

# I Believe Even When God's Time Has Come

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Good morning and Happy New Year. Scriptures today are from Isaiah chapter 61 verses 10 through 62 verse 3 and Luke chapter 2 verses 22 through 40.

I delight greatly in the Lord. My soul rejoices in my God. For he has clothed me with garments of salvation and arrayed me in a robe of his righteousness.

As a bridegroom adorns his head like a priest and a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the soil makes the sprout come up and a garden causes seeds to grow, so the sovereign Lord will make righteousness and praise spring up before all nations.

For Zion's sake I will not keep silent. For Jerusalem's sake I will not remain quiet. Till her vindication shines out like the dawn.

Her salvation like a blazing torch. The nations will see your vindication and all kings your glory. You will be called by a new name that the mouth of the Lord will bestow.

[ 1 : 1 3 ] You will be a crown of splendor in the Lord's hand, a royal diadem in the hand of your God. Now from Luke chapter 22 verses 22 through 40.

When the time came for the purification rites required by the law of Moses, Joseph and Mary took him to Jerusalem to present him to the Lord, as it is written in the law of the Lord.

Every firstborn male is to be consecrated to the Lord. And to offer a sacrifice in keeping with what is said in the law of the Lord, a pair of doves or two young pigeons.

Now there was a man in Jerusalem called Simeon, who was righteous and devout. He was waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was on him. It had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not die before he had seen the Lord's Messiah.

Moved by the Spirit, he went into the temple courts, and the parents brought in the child Jesus to do for him what the custom of the law required. Simeon took him in his arms and praised God, saying, Sovereign Lord, as you have promised, you may now dismiss your servant in peace.

[ 2 : 2 7 ] For my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the sight of all nations, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and the glory of your people Israel.

The child's father and mother marveled at what was said about him. Then Simeon blessed them and said to Mary, his mother, This child is destined to cause the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be spoken against, so that the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed, and a sword will pierce your own soul too.

There was also a prophet, Anna, the daughter of Phanul, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old. She had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, and then was a widow until she was 84.

She never left the temple, but worshipped night and day, fasting and praying. Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.

When Joseph and Mary had done everything required by the law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their own town of Nazareth, and the child grew and became strong.

[ 3 : 41 ] He was filled with wisdom, and the grace of God was on him. This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. So would you pray with me?

Loving God, we are grateful for this moment, grateful for the ways in which you have touched each of us already this morning. With our hearts open, we have felt your spirit moving among us, and we are glad and grateful.

And Lord, would you continue to bless us, pour into each of us afresh, give us what you know we need, plant the seed in each of us that will grow and bear fruit for the honor and glory of your name.

Through Jesus Christ, our Lord, we pray. Amen. Amen. So, it's New Year's Eve, and we are sitting here in the last day of 2023, and Christmas is in the rearview mirror.

All the presents opened, all the cookies eaten, maybe not for some of us. But all that being said, so it was already Monday, and here we sit on a Sunday.

[ 4 : 55 ] How's your Christmas spirit holding up? It's a funny thing, this thing we call Christmas spirit, right? Because I want us to be in this place where we're thinking about the idea of, okay, so we went through all of this to get ready for Christmas.

And then December 25th came, and now here it is, December 31st. And have we simply just shifted into the next gear? Everybody's got their champagne flutes out and sparklers and is ready for midnight tonight?

What happened to that Christmas thing? I mean, decorations are clearly still up. Some of us are still in the 12 days of Christmas mode. Right?

I mean, I know in my neighborhood, though, there are plenty of trees by the curb already, which I just don't quite get, but people do what feels good to them. The reason why I'm asking that is, as I said, we spent all this time in preparation.

That's what Advent means. It's the season of preparation. And we prepared, and we prepared, and we worked, and we got all this stuff ready. And then Christmas came.

[ 6 : 11 ] So, did it do what it was supposed to do? That's where we want to sit for a minute today.

Because we want to talk about this idea of Christmas, not only on the physical and cultural level, but also on the spiritual level. Because what we're reading today reminds us of a really important lesson, especially as we wrap up this idea of believing even when.

Because what we see today is a phenomenon that happens too often to many of us. Whether we want to speak it out loud or not, it's this idea of working, preparing, and then the high moment comes and hits.

And either it passes so quickly that we miss its importance. Or, it doesn't meet our expectations. And we kind of have this disappointment or let down after it because it didn't do somehow what we think it was supposed to do.

And that happens to some folks at Christmas. Right? I mean, folks go through all the shopping and ordering.

