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Week 45: Fall Mission Feeding

James & Betty Robison

Lee Strobel

Studio discussion:

JAMES: Betty, we enjoy all the year. We talk about all the Christian holidays. I don't care if it is Easter, I don't care if it's Christmas, I don't care what it is. I live like the Jesus that we celebrate is living in us because he is. And we live with joy. But I'm telling you, we do celebrate Christmas. And sometimes people wonder, should you celebrate it? Is it celebrated at the right time? Is it the right way? Does God approve?

Well, here's a man who was an atheist who wrote the book called *The Case for Christ* because he decided to, you know, he had destroyed the reality of God in Christ. He decided to look him up, kind of study him up. Well, he became a Christian. Well, here he is taking on another one of these discussions, *The Case for Christmas*. Lee Strobel, it's good to have you here again.

LEE: Great to see you.

JAMES: You have written so many great books. What moved you to write this one?

LEE: At heart, I want to see people come into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. And, you know, statistically speaking, people are more open spiritually at Christmas than any time of the year.

JAMES: Wow. That's amazing.

LEE: Yeah. So I thought, why not? An inexpensive resource book can be a spiritual stocking stuffer. The gospel is in it. But it talks about Christmas. And even when I was an atheist, I loved Christmas. I did! Because people were friendlier and there were parties and people gave gifts.

What's not to like? But when I was at the Chicago Tribune, as an atheist, I was assigned to write a 30-part series on the destitute of Chicago. Each day featuring a family that was destitute. So, one of the families I profiled was the Delgados. A woman named Perfecta; she was in her 60s. She was crippled by arthritis. She had two grandchildren, Jenny and her sister, 13 and 11 years old. They were the most destitute family I interviewed. They were living in this hovel in Chicago. They have literally nothing in their place. I mean, there was not a picture on the wall, not a rug on the floor, not a piece of furniture. There was one little rickety card table with one jar of rice that was their only possession. So I did an article about them that appeared on Thanksgiving. I put their address in the article, on purpose, because I thought maybe the readers would do something. On Christmas Eve, I went back and they opened the door and people had showered them with coats because they had no coats in the cold Chicago winter, with coats, with money, with a Christmas tree, with furniture, with all this stuff. But you know what I interrupted? Perfecta and her granddaughters were packing away much of this newfound wealth to give away to their neighbors. I said, "What are you doing?" In her broken English, she said, "Well, we cannot have plenty while our neighbors have nothing. This is what Jesus would want us to do." I said, "Yeah! But isn't this great that the readers showered you with all this stuff?" And she said, "Yes, this is a gift from God. We didn't deserve it. But the greatest gift comes tomorrow on Christmas. It is Jesus. That is our greatest gift."

Here I am, a successful young journalist at the Chicago Tribune, and I'm thinking they have nothing materially, and they're rich in their relationship with God. I had everything I needed materially, but I was shackled to the material and wracked by anxiety. They had peace despite the fact that they had nothing. I just contrasted my life with them. I said there's something here.

Of course, years later, as you mentioned, my wife became a Christian and I decided to rescue her from this cult. So, I use my journalism and legal training to try to disprove Christianity; became convinced it's true. I thought, how can I seize this opportunity of Christmas when people even like me, atheists, hardcore atheists were open spiritually at that time, how can I help them see the truth of Christmas?

I learned a lot about Christmas I didn't know. For instance, one of the most fascinating misunderstandings I think about Christmas, this comes from one Greek word, kataluma. It's only used one other time other than the Christmas story in the Bible, and it refers to the place where Jesus was born. So, the traditional story is Mary and Joseph go to Bethlehem because the census has been called. They get there and they barely make it in time for Mary to have her baby Jesus. There's no room at the inn, and so they couldn't have admittance to the lodging at the inn. So they go to a cave or to a stable and they have the baby.

