



water from rock

## Selah: Stop, Look, Listen – December 21, 2023

That Lord be with you.

You know I think I began to see through Santa Claus when I was a boy, and one day just before Christmas, I was with my mom in a department store, and there I see Santa Claus, and then I go with my mom to another store... Well, where I see Santa Claus again in that store. But you know, Santa Claus did not look anything like what he looked like in the other store... I mean, in the other store, Santa look kind of obese and in this store, it looks like you could use a few pounds, so I'm wondering... And that's the day that I just knew that something was not adding up for me in Santa Claus. That was a day I began to wonder about this transcendent being who lives way up at the North Pole, and he's supposed to be able to see you when you're sleeping. And he knows when we've been good or bad, and what's more, he's keeping this list on every one of us, and he's checking it twice, and if you and I have not been good, we're getting coal and our stocking this Christmas... Well, it just wasn't making sense for me anymore.

Sad to say... Sad to say it would take some more years before religion didn't make sense for me and more... I mean. Religion in all of its form, religion says, If you're Good, God will love you, if you're good, God will bless you, and God keeping this list, checking it twice, and if you're trying real hard, you might even get to heaven. Well, I'm gonna talk with you for a few moments, not about Santa Claus, Christmas, but, about the real Jesus Christmas and to see why it's called, good news of great joy. I'm reading today in The Little Book of Titus, the Apostle Paul's a letter to his colleague, Titus, who's serving on the island of Crete. Titus Chapter 3, Verses 4-7, Paul writes, When the goodness and loving kindness of God, our savior appeared, he saved us not because of any works of righteousness that we have done, but according to His mercy. To the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit, He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ, our savior. So that having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

So here's a Christmas story, a story that goes even beyond the angels and shepherds beyond Mary and Joseph. The story that God came down and he appears in a manger. Paul says, But when the goodness and loving kindness of God, our Savior appeared, He saved us. He saved us not because of any works of righteousness that we had done, note God's motivation here, note God's reason for saving you and me. It says that He saved us not because of any works of righteousness that we had done. Our work had nothing to do with it, whether he says it's all about the goodness and loving kindness of God. It's not that God is up there in heaven. Keeping a list, checking it twice. Gonna see who's not an nice. No, when the goodness and loving kindness of God, our Savior appeared, He saved us. So what prompts God to save you and me? Well, why did God do what was it? That we deserved it. Was it because... What was it? Because we're good church going, people know? No. When the goodness and loving kindness of God, our Savior appeared, He saved us. It is God who takes the initiative. As believers in Jesus, we don't think in



## water from rock

terms of what we have deserved while we have our earned the terms of God's goodness and loving kindness. The text continues, He saved us not because of any works of righteousness that we have done, but according to his mercy to the water of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit. This means that God washes away all the guilt and stain of sin by the water of rebirth and renewal, God gives us a newness of life that can only be compared to a rebirth, to a new birth. God makes us new people.

God's Christmas gift for you and me is a new birth, a new life, a new heart, a new nature. All of this, Paul says, to the power of the Holy Spirit. Paul continues writing, this spirit God poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ, our Savior, so that having been justified by his grace, that is being put right with God by His grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. It was in a conference on world religion at Oxford University, were experts on religion from around the world, they were meeting and they were debating what is unique about the Christian faith, and the debate is going on and on until the great Oxford scholar and Christian C. S. Lewis... Well, it just happens into the room... And they asked CS Lewis, they said, What is it that is unique about the Christian faith? Lewis fires back his answer, what is unique about Christianity? Well, that's easy, it's grace. And you know the experts in world religion, they had to agree to the thing that is totally unique about Christianity is grace, that only with the God of the Bible does his love, forgiveness, salvation, come to us free of charge. So put Santa Claus theology aside. God is not up there in Heaven keeping a list, you and me checking it twice to see if you've been good or nice. No, when the goodness and loving kindness of God, our savior appeared, he saved us not because of any works of righteousness that we have done, but according to His mercy.

That is good news of great joy, because of the goodness and loving kindness of God that has appeared in Jesus. Our past is forgiven. Our present is secure, our future is glorious life with God. I love the good news of Christmas that we have in the Gospel of Luke chapter 2, where the angel said to the shepherds, Behold, I bring you good news of great joy, which shall be for all people. For unto you was born this day in the city of David, a Savior, who is Christ, the Lord. Something to think about these days of Advent. And something to tell others.

I am Tim Smith, a fellow traveler. Thanks for listening until next time.