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## MAKE ROOM FOR THE BABY!

Two thousand years ago, Jesus was about to be born into the earth. A man named Joseph, and his wife, Mary, were seeking a room at the Bethlehem Inn. The Innkeeper saw the pregnant Mary, but had no rooms in the inn (Lk. 2:7). Jesus was ready to be born. Mary was on the brink of giving birth. He had to make room! The Innkeeper pondered the dilemma. "What to do? What to do! Shall I oust one of my guests for these two, soon to be three peasants?" he asked himself. "Should I take them into my own chambers for this child to be born? No, that would be inconvenient on both counts," he thought, "but the stable is available." So it was that Joseph and Mary shared a ramshackle lean-to with the animals. Not even the servant's quarters were offered; only secondary real estate, unused space, a place barely fit for human habitation. Under the circumstances, they took it with thankful spirit, appreciative to have a roof over their heads. It was better than nothing. Besides, Jesus, the Son of God had to be born. It was his hour. The child came forth. "For unto you is born this day in the in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord" (Lk. 2:11, KJV). Angels rejoiced, shepherds looked on. The wise men came, gifts were given. It was an unforgettable day, an awesome day.

The Innkeeper, years later, would look back and ponder, "Why didn't I make room for that young couple in my own spacious quarters?" Too little, too late, he missed his day of visitation. The Apostle Paul's words would ring in his ears years later, "Let brotherly love continue. Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." (Heb. 13:1-2, RSV). In this case, strangers, Joseph and Mary, showed up; so did the angels, a multitude of them (Lk.2:13)! So did God's Son. "Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name EMMANUEL, which being interpreted is, GOD WITH US" (Mt. 1:23, KJV). "Hindsight is 20/20 vision," they say. "I wish I would have known then what I know today," others retort. "If I could only do it all over again," we often claim. "I should have just made room that day," would be the Innkeeper's words. Repeated over and over again, till the end of his days. How many of us are just the same? We've all done it. In one form or another, we've given Jesus space with the animals, secondary real estate. Unlike the Innkeeper, we really have no excuse. We know who He is, the Son of God, King of the Universe, Savior of mankind. We sing about him in Church on Sundays. We read books about him. We take time, energy, and postage each year to send out cards in his name. We call it Easter, celebrating the resurrection of Christ. But, have we made room? I mean, **really** made room! Have we given him space in our life? Primary real estate, first quality time, or, are we still offering him our stable?

Twenty centuries have come and gone. We are waiting for his imminent return. "Jesus has gone away to heaven, and some day, just as he went, he will return!" (Acts 1:11, LVB). We are just like the Innkeeper. He had the prophecies, too. Isaiah told of the coming Messiah. "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel" (Is. 7:14, KJV). Even the pagan astrologers knew something was about to happen in the earth. "There came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him'" (Mt. 2:1-2, KJV). Yet the Innkeeper missed it. He missed his opportunity to "make room" for the Son of God. Today we have the prophecies. Jesus is coming back. We can see the signs in the sky. Everything is clearly lining

up. Yet are we making room?

## WHAT'S IN YOUR INN?

What's in your inn? What tenants are filling the various rooms of your life? **You are the Innkeeper.** You determine who comes and goes. Who can stay for a day, a week, or a month, or even a lifetime. You decide. Jesus wants a room. Will you make provision? Will you kick someone (or something) out for the Son of God? Or, will you just give him the stable, again? Who is more important; Jesus, or your friends? Will you make room? "But I don't want to offend anybody. If I did I wouldn't be a very good Christian," we might say. The apostle Paul declared, "Am I now seeking the favor of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still pleasing men, I should not be a servant of Christ." (Gal. 1:10, RSV). Well, that uproots that lie of the enemy. Let's try another. "I love Jesus, but I don't have time to read the Bible every day." We have time to shower, fix our hair, and stare at ourselves in the mirror. We talk on the phone, read the paper, watch the news, tell jokes, gossip. Okay, okay, so that's a lie, too. We do have time to read God's word. We just have to make room. We have to kick something out to make room for the Son of God. Gossip alone will make enough room for a fifteen-minute time of daily devotion. That's a good place to start. We can oust the soap opera for another half hour. If we gave Jesus preeminence at our inn instead of the NFL, NBA, or MLB, we might have ALL DAY to honor him. Time management at its best! This isn't that difficult once we get it on paper now is it, Mr. Innkeeper? Shall we talk about pornography? Better not. Suffice to say we know what the good book says. "...and do not make room for the devil." (Eph. 4:27, NRSV). Make no room for the enemy, but rather make room for God.

