

1 A Prophetic Understanding of Life

2 Very Impressive!

- Last summer, Major League Baseball saw two perfect games tossed before June 15.
- Two perfect games in one season!
- It was the second time in three years that two perfect games had been tossed in the same season.
- Not merely a no-hitter, but a perfect game -- 27 batters up, 27 batters out.

3 Perfection!

- But here's the weird part: Before that, two perfect games in the same season had not happened since 1880!
- It's interesting how extraordinary things bunch up like that.
- And THEN, on Wednesday, August 15, Felix Hernandez of the Seattle Mariners pitched the THIRD perfect game of the season. That has not happened EVER!

4 Cluster of Perfection

5 Time Out

- So we have to stop and ask ourselves a very important question.
- What is going on with all these perfect games?
 - Are batters no longer taking steroids?
 - Is someone letting the air out of the baseballs?
 - Are UFOs influencing sporting results?
- Where has something like this happened before?

6 400 Year Silence

- Jesus' appearance on the scene a couple of millennia ago followed a 400-year period often known as the "silent years," —the period of time between the end of the Old Testament and the beginning of the New Testament.
- In that period of time, there'd been no major prophetic activity, no Hebrew seer thundering a "Thus saith the Lord."
- This is not 130 years, like with the baseball thing, but 400 years!

7 Prophetic Silence is Over

- So after 400 years real "prophetic activity" began to reappear in Israel.
- As the Scripture says, In the fifteenth year of the reign of Tiberius Caesar — when Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea, Herod tetrarch of Galilee, his brother Philip tetrarch of Iturea and Traconitis, and Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene — during the high priesthood of Annas and Caiaphas, the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the desert. (Luke 3:1-2 NIV)

8 John's Message

- First, “the word of God came to John son of Zechariah in the wilderness,” so our text says.
- John bursted forth into the region around the Jordan River like he was swinging a baseball bat, looking for the fences:
 - “... proclaiming a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins,”
 - and his hearers quickly concluded that the time of prophetic silence was over.

9 John the Prophet

- As another gospel writer tells it (John 1:19–23), once John made it clear that he was not himself the Messiah, the crowd immediately jumped to the notion that perhaps he was Elijah come back or “the prophet” (a Moses–like figure, predicted to come; see Deuteronomy 18:15).
- But John accepted neither of those identities, describing himself only as “the voice of one crying out in the wilderness,” a quote from Isaiah.
- But no matter how John described himself, the people heard him as a prophetic voice from God.
- Jesus later called John a prophet, too (Matthew 11:9).

10 More Prophets

- Then comes along another prophet! Jesus himself.
- Jesus appeared on the scene, more than a prophet, to be sure, but the crowds recognized the prophetic in him as well (see Matthew 21:11).
- Jesus even called himself a prophet on one occasion (Luke 4:24).
- And then, not too much later, along came Paul!
- Nobody seemed to have call him a prophet per se, but the Lord described Paul's work to Ananias in prophet–like terms, calling him “an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel” (Acts 9:15).

11 What is Going on Here?

- No prophets of great stature for 400 years, and suddenly there are three!?
- Actually, it wasn't that there were no prophets besides these three in the New Testament era -- Anna and Agabus are both identified as prophets (Luke 2:36; Acts 11:27–28; 21:10) and both fulfilled their callings faithfully, but neither played such central roles as did John, Jesus and Paul.

12 Outliers

- Those three, to use a term from statistics, were outliers, which refers to something (or someone) situated away from the main group.
- That is, John, Jesus and Paul were prophets in a way quite different from others who also bore that title during the same period.

- Over the years, preachers have explained the appearance of John, and especially Jesus, by trotting out Paul's own “fullness of time” line from Galatians 4:4.
- That's no doubt true, but some recent research helps us understand how God's timing might be injected into our calendars.

13 Outliers

- Not long ago, Malcolm Gladwell, a former business and science reporter for The Washington Post, addressed genius clustering in his best-selling book Outliers.
- His research suggests that high IQ itself is overrated and that many people are smart enough to succeed when they have advantageous cultural advantages and are presented with the right opportunities -- meaning that they are in the right place at the right time as certain historical developments are occurring.

14 Outliers

- Gladwell says it this way:
 - The people who stand before kings may look like they did it all by themselves.
 - But in fact they are invariably the beneficiaries of hidden advantages and extraordinary opportunities and cultural legacies that allow them to learn and work hard and make sense of the world in ways others cannot.
 - It makes a difference where and when we grew up.

