

12/25/18 rerun from 12/25/17
Week 52: Fall Mission Feeding
James and Betty Robison
Christmas Special

Betty: This is Christmas day! It's a wonderful day. I hope you enjoy it. I'm so blessed that you could join us today.

James: This is a time when we should all rejoice. There's a beautiful Christmas tree behind us. Just keep your seatbelt buckled and you're going to see how we ought to respond when we see a Christmas tree. Watch this. I'll be right back to tell you who it was.

>> Wow! Look at that! It is a big Christmas tree.

[Laughter]

Wow! It is so big and really awesome! I love it!

James: That was Kirie James' grandson and they have as many grandchildren as we do. I think they will probably pass us up for sure. But I'm telling you, listen to me, that was their daughter's son. I'm telling you, that's the way it ought to be for all of us for Christmas.

That was someone you've seen many times, grandson Kirie. She's been all over the world on the mission field with us. She almost paid for the trips with her life. She got a very serious type of hepatitis when she was with us after the Chernobyl explosion in the Ukraine holding children. And then you've seen her in just some unusual experiences with a broken heart. But she has a beautiful, beautiful family.

You're going to listen right now to Sheila Walsh who is such a big part of *LIFE Outreach* and *LIFE Today* and she is talking to Max Lucado, a true gift from God and he is talking about his book and the hope that Christmas offers. Really, he talks about how broken hearts can be healed in a very supernatural way at this time.

A little later you're going to hear Steve Amerson with one of the most beautiful songs about Christmas I've ever heard. I think many of you may have heard it but perhaps not. And then you're going to hear a musical medley about Christmas on the piano that is going to thrill you on this Christmas day. Here is Sheila Walsh and Max Lucado.

Begin video clip

Sheila: I know you're a huge Christmas fan; isn't that true?

Max: I love Christmas! I'm one of these folks, I never complain when the lights go up in October and it doesn't bother me when Wal-Mart starts selling trees in early November. I get excited. I like the Christmas movies. I love Christmas music. I just play it over and over. And of course, I love Christmas food!

[Laughter]

But to me the highlight of Christmas is when you're in a shopping mall or you're walking through a department store and you hear "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear" or "Silent Night," these great classic Christmas hymns that have embedded within them the gospel. You just sense that the word is being sown and people are being, even if they're not conscious of it, they're being taught the meaning of Christmas.

So it's that undertone of hope that comes through. I know we get all busy and I'm sure we could slow it all down but at least there's the possibility that somebody is going to hear a Christmas message and walk away a different person.

Sheila: You're a very prolific writer. You write for us, you write for children. What was the Genesis for you of writing this book?

Max: Thanks for asking; that's a great question. As you know I've been a pastor for 28 years and I have noticed that there is a sensitivity and an openness to Christmas messages. And there's a reason that Christmas Eve services are usually packed and that advent services are very popular. That is I think people want to hear the story of Bethlehem. They really do. They want to hear what... they want somebody to answer the question, what's the big deal about the baby? What's the big deal about the baby in the manger?

So I've had this idea for some years and this happened to be the time to do it, of creating a book that would just speak into that conversation in a very, hopefully winsome way with a lot of Christmas stories, maybe some funny stories but also unpack some key Bible verses. So I thought, because of Bethlehem, how is the world different? That's why we called it "Because of Bethlehem."

Sheila: A lot of people find Christmas a very hard season. I remember last Christmas getting so many notes from people on my Facebook page saying that they actually find Christmas the hardest season of all. Why do you think that is? And how do you think this book will address that?

Max: You're absolutely right. Years ago -- I'm going to date myself now but there is an old Merle Haggard song, "If We Make It Through December." It was a great country and western song. His point was that what's bad is worse in December. Pain hurts more. Bills feel heavier. Separation feels more painful. So what's bad just gets worse in December. It's because we look around and everybody seems so happy. Or everybody seems to have it all together. Or they're seeing somebody with their child reminds us of a vacant crib. It's just everything gets amplified.

But there is a way that we can take the message of Christmas and it can be applied like a balm on our soul, on the wounded parts of our souls. The big message of Christmas is God understands. You talk about a painful world; he was born into a painful world and understands exactly what we go through because he's been through it. That's a huge part of the Christmas message.

So let this Christmas, if it is a hard one, and I can relate, just a few years ago my daughter suffered a miscarriage and we found ourselves just a few days before Christmas in an emergency room. I remember thinking, of all the places you don't want to be at Christmas it's in -- I don't care how much garland they put up an emergency room is still an emergency room. So I get that. But let this Christmas, let the message come through and hear Jesus say, "I understand what you're going through and I know how hard it is but I came into the world in painful times and I can speak to you during yours too."

