

What Christmas Tells Us About God

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Date: 25 December 2011

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[0:00] If I would say as a preacher what my tradition is, it would be to at least at some point in December or Sundays leading up to Christmas, at some point I'm going to preach out of Luke chapter 2.

! And there are a number of reasons why that's the case. Probably the most significant reason would be that Luke chapter 2 has contained within it the whole story, the story of the birth of Christ, more so than any single passage in all of the Bible.

So it just seems quite practical if you're going to preach on the first coming of Christ and His miraculous birth and you would go to Luke chapter 2.

But there is another reason why I always find myself coming to Luke chapter 2 at some point in my preaching schedule. It's because I love it. And it's a pastor's prerogative to preach out of a passage that he loves.

And so I love this passage. And it is beautifully written, of course. And now when I say beautifully written, I guess I would have to say that it is primarily the King James Version that I think of when I think of Luke chapter 2 because of the way it is presented in such a poetic kind of style.

[1:41] And really, you don't lose all of that when you get to the other translations. I'm reading and read a moment ago from the New King James Version.

And it still sounds similar to what we're probably used to coming out of Luke chapter 2. But it is poetic.

It's picturesque. And Dr. Luke, of course, who wrote this book, because he was a physician, by the way, did it in such a beautiful style.

And I'm not going to read the entire passage again. And we read it a moment ago. But just to remind you of what I'm talking about here, you just begin with the words.

And it came to pass in those days. It came to pass that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus.

And we're just kind of lured into the story, aren't we?

[2:43] And we know the story. It's beautiful. And it is an old story, isn't it? I mean, it's somewhat more than 2,000 years old.

And at least when it comes to the Bible, it is one of the most familiar stories in Scripture. And really, when it comes to Christmas, whether you are talking about God's people, Christians, but even those who are unbelievers and not followers of Christ are familiar with this story as Luke wrote it in Luke chapter 2.

And so it's beautiful. It's old. It's familiar. But it is a lot more, isn't it? A whole lot more. This 2,000-year-old story of the birth of Jesus Christ wonderfully connects with our lives.

Have you thought of Luke chapter 2 in that way? I mean, seriously. Looking deep into the story and considering every move of the story, then considering that this story connects with me.

It's not just a beautiful story and a wonderful story and brings up pictures of that nativity. But it connects with me.

[4:10] And in case you haven't considered this, it is my intention this morning to help make that connection from this story.

In the first place, verses 1 through 5, the first few verses of the story, those verses reveal a God who is the sovereign ruler over all the affairs of man.

Including yours. Including mine. Including our somewhat insignificant lives in light of all things, in light of all the affairs of man that are going on on this planet right now.

God is sovereign. He's the sovereign ruler over all of the affairs of man. When you read the opening verses of Luke chapter 2, and I did just a moment ago, have you ever thought what an amazing thing it is that God foreordained that His Son would be born in Bethlehem?

If you know anything about Bethlehem, you know that it was a very insignificant city, a little town really, not even qualifying as a city. Insignificant little town there in Israel.

[5:34] Have you considered how amazing it is that God chose that city? And He told us He was going to do that years before He did, through the prophet Micah.

And God so ordered things in the world to make that prophecy come true. Have you thought about that? God moved everything to make sure that that happened just like He said it would.

You know, according to the biblical record, and surely you know this, and maybe you don't, but when the time came for the Messiah, the Christ, to be born, His mother Mary and His legal father, Joseph, where were they living?

They were living in Nazareth, not Bethlehem. And so in order to fulfill His Word, God's Word, and bring His two choice people to Bethlehem that first Christmas, what did He do?

What did God do? Well, God put it in the heart and mind of the most powerful man on the earth in that day. That would be Caesar Augustus, a pagan ruler.

[6:45] He put it in His mind, in His heart, to issue an order to all the civilized world, which, by the way, was the Roman world. It was an order that they be taxed.

And listen, God moved the ruler of the world to do that. Because not only did He need to move a ruler to make such a decree, but God moved a better part of this world's population to make sure this happened in order for Mary and Joseph to return to their city.

Because, you see, in order for them to be taxed, this was a part of the decree, they had to be enrolled, had to be registered. That's why the Bible puts it just that way.

A census, a registry, an enrollment. And in order to make that happen, Caesar decreed that everyone return to their own hometowns.

Now, a little unreasonable, perhaps. You know, I mean, I'm sure it wasn't very easy. It certainly was not easy for Mary and Joseph to make that journey, even though it wasn't very far, not by our standards today.

[8:06] And yet many had to travel great distances in order to fulfill this decree. A little unreasonable, but when you're Caesar, you have every right to do things like that. I mean, because you are the sovereign ruler of the world, the known world of that day.

And Caesar Augustus then decreed it, and it was done. And yet, in reality, Caesar Augustus was just simply doing the bidding of the supreme ruler of all the universe.

