

The Great Second Chance

by Stewart Ruch

The great second chance is the opportunity to live life for God, for love, as life was designed to be lived, given to us through Jesus' birth, death, and resurrection.

Duration: 19:19

Scripture: Luke 2:10, John 3:16, Romans 6:23

Topics: "Mercy"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the importance of receiving Jesus as a second chance to save oneself from a life of rebellion against God. He invites the audience to make a commitment to Jesus on Christmas Eve, acknowledging the opportunity that His birth, death, and resurrection provide for those living in darkness. The preacher uses the analogy of playing soccer with a baseball to illustrate the futility of trying to live for oneself rather than for God. He encourages those who have not yet received Christ into their lives to lift their heads and make a public declaration, offering privacy for those who choose to do so. The sermon also touches on the concept of paradise and how humans were created to experience perfect days and a constant state of harmony with God.

Transcript

Good news of great joy that is for all people. Which means that there isn't one of you who are here tonight that the message of Jesus Christ is not given for. You cannot imagine someone right now, anyone, that you've even had acquaintance with, that the message of Jesus come to earth to save us from our sins.

You cannot imagine someone that message is not for. So let's pray together now. Father in heaven, our hearts are filled with gladness for some of us, with concern and anxiety for others of us.

Would you speak to each one of us on this holy night? We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

You may be seated. I had the opportunity to study theater when I was in college. And my sophomore year, we would audition for the plays.

I was part of the theater company, but we auditioned for the plays. And I got the kind of role that if you study acting, you wait and wait and wait for. It wasn't that it was the lead role, it was actually kind of a secondary role.

It was a substantial role, but it had everything that I wanted to work on and to do as an acting student. It had humor. It was a very physical role.

There were so many things I loved about the role, and I loved the character that I was playing. I just threw myself into preparations for this play, working every day for several hours on this character. And then during dress rehearsal week, I became more ill than I've ever been in my entire life.

So ill, in fact, with an infection that I had to be admitted to the hospital. As I'm going to the hospital, and they're looking at my signs, and they're telling me that I'm likely going to be in the hospital for the next eight to ten days. I didn't know which to be more upset about, the fact that I had some nasty virus, or the fact that I was going to absolutely, completely miss the ten-day run of the play.

I could not have timed it worse. And the doctors were right. I was admitted on opening night, and I was in the hospital the entire ten-play run of that play.

And you can imagine, I was just heartbroken. Such a lost opportunity. It was my only chance, or so I thought.

What I didn't know is that the actors and the director had talked about it, and had decided, for their great effort, that they would keep the set up and not strike it on closing night. They had decided that they would wait and keep their lines fresh and rehearse without me, until I got out of the hospital and was then strong enough to act in the play. And three weeks later, after opening night, when I regained my strength, we had one night of this play performed for anyone on campus that wanted to come.

And you can be assured, I invited every single person I possibly could. Because this was my great second chance. I thought I'd lost the opportunity to play this role.

I thought it was just something that I would never have a chance to do. And yet, through the generosity of my director and my fellow actors, I actually had the most amazing evening, acting out the second chance. And I just think this second chance is one of the great things in life.

We even have a phrase for it in our American English. It comes out of golfing. The idea is that if you have a really bad stroke, you're allowed, not by the official rules, one stroke to be replayed and not scored against you.

It's called a mulligan. And we use that in sport, we use that in games, we use it in life. Give that person a mulligan.

Or we plead, could I have a mulligan? Could I have a second chance? I mean, American stories are filled with second chance stories. I mean, what a second chance provides for a person can be absolutely life-changing. Now, as an Indianapolis Colts fan, let me just say how much it pains me to use a New England Patriots example.

But it's Christmas, so I'll be generous of heart. We know of Bill Belichick, that he's won four, count them, four Super Bowl rings. What we forget is that the New England Patriots was his second chance.

He spent several years in the Cleveland Browns with losing records season after season after season, making the first round of the playoffs one year out of several. But some manager somewhere in New England Patriots organization saw Belichick and said, let's give Bill a second chance. We experience it in

a way more prosaic way, don't we? After a really strange dream.

