

400 Year Christmas Eve

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- [0 : 0 0] One that every parent, I'm sure, recognizes and realizes. How many sleeps till Christmas? Dude, that was fast.
- That was fast. And your kids are out of the house, too. So, all right. What is the longest day of the year?
- 21st of June, right? Right? If you're a veteran of World War II, you would say June 6th, 1944.
- But technically, we understand that it is June 21st. What is the longest day of winter?
- September what? No. No. It's Christmas Eve. Come on. Right? Any parent knows that their children just can't wait for this super extra long day to come to an end.
- [1 : 0 8] So we can get to Christmas. I want to give you guys some personal strategies on how to deal with this. All right? I can't say this is entirely scriptural at this point.
- But there's a couple of strategies that you might want to try to help you end this extra long day and night.
- One, strategies to put your kids to bed early, right? I've got friends that will actually turn the clock ahead of time to fool them, to think them, just so that they'll go to bed, hoping that they go to sleep and finally do it.
- The other trick to do is just simply ignore all traditions and open up your gifts Christmas Eve, right? Anybody do that? Anybody do that? Okay.
- You know you have just given your children a very bad habit, right? Chances are they're struggling with credit card debt right now. Right? They just can't wait. They've got to jump in there early.
- [2 : 1 0] I'm guessing that there's all sorts of different types of anticipation for Christmas Day.
- For some of your children, it's the gifts that they're getting. They've made out that list. They've put it out by where you have your morning coffee or they attach it to the fridge or they might even send you a letter, right?
- I don't know. Different kids do different things. It might be a doll, a video game, a new TV, or even that diamond necklace that they want. They're going to put it together for you.
- Now, some of your children are actually more excited about the gifts that they're going to give you, right? You know those kids, right? They're just wondering if Daddy is really going to like what they made for them, and they're really excited about this.
- For others, Christmas is a time of excitement because they know their cousins are coming over. I recognize there's a couple of grandparents that are here today. You know there's going to be a little bit more family around the table, and the children are looking forward to this.
- [3 : 1 7] What's important is for us to temper the expectations, right? Temper the expectations. Sometimes our expectations are realistic.

Sometimes they're not so realistic. This can lead to either disappointment or excitement for the next day. Personally, I'm still waiting for that first edition Lego Millennium Falcon to be under my Christmas tree.

It didn't happen in 1977, and it still hasn't happened in 2018. You know, so you have all these type of worries, right? Did I get my list right? Do I really want that?

Is my wife really going to like the earrings that I got her? And maybe every wife wonders, I hope my husband likes the color of the ugly sweater I bought him. Now imagine for a moment if Christmas Eve just wasn't 24 hours.

Remember or imagine if Christmas Eve was 400 years. 400 years.

[4 : 36] Now I think we get the understanding of what the number 400 is. But do we get the concept of 400 years?

To put the concept of 400 years into perspectives, 400 years ago the pilgrims were just arriving at a place called Plymouth Rock.

The British, French, and Dutch actually ruled the world. Believe it or not, Portugal was a world power 400 years ago.

If you're from the Far East, it was the time of the Ming Dynasty in China. So it's safe enough for us to say that a lot has happened in 400 years, right?

From taking long wooden boats to travel to parts unknown, we can now get into a metal container and arrive anywhere in the world in about 12 hours.

[5 : 39] That's how much this world has changed. Now I want you to go back with me to 2,000 years to a place called Israel.

And I want you to take a look at your Bibles. Matthew chapter 1. Now for many of you, you guys have a blank page separating what's called the Old Testament from the New Testament.

This is what I'm preaching today. I'm going to be preaching the text that is between the end of Malachi to the beginning of Matthew, which is exactly 400 years.

You see, God has always spoken to his people for a very long time. Since the very beginning, God has intimately been involved with his people.

From walking in the garden with Adam and Eve, to protecting Noah and his family from the flood, to calling out Abraham to become the father of his chosen people, to leading Joseph into Egypt and Moses out of Egypt, God has always been involved in the lives of his people.

[7 : 14] He's made his voice heard through prophets, kings, and priests. They all knew that God was a God who made promises.

And more importantly, he was a God who kept his promise. Right at the beginning, as Adam and Eve walked the earth, they were the absolute crown jewel of God's creation.

They were created without sin, yet in their selfishness, they broke fellowship with God. God pronounced judgment on them, but even in doing so, God made a promise to them.

We go back to Genesis 3.15. We see that God showed mercy and made a promise on that day that salvation would come to his people through Eve, who would break the head of sin.

God made a promise to Abraham. Abraham, I am your God, you are my people. God made a promise to Moses.

