

# Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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## A Place to Stay: A place of rejection - Luke 2:7

Good morning, and welcome to *Truth for Today* where we are beginning a series of six talks from the Bible about lodging places, where people stayed, sometimes, only for a short while. From all of the talks, we shall seek to show that the attitude and actions of the occupants of the rooms, or homes, are relevant to our Christian lives today. My talk this morning will be centred on Luke 2:7 and I read, as usual, from the King James or Authorised Version of the Bible: "And [Mary] brought forth her first born son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger: because there was no room for them in the inn."

As you listen to this Scripture, on the last Lord's Day in July, you could be forgiven for thinking that it is a long time from Christmas, so why read such a verse. Such questions are answered by the title of today's talk, which is "A Place of Rejection", and I will seek to show that the attitude of rejection displayed, on that first Christmas Day, was repeated many times over in the life of the Lord Jesus.

Before we do that, however, I want to look further into the details of the so familiar Christmas story to find out what Scripture says about Mary and Jesus. Owing to the limitations of time, we shall not be able to read all the verses that I shall refer to, but I will give the Bible reference so that you can look them up later. Firstly, I shall read some of Luke 1:26-35. "And in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God unto a city of Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin espoused to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary ... And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favour with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a son, and shalt call his name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David ... The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee: therefore also that holy thing which shall be born of thee shall be called the Son of God."

This passage has certain statements that are crucial for our understanding of New Testament Christianity. I say New Testament Christianity for there are versions of the faith that are projected today that bear little resemblance to the truths that the apostles passed onto us.

My first point concerns the birth of the Lord Jesus, where the passage informs us that Mary was a virgin, and that His conception owed nothing to man, but all to the power of the Highest. Mention of the virgin birth, in some circles, will bring mutters of disbelief. We, at *Truth for Today*, hold that particular doctrine as an intrinsic element of the incarnation, though this may bring expressions of disbelief from some. Those who do not accept the Virgin Birth, because it stretches their credulity will probably dismiss the truth of God incarnate. The grace of God will enable us to become believers in Jesus as the Son of God, which is what the passage says He is. Matthew 1:23 informs us that He is Emmanuel, which means God with us. Surely, this is another way of stating the same truth. Without any doubt, Scripture tells us who Jesus is and what He has done. If we reject what Scripture says about Him, but maintain some ideas that we have picked up along the way, we are not in line with the truth that the apostles taught.

There are two other points from the verses with which we started that enlarge our view of the Baby who was laid in the manger. We are told that His name would be Jesus which, according to Matthew 1:21, means that He will save His people from their sins. As we shall return to this point again, in a few minutes, I only want to note it here. We must also notice that the Baby will one day occupy 'the throne of His father David'. For years the nation of Israel had been looking for the Messiah. This Scripture states that the Baby born at Bethlehem is that Messiah, a claim I wish to enlarge upon for a few moments.

Much of what Christians call the Old Testament is looking for a time when a king will rule in righteousness, in Jerusalem, and the golden age will be ushered in. This is a simple, or even a simplistic, view of the rule of the Messiah, for we have not the time to go into detail. Therefore, I will quote only one passage from the writings of the prophet Isaiah. If you have a Bible, it is Isaiah 61:1: "The Spirit of the Lord GOD is upon me; because the LORD hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek; he hath sent me to bind up the broken hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound."

These verses highlight the type of activities that Isaiah prophesied would mark the appearance of the Messiah. When the Lord Jesus returned from His baptism in the River Jordan, He entered into the synagogue at Nazareth and read these same verses to the people assembled there. We can read, from the Gospel of Luke, of the effect that He had: "And he closed the book, and gave it again to the minister, and sat down. And the eyes of all them that were in the synagogue were fastened on him. And he began to say unto them, 'This day is this scripture fulfilled in your ears'. And all bare him witness, and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of his mouth. And they said, 'Is not this Joseph's son?'"