15 Examples

- As an example, Gladwell points out that Bill Joy, Bill Gates, Steve Jobs, Paul Allen, Steve Ballmer, Scott McNealy and Eric Schmidt, all power-players in the U.S. computer industry, were all born between 1953 and 1956.
- Meaning that all these men reached their adulthood at a key time in their lives when Popular Mechanics ran a cover story about the Altair 8800—the first desktop computer you could build from a kit at home.
- Being in the right place at the right time all these men were on the ground floor when the personal computer revolution took off.
- They weren't smarter than everyone else, but were again at the right place at the right time.

16 Clusters of Genius

- A few years ago, David Banks, a statistician at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, published a short paper titled "The Problem of Excess Genius" in which he noted that geniuses aren't scattered randomly across time and space but seem to appear in clusters both chronologically and geographically.
- His examples are

- the classical Greek period,
- Reformation,
- Exploration & Discovery of the New World,
- the Founding of the USA, and
- the birth of Ekklesia.

17 Fullness of Time

- According to the dictionary, the fullness of time is when something happens when the time is right and appropriate.
- The Apostle Paul says it like this . . .
 - But when the fullness of time had come, God sent his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, in order to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as children. (Gal 4:4-5 NRSV)

18 Fulness of Time

- From the historical point of view, the “fullness of time” suggests several factors.
 - Roman peace extended over most of the civilized world making it safe to travel.
 - Great roads linked the empire with the diverse regions of that era.
 - Most of the world spoke Greek.
 - Spiritual hunger was everywhere, not only among the Jews but the Gentiles too.

19 Prophetic Preaching

- So what did the world need to hear at that time?
 - In those days John the Baptist came, preaching in the Desert of Judea and saying, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” (Matt 3:1-2 NIV)
 - From that time on Jesus began to preach, “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.” (Matt 4:17 NIV)
 - First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I [Paul] preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds. (Acts 26:20 NIV)
- Why should people be called to repentance?
 - And so John came, baptizing in the desert region and preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins. (Mark 1:4 NIV)
 - and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. (Luke 24:47 NIV)

20 Essence of Prophetic Preaching

- The essence of prophetic preaching from John the Baptist, Jesus and His disciples, and the Apostle Paul centered on calling people to repentance for the forgiveness of sins.

- In other words, New Testament preaching was declaring the soon coming Kingdom of God—a message of hope.
- However, anyone who has this hope must turn to the Lord in repentance, because without repentance there is no forgiveness of sins.
- A good definition of sin is anything that breaks the moral commandments of God, or grieves the Holy Spirit.
- In essence sin is prideful, self-centered behavior that seeks its own will, to gain sensual pleasure, personal comfort, or vain glory.

21 What is Repentance

- C.S. Lewis describes the unrepentant condition as being in a "hole" where we need the help of a friend (i.e., a savior) to get us out.
- And what sort of hole is it we've gotten ourselves into? It's behaving as if we belonged to ourselves.
- We are not simply imperfect creatures who need improvement; we are rebels who must lay down our arms.
- Lewis says, "Laying down your arms, surrendering, saying you are sorry, realizing that you have been on the wrong track and getting ready to start life over again from the ground floor -- that is the only way out of a 'hole.'"

22 God Disciplines Those He Loves

- He allows us to reap the outcome of our poor attitudes and decisions, so that we may become frustrated, miserable, and uncomfortable. Find ourselves in a hole.
- But it is for a purpose. That we may repent and no longer be stubborn and headed in the wrong direction.
 - As the Apostle Paul says, When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world. (1 Cor 11:32 NIV)
 - This is why Paul also says, But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. (1 Cor 11:31 NIV)
- Therefore, if we are going through hard times and our conscience is bothering us, what should we do?
- What happens next?

23 Conclusion

- In the fullness of time, God raised up a cluster of prophets to speak to their generation.
- They brought a message of hope, but also one of warning.
- Those who take this warning seriously, will escape the wrath to come and enjoy His Kingdom come.

- Therefore, let us confess our sins to the Lord and turn from all self-seeking, selfish, and self-centered attitudes and actions.
- For if we do, we will make straight paths for the Lord's goodness in our lives.
- God want us to be holy, so that we can be filled with His joy and peace.