

God's Perfect Timing – the Events of Holy Week

Maybe you've heard the saying, "Timing is everything." If you've ever tried to hit a baseball or bake the perfect cake, then you know how important timing can be. If you swing your bat too early or too late, you'll miss the ball. And if you leave your cake in the oven too long or not long enough, it may come out either too dry or still raw batter! Getting the timing right isn't easy.

That's why it's good to know that God's timing is always perfect. We can trust that whatever God sets out to do, He does at exactly the right moment. Galatians 4:4, a verse we often read at Christmas, tells us this about the timing of Jesus' birth in Bethlehem: "But **when the fullness of time had come**, God sent forth his Son, born of woman, born under the law." Jesus's whole earthly life, starting with His birth, was perfectly timed to accomplish His Father's purpose.

Jesus was very aware of God's timing during the three years that he traveled from village to village teaching and performing miraculous signs. Mark and Luke both tell us that after some of His miracles, Jesus strictly told people to keep His works a secret (see Mark 3:12; 5:43; 8:30; Luke 8:56; 9:21). Jesus knew it wasn't yet time to "go public" with the news that the Messiah had come (John 7:1-8). But when the time was right, Jesus took action; He headed for Jerusalem (Luke 13:31-33) for what we call "Holy Week" or "Passion Week."

The Triumphal Entry (Matthew 21:1-11) – You probably know the story of Palm Sunday and the parade that welcomed Jesus as He entered Jerusalem. Many people in the city had heard of Jesus raising Lazarus from the dead. They were convinced that Jesus was the promised Messiah, and they were excited to see how this "Son of David" would come and set their country free from the Romans who ruled over them. However, Jesus wasn't leading an army on a war horse; He entered Jerusalem on a donkey to show His humility. Jesus knew that the crowd's expectations for Him were all wrong. He knew that the celebration upset the Jewish rulers and made them hate Him all the more. But He also knew that it was all part of God's plan.

The Cleansing of the Temple (Mark 11:15-19) – The temple was a busy place, especially at Passover time when people traveled from all over to celebrate in Jerusalem. Travelers needed to buy animals to sacrifice for the holiday, so merchants set up shop in the temple area. It must have looked like a giant flea market. Jesus saw all the commotion, but He also saw into the hearts of the people there. He knew that not all the merchants were honest. He knew many of them were turning a time of worship into an opportunity to cheat people and make a quick dollar. In righteous anger, Jesus overturned their tables and chased them away. The Jewish leaders should have understood that Jesus was defending God's holiness, but instead they were furious that Jesus was upsetting the system and stirring up trouble. The crowds were amazed at Jesus; He had become a true celebrity. Jesus knew that neither the leaders nor the people really understood why He had come, but He also knew that everything was happening according to God's perfect timing and plan.

The Passover meal (Luke 22:7-23) – At Passover, Jewish people celebrated what God had done for Israel in setting them free from slavery in Egypt hundreds of years before. While sharing the meal of the Passover lamb with His disciples, Jesus told them that He would soon be betrayed and killed. The disciples didn't understand then, but they would later see that what happened to Jesus during the Passover celebration revealed the true meaning of Passover: Jesus would become the Lamb of God that set His people free from slavery to sin. God's perfect timing is easy to see in Jesus's last Passover with His disciples.

Gethsemane (Mark 14:32-52) – After the Passover meal, Jesus led his disciples to a quiet garden so that He could pray. While they were there, Judas showed up with some soldiers who arrested Jesus. In fear for their

lives, the other disciples abandoned Jesus and ran away. Jesus's betrayal happened exactly as He had said it would because it was all part of God's timing.

Jesus's Trial and Condemnation (Matthew 27:11-23) – The Jewish leaders were determined to kill Jesus, but under Roman law, they couldn't do it themselves. They had to convince the Roman governor, Pilate, to condemn Jesus. Pilate knew that Jesus hadn't done anything wrong and that the Jewish leaders were just jealous of Him. But when Pilate offered to release Jesus, the crowd demanded that he release a man named Barabbas instead. That may seem strange since the crowd had been welcoming Jesus as the Messiah just a few days before. Perhaps the crowd had decided that Jesus wasn't the Messiah after all when He failed to do what *they thought* the Messiah should do. In any case, Pilate didn't want any trouble from the crowd, so he gave them what they wanted, and Jesus was sent to be crucified.

We'll think more about Jesus's death and resurrection next week. But if you can, think about what it must have been like for Jesus's disciples the morning after their Passover meal when they found out that Jesus was going to die. They must have been very confused by the events of Holy Week. How could Jesus have been the hero on Sunday and condemned to die on Friday? Maybe they should have prevented Jesus from entering Jerusalem in the first place. Or maybe they had been wrong about Jesus all along. Thankfully, they would later see, as we can see now, that God was in control of everything that happened that week. God was working the events to bring about His perfect plan. Romans 5:6 is a glorious reminder that God is always in control and that His timing is always perfect: "For while we were still weak, **at the right time Christ died** for the ungodly." Let's praise God for the perfect timing of His wonderful plan of salvation!

Hymn of Praise – "In Christ Alone"

"In Christ Alone" by Stuart Townend and Keith Getty contains the whole gospel: the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It expresses the confidence every Christian should have in God's sovereignty over all things and His promise to keep His people secure in faith. In writing about this hymn, Barbara and David Leeman relate the testimony of an American soldier serving in Iraq who prayed through this hymn daily and found that it helped to sustain him through the terrors of living in a war zone.

In Christ Alone

In Christ alone my hope is found;
He is my light, my strength, my song;
This cornerstone, this solid ground,
Firm through the fiercest drought and storm.
What heights of love, what depths of peace,
When fears are stilled, when strivings cease!
My comforter, my all in all—Here in the love of Christ I stand.

In Christ alone, Who took on flesh,
Fullness of God in helpless Babe!
This gift of love and righteousness,
Scorned by the ones He came to save.
Till on that cross as Jesus died, The wrath of God was satisfied;

For ev'ry sin on Him was laid— Here in the death of Christ I live.

There in the ground His body lay,
Light of the world by darkness slain;
Then bursting forth in glorious day,
Up from the grave He rose again!
And as He stands in victory, Sin's curse has lost its grip on me;
For I am His and He is mine—
Bought with the precious blood of Christ.

No guilt in life, no fear in death—
This is the pow'r of Christ in me;
From life's first cry to final breath,
Jesus commands my destiny.
No pow'r of hell, no scheme of man,
Can ever pluck me from His hand;
Till He returns or calls me home—
Here in the pow'r of Christ I'll stand.