

Lifelines

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Pastor, Gwynn's Island Baptist Church, Gwynn, VA

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Topic: Character Evaluation

Are these the Best or the Worst of Times?

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We currently live in the best of times, and the worst of times. Can both of these statements be true at the same time? If so, how is that possible? Can the best of times also be the worst, and the worst, the best?

For teenagers, the teen years are always an awkward limbo time amid mental and physical changes. Their smooth facial skin is suddenly in upheaval with volcanic pimples, or with annoying facial hair. For retirees, it is the best of times with no 8-5 work hours, and the worst of times because many don't have money to enjoy their free time. For aging people life becomes consumed by doctor appointments and medical exams, which makes it the worst of times; yet they are still mobile and active which makes it the best of times.

It is interesting that God sent Jesus into the world at the best time for Him to arrive and minister. In Galatians 4:4-5 NLT we read: "But when the right time came, God sent His Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent Him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that He could adopt us as His very own children." It was in the last days of the life of the Temple, that Jesus came to make those who believe in Him into a living temple, through whom people could encounter the living God wherever they are.

For Jesus, too, it was the worst of times, and the best of times. He came as the long-awaited Messiah to His people, and yet a vast majority of the Jews rejected Jesus, and even arranged to have Him crucified by the Romans. Jesus' time spent on the cross was an experience with the worst of mankind, hatred, and sin. Yet in dying for us, it became the best of times for eternity, for now those who were hopelessly separated from God could become eternally a part of God's family. Eternal life was provided through God's grace and is received through faith by receiving God's gift.

When Jesus came teaching and preaching His good news, He spoke many of His teachings in parables. In Matthew 13:10 His disciples asked Jesus: "Why do you speak to them in parables?" Jesus answered in 13:13: "That is why I use these parables: For they look, but they don't really see. They hear, but they don't really listen or understand." Then in 13:15 Jesus quoted Isaiah saying: "For the hearts of these people are hardened, and their ears cannot hear, and they have closed their eyes—so their eyes cannot see, and their ears cannot hear, lest they return and be healed."

The image is similar to the picture of the three monkeys used for "See no evil, hear no evil, and speak no evil." The point of a parable was to make what Jesus was teaching clear, understandable and memorable. But like the monkeys the people covered their eyes so they could not see what Jesus was doing, plugged their ears so they would hear His truth, and opened their mouths to criticize Him and complain that He wasn't doing what they wanted Him to do. Jesus' quote from Isaiah did not say that they were deaf, nor blind. They had ears, but purposely closed them to the words of Jesus. They covered and closed their eyes. And all of this dulled their minds and hearts because they were refusing to try to understand what Jesus was saying to them.

For them it should have been the best of times, having God Himself walking among them, healing and teaching them how to be restored to a healthy relationship with God, and how to receive

the free gift of eternal life. But by their own choice, they made it the worst of times. They chose death over life, worry over peace, hatred over love, and man's ways over God's way.

Life is a gift, and gifts involve surprises. Some surprises are great! Some not so much. Whether these are the best or worst of times for you depends upon you, and the status of your heart, eyes, and ears. When you discover Jesus, that becomes the best of times. Whenever all we see is the worst in things, those times become the worst of times. Jesus can make even the worst day into the best day, the worst experience into one of your best. Open your eyes, ears, and mind to discover Jesus in your day.

Award-winning columnist Dr. Ed Jordan is pastor of Gwynn's Island Baptist Church, Gwynn, VA. He can be reached at szent.edward@gmail.com