Sheila: You have an interesting phrase in the book where you talk about seeing God's face in Jesus. Talk about that; would you?

Max: Well, because of Bethlehem we know what God looks like. And in the book I talk about, and as a mom you will relate to this, just the excitement that a mother must feel to finally see that baby's face. I know we dads get excited but multiply that by nine months.

Sheila: Ten months, actually -- ten!

Max: And all of that pain and Lamaze classes, multiply it many, many times and the look on a mom's face when she looks in the face of her child, and it's as if she is saying, "Okay, now finally, I know what you look like."

Well, what was it like for Mary who knew she had never known a man, who knew that child was a miracle? Who knew she was carrying God himself? When she looked into the face of Jesus and she saw, I don't know, the little rose bud cheeks, tiny lips and small nose, now this is what God looks like.

It's the most profound moment of the incarnation because God really became flesh. He became so small that he could be delivered just as any baby would be delivered and small enough that a weary young Mary could cup her hands all the way around his face and say, "God would become this. This is what God looks like."

What does he look like? He looks like love. He looks like hope. He looks like understanding and sympathy. It's a turning point moment in history when Mary looked into the face of God.

Sheila: There is so many interesting ingredients in your book, Max, of things I've never thought about before. You would think, there is nothing new about the Christmas story but you talk about Christmas trees, how they tie into our adoption. Talk about that because that's amazing!

Max: That's another fun tradition. Now I've got to confess, we've gone the fake route.

Sheila: Boo!

Max: I know! And quite honestly, I had to give in on this one.

Sheila: It gets messy, doesn't it?

Max: It does. But forever we bought an honest-to-goodness Christmas tree and went through the whole process. I think it had to do with when our kids finally left the house, Denalyn said we don't have to do that anymore. But I love the smell and the sap in carrying the tree and tying it on the car -- all of that.

Sheila: You can actually get spray now. You can just spray it on your fake tree. Yeah! You can even get spray sap.

Max: Spray sap?

Sheila: Yes!

Max: Does it create the smell?

Sheila: It creates the smell. We live in a wonderful world, people! But you take it so much further.

Max: You think about all the things that go into purchasing a tree. You pick it, you select it -- I'll say that -- you select it, you purchase it, you carry it home. And as a preacher, always looking for a good three-point sermon, [Laughing] I can remember some years ago realizing, there is my Christmas Eve

sermon. What you did with this tree God has done with you. He has selected you, he purchased you, and he's carrying you home.

Sheila: But that's profound, Max!

Max: It's really the gospel; isn't it? That all of us are selected by God; that he has determined our gender, our personality, and then he said, "Now I want you for my kingdom, for the kingdom that I'm creating and I purchased you." You don't expect the guy in the striped tent to pay for the tree. We have to purchase it ourselves. So we do. We pay for it. Well, God paid for us. We've all been bought with a price. And he's taking us home.

Every person needs to be reminded that this world is not how it was intended to be and always will be. We're being taken home. Don't we need that reminder? This has been a hard year full of political topsy turvy-ness, and terrorist attacks, and just violence and fear and conflict. Whoo! I think we need Christmas.

Sheila: How does Christmas begin what Easter celebrates?

Max: That's the thing we have to keep reminding ourselves of. As much as we love Christmas, had there been no Easter we would not be talking about Christmas. The reason that the cradle matters is because the cross was occupied. And the reason the cross was occupied was because the crown was given to Christ. So that's how it all progresses. We love Bethlehem. But Bethlehem only began this march, this wonderful journey that Jesus took of redemption.

But remember the name *Jesus* traces its ancestry back to a name that means God saves -- God saves! So when Joseph and Mary were told the name that they were to give their son, there was significance and symbolism there. That Jesus came to save us -- save us! And not just save us as the Angel said from our taxes or from grumpy neighbors or from boring preachers but he came to save us from our sins. That's the goal of God is to save us from our sins. We have this sin nature within us and consequently, we have led imperfect lives yet the kingdom is going to be comprised of perfect people in a perfect place. So God sent his son to lead a perfect life but to die a death that only sinners would die so that we sinners could receive his perfection.

So really, what the cradle began was culminated on the cross and celebrated in the resurrection.

Sheila: Do you think it is possible, Max for us to maintain the wonder of Christmas all year long?

Max: I do. It is not easy. The distractions are so many. I think the reason is the devil. There is a real devil in the world and he lives to steal and to kill and to destroy. He wants us to worship him. And ever

since he was cast out of the throne room because he wanted God's worship, ever since then he's demanded that somebody worship him.

