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## A Quiet Christmas

### Part 2 – Sleep in Heavenly Peace

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The Robbins family loves Christmas. Ashley and I are enjoying a quiet Christmas generally from 9:00 pm to 10:00 pm. That's our window of quiet. It's everything we can do to get the kids down by 9:00. We sit down in the living room and kick our feet up; we've been burning a fire every night. We've got a Christmas tree that's filled with all these little handmade ornaments. Literally, every bough is full. I don't know how we're going to handle the Christmases to come we're so full. We lost our tree skirt somewhere in the move and we broke our star. It's an imperfect Christmas, but, in every way, it's pretty perfect; we love it. And then, of course, at about 10:00, when we're ready to go to bed, somebody starts screaming.

We love being a family. This is the season where the Robbins family does quite a bit of reflection. Today is actually my mom's birthday and tomorrow, Ashley and I will celebrate our 13<sup>th</sup> year of marriage. It's just so fun to look back and see where God has brought us. I look at Ashley and, this is no exaggeration, she is just an illustration of God's grace in my life because of the kind of man I was before Jesus got hold of me. While we're celebrating our anniversary, we're really celebrating just what God has done in both of our lives.

I've been reflecting in preparation for this sermon. I was reminded of two moments in the timeline of my life; two very different moments. I want to share these moments with you in order to set up our conversation this morning.

The first moment was 20 years ago. I was a young man and 20 years ago, I was running from one stimulant to the next. I would cash in on whatever that stimulant was: the pleasure, the feel-good, the distraction, and then as soon as it was over, I would run to the next one. I went from one stimulant to the next as fast as I could. It was, in a lot of ways, from a world's eye, a fun way to live, but I have to tell you it was exhausting.

Now, 20 years later, the second moment I want to tell you about was actually a few weeks ago, Belle and I were in a deer blind. If you don't know what a deer blind looks like, it's basically a camouflage tent. We were nestled up in a cedar tree and in front of us was pasture, both to our left and to our right. We were facing the north. It was early, before the sun had come up. We sat there and we held hands and watched the sun come up in the east. As it came up, the rays of light began to shoot over the horizon and the darkness was pushed and disappeared, and the sun coming up in a beautiful sunrise was the first thing that greeted us. For a couple of hours, we sat there in quiet and in peace and I was good with it.

Two moments that were completely different, a stark contrast. The reason I was running 20 years ago was because whenever there was any quiet space in my life, I was nagged with some combination of the following feelings. Restless, nagged, unsettled, guilty, ashamed, convicted, incomplete, undone, aimless, uncomfortable, lost, down, melancholy, etc.

Because I was so uneasy with all of those feelings and I didn't know what to do with them, I made my life noisy and chaotic. I did all I could to distract myself from those feelings. On the timeline of my life, if you look at those two different moments in time, something happened in between them. Something significant changed the course of my life. You actually have to zoom out and look at the timeline of human history. Several thousand years ago, there was a point in time that collided with my timeline and it changed the trajectory of my life.

This morning, we're going to Luke 2 and it happens to contain that moment of time that collided with my life. It's probably the most famous scripture in regard to Christmas. As I've been preparing for this passage in particular, I feel like God has laid it on my heart that we need to address doubt... or rather, I think he wants to address our doubts in the Christmas season. I want to pause and invite you to pray with me and then we'll jump into Luke 2.

Lord, we invite you into this space. We pray, God, that you would use it however you want. We want to pray that our hearts would be tender to receive the truth. We want to pray, God, that you would dash fear, doubt, and insecurity, and that you would replace them with peace, hope, and joy. It's in Jesus' name we pray... Amen.

Luke 2 picks up right here. *1 Now in those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus, that a census be taken of all the inhabited earth. 2 This was the first census taken while Quirinius was governor of Syria. 3 And everyone was on his way to register for the census, each to his own city. 4 Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David, 5 in order to register along with Mary, who was engaged to him, and was with child.*

The first thing that I want to point out this morning are some specific historical markers. Luke comes right out of the gates and names the most powerful man on earth, a man that we have a lot of historical information on even 2,000 years later, Tiberius Cesar. He mentions a governor named Pontius Pilot in Judea and Quirinius who was the governor of Syria. He mentions a man named Joseph who was from Galilee in Nazareth. He mentions the City of David, which is called Bethlehem. He pulls out these specific things right out of the gate for a reason.

In Luke 3, he continues. *1 Now in the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee, and his brother Philip was tetrarch of the region of Ituraea and Trachonitis, and Lysanias was tetrarch of Abilene, 2 in the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John, the son of Zacharias, in the wilderness.* Now there is a good reason you don't read scripture out loud. It's flabbergasting. He uses this passage both in the beginning of Chapter 2 and the beginning of Chapter 3 and he goes through all these historical figures.

He gives us a time, he gives us a date, he gives us a world ruler, he gives us rulers of Judea, he gives us rulers of Rome. The reason that he does this is to establish the fact that Jesus is not a myth; he is an actual, historical figure. In archeology, as we uncover it and we dive into his historical records and we find these names, we recognize that these men ruled in these places at this time. It qualifies this event of Jesus actually being born. He is not a myth; he is an actual, historical figure and the birth of Jesus is an historical event. It's important during this season, to make sure that we don't intermingle the tradition and the myth of Santa, which I think is fun, with Jesus, and package them together.