That passage is from the Luke 4:20-22, though if we had read on we would have learned that the people of Nazareth were motivated to kill Jesus by throwing Him over the edge of a cliff. Such action shows that, even at the commencement of His ministry, the Lord's claims to be the Messiah were rejected.

It might be argued that none of the signs of the Messiah had yet been manifested, so let us examine John the Baptist's anxious enquiry regarding Jesus being the Messiah. We can read about this in Luke 7:19-22: "And John calling unto him two of his disciples sent them to Jesus, saying, Art thou he that should come? or look we for another? When the men were come unto him, they said, John Baptist hath sent us unto thee, saying, Art thou he that should come? Or look we for another. And in that same hour he cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and of evil spirits; and unto many that were blind he gave sight. Then Jesus answering said unto them, Go your way, and tell John what things ye have seen and heard; how that the blind see, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, to the poor the gospel is preached."

These are the signs that were outlined by Isaiah and by these the Lord demonstrated that He was the 'sent one', or the Messiah. Sadly, as we can read in the closing verses of Matthew 11, so many of the towns and cities, where these signs were manifested, did not accept His claims. Rejection, rather than repentance, was the answer to the claims of Jesus being the Messiah. Similarly, we can read in John 6:66 that many of His erstwhile followers turned their back upon Him and walked no more with Him.

As I write these words, our nation is in the midst of an election campaign. When you listen to these words, the choice between the rival claims of the candidates will have been made and the votes counted. My plea to you this morning, dear listener, is nothing to do with political choices, but rather that you will decide to give your life to the Lord Jesus, if you have not already done so.

Rejection of His mission and message did not catch the Lord unawares. He commented that John the Baptist, whose life style was very simple, was criticised and ignored because people said he had a demon, whereas, when the Son of man came eating and drinking they said that He was a glutton, a winebibber and a friend of tax-collectors and sinners. Luke 9:21-22 gives definitive proof that the Lord was aware of His final rejection after Peter had identified Him as the Christ of God: "And he straitly charged them, and commanded them to tell no man that thing, saying, The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day."

We could also quote from John 12, where the Lord applies to Himself the prophecy from Isaiah 53. To refresh your memory, I will read verse 3 of that chapter: "He is despised and rejected of men, a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief, and we hid as it were our faces from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not."

Notice in this passage that the word 'rejected' is used of the figure that Isaiah calls the "arm of the LORD", who Christians believe was the Lord Jesus.

We must now return to the verse in Luke chapter 2, with which we commenced this morning's talk. If you have just joined us, may I tell you that you are listening to *Truth for Today*, where we are considering thoughts under the general title of "A Place of Rejection". The verse in Luke, that we have just mentioned, tells us plainly that there was no room for Mary and Joseph in the inn at Bethlehem, when Jesus was born. We must be careful, however, when we are considering the Christmas story, for many of our thoughts can be coloured by the nativity plays that are performed every Christmas at schools up and down our land. Episodes from the Gospels are compressed and non-biblical material is tacked on. All that can be stated is, and I quote from one of my favourite commentaries, that: "...even in His birth Jesus was excluded from the normal shelter others enjoyed."

At the beginning of this talk I mentioned that I would return to the significance of the name of Jesus, which, as we noted then, means that He will save His people from their sins. To enlarge upon this I will read Luke 2:9-11: "And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them; and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord."

Notice that in this passage there is no mention of the name Jesus for, as we have read, that was pronounced in chapter 1, yet two claims are made here that a Saviour has been born and that He is the Christ, or the Messiah.

At that time, there was nothing unusual about a Jewish father naming his son Jesus, for it was in common usage in those days. It was a Greek corruption of the Hebrew Joshua, which is a contraction of 'Jehoshua' meaning 'Jehovah is Salvation'. Readers of the Old Testament will know of Joshua, who led the Children of Israel into the Promised Land, after Moses had died. In Jesus, the Christ, the true significance of the name has been fulfilled. God has been active in the Person of His Son to save His people. The name of Jesus declares God's redeeming purposes towards sinful men, the very essence of the glorious Gospel, which has been preached for two thousand years.

