

Worth Our Wait

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[0 : 00] If you have your Bibles, I want you to turn to Luke chapter 1. Luke chapter 1. The corner of tomorrow is frightening. We don't know what's going to happen tomorrow.

We think we want to know what's coming, but in reality, if we knew all that we may face, we'd often be overwhelmed. And Scripture is often explored, explained, and even abused to try to determine what tomorrow's have that we can't know.

And that's what God intended. He intended us to live by faith. Faith living is not so much knowing what tomorrow holds, but knowing who holds tomorrow and being able to rest in that.

And God has called us to live by that. He's always worked that way, and it hasn't changed. Living by faith is not easy, not always anyway.

However, I want to share with you this Christmas season some facts that will make living by faith worth it. You see, the truth is that God has gone before us in every step that we take.

[1 : 29] He's already there. And he prepares us for what is to come when we lean on him, when we trust him.

No matter how blindsided we may be, God has already went before us in his providential care, prepared the way for us.

And we don't always see that. Sometimes it comes much later, and you look back on it, and you think, you know, I see how God...

And I'll be honest with you, sometimes we won't see it in this lifetime. I think it'll be made known one day to us very clearly. But sometimes we don't see it in this lifetime. But our sight, get this now, our sight does not determine his faithfulness.

He's more faithful than we can see. And not only does he prepare us for what's to come, but he's already there in the midst of it, whatever it is. And I don't believe anything points to that more than the incarnation of Christ, which is what Christmas is all about and why Christmas is so important.

[2 : 39] If not for the virgin birth incarnation of Christ, he would not have lived before us. He would not have died for us. He would not have rose again on our behalf, our promise to return to receive us.

And so the reality is the coming of Christ is the greatest event with the greatest impact that can ever be felt. For without him, we have no hope.

So how do you prepare for the greatest arrival in human history? Can you prepare for that? Well, I believe there was preparation.

And I believe God sent one to prepare the people. And I believe God still is preparing us for what's to come.

And although we don't know what's to come, we have to wait. It's worth the wait. And I don't want you to miss the impact of his preparation and what that has on us in the meantime.

[3 : 49] So during the month of December, as we study the story of God in the flesh, Jesus Christ, I want to start with a man named John.

Part of his story is found in Luke chapter 1, beginning in verse 5, and it says this. In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zechariah of the division of Abijah.

And he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth. And they were both righteous before God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and statutes of the Lord.

But they had no child because Elizabeth was barren, and both were advanced in years. Now, while he was serving as priest before God when his division was on duty, according to the custom of the priesthood, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense.

And the whole multitude of the people were praying outside at the hour of incense. And there appeared to him an angel of the Lord standing on the right side of the altar of incense. And

Zechariah was troubled when he saw him, and fear fell upon him.

[5 : 10] But the angel said to him, Do not be afraid, Zechariah, for your prayer has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you shall call his name John.

And you will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth, for he will be great before the Lord. And he must not drink wine or strong drink, and he'll be filled with the Holy Spirit even from his mother's womb.

And he'll turn many of the children of Israel to the Lord their God, and he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just.

And then if you're an underliner, this is what you want to underline. To make ready for the Lord a people prepared. How do you prepare people for the coming of Christ?

You at least let people know that he's coming. And that's what John the Baptist did. That's what God called him to do from the womb.

[6 : 16] That's what he was dedicated to doing. Notice that God also prepared John's parents for their son's arrival. God's in the preparation business. And John came to this earth shortly before Christ.

God raised him up to run ahead of Christ, to let people know of the ministry of Christ. John the Baptist prepared for the coming of the Lord.

That's why he was there. Luke elaborates on it in Luke chapter 3 about this making ready the people of the Lord. And he says this in Luke chapter 3, verse 3.

He said, John the Baptist was sure of his calling.

John the Baptist in his life was up front about his purpose. He came for no other reason than to prepare the way of the Lord. And prepare he did.

[7 : 47] Let me tell you how. One, he told of the coming of Christ. John came for one purpose and it was clear. He came to prepare the way for Christ. And some were so enamored with John that they thought it was enough.

They thought the baptism of repentance that they got from him would be enough. That if they just believed in him of sorts. But John's desire was to stay out of the way of Christ. He kept pointing people to Christ.

He even felt uncomfortable and not worthy to baptize Christ when Christ asked him to baptize him. But once he did baptize Christ, he got out of the way. He didn't want to be the focus.

He told of his coming. Not only that, but he shared his message. John made a clear preview of the message of Christ. He told them to bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

You know what that means? That means let your life reflect that you have turned from your sins and are walking with the Lord.

[8 : 51] Show it like a fruit tree shows its fruit. Show that you have turned from your old ways and followed God. He was trying to awaken them to the coming message of the Lord.