I looked this up this morning. I looked up Jesus and Santa Claus and this is the first thing that came up. It's target. Santa is in the stable, bowing down to baby Jesus. Now be honest; raise your hand if this is hanging from your tree. I don't even know what to think about it. What I do know is that this is a serious, real phenomenon that we need to be aware of. The Christmas story opens with "this is a fact, this is real, this truly happened and here is the context that you can go to and research to ensure that this is not another myth."

The scripture passage picks up in Luke 2. God gives us some more really interesting facts. ***4 Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the city of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and family of David...*** So, the God of the universe prompts the most powerful man on earth, the Cesar, and he speaks into the king's heart and says, "Hey, I want you to go figure out how many people you rule over." So he moves on that prompting and the word goes out to all of the governors, all of the prefects, and they begin to tell their communities they and their families need to go to their home town and take a census to find out how big the king's empire is. That movement initiates Joseph, with his pregnant wife who is nine months pregnant, to hit the road, get on a donkey, and walk through the wilderness to Bethlehem, a rinky dink little town that historians think had about 300 people living there at the time, to take part in the census.

Now, it wasn't by chance that all of this happened. That world-wide event took place so that a little prophecy, found in Micha 5: 2, could be fulfilled. ***2 "But as for you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you One will go forth for Me to be ruler in Israel. His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity."***

Then in Isaiah 9 – ***6 For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on His shoulders; and His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.*** All of this was put in motion so that Jesus could be born in this specific place in Bethlehem to fulfill this scripture. We find out here these little prophetic hints that the Savior that God had promised was going to be both God and man. He was going to be a child born, a son given to us, and his name is Eternal Father and Prince of Peace.

You see, the birth of the Messiah is predicted and then fulfilled in the Christmas story. The Old Testament was meant to establish our need for a Savior. Six hundred and thirteen Old Testament laws showed us that we could not attain to God's holiness and that we needed a sacrifice to pay for our sins. As that's being established in the Old Testament, God says, "I'm going to raise up a Savior, and oh, by the way, here's what he's going to look like. Here's where he's going to be born. This is the family lineage that he is going to come from. This is the lifestyle he's going to live and oh, by the way, here's a

bunch of details about how he's going to die." As the Old Testament story moves forward, it's like a funnel that was drilling down, getting closer and closer to the very specific manner of how Jesus Christ was the son of Joseph and Mary.

We know from scripture that he had to come through Abraham, through Isaac, through Jacob, through Jacob's boy, Judah. That he was going to rule on the throne of David, according to Isaiah 9: 7. That he was going to come out of David's hometown of Bethlehem. The birth of the Messiah that was predicted and fulfilled in the Christmas story.

Our Story picks up in Luke 2. ***6 While they were there, the days were completed for her to give birth. 7 And she gave birth to her firstborn son; and she wrapped Him in cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.*** Really interesting details. God used the emperor to move the entire world back to the original towns and yet, in Bethlehem, he couldn't provide a place for them to stay? Do you think that was an accident or an oversight? No, it wasn't. God was setting this up on purpose. He wanted to illustrate something that was important to him for us to notice. He was wanting to point out that humility is at the crux of God's plan.

In fact, this is one of the big reasons why the Jewish people of the day and then even Jewish people who live during our lifetime, devout Jews, missed the fact that the Messiah has already come in the person of Jesus. They were looking for a political ruler to come and sit on the throne and rule and lead their people victoriously. While Jesus will fulfill that one day, the Jews overlooked a specific passage in Isaiah 53. And I can't even blame them. The reason they overlooked it is during Jesus' day, the people of Israel and many people throughout the Roman Empire were being brutalized by Roman leaders. In fact, when Pilot found out from the Magi that a king of Israel had been born, he ordered all of the two-year-old and under boys be murdered in the town of Bethlehem. That's the kind of wickedness that they were enduring during that time.

Isaiah 53 gives another hint of what he's going to look like. ***2 For He grew up before Him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of parched ground; He has no stately form or majesty that we should look upon Him, nor appearance that we should be attracted to Him. 3 He was despised and forsaken of men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and like one from whom men hide their face He was despised, and we did not esteem Him.***

Part of God's plan was to lead out with one of his premier character qualities through this Savior. He was going to lead out in humility. He wanted to show us, in him, what it would require for us to enter back into relationship with him. It's a prerequisite to have a relationship with Jesus.

2 Corinthians 8 says, ***9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though He was rich, yet for your sake He became poor, so that you through His poverty might become rich.***

The story picks up in Luke 2 – ***8 In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the***

**people..."** It's interesting that God came in humility and he showed himself not to the priests, not to the lawyers, not to the doctors, philosophers, politicians of the day, but rather he met a group of humble shepherds out in the field and he brought them good news of great joy. You see, God didn't send Jesus to judge the earth; he sent Jesus to save it. That's what makes it good news.

