

Series: PUSH THE PAUSE BUTTON - December 24, 2010

THE PAUSE BUTTON

Luke 2

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1. Most of you will be using something like this either tonight or tomorrow, won't you? Cameras are wonderful things for capturing moments. So, tonight—I'd like to capture—not a **Kodak** moment--a **Canon** moment. Smile pretty! Now, do something crazy—go ahead! Give it your best shot! Anyone remember having to take your **film** to a **film processing** place? Not any more—it's all captured on a tiny memory card. **Fascinating!**

-Tonight and all day tomorrow—all over the world—cameras will be clicking, capturing people—frozen in time. You could see pictures as movies as a kind of digital biopsy of life. If you were to sort through our pictures, you'd see me at the age of 7 in our drafty old house in Barnesboro—wearing my cowboy outfit [pic]. You'd see pictures of our family's Christmases over the years—Kelly [pic], Brian [pic], Matt [pic] and Selina [pic]. Forever frozen at 1 month, 2 years, 4 years.

-You might be interested to know that the first Christmas was captured, too. Not on film—or in a diary—but by an eyewitness of the moment when the history of the world split in two. Mary. Now, how many of you think I'm maybe exaggerating a little here? Let's read the account—and you'll see for yourself.

Luke 2:1-20 NIV—Michael Vallins

- a. Now, did anyone pick up **where** Mary, in essence, pushed the **pause** button—and uploaded all these images and experiences into her heart?
But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart.
(Luke 2:19 NIV)

-You have to understand; Mary didn't need an I-phone or Blackberry—people's memories in that culture were **highly** developed. However she did it—Mary pressed the pause button again and again burning the images and words from this amazing event into her mind and heart.

- b. We **all** take photos—**thousands of them**—of babies. Especially the first child. “Here's Johnny being born. Here's Johnny, 3 minutes old, 6 minutes, 1 hour, first bottle, first diaper change. Put them together—it's like a movie of his life. **Everything** is recorded. By the third child? Here's Freddie at birth. Here's Freddie getting married. We've **got** to take more pictures of Freddie!

-**Think** for a moment about what that photo album in Mary's heart must've looked like. The visit from Gabriel; the expression on Josephs' face when she told him she was pregnant—and God did it. The trip to Bethlehem. The picture of the dirty place where she would have to give birth. Giving birth to the Deliverer of the world—who looked tiny, wet and helpless like every baby!

-She had barely recuperated when she had **visitors in the birthing suite!** Shepherds—and an astounding story a visit from angels—telling them how to find the Saviour. And then **millions** of them—announcing Good News of Great Joy—for **all** humankind!

2. Of course, now we know that what Mary captured in her heart was **the single most important day** ever—when history cracked into two big chunks. The Creator of the Universe, in that moment, stepped out of Heaven and showed up here in this tiny baby—named **Jesus!** Somehow Luke, a physician and the author of this record, found someone—perhaps one of Mary’s other children—who had memorized this first hand account. I’m sure Mary **never** dreamed that this scene—which seemed so raw and crude—would be captured on Christmas cards, in crèches, in paintings and frescoes—and in annual Christmas pageants—with kids wearing their parents bathrobes!

-But there **were** people who blew right through this night—indistinguishable from all the rest. Caesar Augustus—the most important man of that day would, ironically, be just a footnote in this story. Herod, the king who dominated the news of that day with his accomplishments and brutality—would hear about Jesus—and try to kill him off before he could become a threat.

-But there were others who should **never** have missed the splitting of history. The religious professionals had been researching and talking about the Messiah’s coming for hundreds of years—but **didn’t even bother to check it out!** Remember in the account we read—the shepherds went out and told **everyone** that a Saviour had been born. People were amazed—but apparently never did a thing with the information! God shows up—just **doors away**—and people **missed** it!

