

WHEN GOD MESSES UP YOUR PLANS

ClearView Christmas--Part 3

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Introduction:

Video: *A social Network Christmas*

I want to talk with you this morning about: *What do you do when God changes your plans?*

The Christmas story is a great illustration of this. And, from it we can learn teaching points for what to do when God changes your plans. In the Christmas story-- everybody's plans got changed. Nobody's life turned out the way they thought it would.

Mary and Joseph certainly had their plans changed. They were just a young couple engaged to be married. All they wanted to do was get married, settle down, have a home – peace and quiet. **They wanted a Silent Night...** In the middle of all their preparation an angel comes along and says, *“By the way, God has a new plan for you. And Mary there are three parts to this plan. Don't get upset about it but there are three parts and it's kind of big. Number one, you're going to get pregnant before the wedding and it's not going to be Joseph. [Ok....] Number two, this will be a miracle. It's never been done before and it's never going to happen again. We're going to call it a virgin birth. [Ok...]* And by the way, the child you will be carrying, he will be ... God. [Really...]” **God messed up their plans.**

God messed up the plans of King Herod. Herod was the king of Judea. He had been appointed by the Roman Empire and he was to be the king over Israel and he wasn't even Jewish. This guy was a control freak. Because Herod wasn't Jewish, he was really paranoid about being overthrown. So, he literally killed everybody around him. He had his wife killed. He had his mother killed. He had his brother-in-law killed. He had his two own sons killed. The guy was a nut case. When he heard that the king of the Jews has been born in Bethlehem he went bizzerk. He went out and declared an order that every baby under two years of age in Bethlehem should be killed in order to make sure that his kingdom would not be overthrown. **But God messed up his plans.**

The religious leaders of Jesus' day had their plans messed up. They had been praying for a messiah, which means “the anointed one.” They had been praying for a savior. They were praying that God would send them a savior, but what they wanted was a political messiah, a political savior. They wanted somebody to come in and overthrow the Roman Empire. They weren't looking for a spiritual savior. All of a sudden Jesus shows up and he's saying things like, *“Love your enemy... Do good to those who despise you... Pray for those who persecute you...Return good for evil... Love your neighbor as yourself...”* And they're going Huh? What? This is not the Messiah that we planned on. **God changed their plans.**

The shepherd's plans got messed up by Jesus' birth. They were looking forward to another quiet night with the sheep. Sitting out there under the Bethlehem sky with the starry night, calm and quiet, just taking it easy. Then all of a sudden the light shined, and the sky lights up and the announcement is made, *“You guys had better get over to Bethlehem because the Savior of the world has been born.”* **Their plans were changed.**

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Has God ever changed your plans? How many of you, this year, in 2011 had your plans changed?

I made a list of some plans that were changed...

- Jim Tressell... “Tat-gate”... Urban Meyer
- Joe Paterno... Penn State—so many lives taking a difficult turn.
- I didn’t plan to be without a car several times this year.

Before we dive into this message: we need to clarify a key truth. *Everything that happens in your life is not God’s will.* A lot of the problems we have in our lives we just bring on ourselves. We make dumb decisions, we make stupid mistakes, we say things and God didn’t have anything to do with that at all. And sometimes other people cause problems in your life. Because we live on a broken planet and nobody’s perfect. We’ve all sinned. We’ve all made mistakes. That means we hurt each other. You hurt people, sometimes intentionally and sometimes you hurt them unintentionally. And sometimes people hurt you, sometimes intentionally and sometimes unintentionally.

We need to be clear...this may challenge your thinking some: *a lot of things that happen in the world are not God’s will.* Rape is not God’s will. Molestation, abuse is not God’s will. Cancer and Alzheimer’s and all the evil things that we find on the planet, prejudice against races. These are not God’s will. These things happen—because of sin--- my sin, your sin, others’ sin, living on a planet under the effects of sin... This is why we’re to pray “*Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven.*” Because God’s will is done perfectly in heaven. It’s almost never done on earth. What’s done on earth, most times, is me and you and everyone else acting out of the freewill that God has given us. With free will...many choose to not go God’s way.

So, we can’t blame God for all the problems in the world. But, there are times where you make plans...you think and pray and make decisions...you have dreams. And, *sometimes God intervenes and he says, I’m going to do something special in your life. So in order to do that I’m going to change your plans.* You may already have great plans for 2012, but God’s going to change some of them because he wants to do something else in your life.

