES THAT SPEAK TO THIS VERY SUBJECT. JEREMIAH 29:11 "FOR I KNOW THE PLANS I HAVE FOR YOU," DECLARES THE LORD, "PLANS TO PROSPER YOU AND NOT TO HARM YOU, PLANS TO

GIVE YOU HOPE AND A FUTURE". AGAIN WORDS BY GOD THROUGH THE PROPHET JEREMIAH THAT TELL US "WE ARE IN GOOD HANDS" AS THE SAYING GOES.

THE VERSE I HAVE JUST REFERRED TO BEGS A QUESTION – "SO GOD HAS PLANS FOR ME THAT I CAN CHOSE TO FOLLOW OR NOT, BUT HOW DO I DISCOVER THEM? HOW DO I KNOW GOD'S PLAN FOR ME?" LET ME QUOTE A VERSE FROM PROVERBS 16:3 – "*COMMIT YOUR ACTIONS TO THE LORD, AND YOUR PLANS WILL SUCCEED*". THERE IS A WAY OF LIFE IMPLIED HERE, WHICH IS SUPPORTED BY THE WORDS OF JESUS WHEN HE SAID "*SEEK THE KINGDOM OF GOD ABOVE ALL ELSE, AND LIVE RIGHTEOUSLY, AND HE WILL GIVE YOU EVERYTHING YOU NEED*".

IN THE VERSES JUST BEFORE THAT JESUS TOLD THEM NOT TO BE ANXIOUS ABOUT WHAT TO DRINK, WHAT TO EAT, OR CLOTHES, THAT THE FATHER KNOWS YOU NEED THESE THINGS. I BELIEVE THAT IT IS THESE THINGS THAT CAN CAUSE US TO BE DISTRACTED OR STRAY FROM THE PATH AND THE PLANS GOD DESIRES FOR US. FOR BY OVER PURSUING THE MATERIAL THINGS WE TEND TO IGNORE GOD, HIS PEOPLE AND HIS CHURCH. SOMEHOW WE JUST DON'T HAVE TIME FOR GOD ANYMORE, HIS PEOPLE OR FOR MINISTRY.

GOD IS THERE FOR US 24/7, DAY OR NIGHT, ARE WE GOING TO BE THERE FOR HIM EVEN FOR AN HOUR? NOW AM I TRYING TO SPUR A REACTION, SURE, BECAUSE EVEN WHEN WE PUSH HIM DOWN OUR PRIORITY LIST HE IS STILL THERE FOR US AND YOU ARE HIS PRIORITY!!!

WE CAN NOT HAVE A GOD OF **OUR** CONVENIENCE! BEING A DISCIPLE DOES REQUIRE SACRIFICE FROM TIME TO TIME, AND REALISTICALLY WHEN WE LIVE OUT THE LIFE OF A DISCIPLE IT REQUIRES **SACRIFICE EVERY SINGLE DAY FOR A LIFETIME!!!** BEING A DISCIPLE IS NOT FOR THE WIMPY, OR THE FAINTHEARTED!!! WE ARE TOLD THAT MAYBE WE HAVE LOWERED EXPECTATIONS FOR ACHIEVEMENT. WE DON'T EXPECT AS MUCH, BUT WHEN THE YOUNG ARE CHALLENGED THEY RISE TO MEET THE CHALLENGE, SHOULD IT WE ANY LESS FOR US NO MATTER THE AGE? FOR MANY OF US FROM YOUNG TO OLD WHEN WE HEAR SOMEONE SAY TO US "YOU CAN'T DO THAT!" WE BECOME MORE DETERMINED TO ACCOMPLISH IT!!!

