

We started five weeks ago, and I want to separate out the idea of Christmas from Advent. I used the book of Colossians to do that and simply said that Christmas is a good thing. The songs, the trees, the presents, the stockings and all of that are good and fun. We should play. But it's simply a shadow, not the substance.

Ultimately, a shadow is never going to be enough for us. You can't get your arms around a shadow, a shadow can't comfort you and a shadow's not going to bring any warmth to you. So to put all the weight of this season onto a shadow is to experience what sociologists would call the Christmas Blues or the Christmas Hangover. I tried to unpack that in a way that would say that there is in all of us a bit of let down after everything is over. After all the presents have been opened, after the meals have been eaten, after the dishes have been cleaned, there's this, "Huh, is that all there was?"

Because our culture has built Christmas up to be this epic, miraculous event where all family wrongs are made right, where unity dwells, where all the desires of your heart are met and there's this kind of magical component to that day. Every show you'll watch, every advertisement is telling you that it's spectacular, it's miraculous and it makes life make sense. And as much as we don't want to buy into it, we get sucked in, drawn in by a bombardment of promises that Christmas could never deliver upon.

So the way I wanted to push you and the way I wanted to shape our time leading up to Christmas is this. Enjoy your family if you can. Don't obey your diet so strictly. Enjoy and party. The Bible actually has multiple commands on partying. Partying is a good thing. Celebrate and rejoice. Go shopping. Do those things, but just don't put your hope there. And don't put all the dwelling of your mind and heart into that place. Rather put it on the substance that casts that shadow.

So we've set out over these last few weeks to really try to draw your mind and heart not just to the fun of the holiday season but actually to the substance that casts that long shadow of joy and happiness.

We talked in week 1 about promises and patience. We talked about the reality that the world is not as God designed it to be. The world is broken, and nobody really wants to argue about that. It doesn't matter what their belief system is, there is uniformity on the reality that something has gone wrong in the heart of man. Now how that's explained and how it's taught that we fix that varies wildly. But we set out in week 1 that the world is broken and it's broken because of sin. People will define it in different ways. In our vein, the problem on planet Earth and in the cosmos is sin, a rebellion against the Creator. That's your problem and that's my problem.

And then we walked through the fact that in Genesis 3, right after the cosmos is fractured, God gives us the first promise that He's going to fix it. And then we tracked through the Old Testament right into the New Testament about how God said, "This is how it's going to take place. I'm going to do this through the line of Abraham, through the line of David. This is what He's going to be like. This is what He's going to do."

And we just simply tracked God pushing forward His promise to solve all things in a man who Isaiah will tell us is also God. He tells of a man who would suffer, who would be mocked, who would have His garments gambled away and who would be pierced in His hands and feet. We walked through all of those promises leading up to Jesus.

And then I pressed that this takes a long time and requires patience. In fact, we looked at a promise of a Davidic king a thousand years before David was born. Then you've got quite a bit of time after David was born before we get to Jesus. This is a long-suffering movement of God for the glory of His name and the salvation of His people. So that was week 1 of promises and patience.

Then in week 2, Paul Tripp came and talked about hope and that where you place your hope is really imperative to your joy. If you put your hope in something that cannot sustain that hope, then your joy will be strongly destroyed. So if you put all your hope in your spouse that they're going to meet your needs, satisfy you and make you happy, then your marriage is going to be rough. If you put all your hope in your kids that you're going to parent right, that they're never going to embarrass you and that they're always going to make the right decisions because you're such a great parent, then you're going to be frustrated. If you take all your hope and put it in your ability to make money or put in your ability to stay healthy, you're going to be let down. So it's important that you're really in tune with where you place your hope. Because if you place your hope in things that can be easily taken from you, then you've set yourself up for heartbreak. And that was week 2.

And then last week we talked about the implications of the incarnation. If Jesus Christ came in the flesh, then that has some massive implications for you and me. So we walked through primarily the idea that, if Christ came, God is all-knowing and Jesus is God, then forgiveness is available for all. The work I wanted to do last week is because I have found that the topic of forgiveness can make people volatile. It's a confusing one for some why people get upset about it. Because if we were talking about what the Bible says about sexuality, I understand why our culture wants to kick against that. If we were talking universal claims, I completely understand that the temperature of the culture in which we live cannot tolerate universal claims unless it's a universal claim about how universal claims don't exist. So I completely get the conflict that can arise over those things, but conflict over forgiveness? Absolutely.

Here's why. There are two unhealthy camps that really flesh themselves out around the topic of forgiveness. There is a group of people who don't believe they need forgiveness. And then there is a group of people who believe that it's impossible for them to ever be forgiven. So what we tried to do last week is really deconstruct both of those camps.

We wanted to deconstruct the idea that you don't need forgiveness. So I pushed really hard on the reality that you don't have problems; you are the problem. You don't lie; you are a liar. Those are different. What we like to do is go, "I'm not a liar. I just lie every now and then." No, you're a liar. You're a thief, you're a blasphemer and you are a Godbelittling robber of God's glory. That's who you are. It's not what you do; it's who you are. You do those things because that's what you are.

