

## Any Good News Lately?

✧ **He walks among us.** (vv.14-16)

✧ **He sends us fishing.** (vv.16-20)

In the brilliant Name of our Savior Jesus the Christ of God, dear fellow objects of God's grace:

Bought any good books lately? Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, once said, ***“Of making many books there is no end.”*** He also said, ***“Much study wearies the body.”*** (Ecclesiastes 12:12 KJV, NIV) And yet many people discover the delight of reading because it either takes you away in a little respite from reality, or the content is so uplifting that it doesn't feel like work. Isn't this especially true of a good book based on God's Good Book of Books, the *Holy Bible*? There's something about it truly unique.

You might discover at least part of that certain “something” if you just asked a few questions: *What if God asked us for advice? What if God was willing to take into account our great insights, fine morality, superior wisdom, and piercing foresight?* That's actually the tack taken by one of our favorite authors in a new two-book series, *ON GIVING ADVICE TO GOD – Devotions on the Wisdom of God and the Foolishness of Man.*<sup>1</sup> But of course, retired Professor Daniel Deutschlander exclaims throughout, *Thanks be to God that He didn't and doesn't take our advice!* Then there would be no **Good News** whatsoever. God's way we can at least ask the question: **Any Good News Lately?** Spiritual blindness like ours as humans will never see it. But when God opens our eyes and gives us sight to see, when He turns the Epiphany spotlight on Jesus, we have a resounding, “Yes!” for today's question because...

✧ **He walks among us.** (vv.14-16)

Without a little background you might not realize what an awesome statement this is, ***“After John was put in prison, Jesus went to Galilee....”*** This territory of northern Israel was under the control of another wicked King Herod who not only imprisoned John the Baptist, but had him beheaded after taking a drunken oath at a party. But as God's Son, Jesus had a saving mission to fulfill. He had already preached to stiff opposition from Jewish religious leaders in Jerusalem and Judea. Now our Lord Jesus went to work up north in spite of, even because of difficulties. For as promised by God, ***“Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows.”*** (Isaiah 53:4 TPA)

If we had our way to give advice to God, we might want Jesus to come preaching social justice and equality. He could put politicians and kings like Herod in their place and use His own power to stop their evil behavior. Instead, Jesus came ***“preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God.”***<sup>2</sup> Later Jesus would explain to an evil governor Pontius Pilate, ***“My kingdom is not of this world.”*** (John 18:36 NIV84) To His followers Jesus had said, ***“The kingdom of God is within you.”*** (Luke 17:21 NIV84) That's where God rules, in your spirit, deep in your soul, to bring priceless blessings like peace and joy.

Here's why: ***“The time is fulfilled.”*** Everything in God's plan was coming together at this time. And God was shining the light of His truth on the world through His one and only begotten Son. Is this still true today? ***“The kingdom of God has come near!”*** It would not be if modern man had his way. But thank God for not listening to us and giving us what we need. Jesus still calls out, ***“Repent, and believe in the gospel!”*** That's an old English word for **Good News**. One thing I love about the Gospel is that it gives what it demands. It says, ***“Repent,”*** then gives repentance. Instead of saying, “Do this,” or

<sup>1</sup> Deutschlander, Daniel M. *Op.cit.* Milwaukee, Wisconsin: Northwestern Publ. House, 2017. (800-662-6022; Amazon)

<sup>2</sup> Unless stated otherwise, scriptures from EHV ~ *Evangelical Heritage Version*. The Wartburg Project, © 2017. (above)

“Do that,” the **Good News** says, “**Believe,**” then gives the gift of faith in that word. Much like the very first day of the first week of this world – what we call Sunday. God spoke: “**Let there be light.**” Guess what! “**There was light!**” So when God wants to turn the lights on, He will – even in spite of us.

Take our Old Testament lesson from Jonah 3:1-5,10. The most reluctant, rebellious prophet ever ran the other way when God said the first time, “Go to Nineveh and preach.” Jonah suffered shipwreck, was saved by a huge fish, and became fish vomit on the seashore. But when God told him again to “Go!” Jonah went. Nineveh, one of the cruelest cities ever, repented! They believed God’s Word even though Jonah did not want them to. That tiny book ends with Jonah still angry at God, but God rich in mercy anyway. Can you think of anyone who does not want you to repent because they think you’re too bad? Maybe you feel that way. Here comes Jesus. Still today **He walks among us.** “**Repent! Believe!**”

### ☆ **He sends us fishing.** (vv.16-20)

This would really make a lot of hardy Minnesotans happy to hear that **He sends us fishing.** But if we could give God advice, it might be for a nice, warm fish house, fully equipped, on a lake we could own and fish for ourselves in the summer too. Not so fast, fish boys!

Jesus knows where we are. “*As Jesus was going along the Sea of Galilee, he saw Simon and his brother Andrew casting a net into the sea, since they were fishermen.*” Jesus had met and even called them before. They had listened first to John the Baptist, then followed Jesus at John’s request. Now Jesus finds them again. But before He calls them once more, something happens that Doctor Luke records in his Gospel account.

Jesus tells the weary fisherman, “*Put out into deep water, and let down the nets.*” Remember Peter’s answer about fishing all night? But he’d do it because Jesus said so. They had to call for their partners James and John to come with another boat. Both were so full they nearly sank. Peter fell on his knees and begged, “*Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!*” Once again, advice for God. A prayer which Jesus answered with a firm, “No!” Here’s a better idea: “*Don’t be afraid; from now on you will catch men.*” (Luke 5:1-9 NIV84) That’s when Peter and Andrew followed. So did the sons of Zebedee, James and John who were “*mending*” (EHV) their nets after such a huge catch. “*Immediately...they left their father Zebedee in the boat with the hired servants and followed him.*”

See why we don’t really want to give advice to God. He already knows who we are. We’re not the great and glorious “beautiful people” so highly honored by this world. They would not even call us “good,” if we don’t agree with their idea of accidental nature with no God and social justice all their way. But God finds us useful for His glory because He wants to forgive the unforgiveable and cleanse those whose souls would otherwise stay dirty with sin. He has His special task of catching messy “fish” like us, then using us to go and catch others. “You catch ‘em; I’ll clean ‘em.”

But if we could give advice to God, maybe we’d be like Moses at the burning bush: “*Send someone else.*” Maybe we’d run the other way like Jonah or if we went, it would be in an angry, frustrated spirit like Ezekiel. Or maybe we’d feel overcome by God’s power like Peter, or by God’s holiness like Isaiah. But remember how one of the fiery angel seraphim took a burning coal from God’s throne and touched it to Isaiah’s lips. “*See, this has touched your lips; your guilt is taken away and your sin atoned for.*”<sup>8</sup> *Then I heard the voice of the LORD saying, “Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?” And I said, “Here am I. Send me!”* (Isaiah 6:7f NIV84) That’s total commitment.

Heard **Any Good News Lately?** We’d have to say, “Yes!” God’s forgiving grace is truly **Good News.** Have you told anyone else **Any Good News Lately?** Don’t fear what people fear. This **Good News** brings the healthy fear of the Lord that is the beginning of wisdom. Fear God most of all, like a child who truly does not want to disappoint his loving Father. Then “*open your mouth wide, and I will fill it*” (Psalm 81:10 ESV), says the LORD your God. Thank God again that He neither needs nor takes our advice. All because of Christ and His Epiphany we have **Good News** to tell. Amen.

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