[8 : 35] If you keep my laws, as David was reading to us today, 1 Peter, it's the allusion to Leviticus. Be holy, for I am holy.

God made a promise to David. Your heir will sit on the throne. And God ultimately made a promise to Israel.

Please turn with me one page back from Matthew 1 to Malachi, chapter 4. We're going to read the first... Actually, we're going to read the whole long chapter here.

For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, when all the arrogant and all evildoers will be stubble.

The day that is coming shall set them ablaze, says the Lord of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear my name, the sun of righteousness shall rise with healing in its wings.

[9 : 44] You shall go out leaping like calves from the stall. And you shall tread down the wicked, for they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I act, says the Lord of hosts.

Remember the law of my servant Moses, the statutes and rules that I commanded him at Horeb for all Israel. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the great and awesome day of the Lord comes.

And he will turn the hearts of fathers to their children and the hearts of children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the land with a decree of utter destruction.

You see, when we turn to Matthew 1, God's people have been waiting 400 years for God to say something.

God has been silent. Imagine praying, hoping, and holding on for 400 years. Ten generations.

[10 : 52] Asking, teaching your children what you learn and asking them to hold on, to teach their children and them their children.

Imagine being consistent in your prayers for 400 years. Think of just 40 years or 40 days. How many of us are really consistent in our prayers for four days? Praying for the sole one thing.

You see, God left his people not just a promise, but promises. Isaiah 7.14 says, Therefore, the Lord himself will bear you a sign.

Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear you a son and shall call his name Emmanuel, which we know means God with us.

[11 : 51] God is going to send his son to be with us. Later, Isaiah reminds us, of the increase of his government and of peace, there is no end.

On the throne of David and over his kingdom to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore.

The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this. This is what God's people have been waiting for. God's righteousness to come, to mete out judgment and justice.

And so, God's people waited. The Assyrians came in, enslaved them.

They waited. The Persians would later come into their land, enslaved them once again. God's people waited and prayed.

[12 : 50] The Greeks came. God's people waited and prayed. The Romans came. And God's people waited and prayed.

The world looks much different now in Israel 2,000 years ago, 400 years after these promises were made. There is now a new language in the land.

Israel is not so much the end of the world, but it's a byway to the east and to the west. There are new roads everywhere and there are new people everywhere.

But with all the changes that were going on, the righteous waited. And why did they wait? Because they knew and understood that God keeps his promises.

Amen? Luke 2, 25 reads, Now there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon. And this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel.

[14 : 05] He is waiting for the words of Malachi to come true. Waiting. And the Holy Spirit was upon him.

And it was revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple.

And when the parents, Joseph and Mary, brought in the child Jesus to do for him according to the custom of the law, he stood up on his arms and blessed God and said, Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace according to your word.

For my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples. A light of revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel.

Think of what a blessing it was to that man to hold to that prophet. Go day in, day out, waiting for God to answer that promise.

[15 : 16] I wonder when people started to hear about Jesus or who he was. Who did they imagine him to be? Would he be from an affluent family?

Perhaps very rich. Maybe he would be like a divine hero like David. Maybe he would be wise like Solomon. Maybe steadfast as Moses or faithful as Joshua.

They would hear that he'd be from a Jewish family in Palestine. Oh! Well, it must be from a religious family or a wealthy family.

They would hear rumors through the Old Testament that he would be someone of royal blood. but someone who's actually not sitting on a throne.

What, you say? There's a teenage girl who's about to marry a carpenter. So, they must be from a great family.

[16 : 32] Perhaps they're Maccabean. Maccabean were rebellious zealots and warriors. Maybe they're from the family of Gamaliel who was a wise Jewish scholar.

What? Our future king would be from Galilee? Galilee is the place where we send the Gentiles to live with the Jews.

The Galileans, do we even really consider them Jews? Heck, they don't even follow all the customs. They hang out with Gentiles. And did you know they even ignore the eating laws?

But yet, for some reason, God chose in the lowliest of countries and the lowliest of people in those countries to send his son.

Luke 1, 26-38, I will read to you. In the sixth month, the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city, Galilee, named Nazareth, to a virgin, betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph of the house of David.

[17 : 51] And the virgin's name was Mary. And he came to her and said, Greetings, O favored one. The Lord is with you. But she was greatly troubled at the saying and tried to discern what sort of greeting this might be.

And the angel said to her, Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son.

You shall call his name Jesus. And he will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David.

And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever. And of his kingdom there will be no end. Mary said to the angel, How will this be since I am a virgin?

The angel answered her, The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, the child will be born, will be called Holy, the Son of God.

[18 : 56] And behold, your relative Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son. And this is the sixth month with her who was called barren.

