

God's Timetable

These words of the scripture text that I will read for us in a few moments have given me pause to stop and to think about all the many unfathomable mysteries that God has woven into place as He has created and now sustains daily life here on this earth. And oh, those mysteries truly are so many.

And while our scientists and educators and doctors and philosophers have tried their best to explain all those mysteries, using intelligent sounding words of worldly wisdom, their words still do fall woefully short.

One of those unfathomable mysteries is the mystery of "sin", that mystical power that reached into the souls of men and women from those first moments of life there in the Garden of Eden and now controls most all of the thoughts and behaviors within the hearts and minds of most all of the people on the earth.

While sin is defined simply as being "any want of conformity unto, or transgression of, any law of God", it reaches much, much farther than what those simple words might imply, controlling and devastating the souls and daily lives of most every person who succumbs to it.

But thanks be to God, in what these scriptures call "the fullness of time", God brought about His miraculous and eternal remedy for that insidious power and control of sin. Here, in the birth of this little baby, the Lord Jesus, and in all that Jesus would later accomplish while on this earth, sin would meet its ultimate defeat.

Follow along with me as I read the first few verses of Luke chapter 2.

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 clothes, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. (Luke 1:1-7)

As we read these words about this miraculous birth of the Baby Jesus, it's important for us to remember that this story did not begin here in this small town of Nazareth and then in Bethlehem. No, these events are just some of many events in a much greater plan that God had put into place long before the foundations of earth were spoken into being.

And I confess to you that I don't know why God chose this moment in time to bring the Baby Jesus into the world, but we do know that His timing had a purpose. Why would that be so? It's because, as we can clearly see throughout all of these scriptures, it is a part of the character of God that everything He does is "intentional", and everything has a purpose.

Another important reminder that I have been giving to us each week is that every event, every encounter, every conversation and especially every moment of surrender was an essential and necessary part of that very special plan that God had put into place. And here, that plan is being worked out in all its intimate details, a plan that would once and forever provide a solution to the plague of "sin" that had afflicted the hearts of men and women from that first moment in the Garden when Adam and Eve rebelled against God and fell into sin.

And folks, while mid-summer does seem an odd time for us to be talking about Christmas, as we say so often during that season of the year, this birth of Jesus Christ described here in these verses of scripture really is what that celebration is all about.

Yes, Christmas is a time of giving, and family gatherings and showing love to one another; and that is all good. But much more than all of that, the true meaning of the celebration of Christmas is that Christ, the Son of God, came to earth, to be our "Emmanuel", "God with us", to live among us, to preach and to teach and to do miracles, and then to die on the cross to save us from our sins.

And in that sense, Christmas has far more to do with "sin" than it has to do with gift giving and family fellowship. God needed to deal with the sin that resides within the hearts of men and women, and the coming to earth of the promised Messiah was the way that God chose to do that.

As we read these words of scripture, to the outside world looking in, the plan that was unfolding in the lives of Mary and Joseph probably seemed very normal and natural, a young woman having a baby. That same thing had been taking place untold millions of times in the lives of others over the past centuries. So, to the on-looking world, this one birth probably seemed much like all the rest.

But not so with Mary and Joseph. They knew, and now we know, that this birth was very, very different from every other birth that had ever taken place before. Beginning with the mysterious visit by the angel, telling them about all that would take place, and then especially the fact that even at this moment of birth, Mary was still a virgin, everything that was taking place was very, very different.

And probably the greatest difference of all was the “reason” this birth was taking place. As we mentioned a moment ago, this special birth had to do with a Divine plan, a plan that had been conceived in the courts of the Trinity in eons past, long even before the thing we call “time” had ever began, even before the first stone was laid in the foundations of the earth.

And it was a plan with one specific purpose in mind, a plan to once for all deal a death blow to the “plague of sin” that had become such an integral part of the lives and the lifestyles of all of creation.

As we know from reading the beginning accounts of man's existence, temptation and sin had entered in and had taken possession of men's hearts and minds, from those earliest beginning moments there in the Garden.

How could such a thing take place in such a pristine environment, two people, with nothing to gain, but everything to lose, making wrong and even eternal choices?

Folks, “sin” truly is an insidious force as it takes up residence within a person's soul, dominating their thoughts and behaviors, even to such an extent that no amount of “trying”, or “human effort”, could ever be able to defeat it . . . only this plan, this little baby and the mission that this little baby would carry out after He became a man, would be able to finally and forever defeat the insidious power of sin.

Little did Adam and Eve know that their one simple decision to surrender themselves over to satan's temptation would bring all the devastating misery, pain and suffering that has taken place on this earth since that moment.

But that really is the way and the nature of sin. It only takes one surrender to one temptation and before we realize it, that one sin has formed itself into a "full-blown" natural way of behavior. It did in Adam and Eve's life, and it has done the same in every other life since. That one sin that they gave in to, has become a "nature", a "sin nature", our "sin nature", yours and mine.

But folks, one thing remains true. God is Holy! And God cannot allow sin to endure forever, taking possession over men and women, the "apple of His eye".

. . . I'd like to pause here for a moment and offer some possible guesses as to why these two innocent people, Adam and Eve, would make such a devastating choice, a choice that would, forever alter the very being of mankind and then wreak havoc in every soul that came after them.

It is said there in the Book of Genesis that Adam and Eve were made in the image of God, able to think and to do many of the things that God would do. But we must remember that though these two creatures were in the "image of God", a likeness of Him, they were not completely like God.

Yes, in His image, they could think and make choices. And they could desire things and do things. But not being exactly as God is, they were limited in their ability to truly perceive the difference between right and wrong. And more importantly, themselves not being exactly like God, they didn't possess the inward righteousness, as God did, to refuse to do wrong and sinful things.

