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PO Box 571 - Priest River, ID 83856 * www.gentleshepherd.com * December 2012

SPIRITUAL SURVIVAL

Part 17

A Time Such As This

By Rayola Kelley

The 2012 election is over. For some, it marks a great time of uncertainty. The path we have been on as a nation, for at least the past decade, marks what implies financial ruin on the horizon. If we continue on the way we have been, we will end up being like the Titanic, hitting the iceberg of financial insanity and sinking in the waters of utter destruction. We will indeed become a third world country which will fade in with the rest of the world and cease to have any sovereignty. Fox News', Brit Hume put it best when he said we are becoming more like Europe.

This type of scenario is not unusual. Israel wanted to be like the pagan nations around her by having a king (*1 Samuel 8:4-22*). The people of Jehovah God did not like the burden of standing distinct as the light in great darkness. In the present situation, some would tell Americans that the digression of America is what the world planners have had in mind all along and have been working towards in the most corrupt ways. America must lose her sovereignty in order to come into line with the one-world government, economic, and religious system.

The attempt to bring the world under a central world government to be ruled by the god of this world, Satan, clearly manifested itself in *Genesis 11* when man built the tower of Babel. He believed that nothing could stop him from gaining supremacy. However, God threw a wrench in his plans by confusing the language of the people. Since then, there have been many attempts to

take over the world by one man. For example, in the twentieth century there was the likes of Adolf Hitler.

Whether we want to face the facts or not, we are in the last generation. The world is winding down to a climatic event that will usher in the rule and reign of the King of kings. However, the initial picture looks precarious.

I am sure it is the desire for most Americans to see this precarious time as being stayed or put off for a bit longer. This attitude is understandable and explains why many prayed and hoped that this election would change the course of this country. I am sure some of those same people are wondering why God allowed America to continue down the course of imminent destruction. They may be shaking their heads and asking themselves *why can't others see what looms in front of this nation?* However, the iceberg does not just point to the financial aspect of this country, it also consists of many other elements such as moral issues.

When moral issues are part of the equation, the first thing people must remember is that without sharpness of morality, or integrity of character and the truth and principles it maintains, people become blinded to the obvious danger in front of them. They cannot see in the distance due to the short-sighted twisted glasses of selfishness, indifference, and fantasy. They have no way of understanding the reality that looms before them for they live in the moment and not in light of the principles and consequences that govern the actual outcome of decisions and actions.

This moral blindness is nothing new. It was present during Jesus' day. He said of many who followed Him that they did so because He gave them bread to eat (*John 6:26-27*). It is easy to cheaply sell the soul to gain something that has no lasting value (*Matthew 16:25-27*). The question is what percentage of the people in this

country voted the way they did because of the promises of free bread, cell phones, and being financially equal with everyone else? However, this does not mean promotion for them; rather, it points to demotion of the middle class who are willing to work and sacrifice to obtain what they possess. This demotion is referred to as Social Justice, but it is nothing more than Communism. In Communism, you have two groups, the few who are very rich tyrants and despots, and the masses that have become slaves, and who are very poor and completely oppressed by fear and hopelessness.

Richard Wurmbrand, a martyr of Communism and founder of the Christian organization, The Voice of the Martyrs, put the satanic idea of Social Justice in this way, "In Communist countries, farming has been collectivized. No man possesses a hundred sheep anymore. Who cares if one is lost? It is state property. Fathers don't have inheritances to impart to profligate sons. When they get into trouble, there is no one who possesses swine who might hire them. They must be state employees, and they would not be free to leave their job to return to the father. Kings cannot arrange marriage feasts for their sons anymore; they have been dethroned. Beggars can no longer hope for alms at the door of rich men. The capitalists have been expropriated, deported to some slave labor camps. They would be willing to beg for a piece of bread themselves, but for a situation epitomized in a little joke: What is the difference between a pessimist and an optimist? The optimist says, 'With this regime, we will all become beggars,' to which the pessimist replies, 'But from whom will we beg?'"

