

Russell Kelfer

No More Rooms

dtm DISCIPLESHIP TAPE MINISTRIES, INC.
INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

PO Box 782256, San Antonio, TX 78278 • (210) 226-0000 / 1-800-375-7778 • www.dtm.org • dtm@dtm.org

No More Rooms

This time of year was made for a merchant. From all over the land, people were coming, children in tow, to be registered for the tax rolls. The biting wind that blew across the plains as they traveled added to their weariness, and the one thing on their minds was finding a place to stay for the night.

There were more people than there were rooms. That went without saying. No Holiday Inns or Motel Sixes dotted the countryside. No “800” numbers were available to call ahead. It was much like having a big convention take all of the rooms in town, and when the late-comers arrive, they have only to try to find any place they can to light for the night.

Melvin and Ruth Angwitz were innkeepers. All year long they waited for weeks like this. The prices went up and the demand increased enough to justify the increase. Though people flinched at the sudden jump in room rates, they knew that by the time they looked elsewhere, there just might be no place left to stay. As the weary travelers began descending upon their little town, Ruth was, for some reason, more agitated than usual. “I told you we didn’t have enough blankets,” she began her tirade. “Why don’t you listen to me?” Mel said nothing. That, through the years, had become his defense. By pretending he didn’t hear, he eliminated about 50% of the conflicts in his marriage. The other 50% he handled through tactful negotiation. “And that pitcher in the room upstairs,” Ruth went on, “I told you a week ago it had a crack. You never listen.”

Melvin’s continued silence was like a time-bomb to Ruth. He has had weeks to get things in order for the rush. But no, not Melvin. “Last-minute Mel” she had nicknamed him.

No More Rooms

“When God calls you home, you’ll pretend you didn’t hear, so you buy a little time.” Ruth would rail. With that, she would trail off into the little streets of Bethlehem, talking to herself, which seemed appropriate, since no one else seemed willing to listen.

Ruth and Melvin were devout in their religious beliefs. Every feast and every celebration had meaning to them. As Jews living under Roman rule, they had experienced a great deal of persecution, but their convictions about Jehovah were too great to cause them to compromise.

Caesar Augustus, the Roman Emperor, wanted to be sure that his Jewish subjects paid their taxes, all of their taxes. The Jews didn’t have to serve in the Roman army, but they did have to pay taxes. And with the Jews scattered across the countryside, the only way to be sure to keep the tax rolls up to date was to set aside a time when the people had to trek to the province of their family and register. There were no exceptions.

So this weekend would see a crush of people flood into town to stand in line while this first-century version of the IRS did its job. Other than the Roman census takers, the only ones who weren’t complaining were the merchants who stood to profit by the influx into town. Mel and Ruth were only two of many. Up and down the little winding streets beyond the city walls were tiny shops and mini-hotels, akin to what we would call a “bed and breakfast”. This was the kind of occasion that made life bearable for them.

The Roman soldiers had to be cared for first. Whatever they wanted, they got. Tension filled the air whenever they entered a Jewish shop and began to demand discounts or special treatment. Their presence left a pall of gloom behind as these proud Jews, so often under oppression and foreign rule, saw this season of their history through the eyes of deep resentment.

It was a particularly dreary day. A heavy mist had moved across the horizon and settled on this normally sleepy little town. As the masses of humanity began to descend on the city gates, it was almost as though they brought the fog with

them. Soon the noise in the streets began to resemble a miniature Mardi Gras. The press of so many people, children, and animals in such a small area created a kind of carnival atmosphere. Trying to make the best of a dreaded trip, the people were beginning to behave like they were on a trip to Disneyland, and alcohol was a rowdy companion for many.

So the mood of the hour was frantic, to say the least. And for the Angwitz family, pressure like this fueled already excitable spirits and made them more like volcanoes waiting to erupt. Finally, the moment arrived. The first of the families looking for rooms entered the little wooden gate at the front of the Angwitz Inn.

“I want a room!” the man of the clan bellowed. “I want one in the back. And I want it now.” The man had obviously been drinking. He and his wife were just as obviously not getting along well, and two of his three children were screaming at the top of their lungs. To top that off, the donkey that carried their supplies had slipped into the mud along the way, and all of their things were covered with a tar-like substance that coated their clothes and their supplies until they were virtually unrecognizable. It was the sort of thing you would make a movie of in our day and call it “Ben and Bertha go to Bethlehem” (or something like that).

