“Christmas Details”

December 23, 2018

Matthew 1:18-25

Please open your Bible with me to the third Book of the NT, Luke, Chapter one.

Besides the LORD Himself being the Great Physician, there are just three doctors mentioned in the Bible. One of them was Luke. He’s called “Luke, the beloved physician” (Colossians 4:14). And Luke was watchful to see that every-thing in his record was accurate.

I want to begin my Christmas sermon this year with this. Luke was a man of detail.

“Eusebius (AD 260-340), considered to be the Father of Early Church History, describes Luke the Physician in these terms: “Luke, who was by race an Antiochian and a physician by profession, was long a companion of Paul, and had care-ful conversation with the other Apostles, and in two books left us examples of the medicine for the souls which he had gained from them” (Eccl. Hist. 3.4.6; LCL 1:197).

One reason for the Gospel of Luke is detail. So today, from the Gospel of Luke a Christmas message that I’ve titled “Christmas Details.” Shall we pray?

Details. Why do you think a doctor would be concerned about details? Why would he not? You see, Luke was a medical doctor and a good record keeper. He had a way of bringing history to life. And whose history did he write? He wrote the life story of the Greatest Person ever, the LORD Jesus Christ. He quotes the OT about thirty-five times just in this Gospel alone. You see, if there was one thing Luke knew well, it was his Old Testament. And he knew specific details about the Person and life of Christ.

Our English word “detail” comes from French word “detailer,” a reference to the clothing industry. The French verb means “to cut in pieces,” just like a tailor would “cut pieces the cloth” to form fit a piece of clothing to the particular person.

So, what is the Gospel of Luke? It’s a history book with just those small pieces, those details, that the Holy Spirit in Luke wanted placed into the Bible.

Some of us are detail oriented. Some of us are not. Let me ask this at the outset? Are details important? Is it impor-tant to you to be specific? And, do you think that God gave us *these* explicit, these *specific* Christmas facts for good reason?

One digit off can make all the difference in the world, by the way. My younger brother Bill and I have a very similar Social Security number. He’s two years younger than me. Yet, his Social Security number is just one digit different, the last digit. So, one digit defines the difference between two brothers, born two years apart.

And this past month something happened to a business man I know. His job requires him to be responsible to make sure that specific parts are ordered, a specified number of those parts, and that they are to be ordered well in advance; then shipped to them on time so that *his* company can re-tool them to make *their* product -- on time.

Now, when he placed the request for 38,000 of this one particular part, he was given a quote of $44,000.00 for the entire order, which was a very good price. He confirmed it numerous times, checked it carefully, got email confirmation, etc., with a salesperson who now was about to retire. One problem, the person who was going to replace the soon-to-be retired salesperson noticed a slight discrepancy in the order. The amount to be charged for the 38,000 pieces was not $44,000.00, but $440,000.00, just one digit off. And the parts were direly needed by the first week of December. To say the least, the problem needed to be addressed; immedi-ately. But they won’t get the pieces until January 15th, 2019. Would you agree with me that *that* one digit, that one detail, was important?

Folks, one of the best ways to read your Bible is to look for a sense of *how* the writer has written his Book. And reading the Gospel of Luke means you are discovering *details*; details of the life and Person of Jesus; details that the Holy Spirit wants you and I read today. And to miss the details, to miss the specifics, is to miss the very reason for Luke’s Gospel.

Now, we’re *not* all concerned about details. But look with me at this first chapter and see how important they were to Dr. Luke. Luke 1:1 *“Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to set forth in order a declaration [an account, a narrative] of those things which are most surely believed among us, (2) Even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word;*

*(3) It seemed good to me also, having had perfect understanding of all things from the very first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus, (4) that thou mightest know the certainty of those things, wherein thou hast been instructed.”*

So, can you tell that Luke was a careful investigator? This phrase “perfect understanding” is Old English for “closely investigated.” He’d carried out a careful, systematic, formal search on the topic of Jesus. He’d dug into the life of Jesus. He questioned and he probed and he scrutinized, searching the *details* of Christ’s life in order to be accurate in his book.