Let me state, it is not my intent to depress anyone, but we must be realistic about what is happening so we can prepare ourselves. The truth is that this time was clearly prophesied in Scripture (*Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 21*). The events we see playing out on the world scene must come to fruition in order to



bring about the culmination of all that God has promised His people. We have been warned that this culmination would be a prelude to a great tribulation that would be introduced by birth pains. The idea of tribulation should not surprise us. Jesus said we would have tribulation in *John 16:33*. We also have the profound words of *Acts 14:22*, "Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." (Emphasis added)

As I pondered this election, I asked myself, why did I want a certain candidate to win? Jeannette and I stated if our preferred candidate won, it meant that we were given the opportunity to work longer in the harvest field. But, is this true? I had to admit that I wanted my candidate to win so that I could keep up the status quo. In other words, I could sit comfortably in my present lifestyle and continue on as always. Such comfort zones often point to that which has become mediocre.

As I considered my attitude, I realized that it was wrong. Granted, Jeannette and I are about to mark 23 years of full-time ministry together. We have availed ourselves faithfully to share the Gospel and disciple believers. However, we have benefitted from the prosperous American lifestyle in that we have always had our basic needs met in spite of different times when even that looked dubious. However, now we must face the harsh reality that nothing is secure in our nation.

Even spiritually, we can see rumblings because of the outcome of this election. Through the years, we have met those who were hardened towards the Gospel, while often meeting with the indifference of others who were content with where they were in their religious lives. We wondered what it would take for God to crack through the hardness of hearts, and cause others to wake out of a complacent state. However, we know the answer. The Lord will do what the Bible declares. He will shake people's foundations (*Hebrews 12:26-29*).

Due to the election results, there are those who are in a state of

confusion and fear. Their confidence and hope was in the "right" candidate winning. They cannot understand how this could happen. Foundations are clearly being shaken. These individuals are beginning to realize that nothing will be the same again. Out of this confusion and fear have come many questions that we have received via our e-mail. Questions mean people are open to hear the answers that make sense. The truth is, as Christians, we possess the answers, but are we ready and prepared to boldly answer these people's questions with Scriptural, loving precision?

As I consider this incredible opportunity for ministry that is being presented to the living Church of Jesus, I cannot help but think of another time. Man's struggles and failures have not changed. As Solomon stated in *Ecclesiastes 1:9*, there is nothing new that happens under the sun. Regardless of cosmetic changes that come with the different cultures, unregenerate man remains the same in his heart, thinking, and doing.

The time I speak of was appointed for the specific purpose of fulfilling what had been spoken by the Lord (*Matthew 1:22*). Likewise, we have to remember that the time we live in has also been declared by the Lord in Scripture. Such matters will come to pass so that God can fulfill His purpose and plan.

The second thing we must remember about an appointed time is that the environment must be correct for God to bring forth a matter to completion. In the first incident, all the different factions, such as the religious and political parties, were primed to come together in an unholy agreement to preserve their different kingdoms. As a result, there was much corruption going on behind closed doors.

Today, there are many factions coming together with a common focus. As a result, much is being corrupted. According to different reports, it appears as if the latest election in America was predetermined and rigged. Due to the corruption at the highest political level of America, this would not surprise me. If this is true, we can get even more clarity as to the type of environment that is being nurtured in the darkness of corruption and evil that would have to be present in the last

generation in order to usher in the ultimate event promised by heaven. Keep in mind, that eventually both the wheat and the tares will come forth together at the same time to be separated by the righteous Judge (*Matthew 13:47-50*). The wheat (believers) will have fruit unto everlasting life to be brought into the storehouse of God, but the tares (unbelievers) will have come to full season as well, for they will be in full bloom. However, the tares at this point will be ready to be cut down in judgment and cast into the fire.