Mel Angwitz was a proud man, determined and proud. The last thing he handled well was someone bossing him around. He took it from Ruth, but only for so long. And nobody’s room rent made them important enough for him to take abuse.

“I’ll be happy to show you a room,” Melvin said calmly, but you’ll have to stop shouting and settle down. This is a family establishment, and we don’t like abusive people.” Ruth was standing about three feet away. She glided to his side and gave him an elbow in the ribs that would have sent a forceful fullback into the ground writhing in pain. “We have a nice room for you,” she sweetly responded, pretending her husband wasn’t in the room. “Follow me, and I’ll show you our nicest back room.” With that, she turned to Melvin and gave him a look that would bore a hole in steel. Sheepishly,

he turned and walked away, rather than have an encounter with his feisty rib in front of strangers.

The bossy traveler, meanwhile, had gotten an equally evil glance from his weary wife, who was envisioning this scenario repeated at every inn until they ended up sleeping under a tree as they had one time not too long ago. So he, too, softened as her eyes met his, and the two men each avoided one another as Ruth led the family to their room. "Such depressing weather," she muttered, trying to take the focus of the conversation off the conflict between the men and place it on something less controversial.

The somewhat combative couple was no sooner on their way to their room than another pair of travel-weary travelers ventured into the gate. This couple was a familiar sight. It was the Issachar family. They had stopped at Mel's Inn every time they had come to Bethlehem for the last three years. Isaac, the father, was a once wealthy landowner whose battles with the Roman government had brought him a degree of infamy. Having him around your establishment was a little like inviting Manuel Noriega for lunch. It made you look like you were harboring the enemy. Mel had tried everything to dissuade Isaac from coming to his version of the Bethlehem Hilton, but to no avail. His wife, Ira, a large, quite assertive woman, was no more welcome than her fretful hubby, but here she was, making her presence felt once again.

You could audibly hear Melvin moan as the Issachars tied their noble steeds in front of his illustrious inn. "Oh, no, Issac again... Oh, hello, Isaac, what a privilege to have you join us." There was no use pretending to be full; this guy would knock on every room and barge in trying to prove you wrong. He could tell by the donkeys or horses tied in front how many rooms were taken. "Got my same room?" Isaac bellowed, "I love that room!"

"Of course," Melvin mumbled, "It's been quarantined since your last visit." Isaac had no sense of humor. Melvin had no use for Isaac. It was a deadly combination. But before Mel had time to show his somewhat unwelcome visitor to his room, the door opened, and in came the tallest, biggest

Roman soldier either of them had ever seen. Clad in his uniform, he looked as much like an executioner as a soldier.

Roman soldiers were called to “endure hardness”. It was part of their pledge at enlistment. Their weapons were heavy, and in addition to the normal spears and swords they were compelled to carry, each soldier was assigned a saw, a basket, a pick-ax, a regular ax, and an ominous looking hook. The men lived rugged, but unpredictable lives. They were not allowed to marry, and they were so clothed and so chosen as to strike fear in the hearts of any who might dare to defy their authority. This man certainly lived up to his billing.

Whatever he was, he was impressive. And both Melvin and the Issachars were immediately affected by his entrance. Melvin’s response was one of fear. Isaac’s was one of hostility. He knew he had been followed the last ten or so miles of his journey to Bethlehem. He knew that wherever he went, the Roman soldiers would follow, trying to make life miserable for him.

“How many rooms have you?” the burly soldier shrieked, forcing his way past Isaac and his obviously agitated help-mate. “I-I-I- just have f-f-f-four left”, he muttered.

“I need five!” the soldier bellowed, “Throw this man out!” he said, pointing to a now smoldering Isaac Issachar. “My soldiers need rooms, and you are Roman subjects.” Never had Melvin Angwitz had more mixed feelings. He would love to have a reason to eject Isaac and his noisy spouse from the premises. But five rooms full of Roman soldiers? Only occasionally did they pay, so his hope for recovering lost revenues on this special day were about to go down in a river of Roman mischief. And no one was harder to care for than Roman soldiers. They didn’t ask, they demanded. They were coarse, crude, and often immoral: the last thing he wanted in his little inn. But he had no choice.

