

January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2004     **Winter 2004 (A) Sharing the Light:  
Redemptive Analogies**

Welcome to another year in the life of the human race, as our little, rotating planet slowly orbits its way around the sun one more time. New Year's for me is a time to look backwards, to look ahead and to look around. When I look back, I see that the children of father Adam and mother Eve have wandered around this planet, built great civilizations and fought some pretty impressive wars. Human history seems to be most characterized by great people movements. This is really just a nice way of saying that one group of people moves into the territory of another group of people by force, killing anyone who resists, taking their land, and enslaving the survivors.

Things settle down for a while, and then another group of bullies moves in on the former bullies, who now consider themselves to be respectable citizens. Sometimes the new bullies are driven off for a while, but when the respectable citizens get tired of fighting them off, or are too busy fighting among themselves, the new bullies come back. They do to the former bullies, what the former bullies did to the people who used to own the land before them, and then, the new bullies in turn settle down and become respectable citizens. Then the whole process seems to repeat itself again and again. In North America we are on the tail end of the last "modern" great people movement. The latest new bullies are settling down and, for the most part we have become respectable citizens. When will our turn come? Let's look ahead.

We have mostly recovered from the near apocalypse of World War II and it doesn't look like a Nuclear World War is imminent. However, weapons of mass destruction are still available for use, and "conventional" weapons are still a multibillion dollar business. Even though we produce more food than at any time in history, people are still hungry and there are still some pretty resilient diseases out there. However, science and technology continue to make amazing strides, and art and culture all over the world are producing some pretty amazing stuff. Does the future look bright or dark? Both, so as we begin 2004, let's look around and see what's going on.

In our generation, probably the two biggest people challenges facing our planet today are population pressure and pollution. A third one is more subtle and harder to define, and will lead me into my winter series about sharing the light: secularization. In increasing numbers people are abandoning any kind of religious faith. Many are uncertain about the meaning of life and purpose of existence, and they think if they can figure out how it all started, they will know what it means. That's like saying that knowing the beginning of a journey will tell you its destination.

Yet, today, we have so much, we seem to know so much, but we are no closer to knowing the point of it all. Is it pleasure – get all you can, can all you get, and sit on the lid? Is it activism – protect the environment, feed the hungry, fight political and social injustice, and advance human knowledge? At Christmas, people look of the true meaning of the holiday. How about the true meaning of life? Let me retrace my steps a little bit and look at secularization, from a Messianic Jewish perspective.

In all of these great people movements of bullies, we believe that G-d, through His Spirit has been active in the lives of all people, even the bullies, and is working to draw them back to a spiritual understanding of life: faith in G-d and obedience to His Word. There is another force at work, to draw people away from faith and into disobedience. This is the meaning of life, generation by generation.

Most of us are aware of what the enemy is up to, but what exactly is G-d doing in all of this. Let me take you to two passages in Acts and talk about redemptive analogies, both in our own lives and in the lives of all people. In Acts 14:15-18, Paul tries to stop the Greeks from performing acts of idolatrous worship, without insulting them or indulging them. In Acts 17:22-31, Paul speaks about the activity of G-d in the midst of pagan darkness, and indicates the coming judgment at the end of the world. These are themes, stories, redemptive analogies which G-d is speaking into people's lives. How?

We see from these passages that G-d both built a homing device into each one of us, and continues to testify to His existence, generation by generation, and these two spiritual realities will continue their

work until the end of the world. I have spoken of these two devices (the homing device and the divine testimony), when I talked to you about the five witnesses of G-d –all beginning with "C" (cosmos, conscience, culture, circumstance and canon), and it is our privilege to hold a third and final device, which is the final "C", the Bible, our source for the light we are to share and the point of this series.

People want to know the meaning of life, and we know it to be a cosmic struggle for the souls of mankind between **spirituality** (that which draws people to G-d) and **secularization** (that which draws them away from final meanings and into false goals). It is not a cosmic struggle between evenly matched opponents, which will decide the future course of the universe. Our G-d rules the cosmos, and there is no confusion, or battle occurring beyond the limits of our atmosphere. The cosmic struggle will determine what part each of us and each generation will have in the world to come.

We believe in the final victory of our L-rd, when all mankind shall stand before Him and be judged, no matter how crazy things get, in our own lives or in the life of the whole world. We need to live for that coming judgment, and do our part in the cosmic struggle which is going on all around us. What is our part? This series will outline our part, and help us to stay on track in 2004, and in every succeeding year until the kingdom comes.

How do we stay on track? I have already spoken to you about redemptive analogies, that activity of G-d in the lives of all people to draw them to Himself. To stay on track, our part in the cosmic struggle is **twofold**, even **threefold**, and I want to close with this. **First of all**, we have to hold on to our faith and to our obedience. This means we need to remain keepers of the canon, the story, the message. We have to wrestle with our doubts and our fears and this is our **second job**, but not in the way you would expect. We have to remain aware of what is doing in our own lives.

You see, I have not always been a believer, and I wandered pretty far both spiritually and morally, before G-d cornered me. He is still cornering me. Has G-d cornered you? I am not saying you should go running off to feed pigs like the prodigal son, and challenge G-d to come and find you and prove Himself to you. I want to ask you, right off the bat in 2004, what is G-d doing in your life? What quests (another word for questions, isn't it) is He sending you on? What people and circumstances is He bringing into your life? These are the divine appointments I will talk to you more about next week.

Our **third job** is to understand that without exception, G-d is also working in the lives of all other people. He is still making divine appointments with them, no matter how bad they are or how far they run (Prov. 1:21-23). As we examine how to share our light, we need to listen and observe and help them discover this activity of G-d in their lives and show them how to respond to it. As well, as we go through this series, I will talk to you about being a salty light (Matt. 5:13-16), which is another way of saying spiritual credibility. I will warn you against the pitfalls of intrusive proselytization, and just before Purim, I will speak to you about the amazing power of Salvation in our lives and in the lives of others.

Sometimes things don't make much sense in our lives. Sometimes injustice, greed and pain have been used by bullies to get their own way, with us, and around the world. And it ain't over yet. Sometimes people will let us down and sometimes people will step up to the plate and do us proud. As my 51<sup>st</sup> birthday approaches (presents can be mailed or dropped off during business hours), I want to start looking at what I have done in my life so far, cause I have probably lived over half of it and am headed for old age. But middle age hasn't been so bad, and I want to keep on sharing my salty light until G-d takes me home. I believe. I understand that G-d is active in my life, even when I don't understand. I understand that G-d is active in other people's lives and G-d wants me to share my light.

All the rest is only a collection of temporary valleys, plains and mountain tops. Our job is not to lose our way, or abandon the journey. More about that next week. Happy New Year, bullies and respectable citizens. Let's pray.