

# A Matter of Timing

Sermon text: 1 Samuel 26:8-11

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## **I. Christmas anticipation**

A few years ago someone gave me this great tie as a Christmas gift. It illustrates the whole "Twelve Days of Christmas" song, so every year during the Advent season I make sure to wear it. When I was a kid I was fascinated by the song and the whole idea of gift-giving throughout a twelve day period at Christmas. Well, to be more accurate, when I was a kid I was fascinated by the whole idea of receiving gifts every day for twelve days around Christmas.

However, my preferred gift list would have been different than the gifts in the song. I wouldn't have had much use for all those birds since my family lived in a three bedroom, two bath house on a quarter acre lot in the northwest suburbs of Chicago – the seven swans a swimming, six geese a laying, four calling birds, three French hens, two turtle doves, and a partridge in a pear tree – they would have been a nuisance in my neighborhood. But I was still interested in getting gifts over a twelve day period at Christmas.

Now my sister, Linda, she's a couple of years younger than me and her whole approach to gifts at Christmas was different than mine. I kind of liked the anticipation – the whole countdown to Christmas Day. I enjoyed seeing wrapped gifts appear under the tree and watching my mom close the door to her room, knowing that she was working on wrapping more presents in there. For me, the unknown added to the excitement, but not for Linda. She couldn't stand not knowing, so she became very skilled at secretly opening her presents when no one was looking and re-wrapping them so you could hardly tell she had done it. Waiting for all that time for Christmas to come was just not something she could do.

On this second Sunday of Advent, we're going to talk about time and waiting and hope and how it relates to the story of David. If you've been here in recent weeks, then you know that Pastor Joe has been leading us through a study of the life of David and how God chose him and blessed him and protected him in a variety of different situations. It was through David's line that the Lord's Messiah would eventually come. And we've been drawing lessons from God's activity in David's life that we can apply in our own lives. Today we

continue that study.

## **II. David's example and God's timing**

A few minutes ago we read a portion of 1 Samuel 26 and I wanted to fill in some of the rest of the story. It happened at a time when there was a huge rivalry between Saul, the king of Israel, and David – the shepherd turned warrior whom God's prophet, Samuel, had anointed as the one to be king after Saul.

In the first few verses of 1 Samuel 26 we are told that some Israelites from an area called Ziph came to Saul and told him that his rival David was hiding out on a particular hill in the desert wilderness there. So Saul gathered a military force of 3000 men and marched down to the wilderness of Ziph to find David and kill him. But David and his men were on the lookout and found out that Saul and his army had arrived. At night, when Saul and his soldiers were sound asleep, David took one of his men and snuck into Saul's camp. In fact, they snuck right up to where Saul was sleeping and saw the king's spear stuck in the ground next to him. That's where we picked up the story this morning.

Abishai, the warrior who accompanied David into Saul's camp, saw the situation and interpreted it as God delivering David's enemy Saul into David's hand. Abishai wanted to grab the king's own spear and run him through with it, pinning him to the ground and killing him. It was an understandable suggestion. I mean, Saul and his 3000 men were there for the express purpose of finding David and killing him, so why shouldn't David allow Abishai to make a preemptive strike against the king?

But David restrained Abishai. He wouldn't allow his warrior to take Saul's life, even though it was there for the taking. Why was that? Why didn't David allow Abishai to get rid of his rival once and for all? Samuel had already anointed him as the next king of Israel. Running Saul through with his own spear would just speed up the timetable a little bit. Besides, maybe Abishai had a point (do you like that pun?) – maybe having Saul sound asleep on the ground in front of them was God's way of expediting the transition.

Let's look again at David's response to Abishai from our text: "Do not destroy him; for who can raise his hand against the Lord's anointed, and be guiltless? As the Lord lives, the Lord will strike him down; or his day will come to die; or he will go down in battle and perish. The Lord forbid that I should raise my hand against the Lord's anointed..." And instead of killing Saul, David had Abishai take the king's spear with them as they left camp.

Here's the thing that is so impressive to me about this text: David was willing to wait on God's timing for the Lord's plan to unfold. God alone would decide the span of Saul's life – whether he would die of illness, or old age, or in battle. The timing was the Lord's and David was prepared to wait. Perhaps that's one of the reasons the scriptures call David "a man after God's own heart." He lived with hope and expectation, confident in God's timing.

### **III. Living hopefully**

Perhaps that's also why, hundreds of years later during dark days for the nation of Judah, the prophet Isaiah would remind them to wait on the Lord's timing for Messiah to come, for the promised one from the line of King David, the son of Jesse:

**A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots. The spirit of the Lord shall rest on him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord. His delight shall be in the fear of the Lord.**

**He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide by what his ears hear; but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt around his waist, and faithfulness the belt around his loins.**

**The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie down with the kid, the calf and the lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them. The cow and the bear shall graze, their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like an ox. The nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put its hand on the adder's den. They will not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain; for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea.**

**On that day the root of Jesse shall stand as a signal to the peoples; the nations shall inquire of him, and his dwelling shall be glorious.**

Do you hear how the theme of God's timing runs through this familiar messianic prophecy? Isaiah proclaims a coming truth that is not yet real for the people of Judah. But a shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse – in God's time. The

Lord's Messiah shall judge with righteousness and justice, even if the people of Judah can't yet experience it. The lion and the lamb will lie down together – even if today their relationship is of predator and prey.

Throughout Isaiah's words, there is hope, there is expectation, there is a call to wait on God's timing especially when life is difficult. That's an important message that David modeled for us in our text this morning. Perhaps it's a message some of us need to hear this Advent season – if we are facing difficult times in life. When our loved one is dealing with a major health issue and we want more than anything for complete healing to be the outcome, waiting can be such a hard thing to do. When pressures from our finances feel like they are more than we can bear and our greatest hope is for God to work a monetary miracle for us, waiting can be the last thing we want to do. When brokenness in a significant relationship seems to be tearing our world apart and we want the Lord to make it clear to the other person how deeply we've been hurt, waiting to heal from that kind of hurt can seem like it will never come.

Remember, David didn't know how it was going to turn out when he restrained Abishai, yet he waited for God's timing. In Isaiah's day the people of Judah wondered why God didn't intervene right away, but the prophet spoke to them of better days ahead – in the Lord's timing. Advent is a season of preparation. It is a season of waiting – waiting on God's timing whatever our situation may be – waiting with hope, waiting with expectation, waiting on the Lord.

That's what I'm doing. You may already know that in 2000 I lost most of the sight in my right eye because the retina detached repeatedly. I had six different surgeries that year. They managed to save my eye, but they could not restore normal sight for me. A couple of years later, some dear friends of ours, who walk as closely with the Lord as anyone I know, prayed for me. In that prayer time, they shared that they believed God wanted to restore my vision. That prayer time was ten years ago and I'm still waiting. But I'm waiting with hope. I'm waiting with expectation. I'm waiting on the Lord. How about you?