

HOMETOWN NAZARETH DEVOTIONS FOR VBS

Pastor Richard P. Carlson

These devotions were given every day, July 18-22, 2011

PART I---JESUS HAD A FAMILY...WE DO TOO!

God Has His Drama Planned—Let's Do Our Part And Say Our Lines

Luke 1: 37 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Our whole life is based on faith. Without faith, we have no foundation for Vacation Bible School. Faith is the very center from which the whole diameter of the Christian life is measured. When the angel told Mary, “For nothing will be impossible with God,” the angel meant those words to be embraced in faith. If Mary had not believed God, she would never have become the mother of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Luke 1: 38, Mary said, “Behold the bond-slave of the Lord; be it done to me according to your word.” Those words of Mary were in response to the angel answering her question about how she could bear a son, when in fact, she knew not a man. Remember the answer of the angel in Luke 1: 35 reads, “And the angel answered and said to Mary, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you: and for that reason the holy offspring shall be called the Son of God.”

Faith is the starting block for the Christian race. Faith is the dock from which we sail Home to Christ in eternity. Faith is the buoy from which the depths of the ocean is measured. Without faith, all our banks would close today. Post offices would close. Paper money and credit are based on faith. Credit comes from the Latin word credo, which means “I believe.”

Now look at our text in the context of Luke 1: 26-38. It is at this point that we could opt to twist the Word of God and we could even turn it against God and ultimately, against us.

"Nothing is impossible with God." We don't want to change this line, do we? No, we all love this line. It's great. It's powerful. It's wonderful. We use it all the time. But in the divine drama as we might tend to script it, this can sadly be mistaken as Mary's line, not Gabriel's. Mary says to Gabriel in this new scenario, "How can this be? "I'm not married, I'm not ready to be a mother and wife. Do it some other way – after all – nothing is impossible with God." VBS workers and leaders. This line, “nothing is impossible with God is not Mary’s line. It is the angel Gabriel’s line, speaking for God.

If you and I make this one little change, it changes everything? If we let Mary direct the action, then we make God her servant. By simply giving that one little line of Gabriel's to Mary, we make this virgin birth all about the desire of our hearts and the thoughts of our minds. And we can make it all sound so wonderful. "We trust you so much God, and we believe that nothing is impossible for you, so give us what we want." "Fix this broken relationship, do my studying for VBS for me, heal my sick child, give me this new house that I want, give me this new car I desire, or give me this better job I am hoping for. Come on God, remember, nothing is impossible with you." In fact, if we do not get our lines right in VBS, each of us will get out of line and VBS will suffer. What has God through the leadership of this Bible School, Karissa Williams, with her associate, Jennifer Duncan, what has God scripted for us to do individually? We best not get our role or our lines wrong.

There are voices around us telling us that this is the way the Bible actually reads and works. People would tell us that there's really nothing that we can think of-- that God can't do if only we know how to motivate Him to do it – because doesn't the Bible say – "Nothing is impossible with God?"

When we twist the Word of God, we twist it against Him—and in the end, we twist it against ourselves, for God will not act when we are driving the action. The drama of the virgin birth—VB is like our VBS. It must be driven by God or it isn't His drama. When the angel Gabriel says "nothing is impossible with God," he means what? The angel means that nothing that God has planned in His divine drama is impossible for Him to do and He will do it. This means if God calls for something, and a part we are to plan in His drama, we had better obediently follow that plan in faith. God doesn't promise to do everything we ask, or can think of, but He will do everything He promises to do, that is according to His will. And that is true in VBS. Nothing God has planned for our VBS will be missed this week as we keep to our parts and say our lines and do His will.

That's what Jesus means when He says, "Ask and it shall be given to you, seek and you shall find, knock and the door will be opened to you." (Matthew 7: 7) You can be absolutely sure that what ever you ask for according to God's will and promise – He will do it, for nothing is impossible with God. "God, I want you to take all of my punishment for my sin that I deserve. Would you take it upon Yourself? I want you to give me all of your righteousness and holiness. I want you to forgive me totally and

completely for all of my sins and credit me with all of Your sinlessness. I want You to live in me and make me Your holy temple until you take me to live with You in Your holy heaven forever and ever. And God answers, “I will.” That’s My divine plan. Nothing I have ever scripted can be thwarted.”

