

WHERE WAS JESUS IN 2001?

Knowing Jesus

Galatians 4:4-6

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Bethany Church

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The year 2001 has been turbulent. Each year holds turmoil for some individuals, families and communities, but this year was tumultuous for 278 million Americans and millions more from other lands. The painful events that transpired these past 12 months have led many into soul-searching questions. When four planes that took off on September 11th were commandeered and turned into guided missiles, some asked where was God? Where was Jesus? Those questions don't require such wide-scale destruction. Earlier this week during a season of celebration two vehicles met head-on near Elgin and four lives ended? Don't

you think that some of the families involved are gnawed by that same question? Where was Jesus earlier this year when a pickup slammed into a hayrack and injured and killed members of an area family gathered for a reunion?

At Bethany this December we reflected each week on Scriptures that would help us know Jesus. The sermon series was *Knowing Jesus*. To fully know the one whose Birthday we celebrate this season, it is helpful to consider *where was Jesus in 2001*.

In the sermon notes (in your bulletin) there is a graphic of the World Trade Center's north tower burning and the south tower collapsing. That atrocity was a pivotal moment in a year that is proving historic in reshaping our world. Pivotal moments are reference points. The media constantly remind us what things were like before 9/11 and after. Even time is counted from 9/11. That is true of important moments. We yearly mark the anniversary of the Oklahoma City bombing. This December 7th was the 60th anniversary of Pearl Harbor. Yet, in history often the most pivotal moments are unseen until much later. When Jesus was born, few contemporaries took notice. Historians gave it little regard for hundreds of years. Yet since 1949, when China adopted the Gregorian Calendar, most the world has measured its time from the birth of Christ. Two years ago,

the entire world celebrated the beginning of the third millennium following Christ's birth.

From the human perspective, we judge the significance of an event with several criteria. We look at an event's immediate effect on lives. How profoundly are people affected by what happened? We look at an event's deviation from the ordinary. How unusual or unique is the matter? We consider how wide the sphere of impact is. How many or few are influenced by what has transpired. Finally we observe how profound and lasting are the resulting changes.

Jesus' birth made an imperceptible ripple for most of his contemporaries. Only later was the impact realized. What was insignificant humanly speaking was supremely important. Heaven celebrated while humanity slept. Although 2001 is a significant marker at the moment, we have only begun to observe its influence. No human being knows how important this past year has been. No human being knows what event will eventually prove to be most influential because the human perspective is inadequate.

There is a divine perspective to be embraced. There was a whole lot more going that first Christmas than what contemporary historians recorded. There was a whole lot more going on this past year than terrorist attacks, humanitarian drops and cave explorations. St. Paul wrote:

We have stopped evaluating others by what the world thinks about them. Once I mistakenly thought of Christ that way, as though he were merely a human being. How differently I think about him now! (2 Cor. 5:16)

Our human perspective often sees events without respect to God and the other spiritual players. It ignores a battle that has raged since the days of Adam and Eve. There is, however, a different vision that evaluates what occurs in view of what is eternal. It considers eternal purposes. It looks at the sweep of history. It understands that God is alive, that God is well and that God is at work.

That view also weighs events by their impact on people's relationship with God. What higher purpose does a Creator have than to enjoy His creation? What greater fulfillment is there for a creature than to please the creator? How have the events of 2001 impacted people's relationship with God and their receptivity to His redeemer, Christ?

Moreover, what in the Bible gives us clues to God's activity in these events? We really don't have perspective on where Jesus was and what he was doing until we consider the eternal, the relational and the revelational.

We gain revelation from the writing of St. Paul. He wrote this about the Christmas story:

When the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children. And because you Gentiles have become his children, God has sent the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, and now you can call God your dear Father. (Gal. 4:4-6)

The Bible reveals that Christmas was more than God sending His Son. It was God sending His Son at the *right time*. That expression *right time* in the original language suggests that God acted at just the perfect moment. To discern God's hand, one must think of timing. God did not crash the planes into the World Trade Center. God did not send terrorists to destroy innocent human beings. "The thief comes to kill, steal and destroy," Jesus said, "I have come to give you life." God did not orchestrate the violence, but he was not absent either. He doesn't jump off the earth and let Satan have at it. Jesus was climbing stairs with firemen. Jesus was rescuing some from death and receiving others in death. He was prompting prayers and comforting bereaved. He was holding the hands of victims. He was present with grieving families. God was active in the timing. He wasn't surprised.

The Bible reveals that there were more players in the events that transpired on Christmas day than human beings. In Christmas there was a woman and her human helpers

involved, but there was also God making decisions, Jesus being born and the Holy Spirit directing events. They were key players. Those players were very much involved this year in what we faced. Our Father was still making decisions. Jesus was receiving and redeeming, and His Spirit was guiding and ministering.

The Bible reveals that there was a goal in the Christmas event: to buy freedom for those who were slaves to Jewish law and to grant adoption to non-Jewish people as children of God. God was reaching out in the birth of His Son. That same God was active this year in the middle of the atrocities and tragedies experienced. The Bible reveals a Creator who is reaching out to His creatures, to His children. Are you beginning to see God's hand?

The Bible reveals that there is dangerous opposition to humanity. Peter writes:

Be careful! Watch out for attacks from the Devil, your great enemy. He prowls around like a roaring lion, looking for some victim to devour. (1 Peter 5:8).

Peter describes Satan as a lion that stalks its prey. We observe the cold calculations of this spiritual creature. That does not mean that God is nowhere near. According to St. John, Jesus came to destroy the works of the devil.

What purposes did the devil have in mind when he incited the events of 9/11? Won't Christ be counteracting them? When we move from revelation to discernment, we begin with what is known. We begin with what Scripture reveals. We are involved in a great, ongoing struggle.

Remember the visit of the Magi? Remember how they came to honor the newborn king? A star directed their visit. They brought honor to Christ. They found enlightenment in Christ. Yet their journey resulted in the death of many children from Bethlehem. Satan used the visit of the Magi to incite King Herod to attack the children. These atrocities were related to Christmas. Yet God was active in that battle. Jesus, who left just in time, was born for those who died as well as for those who survived.

We move from revelation to discernment when we consider God's dealings with us. When God's Spirit came into your heart, you were anointed not only for childlike companionship with your heavenly Father, you were anointed with a passion and power to make a difference. Jesus was active in 2001 through the anointing he gave his believers and the actions they took under his influence. Do you realize that?

Where was Jesus in 2001? He was in the planes screaming toward their targets. He was at ground zero with

those whose lives would end. He was rushing with his people to lend aid and comfort. He still is active in these last two days of 2001. He is issuing a call. In love he calls for you to trust him. He is Lord. Will you live as His disciple? If you will, he will act through you. He will be your partner. Moreover, his Father has already deployed you. You're location is no accident. However, remember there is a battle. There are more powers at work than God, but no power is greater than God.

Where was Jesus in 2001? He was in his believers, partnering with his believers. If you have surrendered the throne of your life to Christ in faith, then he is involved in whatever you regard. If you have embraced his forgiveness and given his forgiveness, then he is giving you passion. In 2001 he was also directing you into relationships. They are divinely directed... even if they are painful. He has also provided you resources. He is directing you to use them.

Jesus was making history in 2001. He was writing a whole new chapter. When you welcome him as your Lord whom you follow and your Savior whom you trust, a new chapter not only begins for you, but a new future is written for the world. I don't know all the problems you are facing. I don't know how the battle rages about you. But with Christ

you and I can make history. Are you ready? Then let's
roll!