



READ: Luke 2:1-5 (ESV)

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child.

ENTER THE STORY:

God is in control of all things. ALL THINGS. If you have been in church for any length of time, you have probably heard this sentiment many times. The question for all of us is "Do we really believe it?" Do we really believe that God can control the events of history down to the tiniest details?

Do we think it was just by chance that Caesar Augustus called for a census, at that exact moment in time? Did it just so happen that Mary and Joseph were traveling to Bethlehem—the very place Micah prophesied the Messiah was to be born? Luke doesn't seem to think so, and to emphasize this point, he includes specific, key historical details. He includes the name of the Roman emperor, the name of the Roman governor over that specific region, and the connection Joseph has with David.

The truth is, God can use whomever he wants to bring about his plan...even a pagan emperor. This should not be new information. We have seen this numerous times throughout the stories of the Old Testament. Many kings and rulers have thought their actions were based on their own decisions and desires, only to later find out that they were directed by the very God they were trying to defy.

Proverbs 21:1 says, "The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will."

God's plan all along was for Jesus to be born in Bethlehem, to descendants of the long-ago king David and part of Jesse's tree, bringing about the fulfillment of many promises and prophecies. This is why God set his plans into the heart of a great Roman emperor, who brought about the very thing God desired.

Many of us claim to believe in the sovereignty of God; that he not only reigns over all things, but also asserts himself into his story in order to bring about his purpose and will. But we typically limit the extent to which God does this to the BIG events that impact the overall direction of the Biblical narrative. For example, it is easy to believe that God is in control of the location of Jesus' birth, of how and when he died, and of how and when he was raised from the dead. After all, without those extremely important events, the prophecies in the Old Testament would remain incomplete. God's word would fail, and there would be no victory waiting for us at the end.

The real question we must wrestle with today is, "Does God's rule extend even to the smallest parts of our lives, and if so, how do we respond to that knowledge?"

God's sovereign control over everything in this life should be the single greatest source of peace and comfort because it means there are no random events, accidents, or coincidences. God is always controlling the circumstances in our life for his glory and for our good. Even if we are unaware of it, God has already, on numerous occasions throughout our lives, acted out of sovereign love to lead us where he wants us to go, and to shape us and conform us to the image of his Son.

- If you've ever wondered what God's will for your life is...this is it! His doesn't just want us to experience happiness and
- blessings on this earth. Everything God brings into our lives is to make us more like Jesus. This is why Jesus told his
- disciples to pray "Your kingdom come, your will be done." When we are conformed to the image of Jesus, we are a part
- of bringing God's kingdom into the here and now.
- We have seen God's sovereignty throughout this Advent, as we've looked back at the stories of the Old Testament and
- seen the foreshadowing of Jesus' first and second coming. As we celebrate the birth of Jesus, we will also celebrate the
- fulfillment of so many of God's promises. But hopefully, we have also seen the benefit of God's sovereignty in each of our
- lives.
- Who knew there was so much to learn from a seemingly coincidental census from a Roman Emperor?
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■ **PRAY:** *God, once again we find ourselves in awe of your sovereignty and control over every detail of our lives. May the knowledge of this bring us immense comfort and joy, and may we rest easy tonight knowing that you are always on your throne, working everything out for your glory and for our good. Amen.*