And so, eventually, with the right temptation, they succumbed to the power of sin, and they made wrong choices, forever condemning themselves and all mankind who would follow after them to a lifetime, and even an eternity, of suffering from sin and death.

What a change! In only a moment, all eternity was transformed from blessed righteousness and bliss into misery and death.

But thanks be to God, He really is omniscient! He knew from the beginning that all of this would take place. And so, there in the Courts of the Trinity, God the

Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit developed their plan, a plan that would remedy sin and redeem mankind from their newfound sinful condition.

And this birth of this Child here in these words of our scripture was God's answer to all that had taken place within the souls of men. This Child would be that remedy for sin, that redeemer that mankind would need to purchase God's people back from their bondage to sin.

What we find taking place here in these words, is God putting into place what our bible teachers like to call, "God's Covenant of Grace".

You will recall that God had put one covenant into place in those first moments of human life there in the Garden of Eden, when He commanded Adam and Eve to not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, under penalty of death, both spiritually and physically. And unfortunately, they chose to break God's covenant and disobey. And they did die, first spiritually, then eventually physically.

But thanks be to God, here beginning with the birth of this blessed baby, the Lord Jesus, God was putting a "New Covenant" into place, a "Covenant of Grace", a plan and a means through which men and women could find redemption from their disobedience and sin.

Through this innocent little baby, God was providing the final and effectual answer to that wretched "sin nature" that had plagued and dominated the souls of men since those first days there in the Garden.

A question . . . why would God wait so long, several thousands of years after the sin of Adam and Eve, to take these steps to defeat sin? We don't know the exact answer to that question, but we do know that it has to do with His patience with us. His "tarrying" was for our good. He tells us in 2 Peter 3,
⁸. . . beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹The Lord is not slack concerning *His* promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance. (2 Peter 3:8-9)

These scriptures refer to God's "timetable" for all of His plans as being the "fullness of time". The "fullness of time". We don't really know how God

measures time to know when such “fullness of time” has taken place, why it had not taken place in all of the previous generations. But now, here at this very special moment being described here, that “fullness of time” had arrived.

And here as we read about these dear servants, Mary and Joseph, traveling all the way to Bethlehem, we can trust with a certainty that every event, every encounter, every conversation and especially every moment of surrender was an essential and necessary part of God's timetable in the very special plan He was putting into place.

And Bethlehem was God's chosen place for the birth of this little Baby to take place. Every detail was part of God's plan!

Let me pause here and remind us of some of the prophecies about Jesus that led up to this special moment in time.

The prophecies began first in the very Garden where sin began its work. There, recall that in rebuking satan for having tempted Eve, God prophesied about how He (God) would, later on, defeat this newfound power that satan had put into the hearts of men. Listen to these words of Genesis chapter 3,

¹⁴ . . . the Lord God said to the serpent: “Because you have done this, You *are* cursed more than all cattle, And more than every beast of the field; On your belly you shall go, And you shall eat dust All the days of your life. (Genesis 3:14)

And listen!

¹⁵ And I will put enmity between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel.” (Genesis 3:15)

The Seed of the woman spoken about here is this very same Jesus that the Virgin Mary gave birth to there in the stable. And while satan would surely “bruise the heel” of Jesus, through tempting and beguiling His beloved bride, satan would never be able to fully defeat God's people. Jesus promised in John chapter 10,

²⁷My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me. ²⁸And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand. ²⁹My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of My Father's hand. ³⁰I and My Father are one.” (John 10:27-30)

Yes, satan would surely bruise the heel of Jesus, tempting and beguiling us, the saints, but satan would never be able to fully defeat Jesus, and neither would he defeat Jesus' beloved bride. But Jesus would defeat satan. Jesus would "bruise His head" and cast him into the eternal damnation of hell!

Recall also that God continued to remind us throughout the generations that He would bring it all to pass. Listen to the prophecy by Isaiah given over 700 years before the birth of Christ. Isaiah 7:14

¹⁴Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel. (Isaiah 7:14)

That virgin is this same dear young woman, Mary, spoken about here. Listen again to those words in Luke chapter 1.

²⁶Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent by God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, ²⁷to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David. (Luke 1:26-27)

And also, 700 years earlier Isaiah prophesied some very specific prophecies about the baby that Mary would bear. Isaiah 9, verse 6,

⁶ For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. ⁷ Of the increase of *His* government and peace *There will be* no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this. (Isaiah 9:6-7)

And again, the angel, Gabriel, who had come to Mary earlier had said the very same words that Isaiah had prophesied. Luke chapter 1,

³⁰ . . . the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. ³¹And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. ³²He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. ³³And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." (Luke 1:30-33)

Isn't it exciting to know that these things that took place here in these words were not just the happenings of men and women doing the things that men

and women do, but were instead, a part of a very special plan of God. Recall those words that I just read to us from Isaiah 9, verse 7,

The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this. (Isaiah 9: 7)

And as we read these simple words about Mary and Joseph traveling to Bethlehem, and about the baby Jesus being born there in the stable, we see God's "fullness of time" finally coming to fruition. Listen, from Galatians 4,

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. (Galatians 4:4-5)

That "law", that "covenant of God" that had been put into place all the way back in the Garden, the law that declared that if men chose to sin, they would surely die, that law, and the penalty for it, was being wiped away by this new "Covenant of Grace" that this baby Jesus would bring to men.

It was the "fullness of time" and God had sent forth His Son, Jesus, to redeem all of us who were under that first law that condemned us to death, so that we might instead receive life and become the true sons that God intended for us to be from the beginning. Praise the Lord!

Listen as we close,

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. (Galatians 4:4-5)