**HEAR YE! IT’S MIDNIGHT AND ALL’S WELL**

The history of the Town Crier fascinates me. Long before alarm clocks, and even before regulated chimes from grandfather clocks that the majority of people could afford, there were Town Criers. Sometimes called Bellmen, they were very important people in most towns and villages in Europe from the 17th to the 20th centuries. They were an important part of early American history from the founding at Plymouth Rock through the Revolutionary War. They were men who carried lanterns and bells and were chosen officials of the king, mayor, town council, or other government position. Their job was critical to the community in that they were the designated *Newsman* of the day.

In a world where very few people were literate, it was important for news to be broadcasted quickly to everyone in town. While there was always the local gossip that was whispered from house to house and from pub to pub, it could not be considered “official” until the man with the booming voice wearing the red coat, tri-corne hat, white pants and black boots rang his bell and shouted, “Oyez! Oyez! Oyez!” (“Listen! Listen! Listen!” --- or in olde English: “Hear ye! Hear ye! Hear ye!”).

After the great news was shouted to the citizens, he would conclude with “God save the King (Queen)!” He would then take the document in which he had made the proclamation and “post” it on the door of the local Inn, or perhaps the Church, allowing any who could read to see it for themselves in the handwriting of the Official (king, mayor, councilman, etc). That is why papers and mail today are called “Posts,” and delivered by Postmen. These Town Criers were protected by the law in the event they brought bad news. The old saying, “Don’t shoot the messenger” comes from this. It was a crime to punish the Crier who delivered bad news. It was equal to attacking the king.

In certain days when possible catastrophes might be imminent, such as a war, or a crime spree, or threatening weather, the Town Crier would patrol the street at night and at the top of the hour would ring his bell and shout: “It’s two o’clock and alllll’s well!” In that village he would be the calming effect of the current crisis.

It’s obvious today we don’t have a Town Crier, instead we have 24/7 news channels, the internet and social media to get our up-to-date news. While we are not always sure of the accuracy of the newsman or publisher or “expert” giving us the news, we want to believe we are getting truth. But, as Mark Twain so humorously would say, “A lie can travel half-way around the world while the truth is putting on its shoes.” You just never know how accurate or truthful the mass media is reporting the events of the day. Most newsmen and commentators have a bias and want to slant the news to their benefit.

But when God speaks, when His prophets shout, “Hear ye! Hear ye!” – then you know for certain what is about to be said is the gospel (“good news”) – even when it is bad news or fearful news. For example, one of my very favorite Old Testament stories is of the prophet Micaiah in I Kings 22 (almost verbatim in 2 Chronicles 18). Judah’s good king Jehoshaphat had foolishly “*by marriage allied himself with Ahab*” – the wicked king of Israel (2 Chron. 18:1). Ahab wanted to go to war with Syria and persuaded Jehoshaphat to fight beside him. But they wanted God on their side and so petitioned the 400 prophets of Israel to ask if the campaign would end in victory or defeat. They gladly told the king what he wanted to hear: “Go up! God will deliver it into your hand!” But Jehoshaphat was not convinced, knowing these were false prophets. So he demanded to hear from a true prophet. Ahab knew of only one in his country, but he was always a bearer of bad news to the idolatrous Ahab and Jezebel. But Judah’s king was insistent to get Micaiah’s message before committing his army to battle.

Micaiah was found and told in no uncertain terms that he should “go along to get along” and “Amen” what the 400 false prophets had predicted. His reply was priceless: “*As the Lord lives, whatever the Lord says to me, that I will speak*.” When he was brought before the two kings and asked if they should go into battle, he replied with dripping sarcasm, “Sure, go ahead, you’re bound to be victorious!” (my paraphrase). Micaiah’s tongue-in-cheek prophecy was immediately seen by Ahab as “fake news.” When implored to tell the truth he proceeded to tell a parable about how God could convince Ahab to go into battle and be slaughtered! Various angels gave their theory as to how to persuade Ahab. But then one spoke up and said he would go as a lying spirit to convince the false prophets to sell the king a lie. God said, “Go, you will be successful.” Instead of accepting this bad news as God’s truth, Ahab chose to imprison him (i.e. shoot the messenger). Bible readers will know how this all turned out. Ahab is killed, while Jehoshaphat escapes with his life back to Judah.

I have said that to say this, God’s prophets were His Town Criers who spoke on His behalf to the world. They have all taken the same oath that Micaiah took, “*As the Lord lives, whatever the Lord says to me, that I will speak*.” Whether it is good news, or bad, God’s spokesmen have told us the future, then “posted” it for all to read for themselves. So what is the news for today? It’s posted in your Bible in 1 Thessalonians 5. God’s Town Crier says, “Hear ye, Hear ye!” …

*​1 But concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you.
2 For you yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night.
3 For when they say, “Peace and safety!” then sudden destruction comes upon them, as labor pains upon
 a pregnant woman. And they shall not escape.
4 But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief.
5 You are all sons of light and sons of the day. We are not of the night nor of darkness.
6 Therefore let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober.
7 For those who sleep, sleep at night, and those who get drunk are drunk at night.
8 But let us who are of the day be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet the
 hope of salvation.
9 For God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ,
10 who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him.
11* ***Therefore comfort each other and edify one another, just as you also are doing****.*

The sun rises and sets. Stocks rise and fall. Wars come and go. Pandemics attack then recede. There’s a time to be born and to die. There’s always good news and bad news. But one thing we can comfort and edify one another with is this, “*God did not appoint us to wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, who died for us, that whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with Him*!”

Hear ye! Hear ye! It’s midnight and all’s well. Sleep in peace.

Until tomorrow, comfort one another with these words.

I love you,

Rick