

Series: **Christmas 2022**  
Today's Title: **"Connecting the Dots of History"**  
January 1, 2023 – *Selected passages*

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**Objective:** To help people realize how important God's presence is and to be comforted in God's desire to be with us.

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### ***Opening prayer***

New Year's Day.

The Beginning of another year.

365 days lay ahead of us.

We can look in the rearview mirror at the 365 days of the past year.

What was your year like?

Do you count it a good year?

A bad year?

A mixed bag?

I assume most might check the 'mixed bag' category.

For Kim and me – our year was a mixed bag of blessings – and of difficulty.

- Jessica & Ben's wedding in December 2021.
- Kim's father – Lew Backer – passed away on January 23, 2022.
- We took a trip to Ireland with our in-laws and good friends – Charlie & Cindy Cajero in February 2022.
- Brian & Gianna were married on March 18, 2022.
- May 2022 - Jess graduated from NAU with her B.S. in Nursing – R.N.

- In July Brian & Gianna shared the good news that Gianna was pregnant – and a few weeks later, at 11 weeks in the pregnancy, she lost the baby.
- In August we spent a week with Brian & Gianna – and our in-laws Joe & Tracy Gagliano, at their home on Lake Travis, just outside of Austin, Texas.
- Nov. 5 – on our way to skydive with Brian – Kim and I were in a car accident. My car was totaled, and we were blessed by God to walk away with only minor injuries.
- My dad started radiation treatments for cancer – and after some delays due to infection and COVID, he finished his treatment the Tuesday before Thanksgiving (11/22?).
- Jessica had surgery to remove a cyst on Nov. 28 – the Monday after Thanksgiving. All went well...until it didn't. She developed complications – needed emergency surgery at 4 a.m. the next morning due to a large amount of internal bleeding. We praise God she is OK – and she is recovering.

Like I said – our year was a mixed bag of good and bad experiences.

I just listed the personal stuff for you.

I didn't touch all of the ministry highlights and challenges from this past year (next week – Annual Report).

If you were able to go back and catalog each year in your life – and list the various events and experiences of that year – you would probably find a mixed bag also.

After considering this year after year recap of life - one might become a little cynical.

- *What is the point of it all?*
- *Why bother with life if this is all there is?*
- *Like the writer of Ecclesiastes says, “nothing new under the sun.”*

What about the years where the bad outweighs the good?

How do we cope with those dark and difficult times in our life?

Not every year can be heavier on the ‘good’ side.

As we stand on the starting line of a New Year, I thought it would be helpful to answer that question:

***What is the point of it all?***

Granted, there is more than 1 answer to that question.

If we dug deep, we would discover God has a different emphasis or ‘point’ for the different phases of our life.

- He has a specific point for our growing up years.
- He has a different specific point for our young adult years.
- A different point for our parenting years.
- A different point for our empty nest years.
- A different point for our retirement years.

Etc.

Although there are certainly some common threads during these different life stages, there are differences.

**But I want us to go to a higher altitude today – and what is the point of history?**

**What is God doing – where is He ‘going’?**

*I believe* knowing the main point is helpful for us.

*I believe* when we know the main point – it will help us navigate through the years of our life.

*It will help us use the good* events and blessings of life to be a blessing to others.

*It will help us use the bad* and painful events and experiences to empathize with others and to remind us that what lies ahead will be worth it!

*I believe* God has revealed Himself in Scripture – in the Bible.

*I believe* He has revealed truths about Himself – and ourselves – that are important for us to know.

When we take a step back and consider the big movements of God throughout history – we can see what the point of it all is!

To see this, we will “**Connect the Dots of History**” by connecting 6 ‘movements’ of God in history.

6 events in history that help us see what the whole point of history is.

## 1. Creation.

We start where the Bible starts.

**Genesis 1:1**

“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”

There are some theological and philosophical questions we could ask – and most of them start with the word, ‘Why?’.

I believe the answer to those questions is this:

**Because He wanted to.**

**Colossians 1:16**

“...all things were created through Him and for Him.”