[ 7 : 38 ] People start ordering gifts in August. Right? People have these lists and they start addressing their cards at the beginning of November. People start wrapping things and baking things and preparing and all of this.

That's preparation, right? The work. So much work. We talked about those lists and all of it goes into it. People spend countless hours, it feels, doing all the things.

And then we get to Christmas Day and the wrapping paper is torn or at least it is in my house. Some folks do that neat stuff. I don't know how that works.

But anyway, gifts all opened, cookies all eaten, everybody's enjoyed the dinner and it's December 26th and December 27th and December 28th.

And then people start to go, okay, so, you know, we heard people talking about it this morning. And so there'll be 259 days till next Christmas.

[ 8 : 47 ] Is that it for you? See, this lets us in on the phenomenon that we want to make sure we don't miss as we leave this series.

As we talk about believing even when. We talked about believing when it's hard. We talk about believing as you prepare. But we have to believe even when God's time comes.

That you don't miss God's moment. Right? And that's where I'm hoping you are today. That you're looking for the God moment in all of this for you.

Because we had the cultural moment. We had the family moment. We had the social moment. I certainly hope you did. I've even asked quite a few of you about how was your Christmas. And everybody was saying, great, it was excellent, et cetera, et cetera.

And I'm really glad for that. But let's talk about the God part. As we consider what God is doing in our lives, you hear me use language pretty regularly during this season where I say, Christ born anew in us.

[ 10 : 01 ] Christ coming to us in a fresh way. I'm hoping you get what that means. This idea of a movement of God in your life.

That God reveals something to you. Maybe it's a next step. Maybe it's a solution to a problem. Or maybe it's a call to serve in a new way. But that's not bound by a date.

That doesn't have to happen on the morning of December 25th. And it also should be something you should be preparing for and looking for with at least as much energy and effort as you put into addressing your cards and baking cookies, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

Because if that's not what's happening, then that's why all of a sudden we hit December 26th and we're kind of like, well, on to the next thing.

Because Christmas is about more than all of that. Now we say that and I know we understand it on a certain level. But do we really live it as disciples?

[ 11 : 16 ] Do we go seeking and searching for the Christ child in our lives? See, we see examples of what we're talking about in the stories Bill read for us this morning.

Because it's really interesting to think about this story, right? Because it opens with Joseph and Mary doing the dutiful things that Jewish people would do in the first century.

Two relatively young, completely anonymous to everyone else people. They wrap up their newborn son and they head for the temple in Jerusalem.

And they go through the purification rites. Mary would need to do that because she had just given birth. Joseph would probably have to do it because he was probably the only one there to help her. There were other pieces that they had to worry about in order to be right according to the law and their church rules.

And that's what we hear is happening. So think of it this way. They get up and go to church. This is about a week afterward. Now, let's just set the context a little bit because let's remember Joseph and Mary know the story.

[ 12 : 41 ] They know who Jesus is. We're not going to forget that. They know who Jesus is. Now, here's the question that I kind of turn over in my brain, right?

Because this is Jesus, but he's also a two-day-old newborn. So a two-day-old newborn is going to do two-day-old newborn things. Those of us who've dealt with two-day-old newborns know what that means, right?

So they're doing those new-parent things. And so that happens one day, two days, three days, four days.

And I'm wondering how long it took in Joseph and Mary's mind before they kind of came down off of that angelic choir thing and mysterious shepherds showing up and telling them how wonderful it all was and Mary pondering things in her heart to, it's your turn.

Go get him. Because this is a newborn, right? But think of that kind of akin to we had this high moment and now we're kind of back to everyday life and the practicalities of things.

[ 13 : 58 ] And it's easy to kind of miss or to let it fade into the background just how miraculous this thing is. So they head off to the temple.

Now, let's park that there. There's this guy named Simeon. And we don't know a whole lot about Simeon, but we presume he was kind of old. And we hear in the scripture that he had been told by God that he would not die until he saw the Lord's Messiah.

Now, we don't know how often Simeon went to the temple. We don't know if Simeon had a job. We don't know what was going on with him. But we do know that this particular morning the Holy Spirit says to Simeon, go to the temple.

And he goes. And he gets to the temple. And I want you to imagine this because there's hundreds of people. Okay? It's not like he showed up and there was like five people there.

The temple was a huge and complex operation. There were always crowds. So one man wandering through the temple.

[ 15 : 20 ] And all of a sudden he sees two people with a baby. And God puts it on him. That's the one.

Now you can assume that there would have been multiple people with babies at the temple that day. So this had to be a God thing to say that's the one.