I feel that I must enlarge upon this wondrous theme at this point, so that we can be in no doubt about the saving and redeeming action of the Lord Jesus. We have no excuse for ignorance about this for the Scriptures tell us plainly that Christ died for the ungodly. So strong and essential is the realisation of this that I shall quote the whole passage from Romans 5:6-8: "For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man some would even dare to die. But God commendeth his love towards us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us."

If one asks about the meaning of the death of Jesus, the answer is here in Romans 5, which is just one of an abundance of references we could cite. The saving ability of the Lord is the simple Gospel message that He took my place. On my parents' grave-marker, in the local cemetery, there is a verse from Galatians 5 which simply states: "The Son of God loved me and gave Himself for me." The question that now faces all of us this morning is whether we believe it or not. Who can fathom such wondrous grace and love? Such marvellous mercy! No wonder Charles Wesley wrote such words as:

*Jesus the name high over all,  
In earth, or hell, or sky;  
Angels and men before it fall,  
And devils fear and fly.*

*Jesus, the name to sinners dear,  
The name to sinners given;  
It scatters all their guilty fear,  
It turns their hell to heaven.*

Only those who know, through grace, something of the love of God in Christ, and of His rich forgiveness, can truly sing such words.

There is, in the death of the Lord Jesus, another confirmation of the rejection that typified much of His life, as well as His birth. When He was betrayed by Judas, (surely another example of rejection), He was taken for a mockery of a trial before both the Roman and Jewish authorities. John 18:37-40 bring us to the culmination of the rejection of the Lord and His claims: "Pilate therefore said unto him, Art thou a king then? Jesus answered; Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice. Pilate saith unto him, 'What is truth?' And when he had said this, he went out again unto the Jews, and saith unto them, I find in him no fault at all. But ye have a custom, that I should release unto you one at the Passover. Will ye, therefore, that I release unto you the King of the Jews? Then cried they all again, saying, Not this man, but Barabbas. Now Barabbas was a robber."

A few hours later, the Lord Jesus was crucified at the place called Calvary.

The paradox is that this was no accident of history, for as Peter boldly claimed in his sermon, recorded for us in Acts 2:23, the Lord was delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God. Such knowledge did not excuse the wickedness of crucifying an innocent man, yet out of the rejection and death of the Lord Jesus came the declaration of His supremacy and the confirmation of who He is. Peter goes on to say that it was not possible for death to hold Him, while Paul in Romans 1:3-4 writes: "Concerning [God's] Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who was made of the seed of David according to the flesh; and declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead."

Raised from among the dead to the seat of all power and might is the Father's answer to the rejection and death of His Son.

As we approach the end of this morning's talk, I want to close with one further example, from Scripture, of the rejection of the Lord Jesus Christ which, as we have seen, began at Bethlehem when He was born. This is found 1 Peter 2:6-8 The context is about Christians being a spiritual house and a holy priesthood. "Wherefore also it is contained in the

scripture, Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, elect, precious; and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded. Unto you, therefore, who believe he is precious: but unto them who are disobedient, the stone which the builders rejected, the same is made the head of the corner, and a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them who stumble at the word, being disobedient; whereunto also they were appointed.”

In those words there is a challenge to us today. Are we amongst those who reject the claims of the Lord Jesus? Do we believe that He is the Son of God, the Saviour who suffered for us upon the cross? If we do, then He will be infinitely precious to us this morning.

There is one title that was announced by the angels at His birth that we have not yet commented on. This is that the baby at Bethlehem is the Lord. His life, which demonstrated His power over creation, disease and death, informs us that He is Lord. For two thousand years His servants have preached that Jesus is Lord. I put the question again. Do we believe that the One whom the world rejected, and still rejects, is the conqueror of death and the supreme being of the universe? Do we believe in the Lord Jesus Christ?

Good morning and thank you for listening.

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