

## Was That Saint Nicholas or Father Time?

*“And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams”* (Acts 2:17). This verse is a fascinating prophecy from the book of Joel. As we approach the winding up of time and Christ’s return there will be an outpouring of God’s Spirit among the rising apostasy. The Bible says, *“Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound”* (Romans 5:20). No matter how dark the day or abounding of sin, we see grace always trumps and superabounds over the effect of sin.

I am about to tell you a dream I had in the wee hours of Friday morning. But before I do, let me tell you of a series of events and thoughts that may have led up to this unusual, yet meaningful dream. Yesterday, Dr. Don Chelette, the man who was pastoring the church in which I surrendered to preach thirty-seven years ago passed away. One by one, the great old saints that influenced me the most to follow Christ are passing into glory. A precious Christmas memory that captures the true meaning of Christmas is the traditional *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens. At the close of the tale, the old, smiling face of Ebenezer Scrooge depicts the transformation of someone caught in the grasp of the wonder of Christmas. Then I also think of Santa Claus (often called Father Christmas) and at New Year’s, Old Father Time. I often see a kind, yet older face at Christmas. In the final picture of our Lord in the Revelation we see, *“His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow...”* (Revelation 1:14). The prophet Daniel saw our Lord thusly, *“I beheld till the thrones were cast down, and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool...”* (Daniel 7:9). I am convinced one reason Mary did not recognize Jesus after His resurrection was because He took on the appearance of “The Ancient of Days.”

This is the busiest Christmas season I can remember. In this hurried time, I feel as though I had a message come through to help me calibrate the Christmas spirit. In the dream, I had some nice new tires put on a very nice vehicle. I drove the car home proudly showed the new tires to my family, went to bed only to wake up and discover one was as flat as a pancake. I aired it up and got it to the tire store and they repaired it. As I prepared to drive off, I noticed two other tires were now down. I went back into the office; the attendant came out, scratched his head and said, “If you just wait a little while longer, we’ll have them both fixed.” As I went back into the waiting room, a crowd was gathering with people looking more bothered than I. Here we sit, Christmas songs coming over the intercom, potential shoppers exasperated because they are not shopping and I am sitting in the waiting room going over my “things to do list” in my planner, bothered that they are not getting done. My name is announced over the sound system. The man gives me my keys with a smile and said, “She’s ready, Mr. Pope.” I go out to my car and now all four tires are flat. I call the attendant over and he apologizes and in his confused state, assures me they will all be good as new in just a little while. I walk back into the stuffed and overcrowded waiting room, filling up with more frustrated Christmas shoppers. In the dream everybody was being called and told their cars were ready, everybody that is, except me. The night was coming on, the daylight was vanishing and so were my hopes of getting everything done. I was angry with the establishment, wondering what was taking them so long. I was angry with myself for not having everything done earlier. I was angry at this turn of events that marooned me in the waiting area of a car repair shop. This was not conducive to my Christmas spirit. So I thought.

Everyone had been waited on and the only one left in the waiting area besides me was an old man. In my mind I see him clearly. I look anxiously up from the book I am reading and see him smiling at me, nodding affirmatively, without an apparent care in the world. After awhile, sensing my frustration, the old gentleman slowly and calmly walks over to me, sits down beside me and says, “What’s the matter, Johnny?” (Hey it’s a dream; you don’t have to know how the people know your name.) I said to the old man, “I have been waiting for hours and they can’t seem to get my tires fixed and every time they are

supposed to be fixed, they are worse. And I've got so many things to do." The old man interrupted and said, "May I pray?" I sighed deeply and answered, "Please do, pray that this tire issue will be resolved and I can get out of here." And this extremely kind gentleman began to pray. "Lord, Johnny wanted me to pray that this repair will take place soon and he can get out of here. But today I am not going to pray his prayer. I am going to pray for him, Lord. Calm his worried spirit and quiet him. Let him see that You are up to far more than he can realize at this time. Lord, Johnny needs to calm down. He needs to listen to the words of the carols, he needs to breathe in the season and remember the Christmas message. He needs to just be still and talk to You, Lord. He has been too busy. So, thank You for flattening his tires and making it impossible for him to go another mile without the awareness of your presence." As the old gentleman kept praying, the dark had fallen and I could feel the warmth of his hand on my shoulder contrasting the coldness of the waiting room. He and I were the only ones in establishment. The attendants were gone, the intercom was off and the old man is the only one with me. I lift up my eyes and snow is falling and as I come into the twilight of waking up, I hear his kind voice trailing off. So as I am writing these words, I ask myself, was that Father Christmas, Father Time or was that a gentle reminder from Him to whom the other symbols of Christmas point ... The Ancient of Days, who has *arisen* "...with healing in his wings..." (Malachi 4:2). Allow me the folly of making a few points about my "Christmas Carol."

### **1. There is a reason why we are delayed.**

The last two times our youngest, Sean has headed back to college he was in a traffic jam caused by fatal accidents. Both times he pointed out that he was delayed and frustrated about it until he drove past the scene of the catastrophes. We cannot say for sure that he would have been involved had he left on his time. I do believe in Heaven we may find that God was doing much behind the scenes of our cognitive understanding. We shall see where He was saving us from catastrophes we were not aware of. Sometimes the disasters are not the more dramatic life or death kind, it may be delays so that we may arrange life's priorities correctly. Keeping this in mind we should give thanks for the times we are delayed. "*The LORD your God which goeth before you, he shall fight for you, according to all that he did for you in Egypt before your eyes*" (Deuteronomy 1:30).

### **2. We need to take a look at the compass.**

I'll never forget winning a young serviceman to the Lord. He was preparing to be an officer and was enroute for his training. During our time together I witnessed to him. He admitted He needed direction in his life. He had fallen for a young lady; he was preparing for his future and wanted to get it right. I told him Christ was the answer! Give your life to Him and He would direct you in the right way. He enthusiastically prayed and invited Christ to come into His life as Lord and Savior. As soon as he prayed he said, "Now how does the compass work?" We then began to explain the significance of Bible Study, meditation and prayer.

We who know Christ have the compass built in, but sometimes we are "winging it" without taking the time to follow Christ daily with a contemplative spirit. Have you ever gotten lost? Do you remember what you did to get back on track? If you are like me, you retrace your steps and usually you come to the crossroads where you took a wrong direction. Better than retracing your steps, let us keep the compass open, so we don't miss the right turn. "*In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths*" (Proverbs 3:6).

### **3. Let the old be the new.**

The message of Christmas often comes through one who has been well aged. Let us here the voice of the older, wiser one who will remind us in the accumulation of years what are the more important

matters with which to be preoccupied. It is not the holiday games, the short-term presents, or the festive lights on the outside. It will be winning in the game of life in the center of God's will. It will be the gift of ourselves in love. It will be the inner light with which God directs us. The beautiful star of Bethlehem is now in our hearts always guiding us to the Savior who in turn will lead us to our rendezvous with destiny.

Merry Christmas! I love you!

- Pastor Pope -

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