Remember Proverbs 21.1, where the Bible says the king's heart is as a stream of water in the hand of the Lord, and he turns it wherever he will.

That included Caesar Augustus. Caesar Augustus did not know he was doing the bidding of Yahweh God. He didn't even know Yahweh God. Nor did he care about Him. But God moved him so that the world could be moved, so that one family could move, that his son, just at the right timing, his son, the Messiah, the Christ, would be born in Bethlehem.

Now, where does this connect with us? Have you ever felt like you were insignificant in a world of billions of people, now seven billion and still counting?

[9:34] Have you ever felt like maybe, you know, my little life, my little concerns, my little private issues, my little private issues, and burdens, are so small, so insignificant, in light of billions of people, and all of the governments, and countries, and great powers, and so forth.

Have you ever felt like maybe God's sovereignty was not all that concerned with your little life? Will take heart. Someone has said, for it is implicit in Scripture that all the mammoth political forces and all the giant industrial complexes without their even knowing it, are being guided by God, not for their own sake, but for the sake of God's little people.

And that's us. And so, first of all, we need to see, in verses 1 through 5, is more than just simply an accounting of why Mary and Joseph went from Nazareth to Bethlehem.

Not just simply the account of the sovereign right of a king by the name of Caesar Augustus. Those verses reveal a God who is the sovereign ruler over all the affairs of man, including yours and mine. Second, verses 6 and 7 reveal a God who calls His people to walk with Him on the road to Calvary.

[11:11] That's in the story here. Though the cross is not mentioned, Calvary, Golgotha, whatever term you prefer to use, is not mentioned here.

The death of Christ is not mentioned in Luke 2. And yet, this is part of the story. It's the road to Calvary. You know, you would think, if God could move a powerful Roman Caesar by the name of Caesar Augustus, and move an entire empire of people, thousands and thousands, multiplied

thousands of people, if God could do that, in order to bring Mary and Joseph from Nazareth to Bethlehem, you would think that He could make sure they had a suitable place to stay when they got there.

Well, of course He could have. And Jesus could have been born into a wealthy family, too. And later, Jesus could have turned stone into bread during His temptation there in the wilderness. And Jesus could have called down 10,000 angels to fight for Him in the Garden of Gethsemane when the Roman soldiers came to arrest Him. And Jesus could have come down from the cross if He had wanted to and save Himself.

The question, you see, is not what God can do. It's what He wills to do and wants to do. God's will is, well, 2 Corinthians 7, 13 puts it well.

[12:45] For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich yet, for your sakes He became poor, that you, through His poverty, might be rich.

Not physically rich, but spiritually and eternally rich. For your sake He became poor.

You see, God rules all things. There isn't any doubt about that in my mind. I hope not in yours. God rules all things, even hotel capacities. He rules that. And He does it for your sakes.

You see, Bethlehem is the beginning of Calvary's road for Jesus. It's the beginning of it. Calvary's road begins, as someone has put it, begins with a no vacancy sign in Bethlehem, but it ends with an unjust trial, wicked men spitting in His face, a beating, and a scoffing, and a cruel cross in Jerusalem.

Don't forget, and here's where it connects with us, don't forget what Jesus said in Matthew 16 and verse 24. He said, If any will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me.

[14:16] So this, see, this is more than just an old familiar story. It wonderfully connects with us today. That is, those of us who are followers of Christ.

We, and you know this, don't you, we join Him on Calvary's road. That's our journey as believers. We join Him on that road.

And we hear Him say to us what He said to His disciples in John 15, 20. He said, Remember, remember the word that I said to you? A servant is not greater than his master.

So Luke 2 is much more than just an old familiar story. Verses 1 to 5 reveal a God who is the sovereign ruler over all the affairs of man, including yours and mine. Verses 6 and 7 reveal a God who calls His people to walk with Him on the road to Calvary.

And then verses 8 through 11 reveal a God who conquers all fear. All fear. In Luke 1, 13, the angel made a visitation to Zechariah who would very soon be the father of John the Baptist.

[15:31] And the angel said to Zechariah, Fear not. Over in Matthew 1, 20, the same angel, I believe, visited with Joseph, albeit through a dream.

And he said to Joseph, Do not be afraid. And then back in Luke 1, verse 30, the angel appeared to Mary.

And what did the angel say to Mary? Fear not. Fear not. And then here in Luke 2, 10, to the shepherds, the angel said, Fear not.

Fear not. Over and over and over again. The truth is that it's natural for us to fear things, isn't it?

And we fear a lot of things. We really do.

And it's natural for us to do so. But though it is natural, God sends His Son, Jesus, with these words to us. Fear not.