WITH GOD ALL THINGS ARE POSSIBLE AND HE WILL BE THERE TO GUIDE US AND STRENGTHEN US FOR THE PLAN. IN PROVERBS 16:9 "*IN THEIR HEARTS HUMANS PLAN THEIR COURSE, BUT THE LORD ESTABLISHES THEIR STEPS*". THAT GOES BACK TO THE IDEA THAT IT IS GOD'S DESIRE FOR US TO HAVE PLANS AND SUCCEED – VERSE PSALMS 20:4 "*MAY HE GIVE YOU THE DESIRE OF YOUR HEART AND MAKE ALL YOUR PLANS SUCCEED*".

IN TODAY'S READING IT WAS THE PLAN OF THE WISE MEN TO SEEK AND FIND JESUS, THE NEW BORN KING, AND WITH GOD'S DIRECTION A START, AND THE HELP OF HIS ANGEL THE PLAN SUCCEED! HE HAS GIFTED US ALL AND WHEN WE KNOW THAT GIFT GIVEN US, A PLAN GOES FORWARD.

YOU KNOW IN THE HISTORY OF CENTENNIAL WE HAVE BEEN BLESSED WITH PEOPLE WHO KNEW GOD'S PLAN FOR THEM AND IT WAS AND IS PURE JOY TO WATCH THEM. (EXAMPLE) ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE COIN, WHEN WE "DO OUR OWN THING" THERE WILL BE FRUSTRATION, WEARINESS, AND NO FULFILLMENT. WHEN YOU ARE "SPINNING YOUR WHEELS" IT MAY BE TIME TO PAUSE AND PRAY! THAT IS THE NEAT THING ABOUT GOD THE FATHER, HE WILL BE THERE WHEN WE TURN TO HIM AND CRY OUT FOR HELP. PRAISE GOD FOR THAT!

NOW HERE WE ARE WALKING IN GOD'S PLAN FOR US AND THINGS ARE GOING QUITE WELL, THEN SUDDENLY THE FLOOR DROPS OUT LIKE THE OLD ROTOR AT ADVENTURE LAND, WE HIT THAT FAMOUS "WALL". WHY BECAUSE PEOPLE ARE QUESTIONING OUR INTENTIONS AND PROBLEMS ARE POPPING UP. (EXAMPLE, EXPANSION AND THINGS).

LET'S LOOK BACK TO THE WISE MEN. THEY HAD GOOD INTENTIONS; THEY HAD COME FROM AFAR TO WORSHIP THE NEW KING OF THE JEWS. THEY HAD GIFTS OF GOLD FRANKINCENSE, AND MYRRH. NOW HOW GOOD WAS THAT? YET HERE IS HEROD NOT WANTING ANYTHING TO DO WITH THE WISE MEN'S "GOOD INTENTIONS". THE WISE MEN HAD BEEN DUPED AND DECEIVED. HOWEVER AS I SAID BEFORE **GOD IS THERE**, HE SENDS AN ANGEL TO THE WISE MEN TO WARN THEM OF HEROD'S NOT SO GOOD INTENTIONS. AS GOD'S PLAN IS CARRIED OUT, THE WISE MEN GUIDED BY THE STAR, GOD'S SIGN TO THEM AND OTHERS, THE WISE MEN SEE THE CHRIST CHILD AND "REJOICED EXCEEDINGLY WITH GREAT JOY"!!

**WHEN WE ARE WALKING IN GOD'S PLAN FOR US THERE WILL BE JOY.** AS IT SAYS IN ISAIAH 28:29 "*ALL THIS ALSO COMES FROM THE LORD WHOSE **PLAN IS WONDERFUL AND WHOSE WISDOM IS MAGNIFICENT***". I WOULD SAY THE WISE MEN EXPERIENCED THE "*JOY OF THE LORD*"!! WE CAN TOO, LET THERE BE NO DOUBT OF IT!! AMEN.