Well, most scholars would say the word kataluma, which is translated as inn, is probably not the best translation. The best translation is guestroom. It's a guestroom. We see it in the story in the Bible, where Jesus has the Last Supper, and he has it in a guest room, in a residence, not in a commercial establishment. So many scholars would say that there was no inn, there was no innkeeper. That guest room that kataluma refers to is a room that some people would add to their house. The typical house in the first century in Bethlehem was one large room, divided into two parts. The smaller part was where they'd bring the animals at night, the donkey, the sheep, whatever they had. It was slanted so they could clean it out easily, and there were stairs up to the main area and that was the living area. They had mangers in both the area for the animals and in the living area, because often the donkey would come up the stairs and visit; they were like pets to them. So that was what a first century house -- but some houses had a kataluma, a guest room with a separate entrance. That is what I think the Bible is talking about that wasn't available for Mary because people had come for the census and there was no room in the kataluma, the guest room of the house. It would have been socially unthinkable for an innkeeper to turn away a pregnant Jewish woman in the first century. I mean, you just did not do that. It would not have happened. There probably wasn't a commercial lodging establishment in Bethlehem anyway. It was a small town, and it wasn't on main roads. So, I think that kataluma refers to this guest room. There was no room for them at the kataluma. They gave birth, and they put the baby in the manger, and some of the animals, no doubt, came up to see what was going on.

The Bible seems to suggest, to some people, that there was an urgency that the baby was coming quickly. But when you read it carefully, it says in Luke, the baby came while they were

in Bethlehem. It doesn't say they were there five minutes or five days or five weeks. There's some fictional stories written. There was one written in AD 200, that says that the baby was coming so quickly that they didn't even make it to Bethlehem; that they gave birth three miles outside of Bethlehem in a cave. But that's fiction. So, I think we don't know whether the baby came real quickly or maybe after a period of time.

It's interesting, too, in 1395, John Wycliffe in his Bible translation into English, translated *kataluma* as room, guest room. The King James Version in 1611, translated as Inn, and that's what kind of made people think of the inn and the innkeeper and everything. But many translations today, like the NIV, translate it as the guest room. To me, that just makes sense in terms of the historical setting in the first century.

But either way, the story is who was --

JAMES: My mind right now keeps seeing this manger scene that's for cattle or sheep, or whatever. I even see where as men, the camels are standing around. That's what I see. It's not necessarily to be proven wrong, but it still gives me just the humility of it. The fact that the King of Kings and Lord of Lords was born in a situation like that.

LEE: Yeah. Philippians two talks about maybe the first Christmas carol, you know, because that was probably based on a hymn where it talks about Jesus, fully God and yet, he didn't resist the giving up of the perks of heaven. He came into our world in a humble way, even to the torture of the cross. It is a mind-blowing thing.

The fact that the Magi came, and we don't know a lot about the Magi. It's kind of vague in stories, in developed legends and stories, and that's fine. But the key thing about the Magi is, in the first century, the Jewish perception of the Messiah who would come is that he would restore the nation of Israel to the exclusion of other cultures. The fact that the Magi came represents the Gentile world. The fact that Jesus came for everybody, not just the Jewish nation, but for everybody. That's the story that I think we want to get across with the Magi visiting.

But there's so many fascinating things. One of the interesting things to me was how did we end up with December 25th being Christmas? Because it doesn't say in the Bible.

JAMES: Can you explain that?

LEE: Yeah! It's fascinating what I learned. The Bible doesn't tell us when Jesus was born. We don't know. It doesn't give us the month. In the year 200, some theologians went off to Egypt and tried to figure out, because in first century Christian culture, they didn't care about birthdays. They used to criticize the Romans because they observed birthdays. In the Christian culture, you didn't observe a birthday, you observed the day they were martyred. That's the day you were remembered for. So nobody cared in the first century the day Jesus was born. It was irrelevant to them; birthdays didn't matter. But then later it did start to matter. In the year 200, these theologians went off and they said, Let's calculate when he was born. They walked away saying it was May 10th, because the sheep were in the fields bearing their young and so forth, and so they came up with May 10th.

But here's what's fascinating. In about the year 212 or so, we begin to see people referencing December as the time Jesus was born. Here's the thing. In that early Christian culture, there was such a connection between creation and redemption that there was the conviction that when the Messiah came and the day he is executed would be the same day that he was conceived. So the same day of the year. So, in the early 200s A.D., Tertullian, the great church father, said, Okay, as best we can determine from the calendar, our calendar, Jesus was executed, he died by crucifixion on March 25th. Therefore, he was probably conceived in the womb of the Virgin Mary on March 25th. Well, nine months later is December 25th. And that's the date that we celebrate as Christmas.

JAMES: That's how it came about.

LEE: That is one interpretation, one possibility, that it was that connection between conception and redemption that ended up pointing us toward December the 25th. Another theory is that the winter solstice is around December 25th, and a lot of these pagan cultures had these festivals.