In the first incident, man-made religion was full of legalism and traditions, but in the present situation such religion is marked by apostasy. In the first incident, one known as the Voice crying in the wilderness was sent to warn and prepare the people for the fulfillment of God. In the present situation we have His Word and those who are truly watchmen warning people about the days we live in, and exhorting them to spiritually prepare for God to once again bring all matters to a climatic fulfillment.

The event that was ushered in, in the past and that will be brought forth, is the same. What was the event that ushered in the fulfillment of God? The coming of Jesus! In the first event Jesus came as a baby, born to a virgin who laid Him in a manger, and who grew as the Man who was brought forth as the Lamb of God to be sacrificed. However, in the second event, Jesus will come as King of kings, Lord of lords, and all consuming Judge.

In the first advent He came as the light that penetrated the darkness, and in the second He will come as the light that will consume the darkness with His holiness. In the first advent, He came to save, and in the second He will come to judge and set all matters right. In the first advent He came to call people to Himself and in the second He will separate people unto His wrath.

As Christians, what must we keep in mind? Jeannette best summarized it the day after the election. She stated three things: 1) The election is over with, along with all of its polls, speculation, and commentaries, 2) it is time to take off the sackcloth of mourning and put on the full armour of God in order to stand in the great darkness enveloping this world with the light of His Gospel,

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THE GREATEST PROPHET

Part 2

By Jeannette Haley

Oh to be great! How many of us have, at least at one point in our lives, thought about what it would mean to be “great?” In our human way of thinking, being “great” brings to mind fame, fortune, and power. Just thinking about being in such a position can stir up a deep desire to find the shortest path to greatness so that one can, theoretically, be in control of his or her life. After all, being in control would mean having the ability to direct one’s life in any way one could wish, avoiding all the problems that face the less fortunate in our world. It is easy to naively assume that being “great” is the ticket to “easy street.”

Many years ago, when a large part of my life consisted of either painting, teaching painting, or traveling to art shows, I



remember thinking one day, *I want to be the greatest artist in the world.* However, it didn’t take long for me to realize, after chasing the proverbial carrot dangling in front of the donkey’s nose, that this was a self-destructive goal. After participating in various art shows, being accepted into some established art galleries, and painting my way up to a competitive par with “winning” professionals, I was confronted with a choice. The choice was verbally expressed to me by a well-known, extremely successful artist at a special two-man art showing for myself and another artist at a gallery in western Washington. The individual presenting me with the choice was surprisingly blunt and uninhibited (probably due to his frequent trips to the spiked punch bowl) as he laid out the “path to greatness.” It couldn’t have been any clearer if the devil himself had presented me with the lurid temptation. There it was—the opportunity to achieve greatness, all laid out in plain English. I knew this individual had the means to open all the right doors to propel me forward in my art career, but what he didn’t know is my soul is not for sale!

After giving him my flat refusal to accept his “offer,” my art career rap-

idly began to slide off center stage into the murky shadows of “nobody land.” But, that is not the end of the story, as many of you know. God was leading me to another work, a work that would bring honor and glory to Him. All the experience garnered from years of painting brought me to the time and place where I was privileged to paint the life of Christ for the Chapel of the Resurrection in Bothell, Washington. It was at that time I poured my life out in ways that broke my health, weakened my immune system, and brought me to a point where I struggled for months, fighting for my life. Spasmodic Dysphonia developed, leaving me literally “speechless,” and no longer able to teach. Rayola’s health pretty much crashed at the same time, leaving us in a deep financial pit.

Any thought of being the “world’s greatest artist” had completely vanished many years prior. But, now I couldn’t even teach, and that was a main source of income. Then, through the many years of physical suffering and financial stress the Lord began to do His work in my heart and life concerning the idea of greatness. Jesus made it clear when He told His disciples, after kneeling before them and washing their feet, *“Know ye what I have done to you? Ye call me Master and Lord: and ye say well; for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; ye also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that ye should do as I have done to you. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The servant is not greater than his lord; neither he that is sent greater than he that sent him. If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them”* John 13:12b-17. In *Matthew 20:26b, 27* Jesus taught, *“...whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister [servant]; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant.”* [Addition mine.]