A couple of months ago, I was interviewing a young man for a ministry job. I walked over and met him. We were in the student center at a college.

I shook his hand, introduced myself and said, "Hey, how are you doing today?"

His first response was, "Oh, I'm tired."

I'm like, "Okay... Why are you tired?"

"Oh, I had to drive an hour and a half to get here."

He's kind of griping about coming to his interview. I'm thinking, *This is going really well.* We sit down and I'm interviewing and he's astounding me with how pathetic his answers are. At one point, I said, "What's your favorite thing to do?"

"I like to play video games."

I am literally typing, "This guy is a dud. This guy is not to be hired, ever." Eventually, I just kind of pushed my note taking aside. God reminded me, *Hey, we've got an opportunity to minister.* So, interview aside, I just began to listen. I'm begging God to help me help this young man because he's a mess. As I kept asking questions, it was almost like my questions were revealing to him how pathetic and lame his life was. He was lifeless, depressed, down, and the list goes on. God opened a door and the next thing I knew, we are in the middle of the student center and this young man is in my arms, weeping into my shoulder. I said, "You need to talk to God." In a prayer that I did not help him lead, he confessed his sin to God in tears in the middle of the student center and surrendered his life to Jesus. I saw a dead man come to life right before me. He got to experience good news of great joy.

Our story goes on in Luke 2. **11 "...for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 This will be a sign for you..."** The angel is telling the shepherds, "I'm going to give you a sign so that when you go in town, your mind is going to be blown. This wasn't just a dream or a mirage, but what we're telling you is true because when you go in town, this is exactly what you are going to see." **...you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger. 13 And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 14 "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased."**

As we read this story today, I think it begs the question, "Who is he pleased in?" We need to know this. That word *pleased* in the Greek is only used one other time. In fact, Luke used it later in his gospel. And Jesus actually spoke it. It says in Luke 10: 21, **21 At that very time He rejoiced greatly in the Holy Spirit, and said, "I praise You, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that You have hidden these things**

*from the wise and intelligent and have revealed them to infants. Yes, Father, for this way was well-pleasing in Your sight."*

Those who are pleasing to God, it's like a carpenter's family in a small fishing town, shepherds that are faithfully and quietly working out in the pasture, children who have a child-like faith and who recklessly place their faith in the Savior whom they believe in, and those of us who have the humility to receive the gift that God has given us. You see, the Prince of Pease is on a collision course with those who receive his humility in their humility.

I want to take a step back as we kind of reach for some personal application here. I want to ask you to examine the timeline of your life. Where do you stand right now? In the quiet space of life, what is revealed to you? Are you at peace in the quiet and in the silence? Or do some of those feelings that I wrestled with come to the surface: restless, nagged, unsettled, guilty, ashamed, convicted, incomplete, undone, aimless, uncomfortable, lost, down, melancholy? Where are you at today?

You see, peace, when it's removed, is similar to flipping a light switch on. When you flip it off, darkness appears. When peace is removed, all of these things appear. I want to speak to two different groups of people today.

First, I want to speak to those whose lives have been changed forever. **A gift is meant to be cherished**, so here's your application today. Peace, or the lack of it, is a spiritual barometer. It is important for us to put ourselves in quiet places, to turn off the radio, put away the phone, cut out the chatter, and be quiet. Just see what your spirit does. God will reveal things to you in that place.

Then we need to take responsibility for anything that is robbing our peace. You see, Paul says to the Philippians, "Continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling." This is not the same fear and dread that the shepherds were experiencing when the angel appeared to them. It's a reverence of God, a thanksgiving for what he's done that we might lay hold of that with gratitude and focus and passion and joy and lean into the robbers of peace in our life. It might be doubts that need to be quenched with biblical study. It might be conviction for sin that remains unconfessed. It might be wounds that you've endured at the hand of another that are bubbling up and God wants to heal in your life. Do not ignore what happens to your spirit in those quiet places.

To the second group: To those who have longed to experience heavenly peace, **a gift is meant to be opened**. Here's your application. God loves you; he has a plan for your life; surrender your life to him. Every Sunday, when we close our service, we mention the prayer team that's down here. They are here as a gateway to all of the resources, support, ministry, community, and help that this church has to offer to everyone who sits before us. So, when you're wrestling through things like this, if you've never experienced spiritual peace, you're left with a lot of questions, I know. Or if you find yourself at a place in life where you are in such a wrestling match with yourself, you don't know where to turn, I just want you to know that these are godly, mature believers that we've put in place every Sunday to receive you and to help minister to you and help you along.

This church is here not just for Sunday morning, my friends. It is here to help you throughout your life. So, I want to charge you. If you need anything, let us help you.

Father, we come to you and we just thank you for the good news of Jesus. I want to pray, God, that we would walk out with hearts full of joy. And if we are left with any question marks, I pray that your Holy Spirit would prompt us and lead us whatever path it might require to enter into your peace. I want to pray that over our people, God, that they might enter into peace.

It's in Jesus' name we pray... Amen.