

Another Chance

(preached New Year's Day 2023)

TIME TRAVEL STORIES. MY OWN—SANTA. I've always liked time travel stories and movies and, at one point, even wrote one myself. In my story a suicidal man is rescued by Santa Claus who brings him to the North Pole and shows him there's a lot more going on behind the scenes. I know this sounds silly, but track with me here. Santa eventually reveals himself to be an angelic being whose working for Jesus, and that a fallen angelic being named Old Nick (one of the devil's nicknames) is occupying the South Pole and working for the devil.

OLD NICK. In an effort to destroy Christmas, the Church, and the New Covenant Old Nick has a time travel machine and is going to go back to the birth of Jesus and attempt to kill Him as a baby. Santa has his own time machine and is going to send the MC back to stop the attempt.

REPRESENT ANOTHER CHANCE. So let's pause and see the draw of time travel stories and movies: *they represent another chance*. In the case of my story, the devil realizes he's been beat by Jesus Who preached the Gospel, healed the sick, and cast out demons as an adult. Satan realizes he has no hope because Jesus went to the Cross, shed His blood, and then rose from the dead on the 3rd day. Lucifer's head is being crush by Jesus' heel because the Lord ascended to Heaven to pray for us, and is coming back soon for His Bride.

ALTAR COURSE? MC FAILS. Thus my story seems to give the devil a chance to alter his own course and that of humanity where he'll come out on top. Now we all know there's no chance of that happening and actually, in a grand fight scene, the MC of my story FAILS to stop Old Nick from entering the place where baby Jesus lies in a manger. Why? *Because he's still navigating through dependency on the Lord vs. himself.*

INCAPACITATE HIM FACE DOWN. When he first tries to prevent a gang of thugs from harming supposedly helpless baby Jesus, my MC is relying upon his own fighting skills and drive to redeem himself...but its not enough. Some of the thugs incapacitate him while the rest head into the stables to do the deed....

CLIFFHANGER. Hold onto this cliffhanger, because I'll return to it later on in this sermon.

DÉJÀ VU—DENZEL. In 2006 Denzel Washington stars in a time travel movie called "Déjà vu" where he's able to travel back in time to stop a terrorist bombing and everyone lives happily ever after.

BAD CHOICES? How many us have made bad choices in the past? Choices that affected us long term, maybe even a lifetime? If we had a time travel machine, we would have the chance to go back and make a better choice.

VICTIMIZED? How many of us were victimized in some way in the past? Wouldn't it be great to go back as we are now and stop that victimization?

KILL HITLER? What if we could go back and kill Hitler before he rose to power? How might that change things?

I believe the draw of time travel stories and movies are exactly this: *they represent an opportunity to make a different choice and/or to stop something bad which then affects both our “present” and future for the better.*

REALITY SETS IN. Yet even after a victorious TT movie like Back to the Future or Déjà vu, reality sets in, doesn't it? We heave a sigh and cynically say “you can't change the past.” We feel we must accept the current timeline and are stuck in whatever choices we made, or things that happened to us.

While it's true that we don't have a time travel DeLorean to step into, we have something greater: Christ Jesus.

TIME CHRONOLOGICAL FOR US. You and I live in physical bodies made of the dust of this earth and are therefore subject to time and space. Time moves chronologically with a past, present, and future, and there's nothing we can do about that. It's bigger than us, it surrounds us, and we are subject to it.

LORD NOT SUBJECT. Yet the Lord is not. He invented time and not the other way around. As the inventor, He is not trapped within it like we—the invented—are. He's not caught up in past, present, or future. He's not limited to only the here and now like us.

- When we're in covenant with Christ He frees our spirits from the prison of time.
- When we're in relationship with Jesus He has the power to cleanse our past, restore our present, and provide for our future.
- When we're one with Christ, time is no longer a god who controls us and determines our destiny.
- **Jesus is our God, He decides, and we follow Him.**

Jonah was given another chance. He was called to go and prophesy to Nineveh, yet he ran in the opposite direction. The Lord gave him the opportunity to make the right choice and no time travel machine was required. Full disclosure—he only took advantage of God's grace when he was inside the belly of the whale...*but sometimes we need to be in a dark, smelly place like that to realize the goodness of God.*

Samson was given another chance. Started out great, performing acts of strength and valor that would make Hercules envious. Even though he was warned about not divulging his secret he told Delilah everything, and got a head shave. He woke up powerless and the Philistines were merciless because Sam had killed a lot of them. They gouged out his eyes and made him a slave. Samson's response was to ask the Lord for another chance, despite his screw up.

GIVEN ANOTHER CHANCE. God gave it to him. Despite these horrible circumstances, the Lord grew his hair back which meant super strength ... and Samson literally brought the house down upon the Philistines. He actually overcame more of the enemy with this last act than he had for his entire life.

Proverbs 24:16 (NKJV)

¹⁶ For a righteous *man* may fall seven times And rise again, But the wicked shall fall by calamity.

