

***The Challenges of Christmas:  
Placing God's Plans Ahead of My Plans ~ Selected Passages***

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**Introduction:** Christmas comes each year with its own set of challenges—shopping, parties, travel, and certainly balancing the true meaning of Christmas with the overemphasis of the commercial aspects of Christmas. The first Christmas had a set of challenges as well. These challenges for the first characters of Christmas are also our challenges. Over the course of the next weeks, leading up to Christmas, we are going to be looking at some of these challenges. One of those challenges is to place God's plans ahead of my plans. God's choosing of Mary to be the birth mother of Jesus helps us to understand some principles related to this challenge.

We are going to start with this scene and then move on to some other scenes in the Gospels as we explore this challenge of Christmas and of our lives: Placing God's Plans Ahead of My Plans.

**First Scene: Luke 1:26-38**

<sup>26</sup> *In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee called Nazareth, <sup>27</sup> to a virgin engaged to a man named Joseph, of the house of David. The virgin's name was Mary. <sup>28</sup> And [the angel] came to her and said, "Rejoice, favored woman! The Lord is with you." <sup>29</sup> But she was deeply troubled by this statement, wondering what kind of greeting this could be. <sup>30</sup> Then the angel told her:*

*Do not be afraid, Mary,  
for you have found favor with God.*

<sup>31</sup> *Now listen:*

*You will conceive and give birth to a son,  
and you will call His name JESUS.*

<sup>32</sup> *He will be great  
and will be called the Son of the Most High,  
and the Lord God will give Him  
the throne of His father David.*

<sup>33</sup> *He will reign over the house of Jacob forever,  
and His kingdom will have no end.*

<sup>34</sup> *Mary asked the angel, "How can this be, since I have not been intimate with a man?"*

<sup>35</sup> *The angel replied to her:*

*The Holy Spirit will come upon you,  
and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.  
Therefore the holy One to be born  
will be called the Son of God.*

<sup>36</sup> *And consider your relative Elizabeth—even she has conceived a son in her old age, and this is the sixth month for her who was called barren. <sup>37</sup> For nothing will be impossible with God."*

<sup>38</sup> *"I am the Lord's slave," said Mary. "May it be done to me according to your word." Then the angel left her.*

Christmas—that is the coming of Jesus into our world changes everything. It is hard to describe all of the ways that this coming changed Mary’s life. Think about a young girl ready to be married receiving the startling announcement that she is pregnant, still being a virgin, with a child conceived of the Holy Spirit. Immediately, her plans are put on hold for the plan of God for the whole world. In this first scene, we see the unbelievable announcement of an angel to Mary. We see a brief question in verse 34, but upon the reply, we see unbelievable abandonment to will of God.

She could have been divorced. She could have been killed for her adultery. However, being a servant to God meant doing God’s will at all cost.

**Principle: We must display complete submission.**

As we seek God’s will, we must remember the principle of complete submission to the will of God.

In *General Patton’s Principles for Life and Leadership*, General George S. Patton Jr. says:

Picking the right leader is the most important task of any commander. I line up the candidates and say, “Men, I want a trench dug behind warehouse ten. Make this trench eight feet long, three feet wide and six inches deep.”

While the candidates are checking their tools out at the warehouse, I watch them from a distance. They puzzle over why I want such a shallow trench. They argue over whether six inches is deep enough for a gun emplacement. Some complain that such a trench should be dug with power equipment. Others gripe that it is too hot or too cold to dig. If the men are above the rank of lieutenant, there will be complaints that they should not be doing such lowly labor. Finally, one man will order, “What difference does it make what {he} wants to do with this trench! Let’s get it dug and get out of here.”

That man will get the promotion. Pick the man who can get the job done!

Thus, God is looking for people to whom He can give authority and responsibility. God is looking for complete submission. (Craig Larson, *750 Engaging Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Writers*, p. 487.)

**Second Series of Scenes: Luke 2:15-20, Luke 2:21-40, and Luke 2:41-50.**

Chapter 2 gives us three distinct scenes that take us from the crib of Jesus until he is twelve years old. In each case Jesus’ earthly parents are hearing what is being said about Jesus.

1. At the stable (2:15-20)—Mary treasured up all these things in her heart and meditated upon them.
2. At the Presentation at the Temple (2:21-40)—Jesus’ parents could see God’s grace on Him.
3. Jesus at the Temple (2:41-50)—They did not understand what He was saying to them (v.49), but one has the sense that they were observing. They were witnessing all of these things.

**Principle: We must determine to have constant sensitivity.**

Though, they were not understanding everything, by the progressive will of God, they were being obedient to as much as was being revealed to them. When I think about God's plans versus my plans, I suppose that one of the great challenges is to not lag so far behind God or get ahead of God. Constant sensitivity to His leadership is essential to being right in step with the will of God.

Constant sensitivity to God's plans for your life is best recognized by meditation on the revealed will of God in the word of God. There really is no easy plan or substitute plan for knowing the will of God outside His word. As we begin to think about a new year, think on a renewed commitment to meditation on God's word every day.

**Third Scene: Mark 6:1-6**

*He went away from there and came to His hometown, and His disciples followed Him. <sup>2</sup> When the Sabbath came, He began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard Him were astonished. "Where did this man get these things?" they said. "What is this wisdom given to Him, and how are these miracles performed by His hands? <sup>3</sup> Isn't this the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James, Joses, Judas, and Simon? And aren't His sisters here with us?" So they were offended by Him.*

*<sup>4</sup> Then Jesus said to them, "A prophet is not without honor except in his hometown, among his relatives, and in his household." <sup>5</sup> So He was not able to do any miracles there, except that He laid His hands on a few sick people and healed them. <sup>6</sup> And He was amazed at their unbelief.*

The concept that I want you to grasp in this scene is that the path to the coronation of King Jesus is not immediate—not by a long shot. The plan of God has a few twists and turns along the way. In those twists and turns we must remember this principle.

**Principle: We must trust God's continual sovereignty.**

There are going to be days in our lives, even periods in our lives, when it seems like God's plans for our lives is not going according to plan. As we attempt to do God's will, there will be some days when we will be disappointed. There will be setbacks, delays, and even derailments. Sometimes, we will be rejected and ridiculed. Sometimes, our response when the plan is derailed or delayed is to go back to our own plan. When things go wrong, we must, instead, be resilient as we trust in God's continual sovereignty.

It is because of this third scene that we cannot forget the final scene.

**Fourth Scene: John 19:25**

*<sup>25</sup> Standing by the cross of Jesus were His mother, His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.*

**Principle: We must expect God's climactic salvation.**

Mary did not recognize the climactic salvation, but we can. Everything comes together all at once and then we see it. It is like the Magic Eye puzzles—those puzzles that reveal a picture within what appears to be a series of random dots.

But don't forget, we only see the plan of God when we are willing to completely surrender, be continually sensitive, and trust His continual sovereignty.

Our hearts are like a corporate board room with divided opinions. We need Jesus to come in to our lives, fire the board members and rule supremely and completely in every decision of our hearts.