

Sermon 1621

Luke 1.26-38

December 24, 2017

Just. Slow. Down.

Wouldn't it be great if you could? Wouldn't it be great if you had all kinds of time?

When you get right down to it, time is what we end up having the least of. We run out of time. We're short of time. We've lost time or at least lost track of time. The past 30 days from Thanksgiving bear witness to that. And we thought we had all kinds of time because Thanksgiving was so early this year!

I know I'm going to have a tough time selling you on this, but boy, oh, boy, am I glad it isn't my crazy idea. It's God's crazy idea, so you know even though it may sound a little bit crazy, God's as crazy like a fox.

Today we are

On the Doorsteps of Forever

1. A timeless messenger
2. A timeless message
3. A timeless kingdom

OK, before we get started, I realize I may be giving you a wrong idea right from the start. The Christmas story is not a fake story. It is not a fairy tale or a legend. You know, in a galaxy long ago and far away. The historical account of our Lord's birth is very much rooted in time. Caesar Augustus was the Roman emperor. Quirinius was the governor of the Roman province of Syria. And when the angel Gabriel comes to tell the Virgin Mary she is going to be the mother of the Savior, it is the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy. Mary's relative, who everybody thought would never have a child, for the past six months had been carrying the baby who would grow up to be John the Baptist. So I hope nobody goes away from church today thinking this is a fable. It is more authentic than today's newspaper, or as wiser heads call it, history's first draft.

We are on the doorsteps of forever because we have a timeless messenger.

“In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth (1).”

An angel. There is a timeless being if ever there was one. You can joke about being older than dirt, but every angel is only one day younger than dirt. God created dry ground on Day Three and he created the angels, along with all the heavenly bodies, sun, moon and stars, on Day Four. And there are no more of them coming into existence. They do not have baby angels. That's why Jesus said we would be like the angels when we get to heaven—we will stop having babies, too, because all the saved will already be in heaven. There will be no more need for families, husbands and wives to offer that special care and protection. God will care for us face to face. Everybody will love us as family.

So the angel Gabriel has been around almost forever. What does time mean when you are forever? And when you are forever, you get really good at doing your

job. On the doorsteps of forever we have a timeless messenger accurately and excellently delivering a timeless message.

“You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father, David (31-32).”

Jesus. Name above all names. He will be the Son of God, begotten of the Father from all eternity, and the Son of Man, according to his human nature, descended from King David who had gloriously ruled God’s Old Testament people a thousand years before.

God becomes man. I really don’t want to steal Pastor Kolander’s thunder for tonight, so I will just say this. Jesus became a human being. God took upon himself human flesh and blood. That is a timeless message. God is not for us, he is with us.

Think of all the charity pleas you’ve received this year, everything from the SPCA, the NRA, the ACLU, Wikipedia, the Salvation Army, Northeastern South Dakota State University. They all wanted you to donate money. Do something for these poor and oppressed people or animals. Send money. But the money never seems to be enough and next year, boom, there’s the hands out again. I suppose God could have worked that way. Every year he could send a parade of angels to show people the dangers of sin, demonstrate how to please God, even have some glitzy 40 day programs to a holier lifestyle or something like that. And it would have been pretty neat, watching an angel give a motivational spiel, perform a miracle or two, maybe even make the stale sandwiches for the on-site lunch break taste good. We would all be pleased that God was doing something for us.

But God had a better idea. No angel could take away our sins. No angel could teach us how to turn back time so Adam and Eve could have a do-over in the Garden of Eden. So God came to live with us. The Son of God came to be one of us and live the life God always wanted us to live. He didn’t lead by example, he lived as our replacement. So his holy life became, by faith in him, our holy life. Our deserved and accursed death (because of our sins) became his horrible death on the cross. And for the rest of the history of the world, Jesus will stand with us, his blood having washed us from our sins, his power guiding this world for the sake of us, his church on earth.

As long as we have sin (and we will surely sin much up to the day we die) we need this timeless message. The war to end all wars was a good slogan. Trickle-down economics may not be the voodoo some have claimed. Manifest Destiny is a great way to summarize a time in American history. But all those messages have their limits. They become time-worn, outdated, relics from another time. The message of Jesus, the Son of the Most High, our Savior, descended from David,

that's a timeless message for all people everywhere. Every time we hear that message we are on the doorstep of forever.

We are on the doorstep of forever when we look forward to a timeless kingdom.

“He will reign over the household of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end (33).”

Forever. Never end. Now you see it, don't you? As I have gone through life, the hardest part is saying goodbye to people. I look at the presentation list of poinsettias. I remember so many of those people. I was blessed to serve them. And maybe I actually did something that helped them keep their faith, encourage them not to give up on Jesus, came up with something for the Sunday sermon that didn't put them to sleep. I was blessed to greet them as visitors when mom and dad, grandpa and grandma, came out to Nevada for the holidays. I know the stories of a lot of them and benefited from their encouragement and leadership. It would be good to have them around. I remember the time our choir, 20 strong at the time, was singing our Spring Concert and I looked over them and wished that they could always be here. Harry and Pat, Janet and Jon. Nothing lasts forever. Things change. Being a pastor is more like being a college basketball coach. You have a very limited time together to get something accomplished. If you don't sense the urgency it's only because you don't have any sense. Every moment counts and time flies.

There is a place where time does not matter. There is a place where that choir will be together, never to scatter like December leaves down the street. There is a place where nothing will change, unless I suppose you want it to change, but then it won't be a change as much as a rearrangement. Nothing will change because everything will be perfect. Jesus will rule us forever. We will never have to get used to a new President, a new boss, a new pastor (because I am not timeless, at least not in this world). Jesus will rule us forever. The happiness he is able to grant will never be reversed.

Jesus' kingdom will last forever. It will never end. It will be timeless. And you and I are that kingdom. The Kingdom of God is his gracious rule of forgiveness of sins, life and salvation through faith over his believers. So when this world ends and all the believers are in heaven, that's where the Kingdom of God will be. That's where we will be. And that's where we will be for all time. We will live forever. We will be with each other forever. We will have all kinds of time, all the time in the world, to lavish on each other, spend it with God, poke our noses into this or that fascinating feature of the world to come. Oh, and did I mention, you girls will have that timeless beauty of youth, fresh as the morning dew? And did I mention you guys will have the timeless strength of youth, renewed like an eagle? Just wait and see. I won't even be obnoxious in heaven and tell you “I told you so.” Heaven will be so perfect it won't even occur to me to say that, I will get such a kick out of hanging around with you all.

Since this is what we are looking for, what sort of people should we be? We've still got the time to make that choice, to make that decision as to whether we will let our fears trap us and our cares annoy. Or will we show a heavenly grace to know there is always time for the other things if you take the time for the things that matter, to listen to the Lord's acts of love towards us and to show love and kindness to those God has put into our lives?

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Nothing is impossible with God. May it be to you and to me as our Lord Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, may it be to you and to me as our Lord Jesus Christ has promised.