

11-1-1997

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Recommended Citation

Gibson, J. Daniel (1997) "The Determined Decoration," *Consensus*: Vol. 23 : Iss. 2 , Article 9.

Available at: <http://scholars.wlu.ca/consensus/vol23/iss2/9>

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The Determined Decoration

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Text: Matthew 28:16-20

I collected all the lights from outside
and tucked them under my arm
brought them all inside;
found the box in which they belong
and flung them all inside,
deciding that I would tie the wires up neatly next year,
rather than now.

Then it was the Christmas cards,
and then some of the ornaments.

And finally I came to the manger scene
that was on our mantel piece.
I lifted up the stable;
I folded it flat and put it in a box.
Then Mary and Joseph,
who had done their thing:
they had been there
guarding over the baby Jesus for several weeks;
time for them to be put away and wait 'til next year.
The angels:
they too were picked up;
they could go away in the box
and practise for another year.

And then I reached into the little manger

to grab the tiny figurine of Jesus the baby.
 I picked it up and I'm sure I heard a voice.
"Dan, what are you doing?"

I looked around,
 but I knew I was alone in the house.
 I heard the voice again:
"Dan, what do you think you're doing?"
 I looked down at the little figurine
 and it seemed strangely warm and soft;
 not at all like the clay that made up the others.
 I thought to myself,
"This can't be happening! Ornaments don't talk!"
"Oh yes I do," said the little figurine.

At about that time I felt I had been alone in the house far too long,
 and I dropped the figurine into the box,
 poured in four sheep and a donkey on top of him,
 closed the lid,
 and that was that!

Then I went back to sorting all of the decorations
 that came off the tree.
 A few minutes later I began to feel a little bit curious.
 Really, that hadn't happened....
 I know that ornaments can't talk;
 I must have imagined it.
 I really shouldn't spend this kind of time alone.
 I must be 'freaking out'!
 My curiosity got the better of me
 and then my courage became stronger.

I went over to where the box was,
 lifted the lid just a bit,
 and peeked in.
"Hi Dan! Glad you came back!"
 I slammed down the lid again.
 How could it be?

Something weird was happening here.

I lifted the lid again.

And the little voice came out of the box saying,

"Please don't put me away yet.

I'd rather stay with you

and your family for the whole year.

Why don't you just leave me there on the mantel?

Don't put me away!

Don't lock me away in this box every year,

making me wait and wait

for the next Christmas

before you bring me out."

At that point I started talking back and I said,

"Well, I'm sorry but you've had your turn.

You've been up there on the mantel

for almost four weeks now.

That's all you get.

In another month it will be Valentine's day.

I've got to have room for my Valentine cards

and all of those nice red hearts.

And soon the Easter Bunny will be coming.

We have to make room for him.

You've had your turn.

Don't be selfish.

I don't have room."

"*You don't have room!*" he said.

"My, that does sound strangely familiar to me.

I think I've heard those words before."

Well, I put the lid back down on the box,

but as I was doing it he said,

"If you let me out,

I'll take you on a great adventure.

There are so many things I want to show you,

so many things I want to do with you this year, Dan."

But I said,

“I’m sorry, I have quite enough to do
and this evening has been adventure enough as well;
I really don’t need any more.
So, in you go,
good night,
good season,
and we’ll see you next year.”

I must admit...

it was rather difficult to get back to the sorting out
of the decorations that had come off the tree.

I had a lot to think about.

I mean, I knew it couldn’t be happening
and that my mind was playing tricks on me.

Yet there was something so compelling about that voice.

I didn’t have very long to think about it,
because just about that time

I started hearing the greatest clamour I have ever heard!

For the life of me, it sounded as though

there were crowds of people inside that box.

I looked over to the corner where the box was

and I could see the sides bulging and moving.

It sounded like thousands of people in there
all milling around,

all sounding very happy.

And I crept over to where the box was,

and I’m *sure* I could smell fresh baked rolls
and fish.

I opened the box.

Inside were just the figurines,

laid all helter-skelter

just as I had dropped them,

with the little baby on the top.

I said to myself,

“Ah, things are back to normal.”

But then the little voice came out and said,

“Dan, I’m so sorry you missed that.”

*It was so great being able to give those
five thousand people the food they needed!*

And Dan,

I still have some left for you.

If you're interested,

it's the bread of life;

it's for everyone.

Would you like some, Dan?"

I sort of stammered

and didn't really know what to say,

so I just said something inconsequential like

"How nice", or

"I'm glad",

and I put the box back in the corner

I had just gotten back to sorting on the other side of the room
when I heard another clamour and noise.

