

The Challenge of Christmas Part One: The Challenge of Timing

Luke 2:1 through Luke 2:7 (NKJV)

¹And it came to pass in those days *that* a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ²This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. ³So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city.

⁴Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, ⁵to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. ⁶So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. ⁷And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Christmas wasn't easy. Bringing the promise of God to life proved to be quite a challenge for Joseph and Mary. We rejoice at the birth of the Lord but it was a struggle for this young couple. They were faced with everything from being rejected by their families to being hunted and killed by the king.

God wants to produce fruit in our lives. He wants to birth his promises and blessings in the bosom of our spirits. But it won't come without challenges.

I believe we are in a season like Joseph and Mary. I believe we are approaching the promises of God as we sow and reap. This series builds on the last series where we discussed the 7 Laws of the Harvest. It is my prayer that we will all learn how to overcome the challenges we will face as we labor through the promises of God.

Today we will discuss God's Time and Our Time, then conclude for the day.

God's Time

Our God is an "on time" God. He may not come when we want him but he's always "right on time". **Time belongs to God.**

He created it. He sets the limits on time. He operates in it. He can step in and out of time. He can manipulate it. He can distribute time as he sees fit.

Time Investment Example:

In the book, the Seven Laws of the Harvest, John W. Lawrence gives this illustration.

"Let's say a bank credited to your account every day \$86,400 every day without fail. Yet the bank carried over no balance from day to day, and so allowed you to keep no cash in your account. What was not used of the \$86,400 was lost by

day's end, yet for the next day you had a new credit in your account. This is exactly what happens to each of us as God credits to our account each day 86,400 seconds of time. We either use time properly or we lose it, for the day cannot be relived again. Each day is a new day with new opportunities, but once we move through the day our record stands."

We live on borrowed time. We receive a portion of time to live within. During our portion of time, God desires for us to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God. Our portion of time is granted to us each day as God invests in us to produce fruit.

We can't go back to redeem yesterday's time and opportunities, and we cannot move forward to take tomorrow's time and opportunities. One of the most irresponsible things we can do with our time is to try and get ahead of God.

What do I mean?

God has appointed certain times for us to accomplish his will. He has appointed certain times for us to reap a harvest. He has appointed certain times for us to be used by him to affect the world we live in. When we get ahead of God and try to move before our time, we are essentially trying to get his blessings on credit. We are trying to reap where we have not sown. We are trying to spend what we don't have.

What we fail to see is, God who owns time, who orchestrates time for his purposes, is actively building the circumstances that will lead to our breakthroughs.

Galatians 4:4 through Galatians 4:5 (NKJV)

⁴But when the fullness of the time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, ⁵to redeem those who were under the law, that we might receive the adoption as sons.

The word used for fullness in this verse is pleroma. It means completion or to fill. One of the root words pleroo means to cram like cramming a net full of fish. God is always cramming or filling our circumstances by bringing multiple things together in the same time.

Think about it. If Jesus was born early, the scriptures wouldn't be fulfilled that said he would be born in Bethlehem. If Jesus was born too soon, the wise men may have missed him. If Jesus was born too early, then perhaps the prophesy of the massacre of the innocents would not have happened. If Jesus was born too early, in

the wrong time period, then our faith would not have spread as easily as it did. Unlike any other empire before them, the Romans built roads.

God was always working out the details and bringing all of the prophecies to pass. He was always putting together all of the pieces necessary for the birth of his Son. He was busy behind the scenes cramming in the details to make everything work out. We just have to make it to our time.

Our Time

Hebrews 1:1 through Hebrews 1:2 (NKJV)

¹God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, ²has in these last days spoken to us by *His Son*, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds;

Hebrews teaches us that God spoke in various times. He spoke in the past to those who lived and thrived in those times. When God's plan was ready he spoke with clarity and purpose for the people in those times.

Harriet Tubman had to move in her time. Fredrick Douglas had to speak in his time. Booker T. Washington had to work in his time. Dr. King had to arrive in his time. Barak Obama had to ascend in his time.

Each of these people had to operate to accomplish certain things in their time. They didn't do the same things and they didn't speak the same things. They seized the opportunities that lay before them to produce fruit for God.

It was no different than the people in Bible times. God didn't tell Moses the same thing he told Abraham. He didn't tell Samuel the same word he gave Habakkuk. The question is what is God saying in our time?

The previous generation understood this better than we do today. I can still hear Sis. Campbell telling the story about how she was riding in the truck with her father as he hauled the bricks to build this building.

In the time God had given them with the opportunity set before them, that generation seized the day and established this church. Friendship was birthed by a faithful generation. It couldn't be done before them or after them. I am humbled when I think of the sacrifices they made and the risks they took to prepare a place for worship in those dark days.

Let's go back two generations. Our parents and grandparents knew what they were fighting for in their time. Many of the things we have now were not available then. Many of the opportunities we have now were not available in their day. Those generations fought for opportunities. Those generations did what they could with what God had given them in their season.

