

THOUGHTS

BY DOUGLAS W. SCHROEDER
SPEAKER ON THE WORD TODAY

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OBSERVE BETHLEHEM

The emotionally laden song's lyrics are "Oh, little town of Bethlehem, how still we see thee lie." It appears the Muslim-majority government in Bethlehem will make sure it is a silent night on Christmas this year. The city's officials sent out crews to dismantle the Christmas decorations and tribute to the Christian Martyrs because they wish to show solidarity with the Palestinians. They say no one is in a celebratory mood. They presume to speak for the 10% of the population that is Christian. The Christian population has dwindled since 1950 when it stood at 80%. Persecution and religious harassment caused most Christians to flee the area.

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It might be the end of the Christian public celebration of Christmas in Bethlehem. Muslims tend to oppose, then remove, and finally eradicate churches around the world. In countries like Indonesia, laws prohibit churches built within a certain distance from a mosque, so they build mosques just overlapping that zone so no churches can be built. Islam is not peace-loving. It's a manipulative, legalistic religion based on works and which seeks to not accept alternative faiths but to displace them.

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Hirsi Ali was right to leave Islam because it is an abusive religion, especially to women. Christ came to Bethlehem to redeem us from our sins, but He also brought profound changes to how women are to be treated, with respect and equal partners in the Gospel.

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The first Christians had government opposition to their faith to the point that they were persecuted. The potential loss of holy sites of our faith is disturbing, but nothing can take away our joy in Christ! We do not need landmarks for our faith to be effective. Christ has brought us abiding joy that lasts throughout the year! Our Christmas is truly merry, and joyful, because of the Christ child! It is an amazing experience to see the traditional site of Jesus' birth, and I hope someday tours resume and you get to see it. But it is not mandatory. Of greater worth is familiarity with and faith put in Jesus as He is presented in the Gospels. Such knowledge truly brings Christmas joy!

<https://www.foxnews.com/world/birthplace-jesus-dismantling-all-christmas-decorations-solidarity-our-people-gaza.print>

2023

COMMENDED BY GOD

The Christian does not live for the approval of society, but for God's approval. That makes things a lot simpler! What we are to do is clear when we assess it in the light of God's will. The Christian who avoids the wickedness of the world has the delight of being free from the horrible consequences associated with sin. For example, when we apply ourselves to do



*The Bible is God's Word...Jesus is God's "Word" made flesh...
His death and resurrection, the message needed Today.*

good, walk with our Savior, and appreciate the blessings God gives us, we are not worried about violence, illness, or death associated with drug use, vengeance, loss of income, alienation by friends or lovers, trouble with the police or the courts, lowered self-esteem, and guilt. Any of these can be a burden to a person and more than one happening simultaneously can drain all the joy out of life to the point that one might be depressed and even suicidal. God would love to commend people but will not condone sin.

The Christian has joy and peace associated with repentance of sin and assurance that the Lord will forgive them. Even though we do not know the future or where the Spirit of God will lead us, we do know that God leads His people toward eternal blessings. The great faith chapter found in Hebrews 11 starts with the foundational principle, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. This is what the ancients were commended for" (Hebrews 11:1). We do not have to live a perfect life to be commended by God. We only need to trust Him and seek to live on the basis of that trust. That is such a freeing principle!

A few years back the phrase "What Would Jesus Do?" was very popular in Christian circles to the point that people were wearing rubber bracelets with the saying. The question was prompting us to consider how we can please our Savior by making decisions that will glorify Him. Our hope of eternal life as a gift from our Lord motivates us to live for His glory. It sidesteps many pitfalls and traps that harm people. While we may not seem to have a glamorous or powerful life, we can have a peaceful, meaningful, and hopeful life! The Lord knows that many times it is difficult to place our confidence in Him. That is why He commends us when we strive to trust in Him!

OUT OF SERVICE

Meeting with a financial advisor yesterday, I saw a humorous display on her desk. It was a fabled crystal ball, the kind that might be found on the premises of a medium or Tarot card reader. I wouldn't know, as I have never had the slightest impulse to visit one. Given what we know about the Bible and creation, it would be a complete waste of time.

The advisor is not a medium or palm reader. She uses computers linked to the main office to assess investments. She is not into trying to predict the future, which is why the crystal ball had a message taped to it "Out of Service"! What a perfect display for a financial advisor who wishes to dispel notions that she should be able to predict what the Market will do!

People get into trouble by not planning for the future or thinking they can predict it. Wisdom knows the difference.

Blessings,
Douglas W. Schroeder