As well, he also warned of his importance. And I'm talking about of Christ's importance. He says in Luke chapter 3 verse 16, John answered them all saying, I baptize you with water, but he who is mightier than I am coming, the strap of whose sandals I'm not worthy to untie, he'll baptize you with Holy Spirit and fire.

In other words, John is saying, don't miss this. Don't miss this. He is just pointing to Christ. Don't look at me. Make sure you don't miss him.

Because if you do, and John was clear about this, you will face judgment. Now understanding that and that message, isn't it sad that Bethlehem didn't get it?

Didn't have any room for Christ? Isn't it sad that John tells us that, as we read earlier as a congregation, that John tells us that his own did not receive him?

[10 : 12] Isn't it sad that some still miss him today? He's right there before us. And ready or not, Jesus came, thank God, and he lived an example before us, and he died a sacrificial death on our behalf, and he has given us victory over death, and he has given us resurrection.

But I want you to notice something else too. As I began to think about how John prepared people for Christ, I got to thinking about God's pattern of preparedness.

Christ had the way prepared for him, and then Christ prepared the way. Because Christ prepared for the coming of the Holy Spirit.

God prepares his people. He did it through Christ. Christ, in his last days, and again, before he ascended into heaven, he promised that the Spirit would come.

And you know what he did? He told of his coming. Jesus spent his last hours with the disciples before the cross, telling them of the coming of the Holy Spirit. He said, It will be different when my physical presence is not with you, but the Spirit of God will come, and his presence will be just as real as when I was walking among you.

[11 : 41] In John 14, 16, he says, And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another helper to be with you forever. Let me say one.

If you've never given your heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ, you've never surrendered your life to the Lord. Maybe you don't get it. You don't understand what it's all about. Let me tell you one piece of it.

And that is that when you give your heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ, surrender your life to him, the Holy Spirit will come and help you.

He will guide you. If you'll listen to him, he'll lead you out of temptation. He'll make a way for you. He's there. Jesus called him the helper.

He's there. He's there. He's there. It's part of a renewed life. And if you're a Christian today, and you've surrendered your life to the Lord Jesus, I want you to hear me.

[12 : 49] I don't know what you're going through. I might know a fragment of it. I might know a little bit of the past of it. You might have shared a little bit with me, but I don't really know what you're going through.

But I know one who does. And I may be of little help to you, but you've got a helper. You've got one that's walking with you daily, ready to guide you.

Just listen. Through God's word, you just listen. You've got a helper to bring you through. He told of his coming.

He also shared his message. Jesus said there's a reason the spirit came, and Christ wanted us to find comfort in that. He says in John 14, 26 and 27, he says, but the helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you.

Hello? Don't you need a reminder from time to time of what God says about things? Have you ever felt your mind begin to wander into areas of discouragement or waywardness, and all of a sudden something just puts a check in your spirit of sorts, and you're reminded of something God says?

[14 : 12] You know what that is? That's not your memory. That's the Holy Spirit of God working in you. He's reminding you of the things that he said. He says, peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you, not as the world gives do I give to you.

Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let it be afraid. Listen, I am well aware that I can't bring you peace. I mean, I try my best to comfort folks when they're hurting. I do, but I'll be inadequate with it. But I am thankful that my job is to just point people to the one who can give you a peace unlike anything this world can give, because he's the one that does it.

He told of his coming. He shared his mission. But not only that, he warned of his importance. As the Spirit of God works, he pricks hearts. He speaks personally, sometimes through the still, small voice within you, that's not audible, but louder than that.

And sometimes God will speak through the thunder and the storms. Either way, it's important that we hear the Spirit of God and what he has to say. John 14, 29 says, and now, Jesus said, and now I have told you before it takes place so that when it does take place, you may believe.

[15 : 25] In other words, I prepared you for this. I've told you about the Spirit coming. And when you surrender your life to Christ and commit to live for him, he empowers you with the Holy Spirit of God living in you.

The conscience of a person simply influenced by his or her background or surroundings, when they give their heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ, that conscience is invaded by the very Spirit of God.

God speaks. He speaks through his word, and the Spirit of God individualizes the word of God so that we get it. He speaks into our hearts.

He stirs us to respond in obedience to him. And when the Spirit of God stirs your heart, don't ignore it because that's how the Holy Spirit speaks. Since Pentecost, the Holy Spirit has been whetting the appetites of believers to experience more of God.

And as John the Baptist prepared the way for Christ, the people found out that Christ was worth the wait. And as Christ prepared for the Holy Spirit, the Spirit was worth waiting for.

[16:30] But thank God Christmas is Christmas because it didn't stop in the manger. It didn't even stop in the ascension of Christ. No. God's in the preparation business.