Proverbs 19:21 says: “*You can make many plans, but the LORD’s purpose will prevail.*” **What do you do when God changes your plans?** Today, from the Christmas story, we’re going to look at three truths to remember when your plans go awry.

When God changes your plans, you need to remember three things.

1. When God changes your plans: He’s trying to get your attention.

Think about Mary and Joseph. If you’re married...or have ever been in love...*remember the times where you felt most alive in that relationship?* Maybe it was new, maybe you’d never felt that way before, maybe you felt—for the first time—that you’d found your soul mate. I picture Mary and Joseph in love...waiting, excitedly, for their wedding day. All of a sudden God interrupted that plan. In Matthew 1, Gabriel pays a visit to Joseph in a dream. In Luke 2, Gabriel invades Mary’s life and gives her the incredible news she would be mother to the Savior of the world. *Why did God change their plans?*

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Because, God's plan for Mary and Joseph was so incredible, so awesome, so unbelievable, so ridiculously out of the ordinary; *he had to do something extraordinary to convince them that it was really going to happen.* So he sent an angel.

For you, God doesn't send an angel. Sometimes he speaks to us through changed plans. Sometimes this is painful. Sometimes we're sailing a long in life and everything is going OK and because we're not in need...we're not listening. So, God might bring some pain into our lives to wake us up and clean out our listening tubes.

God whispers to us in our pleasure but he shouts to us in our pain. Pain is God's megaphone. Pain is God saying to you *"Is anybody home? Is anybody listening? Are you paying attention? Or are you too busy to talk to the one who made you?"*

We have to learn to listen to God's voice daily. But that's not so easy. We're not very good listeners when it comes to listening to God. Instead of listening to God we're talking all the time. Or when we're not talking, we're listening to the radio, or listening to television, or reading our iPhone, or sending email... or something. *We're so busy God can't get through.* People say, *I never hear God talk to me.* **It's because you've got all the lines jammed.**

Does God ever get call waiting when he calls you? Does he get a busy signal? The answer is actually *yes.* Most of the time when God wants to get through to you, he's gotten a busy signal. You're watching television. Do you ever just sit down and say, *God is there anything you want to say to me?* Most of us don't do that--So God can't get through to us.

In **Psalm 81:13**, God was trying to implore His people to just listen to Him. When it comes to listening, we're like the Israelites-- we've all got spiritual ADD – attention deficit disorder. *Why does God want us to listen to him?* **To save you from a lot of problems.** To bless us!

Listen to God's lamenting to His people in Psalm 81:

⁸ ***Listen to me, O my people, while I give you stern warnings.***

O Israel, if you would only listen to me!

⁹ *You must never have a foreign god;
you must not bow down before a false god.*

¹⁰ *For it was I, the LORD your God,
who rescued you from the land of Egypt.*

(Why does God want us to listen?): ***Open your mouth wide, and I will fill it with good things.***

¹¹ *But no, my people wouldn't listen. Israel did not want me around.*

¹² (What happens when we don't listen): *So I let them follow their own stubborn desires,
living according to their own ideas.*

¹³ ***Oh, that my people would listen to me! Oh, that Israel would follow me, walking in my paths!***

¹⁴ (What blessings come when we do listen?): *How quickly I would then subdue their enemies!*

How soon my hands would be upon their foes!

¹⁵ *Those who hate the LORD would cringe before him; they would be doomed forever.*

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¹⁶ *But I would feed you with the finest wheat. I would satisfy you with wild honey from the rock.*

God wants them to listen. He wants to guide them. To protect them. To rescue them. *But they won't listen!* God says: *my people wouldn't listen. Israel did not want me around...*

We must learn from the Israelite's mistake and listen to God. **Why? Because:**

- **He has a perspective we don't have.** We have limited perspective. We can't see the big picture that God sees. God can see everything that's going to happen in your life in 2012 right now. Because he's not limited by space and time. He doesn't live on a twenty-four hour planet that circles the sun. He's not limited by twenty-four hour days. So God can already know everything that's going to go on in your life.

Imagine driving up a curvy mountain road and you get behind slow car. You wish you could pass that car but you can't see around the curve. So you don't know on the other side of the curve if it's clear and safe to pass or if there's a MAC truck coming the opposite direction. So you get stuck slower than you'd normally travel.

Perspective is like this: You're on a mountain road, behind a slow-poke, wondering what is coming around the next corner. God is like a helicopter flying overhead that's flying along that can radio down saying, "*Andy, it's clear for the next half mile. Go ahead and pass that guy.*" That's perspective. God knows what's coming. He can give us perspective when we listen to Him.

