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Are You Dreaming of the Right Christmas?

Matthew 10:7-8: (NASB) ⁷*And as you go, preach, saying, the kingdom of heaven is at hand.*
⁸*Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers, cast out demons. Freely you received, freely give.*



Christmas has come - the hustle and the bustle, the lights, the music, the trees, the ornaments and the garland. Christmas has come - Santa and reindeer and elves and Frosty and movies and presents and gift wrap and cards. Christmas has come - whether you feel you can say "Merry Christmas" or just "Happy Holidays," we are wishing well to those around us, for it is the season of good cheer and smiles. Christmas has come - family and dinner and cakes and pies and cookies and giving and receiving and football and dressing in new clothes. Yes, Christmas has come. It has certainly made its indelible mark on us yet again. You know Christ has come. The prophecies said that he would and God's plan said that it was time. Christ has come - he was born to live so that he could die and redeem all of humanity. Christ has come - his gift was simple, yet it was the greatest and most powerful gift that could ever, that would ever be given to this world. Christ has come, and thus, all the human race has the opportunity for eternal life. Christ has come - has he made his indelible mark on you?

This episode's story of Christmas will be a little different. Rather than simply telling the story of the birth of Jesus, we will instead focus on the simple concept of gifts. We will focus on the lives of some who surrounded his birth and see what gifts they received because of their experiences. We will then see how those gifts are given to us, and how we can take those gifts and "pay it forward." After all, that is what Jesus did! Each segment will bring another gift!

Our first gift is PROVIDENCE: Providence is the overruling power of God applying itself in the everyday life of those who serve Him. Sometimes God's providence comes to us and we do not see it. We do not recognize it because we are so used to seeing life the way we think it should be seen that we cannot wrap our heads around what God is telling us and what God is providing for us. For Zacharias and Elizabeth, this was the case.

Zacharias and Elizabeth were chosen to be the parents of John the Baptist. The two of them were very faithful, and the Scriptures say that they were righteous in the sight of God. Zacharias served the people as a priest of God, and yet despite their faithfulness, his wife was ever childless. As they grew older, their hopes and prayers for children waned.

Yet, they went on with their lives humbly serving their God, until one day the providence of God suddenly began to manifest itself while Zacharias was serving in the Temple: Luke 1:8-10: Zacharias was doing the job God had providentially arranged for him to do. He was serving alone in the Temple, and the people were outside in prayer until he should emerge.

Zacharias needed to hear what God was about to reveal. What better way to get his attention than for him to be in service alone and in a holy place: Luke 1:11-17: This was God's providence, revealed in a very heavy dose. How hard it would have been to absorb such news! How hard would it have been to believe such news, such providence was going to work through you? How hard would it have been to go home and tell your wife?

Sometimes God's providence changes us in an instant. In this case, the news was so overwhelming that Zacharias doubted and was struck mute, which created an obvious communication challenge. But Zacharias' speechlessness also created a poignant reminder of God's providence and will.

The following Scriptures exactly describe Zacharias' encounter with the angel and the aftermath: Luke 1:18-25: When you think about it, God's providence in our lives is God's power in our lives. In the case of Elizabeth and Zacharias, this blessed power in their faithful lives was necessary for the good of the people and most importantly for the bringing of the Messiah. It is a humbling experience to see God's power manifest in your life.

God's providence is a gift. It was a gift to Zacharias and Elizabeth after a 400-year period of silence from God to Israel. God's providence accomplished many things: It blessed Zacharias and Elizabeth, it reignited hope among the people and it gave Israel the opportunity to be properly prepared for their coming Messiah.



We observe God's providence to them. What about the gift of His providence to us?

Romans 8:28: How often do we recognize and unwrap the providences of God in our lives? How often do we bask in the utter beauty of His care for us, even when life seems difficult or unjust? Remember, for Elizabeth there was a measure of disgrace she felt in her childlessness, but the providence of that barren state opened the door for the providence of blessing. How do we accept the gift of God's providence and pay it forward to others? That is what Jesus did!

Our second gift is TRUST: Faith is the foundation for true trust. Faith puts us in a position to be able to see beyond our normal limits. Trust is the real, practical and sold-out changing of our lives to conform to those things which faith has revealed.

The power of providence can open unthinkable doors of blessing and in the case of Elizabeth and Zacharias, it did just that. This couple was beyond childbearing years and had faithfully served God in their barrenness without complaint and without hesitation. They accepted their disadvantaged state and moved on. The providence of John the Baptist being born to them was a door of blessing they thought to have been sealed shut. It was opened to them because God opened it in an unimagined and glorious way. Providence is a gift!

