

At Just the Right Time

Hey family and friends at Amazing Love, visitors, Merry Christmas. Can we say that here. The lights are being put up because of the beautiful weather we had. I don't know if you've been to the commons area in New Lenox, but that is worth the quick jaunt. And we are putting up the Christmas Trees. How many do the real trees, and how many fake? I and my vacuum cleaner are huge fans of the fake trees. And people are really trying to do up it up big. I went into Lowes saw this huge Joy display. Saw how many different lights you can buy, I remember when you could only buy the big colored bulbs and string lights. Now bulbs of every size, Led, icicle, those things you can shoot onto you're house. One had the sound of fireworks. And it just reminds me that it seems more than any other time of year we are putting on our Martha Stewart hats and planning for a perfect Christmas. The decorations are going to be spectacular, the presents are just what they wanted, what I wanted, the music - that song will come on at just the right time, and the tree, the gathering the food will all be just right. And it seems to me anyway, more than any other time of year the inner perfectionist in all of us comes out and here we go. Chestnuts roasting, snow falling, and kissing underneath the mistletoe.

And I hate to be a downer, I realize that is not why you came to church. But can I pop this balloon. Can you turn to the person next to you and say, "It's not going to be a perfect Christmas." And that is because perfect is impossible. Those dreaming of white Christmas, may get rain, those hoping they'd be home for Christmas will be stuck somewhere else, and the gal hoping for a Hippopotamus for Christmas will open the present a pair of tube socks from Grandma. I don't know about you but I'm feeling better already setting my expectations right.

And while you and I won't have a perfect Christmas there was this One Christmas. One Christmas where it seemed all seemed to be perfectly planned. Where things happened in just the right way. When the stars aligned literally, and the heavens lit up greater than any house ever could. When the soundtrack came from the angels, and when the present was priceless. And this One Christmas was the first Christmas - when all was merry and right. For it happened at just the right time, in just the right place, to just the right people, with just the right Savior.

And I have this theory when we start living in light of that first Christmas when all was merry and right, it leads to having not a perfect but a better Christmas this year. When we remember why we are celebrating - not because we have off of work, or new presents, or good food. But because Jesus the Savior was born. Jesus this perfect gift - this imperfect world had been longing for. Jesus our soul's satisfaction and the greatest gift this world has to offer. Jesus the promised one who came so that all who hope in him could have eternal life. Jesus who was born for you. Jesus who changed everything and is still the reason we celebrate. And so maybe if we go back there to then - that one perfect Christmas - we may still not have a perfect Christmas, but it could be the Christmas where everything changes for us and will be blessed.

So let's get into it when all was merry and right. We turn to the Word of God. And the most famous telling of the first Christmas comes from a man who walked with Jesus named

Luke. And he wrote an account in the 2nd chapter of his book that many of you have heard before, partly do to Linus and the Charlie Brown Christmas. And I come across these words every Christmas Eve, and I'm always struck - there is so much here to talk about. So this series is about extrapolating the truths of Luke 2. And seeing why it was just right, today we talk about how he came at just the right time. Let's read.

I was watching Home Alone that classic Christmas movie, and a feeling of nostalgia came over me. It was the scene with the children's choir singing before the big service, and it brought me back to my childhood memories. I remember the Christmas Eve service in our big church in Beaver Dam, the children's choir singing with the senior choir. I remember the place being packed and the music echoing as I imagined it would in the halls of heaven. And there was a part of me that wishes I could go back. Go back to see if it was truly as grand as I remembered, go back and see what I got for Christmas, go back when all the siblings were at home. And I bring this up because I think Christmas is at times a period when we wish we were somewhere else. Maybe in a Christmas past, in the house you grew up. Or maybe some time in the future, some place different where than where you are. I know we are often thinking the grass is greener somewhere else, with someone else, in some time different.

But then I think of how God works. I look to the first three words of our lesson and I hear, "In those days." Those appointed days that God had picked out. Those specific days in history. I'm drawn also to Paul's letter to the Galatians when it says, "But when the set time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under law." (4:4) And I look at that One Christmas at the brilliance of Sovereign God - who does work accidentally but intentionally. For the period of time Jesus was born into was the Pax Romana or the peace of Rome which lasted until about 180 AD. Why was this significant you ask? Let me tell you. Peace meant safe travel. The rule of Rome over many nations meant good infrastructure. There was a common language spoken by most. All so that when Jesus who was born and rises from the dead tells his disciples to spread the Gospel among all nations - they can do just that.

