

## WHO IS MY BROTHER OR SISTER?

*So today, Lord, what is my point? What difference can I make in this world? Do people today really want to hear the truth?* Ever ask these questions, particularly about this time every year? I sure hope so; otherwise I'm in a company of one. Think about it: its almost rhetorical to ask if people do not want to hear the truth. Of course they don't, it moves them away from being the central purpose of their lives, makes them "ungods." Even most of us who confess Jesus as savior still treat Him as a one day a week problem rather than an everyday of the week solution. But particularly at this time of the year, when you see signs proclaiming "Jesus Is The Reason For The Season", people are really preoccupied with indulging everything but Jesus.

Oh gosh, am I preaching to the choir again? Sorry. The only ones who listen seem to always be the ones who've already heard. But catch the rest of it anyway. Even we who claim to be dedicated to seeking the Lord and His ways can be caught up in the reasoning and hype of worldly endeavors: *See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the elementary principals of the world, rather than according to Christ . . ."* (Col. 2:8)

Try this: sometime in the next couple of weeks find a nice spot for a cup of coffee or tea at one of the larger malls, where you can observe the crowd, then spend an hour noting the behavior of all those who come and go. Assume the position of a neutral observer and take notes. Of course this means that you will need to take time from your busy schedule. But that's the point, get out of the loop in order to see the futility of being in it. Take this time to get a little glimpse of what God sees when He looks down upon the sea of shopping, cooking, wrapping, and opening human creatures. Try to be open in your observations while also looking for latent signs of benevolence and love.

Very early in the Bible we see the first recorded act of brotherly love, after which God approached one of the brothers and inquired of him *"Where is Abel your brother?" And he said, "I do not know, am I my brother's keeper?"*(Gen. 4:9) Cain's enigmatic answer in the form of a question has been asked countless times since, either in discussion of a moral imperative or as an excuse for an ethical failure. In more common terms, individuals throughout history have often asked the question "am I my brother's keeper" as a cop out, an attempt to get off the hook of responsibility to help someone else. One particularly irritating contemporary response, "that's not my problem," stands alongside this as another way to wriggle out of responsibility. It may occasionally be appropriate, but more often is a rationale for the selfish appropriation of one's own time and resources, and the unwillingness to share them. Sort of a "get your own, I worked hard for what I have." Pay attention here, this is the time of year when the spoken emphasis is on acts of love and kindness but the behavioral emphasis is on acts of apathy and selfishness. The sentiment of the season is not about sharing or even risking for the sake of another. Most folks are not even willing to risk their comfort for the critical welfare of another.

This is kind of a take off on what I said last week. When you step out into the world around you, especially at this time of the year, and especially when you are just too busy to have time for this ("for goodness sakes Lord, can't this wait until I get these errands done?"), ask yourself who your brother or sister truly is, and what is it that God wants you to do for them? This is a big step and it will invoke responsibility to act on what you hear. The touchstone

scripture of my life is Matthew 25:31-46, in which Jesus concisely defines who His true followers are: ***Inasmuch as you have done these things to the least of these my brothers (and sisters) you have done it to Me (v.40, parenthetic mine)***. Regardless of all the holiness seeking, worship enjoying, prayer invoking, and faith walking we do, we are not Jesus' people unless we follow this command. Tough call, but this is what is required of us. And we can't get out of it by putting on the blinders. God will put these things right in front of us.

Many of you will recall a sermon illustration which Ed Noble used about a year ago, in which he felt compelled by God to reach out to a particularly disturbing individual who had been standing on a corner which Ed passed by daily, and had been begging contributions of sorts, looking worn, homeless, hungry, and a little crazy. Each day Ed drove by he felt that God was calling him to reach out and help. The thing which stands out about this story is not that Ed, or anyone else for that matter, felt compelled to give him money for food, but that he felt required to actually take him someplace and feed him. So he loaded him in his truck and got him fed. Anyone can toss out a buck or two, but are you willing to step out of your comfort zone and actually feed someone? At that moment, was that man Ed's brother, and if so did Ed actually reach out to Jesus by reaching out to him?

I know this; I miss opportunities every day to touch someone for the sake of the kingdom of God. I get caught up in my errands, agendas, and the all-important goals of my own life. Every person I fail to give aid to is someone who may go missing from the kingdom, and perhaps the person whom I may hear from some day in the form of Jesus, wanting to know why I did not respond to a "least brother." We in the Kingdom say that this is the season that annually recognizes the coming of the Anointed One, the lover of all souls and the Savior of the world. If we truly believe in the joyousness of this faith of ours then, by all means, share it with as many as possible. And don't just share a good smile and a few kind words, reach out to those in need as if they were Jesus. Step out of your comfort zone and into the grace zone. Before you give up on this day and set your sights on tomorrow, read Matthew 25:31-46 and see if you see what I saw when I first read it.

Be joyous and blessed. Until next time. BillZ