## GETTING RID OF TOBIAH'S STUFF

or Time to Clean Out the Inn

Who is this Tobiah guy anyway? How did he get into the inn of my life? A quick read of Nehemiah will give us this much-needed info. Moreover, we will learn quickly how to clean his stuff out of our house. Let's take a look and find out what happened first. Then we'll see how this applies to our lives. Remember, you are in the Innkeeper of your house. You decide what stays and what goes. Whatever you make room for will make room for you. If you make room for Jesus, Jesus will make room for you. If you make room for Tobiah, he'll bring his stuff with him. Problem is, Tobiah makes room for all his friends, and they are some bad company to house!

## WHO IS TOBIAH?

Who exactly is Tobiah? Some quick background is in order. First, let's set the scene. The Jews had just returned from 70 years of Babylonian captivity. "...the wall of Jerusalem is broken down, and its gates are destroyed by fire." (Neh. 1:3, RSV). In a word, anyone could enter in to Jerusalem anytime he wanted. There was no civil authority, no Innkeeper to oversee the city, no one to keep the riffraff out. Robbers, thieves, liars, murderers, prostitutes, gamblers, charlatans, and soothsayers ran wild in the city of God. The hooligans were free to run the streets, free to come and go as they pleased. They brought their sinful ways with them, polluting the city of Jehovah God. (Sounds like America in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, doesn't it?) This simply couldn't be tolerated. It was time to rebuild the wall to keep these unruly folks out. In fact, these are the very types of people that crept into Jerusalem more than 70 years earlier and caused the Israelites to fall into sin. Sin that brought the very **captivity** they were just returning from! It's time to rebuild the wall, time to restore the gates, time to raise up **an Innkeeper**. God Himself handpicked a righteous man, Nehemiah, for the job. God spoke to a heathen king named Artaxerxes to finance the rebuilding of Jerusalem. God can use anyone who is willing. So can the devil. That's another teaching. Back to our story...

God gave Nehemiah special favor with King Artaxerxes. The King provided all the money to rebuild the walls, hire workers and gave letters of authority to accomplish the work (Neh. 2:1-9). Things were off and running. The miracle was in the making. Everything was set in place. However, opposition raised its ugly head. **With opportunity always comes opposition.** Expect it. It's a Scriptural reality from Genesis to Revelation. When God makes a move, the adversary makes a counter move, a spiritual game of chess, so to speak. Good news is, no one can ever capture our King again. Last time that happened, he gave himself up, for you and me. He died on a cross, an old rugged tree. But just like he said, he raised back to life. The devil's three days of victory turned into total defeat. Hallelujah! Jesus took his keys and set the captives free. That's the Easter story. Back to Nehemiah...

## OPPOSITION ARISES

Two new characters appear on the scene, enemies of God, Tobiah and Sanballat. Seems like these folks always run in pairs. When they heard that Nehemiah had come to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, they were upset. The Bible says, "... they were very angry that anyone was interested in helping Israel" (Neh. 2:10, LVB). The battle was on. Nehemiah and the children of Israel against Sanballat and Tobiah's men. Nehemiah stood firm, wouldn't budge an inch. He proclaimed God's plans to the children of Israel and to the enemies of God. Then said, "Let us rise up and build" (Neh. 2:18). "They (Sanballat and Tobiah) mocked and ridiculed us, saying, 'What is this that you are doing? Are you rebelling against the king?'" (Neh. 2:19, NRSV). Nehemiah wasn't moved. He had his papers; he had his authority, finances, men, tools. And most importantly, he had his mandate from God. "If God be for us, who can be against us" (Rom. 8:31, KJV).

## OPPOSITION CONTINUES

Opposition continues throughout the thirteen chapters of Nehemiah. Tobiah and his friend Sanballat tried every evil trick in the book to stop Nehemiah from accomplishing his assignment. They tried false accusations, threats, acting like they were his friends. You know the game, whatever works to manipulate. Tobiah and Sanballat tried it all. Nehemiah wasn't moved. He wasn't distracted. He just kept on rebuilding. Finally, Tobiah and Sanballat resorted to an attack with an army of men. "Can't we all just get along?" one would think. Not in this case. The Innkeeper was about to close out the unruly crowd and insulate the people of God. Prophecy was about to be fulfilled. The devil didn't like it one bit! Blood must be shed. "If the Jews want to be separated, a people set apart unto God, then let them die and see him face-to-face," Tobiah and Sanballat thought.

"You don't know a person's true heart until you reject them," one psychologist aptly said. Here, murder was the true heart of Tobiah and Sanballat. The Jews should have had these folks ousted from their city a long time ago. "Take no part in the worthless pleasures of evil and darkness, but instead, rebuke and expose them." (Eph. 5:11, LVB). The Jews picked up swords, spears and bows, they prayed to God, (Neh. 4:13, 2:9), and continued the work. Half did the work, while the other half held the spears, shields, swords and bows (Neh. 4:16-17), protecting their fellow workers. In time, the work was accomplished. The unruly ones were cast out. The wall was rebuilt. The city of God was being restored to holiness. Nehemiah turned to God's people; it was time to clean up their lives.