Nevertheless, it is only natural for us fallen human beings to associate greatness in God’s kingdom with power, miracles and even great wealth. (Amazingly, when we were at our lowest ebb, we witnessed more of God’s power and miracles of deliverances in people’s lives than at any other time.) Pastors of mega churches, men and women who are “stars” in the world of Christian television, conferences, and

book sales in the hundreds of thousands, and those who claim to have healed the masses, built huge edifices to honor themselves and so forth are looked up to by multitudes of people who are easily deluded and swayed by their so-called “greatness.” Their “success in ministry” is viewed as evidence of God’s special “anointing” on them, and many secretly believe these famous individuals are somehow elite, special and God’s “favorite” people. However, this is simply not true. The Bible tells us, *“Then there arose a reasoning among them, which of them should be greatest. And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a child, and set him by him. And said unto them, Whosoever shall receive this child in my name receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me received him that sent me: for he that is least among you all, the same shall be great”* Luke 9:46-48. [Emphasis added.]

Thus, when we read Jesus’ words concerning John the Baptist, *“For I say unto you, Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist: but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he”* Luke 7:28, then we can begin to get a glimpse into what Jesus was saying concerning greatness in His kingdom. After all, when we think of “great” prophets, our thoughts naturally turn to the Old Testament prophets through whom God breathed His Word, and through whom He worked great miracles. Therefore, we must conclude that Jesus was not speaking of greatness in light of such things, but rather in light of John’s unique and special ministry that was foreordained of God.

Jesus declared that John the Baptist was *“much more than a prophet”* Luke 7:26. When John’s mother, Elizabeth, was pregnant with him, he leapt in her womb when she was visited by Mary and heard her salutation. The Bible tells us that she was filled with the Holy Ghost and prophesied. (See *Luke 1:39-45*.) Likewise, after the birth of John, his father Zacharias was filled with the Holy Ghost, and he prophesied, *“And thou, child, shalt be called the prophet of the Highest; for thou shalt go before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways; To give knowledge of salvation*

unto his people by the remission of their sins, Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the dayspring from on high hath visited us, To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace" Luke 1:76-79.

We see in this beautiful prophecy concerning John that he would be called "the prophet of the Highest" because he would go "before the face of the Lord to prepare his ways, and to give knowledge of salvation to his people by the remission of their sins." Indeed, John was the fulfillment of *Isaiah 40:3* which states, "the voice of him that crieth in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the LORD, make straight in the desert a highway for our God." What greater commission could any prophet of God, or believer such as you and I have than going before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways, and to give knowledge of salvation by the remission of their sins? What greater ministry is there than being in the perfect will of God, filled with His Spirit, preparing people to believe and receive the Lord Jesus Christ, and to understand His salvation and forgiveness of sins through His death, burial, and resurrection? And, what did John do for those who repented of their sins? He baptized them to prepare them to receive the Gospel that is the power of God unto salvation for the saving of their souls.

Therefore, what is the greatest ministry? Is it not to obey Jesus who, in light of these words, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth," gave us what is known as the great commission, "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" *Matthew 28:18b-20*. Down through the ages countless men and women have denied themselves, picked up their cross and followed Jesus through obedience, and martyrdom. These are those of whom Jesus declared, "but he that is least in the kingdom of God is greater than he [John the Baptist]" *Luke 7:28b*. [Addition mine.]

