

Introduction

Many of you are familiar with the billionaire business woman and real estate investor, Leona Helmsley. She was noted for many things including a statement she made that revealed her elitism and pride. In 1983, a newly hired housekeeper said, **"You must pay a lot of taxes."** To which she allegedly replied: **"We don't pay taxes. Only little people pay taxes."** By little people, she meant less gifted and rich and thus less important than she.

Leona Helmsley didn't hold little people in very high regard, but that's okay because God does. I came across a little maxim in that regard, **"God must believe in ordinary people because He made so many of them."** What that maxim implies, the Christmas narrative, Luke 2:1-14 teaches. There are, ultimately, no little people in the kingdom of God and that's what I'm going to preach about today.

No Little People or Big People

In my opinion, the birth of Jesus (God the Son coming in the flesh) is the grandest of all miracles. Because it is, we'd do well to identify and examine the people Father God used to bring it about.

First, in verse 5, there was Mary the mother of Jesus. She was certainly the central figure in His birth, but the only information we have about her is what the Bible gives, which isn't very much. Nothing in it suggests that she was any richer, smarter, better looking, or more gifted than most of us are.

Second, in verse 4, there was Joseph, the husband of Mary and the earthly father of Jesus. Two verses in the Bible reveal that he was a carpenter. And like Mary, he probably wasn't any richer, smarter, better looking or more gifted than most of us are.

And finally, third, in verse 8, there were the shepherds. They were the ones, surprisingly, to whom Father God chose to announce the birth of His Son. I say **"surprisingly"** because almost everyone in the first

century regarded them with disdain.

It's instructive isn't it – the people Father God chose to bring about the grandest of all miracles. They weren't royals, aristocrats, politicians, wealthy landowners, wealthy merchants, rabbis, Pharisees, or priests. They were a daughter, a carpenter, and some shepherds instead. Who would have guessed it? Father God chose common, average, ordinary people to bring about the most monumental event in human history.

That teaches us a profound truth. God believes in and uses ordinary people like Mary, Joseph, the Shepherds – and us, which means that there are no little people in His kingdom.

Committed People and Interested People

What are there then? The Christmas narrative tells us. There are only interested people or committed people.

Let's examine God's choice of Mary and you'll grasp what I mean. Question – Why of all the Jewish maidens in Israel did He choose her? I've already said it wasn't because she was so rich, smart, pretty, and gifted. It was because she was so committed instead. Remember her reply in Luke 1:38 when God called her to bear Messiah, **“Behold, the bonds slave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word.”** I don't know a stronger word of devotion than the one she used, **“bonds slave.”** It suggests commitment that is total, utter, or complete.

Many years ago, a young man became a communist and was jailed as a result. When he was released, he wrote his fiancé a letter that broke off their engagement and explained why. Listen to part of what he wrote: **“There is one thing I am in dead earnest about, and that is the communist cause. It is my life, my business, my religion, my hobby, my sweetheart, my wife, my mistress, my breath and meat. I work at it in the daytime and dream of it at night. Its hold on me grows, not lessens, as time goes on; therefore, I cannot carry on a friendship, a love affair, or even a conversation without relating it to this force that both drives and guides my life. I**

evaluate people, books, ideas, and actions according to how they affect the communist cause, and by their attitude toward it. I've already been in jail because of my ideals, and if necessary, I'm ready to go before a firing squad."

The word Mary used, "**bondslave**," connotes that kind of commitment. Most of us as Protestants don't appreciate the great person she was. The price to be paid for being mother of Messiah was high. It began immediately. She conceived out of wedlock and her reputation was ruined. It ended with the crucifixion of her son. Imagine watching your son being crucified. It's clear. Mary was willing to pay any price and give to any degree that being mother of Messiah required.

That illustrates what commitment is. It's being willing to do whatever is necessary. I've made the distinction before. To be interested means that we're willing to do whatever is convenient. To be committed means that we're willing to do whatever is necessary. Mary was willing to do whatever was necessary and that's why God chose her.

He doing so teaches us that there are no little people in the kingdom of God. There are only interested people or committed people. On the one hand, there are those who are willing to do only whatever is convenient. On the other there are those who are willing to do whatever is necessary. There are only interested people or committed people.

Committed to or Interested in Jesus

Now, the Christmas narrative reveals what the object of our interest or commitment is. It's Jesus. Interest and commitment are postures we take toward Him. More precisely, they're decisions we make for Him. We talk about people "**making a decision for Jesus**." Well, that decision they make for Him is usually one of three things.

Some decide to let Him forgive them. They've done bad things about which they feel horribly guilty. That guilt is weighing them down, making them miserable, and they desperately want it gone. So, they decide to let Jesus forgive them and take it away. They say the sinner's prayer and

mean it – the forgiveness part at least. They confess their sins and based on His shed blood, ask Him to forgive them.

