

# Matthew 24:36-51 (PM)

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[ 0 : 00 ] Friends, I am really just going to spend really just a couple of minutes talking about Luke 2, 1 to 7. Did you notice that in chapter 2, that was read, the last reading we had, in chapter 2, it didn't start by talking about Jesus. Did you notice that?

The first thing it tells us about is a ruler, the ruler of an empire, Caesar Augustus, who wants to know exactly how many people he rules over, presumably so he can tax said amount of people. So he sends everyone back to their place of birth for a census. And Caesar, Caesar could do things like this because he was the Caesar. He was the emperor of an empire.

And he was more than actually just a political leader. The Senate in the day declared Caesar Augustus to be a living God. So when he says, I want to do this crazy thing, people would do it. So around 0 AD, this whole empire was on the move. People returning to their hometowns in order to be counted.

[ 1 : 23 ] And amongst those travelers 2,000 years ago was a young man and a young woman, Joseph and Mary. They were traveling from Nazareth to Bethlehem.

About 100 clicks, approximately. Big trip. She, Mary, may have ridden a donkey. We don't know. It doesn't mention a donkey, but maybe she rode a donkey. Maybe she had to walk the whole way. Either way, it would have been a very difficult journey for a teenager who was nine months pregnant. And when they get to Bethlehem, there's nowhere to stay.

So she has to give birth in a stable, a place where animals are kept. There's no extended family around. No midwife. They're alone. A newborn is wrapped in cloth and laid in a feeding trough. And without any other information, what do we have so far? Well, we've got a very powerful man who orders an entire empire to do his bidding because he can. And one of those people is this poor, unmarried, very, very, very pregnant teenager who is forced to make this huge journey and then has to give birth in a barn.

[ 2 : 39 ] I mean, stated like that, it kind of sucks all the sentimentality out of it, doesn't it? Which is good. Because on the surface, it was a pretty awful situation.

And do you see what Luke is trying to show us here? In these few, just these few verses here, Luke is trying to present us with a great contrast.

A contrast between power and weakness, between political muscle and vulnerability. But why? Why this contrast?

What's so important about making that clear? Later, the angels will say to these shepherds, I bring you good news of great joy. You'll find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloth and a manger.

Again, what kind of sense does that make? Like, how is that good news? The manger scene.

[ 3 : 42 ] It just, at first it just looks like weakness and poverty. Again, in our next reading, the angels will let us know more information.

That there's more going on. The angels will let us know that this child is the Lord, is the saviour. The angels will tell us that God has done this amazing thing. That the creator of the universe has, like, woven for himself this tiny body in the womb of a teenage girl.

And unlike Caesar Augustus, who was a man pretending to be a god, we have a god who becomes a person. Again, we'll hear in our next reading that a choir of angels appears and says, glory to God in the highest.

These angels praise God. Because they're amazed at the lengths God will go to be known. And to save us. That's why they praise them. But again, the question still hangs there.

Why did it have to happen like this? Like, why did Luke highlight the seeming disparity of power? Jesus. The son of God.

[ 4 : 58 ] Born in a barn to an unwed teenage Mary. Born into a really difficult situation. A dark situation. I mean, this is brutal. This is real poverty. They were literally left out in the cold.

On perhaps their most, you know, vulnerable point in their life. In these seven verses, what do we have so far? What do they point to?

They point to indignity. Rejection. Obscurity. So, the question again. Why? Like, why did it have to happen like this?

Folks, can I tell you it wasn't a mistake? There was divine purpose in this. This is God signalling to us right at the start of Christ's life. It's God signalling to us what salvation will look like.

Let me unpack that a little bit for us. I want to make a couple of points here. The first thing is this. The first thing the story emphasises is the spiritual state of the people.

[ 6 : 02 ] And it's not great. Think about it. God's son was born. And he wasn't welcomed. Or recognised by most people. No one made room for him.

And that would be Jesus' experience for most of his life. As you keep reading the story of Jesus, you find out his family thought he was literally crazy. The religious elite literally wanted to kill him. I think it's the first point. Right at the start of his life, there was no room for Jesus. And that is this little signpost from a story that says, God came for us and we turned him away.