Have you ever had a dream where you find yourself in your dream doing stuff? Like, immoral stuff. Relationally inappropriate stuff. Financially illegal stuff.

And the dream feels so real. And you wake up and you realize that you're actually in your own bed and you haven't just done what you really felt as you were dreaming that you had done. And there's this relief.

There's this second chance. I didn't really do that. I didn't really cross that line.

There's a reason why second chance is so powerful. And that's because the idea of a second chance is actually not just a kind of dream of after a dream or in sports or in golf. It's actually a concept that is woven into the very center of what it means that God has come to Earth.

Indeed, if you push me on, what does it mean? You're going to expect me to say Jesus, and I am going to say Jesus. Right. He does mean Christmas.

But what about Jesus makes Christmas so powerful? What is it about Jesus and what he did that has caused a complete life-stirring orientation of one civilization after another around Christmas? What is it? It's that Jesus, in coming to Earth, has given a second chance to every human being. That may be simple, but I hope it can stay in your mind and your heart. That what happens on Christmas and the reason we celebrate it so profoundly is that it is the festival, it is the celebration of second chances.

Now, to receive our second chance, we need to remember our first chance. Because we were given a first chance. There's an incredible painting done of Jesus' birth.

It's a manger scene, but it's done by people in the east. So you get, as a westerner, a different perspective and a really interesting one on an eastern take on the birth of Christ. In this painting, you have a cave.

You don't have a manger. It doesn't look like a sweet barn. It's a cave.

In the cave, you have two animals. And the reason those animals are in the cave, and they're actually right next to the figure of the baby Jesus, and then behind it, it is completely pitch dark, is that God is saying that there is incredible darkness in the reality of life. The Bible is saying that there's incredible darkness in the hearts of men and women.

But that in that darkness, there's also creation, symbolized by these two animals that God created, that God made creation good. And these animals are there in a kind of peaceful pose vis-à-vis the baby Jesus. We were given a first chance, and it was a beautiful thing.

We're told in the Bible that God created man, and created woman, and created garden, and created sky, and created trees, and created the glory of nature. Imagine, if you will, the most amazing day you've ever had. Just one of those days where everything locked right.

Where relationships were good, where the weather was beautiful, where the plans that you made actually worked out the way you'd hoped them to work out. Imagine an amazing day. You were made for those days, all the time.

When life seems to be working, even for a half day, and you go, wow, I wish it was like this all the time. Of course you do, because you were made for it to be like that all the time. That's the idea of paradise.

That was the idea of the first garden that's called Eden. That's the idea of the glory of creation. That was our first chance.

But what humanity has done with the first chance is we've said, I want to control that kind of life. We have that life one day, and then we think, I want to have that life exactly the same way again the next day. It's that kind of thinking that leads us into all kinds of addictions.

All kinds of addictions. We want to repeat that glory again. We want to control the life that we taste here and there.

We want to manage our lives. We get to the point where we say, you know, I would like to be in charge of my life so that I don't seem so vulnerable to all that life brings. I want to take my life over.

And that's in the first chance, in the garden, exactly what the rebellion of the first human beings, the first man and woman was about, is they wanted to live their lives by their understanding, by their decisions, by their control. And in making that choice, we utterly twisted the design of life. We so confused what we were made for and the way the life was meant to be lived.

It's like trying to play soccer with a baseball. You can't do it. It won't work.

When you have to live your life by your management and your control and your decision making, you are throwing yourself utterly against the design of how your life was made to be. The first chance was that the life lived in the love of God, under the parenting of God, with the nurturing and the direction of God. In light of that, we see a profound darkness, the kind of darkness that's depicted in that cave picture where there are the creatures, the animals, and in the middle of the cave picture is Jesus.

In the middle of the darkness is Jesus. And in the Bible, Jesus is called the second Adam. He's the second chance for humanity.

He's the second opportunity for humanity to live exactly how life was designed to be lived, to be played exactly how life was designed to be played, which is for the love of God, under the love of God, spreading the love of God. And Jesus, the second Adam, came to reorient and realign the life that was given to us to be lived the first time. And in doing so, He gives us a great second chance.

