

Christmas Choices

The Christmas season has always been my favorite time of the year. I love the lights, the singing, the fellowship of family and friends, and the joy of the season. I love the way people come together to help others, even perfect strangers in a spirit of love and compassion. I love the excitement and the sense of expectation on the faces of children, the bonfires, hayrides, caroling and the candy canes. But, my favorite part of all is when I realize all over again that there is a God who loves me, and loves you so much that He would send His only Son into the world to be our Savior and to reveal to us God's will and His heart.

As I right this devotional today, I am reminded and saddened by the realization that most of the world does not celebrate the Christmas season because they do not know the God or the Jesus whose birth and life we celebrate. They do not know the joy of giving to others in celebration and remembrance of God giving His Son to and for us. For most of the world, Christmas is just another day facing life's challenges, hurts and disappointments without any hope for the future. I am thankful that there are many other Christians around the world who do know Jesus and who do joyfully celebrate His birth and share His love with others—even at the cost of severe isolation and persecution. I am also thankful that there are Christians in America who are willing to give generously and sacrificially to make Christ known so people can have peace in the midst of life's storms and the hope and promise of eternal life.

Have you ever stopped to think about how blessed you are to be born and to live in America where our heritage is based on Christian values, the truths of God's Word and faith in His Son Jesus Christ? We not only have the opportunity to know Jesus, but we have free access to the Word of God and we have seen His touch and blessings on our lives and our nation.

As I travel many places around the world sharing Christ and doing mission work, and as I get reports from other places where Cattle for Christ is funding the work, I often wonder why I and my family are so blessed to live in America where we have freedom and uninterrupted access to the Gospel and to the Word of God—while so many others do not. We have an abundance of food, medical care, and material blessings when most of the world lacks the very basics!

I think I found the answer to that question just a few months ago as I was reading in Acts 17:26-28: "From one man He made every nation of men, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and *He determined the times set for them and the exact places where they should live.* God did this *so that* men would seek Him and perhaps find Him, though He is not far from each one of us. For in Him we live and move and have our being."

This passage makes it clear that in God's sovereignty, He chose the exact times and places that we as individuals would live on earth in the timeline of history. It is by His grace that we are so blessed as a family and as a Nation. However; with that blessing comes responsibility not only to honor, obey and bless God, but to love and share Him and His Son Jesus with one another and with all the world.

This Christmas season, as I think about all the calamity, corruption and chaos going on in our nation and in our churches, I see how far we have wandered from God's Word and His will for our lives and for our country; how we have taken for granted God's blessings and His mercies as if He owed us something! I am reminded of God's words to the nation of Israel in the book of Deuteronomy as they were preparing to finally enter the Promised Land after wandering for forty years in the wilderness. In chapters 26-30 you will see the similarities between God's desire to

bless and honor Israel and God's desire to bless and honor America or any nation who will love and follow Him.

God makes it clear that they will prosper and that He will guide, protect, provide for, and honor them if they are obedient, but He makes it equally clear that curses and calamity will come to them if they forsake Him and go their own way. I am only 49 years old, but as I look back on my life living in this the greatest of countries, I see how we, like Israel, have strayed so far from God and are now beginning to see the consequences of doing so.

Deuteronomy 30:15-18a says: "See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For, I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed."

(vs.19-20a) "This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to His voice, and hold fast to Him."

Isn't it interesting that before the people ever entered the land, God told them that they had two choices: life and blessings - curses and death, and the choice was theirs. The choice is also ours as a Nation! However, He also told them that if they repented, He would forgive and restore them. If America repents, He will do the same for us. (2Chron 7:14)

At Christmas we celebrate God sending His son Jesus to be born a little baby whose very purpose was to die in our place, for our sins, to offer us eternal life. Through the birth, life, death and resurrection of Jesus, God gives every one of us the same choice as individuals. We can turn from our sin, follow, obey and trust Him to forgive us—thus choosing eternal life and blessings, or we can go our own way, live for ourselves, reject His salvation and choose death facing eternity in a place called hell. Just as with Israel, there are only two choices and each of us have to make it for ourselves.

He places before you life and blessings through the blood of Jesus; death and curses if you ignore or reject Jesus. I implore you to accept the greatest Christmas gift ever. Choose Jesus! Choose life! Tell others!