The providence surrounding the birth of Jesus would present itself again and again in different forms and to different people. Joseph would be tried sorely by God's providence, for what he was to face was not just merely the opening of a sealed door of opportunity that was believed to have passed by. No, Joseph would face a mountain of disgrace and doubt that only extreme trust in God could traverse.

Matthew 1:18-20: The dilemma Joseph faced would have been untenable for a devout and upstanding Jewish man of that time, for the covenant of marriage was in those days truly sacred. To hear Mary's story of being miraculously pregnant seemed to be, to say the very least, a far-fetched tale spun in desperation by a young woman who was searching for a way out of some deep trouble. Every logical thought of Joseph was bent towards what he thought was the hard and inevitable solution.

For more on Joseph and the gift of trust, please see CQ Rewind Full Edition.

Romans 8:33-39: First, Paul tells us that other people cannot overrun our personal trust in God's power. Second, Paul tells us that outside circumstances cannot override our decision to trust in Jesus' sacrifice. Third, Paul tells us that nothing, earthly or spiritual, can overcome our call to trust in God's plan through Jesus.

Let us come to adore Jesus and do as Joseph did. Trust in God's providence in such a way that those around us can truly see "God with us!" After all, that is what Jesus did!

Our third gift is PRIVILEGE: When we can recognize the providence of God in our lives and when we can truly trust in that providence, God can give us privilege. To have privilege is to be chosen to play a role in the unfolding of God's plan. There are many roles to be played, ranging from the mighty roles of authority given to the Apostles all the way down to the quiet prayer warriors who support and encourage God's work. To have privilege is to be blessed!

Mary was given an extraordinarily unique privilege in the carrying out of God's plan, for Messiah needed to come into the world and therefore needed a mother. No other mother in the history of the human race would have her experiences and life. Mary truly was privileged.

We do not know anything about Mary before her angelic visit except that she was a faithful God-fearing Jewish girl. We will see that the depth of her faith can be understood by her response to the angel's message. Mary certainly grew to understand the providence of God.

Mary certainly grew to have full faith and trust in God, and she therefore was blessed with great privilege by God: **Luke 1:26-29:** Talk about an unexpected greeting! How do you process something like that?

For more on Mary and the gift of privilege, please see CQ Rewind Full Edition.

We all wonder at the privilege given us. As we wonder we also ought to heed and help the brotherhood, for as Jesus showed us, by serving them we are honoring God and lifting our mutual privilege up before Him in gratitude.

Finally, our privilege should keep us separate from the world so the world can see it and eventually come to glorify God through Jesus: 1 Peter 2:12



From providence, to trust, to privilege. These gifts all work together for the purposes of not only fulfilling God's word and will, but also for the fulfilling of the lives of those whom He has chosen - those several individuals whom He has positioned for extraordinary blessing. As we have been looking at the Christmas story, we begin to realize that we ourselves are in the position to receive these precious gifts. And what are we to do with such gifts? Pay them forward. Share their value and power that God might be praised.

Now we introduce the familiar context of our next gift: Luke 2:1,3-7: Our next gift is the gift of HOPE, divine hope. Hope is the breath that brings us through today and helps us to embrace tomorrow, for without hope we merely exist. Without hope the mundane activities of today are merely fillers of time and fulfillers of responsibility. With hope, our mundane activities become a pathway towards something bigger, something greater.

Such hope was bestowed in a most uncanny fashion upon a group of shepherds the night Jesus was born.

For more on the shepherds and the gift of hope, please see CQ Rewind Full Edition.

The gifts we have received so far can only be described by looking at the divine grace of God and accepting the fact He loves His human creation without measure. He has proven it through His plan for restoration. As we have seen, the path to that restoration runs through the lives of many specific people who were blessed with God's providence, blessed with opportunity to trust Him, blessed with unspeakable privilege to be a part of His plan and blessed with the unique hope of the Gospel message. We, like these chosen ones, have been freely given these gifts. We, like these chosen ones, are charged with not only opening these gifts but spreading their value to the world. There is such wisdom in spreading the value of God's gifts to the world.

The next gift is REVEALED TRUTH. This gift of revealed truth is unique, as it is rarely ever given to any who have not been in a long and diligent search for God's revealed will. Revealed truth is usually given to those whose lives will be spent in the furthering of that truth and it is generally not given to those who would merely appreciate and cherish it.

Simeon was such a man. In the book of Luke, the very next event recorded after the birth of Jesus is the context of Simeon receiving revealed truth.