“I’m sorry, Isaac,” Mel muttered beneath his breath, “they are the law.” In a fit of rage, Isaac started to draw his sword. The soldier, with reflexes that would put a cougar to shame, had his drawn and aimed at Isaac before the angry

Jew could so much as react. Mel, coward that he was, fell to the ground like one of the three stooges, as though World War 1/2 was about to break out. Neither man, of course, intended to make good their threats. The Roman soldier could be court-martialed if he took the law into his own hands. Isaac could be jailed for the rest of his life if he so much as struck a Roman soldier. Both were bluffing.

Isaac returned his blade to its sheath, grabbed his wife by the arm, and walked towards the door. "One day," he shrieked to the soldier, "One day... Jehovah God will vindicate His people. Our God is a consuming fire." he railed. The soldier laughed an evil laugh. "Your God is dead!" he wailed. "Your God is dead. The Emperor is god, don't you ever forget it."

Isaac wheeled around in defiance. The soldier reached once again in the direction of his wicked looking knife. "Dead?" Isaac shrieked, "My God is the I AM", he shouted, "and He is coming to redeem His people. When Messiah comes, Rome will fall like a stricken old man. When Messiah comes, your Emperor will be buried in the dust like the common man he is. Messiah will put the evil serpent under His heavenly feet. You will see. Messiah is coming. Messiah is coming." With that, he hastily retreated, and almost in a single motion, mounted his waiting steed and departed, hoping to find another inn before the soldiers found him.

Melvin wanted to shout "Amen" to his disruptive friend's shouts of Jehovah's might. But inside, he doubted. Oh, how he doubted. It had been years since anyone had so much as mentioned Messiah. Oh, he had studied about it as a child in synagogue. Isaiah wrote about it. Jeremiah wrote about it. Daniel wrote about it. But for years now, the heavens seemed closed to Jewish prayers.

Even the rabbis had ceased teaching the redemption of the Coming One. Jewish teachers were calling it an "allegory". They implied that the Coming One was in fact, an aura of Jewish courage, that the people had to, in and of themselves, save themselves. Messiah was fiction, that's what they were teaching.

"Poor deluded Isaac," Melvin thought. "Does he believe that

drivel? Or was he only trying to impress that unimpressable Roman soldier? If so, he had failed. Demetrius, the unwelcome warrior, was laughing so hard he could not contain himself as Isaac rode off to seek another inn. “Messiah, Messiah, where have you gone? Seems like the years go on and on,” he chided. Mel’s face reddened.

“You have done your duty, sir,” Melvin said with a stern, but fear-stricken voice. “He is gone. Surely you do not need five rooms.” He was hoping for the best. Demetrius wheeled around, pulled that frightful sword once again, and held it just a few inches from a shaken Melvin’s throat. “I need five rooms. Two men to a room. Ten men all told. And I need them now.” With that, he moved towards Melvin with the intensity of an animal about to take its prey.

It was against Roman law to refuse to house a Roman soldier. Mel knew that. He would rot in jail if he so much as said another word. “Yes, sir,” he answered, “Right this way.” With that, he took the angry officer to show him the rooms. And sure enough, right behind him came a cadre of look-alikes: nine other bruising giants, carrying flasks of liquid refreshment, enough swords and axes to fell a city of insurgents, and the smell of a locker-room crowd after an NBA game.

Melvin’s wife, Ruth, had been watching it all from outside through a window. She was both afraid and crushed. There went their revenues; there went their hopes of impressing new visitors; and there went their hope of a pleasant weekend. These bruising beasts would wake them at all hours of the night demanding water or blankets or food. She knew from experience. The good news to Ruth was that her husband didn’t try to become a hero and become a corpse instead.

She had, for the first time, gained respect for Isaac, the revolutionary. Those things he had said about Messiah—she believed him. Why would the prophets have written that God would vindicate His people if He was not planning to do so? Had He not done so again and again? Sure, it had been years. Sure, the heavens had been silent. Sure, the Romans has snuffed out the very heart of the Jewish people. But

something Isaac had said made her heart burn with hope. “When Messiah comes, Rome will fall like a stricken old man.” That’s what she wanted to hear.

In years gone by, as she sat at the feet of her father, she had heard stories of what would happen when God’s Anointed came at last. God’s enemies would fall at His feet in utter defeat. The name of the Jew would be exalted to a place of honor, rather than a place of reproach. “When the Prince of Peace comes,” her father had promised, “the enemies of God will be no more.” To her, Roman captivity simply meant that Messiah’s time might be near. God’s people were captives again. What better time than this for Jehovah to march into Israel and take the captors captive, and set the captives free? What better time, indeed.

