

Roots in Ripon

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Chuck Roots

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The Best of Times

Amidst all of life's many twists and turns, the question is often in the forefront of my mind, "Is this a good time to be alive?"

As one who enjoys history, I find myself reflecting on earlier times, wondering if I might have enjoyed living in a different time, or a different era of history. Of course, I'll never know, but I've heard people say with a certain whimsical lament, "I was born a century too late."

So, while spending this past weekend in Monterey/Carmel celebrating my wife's 65th birthday, I saw a variation on Charles Dickens' quote from his novel, *A Tale of Two Cities*. "*It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to heaven, we were all going direct the other way - in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.*"

Surely Dickens must have wrestled with the same idea that there were better times to have lived, and there were certainly worst times to have lived. Sometimes, depending on your own perspective of events, you can see truth in both the opposing views: "*It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.*"

Frequently I will hear Christians verbally wish for the return of Jesus right now because things seem to be so bad in the world today. I will often ask this person if they think the world's condition has deteriorated to the point that it has never been this bad in the past. I've never had anyone say yes to this. A short review of the Bible and the awful situations that the Jews, and later the Christians, found themselves in can be quite enlightening. Even secular history has pointed out the horrors visited upon those of faith who have been targeted for persecution and annihilation.

You see, what may be the best time in the world to be alive for you, may, conversely be the worst time for someone else, whether a neighbor next door, or an unknown inhabitant of a land on the far side of the world.

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One of the true ironies visited upon this world is the spectacular event that occurred two thousand years ago with the birth of Jesus, the Christ, the Son of God, the Savior. He came as promised, for so the ancient prophets recorded in the Old Testament, hundreds, yea, thousands of years before. This event took place in the little burg of Bethlehem, located a scant five miles from Jerusalem.

The irony I refer to is the spectacular joy expressed by a choir of angels announcing the birth of Jesus, while at the same time King Herod, the King of the Jews, was doing everything in his power to find this baby and have him killed. When a king or ruler feels threatened, they will naturally revert to violence in order to prop themselves up and to maintain control of their power.

As a Christian, I am aware of the paradox within my faith. On the one hand, I rejoice and celebrate in the birth of Jesus in all of his innocence. On the other hand, I also celebrate in the death of Jesus at Easter, despite the fact that he was gruesomely abused by his executioners and hung on a cross, a means of execution reserved for the worst of criminals. And what had he done to warrant this hideous treatment? He willingly came to demonstrate God's love for this fallen race of man.

The absurdity of life challenges us to decide for ourselves: Is this the best of times? Or is it the worst of times?

Because of Jesus and his sacrificial death for me, life is always the best of times, despite the worst of times that come as a result of simply living.

Disappointment, heartache, rejection, death, all are part of life's experience. But because of the birth of Jesus on that first Christmas day two thousand years ago, and his later death and resurrection, I have his promise that he will take me home one day to glory to be with him forever.

Perhaps heaven's portal will boldly state, "Within these golden gates you can only experience the very best of times for all eternity."

Merry Christmas! Hallelujah! Jesus has come!