

Luke 2.¹⁻⁷

Providence

Background

Of all the New Testament writers Luke is the one who more than any was aware of the interplay between the politics of the world and the providence of God.

He was clearly careful – as he himself insisted ([Lk.1.1-4](#)) – to check his sources and to locate his narrative in the hard facts of history.

In this, of course, he is no different from the chroniclers of the Old Testament who set the unfolding story of God's saving activity against the backdrop of the politics and power struggles of the ancient world – Egypt, Philistia, Assyria, Babylon, the regularly cruel, invariably conceited super-powers of a bygone age who threw their weight around and sooner or later got their comeuppance. Such though is the sovereignty of God that, far from being hampered by their arrogant assertiveness, His purposes were actually furthered by their actions and His glory far more openly displayed.

Luke, the most intentional historian of the early church, was an astute and consistent observer of this interplay between, on the one hand, the varied repercussions of the ruthless world of politics, and, on the other, the wise and perfect providence of God. His account of the birth of Jesus is a case in point.

'Government' decisions made hundreds of miles away in Rome perhaps took little account of the considerable inconvenience which their decrees entailed: Rome rode really pretty rough-shod over her territories in pursuit of her imperial aspirations. And those living under the sway of the Roman Empire were obliged to do what they were told.

The census decree of Caesar Augustus reflected a certain ideological mindset, and embodied certain political aims. In the far-away province of Palestine, that mindset wasn't welcome, and those aims were far from shared. But the law was the law, and decrees were decrees, and when the 'state' said 'jump', you jumped. Even if you were nine months pregnant, and a journey from one end of the country (north) to the other (south) was the very last thing you needed.

Such was the nature of the world back then. And such, of course, is the world in which we live today: a world in which the ideological convictions of a powerful nation are not embraced by its neighbour, where the politically-driven 'operations' of a powerful wanna-be 'empire' are neither asked for nor welcomed by the nation against whom they're directed.

I've included in the Bible readings for the week a section in Paul's letter to the Romans which deals with the 'governing authorities' and how as believers we relate to them. I suggest that along with **'days' (1)** and **(2)** the other 'day' on which to concentrate your time (if you're not going to cover them all!) is **'day' (4)**. Again I've inserted some additional questions which I hope will focus your thinking in the CG context.

1) Monday 9th May – sovereign

Read [Luke 2.1-3](#)

“In those days Caesar Augustus issued a decree ..” (Lk.2.1)

The Roman Empire may well have been rampant, but the familiar Christmas narrative makes it clear that although powerful political leaders may well throw their weight around, the Lord is sovereignly working His purpose out through their very decrees.

There have been some striking decrees from central government in recent times: can you see the Lord sovereignly working through them?

As well as ‘decrees’ restricting our movements in the last couple of years, there have been other significant government ‘decrees’, not least in relation to what’s taught in schools, and on ‘conversion therapy’: how do such decrees tie in with the providence of God?

Local elections took place throughout the UK last week: do you know who your elected representatives are? Pray for them!

How should a church respond to ‘decrees’ of a local council which impact our life – such as their tightening parking restrictions on a Sunday, for instance?

Prayer: *Thank You, Lord, for those who assume the weighty and costly responsibilities of government: grant them wisdom and integrity in the exercise of their role.*

2) Tuesday 10th May – inconvenient

Read [Luke 2.4-7](#)

“.. while they were there the time came for the baby to be born ..” (Lk.2.6)

How irksome and inconvenient the government decree must have seemed for this young couple. But something bigger was going on. Scripture was being fulfilled. Salvation was being effected. God makes all things work together for His glory!

A long journey: a strange place: a makeshift maternity ward: what must Mary have been feeling?

How do you handle your emotions when things don’t go the way you’d have wished?

What instances can you cite of situations which at the time were hugely ‘inconvenient’ but through which, in hindsight, you can now see the Lord was at work?

Prayer: *Help me to keep on trusting You, my Lord, when things don’t work out the way I think they should, and I can’t see any sense in what’s going on.*

3) Wednesday 11th May – lordship

Read [Romans 12.1-3](#)

“.. in view of God’s mercies .. offer your bodies as a living sacrifice ..” (Rom.12.1)

God has lavished His love upon you in Jesus Christ: enjoying the blessings and privileges of that love involve you embracing the security and responsibilities of Jesus’ lordship over your life. All that you are is daily offered up in gratitude to Him

In what ways will you be able today to offer your body as a living sacrifice?

What would be a right assessment of yourself (v.3)?

Prayer: *Without You, Lord, I am nothing, have nothing and can do nothing. With You I can do all things. Help me so to live that my daily life is a continuing act of worship.*

4) Thursday 12th May – submission

Read [Romans 13.1](#)

“Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities ..” (Rom.13.1)

‘Submission’ is a core value of the kingdom. Out of reverence for Christ we submit ourselves to one another ([Eph.5.21](#)), across all of life. In the home, at our work, with our friends, as citizens of the state. God rules over all – including governments!

If ‘authority’ in a country has been seized by force (Russia in the Donbas region of Ukraine, for instance) is that to be viewed as ‘established by God’?

Where there has been a ‘coup’, how do you determine which is the rightful ‘governing authority’?

Does a country get the sort of government it ‘deserves’?

In what sense can cruel and oppressive ‘governing authorities’ be viewed as having been *established* by God?

In relation to decrees from the ‘governing authorities’ when, where and how do you draw the line and insist that ‘we must obey God rather than men’?

Prayer: *In Your mercy, Lord, prompt the governing authorities in our land today to recognise their accountability to Yourself: grant them the grace to rule well.*

5) Friday 13th May – authority

Read [Romans 13.1-3](#)

“.. rulers hold no terror for those who do right ..” (Rom.13.3)

God has so ordered the universe under His kingship that authority is key to the well-being of any body, whether the family, state, or any other community of believers. We honour Him as King by honouring those to whom His authority has been delegated.

What do you do when rulers **do** hold a terror for those who do right, because they've re-defined what's right – or simply removed the category?

Have there been times when you've had to stand your ground on the basis that 'We must obey God rather than human beings?' ([Acts 5.29](#))?

Prayer: Give me the wisdom to know what is right, the boldness to do what is right, regardless of what that may entail, and the grace to suffer for righteousness' sake.

6) Saturday 14th May – service

Read [Romans 13.4-5](#)

".. the one in authority is God's servant for your good .." (Rom.13.4)

Service, along with submission, is another core value of the kingdom: the true exercise of authority, therefore, is seen in the humility whereby a ruler seeks to serve those people over whom he or she may be set. [HM the Queen](#) certainly understood this!

In what contexts (if any!) do you exercise an authority, and in what ways might you be able today to serve others for their good?

What lessons do you learn from the way in which Daniel and his friends submitted to the pagan government of Babylon?

Prayer: Keep me from being so pre-occupied with my rights, Lord, that I'm blind to my responsibilities. Help me by Your Spirit to go around [doing good](#) for others.

7) Sunday 15th May – sacrifice

Read [Romans 13.6-7](#)

".. give to everyone what you owe them .." (Rom.13.7)

Sacrifice is a third core value of the kingdom. As you began this past week [thus](#), so today you begin a new week in similar vein: your 'true and proper worship' is the offering of your body as a living sacrifice – that glad self-giving for the glory of God.

Have you been negligent in paying your taxes or in giving respect to others?

Whom might you seek to honour today?

Prayer: You laid aside Your majesty, gave up everything for me! I really want to worship You, my Lord! You have won my heart and I am Yours, for ever!