And, in reminding Theophilus that he had a perfect understanding of Christ’s life from the very first, he men-tions that he was writing *this* record in order; (with accuracy) so that Theophilus would be certain of the things he’d already heard and learned about Jesus. Theophilus, most excellent Theophilus (verse three), the one Luke writes to, is a Roman authority, a Gentile.

What then, can you expect from a medical doctor to a Roman official, but a detailed record, with specific facts, maybe even minutia; details from history; details from the people who had actually been with Jesus, details that tell us exactly what took place.

First, then, God cares about the details. And details tell the whole story; the truth; verse five. Luke 1:5 *“There was in the days of Herod, the king of Judaea, a certain priest named Zacharias, of the course of Abia: and his wife was of the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elisabeth.*

*(6) And they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless. (7) And they had no child, because that Elisabeth was barren, and they both were now well stricken in years.”*

And notice where Luke begins. He comes immediately to the days *before* Christ. And who are those people connected to those days; actually connected to and living in that year before Christ was born? He begins with John, the Baptist. No, he begins with John’s father, whose name was Zechariah.

And Zechariah, who’s he? He lived in Jerusalem in the days of Herod. “In the days of Herod” lived a godly man and wife, Zechariah and Elizabeth, elderly and childless. Zecha-riah was a Jew, a Jewish priest, of the course of Abijah. When David was king, he had divided the priesthood into twenty-four rotating classes. That story is found in I Chronicles 24. And the eighth class was named Abijah, which tells you the days of the year when Zechariah would have served at the altar. And his job? His job was to make sure that incense was continually burning in the Temple. And during those days Zechariah meets an angel and he discovers, from that angel, that his aged barren wife Elizabeth would become pregnant and deliver a baby boy.

Who’s the angel? Who’s the baby? Look with me at the detail in chapter one verse thirteen. Luke 1:13 *“But the angel said unto him, Fear not, Zacharias: for thy prayer is heard; and thy wife Elisabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name John. (14) And thou shalt have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. (15) For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the Holy Ghost, even from his mother's womb.*

*(16) And many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God. (17) And he shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobed-ient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord.*

*(18) And Zacharias said unto the angel, whereby shall I know this? For I am an old man, and my wife well stricken in years. (19) And the angel answering said unto him, I am Gabriel, that stand in the presence of God; and am sent to speak unto thee, and to shew thee these glad tidings.”*

As you can see, the angel Gabriel predicted the coming of John, the Baptist to his father when both Mom and Dad were well-stricken in age. Only two other people besides Zechariah and Elizabeth were said to be “well-stricken in age;” “advanced in age” in the Bible. The other couple was Abraham and Sarah. And they also had a child when they were elderly. Are you getting a sense of *how* this writer writes as you read this Gospel?

First, then, God cares about the details because details tell the story; the whole story; the story of what really happened. And these details are God’s details. An excessive number of details might muddy the waters a bit. But Luke, by the Holy Spirit, gives us just the right amount.

Have you ever noticed that, although a novel is a story, the story isn’t usually real? A novel, generally, is an imaginary story; but one that is true-to-life. Even historical fiction is considered imaginary, written as though it’s the truth; as though it really occurred. And you can almost always identify with the character, their dilemmas, their interactions with others, their solutions.

The details of the Bible, though, are more like the details of history, always true. So, Luke didn’t write a *novel* about Jesus. Instead, in story form, he tells us the plain vanilla historically accurate facts. With lots of detail, by the way.

Folks, we need the facts. As much as I totally enjoy a great writer and a great novel, nothing compares to the facts. As you’ve heard me say many, many times “The reality is not what *you* and I think, but what *God* says in this Book.” That’s what reality is. And Luke is more like an investigator who searched out the truth about this One called Jesus.

Regarding details. As I thought this through last week, I remembered a detail on one of those wonderful days after the LORD was resurrected when He stood on shore, waving to the Apostles, out on their boat, out fishing. They’d fished all night. He called out to His Apostles to throw their net on the other side of the boat. And within minutes, they caught so many fish the men couldn’t pull the net into the boat. Then the Bible tells us exactly how many fish. But then we read this “the net didn’t tear.” Is it even possible that this was just some random detail? Or, was it not a reminder that the LORD really is concerned about what some might call a small detail?