John was of the priestly line, and could have taken his place serving in the temple. Instead, he lived an ob-

scure life in the wilderness, dressed in camel's hair, and a leather girdle, rather than be attired in fine priestly garments. He chose to eat locusts and wild honey rather than dine on the choice meat of the priest's portion of temple sacrifices. Indeed, John's "meat" was to be sold out for God, body, soul and spirit, and the purpose for which he was born. Such a man would be repulsed by the worldly, entertainment filled churches of today that clamor for "greatness," worldly esteem, riches, and power, doing it all in the name of the Lord, but meanwhile denying His Word concerning His character, His deity, man's fallen disposition of sin, and the eternal consequences of judgment and hell. In spite of Roman rule, and the ecclesiastical power of the Pharisees, John never entertained for one second the demonic delusions and lies of such nonsense as modern man's slavish devotion to "political correctness." His calling, mission, and focus were clear, his commitment to God's will unshakeable, his denial of worldly comfort and leisure indisputable, and his obedience to God unwavering and beyond reproach. In spite of what overrated critics declare, John the Baptist was exactly what Jesus said he was—God's messenger and the greatest prophet.

John's work was to prepare the people to receive the Lord of heaven and earth. In order to prepare the way, his message was clear, "Repent ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand" *Matthew 3:2*. Indeed the kingdom of heaven was at hand, in the Person and work of Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son. This is the message the true Church of God must proclaim to the world, for is not the literal, visible kingdom of God close at hand? Who can doubt that the Lord Jesus Christ is coming soon to establish His kingdom on the earth and put all His enemies under His feet? Yet, how many pew warmers in our day and age would knock each other down trying to get out the door of their church if they heard that some "great prophet" over yonder was performing miracles and signs and wonders? We must remember that Satan is the "god of this world" and that he can and does work "signs, and lying wonders" in order to deceive.

As Hollywood so well knows, the idea of greatness and power can be extremely alluring; however, the real and lasting power is contained in the Gospel. *Romans 1:16* still stands, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ: for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek." Jesus said, "A wicked and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given unto it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas" *Matthew 16:4a*. John the Baptist's greatness was not based on miracles, signs and wonders, but on the simple, yet profound fact that he was, as was Elijah, God's messenger and forerunner, preparing the people for the ways of the Lord, and giving knowledge of salvation to God's people by the remission of their sins.

Thus we can conclude that it is not signs, wonders and miracles that establish a prophet as "great," but rather the God-given message that comes forth. And, what greater message is there than the proclamation of Jesus Christ, the Word made flesh? What greater message can be given to the whole world than this: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not" *John 1:1-5*?

John the Baptist was great because it was given to him to introduce to the world Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Son of God, God incarnate, and the Savior and Lord. He publicly declared, and prophesied, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. This is he of whom I said, After me cometh a man which is preferred before me: for he was before me. And I knew him not: but that he should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water" *John 1:29b-31*. John was also a witness, and bare this record, "I saw the Spirit descending from heaven like a dove, and it abode upon him. And I knew him not: but he that sent me, to baptize with water, the same said unto me, Upon whom thou shalt see

and 3) it is time to seek the Lord, to know our God, be strong and do exploits as Daniel prophesied.

For two thousand years God has been establishing a witness in and through His people. Time may be short, but the Gospel message still has the power of God unto salvation (*Romans 1:16*). The message of the cross can still draw hopeless people to once again discover hope. The lost still need to be found, the wounded need to experience healing, and the captives need to receive blessed liberty.

As I consider the time we live in, I realize that each of us has been, or will quickly be, prepared for a time such as this. However, we must recognize that we must be part of the preparation. Here are a couple of things we must examine to ensure spiritual preparation.

Born Again: Each of us needs to make sure we have the witness of the Holy Spirit dwelling in us (*John 3:3, 5*). There are those who are associated with Christianity through relationships, affiliations, and works. However, the Bible is clear that a person must repent and be born again with the new life of Jesus. The new life is marked by the seal and presence of the Holy Ghost.

Purify: Christ is coming for a church that is without spot or wrinkle (*Ephesians 5:26*). Fire is often associated with purification. There are three fires that can bring such purification: 1) The Word is considered a fire, but a person must believe what it says and act accordingly to ensure its work (*Jeremiah 23:29*). 2) The Holy Spirit is a fire that sets apart and empowers a person to walk a victorious life (*Matthew 3:11*). 3) Persecution is a fire and those who live godly lives will encounter this fire in some way (*1 Timothy 3:12*). The key to purification is that we must allow the Lord to have His way.