- **He has your best in mind.** Everything God does in your life he does it for your own goodness. He does it all out of love. He does it to protect you. As a loving parent, as a heavenly Father, he's saying *I don't want you to get burned. I don't want you to have a broken heart. I don't want you to have a broken body. I don't want you to have a broken marriage. I don't want you to have broken relationships. I don't want you to have broken dreams.* So I will give you the perspective if you'll just listen.

And if we don't listen we get all the heartache and the pain and the problems that we never would have expected in the first place.

Application: Listen to God. *Put yourself in position to hear from God!* Make a new commitment to be at church weekly! Make a new commitment to join a small group. Make a new commitment to a Bible reading and prayer time (E100 Bible reading). Read a good theological book. I have great news for you! **ClearView plans for next year.**

When God changes your plans he's trying to get your attention.

2. When God changes your plans: He has a better plan.

Let's just say it: **God's plan is better than yours.** Compare these two verses:

Proverbs (14:12): *There is a path before each person that seems right, but it ends in death.* This verse is significant- because the same text is mentioned in Proverbs 16:25. God is saying- you may think you know the right path- but my plan is best!

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Now a verse that describes God's plan. My plan, apart from God, ends in death. But this verse describes God's plan: Jeremiah 29:11 says this *"For I know the plans I have for you," says the Lord. "They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope."* When we follow God's path—we are on the road to plans for our good...plans that give us a future of hope. *My natural way leads to death...God's plans lead to life.*

As we go into 2012 you don't know what's going to happen. I don't know either. But God says I have plans for you and they're good plans and plans for hope and plans for a future. But he's not going to force his plans on you. He gives you the choice. You can keep on going with your little plan and get into all the problems and difficulties, the stress, and all the things that happen when you try to go your own way. But God says: *I've got a better plan.*

If God changes your plan, here's what we know: *He wants your attention. He has a bigger plan. He has a better plan. He has a more rewarding plan. He may have a more difficult plan.*

Let me talk about these for a second.

- *God's plan for your life is bigger than your plan.*

Mary and Joseph's plan was simple: let's get married, have babies, settle down. God said, *No, I'm going to use you as a couple to bless the entire world.* God's plan was a whole lot bigger for their life than they ever imagined. **And God's plan for your life is bigger than you ever imagined.** If you go with your plan instead of God's plan for your life, you're going to limit your life. You have no idea what God wants to do with your life. In fact, you can't even imagine it. God has a bigger plan for your life than you do.

- *God's plan is more rewarding than your plan*

Following God's plan is the key to significance. It's the key to satisfaction. Connecting with God's plan is where you say: *This is it! This is what I was made to be!* And not only is God's plan more rewarding here on earth but it's also more rewarding in eternity. The Bible says in (1 Corinthians 2:9) *"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, and no mind has imagined what God has prepared for those who love Him."* God's plan is far more rewarding than your plan.

- *God's plan may be harder than your plan.*

I won't kid you about that. At times it is harder. Sometimes when you're going with God's plan it seems more confusing. *Why is this happening to me?* And it's more difficult. And sometimes it's even painful.

Think about God's plan to use Mary to bless the world. It wasn't an easy plan. It probably wasn't easy for her to face nine months of criticism and gossip. She was an unmarried woman, she was engaged to Joseph, and she was pregnant. I can just hear her friends and neighbors, *"Yeah right! You're a virgin and pregnant. Right Mary!"* Would you believe that if you heard that from a friend? I bet she put up with constant criticism and gossip. That was painful.

Then, the day before she delivers they have to go to Bethlehem to take a census. So, one day before birth, she's riding on a donkey for a long journey.

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We tried to never travel for a month or so right before any of our kids were born. It's too uncomfortable for a mom that's about to give birth. It was painful for Mary to have to ride a donkey on the last day before she gave birth.

Talk about painful—can you imagine giving birth in a cold cave or structure that housed animals? *I think it's gross that Seth's new hamster is in his room. That thing stinks!* Can you imagine giving birth next to a stall with a cow or horse?

God's plan for Mary was difficult. ***But, it was also a plan of promise.*** Mary didn't understand it and I'm sure she asked a thousand times, "*Why, God? Why, God? Why, God?*" But it wasn't until later that she finally understood.

There are some things that are happening in your life right now that you're going, *Why God? Why God? Why God?* And you're not going to understand them right now.