That is exactly the way the Bible reads—that is exactly what God planned—that is what the Word of God says. In VBS, let’s not get mixed up and put ourselves in the wrong place. Like Mary, let us believe the word of God from heaven,— may we believe that “... nothing is impossible with God." As we put ourselves in Mary's shoes, by faith, may we let her word become ours, "I am willing, Lord. I am the Lord's servant—I am your bond slave, Lord Jesus. Be it done to me, according to your word. Imagine what God will do this year in VBS—just as He planned it from before the foundation of the world. Imagine. God has amazing miracles planned even as He planned in Nazareth. But let’s remember our lines—our place, our goal, and our part. He will do the rest. Amen.

PART II ---JESUS HAD A NAME...WE DO TOO!

Jesus Got His Name When He Was Born---He Has Called Us By Name

Isaiah 43:1-3a, Luke 1: 31, 2: 21 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Most all of us got our name at birth after our folks made their final decision about what that name would be. A few of us had parents that were so sure of the boy name and the girl name, that they settled on it after they knew they were expecting. Remember from yesterday that God’s scripting of the drama of His universe as well as our lives is a scripting that is settled in heaven. When the angel Gabriel in Luke 1: 31, said to Mary, “And behold, you will conceive in your womb, and bear a son, and you shall name His **Jesus**,” this name was the Name of God the Son from before the foundation of the earth. As the drama unfolded, God let Joseph in on the plan of God, lest he would mess up the plan or try to by divorcing Mary. The angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream, saying, “And she (Mary) will bear a Son; and you shall call His name **Jesus**, for it is He who will save His people from their sins.” Then, following the protocol of God’s command and Jewish culture, do you know what happened eight days after Jesus was born in Bethlehem? Yes, we read in Luke 2: 21, “And when eight days were completed before His circumcision, His name was then called **Jesus**, the name given by the angel before He was conceived in the womb.”

What a drama! What a script! Again, Mary and Joseph did their part in following the script as they were commanded. The naming of this baby is no small thing. Did you know parents argue and have fights over the name of their baby. They will look into the eyes of a child and say, “You may like that name Enid or Enoch, that name Imogene or Ian, but I will never call him/her by that name. Names are big things. It helps in naming a child if we listen to the scripting God is prompting us with. When I was a boy growing up, one of my favorite friends was Boy Caudill. I kind of liked his name, but his Mom named him that because he was child number fourteen and she couldn’t think of any name she liked better. I wonder if she ever had any second thoughts of doing that to her child. I begged a couple one time in adopting a son not to name him Peter. I like the name Peter, but I feared for their child as their last name was Abbott.

In Isaiah 43: 1-3, is one of my favorite passages in the Gospel according to Isaiah. The words of this passage often make me cry. I don’t understand Revelation 13: 7, 8, but I believe it is true, speaking of the days of the tribulation period. We read there, about the Anti-christ, what a terrible name! Or he is called the Beast, having ten horns and seven heads! I read, “And it was given to him to make war with the saints and to overcome them; and authority over every tribe and people and tongue and nation was given to him. And all who dwell on the earth will worship him, everyone whose name has not been written from the foundation of the world in the book of life of the **Lamb who has been slain.**” Somehow God in His foreknowledge knew who was going to be saved way back before He created the world. Do I understand that? No, but He does. Romans 8: 29 tells us, “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to become conformed to the image of His Son...” In First Peter 1: 1, 2, I read that believers are those who are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, by the sanctifying work of the Spirit, that you may obey Jesus Christ, and be sprinkled with His blood...