Treasures: We must examine what is important to us. It is easy to put too much emphasis on the matters of the world, while losing sight of our eternal purpose and inheritance.

Attitude: We must become sober and serious about getting our spiritual houses in order. The casualness that has largely been a trademark of "American" Christianity is dangerous.

In many ways it has demoted who God is, while making Christianity a matter of worldly happiness or useless vanity.

Watch and Pray: We must be watchful over our own souls by being firmly hidden in the ark of Jesus, as well as aware of what is going on around us with the intent of preparation. And, as *Luke 21:36* declares, we must pray about being found worthy to escape the things that will come upon the world.

Occupy: We must learn how to be faithful in our life before God whether times are good or bad. We must be faithful with our commission and our high calling. Regardless of the time we find ourselves in, today is the day of salvation for those who are called to be heirs of salvation, but who are still in the throes of sin and death (*2 Corinthians 6:2*). As *Romans 10:14* states, how can they hear unless there is a preacher to deliver the message?

Seek the Lord: We must seek the Lord while we can. The night is coming, and we do not know how much longer we can work in the harvest fields of the world. We must become opportunists. This means we must avail ourselves to the work of God that He wants to do during this time, knowing that it will present itself as a great opportunity to fulfill our commission.

In closing, I do want to wish you and yours a very Merry Christmas. However, I pray this Christmas is marked with the knowledge and hope that we are truly citizens of another world. We are simply passing through, while noting and marking certain times as a means to remember who we are to serve and represent in this world. †

ISAIAH 9:6, 7

For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulder: and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, The mighty God, The everlasting Father, The Prince of Peace. Of The increase of his government and peace there shall be no end, upon the throne of David, and upon his kingdom, to order it, and to establish it with judgment and with justice from henceforth even for ever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this.

the Spirit descending, and remaining on him, the same is he which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost. And I saw, and bare record that this is the Son of God" John 1:32-34.

As we continue reading in *John 1* verses 35-36 we read, "Again the next day after John stood, and two of his disciples; And looking upon Jesus as he walked, he saith, Behold the Lamb of God!" When John's two disciples heard this from John, they left him and followed Jesus. Here is another reason why John the Baptist was great. He had no personal agenda to gather followers to himself. Neither did he have any desire to establish himself as a great spiritual leader to whom others would pay homage. The thought of having a "great" ministry that would place him in the "Who's Who" realm of the rich and famous never occurred to him. John knew who he was, he knew why he was born, he knew his calling, and most importantly, He knew His God. John did not think more highly of himself than he ought to think, and he certainly was not a man who could be bribed to compromise the truth.

May our thoughts and hearts be united in the love of God this special season as we turn towards the One who "being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." And with renewed hope and joy may we rejoice that the day is soon to dawn when "at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; And that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" *Philippians 2:10, 11.*

God help us to "prepare the way" for the Lord's soon coming! †

Next issue -The Greatest Prophet, Part 3 - Discovering, through John the Baptist's life and ministry, parallels (types) of the end-times Church.

RAYOLA'S Q & A CORNER

WHAT DAY WAS JESUS BORN?

Q: *You have probably been asked this question in the past...was Jesus born on Christmas day?*

A: The best answer I can give you is that I really do not know. I have read various presentations as to why some believe He was born on Christmas, while others maintain He was not.

For example, there are those who believe that Jesus was born in the fall, not the winter. However, the eastern way of looking at birthdays is different from the western way. In some of the eastern culture, a person's birthday is celebrated at the point of his or her conception, not at his or her birth. Some believe that if Jesus was born in the fall, it would put His miraculous conception



around the late part of December, which would make it legitimate to celebrate His birthday in that time period.

