

The Best Times are Yet to Come

2 Corinthians 4:16-5:8 (NIV)

¹⁶ Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. ¹⁷ For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. ¹⁸ So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal. ¹ For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. ² Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, ³ because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. ⁴ For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. ⁵ Now the one who has fashioned us for this very purpose is God, who has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. ⁶ Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. ⁷ For we live by faith, not by sight. ⁸ We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

Dear family and friends of Monte Green - especially to Tori, Taylor, Jordan, Gavin, Marly, and Mary,

I've been the pastor here at Light of the Valley for almost 6 years. I actually got to know Monte in my first month. I was installed in August of 2014 and about 2 weeks later someone mentioned to me that Tori's husband was in the hospital. Forgive me, Tori, but I didn't even really know who you were at that point. I called her up and found out what was going on. It was serious. A nasty staph infection had Monte in the ICU at Davis Hospital. He wasn't really getting better. I visited Monte there, and ended up meeting Jordan, Gavin, and Taylor there for the first time as well. I visited with him every day for a week, including when they moved him to the University Hospital. They took good care of him. We had a good number of conversations and quite a few prayers. Monte got feeling better and went home. Everything was good again. I got to see Monte again from time to time, especially when he came with Tori to worship on occasion. Tori and I were always thrilled on those days.

It was summer of last year that I noticed Tori, who typically was at church pretty much every Sunday, was now attending more about every other Sunday. (By the way, Tori gave me permission to talk about her church attendance in front of all of you.) So, assuming the best and trying to be tactful, I told her one Sunday that I missed her in church last week. She told me that they now had a place up at Bear Lake and had been going up there quite a few weekends.

You could hear the happiness in her voice about the time she was spending up there with Monte and the rest of the family. Tori even told me that Monte was reluctant to go in on purchasing the cabin with their boys, but then he quickly became the "Cabin Monkey." They all enjoyed the golf course, the beach, kayaking on the lake, spending time around the fire. They started a tradition of getting Christmas tree, decorating it, and then later planting it on the property. Just two weekends ago, Taylor, Jordan, Gavin, and Monte played two straight days of golf up there!

These moments, they're precious. Everyone here, pick your favorite moment with Monte because I know you have one. Treasure those memories. Hold them close. They are gifts from God. He blessed you all with Monte.

Then the Lord called Monte to his heavenly home this past Sunday.

All of us were shocked. In the ICU waiting room on Sunday, the question was asked: Why would God do this? He was young. You had plans with him. There was more golf, more kayaking, more cabin work, more adventures, more Christmases to be celebrated, just more time planned on spending with him, plain and simple.

Why did God take Monte when he did? I'm probably not going to be able to give you an answer that will satisfy that question. I don't know the mind of God – nor will I. He says, "My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways," declares the LORD. "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." (Isaiah 55:8-9) Also, I don't see what he sees. I only see a small sliver of life that is just my perspective while God sees all of human life, all of our lives in all their entirety – past, present, and future. He knows exactly what is going to happen and when, and he is in control of it. The psalmist says, "All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be." (Psalm 139:16b) God knew this was going to happen, and he knew it was the right time. I have to admit that he knows more than me and knows what is best for all of us.

So, I'm not really going to answer the question "Why?" today, but let's change the question. Instead of asking "Why did God do this?", we are going to ask, "What did you do, God?" Here's what God did...

Motivated purely out of his infinite compassion and love and joy, God planned to create Monte. He designed him. He knit him together in his mother's womb, giving him to Marly and Mary. God gave you Monte, as he did with each of your sons and daughters – all gifts from God. Later, God arranged it so that Tori would meet him. They would date and get married. And while Monte and Tori were blessed with three boys, Taylor, Jordan, and Gavin were blessed by God with the Dad he gave them. And the blessings from God continued as the Green family grew as the boys all got married and had kids of their own. God made you all into a family. He blessed you all by making Monte and giving him to you.

But even before God gave you all Monte, God gave himself for Monte. Love Monte as much as we do, we know he wasn't perfect. He, like all of us born from imperfect parents, needed someone to save him from his sins and live perfection for him. This is what God planned out and accomplished for Monte and for all of us. Jesus came down from heaven and took on our human flesh to live perfectly, keeping all God's laws for us. When the time was right, he then sacrificed himself on the cross, taking all of the wrong things any of us have ever done and nailed them there. He paid the price so that we never would. He suffered so that we would not just look at today as a day of loss, but as a day of victory. Jesus rose triumphantly from the day on the third after his death on the cross, proving to all of us that he had conquered death for us and all people.

God did all these things so that we would not live forever in an imperfect world filled with heartache, sadness, pain, and tears. No, by living perfectly for us and giving up his life on the cross for us, God gave us something to look forward to. He gave us heaven as our home, "our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life." (verse 4b) "For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands." (verse 1) A kind of perfect cabin up on the perfect Bear Lake. This gift was already Monte's through his baptism. This is what God did and why he did it. Monte knew this and believed it.

Although it's hard to think this thought because we loved him so much, but God blessed Monte by taking him home. I want you to think about what he has right now. There is no more pain for him. There is no mourning, no crying, no more death. He lives with God right now.

Now, I want you to think about what God has in store for you. What God did for Monte he did for you as well. He has given himself for you as your perfect Savior. He has lived for you, died for you, just as he did for Monte. He holds out to you the same eternal house in heaven not built by human hands, that kind of perfect cabin at a place even better than Bear Lake. This house doesn't need work, doesn't need upkeep. You don't have to dig out boulders. You don't have to winterize or summer-ize it. There with God, it's never too hot and never too cold. The sun never burns you and you always have the perfect amount of shade. You can probably golf and never lose a ball.

You are all hurting today, but I want you all to remember those great memories you have with Monte. Tori, Taylor, Jordan, Gavin, I want you to remember those best times at Bear Lake. And then I want you to think of this: because of what God has done for you and for Monte, the best times are yet to come when you are all reunited in heaven. Every great memory you have with Monte, even more are coming. You will all have for the first time ever an absolutely perfect relationship with Monte.

So, today, yes, take stock of those great memories with Monte. But also, because of what God has done for all of us including Monte, "we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." (verse 18) The best times with Monte are yet to come. Amen.

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