Ezra the priest read the book of God's law in the hearing of the children of Israel (Neh. 8:1-12). They responded with fasting and confession of sin (Neh. 9:1-2). They broke unholy ties with foreign women (Neh. 13:23-31). They honored the Sabbath day and kept it holy (Neh. 13:15-21). **One final area of cleansing remained, Tobiah's stuff.**

## TOBIAH'S STUFF REMOVED

Nehemiah discovered a room in the house of God loaded with someone's stuff. When he inquired of the head priest, he found out the owner. Tobiah! **The enemy of God** had been given the best room in the house of God. Eliashib the priest, having the oversight of the chamber of the house of our God was allied unto Tobiah. "Before this had happened, Eliashib the priest, who had been appointed as custodian of the Temple storerooms and who was also a good friend of Tobiah, had converted a storage room into a beautiful guest room for Tobiah. The room had previously been used for storing the grain offerings, frankincense, bowls, and tithes of grain, new wine, and olive oil. Moses had decreed that these offerings belonged to the priests, Levites, the members of the choir, and the gatekeepers (Neh. 13:4-5, LVB). Simply put, Eliashib, the Innkeeper had made room for Tobiah in the house of God. **By making room for Tobiah, God's enemy, there was no room left for God's priests.** This resulted in the entire nation going amok, from the leader on down. God called for a new Innkeeper. Nehemiah came in and cleaned house!

"When I arrived back in Jerusalem and learned of this evil deed of Eliashib -- that he had prepared a guest room in the Temple for Tobiah -- **I was very upset and threw out all of his belongings from the room.** Then I demanded that the room be thoroughly cleaned..." (Neh. 13:7-9, LVB). Nehemiah made room for God. He first got rid of Tobiah's stuff. **God calls us to do the same.** Then, there was room for the things of God. "I brought again the vessels of the house of God, with the meat offerings and the frankincense...then brought all Judah the tithe of the corn and the new wine and the oil unto the treasuries" (Neh. 13:9-12, KJV). People were appointed to "distribute these goods unto those in need" (Neh. 13:13, KJV). **Tobiah's stuff was out; God's stuff was in.** It's as simple as that. Will you make room, too?

## WHAT'S IN YOUR HOUSE?

What's in your house? Your locker? Under your mattress? Have you made room for Tobiah, the enemy of God? What's in your address book? Do you still have unholy ties with foreign women? Women that cause you to sin? Cause you to stumble in your thought life? Is Jezebel's picture posted in your locker? On your bulletin board? Still have Delilah's phone number in your little black book? How about that old drug contact? It's time to get rid of Tobiah's stuff! He will keep you in captivity. Make room for God. He will bring you liberation. **You are the Innkeeper. You decide.** Will you make room? Jesus desires to be born again, born again in you. Will you make room? Will you give him the prime real estate of your soul? Will you give him the keys to your entire house? If so, he will come in and "cleanse the chambers of your life," just like in the days of Nehemiah.

## JESUS IS COMING AGAIN

The Scriptures are clear. Jesus is coming again. Are you ready? Is your oil lamp full? Or, are you flying your flag at half mast? "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Jesus Christ" (Rom. 1:16, KJV), the apostle Paul proclaimed. He was willing "not only to be bound for the gospel, but to die for the Name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts 21:13, KJV). Can you say the same? If not, maybe it's because you've got a chamber full of Tobiah's stuff. Make room for God. John the Baptist said it this way, "Jesus must increase, but I must decrease" (Jn. 3:30, KJV). You want more of Jesus? Decrease. He will increase. You want more oil in your lamp? Die to your old desires. He will fill you with his desires. It's simply the law of exchange.

## THE LAW OF EXCHANGE

The Law of Exchange. In prison, men and women experience the law of exchange on a regular basis. The laundry will, on certain days, exchange a dirty T-shirt for a clean one. An old pair of socks for a new pair. The rule is the inmate has to present his or her worn out clothing item at the window for exchange. A new or clean one is given in trade. This is the law of exchange. Jesus offers "free exchange" to us every day. He's open 24/7. What have you brought Him lately?

