

Sunday Morning, December 17, 1967

SERMON SUBJECT: "SEARCH OF A SOUL BY STARLIGHT"

On Easter Day in the year 1900 a band of sponge fishermen drew a strange object up from the depths of the Mediterranean. They didn't know what it was and everyone to whom they showed it found no answer as to its purpose...what it could possibly have been. It was dated as being at least 2000 years old, but it was an object like none that had ever been seen before. And so, because of its unusual nature, the strangeness of its character, it was put on display at the Greek National Museum...undesignated as to what it could possibly be but simply as an object of curiosity. But three years ago, a professor from one of the great American universities conducted a study of this strange object, and he discovered what it was...an intricate mechanism of gears activated by the turning of a small handle...this was a small working model of our solar system. But turning the handle, the heavenly bodies represented themselves in relationship to one another as they actually are. Commenting on this in the press releases, one newspaper editor said, "This is like finding a jet in King Tut's tomb."

But it isn't strange that someone, even 2000 years ago, moved that far along in his understanding of the stars. For since the very beginning there has been a fascination of man for the stars. Primitive religion had its beginning in the worship of the stars. Primitive science was born in a study of the stars.

We are amazed today as we look back over the artifacts of the Egyptian civilization to discover that these people living so long ago could master the arts of science and mathematics so greatly. In the building of the great pyramids which architecturally have stood for centuries, a marvel to man's creative ingenuity, and it has been ascertained that the building of these pyramids rested upon the fact that the Egyptians had an understanding of the stars, and using them mathematically they were able to build the pyramids such as they did.

Equally fascinating is the Mayan civilization here in our own Western Hemisphere...a civilization that died long before it could be explored, but here uncovered in the study of this civilization is the fact that these people understood the science of the universe. Mathematically they had reached far beyond their years. They too had structures that represented an awesomeness of the universe and an understanding of the precision of the stars.

In England columns rise topped by lintel posts, so massive that they have given rise to a belief that giants once roamed that continent. Known as Stonehenge, this relic of a civilization 2000 years old when Christ was born. The stones must have been moved at least 300 miles before they could have been placed in their present position, and then somehow, using methods that we have no knowledge about, they were able to achieve that which would be expected only in our later day. And for centuries man has wondered about these relics of a past generation, civilization. Where could they possibly have originated, and for what purpose did they come into being? And then it was discovered that they were in relationship to the stars...that 2000 years before Christ was born, here was a people who had such an awesome relationship with the heavenly bodies that they created such a masterpiece as this.

Man could never have reached from one continent to another had he not discovered that one star hangs in its place never to move, and the North Star has enabled man to navigate upon the endless seas. We have lived with the stars from the very beginning, and they have given to man a hope, an ideal. They have enabled him to enlarge himself many times over and to become the creature that he is today, and when we speak of our deepest aspirations and hopes, we liken them to the stars. Emerson, that great thinker, expressed it this way: "Hitch your wagon to a star."

Sometime ago there was a young peasant Polish woman, later to become known as Madame Curie, enrolled in one of the great universities of Warsaw. She never forgot the words of one of her professors when he said in his classroom: "Some of you have stars at your fingertips." Stars at our fingertips...What a noble and a challenging thought, and yet many of us reach for the will "o the wisp. The light of convenience. The innkeeper at Bethlehem did. Listen.....

"History has not given me a name. I'm known only as the innkeeper who lived at Bethlehem when a peasant man and woman came to my door one night and asked for lodging. History has given me a bad name, but they don't know all the circumstances that surrounded that night. You see, I'm a poor innkeeper and this is the only way that I can make my living. Not too many people come by Bethlehem, and when we learned that Augustus had proclaimed that a new taxation was to take place over the provinces of Rome, word came to us that every man would have to go and register himself and each member of his family. ~~And they~~ And they were not to do it in their own villages, but they were to go to the cities of their fathers, and so my wife and I decided that now was a chance for us to make up for lean times. So for days, anticipating a large number of people coming back to Bethlehem, we cleaned every room. We even turned storage rooms into places where people might sleep. Ours was the only inn at Bethlehem, and so we knew that we would have all the Roman officials when they came to supervise the registration, and so we hiked our prices just a little bit. You can't shame us for that, because we don't have that kind of business year around. We had to get out of them what we could while they were here. We worked hard for it...We deserved every penny that we got. Oh how I remember that night...I was so tired. I had taken abuse from our guests. The Romans thought that they were our lords, and they acted as though they were our lords. We stockpiled food and wine for their pleasure, and they made heavy demands on it. And so that evening it was a relief when the last room was taken and I was able to lock the door and go to bed. I was sitting there musing over the events of the day when suddenly I heard a heavy knocking at the door. I rose and I went to the door and there stood a peasant man and presumably his wife seated on the back of a donkey. They were poor. Oh how poor they were...tired...how tired they must have been. And almost apologetically he asked, "Do you have a room where we can spend the night?" But he knew, even as he asked, that there wasn't because he saw that the town was filled with people. And I shook my head and said, "No, I'm sorry, but we don't have a room." But he looked at me so pathetically that it was hard for me to take my eyes off him just immediately. He held me almost in a magnetic trance. "Please sir, can't you see the condition of my wife? It isn't myself that I'm concerned about. But you see, she's in labor pain, and she's ridden this donkey this long distance, and I'm terrified for her. Isn't there something that you could give us just for the night?" And there for just a moment I almost gave them my own bed, and then I thought, Why must I be bothered by everybody who comes to my door? I'm not everybody's keeper. After all, he shouldn't have brought his wife in this condition. They shouldn't have come at this late hour. They should have come earlier. I can't be responsible for everybody else's weakness. And although I almost gave them my own bed, I checked myself and said, "I'm sorry, there's nothing here." And I thought as I spoke that I didn't want them in my inn because I had a high-priced clientele that night, and I didn't want any poor natives unable to pay the cost taking up precious room. And so I was justified in turning them away. I had to sleep as well as anybody else, and so when she was going to have a baby. Babies were a cheap commodity here, and so I closed the door and went to bed. Somebody told me the next day that they went to a stable and the baby was born there and they put it in a manger. I'm glad they found a place that was warm. But don't blame me...I didn't have any room. There was no room... NO MORE ROOM. I was full...I had no room."

