

EVERLASTING LOVE CAME DOWN AT CHRISTMAS

Text: Jeremiah 31:3: "The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee."

The meaning of accepting Jesus as personal Savior can sometimes get clouded by our pulpit theology spoken with "stained glassed voices." I have often wondered if, after we have preached a sermon or taught a lesson laced with great truths, we have sometimes left our listeners cold.

Charles Spurgeon, the prince of preachers from the Victorian Age said that illustrations are the windows through which we see the sermon. In the next few minutes, I would challenge you to read a factual story of a little boy in Russia who entered the true spirit of Christmas. May the warmth that this little boy found on his first celebrated Christmas be shared by everyone who reads this story.

In 1994, two Americans answered an invitation from the Russian Department of Education to teach morals and ethics (based on biblical principles) in the public schools. They were invited to teach at prisons, businesses, the fire and police departments and a large orphanage. About 100 boys and girls who had been abandoned, abused, and left in the care of a government-run program were in the orphanage. They relate the following story in their own words:

It was nearing the holiday season, 1994, time for our orphans to hear, for the first time, the traditional story of Christmas. We told them about Mary and Joseph arriving in Bethlehem. Finding no room in the inn, the couple went to a stable, where the baby Jesus was born and placed in a manger.

Throughout the story, the children and orphanage staff sat in amazement as they listened. Some sat on the edges of their stools, trying to grasp every word. Completing the story, we gave the children three small pieces of cardboard to make a crude manger. Each child was given a small paper square, cut from yellow napkins I had brought with me. No colored paper was available in the city.

Following instructions, the children tore the paper and carefully laid strips in the manger for straw. Small squares of flannel, cut from a worn-out nightgown an American lady was throwing away as she left Russia, were used for the baby's blanket. A doll-like baby was cut from tan felt we had brought from the United States.

The orphans were busy assembling their manger as I walked among them to see if they needed any help. All went well until I got to one table where little Misha sat. He looked to be about 6 years old and had finished

his project. As I looked at the little boy's manger, I was startled to see not one, but two babies in the manger. Quickly, I called for the translator to ask the lad why there were two babies in the manger.

Crossing his arms in front of him and looking at this completed manger scene, the child began to repeat the story very seriously. For such a young boy, who had only heard the Christmas story once, he related the happenings accurately—until he came to the part where Mary put the baby Jesus in the manger.

Then Misha started to ad-lib. He made up his own ending to the story as he said, "And when Maria laid the baby in the manger, Jesus looked at me and asked me if I had a place to stay. "I told him I have no mamma and I have no papa, so I don't have any place to stay. Then Jesus told me I could stay with him. But I told him I couldn't, because I didn't have a gift to give him like everybody else did. But I wanted to stay with Jesus so much, so I thought about what I had that maybe I could use for a gift. I thought maybe if I kept him warm, that would be a good gift. "So I asked Jesus, 'If I keep you warm, will that be a good enough gift?'

"And Jesus told me, 'If you keep me warm, that will be the best gift anybody ever gave me.' So I got into the manger, and then Jesus looked at me and he told me I could stay with him—for always." As little Misha finished his story, his eyes brimmed full of tears that splashed down his little cheeks. Putting his hand over his face, his head dropped to the table and his shoulders shook as he sobbed and sobbed. The little orphan had found someone who would never abandon nor abuse him, someone who would stay with him—FOR ALWAYS.

1. GOD LOVES US BEYOND OUR ABILITY TO COMPREHEND.

Romans 5:8: "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

Benjamin Grosvenor (1676-1758) imagined the risen Jesus addressing His apostles, as they were about to take the gospel out into the world. Among other things, the Lord gave them these instructions, revealing his heart for the undeserving: "If you meet that poor wretch who thrust the spear into my side, tell him there is another way, a better way, to come at my heart, if he will repent and look upon whom he has pierced and will mourn. I will cherish him in that very heart he has wounded; he shall find the blood he shed an ample atonement for the sin of shedding it. And tell him from me, he will put me to more pain and displeasure by refusing this offer of my blood, than when he drew my blood forth."

2. GOD LOVES US SO MUCH THAT HE HAS CHOSEN TO ADOPT US.

Romans 8:15: "For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father." I Corinthians 8:9: "For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich."

I love the story of the king and queen who could not have children, and were finally persuaded to adopt. In frustration, they could not find a child. But then when they were ready to give up, they saw a little boy dressed in rags playing by the roadside on their way back to their palace. They inquired where the boy lived and who were his parents. He replied that he had no home and his parents had both died. He was living on the streets. When proof made known that this was true, they asked the boy if they could adopt him and make him their son. This was not a difficult decision for the little boy. He most certainly agreed! Every morning the boy was seen wiping tears from his eyes. When the butler asked why he was crying, the newly adopted son replied, "Every day before I put on my new clothes, I open the drawer where I keep the rags I was wearing when the king found me. I place those rags up to my chest and waist, then I fold them back into the drawer, because you see, before I walk to the lovely table my father has had food prepared for me, before I walk these beautiful grounds my father has placed beneath my feet, before I frolic freely in the hills that surround me, I never want to forget what my father, the king has done for me." I believe you have already made the application. Never lose the wonder of the Savior who loves you and adopted you into the family of God.

3. GOD LOVES THOSE WHOM HE ADOPTS ALWAYS!

John 10:27-29: "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand."

Horatio Bonar said it well in his old hymn:

So near, so very near to God,
I cannot nearer be;
For in the person of His Son
I am as near as He.

May this Christmas season remind us all that God through Christ loves His children always, always. Romans 8:38, 39: “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

-Pastor Pope-