

## It Came to Pass – Luke 2:1-7

### I. INTRODUCTION – RR 1 Thes. 5:23-24

**23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.**

#### **A. To Be Continued . . .**

1. Because of television & movies, we've become used to having entire stories told in an hour or two.
  - a. We're introduced to the characters; confronted with a problem,
  - b. Then watch the plot unfold. A short time later, it's neatly resolved.
2. We see this same scenario played out several nights a week, hour after hour, story after story.
3. We begin to think that **any problem** ought to be able to be solved in an hour.
4. Murderers can be arrested, tried & put in prison within 60 minutes of their crime.
5. Terrorist plots can be unmasked at 8:35 PM & the terrorists apprehended by 9.
6. Complex family problems can be diagnosed & cured in an hour.
7. What we hate, is when the end of the hour comes & the problem **hasn't** been solved!
  - a. As the screen fades to black, those loathsome words appear; **"To Be Continued . . ."**
  - b. Oh the howls of protest & outrage that fill the air!
  - c. How dare they postpone the end of the story till next week, or even tomorrow night!
8. A few of the weekly TV series are only segments of a **longer** story that takes many hours to tell.
  - a. A new installment comes each week.
  - b. But there are some people who **refuse** to watch the regular season of these shows because they can't stand the tension of having to wait for the next episode.
  - c. They buy the series when it comes out on DVD, then watch the whole thing at one time.

## **B. God Will Do It**

1. In this passage, Paul is saying that God is at work in our lives.
2. But that work isn't commenced & completed in an hour.
3. It's a *life-long process* of God molding us.
4. The Holy Spirit is patiently shaping our entire being into the image of Jesus Christ.
5. The job won't be complete until the day we go to be with Jesus or He comes again for us.
6. The thing we need to hold on to is that *God is faithful*, and what He's begun in us, *He will complete*.
7. V. 24 says -

**He who calls you is faithful, who also will do it.**

- a. No obstacle can thwart Him.
- b. No problem can confound Him.
8. In Philippians 1:6 we read that we can be, **“confident that He who has begun a good work in us, will bring it to completion.”**
9. Christian, listen – God is at work in you. He's at work *on* you – making you more and more like Jesus.
  - a. You are His workmanship, as it says in Ephesians 2:10, His finely crafted work of art.
  - b. And like any masterpiece, it takes time; YOU take time.
  - c. God is TAKING TIME with you. He's patient.
10. Spiritual maturity isn't developed in an hour or two.
11. The Christian life is a great “To Be Continued . . .” story that won't end till we step from this life into the glory of heaven.

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12. Now – here's what God wants us to know & be assured of while we live our story:
13. **He is faithful**. Everything He's promised concerning us, **WILL COME TO PASS**.
14. There's a wonderful example of just how true that is in Luke 2.

## **II. TEXT**

### **A. V. 1**

**<sup>1</sup> And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered.**

1. I need to recap a bit of our study from last Wednesday.
2. The story of the rise of Rome is a long & fascinating one.

3. Rome's control of Israel began in a benign & *welcomed* way when some of the rulers of the nation allied themselves with Rome's emerging power.
4. Once invited in, it didn't take long for Rome to assert *complete control*.
5. Until the time of Augustus, Rome had been a *Republic*, ruled by a Senate.
6. Julius Caesar was one of many in Rome who knew that the Senate had become hopelessly corrupt.
  - a. Stalled by endless political battles & vicious conspiracies, Rome was beginning to fall apart from within.
  - b. So Julius Caesar made a play to *break* the power of the Senate & assert the role of *Emperor* as the undisputed ruler of Rome.
  - c. He succeeded in his plan to defeat the Senate, but was assassinated before he could enjoy the position of Emperor.
  - d. That privilege fell to his favorite nephew, Octavius.
7. As soon as Octavius ascended the throne, he took the title "The August One – Augustus."
  - a. Augustus knew the position of Emperor would only be secure if he was esteemed as more than a mere man.
  - b. So he took a title that implied he was a god.