So now, this generation doesn't have to struggle to birth opportunities. Opportunities were handed to us when we were born.

We don't have to fight for the right to get an education. We don't have to fight as hard to get jobs. We don't have to fight for fair representation in government. We don't have to fight for knowledge of the scriptures due to ignorance. In slavery times, many black preachers couldn't read and only preached from what they heard in the balcony or the back of the white churches.

God used those generations to give us more than they had. They did their work in their time. They prayed their prayers in their time. They laid foundations for us in their time.

Honestly, I believe that's why some of our elders look at what we are doing today and they are not impressed. They recall the high watermarks of accomplishments in their season because we have not set any watermarks in our season. They have passed us the baton and we have sat down with it.

Their struggle is not our struggle. Their battle is not our battle. Their time is not our time. But their God is our God. If he could miraculously work through them, in their season, then what about now?

What will we do with our time? God is still on the throne and he is still cramming in the details to birth something in us that will bless us today and the next generation. Let me ask you a few questions.

- What opportunity do you have in your career that will produce fruit for God?
- What opportunity do you have in your community that will grow the kingdom for God?
- What conversation do you need to have today that will open doors tomorrow?
- What position do you need to move into today to pave the way for others tomorrow?
- What are the things you need to do for your children today so they won't forget God tomorrow?
- What ground do you need to sow into today so you can reap in another season?
- What prayers need to be prayed in your spirit today to birth your breakthrough tomorrow?
- What level of worship do you need to achieve to break the yokes in your life?

What sacrifices do we need to make today to reach the vision God has for us tomorrow?

What service to God do we need to render today to be lifted to a higher service tomorrow?

What spiritual fruit do we need to bear in this season to sustain us in the next season?

What spiritual gifts do we need to exercise today so we can overcome tomorrow?

Are you ready for the wise men to visit?

Are you standing under the star to light the way?

Are you in position to see your destiny come together?

Have you spent your nine months carrying your promise within your bosom?

Where is your Bethlehem?

Where is your manger?

You've got to be ready in the fullness of time! It's going to take time for God to orchestrate your blessing. He could bless you now but there is more glory available if we take the blessing in the right season. Don't get ahead of God. You will get to Bethlehem soon enough. You will release your blessing soon enough. You will have your time of joy soon enough. But God is in the background working things out while you wait.

There are lessons to be learned while we wait. There are skills we need to develop while we wait. There are victories we must win while we wait. There are some people God will have to move while we wait. There are some barriers he will break down while we wait. There is some wisdom he has to bring into our lives while we wait. There are some gifts he has to prepare while we wait.

Abraham can tell you about waiting on God. His impatience birthed Ishmael before Isaac.

Jacob can tell you about waiting on God. He had to serve his uncle twice to get the wife he wanted while God was preparing him to birth the 12 tribes of Israel.

Joseph can tell you about waiting on God. He had a vision from God where it was revealed he would rule over his brothers and his parents. But he was sold into slavery until his time arrived and he ascended to second in command in all of Egypt.

Moses can tell you about waiting on God. His zeal slew an Egyptian and caused him to flee for his life. He spent 40 years in the desert before he was able to truly deliver God's people.

Joshua can tell you about waiting on God. He served faithfully for 40 years before he was able to be used by God to deliver his people into the Promised Land.

David can teach you about waiting on God. He was already anointed king of Israel as a shepherd boy. He was anointed king before he slew Goliath but he had to wait and serve king Saul until his time came.

Jeremiah can tell you about waiting on God. He was with the people when they were trying to free themselves from the Babylonians. God spoke through him to inform the people they would be in bondage for 70 years.

Isaiah can tell you about waiting on God. It was he who prophesied that God would deliver his people through a king named Cyrus hundreds of years before he was born.

The man by the pool of Bethesda can tell you about waiting. After 38 years of waiting for the waters to be stirred his time came when Jesus stopped by to heal him.

The woman with the issue of blood can tell you about waiting on God. After 12 years of fighting disease while waiting on her breakthrough, Jesus passed by. She reached out to touch the hem of his garment and was made whole.

Paul and Silas can tell you about waiting on God. While in bondage and chains, locked away in a Roman jail they prayed and sang until God shook the foundation of the jail and made them free.

John can tell you about waiting on God. While he was exiled on Patmos with the threat on his life of being boiled in oil for speaking the Gospel, he stood firm in his faith. John said "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's Day, and I heard behind me a loud voice, as of a trumpet, ¹¹saying, "I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last,"."

Conclusion:

Hold on a little while longer. I know there are some challenges in front of you. But keep moving forward. In your time God will make his promises sure. He will do what he said. Joseph and Mary had to leave town to get to the right place in time. Mary had to ride that donkey carrying the promise until it was time. The manger had to be ready when it was time. The wise men showed up right on time. All you have to do today is be ready when he comes.