

God's Timing

(sermon for December 18, 2011 – Advent Sunday 4)

By Dr. David R. Mains

Text: Genesis 18:9-15, Romans 9:8-9, Esther 4:14b.

Subject: God's timing (He knows when it is right).

Desired Response: Be sensitive to.

How To: Take the first steps.

How Long: (40-day fasting and prayer continues.)

Sermon in a Sentence: God's people need to be extremely sensitive regarding times of His "coming to them."

When the two-minute warning is given in football, players and fans alike know that the dynamics of the game change. It's as if all in the stadium assume a higher level of intensity. Everyone is aware of what's at stake, and how much time is left, even to the second. Athletes and spectators are totally focused, giving what's going on their full attention.

I use my opening illustration to make the point that all timing is not the same, and especially is this the case when understanding God's timing.

You see, the timing of the Lord doesn't always coincide with ours. As a spiritual illustration, consider Sarah, the wife of Abraham in the Old Testament. With a husband who is nearly 100, and Sarah is not that far behind age-wise, it's understandable that she laughed about what she overheard. This is Genesis 18:9-15...

"Where is your wife Sarah?" they asked him.

"There, in the tent," he said.

Then the LORD said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son."

Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. Abraham and Sarah were already old and well advanced in years, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?"

Then the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' Is anything too hard for God? I will return to you at the appointed time next year, and Sarah will have a son."

Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, "I did not laugh."

But he said, "Yes, you did laugh."

And sure enough, this old lady gets pregnant, then gives birth, and the aged father and mother name their son Isaac, which means "he laughs" or "laughing boy."

Timing-wise, here is Romans 9:8 and 9:

It is the children of promise who are regarded as Abraham's offspring. For this is how the promise was stated: "At the appointed time I will return, and Sarah will have a son."

Resaid, "This is all going to be by My timing, not yours!"

The feel is similar in the story of Esther. You recall the words of Mordecai to the queen, "*Who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?*"

Rephrased... "I know this is a development that's outside of what you had in mind when God made you queen. But maybe the Lord is behind all that's happening. And if that's the case, be careful. You don't want to mess up God's incredible timing!"

Let's look at a third woman. This will be the youngest of the three—Sarah, Esther and now Mary. I'm reading from Galatians 4:4.

"But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman..."

When did God do this? When He Himself had determined that the time was right, "*when his time had fully come*"!

God's people need to be highly sensitive to His timing. You don't want to be somewhere else in your head if God's saying, "I want this to happen now!"

On a personal basis, you need to respond to God when He calls, not when you snap your finger, expecting Him to jump. The shepherd calls the sheep. The sheep don't whistle for the shepherd. Understand?

One of the truly tragic passages in the Bible is this one in Luke 19. You'll recognize these verses being at the end of our Lord's triumphal entry into Jerusalem. Luke 19:37-44...

When he came near the place where the road goes down the Mount of Olives, the whole crowd of disciples began joyfully to praise God in loud voices for all the miracles they had seen:

"Blessed is the king who comes in the name of the Lord!"

"Peace in heaven and glory in the highest!"

Some of the Pharisees in the crowd said to Jesus, "Teacher, rebuke your disciples!"

"I tell you," he replied, "if they keep quiet, the stones will cry out."

As he approached Jerusalem and saw the city, he wept over it and said, "If you, even you, had only known on this day what would bring you peace—but now it is hidden from your eyes. The days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment against you and

encircle you here and hem you in on every side. They will dash you to the ground, you and the children within your walls. They will not leave one stone on another, because you did not recognize the time of God's coming to you."

What an explosive accusation. "You didn't recognize the time of God's coming to you."

What a sad statement this is as well, and it was said by our Lord through tears.

This had been true for the most part regarding the entirety of Jesus' life. People didn't recognize that this was the time God had come to their world in the flesh.

"When the time had fully come, God sent his Son..."

All time is not the same.

This is Sunday 4 of Advent. Advent is about the coming of the Lord—His First Coming, and also His future Second Coming.

It's appropriate that we be reminded of these two huge events. Be aware, however, that these are not the only times God has made His presence known. Scripture, including the story of the nation Israel, is filled with such occasions.

So is the story of America!

Every day is not the same. I'm telling you there have been seasons when God has drawn especially close to us as a people. In the Colonial American period, the Great Awakening is an example. The huge revivals that marked the churches during the opening years of the 1800s is another. These came when we were just getting established as a nation. Skipping other examples—consider the national prayer revival that swept the country during 1857 and '58. I specifically refer to those years because since that time we haven't experienced such a glorious time of God's presence. That's over 150 years ago.

