

Isaiah 43:18-19
January 1, '12

"HAPPY AHA DAY!"

IT ALL BEGINS RIGHT ABOUT NOW, DOESN'T IT?

THAT WAS THE OPENING LINE OF THE SERMON ON CHRISTMAS EVE, JUST A WEEK AGO LAST NIGHT.

THAT LINE WORKS TODAY AS WELL.

WHAT I WAS REFERRING TO ON CHRISTMAS EVE WAS THE BEGINNING OF A CHRISTMAS CAROL THAT WE FOCUSED ON THROUGHOUT ADVENT.

TODAY, OF COURSE, I'M TALKING ABOUT THE BEGINNING OF A BRAND NEW YEAR.

IT ALL BEGINS RIGHT ABOUT NOW, DOESN'T IT?

TODAY IS ALSO EPIPHANY SUNDAY – THE DAY DESIGNATED TO COMMEMORATE THE VISIT OF THE WISE MEN.

THE DAY SET ASIDE FOR THAT OBSERVANCE IS JANUARY 6 AND, THEREFORE, THIS IS THE SUNDAY IMMEDIATELY PRIOR TO IT.

SO WE'VE GOT THREE THINGS GOING HERE – A CHRISTMAS CAROL, A NEW YEAR & EPIPHANY.

BELIEVE IT OR NOT, THERE'S A CONNECTION BETWEEN ALL THREE.

I THINK THIS PASSAGE FROM THE PROPHET ISAIAH WRAPS THEM ALL TOGETHER VERY NICELY.

IT'S A PASSAGE ABOUT NEWNESS.

IT'S A PASSAGE THAT INVITES US TO LET GO OF THE PAST & SEE THE MAGNIFICENT THINGS GOD HAS IN STORE FOR OUR FUTURE.

IT'S A PASSAGE THAT TELLS US THAT GOD IS READY TO DO SOMETHING NEW IN THE FUTURE THAT AWAITS US.

IT'S A PASSAGE THAT OFFERS THE ABSOLUTE ASSURANCE OF GOD'S PRESENCE WITH US IN EVERY EXPERIENCE OF LIFE & IF WE WILL SIMPLY LISTEN TO THE VOICE OF GOD CALLING US & HEED THAT CALL, THE REWARDS WE RECEIVE FAR WILL EXCEED THE RISKS WE TAKE.

FINAL REFLECTIONS ON A CHRISTMAS CAROL, THE BEGINNING OF A NEW YEAR & OUR CELEBRATION OF EPIPHANY ALL PRESENT US WITH THE OPPORTUNITY TO CONSIDER EACH OF THESE MESSAGES FOUND IN ISAIAH'S WORDS.

EBENEZER SCROOGE LET GO OF THE PAST AFTER VISITING IT & SAW THE TREMENDOUS POSSIBILITIES THAT STOOD BEFORE HIM – FUTURE POSSIBILITIES THAT COULD BECOME PRESENT REALITIES IF HE CHOSE TO LIVE HIS LIFE IN A DIFFERENT MANNER.

THE BEGINNING OF A NEW YEAR TELLS US THAT GOD IS READY TO DO SOMETHING NEW IN THE FUTURE THAT AWAITS US.

THE VISIT OF THE WISE MEN GIVES US THE ASSURANCE OF GOD'S PRESENCE WITH US IN EVERY EXPERIENCE OF LIFE AND, LIKE THEM, IF WILL SIMPLY LISTEN TO THE VOICE OF GOD CALLING US & HEED THAT CALL, THE REWARDS WE RECEIVE WILL FAR EXCEED THE RISKS WE TAKE.

WHEN WE SPEAK OF EPIPHANY IN THE MODERN VERNACULAR, WE USUALLY MEAN A SUDDEN REALIZATION OR UNDERSTANDING.

SOMEONE WILL SAY, "I HAD AN EPIPHANY THE OTHER DAY!"