**Revelation 4:11**

“Worthy are you, our Lord and God...for You created all things, and by Your will they existed and were created.”

God created “for Him” – “by Your will”.

He didn’t have to create the world – or us – but He did – because He wanted to.

When we dive into the creation account, the text seems to indicate that God would spend time with Adam and Eve.

In **Genesis 3** we read:

**Genesis 3:8-9**

And they heard the sound of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day...”

Before sin entered humanity, it seems a regular pattern was God spending time with Adam and Eve in the garden.

God does not have a body – so the sound of Him “walking in the garden in the cool of the day” was a visible manifestation for the benefit of the man and woman. The text gives the idea that this was common.

Here's the takeaway from creation:

### **God dwelling with man/woman**

Part of God's joy – in creation – was simply being with His creation.

This may seem like a simple thing – too simple to even take note of.

But this idea – God spending time with Man – The Creator spending time with the Creatures – is unique to Christianity.

All other religions have a view of God that is transcendent – far above all things and has no interest in getting entangled in the affairs of people.

But, in the opening chapters of the Bible – we see a picture of God dwelling with Man.

## **2. The tragedy of the Fall.**

We could make this point very lengthy.

After all, there are many tragedies as a result of the Fall.

But for our purpose today, I'm going to focus on 1 tragedy – what I believe is the primary tragedy.

First, let me define 'The Fall'.

Unless you've been raised in the church and have truly studied the Bible / theology – you probably don't know what 'The Fall' is.

**Defined:** 'The Fall' is when sin entered the human race and the human race 'fell' from its sinless state. Adam and Eve rebelled against God by disobeying what God told them not to do.

Sin – 'The Fall' – brought death into the world – it polluted the entire human race because all came from Adam and Eve.

But the most profound effect / penalty / consequence of 'The Fall' is that we were separated from God.

We could no longer be in the presence of God.

We read in **Genesis 3:23-24**

“So, the LORD God banished them (Adam & Eve) from the Garden of Eden...After sending them out, the LORD God stationed mighty cherubim to the east of the Garden of Eden. And He placed a flaming sword that flashed back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.”

If God's presence was experienced in the garden – 'The Fall' made it impossible for man to be with God – to be in the presence of God.

**Habakkuk 1:3**

“But You are pure and cannot stand the sight of evil.”

So, when ‘The Fall’ occurred, it marked a point in human history which broke the fellowship we had with our Creator.

He could no longer be in our presence like before the Fall.

This was a problem – that needed to be resolved.

It was a problem with us – which made it impossible to be resolved by us.

This problem needed to be resolved by something / someone outside of ourselves.

### **3. Israel / the Law.**

The initial and temporary solution to the problem of sin was in God choosing Abraham – and His descendants to be His Chosen People.

God chose Abraham not because Abraham was more worthy than anyone else in His day – but simply by His grace.

God chose Abraham – who lived in an idol-worshipping polytheistic culture – to follow Him – 1 God – the true God.

Abraham obeyed God – leaving everything He knew – to follow God’s leading.



Abraham – the Father of what would become the Jewish people – the nation of Israel – was called by God for a specific purpose of God.

**Genesis 12:2**

“I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing.”

*Through Abraham’s descendants – the Jewish people – God’s desire was to show the nations of the world what it looked like to worship Him – the 1 true God.*

*Israel was to be an example to the nations of what could be theirs – if they did what Israel did.*

God’s plan for this long-version ‘show-and-tell’ would take centuries to unfold – but there would be enough for each generation to see Israel’s worship of God – and God’s blessing of Israel – to provoke the nations to follow Israel’s example.

Part of God’s plan was to give Israel the Law of Moses. Commands of God that gave Israel instructions of how to live privately, in civic governing, and in religious practices and truth.

Many centuries later, the Apostle Paul would write that the ‘Law of Moses’ was given to be a tutor – a “guardian” which would point us to a greater truth – a greater law – the Law of Christ – of Messiah (Galatians 3:24).

The ‘Law of Moses’ was designed to be a stepping-stone – a step ladder – to something more – something greater.