## HEAVEN'S EXCHANGE WINDOW IS OPEN FOR BUSINESS

Heaven's exchange window is open for business. Jesus is waiting for you right now. So many things are available for exchange. If you bring him your sin, he'll give you his righteousness. If you bring in your sorrow, he'll give you his joy. If you bring him your sickness, he'll give you his healing. If you bring him your anxiety, he'll give you his peace. If you bring him your pride, he'll give you his humility. If you bring him your problems, he'll give you his solution. If you bring Him your cigarettes, he'll give you new lungs. To receive the blessings of God we have to make room. We have to bring God Tobiah's stuff. We have to get rid of what is blocking Jesus from filling our house. As Innkeeper, you have full authority. Will you make the right decision today?

## PRAYER FOR JESUS TO COME IN

Let us pray: Jesus, I know you are returning soon. Today I choose to make room for you. You can be born anew in me this Easter season. As Innkeeper, I give you the Presidential Suite of my life. I give you the keys to every chamber of my house. Show me what things are in the way of your fullness radiating in my life. I choose to obey your word. I choose life this day. I choose to expel Tobiah, his friends and their stuff from my life. I choose to exchange death for life. Sin for righteousness. Worry for peace. Pride for your humility. My sports idols for you. I give you the stations on my radio. Show me which ones are pleasing to you. I give you my T.V. time. My shows. The movies I watch. I ask you to reveal what you would rather have me watch. I give you my conversations. Give me your speech, your love, your tongue in exchange. Show me whom to avoid. Grant me new friends. By faith, I give you my old desires. Grant me your desires in trade. I give you're my addictions, give me your freedom and strength. I evict Tobiah and all his friends today! I want to serve you. I choose to live with you, beginning this very day. Amen.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Now that you've committed to be a wise Innkeeper from this day forward, let's look at **five things** that will help keep and add additional room for Jesus at the inn of our lives: **ONE:** Spend time daily in the Bible (2Ti. 2:15). God will speak to you through His Scripture. He will quicken you to verses that apply to you personally. Then as you obey him, making room for him, he will begin making room for you. All kinds of things will begin to change in your life. **TWO:** Pray daily (Jer. 33:3). When you communicate with God, God will communicate with you. Talk to him as you talk to a friend. Tell him your struggles. Confess your sins (2Jn. 1:9). He will forgive you, then give you power to change. **THREE:** Go to Church (Heb. 10:25). Just do it. God will speak to you during service. You will meet other Christians. God will link you with like-minded believers. You will begin to grow in your faith. Fellowship is necessary. It's also a command. **FOUR:** Share your faith with others (Mk. 16:15-20/Rev. 19:10). When you tell others about Jesus, you are sharing the greatest gift possible. You don't have to quote a bunch of Scriptures. Just tell others what Jesus has done in your life (Jn. 4:5-42). The Holy Spirit will take care of the rest. Trust him. Step out and be a

bold witness for Jesus. You'll be surprised. Others will give their lives to Christ and your faith will increase in the process. **FIVE:** Pay your tithes (Mal. 3:6-11). It's not that God needs your money. Believe me, he doesn't. He does, however, need your obedience. Tithing honors God and provides us with a multifaceted lesson in faith and obedience. Tithe means "tenth." So if you receive \$10.00, you give \$1.00 back to the work of God. \$25.00 means \$2.50 back to the kingdom of God, and so on.

At some prisons where I've been, we had a Christian locker. Many of the Christians purchased basic items such as shower shoes, deodorant, soap, soap dishes, toothbrushes, shampoo, lotion, etc..., and put bags together to give out to the "newbies" coming in. This demonstrated the love of Jesus and met the needs of those just arriving. Sometimes we even threw in a bag of microwave popcorn or a Cup-O-Soup so they had a small snack to eat. We gave Christian bags to whoever was in need. We showed no partiality. Whoever had a need, Jesus was there to meet it, through the Body of Christ. This act of love from Jesus in an otherwise selfish and difficult environment often opened these men's hearts to hear the Gospel. Many were saved as a result.

As you are faithful in small things, God will trust you with more. Tithing is the prerequisite to biblical increase. In fact, Malachi says the blessings return in such amazing ways that we won't have room enough to receive them all (Mal. 3:10-11). We'll just have to share the overflow of God with those around us to make more room! If what is in your hand is too small to be your harvest, it must be your seed. So plant it. This also teaches us faith as we become first-hand witnesses to God's faithfulness in this area of His word. Additionally, it's not quite as easy to walk away from something you have an investment in. Tithing not only makes room for God to move, it also keeps us reliant upon Him to meet our needs. Trust me, He will! If you make room for Jesus in these **five areas of obedience**, He will make **abundant room for you**, just as He promises, "The Lord has made room for us" (Gen. 26:22, KJV). "Thou hast set my feet in a large room" (Ps. 31:8, KJV). Get rid of Tobiah's stuff and make room for God. Innkeeper, have a great Easter, now that Jesus has preeminence at the inn of your life! God bless you, Innkeeper!