This isn't just my opinion this is backed up by the church father Origen who said, "For righteousness has arisen in His days, and there is abundance of peace, which took its commencement at His birth, God preparing the nations for His teaching, that they might be under one prince, the king of the Romans, and that it might not, owing to the want of union among the nations, caused by the existence of many kingdoms, be more difficult for the apostles of Jesus to accomplish the task enjoined upon them by their Master, when He said, "Go and teach all nations." See told you so. It's significant. He was born at just the right time, to accomplish exactly what God wanted to be accomplished.

And how does this apply to your Christmas? Here it is *This Christmas you are where you are not by accident but by God's intent*. See there is a God who has ordained all your days before one of them came to be. If you're new to Christianity it means there is a God who had a purpose for you, and that is why you were born. You were here to find him. His name is Jesus who was born for you, that you might be born for him. He let you see the light of life, so you could find He who is the light of all life. He is the Savior God who came on a rescue mission for us the lost. Because couldn't be good enough, because we were trapped by the guilt of our sin. He came and bore our punishment on the cross. And he won for us forgiveness. And we find ourselves in this place at this time to know no greater truth, and receive no greater gift.

And what this means practically speaking of an intentional God. Is this Christmas instead of wishing you were elsewhere what this means is that God is exactly where he wants you. And instead of thinking of all the people we miss and never letting go of that, we can open our eyes to those who are there. Instead of looking at all the things you don't have, or had before and are gone now, you can look at what you do have. When we realize God's intent we don't have to be longing for a time that has already been, or has yet to come. We can just rejoice knowing he has us where he wants us. This is not an accidental Christmas. So be present this one Christmas. But fully there.

You know I love this passage from Acts that says, "From one man he made all the nations, that they should inhabit the whole earth; and he marked out their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands." (17:26) God is with you this Christmas to bless you.

But why did God wait so long? Let's talk a little about that. My Dad and I were recently talking about fruit trees we had planted. He planted orange and mango trees, and I just planted a cherry tree. He was telling me after years the orange tree finally had a good produce, but the Florida storms came and left the crop of 30 on the ground and inedible. Still nothing from the mango tree. I look at my cherry tree and I think it had a good year, but it's going to be a while for some cherry pies or jam. And this is a game that just takes time. Reminds me of the saying the best time to plant a tree. Do you know according to the Chinese proverb the best time to plant a tree? 20 years ago is best, 2nd best is today - because it takes time. There may be a day when our fruit trees produce an abundant crop, but they are growing, they are in the process of becoming abundant trees.

This whole discussion reminds me of how God pictures us. He says that we are like trees who are made to produce fruit. Consider, "But I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last." (15:16) And is it possible that just as a tree needs time to produce an abundant crop, so we need time to develop the kind of fruit for the positions we seek. We're tempted to live saying if I only where there already, only had that position, only past that season of training or school. But we're overlooking that we are at just the right time right now because God is developing us.

And there have been so many people who've had to wait for what the Lord promised to make of them. Abraham to have a child, Joseph to have his childhood dreams come true, David to be king. Or consider even Jesus. Who was that branch growing from Jesse's tree. It took time for him to get here didn't it. Thousands of years, millenia - for the stump of Jesse to bring forth the Branch it was looking for. And when Jesus did get here it says describes how developed he was, "The Spirit of the Lord will rest on him- the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of might, the Spirit of the knowledge and fear of the Lord—and he will delight in the fear of the Lord." (10:2-3) And yet the one filled with the Spirit, when did he start his ministry. 30 years later.

And here's why this discussion matters when it comes to timing. Because in our lives we over-emphasize the arrival and downplay the process. And we always want to arrive. I remember if someone allowed me to be a pastor at 16 I would have been. I was ready to go, God's going to strengthen me anyway right. 11 years later I finally got there. Than I was reading installation verses of pastors and it said you must not be a recent convert. It reminded me of being young in the faith, because he may become conceited and fall into the devil's trap.