WHAT THEY MEAN IS "I HAD AN INSIGHT...I HAD AN EXPERIENCE OF RECOGNITION...I HAD AN 'AHA' MOMENT."

THAT'S WHAT WE MEAN BY "AHA" ISN'T IT?

IT'S THE COMIC STRIP LIGHT BULB ABOVE THE HEAD.

IT'S THAT MOMENT OF CLARITY WHERE A BRAND NEW WORLD OPENS IN FRONT OF YOU.

IT HAPPENED TO EBENEZER SCROOGE.

IT HAPPENED TO THE WISE MEN.

IT CAN HAPPEN TO YOU AS WE BEGIN A BRAND NEW YEAR WITH ALL THE POSSIBILITIES THAT STAND BEFORE YOU.

LAST SUNDAY, ON CHRISTMAS DAY, I SHARED A SERMON IN VERSE THAT I HAD WRITTEN & I TOLD YOU IT WAS INSPIRED BY A POEM I HAD READ AS A CHILD THAT I'VE SHARED HERE BEFORE.

FOLLOWING WORSHIP & IN THE DAYS AFTERWARD, I HAD SEVERAL PEOPLE TELL ME THEY COULDN'T REMEMBER HEARING IT.

BECAUSE SOME OF YOU MAY NOT HAVE HEARD IT & OTHERS OF YOU MAY NOT REMEMBER IT AND BECAUSE I CAN THINK OF NO BETTER EXAMPLE OF SOMEONE EXPERIENCING AN "AHA" MOMENT THAN THE FATHER IN THIS TALE, HERE'S THAT POEM, ENTITLED "ANNIE & WILLIE'S PRAYER" BY SOPHIA P. SNOW, WRITTEN IN 1884.

'Twas the eve before Christmas. "Good night," had been said,
And Annie and Willie had crept into bed;
There were tears on their pillows, and tears in their eyes,
And each little bosom was heaving with sighs,
For tonight their stern father's command had been given
That they should retire precisely at seven
Instead of at eight-for they troubled him more
With questions unheard of than ever before:
He had told them he thought this delusion a sin,
No such creature as "Santa Claus" ever had been.
And he hoped, after this, he should never more hear
How he scrambled down chimneys with presents each year.
And this was the reason that two little heads
So restlessly tossed on their soft, downy beds.
Eight, nine, and the clock on the steeple tolled ten,

Not a word had been spoken by either till then,
When Willie's sad face from the blanket did peep,
And whispered, 'Dear Annie, is 'ou fast as'eep?'"
"Why no, brother Willie," a sweet voice replies,
"I've long tried in vain, but I can't shut my eyes,
For somehow it makes me so sorry because
Dear papa has said there is no 'Santa Claus.'
Now we know there is, and it can't be denied,
For he came every year before mamma died;
But, then, I've been thinking that she used to pray,
And God would hear everything mamma would say,
And maybe she asked him to send Santa Claus here
With that sackful of presents he brought every year."
"Well, why tan't we p'ay dest as mamma did den,
And ask Dod to send him with p'esents aden?"
"I've been thinking so too," and without a word more
Four little bare feet bounded out on the floor,
And four little knees the soft carpet pressed,
And two tiny hands were clasped close to each breast.
"Now, Willie, you know we must firmly believe
That the presents we ask for we're sure to receive;
You must wait very still till I say the 'Amen,'
And by that you will know that your turn has come then."
"Dear Jesus, look down on my brother and me,
And grant us the favor we are asking of thee.
I want a wax dolly, a teaset, and ring,
And an ebony workbox that shuts with a spring.
Bless papa, dear Jesus, and cause him to see
That Santa Claus loves us as much as does he;
Don't let him get fretful and angry again
At dear brother Willie and Annie. Amen."
'Please, Desus, 'et Santa Taus turn down tonight,
And b'ing us some p'esents before it is light,
I want he should div' me a nice 'ittie s'ed,
With bright sbinin' 'unners, and all painted red;