- a. But it’s easy to miss things—important things— isn’t it? Sometimes life becomes a blur—a series of **have-to’s** chasing you, demanding more of you. Sometimes we just forget to stop and capture moments; but I think we...I...get pre-occupied. You know—work, things we’re worrying about, angry at, afraid of. We think, “I don’t have **time** to mess with that now! Maybe **later!**”

-And we’re **tired!** Anyone here who’s **tired** tonight? Our plate gets so full that things start to fall off the edges of it. A guy I once knew, Jack Davis, worked a couple of jobs and was always tired. Jack was in church one Sunday, holding a kid with one arm—and his communion with the other. He fell asleep and dropped all **both!**

- b. It would be cool if life were like the buttons on a DVD player, wouldn’t it? Anyone here who would ever be tempted to hit the **FF** button? You’re bored, you’re listening to this guy up front who **just keeps dieseling on!** Or you’re in significant pain. Hit **FF**—and your at the other side!
- c. How about the **rewind** button? Wouldn’t it be great to push a button—and get a do-over on certain parts of your life? Anyone here, like me, have moments you regret—and you’d like to undo stupid decisions, ugly comments, or places you wish you’d never gone? But...we can’t.

- d. These days, I'm thinking that the **Closed Captioning** button looks good! Sometimes I don't hear things well because of some hearing loss. It's annoying the heck out of my family! Wouldn't it be cool to just have someone spell things out as they're happening? Man, life gets confusing!

-And, of course, most of us have been tempted—when we're in a lot of pain—or feeling really hopeless or worthless to just hit the **Stop/Eject** button. To just escape. Check out. Problem is—life is still there when you get back!

3. There is, however, one option we sometimes ignore. The **pause button**. And that's something we can learn tonight from this amazing teenage girl, Mary. She didn't just click the mental photo; she lived it, **treasured** it.

-As I was writing this message, I remembered something Lori said to me a couple of weeks ago; something like, "Ken, sometimes when you're home—it's like you're **not there!** You're somewhere else. Pre-occupied." I realized—I'm not pushing the pause button enough--taking time to appreciate and **live** in the moments I'm in. It's like arriving somewhere in your car—and having **no memory of actually driving there!** That's a **scary thought** isn't it?

-I've missed—huge moments in life. When Lori was pregnant with Brian, her obstetrician told us that he would be born around Christmas. Well—he came early—like four **weeks** early—and surprised us both when we were at my parents house for. We had left our Lamaze manual at home—you know, the one that talks about the cleansing breaths, the **choo-choo** breathing—all that? We were supposed to leave to candidate at a church the next day—and Brian showed up at 12:35 a.m. the morning we were to leave. When I called my boss the next morning and told him that Brian had been born, Lori was in the hospital—and I wasn't feeling well. He said, "Well, **they're expecting you!**"

-See, I **should've** said, "No. I've got this moment—and it will **never come again!**" But I didn't have the guts or foresight to do that! So, I went to the church, played the part of a martyr—and **missed** a moment I regret to this day. I can't get it back no matter how much I **want** it back. I realize now that I was way too busy thinking about the future—**my future**—to receive the gift of the moment. Have you ever thought about what cause us to **miss** the moments that we should be thinking about—treasuring—pondering—living—valuing?

- a. Sometimes we think that the moments worth fully living should be perfect, Martha Stewart moments—you know, with perfectly folded napkins, candles lit, the dog behaves, the germs are **gone!**

-The problem is—there **are** no moments like that. Think about Mary. Think this moment was a Hallmark moment—where all the things she'd ever dreamed about for her first-born came true? **Hardly!** Imagine a germ-freak having to go through what Mary did! Think about someone obsessed with their reputation—facing Mary's out-of-wedlock pregnancy in a culture that publicly humiliated women for that and sometimes executed them!

-The angel told Mary that this baby would be miraculously conceived—but he apparently didn't share that with her parents—or her village.

-These were **not** Kodak moments—but they were part of a much **bigger** picture that changed the world. And somehow, Mary had the maturity to grasp that.