Her daydreaming ended abruptly. Demetrius and his second in command, a young rebel named George, had seen her through the window, and recognizing her as the woman of the inn, bellowed at her like a servant girl, “Come fetch us bread and water, girl,” they laughed, “don’t just stand there staring.” Quickly, she responded, but under her breath you could almost hear her saying, “Messiah will come, Messiah will come.”

The remainder of the afternoon was a nightmare for Mel and Ruth. More than a dozen families had come and gone seeking a place to stay. Some were willing to pay any price for a room. Most were crestfallen to learn that Mel’s little inn was full, but upon seeing the rowdy Romans come and go in such force, many construed Melvin to be a member of the enemy camp, and you could see them mentally scratch this place off their list.

It was about five in the afternoon, and the crush of people outside, along with the crescendo of noise, was beginning to take its toll on Ruth. The soldiers were, indeed, living up to their reputation. They were rude, crude, and incredibly demanding. They appeared to be intentionally difficult, trying to see if they could agitate Melvin to the point of anger, and justify his arrest. He played it safe, however, and remained virtually hidden most of the day.

No More Rooms

The sun was beginning its descent behind the clouds, and the mood of the evening was surfacing as nothing short of frantic when they arrived. In one sense, they were no different than any of the other couples Mel and Ruth had turned down. But in another sense, an indescribable sense, they were as different as night and day.

He was a nice looking man, somewhat shy, extremely weary from the journey, but she seemed to be his only concern. And his concern was justifiable indeed. You needed only to look at her to realize that she was great with child; in fact any woman could tell by the look on her face that she might deliver any minute.

She was a very plain looking woman; not strikingly attractive at all. But there was a kind of glow about her, an inner beauty that was so intense it was actually distracting. You really didn't notice her; you noticed her character. There was a gentle graciousness in her manner, even though it was obvious she was in some kind of pain, either from the journey, the pregnancy, or both.

The man opened the conversation. "Would you perhaps have any place my wife could rest for the night?" he asked, somewhat hesitatingly. "She is very great with child." Ruth flinched. It had been easy to turn the others away, relatively easy. This was not so simple a choice. The woman walked over to Ruth, and with a gentle smile, whispered something in her ear. Ruth's expression told the story. The woman was experiencing the first pangs of childbirth. She was going into labor. And she had no place to lay her head.

Ruth was unselfish enough to give up her own bed for the night, but she had already done that. Her cousin, Adelaide, had arrived with her husband just moments before, and Ruth and Mel had surrendered their lodging to them. They were planning to stay up all night and try to control the raging Romans in the other four rooms, not to mention the demanding travelers who had arrived first

Ruth thought of reasoning with the soldiers. About that time, Demetrius passed through the hallway, on his way outside. "Sir," Ruth timidly asked, "this woman is great with

child, would your men consider giving up a room for her? She has come a long way and cannot sleep in the street.” Demetrius gave her the once over, acknowledged that she had a problem, and then laughed. “Roman soldiers give up their room for a Jewish woman? Caesar would disown us.” With that, he bellowed again, and he and his already drunken cohorts made their way out into the street, hoping to antagonize some unsuspecting Jews as a way to liven up the evening.

“I’m so sorry, child” Ruth whispered. “I’m so sorry.” Suddenly her expression went from soft and tender to angry and vindictive. “When Messiah comes,” she repeated the phrase she had been mulling over all afternoon, “when Messiah comes, He will crush these evil monsters under His feet. When Messiah comes, our people will be free at last.”

Mel could take it no longer. “Messiah is a joke!” he railed, quite unexpectedly. “There is no Messiah. The Jewish people are their own Messiah. Were God concerned about us, He would have come long before now. He expects us to redeem ourselves. Stop that infernal ‘Messiah’ stuff.” With that, he stomped his feet in the ground to make his point and walked out of the room.

Just then it happened. The woman turned to the man and a quiet smile spread across his face. “Messiah will come,” he quietly echoed, “Messiah will come. Now come, Mary, we must look further. Nightfall is upon us.” Ruth could not put her finger on it, but something about this couple was different. They seemed to have a godliness about them that defied description, yet they were so ordinary. It was obvious they had very little money. Their clothes were not at all impressive. They had no precious jewels or gold upon them. The donkey the woman rode upon looked much like a reject from the local circus. He was bedraggled and one ear seemed to be partially missing. But none of that mattered. They were a couple that appeared to be quietly at rest amidst all this confusion and uncertainty. It was almost as if they would be comfortable any where.,

Just then, it hit Ruth. “Young lady,” she began, “Your

No More Rooms

name is Mary? What a pretty name. Mary, there are no more rooms in Bethlehem. We have turned down more than a dozen. Many have told us we were the last place they tried. I know, however, how desperate you are. My sister's husband owns the stable down the road. Perhaps you could stay there for the night. It would be warmer than being outside, and they could at least fix you a bed of straw to lie upon. I know it wouldn't be much, but there are no rooms, Mary. There are no rooms."

