

July 2, 2000

**John: 10: 22-30**

I am having a hard time getting out of John's Chapter 10. It seems that every line you read deserves a re-read.

**Read 10: 22-30**

In these verses John tells us when and where.

The when is during the festival of lights; the festival of dedications; Hanukkah. It comes in December, close to the pagan's solstice; close to our Christmas.

What we know as the Holocaust and what Clinton refers to as "ethnic cleansing" is not new to Jewish history. When the chosen one's crossed the river Jordan into the Promise Land, they were to wipe out the inhabitants of that land, man, woman and child. One way to escape the temptation to worship gods of wood and stone was to rid the land of those who did. To keep the people directed toward the worship of the God that freed them from the slave pits of Egypt, these chosen ones undertook a systematic elimination of the Palestinians.

About 175 years before Christ a king of Syria got caught up in the same exercise. The king determined that he would establish Greek ways, Greek thoughts and Greek gods throughout his kingdom. A kingdom which included

**Palestine or the Promise Land. No longer could the Jews publicly worship Jehovah.**

**The Syrians started the program as a peaceful educational process. Some Jews were won over for the usual reasons: to please the rulers; to keep up with the trends; because they liked what they heard; because the religious practices were not so strict; etc. However most would not budge. They lived with what they believed. They stuck with the faith of their fathers.**

**Off came the velvet glove and out came the iron fist. The Syrian army jumped on the Jews like a whirlwind. Over 80,000 Jews were left dead and a like number taken into slavery. To be caught with a copy of the laws was a crime punishable by death. Mothers who allowed their boy babies to be circumcised, and were caught, were crucified with the child hanging around her neck. The Temple chambers were turned into brothels. The Temple grounds and Solomon's porches were polluted. The great altar where generation after generation had sacrificed the Passover lambs was turned into an altar to Zeus. Swine flesh was offered up as burnt offering. The brothers Maccabaeus raised a resistance. After many years and at the cost of many lives the country was rid of Syrians. With that great victory came the task of cleansing and purification of the Temple.**

**It was only after the Temple was clean that the Jews were in position to light the great seven-branched candlestick. Unfortunately they could only find one little bottle of unpolluted oil. This bottle bore the seal and stamp of the High Priest. In it was just enough oil to keep the lamps lit for one day. Miraculously the oil in that one flask lasted for the eight days that was required for new oil to go through the purification process. The Jews set aside 8 days in December to celebrate. This celebration was not just a time of remembering one of the gloomiest periods in their history, it was a time to rededicate their lives. The eight-branch candlestick became the symbol of this rededication and remembrance. In time this celebration became the Festival of Lights or Hanukkah, a time of gladness and joy; a time to party and exchange gifts. Like our Christmas the real meaning of the hour has been replaced by the pleasures of the moment.**

**It was during this period of celebration and rededication that Jesus walked within Solomon's porch. Solomon's porch was one of two magnificent colonnades that ran on either side of the Court of the Gentiles. These colonnades consisted of rows of magnificent pillars almost forty feet high and roofed over. In Luxor along the Nile we find examples of magnificent colonnades that were once roofed over but now seem to hold the heavens in**

place. Just as the colonnades that formed Solomon's porches were destroyed so the colonnades in Luxor are being threatened by ground water that is undermining their foundations.

During this celebration of the victory over the Syrian attempt to erase the faith of their fathers the Jews gathered around Jesus. Some translations state the Jews closed in on Jesus, that this was not a friendly crowd. (When John uses the word "Jews" here he is referring to those in leading positions. This is not your City Stages crowd.)

The crowd wanted answers. "Why do you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, say so." We might interpret what was said, "Why do you trouble us? Are you trying to upset our cherished beliefs, our traditions, our heritage? Are you trying to do to our beliefs what the Syrians did?"

John is very liberal in his portrayal of Jesus as the Messiah. We do not get the same awareness in the other Gospels. And of course the people in Jesus's day were not reading John. Jesus said this to one group and that to another. Some of his teachings He shared only with His disciples. These leaders had heard rumors, bits of this and that. Now they wanted to hear something from the horse's mouth.

That Jesus did not use specific language does not mean that the truth

was not there for those who had ears to hear and eyes to see. When Isaiah told of the Golden Age he said, "And the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall a lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue the dumb, sing."

Earlier John reports Jesus as saying, "Before Abraham was, I was." The crowd heard that well enough because they took up stones to stone Him. But the leaders didn't hear. They were blinded by their religion.

This is not uncommon. Religion is one of the most heavily charged feelings that we experience. Too often the emotions generated by our religion gets spent on secondary matters. You want to see some eyes pop out, just change the order of worship.

Jesus speaks of "The Father and I." We can use this family relationship to illustrate the effect of secondary matters within our family. For instance, most parents love their children; some love them to death. They tend to over indulge and spoil the child in an attempt to express their love. These parents miss the point of the family relationship. Out of that relationship the parent has the responsibility to prepare the child to become a responsible citizen, to become a responsible adult. The love emotion can get out of control when it is not guided by judgment.

**This spills over to the so-called social reformers of our society. They become so obsessed with their objectives that they conclude the end justifies the means. For an example are those who stand for or against abortion. There are the para-military organizations that are against big government. Here we find people expressing their zeal in a way that is subversive to law and order. Those very elements that hold our society together.**

**Our religion gets all charged up over secondary things that cloud our minds from the recognition of the truth that is spread out before us. As the churches meet in general assemblies the headline news is homosexuality. What a way to spend the energies of a church group. The question we need to face is, "Is my heart sincere?" That question forces the organized church to face the issue of how it can install this question in the lives of believers. If we can respond to the question of a sincere heart everything else should fall into its proper place.**

**We can't be perfect in what we do. We can't be perfect in the way we live our life. We can't be perfect in the practice of our religion. We will have our doubts. From time to time we will raise the question, "Are you really the Christ?" A sincere heart will overcome these imperfections. Our religion meets the test in how we treat others. It is in our relationship with others, the**

people we deal with in the ups and downs in this journey through life; it is that our heart, our religion receives the final test.

Back in the late 80's and the early 90's we had a friend. Not a close friend. We knew her for a relatively short time as friendships go. In the years we knew her she suffered many thorns of the flesh. Even so she lived a good life, a life that touched many others. At one time she gave us a miniature rose bush. It produced a tiny, pink, delicate bloom. I planted it by an old azalea bush. A big mistake. That azalea bush keeps on growing, spreading out. I try to cut it back away from the rose but it keeps on encroaching. Even so that big old azalea hasn't been able to overcome the little rose. Long after the azalea has bloomed and faded you can find underneath its boughs a little pink bud.

Like the old azalea bush these secondary matters that confront our religion have a tendency to branch out and take over. If we will take the time to cut them back we will find that the sincere heart will still prevail.

We can't get around the basic truths that rise out of the sincerity of our hearts. Here we will find the strength of our religion and its harvest. The best we know comes to us through the seeds that were sown by the hearts of good men and good women. A word of encouragement, a word of hope, a

**word of good cheer, a word of wisdom, a word of help.**

**The question comes, "How long are you going to keep us in suspense?" Today that question has been answered in the harvest of those whose hearts were touched by the life and teachings of Jesus. Jesus says, "The works I do in the name of the Father, these are evidence about me."**

**The answer given by Jesus is the answer we give. The works we do are evidence about us. The test of the pudding is still in the tasting. You can't beat that basic truth.**