And Matthew tells us that the LORD knows the number of hairs on your head. And Jesus reminds us that He notices every single bird that falls to the ground. Matthew 10:29 *“Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father.”*

Does anyone know the value of a farthing? And what about a mite? What’s the difference between a farthing and a mite? You see, God goes so far as to tell us the *detail*. Do you remember Jesus watching as a poor woman threw two mites into the Temple treasury box? He told His disciples that she had thrown in more than everyone that day. But, what’s the difference between a mite and a farthing? Here’s what Mark tells us. Mark 12:42 *“And there came a certain poor widow, and she threw in two mites, which make a farthing.”*

So, just like two sparrows, sold in the marketplace for one farthing, the LORD knows when you give what you give as an offering, be it ever so small, He’s fully aware of *that* detail as well as the heart that offers it.

Some people read their Bibles for information; some out of curiosity; some for comfort. But when you come to your Bible with the right spirit, looking to understand God’s will, you see details placed there carefully and specifically by the Holy Spirit. Some of us know the Christmas story so well. But, when was the last time you read it like *Luke* wrote it, with those *details* God had chosen for him to include?

Whenever, wherever, whatever you are reading in the Bible, you are reading exactly what God wanted recorded. It’s *exactly* what happened. And it’s exactly the way it happened. You get the exact truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth when you read your Bible.

So, here’s my question for Christmas. How are you reading your Bible? Are you reading it because it’s part of your devotions each day? Are you reading it because the section you are now reading is interesting? Or, are you among those who read the Bible just for information’s sake?

Folks, every word has been chosen by God to be put in the Bible. Every word of your Bible is true. Every person you read about, every event in their lives, every historical state-ment, every scientific concept, every word about the heart of man; it’s all *God’s* Word. Your Bible is scientifically accurate. It’s historically accurate. What is says about psychology and marriage and finance and anthropology and soteriology and theology is accurate; it’s all the word of God.

So, how will you read the Christmas story today? Will you read it with a heart like Luke, a heart that aches to know and understand the truth? A heart that wants to pass that truth on to someone else? Will you read it, not just for information and interesting things? Or, will you see it as it is in truth, the Word of God Himself? And will you respect every word because your Bible is a living Book? It’s like it was written just this morning and you’ve got one of the first copies. A writer I know sent me a copy of the first chapter of the book he’s writing. Not even his wife has read this first chapter. Folks, God’s Word is like that; fresh; and like His mercies, it’s new every morning.

Now, with that in mind, turn with me to the Christmas story as recorded for us by Dr. Luke. Luke chapter two and verse one. Luke 2:1 *“And it came to pass in those days, that there went out a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. (2) (And this taxing was first made when Cyrenius was governor of Syria.) (3) And all went to be taxed, every one into his own city.*

*(4) And Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Naza-reth, into Judaea, unto the city of David, which is called Bethlehem; (because he was of the house and lineage of David:) (5) To be taxed with Mary his espoused wife, being great with child. (6) And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished [elapsed] that she should be delivered.*

*(7) And she brought forth her firstborn son, and wrapped him in swaddling clothes, and laid him in a manger; because there was no room for them in the inn. (8) And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. (9) And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore [very] afraid.*

*(10) And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. (11) For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. (12) And this shall be a sign unto you; ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.*

*(13) And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, (14) Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men. (15) And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which is come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us.*

*(16) And they came with haste, and found Mary, and Joseph, and the babe lying in a manger. (17) And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child. (18) And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.”*

The first thing I wanted to say today is this. God cares about the details.

Second, all the details of your day fit perfectly into Romans 8:28.

What happens when those little things of your day begin to irritate you? What happens when your spouse does things or says things that aggravate you? Aren’t they details? Yes, they are. But they are also allowed of God. Yes, He’s sovereign. We can’t change His sovereign plan for our lives. But what about His will as revealed to us in the Bible? What about those things He *allows* to come into our lives so that we can put the Bible to work on our character? What about being careful that your spirit is clear with Him? What about being careful that your attitude is the attitude of Christ in everything?