NOW WE HAVE JUST SEEN HOW ANOTHER, KING HEROD, CAN IN A NEGATIVE WAY BE A PART OF A PLAN. HOWEVER, MANY MORE TIMES OTHERS PLAY A POSITIVE PART IN OUR PLANS WHEN WE ARE WALKING WITH GOD. GOD CONTINUES TO USE US ALL IN ONE WAY OR ANOTHER FOR EACH OTHER. IN I THESSALONIANS 6:33 "*ENCOURAGE ONE ANOTHER AND BUILD ONE ANOTHER UP, JUST AS YOU ARE DOING*" OR IN PROVERBS 15:22 "*PLANS GO WRONG FOR LACK OF ADVICE; MANY ADVISERS BRING SUCCESS*". THESE VERSES SUPPORT THE IDEA THAT OTHERS DO PLAY A PART IN THE SUCCESS OF OUR PLANS.

OUR CULTURE SWINGS FROM THE "I DON'T NEED ANY ONE" PHILOSOPHY TO THE CURRENT PHILOSOPHY NOW WHERE "IT TAKES A VILLAGE" AND LIKELY WILL SWING BACK OR HAVE A TOTALLY NEW PHILOSOPHY ALL TOGETHER. FOR PEOPLE OF GOD IT REMAINS CONSTANT – WE NEED EACH OTHER AND TO BE UNDER THE AUTHORITY AND GRACE OF GOD! JESUS HIMSELF HAD THE DISCIPLES TO PARTNER IN MINISTRY WITH HIM, SO WE CAN NOT BUY INTO THE NOTION THAT WE CAN DO IT ALL OUR SELVES!!! GOD HAS PROVIDED FOR US IN A VARIETY OF WAYS PEOPLE WHO HAVE AND WILL CONTINUE TO HELP US IN WALKING IN GOD'S PLAN FOR US. WHETHER IT BE A SPOUSE, A PARENT OR FRIEND. I BELIEVE WE CAN ALL RECALL THE WISDOM, ADVICE OR DIRECTION THAT HAS

COME FROM THE PEOPLE IN OUR LIFE, ENCOURAGING US TO GO FORWARD DESPITE WHAT LOOKED AT THE TIME INSURMOUNTABLE OBSTACLES. REMEMBER, YOUNG OR OLD, ADVICE, EVEN BAD ADVICE CAN BE TURNED INTO A BENEFICIAL LESSON. IN THIS CULTURE IT APPEARS WE SHUN THE ADVICE OF THE AGED AND THEIR EXPERIENCE.

WHETHER IN GOD'S PLAN FOR YOU OR NOT, YOU WILL MAKE MISTAKES, AND HOW WE GO FROM THERE, WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED, IS THE FIRST STEP OF GAINING WISDOM, AND **NO MATTER OUR AGE WE ARE NEVER, EVER TOO OLD TO LEARN! OR BE USED IN GOD'S PLANS.** PROVERBS 24:16 *"FOR THOUGH THE RIGHTEOUS FALL SEVEN TIMES, THEY RISE AGAIN"* OR ECC 4:9-10 *'TWO PEOPLE ARE BETTER OFF THAN ONE, FOR THEY CAN HELP EACH OTHER SUCCEED, IF ONE PERSON FALLS, THE OTHER CAN REACH OUT AND HELP'*. THE PLAN IS FOR US TO **NOT** GO IT ALONE, BUT TO HAVE THOSE IN OUR WALK THAT CAN HELP THE PLAN SUCCEED!!!

THERE ARE TIMES WHEN THE VOICE OF GOD SEEMS DISTANT, AND WE ARE CONFUSED OVER EXACTLY WHAT DIRECTION TO TAKE. I AM HERE TO SAY GOD IS A GOD OF ORDER AND HE IS NOT ONLY THERE, HE IS WITHIN US BY THE PRESENCE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT! WHEN WE TURN TO OUR TRAINING MANUEL – THE BIBLE – WE WILL FIND COMFORT AND GUIDANCE. THERE IS HEALING IN THE WORD OF GOD, AND THAT IS WHY IT IS CALLED THE *LIVING WORD*. LISTEN TO PROVERBS 4:20-22 MY SON, PAY ATTENTION TO WHAT I SAY; *"TURN YOUR EAR TO MY WORDS. DO NOT LET THEM OUT OF YOUR SIGHT; KEEP THEM WITHIN YOUR HEART; FOR THEY ARE LIFE TO THOSE WHO FIND THEM AND HEALTH TO ONE'S WHOLE BODY"*. IT IS CLEAR WHERE WE SHOULD TURN AND THE BENEFITS THAT ARE PROMISED. THEN WE CAN AFTER A FALL, AN ERROR GET UP AND MOVE FORWARD.

