

# *Timing is Critical*

## CHRISTMAS TRUTHS

Luke 2:25-38

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Bethany Church

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It was inexplicable. I don't know why, but I depressed the brake instead of the accelerator, and my vehicle hesitated rather than entered the intersection as a truck roared by. I was that close to disaster. The misfiring of my leg, the momentary movement of my foot to the brake altered my future. Someone might call me lucky, but luck is not a word I would use.

If you've lived any time, you've discovered the importance of timing. The seasons teach us that there is a time to plant and a time to reap. Right now, very few are planting a garden unless they're into frozen vegetables (you know... iceberg lettuce and snow peas). If the weather reveals timing is relevant, history shows it is critical. Timing profoundly shaped Europe. In 1815 Napoleon was winning the Battle of Waterloo until his courier delivered his orders to the wrong person. The delay brought defeat and ended French domination. Then Europe's landscape changed again in the fall of 1941. Hitler's armies crushed the Russians. They prepared to capture Moscow, but rain began to fall. Russian roads became impassable. Then record cold descended upon the area. Lows plummeted to 40 and 50 below zero. German vehicles and equipment froze up and were abandoned. Soon the Germans were in full retreat. No human being could orchestrate what happened. Timing devastated a superior army.

Most everyone admits that timing is critical. What they don't understand is that it is not coincidental. Timing is not random or accidental. Maybe you and I don't choose the time of our lives, but that doesn't mean it was not chosen. On the contrary, our time was divinely chosen, and Christmas reveals that God is in charge. No matter what the world looks like, no matter who seems to be in power, no matter what evil prevails, God is still in charge. He's not pulling strings as if people are puppets or pawns. He's not stirring up storms, producing plagues, orchestrating accidents or inciting violence. Much of that, the Scripture suggests, are activities of God's enemies. Yet, wise Solomon wrote:

***How can we understand the road we travel? It is the LORD who directs our steps.*** (Proverbs 20:24, NLT)

King Solomon also wrote:

***You can make many plans, but the LORD's purpose will prevail.***  
(Proverbs 19:21, NLT)

How then is God in charge of timing? We can see it in the Christmas story. Do you suppose the timing seemed lousy to Mary when she had to explain her pregnancy to her fiancé? Do you suppose it troubled Joseph when Mary talked to him? Timing didn't improve when Mary in her ninth month traveled from Galilee to Bethlehem. Imagine their thoughts when there was no room in the inn! How about labor pains starting when they are resting in a stable? Was God misfiring? Was God in charge? If you think that God is in charge only when good things are happening, you can't be reading the Scriptures. There's more. Joseph and Mary could not exactly afford a baby. When Jesus was taken to temple after his mother completed her forty day period of purification, the Law prescribed that Joseph sacrifice a lamb to honor God and a pigeon to atone for their sins. If they were very poor, they could substitute another pigeon. Joseph and Mary gave

the offering of the poor. Have you ever heard it said, “They’re so poor; they have no business having kids?” I’ve heard that, and Joseph and Mary may have wondered about that. However, God was not misfiring. The hardships were not accidental.

When Joseph and Mary arrived at the court of the temple with forty-day-old Jesus to offer their pigeons, they bumped into Simeon. He was not there by accident. Luke writes, **“That day the Spirit led him to the temple”** (Luke 2:27, NLT). Simeon was there because he sought God with all his heart. Believing the scriptures, he expected God to fulfill his promises and influence his life. He watched for God’s hand and talked with God continually. I think tears filled his eyes as he held baby Jesus. His heart must have skipped as he said,

***Lord, now I can die in peace! As you promised me, I have seen the Savior you have given to all people. He is a light to reveal God to the nations, and he is the glory of your people Israel!*** (Luke 2:29-32, NLT)

Those words were meant for Joseph and Mary. They also were meant for Anna. Anna was 84 years old. She lost her husband when she was young. Instead of toiling in bitterness, she turned to God and gave him her whole heart. She never left the temple, even at night. She continually fasted and prayed, and often God spoke to her and would speak through her. She was a prophet. Hearing Simeon, her heart gushed with praise of God. She excitedly shared about Jesus with others. Mary and Joseph suffered from terrible timing, yet it is evident that God was in charge of it. God was doing something great in all their hardships. Except for the Magi who would soon arrive from the east, it would be another thirty years before people would get a glimpse of what Joseph and Mary heard and what Simeon and Anna saw.

Thanksgiving Day, my brother said to me, “I know we mourn and agonize when a baby is born with severe deformities and survives hours or days; but such a child is not a tragedy. He or she is a gift. If we realize what a gift we have, we can show that child our love and be truly thankful.” I pondered his words. It is hard to look at some deformities. They can be hideous. Deformities and disease are not from God, but children are. All children are. Deformities do not last. We receive new bodies through Christ. Each little life is not accidental, but chosen. Then I thought of many women who have suffered miscarriages. Was conception untimely or was it purposeful? God knew the child would not be born alive. Was not there a purpose for the conception? Is not there a divine plan for every child conceived? Won’t many parents meet their children in heaven? Isn’t conception a gift and privilege even if we suffer loss and pain? Doesn’t the Christmas story reveal that a good God still is in charge?

We use scientific nomenclature to distinguish one type of creature from another. Human beings are called *Homo sapiens*; yet a newspaper headline, such as *Disease kills three Homo sapiens*, would be inappropriate. Although entirely accurate, the headline would be impersonal and dehumanizing. The scientific term *fetus* describes any creature with a backbone – reptile, fish, or mammal – in a stage before its birth when all the adult features are recognizable. For human beings that is any time after 8 weeks from conception. Does using scientific terminology, calling people *Homo sapiens* and pre-born children *fetuses*, change their humanity, their spirituality or their sanctity? Words influence how we think, but they do not change the reality of what lives, dies and is given a new resurrected body. A lot of tears will turn to laughter.

No matter how dark the time is, Christmas reveals a great God in charge of timing. God is still in charge, doing amazing things. During the dark period when Jesus was born, two people, Simeon and Anna, were ready to embrace God's gift. They were ready to see what others could not. Their eyes were open to the God who is in charge of timing. Has Christmas opened your eyes yet? Despite the pain you've experienced, can you believe the timing is appropriate? Can you believe that God is doing great things despite your lack of vision and understanding, despite your tears and sadness? St. Paul wrote:

***We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.*** (Rom 8:28, NIV)

That truth surfaced at Christmas. It continued at the cross. Believe it, and watch it unfold.