And the Holy Spirit is preparing the church for the return of the Lord. That's right. The great victory of the manger is the promised return of the Lord.

He created this great earth in seven days and he's been working on heaven for over 2,000 years. And I'm so glad that through his word, the Holy Spirit has been preparing the church for the return of the Lord since the day of his ascension.

How? Well, there's a pattern here. You might be picking up on it. One is he told of his coming. We see it most graphically illustrated how the Holy Spirit spoke through the Apostle Paul.

In 1 Thessalonians 4, 16 when it says, For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of the archangel, with the sound of the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

[17:39] But he didn't stop there. Not only did he tell of his coming, but he also shared his mission. He says in the next passages, Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with him in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

And verse 18 is my favorite of the whole chapter. Therefore, encourage one another with these words. Friend, this ain't it. This ain't all there is.

Because God's in a pattern business of preparedness, that also serves as a warning of the Holy Spirit's importance. 1 Thessalonians 5, verse 3 and 4 says this, While people are saying there's peace and security, then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

But you're not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief. Why? Because he's told you. Because the Holy Spirit's been preparing us for the return of the Lord.

Whether you're ready or not, the Lord's going to return. Whether that be through death, or whether that be through his coming, hell is certain for the sinner, heaven is sure for the saved, and so my question is, do you have a firm hope?

[19:12] Do you have a firm hope? Jesus put it this way, and I'll close. Matthew 24, in verse 40, he said, Then two men will be in the field, one will be taken and one left.

Two women will be grinding at the mill, one will be taken and one left. Therefore, stay awake. For you don't know on what day your Lord is coming.

But know this, that if the master of the house had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have stayed awake and would not have let his house be broken into.

Therefore, folks, you also must be ready for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect. Jesus is coming back, and I can't wait, but I'll tell you, he's worth the wait.

My question is, are you ready? It's not because he didn't prepare us. Because God has a pattern of preparation.

[20:16] Christmas is about Jesus. And we're just waiting for Jesus to come back and receive us unto himself. And I'll tell you, as we wait, it's worth the wait.

Because the greatest gifts that have been given on this earth is Jesus Christ. And he is a worthy gift. Now, what does that mean for us today?

What it means for us today is, Jesus came to this earth to give each one of us hope, no matter where we are on our journey.

And if you're here this morning and you have never surrendered your life to the Lord Jesus Christ, you're living for you or you're living for your loved ones, but you've never surrendered your life to the Lord Jesus Christ.

You've never acknowledged that there's sin in your life that separates you from God. Sin that you can't remove. You can ask God to forgive you, and he will. You can ask God to remove it and surrender your life to him, and he'll change you forever.

[21:27] But until you surrender your life to him, you're on your own. Your hope is found in him. And I am thankful today that I can share the message to know that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

God's speaking to your heart today, not audibly, but louder than that. You just do what he tells you to do and obey him. Maybe you're here this morning and you have surrendered your life to the Lord

Jesus, but you never told anybody about it.

It's been a private decision for you. You've never made that public. Never told anybody about that. Jesus said, if you're ashamed of me before men, I'll be ashamed of you before my Father. And what he means by that is it's not a real deal if it's just a secret.

Y'all let people know. And the way we do that is by the commission and by the example of Christ.

And that is to publicly acknowledge that and to follow that with baptism.

We're going to do that in a couple of weeks. If you're a believer today and you've never been baptized and you want to make that public, you come. We'll guide you in that process.

[22 : 35] Maybe God's drawing you to this church. You've been sticking your head in and fellowshiping with us some and worshiping with us and God's leading you to be a part of us.

You just follow his will. Follow his way. We'll guide you in that process. God's doing a wonderful work at Pickens First Baptist Church. Thankful to be a part of it. Would love for you to join us in that journey.

You just obey God and I'll guide you in that. Maybe you're here and you just need the helper.

There's just some things in your life that you just need the Holy Spirit's help.

And you just want to take a few minutes to close the service to say, God, will you help me? Will you help me to turn from what I need to turn from? Will you help me to lean on what I need to lean on?

God, will you clear my cluttered mind? God, will you work in one that I've got a burden for? I never will pretend to know what God's saying to you.

[23 : 41] But I promise you, you'll never be satisfied until you obediently follow him. Trust him. He's worthy of it.

Lord Jesus, I love you. And I thank you for the opportunity to worship you today. I pray that you'll give boldness to one who needs to receive Christ. I pray that you'll give boldness to one who needs to publicly acknowledge God.

I pray, dear God, that you'll work and move in one that just needs help from the Holy Spirit today.

Right now, lead us, Lord. Help us to not be reluctant to simply follow your will as you lead us, God, I pray.

In Jesus' precious name, amen. If you... If you... If you... If you... If you...