For many years in the Old Testament era – we see 2 ways that God dwelt with His people – where His presence was seen or experienced.

### **1. The pillar of cloud and fire (The Exodus and Wilderness years)**

Perhaps the most dramatic expression / manifestation of God’s presence with Israel was during the Exodus from Egypt – and the 40 years of wandering in the Wilderness.

We read in **Exodus 13:21-22**

“And the LORD went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to lead them along the way, and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light, that they might travel by day and by night. The pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night did not depart from before the people.”

These vivid displays of God’s presence were an encouragement to the young nation – they were a guide for them to follow – and at times they were a source of protection shielding them from enemies. There were other manifestations of God’s presence – on Mt. Sinai during the giving of the 10 commandments – and when Moses would go into Tent of Meeting or later the Tabernacle, he would

meet with God – and the pillar of cloud would settle on the place of meeting.

**Exodus 33:9-10**

“When Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the LORD would speak with Moses.

10 And when all the people saw the pillar of cloud standing at the entrance of the tent, all the people would rise up and worship, each at his tent door.”

This was the presence of God – but His presence was limited – only Moses would truly experience God’s presence.

The sin of the nation – both generally as part of the human race – but specifically their sin or rebellion at Mt. Sinai – led to them seeing the presence of God – but they couldn’t experience God’s presence – at least not like Moses.

## **2. Ark of the Covenant**

The Ark of the Covenant was a rectangle box about 4 ½ feet long – and about 2 ½ to 3 feet high.

It was overlaid with gold and the lid – referred to as the Mercy Seat had 2 cherubim (angels) on top – facing each other.

Inside the Ark, God told Moses to put the tablets of the Law – the 10 commandments – God gave to Moses on Mt. Sinai.

Also in the Ark was a pot of Manna – the food God provided the nation during the wilderness years – and the rod / staff of Aaron – who was the priest over the nation.

The Ark of the Covenant would be carried – in a very specific way – when the people moved their camp to a new location.

The Ark was central to the worship and sacrifices of ancient Judaism.

God’s presence would be manifest over the Ark – above the Mercy Seat (lid) and between the 2 Cherubim.

**Exodus 25:21-22**

“And you shall put the mercy seat on the top of the ark, and in the ark you shall put the testimony that I shall give you.  
22 There I will meet with you, and from above the mercy seat, from between the two cherubim that are on the ark of the testimony, I will speak with you about all that I will give you in commandment for the people of Israel.”

The presence of God above the Ark of the Covenant was very limited.

It wasn’t for the people to see – but only for the High Priest – or Moses.

(<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/ark-covenant-and-gods-presence-us>)

(<https://www.biblestudytools.com/bible-stories/ark-of-the-covenant.html>)

God's presence was manifest in this special way above the Ark – but the Ark itself was a symbol and a reminder to the people of God's presence among them.

The sin of the people limited how God's presence would be experienced.

But everyone in the nation of Israel should have known that God was over all the earth – and He was with them in a special and unique way.

His presence was not manifest with other nations in this way.

Only with the nation of Israel.

#### **4. Christmas / Incarnation.**

About 1,500 years after Moses, we come to the time of Christ.

The 1<sup>st</sup> century.

Christmas is a celebration of the birth of Jesus – the long-awaited Messiah – the Christ.

The birth of Jesus - God taking on flesh – marked another major movement of God in history.

When Jesus was born, God's plan of redemption – the plan of salvation – took a sonic leap forward towards the culminating work of salvation which started with the birth of Jesus and led straight to the cross.

For 1,500 years the presence of God was symbolic – and rare – only experienced by a handful of people.

With the 1<sup>st</sup> advent – 1<sup>st</sup> coming of Jesus – the presence of God was now seen by the entire nation of Israel.

One of the reasons Jesus was born was to reveal God to us.

Jesus – being fully God – and fully man – meant that in Jesus the presence of God was with us.

**Matthew 1:23**

“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel” (which means, God with us).”

**John 1:14**

“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us...”

