

Luke 2:1-7 NIV

1In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world. 2(This was the first census that took place while Quirinius was governor of Syria.) 3And everyone went to his own town to register. 4So Joseph also went up from the town of Nazareth in Galilee to Judea, to Bethlehem the town of David, because he belonged to the house and line of David. 5He went there to register with Mary, who was pledged to be married to him and was expecting a child. 6While they were there, the time came for the baby to be born, 7and she gave birth to her firstborn, a son. She wrapped him in cloths and placed him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

This morning we are starting our Christmas series entitled 'Do You See What I See?' Over the next few weeks leading up though Christmas we will look at a different aspect of our celebration of the birth of our Savior Jesus Christ through readings, song, drama and the preaching of God's Word. This morning's theme is 'Missed Opportunities.'

As a matter of fact the title of the message is
'Coulda-Shoulda-Woulda'

Let's pray:

I read in the Palladium-Item last Saturday that the S. 9th street Village Pantry accidentally sold gasoline for 19 cents a gallon during a three hour period due to a mistake in the pricing at the pump which was supposed to be \$1.90 a gallon. They sold about 400 gallons. I didn't get any of that action did you?

Man, talk about a missed opportunity!

'Coulda-Shoulda-Woulda...didn't!'

Our Bible text this morning refers to a much more significant missed opportunity. The innkeeper missed a once in eternity opportunity to allow a very pregnant woman and her carpenter husband room at the Inn to give birth to the savior of the world.

Maybe it was an 'I'm sorry, we're full tonight, can't help you.' Maybe it would have been too much work to squeeze in another couple of guests. It could be that it was late and the innkeeper just didn't want to mess with them. Regardless, it was a missed opportunity.

So why is it that some people seem to take advantage of the opportunities that come their way, while others seem to allow opportunities to simply pass them by?

It's easy to say, "Well, they were just lucky." However I am not a big believer in luck. In fact I don't think luck really has anything to do with not missing opportunities at all. I think some people are just more sensitive to the opportunities they encounter!

Andy Stanley made this statement in his book "Visioneering:"
"We don't need to pray for more miracles, we just need to be more sensitive to the opportunities that God brings our way."

Would you agree with his statement?

A number of years ago a shoe company sent a shoe salesman to Africa. He was there less than two weeks when he contacted his company saying, "Please bring me home, nobody wears shoes over here."

A few months went past and the shoe company sent another shoe salesman back to Africa in his place and in a couple of weeks, he sent a communication back to the company saying, "Please send all the shoes you can, because nobody wears shoes over here!"

The second salesman seemed to be much more sensitive to the opportunities presented to him, wouldn't you agree?

Usually being sensitive to opportunities and availing yourself to them brings residual benefits as in the case of the second shoe salesman.

The Bible is full of examples of those who missed golden opportunities. Let's look at a couple this morning:

1. The people of Noah's day had an opportunity to come into the Ark and be rescued from the flood. Genesis 6-7

- But they were too busy with life and had other things to do.
- They didn't have time to listen to Noah's warning
- They even saw the Ark being built and probably laughed at Noah.
- But one day, it started to rain and they weren't laughing anymore.
- And God shut the door!
- All of a sudden, they had time but they had missed the opportunity.

'Coulda-Shoulda-Woulda' but they didn't. Missed opportunities!

2. The people of Sodom and Gomorrah had an opportunity to repent and avoid destruction by fire. Genesis 18-19

This is an extremely powerful story in the Bible. God was going to destroy this city because of their unrepentant sinful practices, but before He did, He revealed his plan to Abraham.

God is a loving as well as a just God.

2 Peter 2:9 NIV

'The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance.'

Abraham began to pray and intercede for the city. '50-45-40-30-20-10 righteous people?'

However, when Lot told his son-in-laws to leave Sodom because God was going to destroy it, they didn't take him seriously.

*Listen to me church; when we camp in Sodom, that is, when we willingly and continually dwell in sin's neighborhood, people aren't that likely to take us very seriously if at all.

Genesis 19:14b NKJV *'But to his son-in-laws he seemed to be joking.'*

What was the result? Listen to this tragic account:

Genesis 19: 24-25 NIV

24 Then the LORD rained down burning sulfur on Sodom and Gomorrah—from the LORD out of the heavens. 25 Thus he overthrew those cities and the entire plain, including all those living in the cities—and also the vegetation in the land.'

'Coulda-Shoulda-Woulda' but they didn't. Missed opportunities!

3. The two thieves on the Cross both had opportunity. Luke 23

One thief ridiculed Jesus and said, *"If you are really the Christ, save Yourself and us!"* while the other realized this was no ordinary man that was dying beside him. He looked at Jesus and said, *"Lord, remember me when you come into Your Kingdom!"*

Both men had an opportunity and yet Jesus said to the second thief *'Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise!'*

'Coulda-Shoulda-Woulda' but the one didn't. Missed opportunities!

4. The Story of the Good Samaritan. Luke 10

We know this story all too well. It is a story about opportunity. A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho and he fell among thieves.