[16:35] Fear not. Whatever the source of that fear is. Do not fear. And speaking of the source of fear, Hebrews 2, 14 tells us, though it's not a text that speaks specifically about Christmas, but it tells us and helps us understand that Jesus came on that Christmas morning so that He could die for us.

And Hebrews 2, 14 says that through death, that is His death, He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil, and deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

There's a whole lot in that passage. But the implication is this. If the worst fear, fear of death, and resulting condemnation, if that has been taken away through the death of Christ, then surely God has conquered all the lesser fears that we might have.

The fourth connection comes to us in verse 10. Verse 10 reveals a God who wants to replace all my fears with joy.

His joy. I'm not talking about happiness. Happiness is a good thing to have, and God is gracious to give us that as well, but that's a little different than joy. Happiness is based upon our circumstances. [18:08] Happenstance, that's where the word comes from. We're talking about something deeper than that, more abiding than that, something that is sourced completely in the Lord, and that is joy.

Now, the angel said, do not be afraid. And why? Well, he tells us. He said, I bring you good tidings of great joy. Joy.

Christmas is all about joy. The Christmas story is about God sending His Son, Jesus, into the world with this message to us. Have no fear.

I've come to remove fear. And I have come to replace it with joy. My joy. In Philippians 1.25, Paul summarized the goal of his ministry to the church.

And this is what he said. He said, I know that I shall remain and continue with you for your progress, or that is, your spiritual growth and maturity. And then he says this, and for your joy of faith.

[19:11] The joy of faith. The next wonderful connection in Luke 2 comes in verses 13 to 14. In verses 13 and 14, God reveals, or these verses reveal, a God who offers peace to those who will believe in His Son, Jesus.

Peace. The Bible says here, and suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of heavenly hosts praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest.

and on earth peace, good will toward men. Now that's the New King James Version. The King James Version is very similar. A more literal translation would be like the NASB that says, On earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.

Even the NIV, which is not my version of choice, it gets it right. Glory to God in the highest. And on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests.

This is a tremendous passage. Tremendous truth. Now the sad reality is that Christmas does not bring peace to everyone.

[20:34] Did you know that? It doesn't bring peace to all. Jesus said in John 13, 19, This is the condemnation that light has come into the world.

That's a reference to the incarnation, the coming of Christ, Christmas. He said, Light has come into the world and men love darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil.

You know, on this day, this perhaps most popular of holidays, there are those who can look out on a Christmas day.

Maybe it's chilly, cold, maybe even a bleak kind of day to some, and that's all they see. That's all they see.

And there is no peace with God for many in the world today. Far from it. Instead, there is hostility, anger, even hatred for anything that represents the truth of Christmas in our world today.

[21:53] The coming of Jesus does not bring peace to everyone. Christmas does not bring peace to everyone. For who then?

For who does Christmas bring peace? For everyone who believes. Everyone who believes. See, faith is the key that opens the treasure of peace with God.

John 1.11. He, that's Jesus, came to His own, the Jews, and His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God to those who believe in His name.

And the name, of course, is Jesus. That is the crucial point of Christmas. I mean, the birth of Jesus is not intended just to warm you as we just kind of imagine and visualize the nativity and the beautiful scene of the birth of Christ.

It's not intended just to warm you, to warm your heart. It's not intended just to wow you as we read through the story and think, wow, what an incredible story.

[23:17] It's more than that. God sent His Holy Son on that Christmas morning and He did so with, of course, with an amazing announcement from the angel. And He did all of this so that He would receive the highest glory.

Glory in the highest. And why? Why does God deserve that high glory? Well, because God chose to offer sinful man the opposite of what we deserve.

grace, not justice, favor, not condemnation.

And all you must do is turn to Him and believe on Him. Trust Him. See, we understand all of this from the story of Christmas recorded in Acts, or excuse me, Luke chapter 2.

And this is so much more than just an old familiar story. A Savior has come. A Savior has come. And there is the favor of God's peace for all those who will believe in Him.

[24 : 34] What a story. A mother and her four-year-old daughter were Christmas shopping in a very busy Christmas mall as they all are leading up to Christmas.

And at some point they stopped for a moment right there in front of a window to a storefront there in the mall so that the little girl's mother could check her gift list and start checking things off.

And she was quite frantic and stressed out to the limit. Meanwhile, her little girl oblivious to all the stress involved.

She just stood there and she looked in the window of that storefront and it happened to be a Christian book and gift store. And there in the window was a beautiful nativity scene.

And the little girl just looked at that nativity and noticing all the different characters and she just took the whole thing in.

[25 : 38] And after a while she tugged on her mother's coat and said, Mommy, why is there a little baby lying in the hay? To which her mother responded very curtly.

She said, Honey, we don't have time for that now. We have to get ready for Christmas. Well, thankfully, the Christmas shopping is now over.

Today is Christmas Day. Take time to worship the baby that was lying in the hay.

Thank you.