The birth of Jesus – the incarnation – meant that God’s presence was experienced by every single person who saw Jesus – who heard Him teaching on the hillsides - in the synagogues – or on the shore of the Sea of Galilee. Jesus was truly “God with us”.

But there was a whole world – outside of Israel – that never saw or heard Jesus – and as a result, they never experienced the presence of God – through Jesus.

*But God had a plan for that.*

How would He follow Jesus’ presence on earth?

How would the rest of the world get a taste of His presence?

Movement #5: The Church.

## 5. Pentecost / The Church Age.

The Church does not replace Israel.

There is yet a future for the nation of Israel in fulfillment of all the promises God made to Abraham and his descendants.

But due to Israel's disobedience and failure to be a light and example to the nations, God is now using the Church – followers of Christ – to shine a light in the darkness and to demonstrate the presence of God to the world.

The primary way God is doing this is through the Indwelling of the His Spirit – of God Himself in each believer.

**Matthew 28:20**

“And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age.”

**John 14:16-18**

16 “And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, to be with you forever,

17 even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him. You know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you.

18 “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.”

The Church is the manifestation of God in the world.

We are the Body of Christ.

What we do and say – the witness we put forth – our unity – or disunity – will send a message to the unbelieving world about the reality of God.

The Holy Spirit's presence in our worship.

Our love for one another.

Our love for those in the world.

Our choices / attitudes – our lifestyle – our obedience to God's Word – is an example (good or bad) to the world.

**Hebrews 13:5b**

"...for He has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you."

The greatest manifestation of God's presence – in all of human history – is in us – through us.

The Church.

## 6. The Eternal State.

We could say this is the final destination.

The end game.

The eternal state is what all of history is leading to.

The eternal state is what God is working toward as He sovereignly moves and guides nations and people toward the end He has decreed.

There are many amazing things we read about in Scripture of the eternal state, but one of the revelations in the Bible is there will be a new Heaven and Earth.



In a sense, Eden will be restored!!!

As it all began – God will bring all creation back to its original state – but even better!

**Most importantly – all who enter the eternal state will experience the undiluted presence of God forever.**

**Revelation 21:3-4**

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God.

He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

As amazing as the New Jerusalem will be – and the new earth and heavens which will be liberated from the ravages and darkness of sin – none of it will be greater than soaking every moment of eternity in the presence of God.

His presence will be a light – and night / darkness will be no more (Revelation 21:22-26).

The whole point of human history.

The whole point of the work of God throughout history.

The whole point of your struggles and joys – of your life – is to get back to how it all began.

The presence of God walking with Man.

**Only in the eternal state – it will be even better than the 1<sup>st</sup> time!!!**

The presence of God.

No sin.

No fear.

No sorrow or tears.

No sickness or death.

No war – only peace.

The presence of God.

**Revelation 21:3**

“Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God.”

***Apply it...***

If this doesn't bring you joy – and give you hope for the future:

A. You don't know who God is.

B. You haven't been forgiven of your sins.

The Bible is clear: Those who don't believe in Jesus – those who have not put their faith in Jesus as their Savior – will not enter the eternal state.

**Who enters?** All those who do believe in Jesus – those whose name is found written in the Lamb's Book of Life (Rev. 21:7).

“But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.”

There is so much we can apply from these truths today, but here are 3 things as we stand at the starting line of the New Year.

1. Christian – be encouraged and confident about your future.
2. Christian – your lifestyle – your obedience to God’s Word is a 24-7 witness of God’s presence to the world.
3. non-Christian – your eternal destiny hangs in the balance.

The Bible is clear:

**Revelation 20:15**

“And anyone whose name was not found recorded in the Book of Life was thrown into the lake of fire.”

You can change your destiny by putting your faith in Jesus.

**Admit** your sin – and need for a Savior.

**Believe** in Jesus as the only Savior – who gave His life to pay the price for your sins.

**Commit** to giving your life to Christ – to living for Him – to be a light to the world.

Start 2023 – with the full knowledge and confidence – that your eternity will be in the presence of God – who loves you – gave Himself for you – so He could dwell with you...forever...which is the point of it all!

*Close in prayer*