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8. The Roman Empire took a census every 14 years.
  - a. These censuses did 2 things –
    - 1) They determined what the proper tax revenue for a province was,
    - 2) They identified what men could be drafted for military service.
  - b. Many documents of the Romans census have been found in Egypt so we have a good idea of how they were conducted. [\[1\]](#)
9. Besides the usual census conducted ever 14 years, Rome occasionally called for a *special* census.
  - a. A new military campaign would require *new funding* as well as *fresh troops*.
  - b. So, whenever the Emperor was planning a new campaign or word reached Rome of trouble on some front, a new census would be ordered.
  - c. That's what this was, one of the *special* censuses that would

require a decree from the Emperor.

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10. What I want to ask you to notice is how Luke describes what happened –

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

- a. It sounds so casual – “It came to pass. It just sorta’ happened.”
  - b. While that’s the way it appears to us in translation, the original words carry a strong sense of *purpose*.
  - c. In other words, it didn’t just come to pass that Augustus issued this decree,
  - d. It was *destined* that the decree would be issued.
  - e. Things couldn’t have worked out any other way.
11. Think of it like this –
- a. You have a patch of bare dirt in your backyard. Not a thing is growing in it.
  - b. It sits that way for a week – nothing but dirt.
  - c. Then it rains, & days later you notice a few shoots of green breaking through the soil.
  - d. In a couple weeks, full-grown flowers are blooming and you take delight in the surprise of flowers in a place you thought was bare dirt.
  - e. That’s your perspective from standing above ground looking at it from the outside.
  - f. But if you’d been considering the whole thing from *the perspective of the soil*, you would have known that there were seeds scattered throughout.
  - g. And you would know that it’s inevitable that with a little warmth & moisture, those seeds are going to burst forth into life. *Nothing can stop them!*
  - h. Flowers would be as inevitable to you as the rising of the morning sun.
12. It was *certain* that Augustus would issue this decree because God had planted a seed in the soil of time many years before through the prophecy of Micah.
- a. In 5:2, Micah said that the little village of Bethlehem would be the birthplace of the Messiah.
  - b. But Mary, who was carrying Jesus, was living in Nazareth, 80

- miles to the north.
- c. As she was nearing the end of her pregnancy, there was probably *nothing less* than an edict from the Roman Emperor that could have moved her.
  - d. Ladies, those of you who've had children, would you enjoy an 80 mile trip by foot & donkey,
    - 1) Over dirt roads and footpaths, up hills & down valleys
    - 2) While you're in the final weeks of your pregnancy?
13. Mary's not leaving her home in Nazareth unless she *absolutely has to*.
14. And to be frank, there was probably no one on Earth who possessed the kind of power needed to get Mary to Bethlehem, other than Augustus.
15. So God moved him to call for this census.
16. Now - Luke says the decree was for the *entire empire*, which by this time spread over millions of people.
  - a. Hundreds of thousands would be on the road, returning to their ancestral homes to be counted.
  - b. Work projects would be put on hold. Business deals suspended.
  - c. Huge commercial ventures halted. Countless plans would be thwarted.
  - d. All because one young, pregnant Jewish woman needed to get to Bethlehem where the Word of God said her child was to be born.

### **B. Vs. 3-7**

**<sup>3</sup>So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city.**

**<sup>4</sup>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, <sup>5</sup>to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child.**

1. For many years, skeptics said Luke made up the part of the decree that people had to return to their hometown to be registered.
2. They said that he only *added* that as a way to get Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem.
3. Their scoffing was answered by the Roman census documents found in Egypt.

4. Sure enough – part of the decree was the requirement that each head of home had to return to his ancestral lands.
5. Because Joseph was of the family of David, he had to return to Bethlehem, David's home.