For nothing will be impossible with God. The book of Matthew tells us that Joseph, upon hearing these words, thought about divorcing Mary.

Now I want you to take these 400 years of promises and they're all coming to a point.

A woman. Really, by our standards, she's a child. Somewhere around the age of 14.

400 years of promises. 400 years of hope. are all being placed on the shoulders of this woman.

[20 : 02] Now I want us to fast forward 2,000 years. The reality is we see single moms all the time. To put this into perspective of a tight Jewish culture, this is something totally different.

Think about this if this happened in our church. A young girl, not even 14, perhaps she's babysat for you. We see her helping out in the children's ministry.

She's young. She tells us that she is now pregnant. What about Joseph?

The young boy that she hangs out with. How would we feel toward him? What would we suspect? Enduring the shame, the awkward questions.

Him thinking there, did I really see an angel? And did he really talk to me? One author on this subject states, Nine months of awkward explanations.

[21 : 30] The lingering scent of scandal. It seems that God arranged the most humiliating circumstances possible for his entrance into this world.

It's almost as if he did it to avoid any charge of favoritism. I am impressed that when the Son of God, a human being, he played by the rules.

The harsh rules. Small towns do not treat kindly young boys who grow up with questionable paternity. The writer Malcolm Muggeridge observed that in our day, with family planning clinics offering convenient ways to correct mistakes that might disgrace a family name.

It is in point of fact, he writes, extremely improbable under existing conditions that Jesus would have been permitted to be born at all. Mary's pregnancy in poor circumstances and with the father unknown would have been an obvious case for an abortion.

And her talk of having conceived as a result of the intervention of the Holy Ghost would have pointed to the need of psychiatric treatment and made the case for terminating her pregnancy even stronger.

[23 : 02] Thus, our generation needing a savior more perhaps than any other generation ever existed would think themselves too humane to allow one to be born.

What do you think of Mary's thoughts? What about her expectations? Verse 38, she simply says, Behold, I am the servant of the Lord.

Let it be to me according to your word. And the angel departed from her. Mary is such a unique individual, isn't she?

Regardless of the personal cost, Mary was the first one to accept Jesus Christ. She was the first to respond to Jesus on his terms, not hers.

How true is this, isn't it, that a work of God often comes with two edges, great joy, in great pain. You see, Mary perfectly understood what was happening.

[24 : 21] Mary understood that God was making good on his promise that her people had been waiting 400 years for.

Promises made to Adam, Noah, Abraham, David, Joseph, all his people, and they were all about to be made good on what we call Christmas Day.

This is truly what Christmas is all about, my friends. This is about God being good to his promises. It begins with us responding to God in his promises.

This is about us responding to the one who brings harmony to everyone. See, the fact of the matter is Mary brought no outstanding credentials.

Mary reflects that the person God unexpectedly chose to use has no impressive resume. But she's got three things going for her.

[25 : 27] One, availability. Two, a willingness to serve. And three, a worshiping heart. I am often saddened when I present the gospel to people and they respond that they need to step away and clean up their lives.

I'm actually not good enough for this gospel. Let me go do some sort of works of righteousness to make myself worthy to you, oh God.

Tragically, it never works, does it? See, the fact of the matter is God wants it all. God wants our lies.

God wants our deceit. God wants our stupidity. God wants our cheating hearts, our abusive nature, whether through alcohol or drugs.

He wants our rebellious attitudes, our selfishness, our gossip, our abuse. those are the reasons we have Christmas.

[26 : 39] So God not only answers his promises, but desires to bring harmony in our life. You know what Mary knows?

By God's grace and with God behind her, she can do anything that God asks her to do. the reality is as an unbeliever, you do not have the honor of giving birth to the Savior of the world.

But we have the benefit or the blessing of becoming one of God's children. children. See, the whole point of fact that God bringing his child into the world is so that we could be known as his children.

That's the point of Christmas. It's to redeem our stupid, foolish, selfish, perverted lives. God wants it.

He's the one who cleans us up. He's the one who prepares us. He's the one who fixes us. You see, God promises to forgive us all our sins if we are willing to confess and call him Lord.

[28 : 03] You see, God promises to save us from our sins if we are willing to confess and repent. You see, if we trust in his name, Jesus Christ, if we believe in his name, Jesus Christ, that when God calls his sinners, we trust him at his word and we say, yes, we are and you are not.

You see, my friends, to believe the Christmas story, that Jesus was born for you and me, that I could one day walk in his glory, is what Christmas is truly all about.

my prayer is that you would join us who believe in Jesus Christ, who believe in this Christmas story, that you would come to believe this story as well, that you would identify with these people who are waiting for a promise that only God can make good on.

Christmas Day is God's invasion of mankind. Amen? Let's pray.