And with God moving in him, he says, what you heard read. He pours out this song of praise. And he speaks blessing over the newborn Jesus.

And he speaks some things to Mary and Joseph. Things that they need to hear because Jesus is not neat and clean. I mean, one, he's a newborn at this point.

But what his ministry will do will not be neat and clean either. We all know that. Jesus himself tells us that. We tend to put it in this nice, neat place.

[ 16 : 21 ] But don't forget, Jesus was a problem for a lot of people. And Jesus is a problem for us, whether we want to admit it or not, because Jesus wants us to do things we don't want to do. Jesus asks us to do stuff that's hard to do.

Jesus wants to leave some things and says, come over here and do these other things. And we don't want to do that. That's a problem. And Jesus himself says, I will be that problem in your world.

That doesn't mean I don't love you. That doesn't mean I didn't die for you. But I'm going to be that problem. And that's when we don't like Jesus so much.

And Simeon's trying to prep them. He preps Mary specifically, saying a sword will cleave your heart as well. Let's remember what happens to Mary.

She has to watch that whole thing go down. Now, with all that in mind, one of the things that really spoke to me in this story was the idea that Joseph and Mary marvel at what is being said about Jesus.

[ 17 : 41 ] Right? It says that the baby's mother and father marveled at what was said about him. Now, that to me says they had fallen into that it's Tuesday trap.

Right? That this is a eight-day-old baby doing eight-day-old baby things and that sort of wonder and mystery had kind of faded into the background.

And here comes God saying, don't forget who this is. And he reminds them of what's going on in their world.

Friends, I want you to hear that about your own journey. See, because the thing about Simeon and the thing about Joseph and Mary is the idea of there were these days that were the ordinary days.

these days where it wasn't some big heavenly revelation. We don't know how long Simeon had to wait. It could have been a month before he got that promise.

[ 18 : 49 ] It could have been a year. It could have been ten years. We have no idea how long he was waiting on that promise. But he knew he had been promised. How long would it take you?

Because, say God dropped this revelation in your life. You will not die until you see my Messiah. And then, a week passes.

Two weeks pass. A month. Three months. Six months. How long until you start to let go of that promise?

right? Waiting and preparing. You see, build up to the big moment.

If you're not on top of it, if you're not going to hold on, what happens when that voice comes on that random Wednesday that says, go to the temple?

[ 19 : 52 ] Friends, this is the point of saying, if you're searching, if you're seeking, if you've got a problem of some kind, some crisis in your soul, some question you're hoping God will answer, some desire you're hoping God will fulfill, are you actively waiting and preparing for a God that actually shows up in your world?

because if you are not, if you've let it go and just gone back to regular life and the days start to blend together and you're on to the next thing already and then all of a sudden go to the temple and you start looking at your phone and go, wait a minute, I got all this other stuff to do or you're distracted by all these other things that are happening around you or you've decided that, well, God must be done talking to me so I don't know what that was and you will miss Christ coming to you in a new way which is ultimately the point.

if you hope that will happen, if that is the desire in your heart, then you have to be actively looking and listening for God.

You have to keep preparing and seeking God. It has to be a priority. It can't just be something we talk about once in a while.

It can't be something that you think of randomly. That it has to be purposeful. And it will get hard. Because, as we said, when those days start to run together and it feels like it's just been too long and if you're like me and not a patient person, that's really when this goes sideways, that doesn't mean God won't show up.

[ 22 : 14 ] It just means you're not prepared. It just means maybe you missed the moment. And that brings us back to this idea of can you believe even when?

Will you choose to believe when it's boring? Because that's the hard one. Most of us can believe when we're in a low moment.

When something really bad has happened. We got that diagnosis. We've lost someone in our lives. There's some crisis or something like that. Most folks go running to God in those moments. So that's really less of a challenge.

And of course, we celebrate God in the high moments because that's what they are. They're the high moments. So it's not hard to be conscious of God in the high moments. But when it's everyday routine and it's just flat and the days start to run together, that's when it's easy to forget.

That's when it's hard to hang on. But we know that God moves whenever and however God chooses to move. God's ways, God's times are not our own.

[ 23 : 38 ] And so, if on that random Wednesday God says, go to the temple, will you be ready? Can you believe even then?

That's our challenge. then you have to be ready for what happens in the moment. Because when God shows up, God rarely just leaves things nice and neat.

We know that. God turns over tables. God disrupts. God blows stuff up. And usually we're not ready for that part.

when God does something dramatic. And when God says, I know you had planned to go over here, but you're going over here instead.