So since he knows he'll never receive our ultimate worship he wants to take our joy, he wants to take our attention away from God. So we just be aware of him. We glance at the devil but we gaze at God and we stay focused on Christ. I think that wonder can be stirred.

But let's not -- we can't beat ourselves up. We're going to ebb and flow in our emotions. Some days we're going to feel on cloud nine, some days we'll feel at the very bottom but God's hold on us is secure. That's the gospel. It is not our hold on him but his hold on us that matters and his hold is secure.

Sheila: You talk also in the book about what we value and how our view of what is valuable is very different from God's. You talk about that in the book. Talk about that; what is it? We place a lot of value in even when it comes to Christmas, people get into debt because they think they have to give big gifts and they have to do this and they have to do everything bigger. Christmas speaks a different message.

Max: It does. Yeah, and also have big parties and have nice new clothing to wear. Again, I don't beat -- it's not worth it to get beat up on that, but just don't get lost in that. Don't get lost in that. What God values is every human being.

Here's a challenge. Somebody gave this to me and I'm going to pass it on. And that is as you are receiving this Christmas what God has done for you, turn and do for others exactly what God has done for you. So you make a list of all the things that God has done for us through Christmas. Well, he's been sympathetic; sympathetic enough to enter our world. What if I did the same? What if I was sympathetic enough with my neighbor down the street to make an effort to enter his world, to try to understand him or her? Or go across town to people of a different ethnic background, to enter their world, to be sympathetic, to do everything I could to understand it.

You think about Jesus. He was on the earth as far as we know, for three decades before he ever preached a sermon. Our tendency is to walk in the door preaching a sermon. But he understood the world even though he already did. But he wanted to make sure we knew he understood what it was like. He entered our world. So maybe that is a good assignment this Christmas. Try to be to others what God has been to you.

End of clip

In the studio

James: Sheila, thank you. Max Lucado, thank you for being such a blessing. Betty, I love this time of the year where we get to watch -- this year we get to watch great grandchildren.

Betty: We do! How exciting!

James: Next year we'll even have more of them. We've got two more at least. Who knows? Maybe more. But it is such a special time. I'm thinking back about watching that little incredible scene of rejoicing over the Christmas tree. Wasn't that beautiful? And you know we really need to see that the greatness of Christmas is the little child that was born.

Steve Amerson has been blessed with one of the greatest voices God ever gave anyone. But he wrote a song, some of you may have heard it, "Where Else Would a Lamb Be Born?" -- the Lamb of God. But think about it, the King of kings, the Lord of Lords, born in a manger? Where else would a lamb be born? Here's Steve Amerson.

No proper place
 No regal palace
 To receive a royal birth
 God's gift of love
 Wrapped in a blanket
 Would be his way to reach the earth
 A bed of straw became a cradle
 Embracing God in human form
 What would expect more than a stable?
 But where else would a lamb be born?
 But where else would a lamb be born?

No stately house
 No noble mansion
 Where he would reign in majesty
 The path he chose
 Led to an altar
 Where he would give his life for me
 A bed of straw became a cradle
 Embracing God in human form
 One would expect more than a stable
 But where else would a lamb be born?
 But where else would a lamb be born?

He is the great I am
 The sacrificial lamb who takes away the sins of the world
 The bed of straw became his cradle
 Embracing God in human form
 One would expect more than a stable
 But where else would a lamb be born?
 But where else would a lamb be born?

James: Oh, I know that blessed you. Lord Jesus, I just want to thank you for being that lamb -- so lowly, so humble! And then truly being the lamb of God that redeems us forever. Thank you for the precious gift of redemption. Thank you for your willingness to be born in a manger that we may be born and experience eternity in your presence forever; in Jesus' name.

Well, Betty and I pray that you have a great Christmas day. We will! In the presence of that savior who lives in us and who longs to redeem every life he died to save.

Be blessed this day. Remember this. We are right now feeding children and during this last week when we're celebrating after Christmas and into the New Year, you might consider a special year-end gift. We have some gifts to send you to say thank you and bless you in your life. But let's praise God for the greatest gift at the same time, let's reach out to those who are too often overlooked. Thank you for doing that.

Now enjoy a beautiful Christmas medley by Hyman Stansky on the piano and what a gifted musician he is. Have a wonderful Christmas day and a great New Year!

[Song: Christmas medley]

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Announcer: Tomorrow on *LIFE Today*! Country music Hall of Famer, Charlie Daniels, shares inside stories reflecting back to the beginning of his career and his faith journey.