Now getting back to Isaiah, I read about God calling us by name—honestly He knew the name our parents would give us. He knows the names of those who will come to Him in VBS. He knows. I read, “But now, thus says the Lord, your Creator, O Jacob, And He who formed you, O Israel, Do not fear, for I have called you by name; you are Mine! When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; And through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, Nor will the

flame burn you. For **I am the Lord your God, The Holy One of Israel, your Savior.**”

Teachers and Helpers in VBS, those are names too. God knows who you are. He knows what you are going through today. One of His holy names is Savior and Deliverer. Oh, the floods and fires and rivers overflowing, the tears and the hurts and the misunderstandings and the woes that we all know at one time or another. He knows. Listen carefully. He is calling you by name today. Listen up! Be still and listen. He is saying, “I know who you are, what you are facing, and I have your name in My Book of Life, but also on my mind and heart. I am watching you, helping you, and I am delivering you. Trust Me!” Will we, who have names He loves, will we obey the One with the Name above all names today? Will we follow His scripting for our lives today. Luke writes in Acts 4: 12, “And there is salvation in no one else; for there is no other name under heaven that has given among men, by which we must be saved.” Claim His name today, and your own name will be elevated to its rightful place in Christ. I love you. Happy Tuesday in VBS!

PART III---JESUS HAD A HOME...WE DO TOO!

Jesus Has More Than Enough Room For Us All In His Father’s House

John 14: 1-3, Matthew 2: 13, 14, 19-23

Jesus first home was a home in Bethlehem, Joseph did not immediately return to Nazareth after the birth of Jesus. The birth of Jesus was in a stable, perhaps, even in a cave. But Jesus moved with his mother and step-father. Where did He move to? Matthew 2: 11 tells us that the Magi or wise men did not arrive on the night Jesus was born. When they arrived in Bethlehem, we read, “And they, (the wise men) came into the house and saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell down and worshipped Him; and opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold and frankincense and myrrh.” It was not long after this that we read in one of our texts, in Matthew 2: 13, 14 that Joseph obeyed the angel of the Lord and he arose and took the Child and His mother, and they fled to Egypt, and remained there until the angel appeared again to give further instructions. This was all because Herod the king was out to destroy Jesus. This is the second move in the life of Jesus and this was in less time than two years. Yet, when Herod died, the angel of the Lord appeared again to Joseph in a dream and the third move of Jesus happened as Joseph and Mary returned now to Nazareth, the home of Mary, in order that the words of the prophets might be fulfilled saying, “He shall be called a Nazarene.” (Matthew 2: 19-23)

How many of you moved from one home to another up to three times in your first two or three years of life? Moving from one home to another can be traumatic. It was not traumatic in Jesus' first move from a stable to a home in Bethlehem, but it was traumatic from that home in Bethlehem to a home in Egypt. The third move from Egypt to Nazareth was also somewhat traumatic as Joseph was originally coming back to Bethlehem, until Joseph found out that Archelaus was reigning over Judea in the place of his father Herod. That fact led Joseph to head for Nazareth in Galilee. I remember so well when Mom moved from Clinton, Iowa to Beresford, South Dakota, after Dad died on May 10, 1966. She sang an old Gospel song the Carter Family composed and sang. It's called "When I Move To The Sky!" Here are the words: "I've been traveling for Jesus so much of my life, I've been traveling on land and on sea. But I'm planning on taking a trip to the sky; That will be the last move for me. Chorus: When I move to the sky up to heaven on high, What a wonderful trip that will be! I'm all ready to go washed in Calvary's flow; That will be the last move for me. I've seen wonderful sights as I've traveled afar, How little, how empty they seem. When I make my last move to that city of gold; That will be the last move for me. Here I'm bothered with packing each time that I move And I carry a load in each hand, But I'll not need one thing that I've used in this world; When I move to that heavenly land. Everything that I'll need will be furnished up there Not even my song books I'll bring, Or the precious old Bible that showed me the way; I'll not need when I stand by my King." Try singing it with me.

That old Gospel song may sound trite to some folk, but not to this preacher. I've been doing some repair work on our back deck, making it baby proof for our twins, Micah and Noah." It's been fun, but it's been hot in the sun and hard work, and the work looks good, but it won't last forever. Only one home is forever. Down here on earth, Peter's home was Jesus' home away from home in Capernaum. Yet, Jesus said, speaking of home on earth, (both in Matthew 8: 20 and Luke 9: 58), "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the air have nests; but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." We make so much of where we live, but the real home we have as believers is our mansion Jesus has prepared in heaven. Jesus said to His disciples in John 14: 1-3, "Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions/dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that

where I am, there you may be also.” In VBS, some of our children come from broken homes and homes where there is turmoil. It’s wonderful to teach them the truth that even if home life for them is sometimes difficult, as it was for Jesus, Jesus has gone back to heaven to prepare an eternal home for them forever if they trust Jesus.

