WHEN THE DEVIL KNOCKS

**(Matthew 2:13-18)**

Last week, we celebrated the gift of Jesus and I love Christmas but the thing that’s so wonderful about Christmas is that it’s Jesus’ birthday, but we’re the ones that get the gift. That’s the universal appeal of Christmas. Christians and non-Christians alike share the joy of Christmas because they get gifts. But Christmas is also a time when many of us will do what is called a Dirty Santa, a Yankee swap, or a White Elephant gift exchange. Some of you did that this year, I know my family did. You exchange gifts, taking something that you’re not that crazy about and you exchange it hoping to get something better. Now, a lot of us have fun with this and we buy gag gifts or even special gifts and it can be a lot of fun, but the bottom line is that you hope to come away with something better than what you gave.

The thing is that for many of us, there is something that we received, maybe something that was inherited, something that was passed down to us from our parents, and we don’t like what we got and in the same way we’d like to exchange it for something else. For some of you, maybe it’s your temper, that raging uncontrollable anger, or those things that you said that you wish you could take back. For others of you, maybe it’s that ongoing cycle of sin, maybe it’s an addiction or a temptation and you said, “Never again, but you did again and again.”

Today, I want to share a message with you entitled “When The Devil Knocks” because when you have expectations of changing and improving, but you’re still dealing with the pride, bitterness, unforgiveness, or jealousy the good news is that you have the opportunity to exchange what you have for something better because Jesus came to make a trade. For some of you, this is the best news ever as we come to the end of the year, because it’s a great time to exchange what you’ve got, what you don’t like and make a new start. You see, you don’t have to hold onto it anymore, you can exchange it, because the Bible tells us in second Corinthians, chapter 5, that God initiated a great gift exchange. Verse 21 says,

“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

The reality is that you don’t have to hold on to those things that were passed down to you, you don’t have to continue in those harmful self-destructive habits that lead you to do something or go somewhere that you don’t want to go. Of course, you can’t change the past, but you can start over and God can change your future. In fact, he initiated it, he started it when you were dead in your sins, and he made you alive with Christ. He took the sin that was against you, that stood opposed to you, and he took it away nailing it to the cross.

This is good news, because if there are things that you want to exchange, you have the chance to redeem what you have for something better, because the Bible tells us in Galatians chapter 3,

“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: "Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree” (Galatians 3:13).

And so, when the devil knocks and tells you that you’ve done too much, you’ve gone too far, or you’ve just hurt too many people, when he tells you that what you’ve done is unforgivable, there’s no turning back, you’re useless, when he continues to whisper those lies, God could never use you, you have no future, in the name of Jesus you’re going to exchange which you received, what you have, and what you’ve experienced for something so much better.

This is the hope of Christmas, because Jesus doesn’t leave us holding onto our past, but instead he comes and exchanges it for his bright future. He comes and he helps us where we need him the most and we know that because the Bible tells us,

“For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

And so, Jesus exchanged the glory of heaven to become like one of us, he humbled himself and though he was rich he became poor so that he could exchange what we have for his riches. This is what we celebrate on Christmas, number one, we remember that he became poor.

**1. REMEMBER HE BECAME POOR**

Jesus exchanged the riches of heaven for all the burdens that we’ve been carrying. You see, many of us are hurting, grieving, and lonely, because we’re living in a broken world. In fact, some of us have become so desensitized because of the pain and devastation around us that we’re no longer aware that the devil has been knocking, pushing his way into our lives, and yet this is exactly what has been happening and it really isn’t anything new.

In fact, the prophet Isaiah said of Jesus, that he was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering (Isaiah 53:3). And the psalmist, speaking of God said, “You are familiar with all of my ways” (Psalm 139:3). And so, Jesus, stepped down from his throne and exchanged the riches of heaven for the poverty, the brokenness and suffering of this world, so that he is able to sympathize with us in our weaknesses. Jesus did this on Christmas day, and I want to read to you part two of the Christmas story, because it wasn’t all cookies, candy canes, and gumdrop forests. Some of you may never have heard this before, but it is recorded in Matthew chapter 2, just after the wisemen left, and verse 13 says,

“When they had gone, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream. "Get up," he said, "take the child and his mother and escape to Egypt. Stay there until I tell you, for Herod is going to search for the child to kill him." So, he got up, took the child and his mother during the night and left for Egypt, where he stayed until the death of Herod. And so was fulfilled what the Lord had said through the prophet: "Out of Egypt I called my son."

When Herod realized that he had been outwitted by the Magi, he was furious, and he gave orders to kill all the boys in Bethlehem and its vicinity who were two years old and under, in accordance with the time he had learned from the Magi. Then what was said through the prophet Jeremiah was fulfilled: "A voice is heard in Ramah, weeping and great mourning, Rachel weeping for her children and refusing to be comforted, because they are no more" (Matthew 2:13-18).

Now, I know that may not seem like the most encouraging and uplifting passage of Scripture, but it’s actually an appropriate frame of mind, because believe it or not God had a plan in all of this. There is actually a word of encouragement in this weeping and mourning of mothers grieving over their children who are no more. You see, death and dying is the reason why there ever was a Christmas in the first place. Jesus came to solve the problem of death and that’s why even in his birth it shouldn’t be shocking that there would be so much death and bloodshed.