His birth is about an entirely new life. His death is about dying to our corruption of the first chance, about dying to our desires to rule and run our lives. He died to the power of sin, which is our desire to rule our lives at the cross.

And in the resurrection of Jesus, which we remember at the birth of Jesus, it is about conquering death, conquering rebellion, and giving every single human being a second chance to live their lives for God, for love, as life was designed to be lived. One early church thinker calls Christmas the festival of re-creation, where creation is given to us again in and through Jesus. So my guess is, tonight, we've got a spectrum of second chances needed.

Some of you may just be like, I'd like a second chance on Advent. It didn't go very well, it went really quickly, and I do not feel at all prepared for Christmas. Okay.

Jesus gives you that second chance. He'd be glad to lift the shame you have about whatever your Advent was and however you played it out or didn't play it out, how many Advent wreath devotionals you actually

did as opposed to what you thought you were going to do. He would be here to forgive you for whatever you fell short of, and He'd be here to give you a second chance to be ushered into the celebration of His new life now.

For others of you, perhaps there's a bit more seriousness to your spectrum. Perhaps you've not received Jesus. You haven't received the second chance that He has come to enact in His birth and His death and His resurrection.

You're still trying to live your life playing soccer with a baseball. You're trying to live your life for yourself, rather than for God. And you know what the darkness of that cave and that picture that I described is all about.

You know it in your own heart. If you have enough courage to read what's going on throughout our world, you know it throughout the world. And what I'd like to do is I close.

And I'm going to give any of you an opportunity that are ready to receive the second chance of Jesus to save you from your own life, to save you from the control of your life, from the rebellion against God's life for you. I just want to give you a chance on this Christmas Eve to make that commitment to Jesus. It's very simple.

And I know there's a lot going on tonight. But if there are any of you who are ready to receive Jesus, I do not want this evening to go by without an opportunity to ask Christ to enter your life, to receive Him, to receive the great second chance that His birth, death, and resurrection give us who have lived in great darkness. And now we're given a new opportunity.

So here's what we're going to do. It's very simple. I'm going to ask everyone to bow their heads because there's a whole lot of us in here.

And for your neighbor, it's hard to feel like there's much privacy. So I'm going to ask you to bow your head in just a moment. You don't have to do it yet.

And what I'm going to ask is, if you have never received Christ into your life, you don't have a personal, day-by-day relationship with Jesus, you haven't received the second chance that His birth, death, and resurrection give us, here's what I'm going to ask you to do. While everyone else's head is down, I'm just going to ask you to put your head up. And I'm going to be looking.

I'm going to ask that no one else looks to give some privacy here. But I'm going to be looking. Here's why.

When you receive Christ, you're not only receiving Jesus, you are, but you're also receiving His church. It's a personal thing with someone else. And I just want to be able to see you eye-to-eye.

If you're in the back and you want to receive Christ, I may need your head up and a hand by your head so that I can see you, because I do want to see you. So let's go ahead. Would you bow your head? Maybe you've already received Jesus tonight and you're just reflecting on the second chance and another area that God has given you.

Reflect on that. But would you also pray for any who are here tonight? And they already have a sense that God is calling them. Would you just pray for them? So every head bowed.

If you are here tonight and you'd like to pray with me, I'm going to pray out loud to receive Jesus into your heart. I want to pray with you. Would you just raise your head and put your hand up so that I can see you? I see you.

I see you there in the back right. Great. Got it.

I see you there. Okay. I see you.

The Lord sees you. There are several of you. Would you just pray with me if you've made eye contact with me or if you had your hand up? Lord Jesus Christ, I would like to receive the second chance of your life.

I want to repent that I have sought to run my life and control my life. And tonight on this Christmas Eve, I want to give my life to you. I want to invite you into my life.

And I ask that you would fill me now with your Holy Spirit. Father, I pray for any now who have prayed this on this night, that they would receive a filling of the Holy Spirit that would assure them of Jesus' life given to them and of Jesus' life filling them. I pray all these things.

And I pray for all of us on this night in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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