TO KNOW AND DO GOD'S PLAN FOR US

1. FIRST SEEK GOD, MAKE YOUR PLANS, SUBMIT THEM TO THE LORD WITH A PRAYER *"YOUR WILL BE DONE"* TAKE THE NEXT STEP THAT IS IN FRONT YOU. THEN TRUST GOD TO TAKE CARE OF EVERYTHING ELSE.

THERE WERE TWO OLD GUYS LIVING IN THE BACKWOODS OF THE OZARKS: RUFUS AND CLARENCE. THEY LIVED ON OPPOSITE SIDES OF THE RIVER AND THEY HATED EACH OTHER. EVERY MORNING, JUST AFTER SUNUP, RUFUS AND CLARENCE WOULD GO DOWN TO THEIR RESPECTIVE SIDES OF THE RIVER AND YELL AT EACH OTHER. EVERY MORNING. EVERY DAY. FOR 20 YEARS.

ONE DAY ENGINEERS CAME ALONG AND BUILT A BRIDGE. BUT THE INSULTS WENT ON EVERY MORNING. FINALLY, MR. RUFUS' WIFE HAD HAD ENOUGH. "RUFUS!" SHE SAID ONE DAY, "I CAN'T TAKE NO MORE! EVERY DAY FOR 25 YEARS YOU'VE BEEN THREATENIN' TO WHUP CLARENCE. WELL, THAR'S THE BRIDGE! HAVE AT IT!" RUFUS THOUGHT FOR A MOMENT. HE DECLARED, SNAPPING HIS SUSPENDERS INTO PLACE. "I'M GONNA WHUP CLARENCE!" HE WALKED OUT THE DOOR, DOWN TO THE RIVER, ALONG THE RIVER BANK, CAME TO THE BRIDGE, STEPPED UP ONTO THE BRIDGE, WALKED ABOUT HALFWAY OVER THE BRIDGE, THEN TURNED TAIL AND RAN SCREAMING BACK TO THE HOUSE, SLAMMED THE DOOR, BOLTED THE WINDOWS, AND DOVE UNDER THE BED. "RUFUS!" CRIED THE

MISSUS. "I THOUGHT YOU WAS GONNA WHUP CLARENCE!" "I WAS, I WAS!" HE WHISPERED. "WHAT IS THE MATTER?" "WELL," WHISPERED THE TERROR-STRICKEN RUFUS, "I WALKED HALFWAY OVER THE BRIDGE AND SAW A SIGN THAT SAID, 'CLEARANCE, 13 FEET, 6 INCHES.' HE AIN'T NEVER LOOKED THAT BIG FROM THE OTHER SIDE OF THE RIVER!"

THAT'S WHAT HAPPENS SOMETIMES TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD. WE LOOK AT THINGS FROM A DISTANCE AND MAKE PLANS BUT WHEN WE GET CLOSER TO DOING WHAT GOD WANTS US TO DO WE THINK THAT THE TASK IS TOO MONUMENTAL AND WE RESORT BACK TO THE SAFETY OF WHAT WE HAVE ALWAYS DONE. WE STAY RIGHT IN OUR COMFORT ZONE.

GOD HAS A PLAN FOR EACH AND EVERY ONE OF US, AND AS A DISCIPLE IT IS OUR TASK TO FIND THAT PLAN FOR THEN WE WILL FIND PEACE THAT PASSES ALL UNDERSTANDING AND HAVE JOY WITHIN.

AMEN