You ever been like me. You see the fruit that you want to bear in life, where you'd like to be, what you'd like to be doing. But you overlook God's timing and the process. So here's what I'd like you and me to appreciate. *Don't downplay the process of who God is making you.* What this means is don't minimize the small steps. Some might think it is such a small thing that I came to church today, not for some. For some it is huge, God honoring, awesome thing that you are here today. You might not have a crop of 100 fold, but you are here and God can have his way. Keep it up and come back. You might look down at reading your Bible you tried 5 minutes and felt a bit confused. The devil is trying to make you minimize those 5 minutes. To give up now. So that 5 doesn't become 10 become 20 become an understanding of the richness of God's revelation. Trying to look down on the parent's effort to be in church. Tell you could have had more easy options on a Sunday morning, don't look down on the significance of this step for what it is making you and your family - so that you bear abundant fruit.

But I think the problem with most of us when it comes to the issue of timing is accepting someone else's timetable. I was having a great conversation with my coach as a pastor. And we were talking about the Sovereignty of God, and the imminence of God. Sovereignty is that God stands so far above, is higher than any power and worthy of our awe and humble respect. Imminence is this idea that God is right here, that Jesus is my buddy and closer than my best friend. You know what is more common in our circles? Jesus is my buddy. My buddy, my buddy, my buddy and me. And if that's the case we struggle with the timing of God.

It reminds me of what we do when watching sports. We look at the plays being called and their ineffectiveness, who they have in. The balance of runs vs throws especially with a conservative play caller like John Fox, and we start coaching the coach. You ever do that. Throw the ball, be aggressive. A running back draw on 3rd and 12 come on! Or maybe you do that with other professions, you're telling your doctor how it is, or things of that matter.

So is it possible that we coach the coach. Are you guilty of telling him how it should go down, and being angry rather than humbly submitting to his play calling. If so I need to remind you, "Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him." (Psalm 115:3) He didn't call me up over when the Savior should be born, and honestly isn't looking for my advise. He is Sovereign. And so we need to repent for our pride. Repent of all the times we've sought to coach the coach. And we should see because of our sin of pride he should have nothing to do with us and no patience for our lack of humility.

And honestly it is good that he stands above us. Because if he operated according to our wish, will and normalcy - I don't think he'd ever sent His Son. But he has this crazy love above our worldly notions of love. This Sovereign superior love that enters into a messy world to save enemies and sinners. And this Sovereign God became lower than any human in order to prove to us - we might not understand the timetable, but we can understand the true meaning of Christmas. And that this Savior was born for us, to rescue us, and to set us free. Hallelujah and Amen. So let me remind you. *He is sovereign in his timing and sovereign in his love.*

But there is more to God's waiting then and now. Has anyone every had to wait for you so you didn't miss out on something? For me my Senior Year of high school we take a trip to Great America in Gurnee. It was the year the Raging Bull was new, and my classmates and I were looking forward to going on that and the Giant Drop and Batman. It was a day you earned because you had been in high school for 4 years, and you finally made. The problem was I

almost missed it. I have no clue why I didn't wake up on time, maybe my alarm. Everyone else was already out of the house so I was on my own to get to school. And it's only because a teacher called me and warned me that I woke up. And when I got to the bus there was the whole class who was waiting on...me. That's a feeling you don't forget - all those piercing eyes knowing your blunder. But because they waited I got to go.

What if that One Christmas wasn't 2000 years ago, but he came 4000 years ago. He came at Christmas then, and already returned. What if we missed his 1st and 2nd coming because he wasn't willing to wait for another generation or for the year 2017. Or consider his 2nd coming. Many were waiting on that and feel it should have happened by now, but it hasn't. And so Emelia Pratt, and Jonathan Bowen were born and became part of the kingdom of God. And we start to see why the Lord would continue to wait. To get more people on the bus, going not to Great America, but to a much greater land. Consider what it says in 2 Peter, "The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance." (2 Peter 3:9)

And maybe he didn't come yet, because you needed this One Christmas to come to the one who came to you. You needed this One Christmas to understand once again there is no greater love and no greater gift than Jesus the Savior. And maybe he's waiting for your relative or child to get on the bus. For the grandchildren you have yet to meet to come to. So we say Lord wait if you need to, we're good. We need to put down the temptation like my classmates on the bus, who cares if they miss I want to go. And say Lord if you need to delay, you do that. Because what we see is *He orders his timetable according to grace*. So others can repent.

Just as he did that first Christmas. Coming when there was a common language, good roads, and peace so the message of grace could be shared. Let us remember that one Christmas when all was merry and right, and when he came at just the right time. May it lead you to trust he is not working through accidents, but his sovereign intent, and may you rejoice that he's waited this long for us to know - this Savior was born, this Savior died for us. Amen.