And there's the difference...to make room or to turn away. Stars at your fingertips, and yet so many of us reach for the fireflies. The light of expediency. Herod did. Listen.

"My name is Herod. I've had a hard life. I came to where I am by my own skills. Nobody gave me anything. I'm a member of a very prominent ruling family, and when I found favor with the Romans and they rewarded me they gave me this province to rule over. Now, I took it gladly, but even when I took it I knew that there were many Roman governors who wouldn't accept it even if it meant that they would never get another province to rule, for of all the provinces that Rome controlled, this was the worst of them all. Not only was it at the very end of the world, but the people who live in this province... You just can't get along with them. They're so religiously fanatic. They think that they have an authority that's higher than Caesar, and you just can't do anything other than to pacify them and to hope to keep them in check. For 37 years I've done just that. I haven't given ground to anybody. I've been ruthless when it's been necessary, but nobody can say that I haven't kept them in control. So who could blame me when one evening I'm sitting in my room at ease, at peace with all that's about me, and then 3 men from out of the East asked to have an audience with me, and so I admit them in, and they come and ask a very strange question: "Where is he that is born King of the Jews? Now I'm King of the Jews, and everybody knows that I'm King of the Jews. And I'm not going to relinquish that title to anybody else. And yet here come three men and they are sages. They come out of the East and they're asking the impertinent question: "Where can I find the man that's born King of the Jews?" I don't have a son just born, so it couldn't be him they're seeking. So can you blame me if I get a little upset when someone asks me who's born king of the Jews. My first impulse is to tell them to be on their way, but then something tells me that there's something deeper here than lies on the surface, and so I call in my own wise men, and I ask them if they know anything about a king that has been born. And one after another says, "No I don't know a thing about it.", until one says, "Yes, there's a writing about it in Hebrew prophecy... about a child that is to be born King of the Jews." And so this sets my mind on troubled thoughts. Could it possible be that a prophecy has come to pass. And so I call the wise men back, and this time I treat them just a little more courteously as I say to them, "I'm sorry that I was abrupt with you at first, but you'll understand my concern that you have come all the way here to my province to find a baby that was born here and I didn't know anything about it. And so I'm very much concerned that I've overlooked this. I want to go and show my respects as well. And when you have found where this little baby is, will you please come back and tell me, and then I'll go and show him homage as well." And the wise men went on their way. Well, if they had followed orders, it would have been a different story. How easy it would have been to go out and kill this little child and get it out of the way. But, no, they went back another way. They didn't come back by my palace, and so I was left with only one recourse and that was just to kill them all. And so I gave orders to my soldiers, "You're to go out here and get every child under the age of two and you're to run your spear through its heart, and then we'll know for sure that there's no baby born to take my throne." And it must have worked, because as long as I lived, I never heard of him again... about a baby born to be king.

The light of expedience. How familiar it sounds. The ends, if noble, justify any means that we would use. ~~Sat~~ Stars at our fingertips, and we're constantly reaching for the glowworms. ... They have many names... personal gain, circumstance, security. We have our own personal ones that we're trying to gain and strengthen. But then there's the true star... the star that stands above them all... the star that G.K. Chesterson wrote about when he said: "To a place that is older than Eden, to a town taller than Rome... to the end of the way of the wandering star." This is the light that the wise men saw, and wise men of every generation still seek that star, for they learned from experience long ago that following that star leads one to the foot of the Saviour... he who is the creator of all the universe and the giver of life. That's why it's so important for us to recognize it today... to realize that the star of Bethlehem still shines brightly like a torch flaring up in the night sky. It burns brilliantly still bringing wise men from all the world to the feet of the Christ child who gives meaning to life... strength and purpose to being.

Sir Walter Scott wrote about Mary, Queen of Scots. He said that when she was imprisoned in the castle that it looked as though there were no hope for her deliverance, but each evening she would stand at her window, and she would look across the waters that separated the castle from the village, and in a room in the line of her vision where she knew her friends lived, each night there burned a light. And she knew that in that room were her friends plotting for her escape, and as long as that light burned brightly in the room, she knew that there was a possibility that her life would be spared and that she would be set free. Sir Walter Scott put these words in her mouth: "That little light shining through a humble window gave me greater hope and joy than all the stars in the heavens." The light of hope.

And oh how badly we need that hope to burn in a world that is blackened with Viet Nam, with Stokely Carmichael and psychedelic drugs, and Fidel Castros and hippies. At a time when a heart can be taken from one human being and transplanted as a living organism into a dying man. In such a remarkable that virile life can be created in the test tube of a laboratory. When man's eyes look far beyond this universe to detect stars in other universes and whose shortened arm is constantly being lengthened until he can grasp the moon. In such a day as this man still has not learned how to live in love and peace.

The Star of Bethlehem burns with hope...hope in a world where man's morality is approaching the morality of the animals of the fields...when his mind is grasping greater truths than man has ever possessed.

And now this. There are stars at your fingertips, and the Star of Bethlehem can lead you to your own star.