Humanity left to ourselves. We are not spiritually upwardly mobile. We are not hankering to make room for God in our life. Which is why we need to be saved.

Because we can't rescue ourselves. It's not even our inclination. That's the first point. The second point I want to make is this. Did you notice that in the story it's not a magic birth?

[ 7 : 12 ] Luke doesn't jazz it up. And this speaks to the humanity of Jesus. What Luke is trying to point us to is the fact that God really did become a person.

It's not some weird, freaky birth. You know, like, God didn't become a pretend person. He didn't, he wasn't an avatar. He was a real person.

God didn't save us from a distance. You know, he came as close to us as possible. He came down to us, became one of us because we couldn't reach up to him. But there's more to it than that.

God became human, a baby. Not just so he could be close to us. God became a human so he would be fragile. God became someone that could be hurt.

And 33 years later, there's another great political force would send Christ to the cross to die for us. And this is all God's plan.

[ 8 : 24 ] This is not a mistake. Like the circumstances of his birth. God's plan was vulnerability. It was humility.

God could only save us by suffering and dying. And that suffering started when he became a human. And it culminated in the cross. This little baby that was wrapped in swaddling cloth. 33 years after that would be wrapped in a burial shroud. Folks, the manger points to the cross. It points to how we're going to be saved. And I think this is why we prefer a sentimental sort of version of the whole situation.

Because the real Christmas story is so perplexing, isn't it? It's perplexing to us. The vulnerability is perplexing to us. Because we're so enamored by power.

We love power. And vulnerability is just, it's just terrifying. But God's pattern established right here in Luke 2 at Jesus' birth. That's this huge billboard.

[ 9 : 24 ] And it says, God will save you through vulnerability and through humility. Those are my two big observations from this story. God came to us.

We rejected him. We didn't make room for him. We couldn't reach up for him. We didn't really want to reach up for him. So God reached down to us.

And he became a real human. A baby. He entered into our mess with all its limitations and pain. To save us. Now let me finish up here.

If you are not a super religious person. And you're invited here this evening. I don't know what you make of anything I just said.

But I do hope you hear this. I hope you hear that the creator of the whole universe loves you. And in great humility and courage stepped into the world and became this wriggling baby in order to be close to you and to die for you.

[ 10 : 25 ] And I want you to think about this, right? If the Christmas story is just a sentimental myth. If it's just a sentiment meant to inspire us.

What does that make the big point of it? If that's all it is, is this lovely sort of romantic sentimental story.

What's the big point? Well, it's try harder. It's be a better person. It's be more generous. And maybe God will like you. But it's not a sentimental myth.

I mean, think about these readings. Listen to these readings tonight. Luke does not write like a fiction writer. He doesn't write like a myth writer. It doesn't read like chicken soup for the soul. It begins by Luke saying, hey, remember that time that Caesar had a census and Quirinius was the governor of Syria? He writes like an historian. He writes like that because this is history.

[ 11 : 26 ] These things really did happen. God really did become a baby. And if that idea intrigues you, if that idea surprises you, and you think, I need to make peace with my maker.

I think it's really important you know that this means that making peace with God is not a negotiation. It's a surrender. See, the story tells us that God came down to us because we couldn't reach up for him.

Because we need a rescue. And that's the genius of Christianity. It's not a try harder faith. It's an accept what God has done for you.

And you love him for it. Now, you don't try and make a deal with God. I'll do my best and you'll accept me. No, it's not how it works. Christ became a baby. And then he died on a cross.

He has done all the work. Will you accept that? And it's the best news in the world. If you want to know more about this, come and talk to me.

[ 12 : 35 ] Or just keep coming back. Come to a few more services. Decide to know more about Jesus. Folks, I'm going to pray for us now.

If you've never ever prayed before, that's fine. You can make this prayer a prayer that you quietly pray in your heart. It's very short. You can quietly pray it in your heart.

Father, Father, thank you that you became one of us to save us. Forgive me for not making room for you.

Help me to follow you. Amen.