They were just debauchery. Just horrible, sex-filled, drunken festivals that they would have. And there was a sense that, wait a minute. If we observe December 25th as the birth of Jesus, we could bring a counterpoint to that. We could bring the goodness of the worship of God into that debauchery and be a light for good. Some people think maybe that was a factor in December the 25th. It wasn't until the fourth century that the Pope at the time declared December 25th as being Christmas. But there's good reason to think that yeah, it could have very well have been. It goes back, and this idea of conception, redemption is very interesting to me. It's kind of odd to our ears. Why would they put those two together? But they did back then, and that would explain December 25th.

JAMES: And even though he was conceived by the Holy Spirit That wouldn't change the nine-month-birth cycle. Connect it all. But *The Case for Christmas* as far as I'm concerned is it gets people talking about Christmas, talking about Christ. Also, it oftentimes gets people in a giving mood where they love to give, they love to see children receive, and it's a beautiful thing. You love to see children that get excited about giving, about sharing.

I think one of the most beautiful things is when you see children learn to want to share something rather than, "It's mine!" And they want to share. Even the thought when you were talking a moment ago about the poor family that received the help and wanted to share with all their neighbors, that's really and truly the way. We are so poor without Christ when he comes into us, and we know him, I want to share him.

Betty, you and I want to share Jesus because he became real to us as a very young couple. Now that we've been married a long time, over 60 years, and I'm telling you, life has never been sweeter. You've never been any more beautiful. But isn't Jesus wonderful?

BETTY: He is! I just want you to know in your heart how much Jesus loves you, how much he cares for you. He gave his only Son for you, that you might have eternal life. That is precious to me. When there's times when I feel lonely, times when we lost our child, she was 40 years old, she was still our child. I was at my lowest point and God lifted me up. He lifts me up every day. When I get up in the morning, I'll say, Thank you, Jesus, for a new day! I'm going to have days

with you for the rest of my life. I want you to know that relationship with him, that sweet, sweet, gentle spirit of Jesus. He loves you. He loves you! So please, if you don't know him today, for the first time, say, Jesus, come into my heart. I did that as a 19-year or 18-year-old girl. Said for the first time and I'd studied about him all my life, been in church every day, went to everything they had at church. But I didn't know him until I said, Please come into my heart. It makes such a difference. You can play church, but God is real. So please at this moment say, Jesus, come into my heart. You can call and let us know. We'd love for you to do that.

JAMES: You know, Betty, I was watching you on the monitor, and just listening to Betty talk to you, look at her camera, the love I could tell coming through her. That love she wants you to know, that's Jesus living in us, the living Jesus. And *The Case for Christmas* is really all about Christ. He's born. We can be born again because he's born to be born in us and live in us. I'm just telling you, this is a wonderful time to give your life to Jesus.

Father, I pray every person watching would just hear the still, small voice. It could sound like roaring thunder, but it's still your voice and you're inviting them to receive your life, your love, and release that love, release that love. God, change the lives of every person right now who will simply say, Jesus, become my Lord, my Savior. Jesus, I receive you. I hope you do that.

Lee, I'm praying that as we talk about *The Case for Christmas*, it's a wonderful time of the year. But the fact that he was born, and the fact that we can be born again, and he lives his resurrected life through us. Betty and I are living proof that he can do it. I didn't have a home. I didn't have a father. You know, I became a Christian as a teenager. She did too. I didn't know much about Jesus, but I knew him, and she realized she was in church and she was the best girl in the church they said, but she didn't know Jesus. She came to Jesus. Don't miss Jesus. What a wonderful time to receive him.

Lee, I want to thank you for being with us.

LEE: My pleasure.

JAMES: We're going to give this book to every single person watching who would like to have it. I tell you what I want to ask you to do. I want to ask you to put your arms around those who will die if somebody doesn't reach out and offer them life. We have found the hungry, we have found the starving, and we have the answer. You can become the miracle that provides life, the life that Christmas represents. You can give that life to those who are dying of starvation. We meet their need, and they meet Jesus because of his love flowing through you like a river.

Please watch closely and then respond as God leads. You become the miracle, providing the miracle that someone longs for and desperately, desperately needs. Thank you.