But that's all they want Him to do. They want Him to forgive them but not to intrude any further into their lives than that. What they've decided is to enjoy forgiveness at His expense. They don't want to have anything more to do with Him than that. Dallas Willard calls those who decide that "**vampire Christians.**" The only thing they want from Him is His blood and the forgiveness it brings.

There's a second basic decision for Jesus that people make. It's to let Him help them. There is an area or there are areas of their lives in which they're having problems that they, on their own, can't solve. They have felt needs, in other words, and decide to let Jesus meet them.

But that's all they want Him to do. They want Him to leave them alone otherwise. What they've done is make Him "**part of their lives**" as we say it – or "**the god of the gaps**" as Dietrich Bonhoeffer said it. They need Him here, here, and here in their lives and want Him to come here, here, and here and help them. But they don't need Him there, there, and there in their lives and want Him to stay away from there, there, and there.

So, those are two basic decisions for Jesus that people make – both of which A.W. Tozer accurately described this way: "**A notable heresy has come into being throughout evangelical Christian circles – the widely accepted concept that we humans can choose to accept Christ only because we need Him as Savior and that we have the right to postpone our obedience to Him as Lord as long as we want to.**" That's what those first two decisions are about. People decide to receive Jesus as Savior and let Him forgive or help them. But they decide to reject Him as Lord and not let Him govern them.

How many of you remember Jim Bakker's television ministry, the PTL Club. Years ago, I was on a follow up team that visited people who made decisions for Jesus over the phone to PTL. I visited 11 such people, not one of whom was willing to be disciplined. That reveals the decision they had made – to let Jesus forgive or help them and no more.

There's a third basic decision for Jesus that some people, only a few actually, make. It's to let Him govern them. They say to Jesus what Mary did to Father God, "**Behold the bondservant of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word.**" We call that response "**apprenticing**" ourselves to Him – becoming His disciples. We firmly make and devotedly carry out the decision to be with Him in order to learn and do all that He says. We arrange all of our affairs around that decision. We do literally whatever is necessary to carry it out. We pay any price and give to any degree we have to in order to learn and do what Jesus says.

In his book *The Cost of Discipleship*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer identifies part of the price we have to pay. It's to forfeit some things that are normally sought in human life. Mary did that and so must we. Attorneys, for instance, normally seek to make as much money as they can. They do that by charging everyone the going rate of \$150-\$200 an hour. But one attorney I know, a disciple of Jesus, doesn't. He believes that Jesus wants him to charge on a sliding scale, based on what people can afford to pay, and so that's what he does. As a disciple of Jesus, he has to forfeit some things that are normally sought in human life, and he's willing to do just that.

Those then are the three most basic decisions for Jesus that people make. They decide to let Him forgive, help, or govern them. Those who make the first two decisions are interested. Those who make the third are, like Mary, committed.

The Right Decision

Let me ask you a personal question that I've already asked myself. When it comes to Jesus, are you committed or interested? I hope that you're committed and here's why. It's because "committed" people are ultimately "big" people in the kingdom of God. One writer said it well: "**To be wholly committed to God in the place where God wants him – this is the creature glorified.**" He was right. If you're committed in

whatever your place is right now, then you are the creature glorified.

Many sincere followers of Jesus don't believe that. They believe that only full time Christian workers or Christians who are involved in extraordinary events are big people. But they aren't either of those and so, conclude they don't and can't amount to much in the kingdom of God.

But they're wrong. There's something all of us need to know. Discipleship to Jesus presupposes a life. That life is yours and mine right where we are right now. Stop for a moment and consider the people, circumstances, activities, experiences, and events that comprise our real lives. Well, those real lives of ours have true dignity because Jesus cares deeply about them. He cares so deeply in fact that He teaches us in the Bible how to live them. So, we learn what He teaches and then live our lives that way. Or to say it another way, we live our lives the way He would if He were we. And we become creatures glorified in the kingdom of God because we do.

The Bible teaches that God is going to glorify followers of Jesus on judgment day and many are going to be surprised when He does. My mother, Ruby, was a widow with five children who waitressed and took care of cancer patients to support us. Billy Graham was an evangelist who led more people to Jesus than probably anyone who has ever lived. But on judgment day, God is going to give Ruby Murphy as much glory as He gives Billy Graham. Why? It's because she was just as committed in her place as he was in his.

Conclusion

That isn't just nice talk. It's the truth. Francis Schaeffer summed it up well in closing: **"We must remember throughout our lives that in God's sight there are no little people and no little places. Only one thing is important: to be consecrated persons in God's place for us, at each moment."** He's right. Be committed to Jesus right where you are right now. You're big (glorified) in His kingdom if you do.