Paul says Philippians 2:1 *“If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, (2) Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.*

*(3) Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. (4) Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. (5) Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: …”*

“Let *this* mind be in you.” “Let this attitude be in you.” “Let this opinion be in you.” “Let this habit of thought be in you.” “Let this concern you.” “Adopt this same mindset that Jesus had in His mind and heart.”

Folks, small things often loom large while large things often appear small. The LORD wants full control over your life; over your heart and mind; over your attitudes. He wants the one thing that all of the great servants of the LORD gave to Him; a surrendered heart.

Janet and I recently watched a Christmas program on the internet. And the essence of it was this. “What will you give to Jesus this year on His birthday?” I’d like to recommend your give Him the following gift; a fully surrendered heart.

During Corrie’s presentations to audiences, she would often hold up the back side of a piece of embroidery, with hundreds of tangled threads hanging from it. Many wonder-ed if she was holing up the wrong side by mistake. As she held up the messy side of the embroidery she would ask “Does God always grant us what we ask for in prayers? Not always. Sometimes He says “No.” That is because God knows what we do not know. God knows all. Look at this piece of embroidery. The wrong side is chaos. But look at the beautiful picture on the other side – the right side. Triumphantly she flipped the cloth over and revealed an elaborately embroidered crown – symbolizing our crown of eternal life. The crown is intricately stitched, and had threads of many colors, including gold, silver, and pearls. “We see the wrong side; God sees His side all the time. One day we shall see the embroidery from His side, and thank Him for every answered an unanswered prayer.”

Has anyone here ever heard the poem “Life Is But A Weaving”? “My life is but a weaving  
Between my God and me.  
I cannot choose the colors  
He weaveth steadily.  
  
Oft’ times He weaveth sorrow;  
And I in foolish pride  
Forget He sees the upper  
And I the underside.  
  
Not ’til the loom is silent  
And the shuttles cease to fly  
Will God unroll the canvas  
And reveal the reason why.  
The dark threads are as needful  
In the weaver’s skillful hand  
As the threads of gold and silver  
In the pattern He has planned  
  
He knows, He loves, He cares;  
Nothing this truth can dim.  
He gives the very best to those  
Who leave the choice to Him.” (Corrie Ten Boom)

There are lots of things that stand in the LORD’s way. But the main one is the unsurrendered life. He wants to work His will in this world. And yet, how many of us are in agree-ment with Him? Who here is ready for Christmas because you’ve decided to give Him a surrendered heart? You see, when you’ve surrendered, then the details of your day are *His* allowances to you to get you to turn again to Him, moment by moment, and to find His strength to receive and respond to everything He allows. Your life is made up of His allow-ances. And it’s in the little things, those details that He allows; it’s in *those* things that you will find your walk with the LORD is real. “Take care of the nickels and He’ll take care of the dollars” the banker used to say. Let Him have *His* way with the details and He will certainly take care of the big picture.

Now, granted, you won’t want to be so consumed with every detail of your life that it makes you paranoid. So, what can you do with this wonderful awareness that the LORD is in full control over even the details of your life?

So, for Christmas this year, consider those things that affecting you today. What’s happening at your job, for instance? Or, what’s happening in your home and in your relationships at home? What’s happening with your finances? Did your washer break? Did your car break down? Did you receive a totally unexpected bill? Aren’t we all tempted to think that the day-to-day details are not so important to God? Yet, consider how important the details are from God’s viewpoint and then take every single one of those things to Him because He cares.

If He’s got a name for every star in the heavens; if He’s got the hairs on your head numbered; if He notices every single sparrow that falls; if He sees every offering you make; if He can fill a net with 153 fish and the net not break, can’t He take care of your day?

God cares about the details. And, all the details of your day fit perfectly into Romans 8:28 *“And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the Called according to His purpose.”*

Shall we pray? Hymn # 256 “Love Has Come”