Jesus was born...now what? How are you supposed to act towards and care for him as a helpless infant? Joseph and Mary knew he was the Messiah but had not been given any special dispensation as to specifics to care for him, so they cared for him the only way they knew how.

They followed the rites of the Jewish Law: Luke 2:21-24

Our first lesson in understanding revealed truth: To realize divine truth is usually more fully understood while seeking or doing other things divine will has designed.

Being in the Temple and following the Law were sure signs of putting God first. The opportunity for revealed truth was now present.

Luke 2:25-27: Simeon was righteous and devout.

Our second lesson in understanding revealed truth: Truth was not only apt to be revealed where God's will is being followed, but truth is apt to be revealed by those whose character has already been shaped and proven so they are capable of bearing the burden of revealed truth with maturity and grace.

Simeon was ready for such a burden: Luke 2:28-32: Simeon's humility and passion are made plain.

Our third lesson in understanding revealed truth: All revealed truth is built upon the foundation of God's previously revealed truth.

Simeon gently cradles the newborn Messiah in his arms, immediately praises God and boldly proves the truth he is about to speak by the power of the prophetic word.

Think of the joy, passion and fulfillment Simeon would have experienced!

These emotions spilled over into the lives of Joseph and Mary: Luke 2:33-35: will pierce even your own soul to the end that thoughts from many hearts may be revealed.



Joseph and Mary are enlightened and perhaps cautioned.

This brings us to our fourth lesson in understanding revealed truth: Revealed truth expands the understanding of those around you.

While Jesus' parents knew he was the Messiah, they had not been able to begin to understand the scope of what that meant. Simeon broadened their prophetic and spiritual thinking.

The gift of truth revealed is for us as well. We just need to decide to be in the godly places to be able to see it coming. We need to develop our characters enough towards Christlikeness to be able to bear its weight.

While Simeon was privileged to reveal truth, Anna was privileged to expand it: Luke 2:36-38: Anna was a blessed vessel of revealed truth as well, for she was cut from the same cloth as Simeon.

Our final lesson in revealed truth is simple: There is always just enough revealed truth provided by God for whatever the time and circumstances require.

God uses revealed truth to build great power into our hope.

The world does not want or appreciate these gifts. It would rather replace them with the constant clamor of holidays and glitter. We must choose to protect our precious gifts.

God, in His wisdom, has given us the sacred history of His plan to always go back to, so we can be reminded of the beauty, simplicity and clarity of the gifts He has given to us. This has been illustrated through so many of his faithful ones. This represents another gift - **the gift of legacy** - the gift of a powerful pathway laid out before us that has been trodden by so many!

Our final gift is RESPONSIBILITY. Spiritual responsibility is not only being accountable for each and every gift received, it is being dependable enough to produce results with each and every gift.

Responsibility cannot be better represented than by Jesus himself. First, the previous gifts were all given to others to support his coming as the Messiah, so he is responsible for them being given. Second, Jesus himself received these gifts and with them he accomplished the greatest and most important mission the human race has ever or will ever see!

We start with Jesus as a child. **Jesus showed us early in his life he had recognition of his responsibility gift: Luke 2:42-43**

To recognize responsibility is to act on it, and Jesus acted as fully as a 12-year-old boy could act: Luke 2:49-50,52: (Do we recognize the gift of responsibility we are given in our privilege as Christians? **We move forward to age 30, and Jesus begins his ministry. When he is of age, Jesus applies himself to his gift of responsibility without reservation: Mark 1:9-13: Do we appreciate the gift of the responsibility we are blessed with? Do we fully and without reservation take the steps necessary to fully engage our awesome gift of Christian responsibility? **For three-and-a-half years, Jesus walked the walk and fulfilled that which he had come here to do. He completed the work of his responsibility to the last detail: Matthew 27:27-32: True praise to God is to fully use that which He has given you. How far along are we on our walk towards the completion of our own gift of responsibility? What is yet undone? What has yet to be attained?****

PROVIDENCE, TRUST, PRIVILEGE, HOPE, TRUTH REVEALED and RESPONSIBILITY. These are the gifts the lives of those surrounding the birth of Jesus gave to us. These are the gifts we are now to use to praise and honor our Father through Jesus!

Psalm 116:12-14: Let us look upon this Christmas season with true joy. Let us dream of the *right* Christmas and all that it means. Let us take the inspiration of these gifts with thanksgiving, open and apply them to fulfill our lives and bless those around us!

These gifts are gifts for us as well. Stop and look at what we have been given. Our lives are better because of Jesus. Pay it forward! That is what Jesus did.

***So, are you dreaming of the right Christmas?
For Jonathan and Rick and Christian Questions...
Think about it...!***