

'THE REALLY GOOD LIFE'

(Life of Christ Series)

Studies in the book of Luke

Great Things in Little Packages

Opening Christmas presents is the high point of the holidays for many people. The long anticipation of what good things are inside those festively wrapped packages is almost over. When you're a child, you usually want to open the big packages first, assuming the best gifts are usually large and heavy. The older you get, the more you know that sometimes the gifts of greatest value and blessing often come in small, simple packages. A tiny box may contain expensive jewelry. Even a simple envelope may hold a key to a car or house! A simple greeting card may enclose a check for lots of money or even a cash gift itself. God is often like that with His greatest gifts, so we will be totally awed by His gifts, not the wrappings.

The Christmas story is full of historical evidence of this gift-giving policy of our heavenly Father. Just consider: a little known couple from the obscure town of Nazareth got a big surprise visit from an archangel about the coming of Jesus; then, a trip to the tiny village of Bethlehem where the birth of the Lord Jesus would happen in a small, obscure stable rather than an executive suite in the Holiday Inn as the delivery room of little Lord Jesus – all these seemingly small, insignificant venues actually highlighted and glorified God's most awesome Gift to the human race, His only begotten Son. And now, these places are famous because of Christ's visitation to them. Originally, they were small and unimportant, but now they are historic and renowned. Great things from God usually do come in packages of seemingly little value or importance until He touches them with greatness.

Sometimes people get depressed at Christmas time because they feel that they are insignificant and unimportant. Or they feel that they are in some dead-end situation in their lives that nobody cares about. It's very possible that you or someone you know or will meet during the holidays will feel down and out and alone. Don't forget that if you are feeling worthless or that you are in a remote, far off place, God likes to do really great things in people and in places where there is a humble ambiance in which to magnify His glory. The common denominator of all the biblical Christmas characters was the Lord Jesus Christ. What brought excitement and adventure and meaning to their lives was that all of them were vitally involved in the mission of Christ's entry into the human race. If you are as committed to being used of God to glorify His Son, Jesus, as Zacharias & Elizabeth, Mary & Joseph, the shepherds, Gabriel & the angelic host, there is nothing small and unimportant about what God can and will do with your life. It didn't really matter how important they were or weren't at the start– the One with Whom their lives became wrapped up greatly escalated their value and importance before God. Feeling small and unimportant right now? You're a perfect candidate for something big from God if you are also totally committed to His Son.

'The Way to the Manger'

(God's Sovereign Control of Circumstances)

Luke 2:1-7

An Egotistical Emperor

(God's use of Caesar Augustus to order His will)

"And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world as to be registered."

2:1

'In 29 BC the Roman senate declared Octavius (aka Augustus) Rome's first emperor. Two years later they honored him with the title 'Augustus' ("exalted one" – a term signifying religious veneration)... He ruled until his death at age 76 in AD 14. Under his rule, the Roman Empire dominated the Mediterranean region...He ordered "all the world" (the world of the Roman Empire) to be registered. This was not merely a one-time census but a series of enrollments that were to occur every 14 years. Palestine previously had been excluded from the census because Jews were exempt from serving in the Roman army (a main purpose of registration was to register young men for military service), but this new registration was to number each nation and tribe...for use in the levying of poll taxes.' **(From notes of the MacArthur Study Bible)**

God's sovereign use of political authorities to accomplish His will: Proverbs 21:1 / Ezra 7:21-23, Isaiah 45:1-4, Daniel 4:34 & 5:23-25, Acts 4:27-28, Romans 13:1-5, 1 Peter 2:13-17

A Procrastinating Politician

(God's use of Governor Quirinius to 'time' His will)

"This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city." **2:2**

Ancient historic records say Publius Sulpicius Quirinius governed Syria from AD 6 - 9. A registration was taken in Palestine in AD 6 that sparked a violent Jewish revolt (the historian Josephus) (according to Acts 5:37, Luke concurs). Quirinius was responsible for that census and helped to subdue the revolt, but the date of that census can't be the one that made Joseph, Mary and Jesus relocate to Bethlehem since the birth of Jesus of necessity must be previous to 4 BC (date of Herod's death). This apparent problem was resolved when an archaeological fragment was discovered near Rome that acknowledges a Roman official who served twice as governor of Syria during the reign of Augustus. The remaining problem is that the earlier date for a Roman census is 8 BC that is a bit too early for the one associated with the birth of Jesus. It is believed by scholars that Augustus ordered the census in 8 BC but Quirinius didn't actually carry it out for 2 to 3 years after that due to political difficulties in the region. Since this seems to be the case, the census would have actually taken place about 5 BC with Herod's death coming one to one and a half years later (late in the year of 4 BC). Luke's account then should be trusted as an accurate record that assumes the earlier administration of Quirinius as a well-known fact at the time.

God's sovereign use of human failures (procrastination even) to accomplish perfect timing in the accomplishment of His perfect will: Galatians 4:4, Psalm 37:23-24, Genesis 50:20, etc.

A Mercenary Merchant

(God's use of an insensitive inn-keeper to set the stage)

"And she brought forth her firstborn Son and ...laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn." **2:7**

Although it may seem shameful that no one would find better accommodations or even surrender their own for a young lady in labor ready to give birth, it probably suited God's purposes better for the delivery to happen like it did. It probably was not a barn-like building but rather a sort of cave like shelter near the small inn in Bethlehem. If this is true, the shelter and feed ledge (not a feed box) would have looked quite similar to the grave from which Jesus would arise, making His entry and exit into and from this life very congruent. Even the swaddling cloths He was wrapped in resembled the strips of cloth that will be used to wrap His body after the crucifixion. It was also a place to which the visiting shepherds later that night could have access (not so with the inn or private homes).

God can even use the harshness of other people to steer us into the perfect place for Him to creatively show forth His perfect plan and design: Romans 8:28, Job 1:21, Psalm 76:10

A Committed, Contented, Christ-Centered Couple

(God's blessing of a humble, submissive couple to do His will)

"Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with Child. So it was while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. And she brought forth her firstborn Son and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn." **2:4-7**

Although it is most likely not during the winter months that Joseph and Mary traveled to Bethlehem, it still was an arduous 70-mile trip that was difficult and uncomfortable. God's will is not always an easy assignment without pain or difficulty. But for those who love the Lord there is a meekness and a quietness under duress that sustains them on the way to His perfect will and blessing. God controls situations around us as we follow Him, but He also expects patient, gracious endurance on our part.

Philippians 2:14-15, Hebrews 10:32-36, 1 Peter 5:6-11