Did you hear that piece in Isaiah? Because that tends to roll past us a little bit. Isaiah's speaking to a group of people who are being redeemed after the exile.

[ 24 : 41 ] And what he wants them to hear is this. Is now that God has moved, now that you have been redeemed, now that you have seen the hand of God, you can't be silent.

I have to speak out for what God has done for me. I have to let the world know, I have to bear witness, because God has done this great thing.

That will take courage. that will take real faith. Because we love it if God would just show up and do it in a nice, quiet, tame way.

That's rarely how God moves. And like Simeon, and like Anna, who had been there waiting, had been there hoping, had been there looking forward to the day, and here it comes, and they didn't let the moment pass.

They had to cry out. Because God had kept God's promise. God had shown up in their lives just like God said he would. What will you do?

[ 25 : 55 ] Will you just take? Will you decide that, wait a minute, I didn't realize it was going to require that, God. God. Can you believe even then?

Can you believe that the God who did show up, just as you asked God to show up, is not about to drop you because he said, here's what I need from you.

That's the hard part. Friends, when we look at the ways in which Christmas tends to unfold, this thing we've turned it into.

I love the traditions of Christmas just as much as everybody. And it was great to have my family in, even though I got this cold from them. And we had a great time.

We did all the things we do. And it was beautiful. And it was blessed. And I thank God for the moment. As much as I value and treasure all of that, don't miss the God part.

[ 27 : 15 ] Because this thing, this idea of Jesus coming to you in a new way, is something we should not simply ignore.

Remember, Jesus is not just some speed bump or some other box on your Christmas list. Christ. This whole thing is about Jesus.

Everything springs from what God has done in Jesus Christ. And if that's just some sidebar in how you do this, you have missed the point.

Look for that. That part of your soul that is hurting. That part of your soul that is confused. That part of your soul that is just flat bored.

Are you looking for God to move in your life? Are you prepared for God to move in your life?

[ 28 : 20 ] Because that is the difference that most of us hope will get made. And that, friends, will require believing. we have to believe when God shows up.

Otherwise, we might miss the moment. Amen and amen. Almighty God, we thank you for being the God who shows up.

For being the God who keeps promises. God, it would be easier if you fit into our nice, neat little boxes. promises. That you did things exactly the way we hope they will work out.

But you are God. The almighty sovereign creator of all things. And Lord, we, your people, love you.

But we need to love in ways that will trust you when you do things we do not expect. That when you choose to save us instead of condemn us.

[ 29 : 28 ] When you love us in spite of our weaknesses and sins. When you hold us up and encourage us when we are afraid to move forward.

Lord God, let us hold on to the fact that you are who you said you would be. That only by coming this way, even though it didn't make sense to the world, and sometimes it doesn't make sense to us.

You've shown us what love looks like. You've shown us your very heart and nature. Let us lean into that. Let us trust that.

No matter what it looks like in our lives, come to us in a new way. Be born in us again. Amen.

Indeed, we have a story to tell. I hope your life bears witness to the power of a God that moves in your life. A God that makes a difference and a God that shows up.

[ 30 : 35 ] People don't need empty promises or false hope. They are looking to people who can testify that my God is God and my God makes a difference for me and for you.

As you go into the world this week, look for these opportunities to live your faith. We're starting our new Bible study, as you heard me say, during the prayer time. We still have some opportunities to sign up for our small group ministry that's coming, those next step small groups, opportunities to learn more about the Bible, discerning your spiritual gifts and call, as well as how to deepen and strengthen your prayer life.

If you're interested in any of those topics, please make sure we get your name before you leave. You can also ask me more questions about it if you need more information. Also, there are multiple meetings, coming up, different ministries kicking up back after the holiday.

All that's in your bulletin. You can use the digital version if you're with us online. But of course, there are several things discussed already in the paper one as well. So all that being said, let's receive our benediction.

We wait for justice. peace. We wait for restored health. We wait for wholeness.

[ 31 : 51 ] We wait for peace. peace. And so, friends, like bells ringing out the news that we believe that good will prevail, fill the night left by sadness with light.

Go into your lives humming the tunes that keep goodness alive in you and that spur you on in your ongoing work of justice and reconciliation. Like those whose stories we celebrate, we lift our voices in praise.

Praise to you God. God is moving among us. God is not at all us. We will not be afraid. We will raise our voices to bear witness to the light that has come to teach in our hearts and the whole world.

Amen. Now, in the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, go to live and be loved for God and all God's children. Amen.