

May God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ give you grace and peace.

"The Gift God's Preparing Where You Can't See." by Ron Hutchcraft

Like most families, Christmastime for us has always been a season of secrets, mysteries and anticipation. And sometimes even a little frustration. Like the year my wife and I decided to build a dollhouse for our daughter and then another year we built a general store for our son. We closed off the basement and we set up our workshop. That sign on the basement door said, "Closed - Christmas Workshop." But, of course, the kids could hear all the construction sounds downstairs, it was driving them nuts! They begged us to tell them what we were working on. But that, of course, would have ruined everything. Even though it left them wondering, we were building something really nice for them. They just couldn't see it until it was done.

I'm Ron Hutchcraft and I want to have A Word With You today about
"The Gift God's Preparing Where You Can't See."

That scenario could be going on in your life right now. Your Father is building something really good for you, but He can't let you see it yet. It's not ready. You're not ready. It's not time. And not knowing what He's up to may be causing you some frustration and some anxiety.

Maybe you could find a little encouragement in a brief visit to the Christmas Story. It's in our word for today from the Word of God. We'll go to a young woman named Mary who's been told God is up to something big in her life; a young woman who right now has a lot more questions than answers. The angel has just announced that she is about to be pregnant by a miracle of Almighty God, and that baby she will bear will be called "the Son of the Most High."

When Mary asks how this can be in light of the fact that she's a virgin, the Bible says, "The angel answered, 'The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you...Nothing is impossible with God.' 'I am the Lord's servant,' Mary answered. 'May it be to me as you have said'" (Luke 1:38). Then later, her cousin Elizabeth says to her, "Blessed is she who has believed what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished" (Luke 1:45).

Okay, God is making something wonderful. But before Mary will be able to see what God is doing, she's got some major hassles to deal with. Who's going to believe she's pregnant without committing a sexual sin? What's going to happen to her reputation? What's going to happen to her upcoming marriage? She risks losing Joseph, the man she loves. She's going to have to make a grueling 90-mile journey to Bethlehem in her ninth month. There won't even be a room where she can have her baby. He'll be born in the filth of a stable. Lots of questions, lots of bumps in the road. When she finally sees what God has been building, of course it's going to be incredible. When you finally see what God is putting together behind closed doors for you, you're going to be forever grateful. You're going to love it. But for now, you may hear the hammering, but you won't be able to see what He's working on. Will you, as David said, "Wait patiently on the Lord"? You can't see who, you can't see what, you can't see when, but you know your Father loves you and you know He only "works all things together for good" (Romans 8:28).

Mary showed us how to respond in times like these, a marvelous five-word response you might call the ultimate Christmas spirit. Here are those words, "I am the Lord's servant." "Do whatever You think is best, Lord." You know, when you do that, you can relax in the anticipation that when you finally see what your Father is building for you, you're going to love it!

Prayers and Thoughts: Pray for Nick Butcher and family as they minister to us here in Ladoga. Pray for the Leonards and their work in Turkey. Pray for our shut-ins. Remember all our mothers and fathers. Remember our Military the mothers, fathers and their families. Pray for our church and leadership.

Beautiful Words: Psalm 45 For the choir director: A love song to be sung to the tune "Lilies." A psalm of the descendants of Korah. Psalm 45:1-2 Beautiful words stir my heart. I will recite a lovely poem about the king, for my tongue is like the pen of a skillful poet. You are the most handsome of all. Gracious words stream from your lips. God himself has blessed you forever. Little notes about the Psalms can make you wonder for instance here, how did that tune "Lilies" go. Beautiful words and gracious words that stir the heart are something that we hear little of concerning our political leadership but this is what the descendants of Korah were doing. God's blessing would be something we could all wish and pray for our country's leadership. During this Christmas Season keep the Lord centered in your heart with beautiful and gracious words to all those around us.

THE BEST GIFTS THIS SEASON:

To a Friend - Loyalty	To an Enemy - Forgiveness
To your Boss - Service	To your Child - A good example
To your Father - Honor	To your Mother - Gratitude and Devotion
To your Spouse - Love and Faithfulness	To Yourself - Respect
To All Men - Charity	To God - Your Life!! -- <i>Author Unknown</i>

Church Christmas Signs:

*On the church sign in Mace
A long long time ago in
A Galilee Far, Far Away*

*The World needs
A Stable Influence*

*Joseph was
The First to be in
A Christmas Rush*

*A Christmas Story:
Middle East Family
Seeking Refuge*

*A Baby
Changes Everything
Merry Christmas*

*What Happened in Bethlehem
Doesn't stay in Bethlehem
Merry Christmas*

REFLECTIONS A Christmas Meditation by Frank S. Smith Advent, 2011

The Apostle Paul speaks of the grace and power of God, now made manifest in “the appearing of our Savior Christ Jesus, who abolished death and brought life and immortality to light.” II Timothy 1:10.

These words of the apostle express the essential significance of the Christmas story, which in time would lead to the recording of the details concerning Jesus’ birth. Our earliest Christian witnesses seem not to be particularly concerned with those details of Jesus’ birth, but rather with the timeless impact of his earthly life, which culminated in his death, burial, and resurrection. Even the Gospels of Matthew and Luke — the only ones which contain the birth stories — give relatively little space to that event, but devote several chapters to the week of his passion, which began with his “triumphal entry” into Jerusalem and ended with his resurrection.

Chronologically, the earliest writings of the New Testament were not the Gospels, but the Pauline Epistles. These were written between about 50 and 64 AD. Matthew and Luke would come some twenty years later, as the early church sought to preserve some accurate record of Jesus’ life. The proclamation of that early church was that God had entered into human history in the person of Jesus Christ, who by his resurrection from the grave had vanquished the forces of sin and death and had opened the way for humankind to be incorporated into the eternal Kingdom of God.

Thus, Paul in his letter to Timothy could speak of the “appearing” of Jesus, not simply as the babe of Bethlehem, but as the entire earthly manifestation of the Lord Jesus. He has “abolished death.” Throughout the biblical record death is seen as a horrific miscarriage of our natural state of being, and foreign to the divine intention in creation. (This was what made the crucifixion of Jesus such a stumbling block to the Jewish people — revulsion at the thought of the Messiah being crucified.) Early Christian witnesses, in contrast, saw that death as God in Christ becoming like us in every respect, even in the experience of death, but in order that he might destroy it in his resurrection. Thus, Paul could say that Jesus “abolished death and brought life and immortality to light.” Death was no longer the dreaded end of life, but the gateway to life’s eventual fulfillment in the eternal kingdom of God. The very rite of baptism, practiced by the church from its beginning, vividly symbolized one’s identification with Jesus in his death, burial, and resurrection to newness of life. It would be three hundred years before the church would begin celebrating an annual “Feast of the Nativity.” So, this Christmas I will enjoy to the full this annual celebration, with all its stories and songs and manger scenes. My heart will abound with praise and thanksgiving. And the holidays will be merrier because I know “the rest of the story.” *thanks to Belinda Monts for sharing this a few years ago*

***Check in with our heavenly Father this week, do some good and disappear. Clay Halsey alhalsey@tds.net
May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God be with you all. IICorinthians 13:14***