**6 So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. 7 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.**

6. In v. 2, Luke says that this census was taken when Quirinius was governing the Roman province of Syria, which included the region we know as Israel.
7. The usual 14 year census was taken at a time too early for the time of Jesus' birth.
  - a. Vs. 1 & 2 make it clear *this* census was *special*.
  - b. As I mentioned a moment ago, these special censuses were usually called for to raise funds & troops for a military campaign.
  - c. That means there was some crisis in the Empire to prompt this. But behind it all was God.
8. From Augustus' perspective, he made this edict for grand & far-reaching political reasons.
9. But *we know* it was just to get Mary to Bethlehem because God's Word *cannot* fail.
10. And *that* is the lesson for us.
  - a. God's word and promise to us cannot fail! It *cannot*!
  - b. Everything that God has said *concerning you* **WILL** come to pass – *everything*.
11. "It came to pass that Caesar issued a decree."
  - a. Of course it did because it was not possible that it couldn't come to pass.
  - b. God had said it.
  - c. Heaven and Earth will pass away before one Word of God fails.

### **III. CONCLSUON**

#### **A. The Surety of God's Word**

1. What I hope you take away from this time today is the rock-solid confidence that *God is faithful*.

- a. Not just in an abstract or general way.
- b. But that He is faithful, **TO YOU**, personally!
2. God isn't just the God of the "big thing," the world shaking events.
3. He's the God of the *circumstances*, big & small, of *your* life.
4. Everything we see taking place in the world today is nothing but the hand of God preparing a people for Himself.
5. This is a newspaper with today's headlines.
  - a. But you know what all of these stories are **REALLY** about?
  - b. They are the story of God's setting the stage of this world so that Jesus can be formed in you & you can be conformed to Christ.
6. If there'd been a newspaper in Rome, the headline would have read, "Caesar issues decree: Entire Empire to be registered."
  - a. The angels would read that headline & laugh at the blindness of the Roman journalists who could only see *effects* but not *the cause* or the purpose of the news.
  - b. Augustus moved an entire empire, all because one lone, little Jewish woman needed to make an 80 mile trip so her son would be born in the right place.
7. Listen Christian – God will move the entire Earth just to make sure ***His work in you & promises to you*** are fulfilled.
  - a. He'll move presidents, prime ministers, tyrants, & despots – just to keep His Word to you.
  - b. There's an old saying that you can't fight City Hall.
  - c. We don't **have** to – God will deal with them. City hall cannot defeat God.
8. The story is told of a godly Christian woman who was married to a hard, godless man.
  - a. She'd often shared her faith with him but he always scoffed & finally told her to leave him alone.
  - b. One of the things he loved to mock was the resurrection.
  - c. When his wife lay wasting away from tuberculosis, he asked if she was afraid of dying.
  - d. She told him that far from fear, she **longed** for her resurrection.
  - e. This angered him, and when she died, he determined to give evidence to his unbelief & scoffing at the resurrection by placing a massive marble block on **top** of her grave.

- 1) it was 7 by 4 ft, 6 inches thick and weighed a couple tons.
  - 2) As the stone was placed onto the grave, he said to himself, “Let’s see if she can rise now.”
  - f. What he didn’t know was that in the soil under the stone was a single chestnut.
  - g. Within a few weeks the nut had sprouted and sent down roots.
  - h. It pressed its way up, encountered the marble block, & began to push.
  - i. The stone cracked under the relentless pressure of the chestnut & the light of the sun fell on the plant, adding further strength.
  - j. When the man returned to the gravesite months later, he found the marble block split in half and pushed to the side, a small tree growing straight and true towards the heavens.
9. God’s Word, His promises, are spiritual seeds that have been planted in the soil of time.
  10. They are as certain to grow and produce fruit in their time as that chestnut.

11. Nothing can stop them!

12. In Isaiah 55:10-11 we read –

***10 “For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, And do not return there, But water the earth, And make it bring forth and bud, That it may give seed to the sower And bread to the eater, <sup>11</sup> So shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, But it shall accomplish what I please, And it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.”***

### ***B. That’s It***

1. Let’s end where we began today – with our reading in 1 Thes. 5:23-24

***23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>24</sup> He who calls you *is* faithful, who also will do *it*.***

2. Phil. 1:6 –

***being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will complete *it* until the day of Jesus Christ.***



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[1] *The Gospel of Luke*. 2000, c1975 (W. Barclay, lecturer in the University of Glasgow, Ed.). The Daily study Bible series, Rev. ed. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press.