Those who believe Jesus was not born on Christmas day point to the fact that it has its origins in pagan celebration. In fact, the first person to leave gifts was a man by the name of Nicholas. He was a Christian who was wealthy, but believed the Bible about giving his riches away. He used his whole inheritance to assist the needy, the sick, and suffering. He later was made Bishop of Myra. Because of his great benevolence, he became known as Saint Nicholas.

The first Europeans to arrive in the New World brought St. Nicholas with them. However, the Puritans actually banned Christmas due to its questionable origins, and made it illegal to mention St. Nicolas' name. But, in the early 1800's Washington Irving reinvented Christmas by presenting what we now know as Santa Claus in different ways. In 1870 it became a national holiday.

The idea of Saint Nicholas went through various metaphoric presenta-

tions in America, but was ultimately repackaged as Santa Claus. As stated, Washington Irving is the one who gave Santa Claus much of his present identity.

Today in America, the inflated commercialism surrounding this holiday has made it pagan in many ways. However, the question is, as Christians can we celebrate an event that was clearly recorded in Scriptures?

To me, the date of Jesus' birth remains a matter of speculation. However, if we as believers decide to recognize that He came into this world on December 25th, and use it as a witnessing tool, we need to maintain the integrity of it by making it a matter of heart adoration.

In order to make it about the matter of the heart, Christians need to put aside the commercial glitter and examine whether we celebrate a day, the idea of the event, sentimental feelings, or the actual Person of Jesus. It is true that Jesus is God's greatest gift to mankind and that everything around His conception and birth was miraculous. However, that gift of God was wrapped in love, nurtured in obscurity, and brought forth as the Lamb of God who would die on a cross to redeem us.

Redemption, life, reconciliation, and hope are the real messages of Christmas. Personally, I see this holiday as an opportunity to lift up the only true message of peace and good will towards mankind. As a result, regardless of whether the date of Jesus' birth is correct or not, Christmas is a glorious way to proclaim the unchanging message of heaven and sing about the incredible blessings that have been poured out through God's greatest gift, a gift that has been freely offered to all the peoples of the world. †

LUKE 2:786, 79 ~ JOHN 1:4, 5, 9

"...the dayspring from on high hath visited us, To give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

"In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world."

QUOTED FROM OSWALD CHAMBERS

Now therefore, I pray thee, pardon my sin, and turn again with me, that I may worship the Lord (1 Sam. 15:25).

No other class of people will drive the Christian closer to God than the stupid. They will tax every bit of patience and endurance you have. These dear people always pretend to want to do something for God. Yet they are "ever learning and never able to come to a knowledge of the truth." Why? Because they do not wish to obey the Word of God they have heard!

Pretending to do right is another characteristic of a stupid soul. Samuel asked Saul if he had fulfilled the word of God with regard to the Amalekites, and Saul said he had. "Then what is the meaning of the bleating of the sheep in mine ears?" (v. 14). Saul said, "I obeyed, but . . . The people flew on the spoil and I left them." That was the beginning of his stupidity, which would lead him to consult spiritualistic mediums and openly defy the Word of God.

Do you know someone who is feverishly studying the Word of God to avoid doing what they already know of God's will? Or someone who is pretending to obey Him, when secretly they are going their own way? Plead with that person to turn back from his foolish ways.

WHAT PEOPLE ARE SAYING

"In my spirit and many others, this ('set our mind on things above not on things on the earth,') is so that we can reach out to this world that is perishing with the good news of the gospel while we still have time! - AK

"We have just witnessed the suicide of this nation. I mourn for and with my countrymen." - ID Veteran

"A very sad day for us all. Is this what has to happen - biblically speaking? I am so upset with this decision to re-elect Obama. We are headed for trouble." - GA

"In the stores. . . the Andrew Murray books are in the discount bin. People want the self help [junk]. The classics are becoming extinct. We need the lord to have mercy and pour out His Spirit once again." - WA