The devil was knocking and much like it was in the time of Moses birth when the Pharaoh was killing all the baby boys in Egypt, Herod was trying to eliminate the threat to his own throne. And so, he sent soldiers to Bethlehem and the surrounding countryside in an attempt to kill all of these baby boys before they had the potential to become the prophesied “King of the Jews”. But as Herod was trying to kill Jesus, God was planning the death of Jesus as well, but it wouldn’t be quite yet. In God’s plan, the death of Jesus wouldn’t be in Bethlehem as a baby, but it would be in Jerusalem as a full-grown man hanging on a cross for the sins of the world.

You see, it was a great gift exchange as Jesus stepped down from his throne, leaving behind the worship of angels, and just as the Bible says,

“Though he was rich, for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich” (2 Corinthians 8:9).

And so, Jesus humbled himself and became like one of us. He left his throne, he left the glory of heaven, and coming into this world he began taking his first steps in a hostile environment filled with the sound of mothers weeping and mourning over their children who are no more. It was through his poverty, through his brokenness, voluntarily becoming one of us and taking our place on the cross, that through him we would come to experience all the glory of heaven.

For your sake he became poor, he laid down his life, so that through him you could become rich. You see, he saw through the cross to the other side, knowing that he would lay down his life so that he could take it up again. And so, he invites us today to follow him, not necessarily to change our present, certainly not to change our past, but he rose victorious over sin and death so that he could change our future.

**2. STEP INTO HIS FUTURE**

Number two, Jesus invites us to step into his future, and so we need to close the door on the past, locking it so that when the devil knocks, he no longer has access. You see, we can’t walk in the freedom that Christ came to give us if we continue to allow the enemy to speak lies into our lives. And so, we refuse to listen to his lies, accusing us of being unworthy and unforgivable, and instead we embrace the truth that God’s grace is bigger than our past. We put our faith in the Word of God which tells us,

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

When the devil knocks, we just ignore him because we know that God’s grace is bigger than our sins. And so, we confess our sins, coming boldly to God with confidence knowing that our standing with him isn’t determined by our imperfections but by our relationship with him. We give ourselves the same grace that God has given us through Jesus Christ, trusting in the gift of Christmas, trusting in that gift exchange, that…

“God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God” (2 Corinthians 5:21).

We have been set free and no longer does our past hold any power over us because Jesus slammed the door shut on our past and our sin when he died on the cross. He literally cast our sins as far away as the east is from the west and so we simply need to determine not to open the door when the devil knocks. Instead we listen to Jesus voice because he said,

“My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me” (John 10:27).

We listen to his voice, stepping out, knowing that he plans to give us a hope and a future, and that we are who God says we are. You can be confident today, if you’re in Christ and his Spirit is in you, that you’re forgiven, you’re loved, and you’re his child because you’ve been born of God. That’s what the Bible tells us in John chapter 1,

“To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God; children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God” (John 1:12-13).

And when you’re someone’s child, your relationship with them is based on who you are and not what you’ve done. You are who God says you are, and he says that you’re his child, that you’re loved, and that you’re forgiven, and so when the devil knocks you don’t listen to those lies anymore. God has called you and I to step into the future that he has placed before us because we’re listening to a different voice now. In fact, in Revelation chapter 3, Jesus said,

“Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me” (Revelation 3:20).

Jesus is inviting us into a deeper relationship with him and he wants to use us to show his love in our homes, our schools, and our communities. He is inviting us to demonstrate his love, reaching out to people who are hurting, bitter, and lonely, because he’s called us to step into his future. You see, God doesn’t just save us from something, but he saves us for something. Not to have a perfect past, but to have the perfect presence of Jesus in your life today.

**3. PRESS ON TOWARD THE GOAL**

Number three, therefore, you want to press on toward the goal to win the prize. You see, the coming of Jesus wasn’t to leave us holding onto our past, mourning and grieving over what was or what should’ve been, but to live for our future. He comes to us so that we might know his grace and that through his poverty that we might become rich. Even though his birth was followed by mothers crying and grieving over their children who are no more, we need to recognize that there’s so much pain around us, because we live in a broken world. But as we look to the past and even our present struggles, instead of pausing to reflect on our weaknesses, that failure or defeat, we can look ahead and see how good God is and focus on Christ’s victory in our lives.

When the devil knocks, it’s really an opportunity to see God’s faithfulness in our lives, because the past really magnifies the story of what Jesus has done for us. And even now God is writing your story of what he has done in your life, what he’s doing, and what he wants to do through you. This was something that the apostle Paul understood and more than anything else he wanted his life to be a story about what Jesus was doing through him. You see, he recognized that it wasn’t about him, it wasn’t about his past, it wasn’t about what he had done, but only that his life was a story pointing people to Jesus.

In Philippians chapter 3, verse 12, the apostle said,

“Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:12-14).

In other words, he says, I know I don’t have a perfect past, but I press on to take hold of the perfection of Christ. And he admits, “I’m not there yet, but I focus on one thing, forgetting what is behind, closing the door on the past, shutting out the lies of the devil, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

Today, were going to celebrate the Lord’s supper together remembering that we’re not what we’ve done, we’re not who we were, but that we are who God says we are. This is so important to remember because when you’re in Christ Jesus, you are his child, you are forgiven, and you are called to step into his future. Today and every day we need to remember this and that when the devil knocks,

“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9).

As we close, I want to invite you to step into God’s future, pressing on toward the goal, and closing the door on the past. Because the truth is that there are things in our lives that we wish we could undo but we can’t. However, we serve a God who not only can change our future, but a God who is already in our future, and so let’s step into the calling that he has placed on our lives.

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