- b. If you wait for the perfect day to celebrate—you'll be waiting your whole life. See the problem I have with perfect days is that **I** show up—and it ruins everything! And I'm trying to be funny or modest. It's not usually something wrong with the day that makes it not worth **pushing the pause button**. I mean, **sometimes** there are really bad days—but most days are blown by—or blown off—by how I'm thinking about them.

4. The Bible says,

This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.
(Psalm 118:24 NIV)

Interesting, isn't it? The Bible doesn't say, **Today isn't so hot, but yesterday was good—it was the day the Lord has made**, or, **Tomorrow I've got some really cool things planned—that will be the day God makes**. Actually, it's **today**. Know why? Because **today** is the only day I have right now. I recently bought this mug with an amazing quote on it by Eleanor Roosevelt that reflects this verse—and all that Jesus grew up to teach.

Yesterday is History; Tomorrow is a Mystery; Today is a GIFT—that's why we call it *The Present*. [pic]

- a. It's true, isn't it? Whatever it holds for you, **yesterday** is history. Sometimes we miss the joy of today because there's no room on the memory card; it's jammed with sad things that have happened, inconsiderate, hurtful things people have done, regrets from our past—**that's** what we focus on. We're **history** majors! And the history channel we're on totally ruins today.

-Know what the problem with that is? Your history shapes you—and you can **learn** from history—but you can't change it. In fact, yesterday can taint or even ruin your **today's**. And that's a tragedy—because it's **history**. By definition, it's frozen in the past—untouchable, unchangeable.

-If you let it—if you rehearse it—but never process it or let it go, **yesterday** can be like a cutting board that someone cuts up a turkey on—but never washes. Anyone here who'd like a wonderful Christmas turkey prepared on an unwashed cutting board? **Maybe not!** The past, if you don't wash it, forgive it, and let it go can contaminate the **present** God gives, brand new—every day—with sadness and bitterness.

- b. And it's true that tomorrow is a **mystery**. As much as you obsess over it, worry about it, plan for it—you **can't** anticipate everything that will happen. Every year Lori and I try to think ahead and by Christmas wrap on sale—to use **next** year. As I was writing this message, I got a frantic call from home that water

was pouring into the basement from a leak in our kitchen faucet. Guess where most of it landed? In the box of brand new Christmas wrap we bought **last** year on Boxing Day—**soaking** the bottoms of the rolls!

-So. I took a utility knife and cut the ends off the rolls. Then we had to take our Christmas gifts back and buy **smaller** ones! Buying the wrapping paper was a **great** idea...last year!

-Sometimes we miss today because we're obsessing about, anxious about, fretting about—planning for tomorrow. About money. About health. About life. About death. How many of you think worrying about and trying to nail down all the edges of the future—**helps?**

- c. And that's why **today**, friends, is the day the Lord has made. Today, every single one we have—is an **incredible gift**. And you can either receive the gift—and choose to **rejoice** and be **glad**—treasure it. Or not. Pushing the pause button and treasuring the gift of today **doesn't** mean just pretending everything's okay when it isn't. No, but it **does** involve gratitude. Being grateful for **all that God has given you**—even, ultimately, the tough things.

-When I was about 10 or 11, my brother and I were opening Christmas presents—and I opened this really, **really** cool gas-powered model plane. I was one **very** excited boy—until Mom and Dad told me that I had opened my **brother's** present. **He** got the plane; I got a **Vac-U-Form**—a little disappointing. My gift did actually last longer though—he had a kamikaze instinct when it came to flying planes.

-Sometimes our problem with seeing **today** as a gift is that we're busy looking at **other** people's 'presents'—if you know what I mean. Today **I'm** losing, **he's** winning. Today **I'm** not getting recognized or rewarded, **she** is. Today **I'm** in need—**they** have plenty. And instead of seeing today as a gift, we want to sit in the corner and feel sorry for ourselves.

