



RIVERS of JOY MINISTRIES

NEWSLETTER
24 December 2014

Dear Pastor

Greetings in the wonderful name of Jesus Christ, our Lord and Saviour. I thank God for your life and commitment to this ministry and above all to God's service. Here is my latest pastoral letter for you all. Please share it with your people. It is very important that your people can be blessed with these great teachings.

Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year to all of you!

May the Lord continue to bless us, protect us and increase us.

Please note that the international office will be closed between 20 December 2014 and 4 January 2015.

The Word of God

The Real Reason for Christmas

By Bishop Alex Tana

Do you plan on taking the time this Christmas to tell your children or friends about the purpose of Christmas? If so, what will you tell them?

Although we usually meditate on the birth of Jesus at this time of the year, His purpose in coming to earth was not to give us the sweet picture of a baby in a Bethlehem manger. That little baby was born to die for you and for me and thus pay for the forgiveness of our sins. He was born to die on the Cross that we might be reconciled to God.

For this reason, I always told our sons when they were young, "Don't just think of a baby in a manger at Christmastime. Christmas is about much more than that. It is about God coming to earth in human flesh so He could die on the Cross to pay for your salvation and destroy all the works of the devil in your lives! That is what Christmas is all about!"

People rarely think of the Cross at Christmastime because it is the time set aside to celebrate Jesus' birth. But in Philippians 2, Paul connects the two thoughts. As Paul writes about God becoming a man, he goes on to express the ultimate reason God chose to take this amazing action. Paul says in verse 8, "And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross." Because today is Christmas Eve, I want to use this Sparkling Gem to discuss the real reason for Christmas, which is contained in the truths found in this verse.

Philippians 2:8 says that Jesus was "...Found in fashion as a man..." That word 'fashion' is the Greek word *schema*. This is extremely important, for this was precisely the same word that was used in ancient times to depict a king who exchanged his kingly garments for a brief period of time for the clothing of a beggar.

How wonderful that the Holy Spirit would inspire the apostle Paul to use this exact word! When

Jesus came to earth, it really was a moment when God Almighty shed His glorious appearance and exchanged it for the clothing of human flesh. Although man is wonderfully made, his earthly frame is temporal dust and cannot be compared to the eternal and glorious appearance of God. However, for the sake of our redemption, God laid aside all of His radiant glory, took upon Himself human flesh, and was manifested in the very likeness of a human being.

This is the true story of a King who traded His kingly garments and took upon Himself the clothing of a servant. But the story doesn't stop there. Jesus — our King who exchanged His royal robes for the clothing of flesh - loved us so much that He "...Humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross"!

The word "humbled" is the Greek word *tapeinao*, and it means to be humble, to be lowly, and to be willing to stoop to any measure that is needed. This describes the attitude God had when He took upon Himself human flesh. Think of how much humility would be required for God to shed His glory and lower Himself to become like a member of His creation. Consider the greatness of God's love that drove Him to divest Himself of all His splendor and become like a man. This is amazing to me, particularly when I think of how often the flesh recoils at the thought of being humble or preferring someone else above itself. Yet Jesus humbled Himself "...and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."

The word "obedient" tells me that this was not a pleasurable experience that Jesus looked forward to in anticipation. To humble Himself to this extent required Jesus' deliberate obedience. As preexistent God, Jesus came to earth for this purpose. But as man dressed in flesh, He despised the thought of the Cross (Hebrews 12:2) and could only endure its shame because He knew of the results that would follow. For Jesus to be obedient as a man, He had to choose to obey the eternal plan of God.

The word "obedient" that is used to describe Jesus is the Greek word *hupakouo*, from the word *hupo*, which means under, and the word *akouo*, which means I hear. When these two words are compounded together, they picture someone who is *hupo* - under someone else's authority, and *akouo* - listening to what that superior is speaking to him. After listening and taking these instructions to heart, this person then carries out the orders of his superior.

Thus, the word *hupakouo* tells us that obedient people are 1) under authority, 2) listening to what their superior is saying, and 3) carrying out the orders that have been given to them. This is what the word "obedient" means in this verse, and this is what obedience means for you and me.

You see, even Jesus had to come to this place of obedience. Although He knew that He was the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world, that didn't mean His flesh was excited about dying as the Lamb of God on the Cross. According to this verse in Philippians 2:8, Jesus had to humble Himself and become "obedient" in order to follow God's plan. He wasn't looking forward to the experience of death on a Cross; He made a choice to humble Himself and to go to any measure in order to accomplish the Father's plan.

Part of the Father's plan was for Jesus to humble Himself "...unto death, even the death of the cross." The word 'unto' is from the Greek word *mechri*, which is a Greek word that really means to such an extent. The Greek word *mechri* is sufficient in itself to dramatize the point, but the verse goes on to say that Jesus humbled Himself unto death, "...even the death of the cross." The word 'even' is the Greek word *de*, which emphatically means EVEN! The Greek carries this idea: "Can you imagine it! Jesus humbled Himself to such a lowly position and became so obedient that He even stooped low enough to die the miserable death of a Cross!"

I heartily recommend that you take the time today to read the April 24 Sparkling Gem in order to refresh your memory on the full process of crucifixion. It was genuinely the worst death a person could ever endure. For Jesus to humble Himself to the point of death, EVEN the death of the Cross, demonstrates how much He was willing to humble Himself to redeem you and me.

Just think of it - Almighty God, clothed in radiant glory from eternity past, came to this earth formed as a human being in the womb of a human mother for one purpose: so that He could one day die a miserable death on a Cross to purchase our salvation! All of this required humility on a level far beyond anything we could ever comprehend or anything that has ever been requested of any of us. Yet this was the reason Jesus came; therefore, He chose to be obedient to the very end, humbling Himself to the point of dying a humiliating death on a Cross and thereby purchasing our eternal salvation.

So as you celebrate Christmas tonight and tomorrow, be sure to remember the real purpose of Christmas. It isn't just a time to reflect on the baby boy who was born in Bethlehem so long ago.

That baby was God manifest in the flesh. He was born to die for you and for me. Jesus was so willing to do whatever was required in order to redeem us from Satan and sin that He humbled Himself even unto death on a Cross! That is what Christmas is all about!

School of leadership

No school of leadership for this time. We will start again next month!

God bless you all!

Bishop Alex Tana

General Overseer