Echoing down through the corridors of time, those words are much more than a simple declaration about the housing shortage in a little town called Bethlehem. They seemed to be saying a lot about man, and a lot about God.

One thing they were saying about man is this: there is only so much room in the inn of the heart. The world comes brashly, arrogantly, demandingly. They expect to occupy all the space in your life. God comes quietly, unpretentiously, meekly. He offers to take up residence, but only if there is room. He must be invited in, and for Him to come in, something must go. The decision will not necessarily be popular. It may even be divisive. Your loved ones may not understand. You have to choose. But unless you make room, He will move on.

What they were saying about God was this: There would have been room, had God so desired. Those who occupied the rooms could have been removed by a word from Heaven. God could have spoken, and an inn of such magnitude the world would stand amazed would have been erected in seconds. An angel could have come down from above and spoken a word, and every room in Bethlehem would have been vacant. Had God so desired, the magistrates could have met them at the city gates and ushered them into a palace.

There could have been room. God's plan was not thwarted by the sudden influx of people into that tiny little town. God planned the birth of His only begotten Son to take place at the exact moment in time and in the exact place in history when there would be no rooms. Man cannot easily grasp that. To understand that is to understand the marvel of the

No More Rooms

sovereignty of God. To understand why God's own Son would be born in a stable, we must understand something of the plan of God. The next time He comes, He will come in power and great glory.

Had He come that way the first time, He would have been honored, but we would be lost. So in order to bless us, He humbled Himself in ways we cannot even fathom, let alone accept. He who knew no sin, became sin for us. And it all began in a little stable, filled with hay, because there were no rooms.

The sovereign plan of God is an awesome thing to grasp. It means that to accomplish something spiritual in the lives of others, those who are committed to being His vessels, surrender to a life of quiet anonymity if need be, of obvious obscurity, if necessary. It means that those who are to be vessels of holiness to bring salvation to others may have to suffer great hardship: loss of jobs, loss of reputation, loss of prestige, loss of comforts, loss of acceptance.

When we cry out to God for the world's accommodations, He may have to answer, there are no rooms, my child. There are no rooms. He may have to whisper to us, "Here, my child, follow me and I will lead you to where you can be used." We so often reply, "No, Lord, not here. Not in life's stables. Not in life's hospitals. Not in life's unemployment lines. Not where the pain is; not where the stench is; not where the rejection is. No, Lord, not here."

And yet He softly must answer, "But child, I thought you wanted to walk in my steps. My steps began in a stable, because there were no rooms. No rooms. Do you not understand? Are you better than My Son?"

We will never be able to bear life's disappointments from God's perspective until we go back to Bethlehem. Until we can see that to accomplish God's higher plan, man must be willing to humble himself and be born again, not to achieve life's comforts and acclaim, but rather to be humbled and, if need be, suffer, to achieve God's purposes and God's rewards. Life will often say to us, "Sorry, no room for you

No More Rooms

here.” That’s all right. God could have made room had you needed it.

Ruth Angwitz had a miserable night that night, partly because of the rowdy Romans, of course. But something else was bothering her. It was that look. The way Mary had looked at Joseph when she had talked about Messiah coming. Joseph had so quietly, yet so convincingly, answered, “Messiah will come. Messiah will come.”

In but a few short hours, unknown to Ruth, Messiah did come. On a bed of straw, He came. Surrounded by animals, He came. With no recognition, He came.

Ruth, you were right. God does keep His word. When He said He was coming to save us, He did.

Now He says He is coming to deliver us. He will.
Messiah will come, Beloved. Messiah will come.
And this time there will be room.
There will be room, indeed!

dtm DISCIPLESHIP TAPE MINISTRIES, INC.

PO Box 782256, San Antonio, TX 78278
210-226-0000 or 1-800-375-7778
www.dtm.org • dtm@dtm.org • © Russell Kelfer

(06.25.15)