Illustration:

Janet Westbrook. Terrible car accident. But, looking back later, she says: *I could see God's hands all around me immediately after her crash.*

When your plans fall through and God changes your plans, you need to remember, he's trying to get your attention, and he's got a better plan. It's bigger, it's more rewarding. And it may be more difficult. But there's a third thing he wants you to do.

3. When God Changes Your Plans: He wants you to learn to trust Him.

When your plans fall through, God is saying: *Trust me.* Imagine how this whole Christmas thing tested Joseph's faith. Your fiancée comes to you and says, "*Honey, I'm pregnant.*" And you know it wasn't you. Imagine the test of faith for Joseph to be told that by his fiancée. Imagine Mary, how many times she was tested by this whole thing.

God's plan for their lives was so different all they could do was trust. There was nothing else they could do. Rick Warren: "*Sometimes you don't know God is all you need until God is all you've got. In that moment you have to learn to trust.*"

The Bible says there is only one way to please God. If you don't get anything else I say this morning: I want you to get this. I want you to listen as if your life depends on it because it does. How do you please God? How do you get into heaven? You can't be good enough to get to heaven, you're not. You can't be perfect, you're not. How do you please God?

God says (Jeremiah 29:13): "*You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart.*" To please God, we have to seek God.

Only through faith can we please God. Hebrews 11:6 "*Without faith it is impossible to please God.*" How do you please God? Not by religion. Not by relationships. Not by ritual. Not by rules. Not by regulation. But simply by seeking God in faith. The Bible tells us if we come to him in faith, that pleases God. Just like a father is happy when his children trust him, just like a mother is happy when her children trust her, God is happy when you trust him.

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So what do you do when your plans fall through? You seek God. God says: *When you seek me you will find me.*

Let me tell you what you don't do. You're going through a problem right now? Don't seek the solution. Don't seek relief. Don't seek to get away from it. Don't seek an explanation. If you're going through a problem right now *seek God.* God! The Bible says "*If you seek me you will find me if you seek me with all your heart.*" And the Bible says (Hebrews 11:6): "*And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him.*" You seek God.

The second thing you do when you have a problem is you trust God. You trust that he knows what he's doing, that he's wise, that he's loving, that he cares for you, that he's going to see you through the situation.

The Bible says in Romans 8:28: "*And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.*"

We know. We're not guessing. We know for certain. We're confident. *We know that God causes everything.* That doesn't mean just some things. It means everything. *God causes everything to work together for the good.*

Illustration:

ClearView in 2011. A lot of things I didn't expect. *What if God is trying to get my/our attention? What does He want to show us?* He has a bigger, better, and harder plan—but it is for our and His best. Are we seeking and trusting?

When your plans get changed—you just need to understand, ***this is a test.*** God's testing you. Will you let God get your attention? Will you listen? Can you have faith...can you trust that His plan is better? *What is the test when your plans get changed?* **The test is this: Am I going to trust God or me? That's the test.**

We don't know what 2012 holds. None of us do. We do know that God has a bigger, better, and sometimes more difficult plan. He wants us to listen to His way. He wants to follow His directions. He wants us to tune into His plan, which is for our best.

That's why God sent Jesus to be our Savior. Not just to save you from sin. Yes, he did come to do that. But to save you from the effects of sin too. What are the effects of sin? Failure, fatigue, frustration, fear, doubt, depression, resentment, anger, loss, fear, worry, guilt, shame, resentment, bitterness. All the different emotions that come from not going with God's plan for your life. So that's why God sent Jesus at Christmas.

The Bible in Psalm 138:8 says: "*The LORD will work out his plans for my life—for your faithful love, O LORD, endures forever.*" God says, I have a plan and I'll work it out if you'll just trust me. And who does he want you to trust? The person he sent at Christmas.

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This is what the angels announced at the first Christmas *“Today a Savior has been born for you. He is Christ the Lord.”* Why do we celebrate Christmas? Because God sent *you* a Savior. A Savior has been born to you. He’s a personal Savior.

Has God been trying to get your attention? Maybe He wants you to listen. Maybe He has a better plan. Maybe He needs to teach you to trust.

I found this quote at the bottom of an e-mail this week. I don’t know who wrote it, but it is excellent:

“The capacity for knowing God enlarges as we are brought by Him into circumstances which oblige us to exercise faith; so, when difficulties beset our path, let us thank God that He is taking trouble with us and lean hard upon Him.”