I could hear a man yelling at the top of his lungs,

"I can see! He cured me!

I can see!

I can see!"

I began to wonder what was going on

and went back to the box,

tore open the top

and peered in as quickly as I could

to see what was going on.

Just the little figure

lying there

looking up at me.

And the little voice came out saying,

"Isn't it sad that some people,

even though they already can see,

simply refuse to see what I want them to see?

Isn't it sad that some people are so blind

and have so little imagination in their hearts

that they can't even accept something even slightly

miraculous happening to them?"

I somehow had the feeling
that that comment was aimed at me
as I closed the lid the fourth time.

As soon as the lid was closed
there was more noise;
there was singing,
there was shouting,
there were cheering people yelling "Hosanna!"

My first impulse was to open the box and yell,
"Keep the noise down!"

But I didn't.

I thought I'd just ignore it.

I would not take part in this foolishness any longer!

And after awhile
the noise *did* die down,
and there was silence.

I went back to my work
and had almost forgotten about what had happened,
when suddenly I heard even more noise.

This time the clamour was not cheering,
it was jeering.

I heard footsteps
and pushing
and shoving.

And then I heard nails being driven in with a hammer.

You know,
that was the first point
at which I actually began to realize what was going on.
That little figurine was living out the entire life of Jesus
in greatly speeded up time,
within that little box,
within my little home.

And I suddenly realized
that what was now taking place was the crucifixion.
I ran to the box as fast as I could

and I tore open the lid,
and I looked down inside.

With anguish in my voice I said,
"I'm sorry, Jesus!
I'm so sorry.
Is it possible
that if I had given you your freedom
to stay in my house
and be part of my family,
that I might somehow have been able to save you
from your suffering?
From your crucifixion?
Please, Jesus!
Come out now!"

And the voice said,
*"I'm sorry,
I can't come out now
because evil men have taken me
and have hung me on a cross,
and I'm no longer free to move.
I can't come out.
Because I'm hanging on a cross."*

And I said,
"Are you sure?
Is there nothing I can do?"

And he looked at me,
and started to say something,
and then there was silence.
I said "Pardon me,"
but he didn't answer.
So I picked up the figurine
and held it close to my face,
hoping for some sign of communication.
But it was just like all the other figurines;
it was cold
and hard

and firm;
and the sparkle I imagined I had seen in the eyes earlier
wasn't there at all.
And the voice was silent.

Of course,
I must have been imagining it all the time.
It couldn't really have happened.
I was sure of it now
because that figurine was just like all the others.

But somehow
I couldn't help but feel guilty,
as if in some mystical way
I too had taken part in the crucifixion.

And it was very soberly
that I put the figurine tenderly back in the box;
and it was with regret
that I put the lid on the box,
lifted it up,
carried it downstairs,
opened the shelf,
pushed it in
and closed the door.

I felt it was my fault.

A long time went by
(or it seemed like a long time;
actually it may only have been a few moments)
and I was upstairs doing the final vacuuming
when I heard the greatest noise imaginable downstairs.

It sounded like an explosion,
and my immediate thought
was that the furnace had blown up!

So I ran down the stairs
and almost collided with the open closet door.

I had closed that closet;

I was sure of it!

I held the door

and looked inside.

It was a most remarkable sight!

There was the box

with all the manger scene people in it,
but the top hadn't been opened,
it had been ripped off!

I grabbed the box

and looked inside—

there were Mary

and Joseph,

and there were all of the animals,

and the angels,

and there was the stable all folded up;

and there was the manger.

But the baby was gone!

I poured the box out on the floor

and counted each piece,

and looked at each piece,

and then I looked through the whole closet.

My baby Jesus was gone

But at the bottom of the box

I did find a note, which said,

Dear Dan,

Don't feel bad;

it's the same everywhere I go.

*Everyone thinks that the Babe of Bethlehem
is so sweet at Christmas.*

*Everyone wants to keep me that way
year after year*

so they can take me out

and look at me

and have good feelings.

Then they put me away just the same.

Always a baby

waiting for next year's celebration.

But Dan,

*You know now
that it can't be that way.*

*You know now
that I didn't come into the world
just to decorate your holiday.*

*People are hungry,
they're suffering.*

*People are sinful
and I have work to do.*

*You won't have to look very far to find me,
because everywhere you go,
and everyone you see
from now on,
will remind you of me.*

*P.S. Please tell all your people
to expect to hear from me this week
when they put away THEIR decorations.*

Love,

Jesus