What that verse starts out saying is that we all mess up.

Sometimes we make bad choices that have lifelong results. Other times someone victimizes us, leaving us scarred for life. Sometimes we fail to act when we should, and the results are horrible.

WE WILL FALL DOWN. Look at the verse again: if you know Jesus as your Savior you and I **will** fall down because we live in a fallen world where the devil reigns.

- You and I will mess up because we still live in a fallen body that wants the things of this world and not God.
- You and I will still find ourselves tripping and falling flat on our faces because the work that God is doing in our hearts is not yet complete.

But we will get up again!

BACK TO CLIFFHANGER. Time to resolve the cliffhanger for the story I wrote. In the last episode, our protagonist fought valiantly to save baby Jesus but was overcome. Pinned facedown on the ground by Old Nick's thugs, the rest of them head into the stables to finish their terrible mission. ***At that moment, a time of feeling like the biggest failure in the world and knowing that he doesn't have the power to stop what's happening, my MC cries out to God....***

It's deeper than that, really. He doesn't just cry out to God to save baby Jesus, **but to save himself**...not a physical deliverance from being held down, **but to save his soul**. To be forgiven and reconciled to God for the things he's done. At the same time he cries out to Father

to save baby Jesus, he's also *pleading for mercy and grace for himself for having failed at...everything.*
Just like Jonah and Samson, God gives him another chance.

HOLD THAT THOUGHT....

MIGHTY MEN. A Jewish person in the time of Jesus, raised in the synagogue, would have been regaled with Biblical stories of what the Lord called "Mighty Men." The MM of God were warriors filled by the Spirit of God to perform supernatural acts of valor, strength, endurance, and fighting that went way behind any natural human capability.

DAVID HAD 3. King David had 3 of them and, in one battle, they would kill up to 800 men singlehandedly. No guns here, we're talking a sword! They also killed giants who were far bigger and stronger than them.

MC BECOMES MIGHTY MAN. So when my MC cries out to God, he becomes one of God's MM and takes out all the thugs. He's so effective that Mary and Joseph don't even notice, the Drummer Boy keeps playing undisturbed, and baby Jesus doesn't wake up from his nap.

With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.

As long as we're breathing and the Holy Spirit lives inside of us, we have another chance.

PEOPLE CUT US OFF. Make no mistake: other human beings may have cut our chances off as far as they're concerned. Boss man or lady fires us from work and says don't ever come back. A spouse or SO says they're done with us and that it's over. A friend or family member unfriends and blocks us, refusing to answer any calls or texts and takes back their invitation to Christmas dinner.

Yet who knows what God will do?

- Even to someone who says they're done with us.
- Even within us toward someone we've cut off.

Who knows what outcome God can make happen?

- Maybe we've made past choices that have marked us for life.
- Maybe we've ate, drank, or smoked too much of something that's affected our health.
- Perhaps our neglect of something or someone has had terrible consequences.
- Maybe one or all these things has happened and we often find ourselves in a dark place.

- Perhaps Satan's minions have us pinned to the ground, face down.
- Maybe we feel like we've been thrown overboard into the sea and swallowed up by a whale.
- We might feel as though someone we trusted cut our hair and then sold us out to our enemies, who treated us like dirt and gouged our eyes out.

When we know the Lord as our Savior, we have another chance. No time travel machine needed.

DOESN'T CHANGE PAST. The Lord doesn't take us back in time to CHANGE what happened or didn't. The car accident, the divorce, the abuse, getting fired, whatever. Those events remain on the timeline.

What God can and wants to change are the RESULTS of those things in our hearts, minds, and sometimes even our bodies.

Philippians 1:6 (ESV)

⁶ And I am sure of this, that he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.

The time of completion is in our future, at the Resurrection, so let's focus on right now—*the verse says God IS working.*

WORSHIP SONG. We love to sing the song, don't we? "Even when I don't/feel that You're working, You never stop, You never stop working!"

God doesn't tread water. He doesn't get to a point in a project where He hits a wall and stops. When God works, it's always moving forward toward completion.

YOU are moving forward toward completion because He is moving you!

Just like Jonah, Samson, and the MC in my Santa story, you are partnering with Jesus on the project known as you.

Jesus isn't trying to make me more like me and He isn't trying to make you more like you.

He's making us more like HIM.

Colossians 3:10 (ESV)

¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

The Lord is relentless, and He will NEVER stop working on you and I.

As long as He's doing this, we have another chance.

NEW YEAR ISN'T A GOD. Now that we've transitioned into the new year, people are making all manner of declarations and not just resolutions. They view a year like they do time: a god-like force that determines their destiny. Hence comments like "I hope 2023 treats me better than 2022." Stop praying to the New Year or even a year after it ages a bit. It's not a god. It doesn't have a will. It's unable to either bless or curse. It can't bring us anything, either good or bad. It's just like an idol—it has no power or ability to change your destiny.