- They stripped him of his clothing and stole his money.
- They beat him up and left him to die.
- It's a picture of many people today!

Now by chance, a certain priest came down that road and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.

Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. He stopped and looked, but he didn't want to get involved.

But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was! And when he saw him, he had compassion on Him! He was sensitive to somebody else's needs but his own. This is where true ministry begins to occur.

It's amazing the things that we will begin to see when we are moved by compassion! The Bible says;

- He ministered to him.
- He bandaged up his wounds.
- He set him on his own animal.
- He took him to an Inn [where they must have had some room. Who knows, maybe this was the same Inn and they now realized an opportunity?]
- He paid the guy out of his own pocket!

'Coulda-Shoulda-Woulda' but the Priest and the Levite didn't. Missed opportunities!

What about our text? The innkeepers had a golden opportunity to provide a place for the birth of the savior of the world. In strict commercialism speak they missed a golden opportunity to have a 'Mary, Joseph and Jesus slept here' sign in the lobby of the Bethlehem Inn. Talk about missed opportunities?

So how can we be more sensitive to opportunities? Here are a couple of things I believe we can learn from these stories. We can learn...

-From the people in Noah's day: to recognize the seriousness of life.
[Eating and drinking and marrying...]

-From Sodom and Gomorrah tragedy: to reject dwelling in sinfulness.
[Lot chose to pitch his tent towards Sodom when given a choice]

-From the thief on the cross: to realize our own hopeless condition.
[God does some of His greatest work in the darkest hours]

-From the Samaritan: to allow compassion to move you.
[splangkh-nid'-zom-ahee : to be moved as to ones bowels]

Not missing opportunities requires making adjustments and requires active participation. If indeed there was a full house at the Bethlehem Inn that night in order to make room it would have required some moving things around to help create a space.

The same is true of us today if we are indeed going to make room for Jesus in our lives and thereby allow ourselves to be conduits of His compassion to others and not miss divine opportunities to be bearers of His image and grace to a lost and dying world.

Don't commit yourself to not miss another opportunity; rather consider allowing the Holy Spirit of God redirect avenues and areas of your life so that you are more 'in tune' and sensitive to those opportunities He presents them to you.

Remember Andy Stanley's statement

"We don't need to pray for more miracles, we just need to be more sensitive to the opportunities that God brings our way."

I received an e-mail from one of you earlier this week with the subject line of 'full and a little sick to my stomach.' Here is what it said:

Brett,

I was convicted by this passage today and wanted to share it with you.

Proverbs 27:7 He who is full loathes honey, but to the hungry even what is bitter tastes sweet.

They went on to explain... *'Not food and drink, we fill up on everything the world has to offer. We are so full. We want no part of the God's word, his instruction, because we have no room left for it. Let's stop being filled up from eating out of the garbage and feast at the table of the King!'*

Thanks a lot! Do you want to know what my response was? Listen...

'Why send this to me, so I could be convicted again... like by the words ... of the Dive [Bible Study] devotion this morning? You and I seem to be on the same page: words such as surrender, repent, return to your first love are my recent constant companions.'

Closing:

Luke 7:36-50 NIV

'Now one of the Pharisees invited Jesus to have dinner with him, so he went to the Pharisee's house and reclined at the table. 37When a woman who had lived a sinful life in that town learned that Jesus was eating at the Pharisee's house, she brought an alabaster jar of perfume, 38and as she stood behind him at his feet weeping, she began to wet his feet with her tears. Then she wiped them with her hair, kissed them and poured perfume on them. 39When the Pharisee who had invited him saw this, he said to himself, "If this man were a prophet, he would know who is touching him and what kind of woman she is—that she is a sinner." 40Jesus answered him, "Simon, I have something to tell you." "Tell me, teacher," he said. 41"Two men owed money to a certain moneylender. One owed him five hundred denarii, and the other fifty. 42Neither of them had the money to pay him back, so he canceled the debts of both. Now which of them will love him more?" 43Simon replied, "I suppose the one who had the bigger debt canceled." "You have judged correctly," Jesus said. 44Then he turned toward the woman and said to Simon, "Do you see this woman? I came into your house. You did not give me any water for my feet, but she wet my feet with her tears and wiped them with her hair. 45You did not give me a kiss, but this woman, from the time I entered, has not stopped kissing my feet. 46You did not put oil on my head, but she has poured perfume on my feet. 47Therefore, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven—for she loved much. But he who has been forgiven little loves little." 48Then Jesus said to her, "Your sins are forgiven." 49The other guests began to say among themselves, "Who is this who even forgives sins?" 50Jesus said to the woman, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."

The religious missed the opportunity; the sinful woman did not. Why?

- She obviously recognized the seriousness of life.
[Jesus didn't just come to eat dinner...]
- She evidently had chosen to reject dwelling in sinfulness.
[When the pain outweighs the pleasure...]
- She undoubtedly was keen to realize her own hopeless condition.
[Pride took a huge blow; humility reigned in its place]
- and she certainly was willing to allow compassion to move her.
[One of the greatest acts of loving sacrifice ever]