I close our devotional this Wednesday morning with one more old song written in 1914 by William M. Golden, “To Canaan’s land I’m on my way.” Here are the first and third verses and chorus. “To Canaan’s land I’m on my way, Where the soul of man never dies; My darkest night will turn to day, Where the soul of man never dies. Chorus: Dear friends, there’ll be no sad farewells, There’ll be no tear-dimmed eyes, Where all is peace and joy and love, And the soul of man never dies. A lovelight beams across the foam, Where the soul of man never dies; It shines to light the shores of home, Where the soul of man never dies.” Jesus did have a home...we do too. But the home awaiting in glory is a Home beyond compare. Let’s tell our children in VBS that when we trust Jesus, He comes and lives in our home. He lives in our hearts—our heart, Christ’s home. Is Jesus living there?

PART IV---JESUS WENT TO CHURCH...WE DO TOO!

Jesus Wants Us All To Go To The House Of God Even As He Did!

Psalm 122:1 and Luke 2: 41-52 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

There’s an old song we used to sing based on today’s memory verse. Is that rendition of Psalm 122: 1 a picture of you? Do you long to go to church? Do you enjoy VBS this week? Was church ever so busy that any of you got in the car and left your 12 year old son or one of your children at the house of God? This incredible portrait into the life of Jesus as a boy is our only portrait in the Gospels. Do you think he enjoyed being in the temple in Jerusalem? There He was sitting in the midst of the teachers, both listening to them and asking them questions—the Jewish way to learn—“asking questions.” And the upshot of this near tragedy for Joseph and Mary was for Jesus one of the greatest times of His earthly life as a boy. The wealth of His knowledge as a young man asking questions made all who heard Jesus, (Luke 2: 47) “...amazed at His understanding and His answers.” When Mary and Joseph finally found Him in Jerusalem after searching for three days, their response was not amazement, but they must have walked up and noticed “church going on... in the temple.” What they saw astonished them. The upshot of finding Him there was that Mary is recorded as reproving Jesus and chiding Him. Her words are a mother’s words as we read in Luke

2: 48, 49, “Son, why have You treated us this way? Behold, Your father and I have been anxiously looking for You.” And He said to them, “Why is it that you were looking for Me? Did you not know that I had to be in My Father’s house?”

The whole scenario for Mary and Joseph was finally relief and then, it was wonder. We read in Luke 2: 50-52, “And they did not understand the statement which He had made to them. And He went down with them, and came to Nazareth; and He continued in subjection to them; and His mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men.” Mary and Joseph went up to the Passover Feast in Jerusalem when Jesus was twelve years old as they went up there every year. Luke 2:42-44 tells us that Mary and Joseph attended the Feast for the full number of days—(seven days according to Exodus 12: 15) and then the caravan going back to Nazareth was off, and they thought Jesus was in the caravan. But they were done earlier than Jesus was done. They were ready to go home to Nazareth and they had no idea that Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem. This picture is all I want us to think about today. Are we in church, waiting for the service to be over so we can get home, or are we lingering in the house of the Lord, like Jesus? What a picture of His love for His Father’s house.

In the Old Testament, Joshua is a type of Christ. Would you turn with me to Exodus 33: 7-11. Let me read this to you. Why do you think Joshua wanted to stay with God at the tent of meeting or the tabernacle? Today, let’s dig a little deeper into our hearts and ask the Lord—“Do you see in me the heart of Jesus and Joshua about the house of the Lord? An old song I love that speaks of this longing for the house of the Lord is, “Come And Go With Me To My Father’s House.” Do you know it? Let’s sing it in closing.

Part V---JESUS SERVED OTHERS...WE DO TOO!