Transition roll-in: [Prayer of a Mother]

OPEN CAPTIONS: South Sudan faces a severe malnutrition crisis. There are an estimated 2.1 million children under five at risk. UNICEF

RANDY: I'm here in South Sudan with a mother named Pamela, and this is her child. Her name is Mawndai; she's a twin. Pamela also has a third child. There was another child, a little girl named Ana. Ana was a year-and-a-half-old when she died from malnutrition.

This mother's concerned because right now she doesn't have enough food for her twins or her other child. They'll try to collect some berries or try to collect some seeds that can actually make the situation worse because some of them are toxic. She also risks her life to go far from this village, in order to try to find firewood that she can take to the market and sell.

What is the solution for her? She doesn't have a lot of choices, but you and I can change that situation. We can change it quickly. Mission feeding is ready to move into this village and many other villages just like it where children are right on the edge. That's this mother's hope. She just simply prays that she would have food for her children.

I'm asking you to be the answer to her prayer, not just her, but so many mothers just like her. Know that when we partner together, we are answering the prayers of so many and saving the lives precious little ones.

Studio appeal:

JAMES: Betty, this is a very difficult thing for me to do, to look at those mothers. By the way, that area there is so much nicer than many of the places that we've been, and where we started where there was nothing, a grass hut, mud hut. But they were all dying of starvation. By the tens of thousands we saw where they were buried. And then we begin to save them by the tens of thousands.

So where we plant the money in needs and meet those needs of the least of these, it opens hearts of the families of the others. We save their lives and they come to Christ, and then they share Christ, because the transformation is so magnificent.

Father, I just pray that right here at the Christmas season right now, everybody watching will say, I'm going to feed ten, I'm going to feed 100. I'm going to give the largest gift I've ever given to save lives. God, please! Or if someone says, I can only afford to help one, three. God, just direct them and fill them with your joy at loving others and putting your arms around them; in Jesus name.

We've got gifts that you'll see that we want to send you, but you're giving the greatest gift, you're giving life. \$30 will give life to three children, \$50 to five, \$100 to ten, \$1,000 to 100. Would you right now go and get your bank card and use it like a check? If you write a check make it out to LIFE, but call the number or go online and tell us you're putting it in the mail. This is a tough time of the year for people to do this, sometimes, but it's still a needy time. Right now, while people are giving, would you give to save lives? Thank you so much.

We have gifts for you, as we always do, because we want to bless you as you bless others. Thank you so much. And I want to tell you something. You're going to give somebody a great Christmas. What a gift -- life! Thank you.

FMF Cause spot 2025:

ANNOUNCER: Right now, across the continent of Africa, children are suffering, facing severe malnutrition and even death. With food reserves critically depleted and many areas experiencing devastating famine, we urgently need to replenish supplies to keep feeding the 350,000 children who are counting on us every single day.

Through Life's mission feeding outreach, your gift of love can be an answer to a prayer for a hurting and hungry child in their time of need. Call now with your lifesaving gift of \$30, \$50, or \$100 to help feed and care for three, five or ten children for three full months. With your gift, we'll send you "Happy, Healthy and Free." A powerful 31-day journey to help you embrace God's promises for healing, wholeness, restoration, peace, and joy. Step into the abundant life God has prepared for you.

With your gift of \$100 or more, please request the beautiful and soft "Perfect Peace" blanket bearing the words of Isaiah 26:3 as a meaningful reminder that those who trust in the Lord are never alone.

Finally, this is the last opportunity to request our 2025 majestic bronze sculpture, "Lion of Judah" with your gift of \$1,000 or more, which will help feed 100 children in desperate need. So please call, write, or make your gift online today.

Studio goodbye:

JAMES: Betty, we have a lot of great grandchildren that are pretty excited right now. I don't know what's going on in your house, but children get happy. I love to make children happy. I guarantee you, when you save a child's life or you give them food, you make that whole family

happy. *The case for Christmas*, if you'd like to have this? It's a fabulous little book. You just make a gift to help us help others, and we'll send it to you.

Lee, you've written so many books to help people. What a great gift God's given you. Betty and I want to say thank you to you and your precious wife, for your journey, your faithfulness. Thank you for loving us. I remember when you were moved to say, I'm going to drill a well. You and your wife just immediately drilled a well. Thank you for that.

LEE: It was an honor to do it.

JAMES: Well, just thank you. Hey! Thank you for watching *Life Today*. Thank you for sharing life today. Lee, thank you for being with us.

LEE: My pleasure.

JAMES: Thank you for being a blessing to so many, the overlooked, the least of these. Thank you.