-Sometimes our problem with seeing **today** as a gift is our lack of faith in a God who is at work even when life is painful. Like Mary—**even** when you're a virgin carrying God in your womb—and the town thinks you're a whore. Like Joseph--**even** when a God who could nuke an evil king like Herod and his soldiers with a single medium-sized angel—tells you to run for your life.

-Sometimes our problem with seeing today as a gift is that our eyes are totally on ourselves—to the point where we **never** see today as a chance to make a difference in someone else's life—as a gift to **them**.

-The reality of life is...that you and I have today—and whether or not we see it—it's a **gift**. **Yesterday is history. Tomorrow is a mystery. Today is a gift. That's why we call it the Present.**

5. What I **don't** want to do on this day is turn it into some Reader's Digest, Chicken-Soup-For-The-Soul moment. This is too holy of a moment for that. The reason that

the angels made the announcement that they did that night, that this **Saviour's** birth was **Good News** of **Great Joy** for **Everyone**—was because God was stepping into history to make all things right. And He was doing it under appalling, conditions—acknowledged only by poor, unrecognized people—and foreigners.

-Jesus, this Saviour who was born, didn't stay a baby. He lived and worked in obscurity—as a construction worker—and then showed up as teacher. In a period of only 3 years, he totally shook up the world of that day. See, He claimed to be precisely who the angels said He was; Son of the Most High, the Saviour of the world—the Jewish Messiah who had been promised for **thousands** of years. And, of course, that got him nailed to a cross. But rising from the dead does **amazing** things for your credibility—that you are **Who** you say you are, and that you can **do** what you say you'll do.

-Two thousand years later, everything still comes to a screeching halt on this day when we celebrate Jesus' birthday. Work stops. Shopping stops. People stop. It's like someone pushes the pause button—and the world is forced to ask the question: Is Jesus just a wonderful man who taught us to love each other—that in loving and giving, we find our own happiness. Or were the angels right? That it **was** God who humbled himself and stepped out of Heaven one starry night—so He could **save** us; that He did it because **LOVE** characterizes all He is and does.

- a. You may need some help in receiving today as a gift. You may find yourself haunted by your yesterdays. Filled with remorse—or all these memories of ways you've been hurt. Jesus, by dying in my place and yours, made it possible for the past to be washed. Like **totally!** Jesus promises a do-over—no matter how broken or sinful our pasts are. And it gets better. It's not like our history get's blanked out—deleted. It gets **redeemed**. God works in it—and through it.
- b. The future always remains a mystery—but Jesus made it possible for it to be **de-mystified**. Death looms over every person—that's the thing that stalks us. Here's what Jesus promised; that we wouldn't **have** to worry about the future; that He wouldn't just walk hand in hand with us—He would prepare the way before us. And that when the end of life comes, hand in hand, He would step with us over the threshold from **this** home—to **His** home. Forever. And in the meantime—He would work through us in profound ways to make the world right. How's **that** for a promise! This has absolutely nothing to do with religion or performance; the only way it happens is for you and I, whatever our religious background is, to receive the Life He offers—as a gift.

-When your past has been washed, and your future is better than anything we could **ever** think up—and the inbetween is in that hands of a God powerful enough to work **all** things for your good—that frees you and me to see—and treat—today as a gift.

- c. I know this decision to receive God's gift of His Son—of **life**—is a tough one for some of you. I would simply refer you to this gutsy little teenage girl, Mary, who when confronted with a choice that would **profoundly** alter her life, her future,

and her reputation—simply said: **I am the Lord's servant. May everything you have said about me come true. Luke 1:38 NLT)**

-And it did. **That** was the day all of history changed!

6. Hey—I have a gift for you—both the ***past*** and the ***present!*** How many of you would like to see the pictures I took earlier? Like it or not—**here you are!** Cool, isn't it—how a picture freezes time for just an instant.

-This moment could be more than just a picture. It could be God's gift of ***Himself*** to your present. Every kid knows what to do with a gift. Do you? That's really what Christmas is all about.