A box full of tandy, a book, and a toy,
Amen, and then, Desus, I'll be a dood boy."
Their prayers being ended, they raised up their heads,
With hearts light and cheerful, again sought their beds.
They were lost soon in slumber, both peaceful and deep,
And with fairies in dreamland were roaming in sleep.
Eight, nine, and the little French clock had struck ten,
Ere the father had thought of his children again:
He seems now to hear Annie's half-suppressed sighs,
And to see the big tears stand in Willie's blue eyes.
'I was harsh with my darlings," he mentally said,
'And should not have sent them so early to bed;
But then I was troubled; my feelings found vent,
For bank stock today has gone down ten per cent!
But of course they've forgotten their troubles ere this,
And that I denied them the thrice-asked-for kiss:
But, just to make sure, I'll go up to their door,
For I never spoke harsh to my darlings before."
So saying, he softly ascended the stairs,
And arrived at the door to hear both of their prayers;
His Annie's "Bless papa" drew forth the big tears,
And Willie's grave promise fell sweet on his ears.
'Strange-strange-I'd forgotten," said he with a sigh,
'How I longed when a child to have Christmas draw nigh."
"I'll atone for my harshness," he inwardly said,
"By answering their prayers ere I sleep in my bed."
Then he turned to the stairs and softly went down,
Threw off velvet slippers and silk dressing gown,
Donned hat, coat, and boots, and was out in the street,
A millionaire facing the cold, driving in the sleet
Nor stopped he until he had bought everything
From the box full of candy to the tiny gold ring;
Indeed, he kept adding so much to his store,
That the various presents outnumbered a score.
Then homeward he turned. When his holiday load,

With Aunt Mary's help, in the nursery was stowed.
Miss Dolly was seated beneath a pine tree,
By the side of a table spread out for her tea;
A workbox well fitted in the center was laid,
And on it the ring for which Annie had prayed,
A soldier in uniform stood by a sled
"With bright shining runners, and all painted red."
There were balls, dogs, and horses, books pleasing to see,
And birds of all colors were perched in the tree!
While Santa Claus, laughing, stood up in the top,
As if getting ready more presents to drop.
And as the fond father the picture surveyed,
He thought for his trouble he had amply been paid,
And he said to himself, as he brushed off a tear,
'I'm happier tonight than I've been for a year;
I've enjoyed more pure pleasure than ever before;
What care I if bank stock falls ten per cent more!
Hereafter I'll make it a rule, I believe,
To have Santa Claus visit us each Christmas Eve.'
So thinking, he gently extinguished the light,
And, tripping down stairs, retired for the night.
As soon as the beams of the bright morning sun
Put the darkness to flight, and the stars one by one,
Four little blue eyes out of sleep opened wide,
And at the same moment the presents espied;
Then out of their beds they sprang with a bound,
And the very gifts prayed for were all of them found.
They laughed and they cried, in their innocent glee,
And shouted for papa to come quick and see
What presents old Santa Claus brought in the night
(just the things that they wanted,) and left before light:
'And now,' added Annie, in a voice soft and low,
'You'll believe there's a 'Santa Claus', papa, I know!'-
While dear little Willie climbed up on his knee,
Determined no secret between them should be,

And told in soft whispers how Annie had said
That their dear, blessed mamma, so long ago dead,
Used to kneel down by the side of her chair,
And that God up in heaven had answered her prayer.
'Den we dot up and prayed dust well as we tould,
And Dod answered our prayers: now wasn't He dood?"
'I should say that He was, if He sent you all these,
And knew just what presents my children would please.
(Well, well, let him think so, the dear little elf,
'Twould be cruel to tell him I did it myself.")
Blind father! who caused your stem heart to relent,
And the hasty words spoken so soon to repent?
'Twas the Being who bade you steal softly upstairs,
And made you His agent to answer their prayers.
IN THE COMING YEAR, MAY YOU, LIKE ANNIE & WILLIE'S FATHER, EXPERIENCE ALL THE "AHA"

MOMENTS GOD HAS IN STORE FOR YOU. AMEN.

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