

NO ROOM FOR CHRIST

"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." Luke 2:7.

We never tire of the story of the birth of Christ. Our emotions respond instantly to its recital. Everything about it is deathless in its appeal. A story with a baby in its center always challenges our interest. Babyhood is perennially and irresistibly interesting.

On the imperial throne in Rome sat Caesar Augustus, who needed and wanted more money. He issued a decree that all the world over which he had control should be enrolled with a view to taxation and perhaps military service. On the basis of this census new taxes were to be levied. Instead of waiting for the census enumerator to call on each citizen, it was decreed that every man would have to go to the village or city where he was born and be enrolled. Joseph and Mary resided at Nazareth, but their enrolment required them to journey to Bethlehem, which was nearly one hundred miles distant by the route which they traveled. In those days when a person traveled by land, he rode a donkey or a camel, or he walked. Being a poor man, it is assumed that Joseph walked and that Mary, who was soon to give birth to her first child, rode on a donkey.

For both of them, it must have been a long and tiresome journey. For Mary it was an unusually difficult trip. As far as the physical aspects of the journey were concerned, Joseph probably didn't mind it. But the mental strain was terrible. One can well imagine the solicitude that Joseph exhibited for Mary -- how carefully he led the donkey over the winding, uneven trail that connected the little village of Nazareth in Galilee to the outside world. The trail led through the valley of Esdraelon, down the plain of Sharon, up the hills to Jerusalem, and then down to the Judean village of Bethlehem. Doubtless he frequently asked Mary if she thought she could make it, only to be reassured that everything was all right.

After what seemed an endless journey, the gleaming Temple on Jerusalem's Mount Moriah came into view and they both breathed a sigh of relief, because Bethlehem was only one day's journey beyond. Under normal circumstances they would have paused in Jerusalem for a few days, worshipping in the Temple, visiting with friends and shopping in the bazaars. But after a night's rest, they passed out of the city, down the Kedron Valley, up to Bethany on the slopes of Olivet, to the fork in the road. Taking the south fork, they made their way toward Bethlehem, the village of Ruth and Boaz, and the birthplace of David. As the sun was dropping into the Mediterranean Sea, they passed Rachel's tomb on the outskirts of the village and soon they came to the only inn which the village could claim as its own. The inn was not unlike the average small-town hotel of our day. It was seldom filled. The occasion of our text was very unusual and created an emergency, because so many had to return to Bethlehem to be enrolled. Except for the reference in this story, the inn would have remained in oblivion.

You know the disappointment that awaited Mary and Joseph. They were tired and weary, but that night there was no room for them in the inn. Luke tells the story very simply: "And so it was, that, while they were there, the days were accomplished that she should be delivered. 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" (Luke 2:6-7). At that time, when her baby was about to be born, Mary needed all the care that human tenderness could give.

In fairness to the innkeeper, however, it ought to be said that, as far as Luke's account goes, there is no implication that he refused them admission to his inn because of any inflated prices or any other low motive. Bethlehem was crowded with other strangers like Joseph and Mary, they were late in arriving, and there wasn't any room left.

Of course, Mary, on account of her condition, should have received more tender consideration. But nobody offered to give up his room to her. It is difficult for us to understand why people would not have compassion on a woman in the hour of her direst need. That is because Christianity has softened our hearts and opened our eyes to the loveliness and glory of childhood.

As far as we know, the innkeeper volunteered to permit Mary and Joseph to stay in the cave which served as a stable for the donkeys and other livestock which belonged to the innkeeper and his guests. Somehow or other, we have the feeling that, if he had known, the innkeeper would have managed to make room for Mary, even if he had had to give up his own bed for the night. If some royal personage had stopped for the night or if a high Roman official had sought a place, we feel sure that something would have been done. But Mary was only a peasant woman, with a carpenter by her side.

What a contrast between the stable and the inn! One was for the animals and the other was for people. One was poor, cheerless and comfortless, and the other had the common comforts and conveniences which would minister to the needs of people. One was the only place where the Son of God could find shelter, and the other was so crowded that there was no room for Him. The stable has passed into history glorified and dignified by the distinction of being the birthplace of the Lord Jesus, while the inn is without a place of honor on history's pages, but stands out as the monument of missed opportunity. The opportunity of sheltering the Christ came to the inn but once. When it was lost, it was gone forever. The inn was stamped indelibly with the stigma of inhospitality to the highest.

Selfishness, hard-heartedness and the lack of sympathy were exhibited by this innkeeper when he closed the door against Mary and her expected Child. Instead of giving the Christ-child the best room in the inn, he relegated Him to the stable. A more lowly birth could hardly have been imagined.

Doubtless the inn was astir the next day with the news of the birth of Christ in the stable. All were talking of the Babe in the manger. Ere the morning sun had climbed the Bethlehem hills and gilded the distant

heights with its golden splendor, the mighty secret of that stable became known to the residents of the village.

"There was no room for them in the inn." There is foreboding in those words. That was to be the experience of Christ throughout His ministry. There was no room for His teachings in the minds of men, or for His quality of spirit in their lives, or for His reforming zeal in the synagogue, or for His prophetic message in the nation. Lack of hospitality was His experience throughout life. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not" (John 1:11).

What is the message of the stable? What is the message of the inn? One stands for cooperation with God, the other for rejection of Christ and indifference to His claims. One becomes the recipient of blessing and the medium of exalted service, while the other loses blessings and the privilege of service. The characteristics of the stable and the inn are still present and obvious in our world today. There are those who are willing to receive Christ, and who as a result of doing so become instruments in God's hands of great blessing and service. On the other hand, there are those who typify the inn and refuse to admit Christ. They maintain an attitude of supreme indifference to His claims upon them. Is your attitude that of the welcome of the stable or the rejection of the inn?

They should have made room for Christ in that inn, even if it had been necessary to remove all others. Likewise, every one of us should make room for Him in our lives no matter who else or what else must go.

Our Lord Jesus Christ began His earthly life by being shut out. He was shut out of the inn at His birth. It was the same all through His life. Many places beside the inn had no room for Him. The palaces of emperors and the halls of kings did not afford Him a place. Because there was no room for Him elsewhere, He wandered from place to place. He said, "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Matthew 8:20). There was no room for Christ in the fellowship of His family. God's Word says, "For neither did his brethren believe in him" (John 7:5). There was no room for Him in Jerusalem. "Then took they up stones to cast at him" (John 8:59).

Christ has all too little room in the churches. He has such little room in what is called good society. He has such little room in the realm of business. What a little place He has in the modern educational systems! The words, "No room for Christ here," are certainly written over many places of worldly amusement. The world has never had room for Christ. Just as there was no room for Christ in Bethlehem's crowded inn, so there is no room for Him in the kind of world in which we live.

We do not deliberately shut Christ out of our lives. We are not necessarily hostile or unkind to the One Whom God has sent to save us from sin and to give unto us eternal life. It is just that our lives are so filled with things, and our interests are so varied and numerous. We do not really mean to shut Him out, but we do it anyway. We reserve the best we have for ourselves and our selfish interests, and we send the Son of God to the stable or elsewhere. We fool nobody, much less do

we deceive God, when we say that we don't have time to pray, to read God's Word, to attend church services, to perform deeds of kindness and helpfulness for others and to render some significant service for Christ in and through the church.

How much room does Christ have in your thoughts, your reading, your conversation, your pleasures, your work or your life? If you have room for Him, the world will not have much room for you. If you have room for the world, you will not have room for Christ.

If you are not a Christian, accept Christ now as your Saviour and give Him His rightful place in your life until He takes you home to heaven. Make room for Christ in your heart, your head and your habits.