Let's be more like Jonah who, after making a really stupid choice to disobey God, ends up getting tossed overboard and swallowed by a whale. In that dark, smelly, and horrible place he fell on face and cried out to God.

Jonah 2:1-9 (ESV)

¹ Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the belly of the fish,

² saying, "I called out to the LORD, out of my distress, and he answered me; out of the belly of Sheol I cried, and you heard my voice.

³ For you cast me into the deep, into the heart of the seas, and the flood surrounded me; all your waves and your billows passed over me.

⁴ Then I said, 'I am driven away from your sight; yet I shall again look upon your holy temple.'

⁵ The waters closed in over me to take my life; the deep surrounded me; weeds were wrapped about my head

⁶ at the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the pit, O LORD my God.

⁷ When my life was fainting away, I remembered the LORD, and my prayer came to you, into your holy temple.

⁸ Those who pay regard to vain idols forsake their hope of steadfast love.

⁹ But I with the voice of thanksgiving will sacrifice to you; what I have vowed I will pay. Salvation belongs to the LORD!"

GETS TO NINEVEH. Right after this, the whale spits Jonah up onto the beach...at Nineveh. He had another chance to obey the Lord and follow his will, and he took it.

Even though Samson lost all his hair, his strength, his wife, his freedom, and his eyes God wasn't done with him. The Lord didn't cast him aside and say "you failed so now its over!" When Samson called out to Him, the Lord responded.

The Prophet Jeremiah pulled out all the stops to warn God's people about the coming Babylonian invasion. He told the politicians and people of the time that, if they would repent, God would relent. They didn't listen and everything happened just as the Lord prophesied through Jeremiah.

BABYLON CRUSHES THEM. Babylon wiped the floor with them, destroyed Jerusalem and the Temple, and whoever they didn't kill were enslaved. The entire Book of Lamentations is Jeremiah bawling his eyes out after the fact. Imagine a post-apocalyptic devastation of the place and people you love the most—that's what Jeremiah was seeing when he wrote Lamentations.

BUT GOD.... Yet look what he records even in the middle of his heart crushing grief:

Lamentations 3:21-26 (ESV)

²¹ But this I call to mind, and therefore I have hope:

²² The steadfast love of the LORD never ceases; his mercies never come to an end;

²³ they are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

²⁴ "The LORD is my portion," says my soul, "therefore I will hope in him."

²⁵ The LORD is good to those who wait for him, to the soul who seeks him.

²⁶ It is good that one should wait quietly for the salvation of the LORD.

In other words ***this isn't the end all, be all.*** The death and slavery of God's people isn't the last chapter of the story God has written for them. The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple—which represents God breaking covenant with His people—isn't the conclusion.

DESERVED IT. Why not? The people had GREATLY sinned to get to this point. I'm reading through Jeremiah's book again, so all this is fresh in my mind. It was bad. Both Israel and Judah had abandoned the Lord and gone after everything and everyone else. Corruption among both the politicians and people were at an all time high. Morals were in the sewer because everyone from the top to the bottom were ignoring the Lord and His ways.

LOTS OF CHANCES. They had lots of time AND chances to repent. God warned them abundantly through Jeremiah telling them of two possible "futures" depending on their response to Him. They ignored Jeremiah and ignored the Lord. They listened to other false prophets who told them what they wanted to hear. In other words, they deserved everything that ended up happening to them.

GIVES ANOTHER CHANCE! Yet even through all of that, even though Babylon did invade, and even in the post-apocalyptic aftermath...the Lord said “I’ll still give them another chance. Even now.”

PROPHECIES RESTORATION. Before ANYTHING happened, the Lord is telling everyone what’s going to happen. Even though He warns of the coming invasion, He also says things like this:

Jeremiah 50:33-34 (ESV)

³³ “Thus says the LORD of hosts: The people of Israel are oppressed, and the people of Judah with them. All who took them captive have held them fast; they refuse to let them go.

³⁴ Their Redeemer is strong; the LORD of hosts is his name. He will surely plead their cause, that he may give rest to the earth, but unrest to the inhabitants of Babylon.

STILL DEFENSE & AVENGER. In other words, even though the Lord is allowing the invasion as a result of the people turning away from Him...He’s also going to be both their Defense Lawyer and their Avenging Savior. Not only will He punish Babylon for what they’re about to do, but He’ll free His people from their grasp and regather them in the nation of Israel. He’ll reconcile with them, restore covenant with them, which will result in rebuilding the temple and city of Jerusalem.

In other words, He’s already worked in another chance with the invading army of Babylon on the way....

We’re under a better covenant than they were, church. Jesus hadn’t come in the days of Jeremiah. No cross, no shedding of blood, no resurrection, no ascension.

We have all that and more. Do you need another chance? I sure do. Do you want one more opportunity to make something right? To be healed from something bad that happened to you? To restore a neglect or undo something that happened?

God is outside of time and with Him inside of us, we always have another chance.