Jesus Wants Us To Serve One Another In Love

Galatians 5: 13 and John 2: 1-12 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

In Galatians 5: 13, we read profound words: “For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh. But through love, serve one another.” Can you imagine the difference in serving out of slavery, under the scourge of a whip, or under the scorn of a hateful master as opposed to serving out of love? Is there a difference? Serving out of slavery is serving out of intimidating fear. Serving out of love

is serving with joy and hope and peace and joy and security. I John 4: 18 declares, “There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves punishment, and the one who fears is not perfected in love.” In our text, Mary got ahead of Jesus, but she also had a beautiful and immediate recovery. When Jesus let Mary know that His hour had not yet come, she got out of “control mode,” and she shifted into a humble serving and delegating mode. She knew Jesus well enough to know He would not ignore the awful dilemma of the newlyweds in Cana of Galilee. When Jesus would act, she did not know, but now she knew what we all need to know. God doesn’t need our leadership of Him, but He longs for our willingness to follow whatever He says or prompts us to do by His Spirit.

Cana of Galilee was not far from Nazareth, about 10 miles to the north and perhaps a mile east. It was about the same distance as it is from Rock Springs to Green River. Obviously people from miles around had arrived at the wedding and the wedding planners hadn’t quite calculated correctly as to how well-attended this wedding would be. No doubt the family considered it would be a large wedding, but not this big. The embarrassing dilemma was that in those parts, water was not an acceptable drink for a wedding. Wine was the cultural norm. All of a sudden, Mary, like a wedding coordinator, made the observation to Jesus, that the unthinkable had happened. It was an awful dilemma. The wine had run out. Mary knew Jesus was the only one capable of fixing the problem on the spot, in time. Though she got ahead of Jesus’ timetable, her assessment of Him being the only answer to the dilemma, was spot on. What was so bad about Mary telling Jesus, “They have no wine.”? Was it wrong and is it wrong to bring all our problems to Jesus? Never! God wants us to bring all our problems to Him. So why did Jesus mildly chide Mary by saying to her, “”Woman, what do I have to do with you? My hour has not yet come?” A better translation is found in the English Standard Version in which Jesus reply to Mary was, “Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come.” In other words, the issue was—“What was Jesus role, if any, at this wedding? Was He the financier of the wedding? No! Was He the father of the bride or groom? No! Whose problem was this?

Nevertheless, Jesus took Mary’s tip. He knew the problem before Mary spoke. Jesus even allowed Mary’s concern to end up being the catalyst for Him jumping in and solving the dilemma. How did Jesus begin His miracle? Jesus heard Mary put the servants on red alert to do whatever He said. Jesus noticed the six stone water-pots set there for the Jewish custom of

purification. Each stone water-pot held 20-30 gallons of water. Those were huge pots. We all know how big a 5 gallon water container is. Imagine a pot holding 6 times that amount. Jesus now acted as if He were going to break tradition and supply water as the drink for this wedding, since the wine was gone. Jesus said, “Fill the water-pots with water.” The servants filled the pots brim full. The servants apparently never moved the six water-pots.

All the servants did so far was to fill the water-pots with buckets or gourds full of water. Now Jesus tested the command Mary had given the servants about doing whatever He said. He said to the servants, “Draw some out now, and take it to the headwaiter. So they ignored their inhibitions about obeying this seemingly foolish, “anti-Jewish culture” command. They obeyed the Lord. When the headwaiter tasted the water which had become wine, he did not know where it came from. The servants and Mary alone knew. The headwaiter called the bridegroom and said to him. “Every man serves the good wine first, and when men have drunk freely, then that which is poorer; you have kept the good wine until now.”

VBS leaders, helpers, servants and rabbi, hear this lesson from Jesus. He wants to decide when to act in our problems. He wants to solve our problems in ways that surprise us, baffle us, and in ways that may be even culturally unacceptable. He is not bound by our cultural norms. As His servants, He wants us to drop our guard, our arguments, our wiser wisdom, which isn't as wise as His, and He wants us to oft-times do the unthinkable. Why does Jesus act in this way—against each of us and our wiser judgments? He acts in this way to manifest His glory. (John 2: 11) Today, I close this VBS devotional by asking you this question. what does God want to do through you that defies your reasoning and your wisdom? Will you do it, or will you resist Him, and thereby rob Him of His glory? May today's final VBS be a thrill as Jesus calls the tough decisions and we do whatever He says.