Let me read to you from a book called *America's Great Revivals* about what was happening in 1857-58:

In Chicago, where 2,000 people showed up for prayer in the Metropolitan Theatre, a newspaper commented: "So far as the effects of the present religious movement are concerned, they are apparent to all. They are to be seen in every walk of life, to be felt in every phase of society. The merchant, the farmer, the mechanic—all who have been within their influence—have been invited to better things; to a more orderly and honest way of life."

And everywhere, it was a revival of prayer. There was no hysteria, no unusual disturbances.

Just prayer.

Revivalist Charles Finney, still alive at the time, said, "There is such a general confidence in the prevalence of prayer, that the people very extensively seemed to prefer meeting for prayer to meeting for preaching. The general impression seemed to be, 'We have had instruction until we are hardened; it is time for us to pray.'"

In a church in the Midwest twenty-five women got together once a week to pray for their unconverted husbands. The pastor traveled to the Fulton Street meeting [that's in New York, where the prayer movement began] to testify that on the Sunday he had left, the last of the twenty-five husbands had been received into the church.

At the very first union prayer meeting held in Kalamazoo, Michigan, someone put in this request: "A praying wife requests the prayers of this meeting for her unconverted husband, that he may be converted and made an humble disciple of the Lord Jesus."

At once a stout, burly man arose and said, "I am that man. I have a pious, praying wife, and this request must be for me. I want you to pray for me."

As soon as he sat down, another man got up and said, "I am that man. I have a praying wife. She prays for me. I am sure I am that man, and I want you to pray for me."

Three, four or five more arose and said, "We want you to pray for us too." That started a revival that brought at least 500 conversions.

Here are the kind of stories we should be hearing more about in our day. The truth is, I sense God calling His people throughout America today to humble themselves in fasting, prayer and crying out for the Lord to show Himself strong against the forces of evil that are all but destroying this once-great nation.

In my mind, here's the question of great importance that needs to be asked: Is this one of those "at the appointed time" moments? If it is, nothing else is really all that important. Whether there's an NBA season isn't. Neither is how the stock market is doing. Forget worrying about what movie wins the Oscar for Best Picture, or who's going to be the Republican candidate for President. The critical question is whether God's people who are called by His name will humble themselves and pray, seek His face and turn from their wicked ways. If God is the one who has initiated the present call to prayer, the response of the church to His divine invitation is of paramount importance.

So, is this another "for such a time as this" piece to fit into place? Maybe our minds are off somewhere else, fixated on something not nearly as important? What if we don't catch the intensity of this divine priority? Maybe we just carelessly figure other options are more appealing. Let's face it, meeting for prayer can't begin to compare to watching hockey or NASCAR racing! Eating out, with all its incredible options, makes fasting sound like we're reverting to the 1920s. For that matter, even the word "revival" needs some serious updating. The mental picture it conveys to many is not all that attractive.

But then what if this truly is another God moment? How tragic to miss it if *now* is when "his time has fully come" once again for these United States. When it's God's time to do something truly special, He always calls His people to prayer. Old Dr. A. T. Pierson once said, "There's

never been a revival but by such united supplicatory praying, and no revival has ever continued beyond the continuation of that same praying.”

Fit that quote into what I have been preaching these past Sundays, and here’s how it sounds. There wouldn’t have been a marvelous movement of the Holy Spirit in a country like Egypt had there not been the united prayers of the Egyptian believers to kick it off, and the revival won’t continue very long once the prayer meetings stop.

Transfer countries, and it comes out like this. The frequent prayers of our Egyptian brothers and sisters in Christ won’t be enough to bring about a powerful moving of the Holy Spirit in this country. That’s going to require the prayers of American believers. And if, praise God, those prayers materialize, the subsequent powerful movings of God’s Spirit will only be sustained for as long as the prayer and fasting continues.

I have a concern that this nation doesn’t have all that many “his time has fully come” moments left. Do you agree?

“Come on, preacher, it’s almost Christmas. My house is filled with chocolate and nuts and cookies and ham and cheeses and spiced cider plus gift baskets I haven’t even opened yet. Your timing couldn’t be worse.”

I think I mentioned earlier that the timing of the Lord doesn’t often coincide with ours.

I sense that the timing of our Lord’s Second Coming won’t seem like it was all that good a choice in the minds of many people.

More specifically, I really don’t want this generation of American believers to ever hear their Lord say something like, “You didn’t recognize the time of God’s coming to you!”

God’s people need to be extremely sensitive regarding times of His “coming to them.”

“What if I get involved like you want. I pray. I even attend one or two of the corporate prayer times. Say I go so far as to fast, and all this turns out to be a big bust! (*laughing*) No moving of God’s Spirit, no revival ... no nothing!”

Then the LORD said to Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Will I really have a child, now that I am old?’ Is anything too hard for God?”

Mordecai’s words to the queen, “*Who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this.*”

Sarah, Ruth ... Mary.

“But when the time had fully come, God sent his Son, born of a woman...”

Next Sunday we will celebrate that miracle birth!