And then we moved from spending a good bit of time proving guilt and we moved over to that second error that there is so much carnage behind you, there is so much damage behind you and there is so much pain that you have caused that there is no way you could ever be forgiven. We just unpacked that Jesus knew all that and still came. Regardless of what carnage you've caused, regardless of what damage you've caused, regardless of what's lying in the wake of your horrible, rebellious decisions or what pain is currently existing in your life, He knew and still came. This is not just a man. This is God in the flesh. You don't surprise Him ever. . .and yet He came. So we talked about the fact that this idea that you can't be forgiven is somewhat silly in the light of the fact that God knows who you are and still came.

Now, that leads us to where we need to wrap my part up today. The life of Jesus Christ is extremely important by the the fact that He came and that He came and fulfilled the righteous requirements of the Law. The fact that Jesus came and was perfectly righteous is extremely important. If Jesus comes and He is not completely righteous and dies on the cross, then He has no righteousness to give to us. So even if He absorbs God's wrath towards us, we can't have righteousness

replaced, because we have no righteousness of our own. So the life of Christ is unbelievably important, and the death of Jesus Christ is unbelievably important.

And then the pieces that we haven't discussed yet are the resurrection and the return. I know some of you are skeptics that are being drawn here. I always smile a little bit about that. Because I think that you might not be aware that God is actually wooing you and romancing you and you'll be one of us before you know it. That's why you just keep coming back even though I infuriate you. So I always want to address that you're here. I'm glad you're here. You're welcome here. And what I have found is the idea of the resurrection really bothers people in regards to they just can't intellectually get there. "So you're telling me a man was killed, and three days later He came back to life? I just have a hard time with that."

Well let me show you some things here, because it's important for us as believers in Christ and even as skeptics. Because if the resurrection is true, what can't be true? Let's look in 1 Corinthians 15, starting in verse 3. "For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, . . ."

So Paul, when he's defending the resurrection to the church at Corinth, is saying, "This didn't come out of nowhere. He died in accordance with the Scriptures. The Old Testament said that this is how it would occur with the Messiah. So Jesus died in accordance with the Scriptures. Not only that but He was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures." He's bringing their minds and bringing their eyes to the details at which Christ lived, died and was resurrected.

But then look at where he goes next, because at this point, the appeal is to one of faith. It's an appeal that Christ has fulfilled their sacred literature. But that's not what where he goes next. He moves on from an appeal to faith to an appeal to the rational mind. Verse 5, ". . .and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles. Last of all, as to one untimely born, he appeared also to me."

The appeal in the next part of 1 Corinthians 15 isn't faith, but it's reason. His appeal is, "We saw Him. And I'm not the only one who saw Him. Peter saw Him. James saw Him. There were 500 in one gathering who saw Him. We talked to Jesus. We walked with Him. We ate with Him. We heard from Him. This is not some sort of guilt and sorrow that led me to imagine that He was there."

This isn't one of those movies about loss where they have a flashback and they see their loved one in the room real quick. That's not what this is. They saw Him, they walked with Him and they ate with Him. Paul honestly says, "Hey, there were 500 at one point who saw Him, and not all of them are still alive. Some have fallen asleep. But there are many who haven't. Go ask them. I'm not making this up. Go talk to them. There are still people who saw Him. I'm not crazy. Peter is not crazy. The Twelve were not crazy. We saw Him. We walked with Him. Go ask."

It's not an appeal to faith. It's an appeal to reason. This wasn't some sort of sorrow-induced hallucination, but rather Jesus walked with them, He touched them, they touched Him and they ate together. This is what comes out when Paul goes, "Go ask around. I'm not making this up."

And then we'll just take that appeal to reason and hash it down into what I'll call circumstantial evidence. Every Easter, I like to point this out, because it really is a strange phenomenon. Every Easter, what you'll find on the National Geographic Channel and the Discovery Channel is specials on the resurrection, but they're not pro-gospel presentations. No one has ever accused those two channels of having a pro-evangelical agenda. They have never written

on the white board going, "How can we promote the cause of Christ?" That is not their agenda, and yet every year they roll out specials to explain what caused the commotion around the resurrection of Christ.

Here's why. Because historically there was a commotion. Historically you've got to do something with that period of time where these cowardly men (and it's well documented that they were cowardly) ceased in a moment to be cowardly. So you've got in our own sacred literature a clear unpacking of the cowardly nature of them all, and then out of nowhere they all turn into just a bunch of ferocious beasts. All of a sudden they're not afraid to die and they're not cowards at all. They go from hiding in the upper room to standing out publicly proclaiming that Christ has been risen. Peter says in the book of Acts, "Not only has Christ risen, but you killed Him. You killed the One who God sent to save. But you only did it because God let you and because He had predetermined that you would. Now repent and believe." And they are all willing to die badly.

You see, the madness of the prosperity teaching of our day is that you're just not going to be able to find a lot of it in the Scriptures. That's problematic. Now does God bless? Yes and amen. But sometimes God blesses with loss, with suffering and with pain. Sometimes that is your gift and that's your blessing. Because to bless you with that has your hands clutched to Him, whom you really need.

So Peter goes from being this cowardly man who runs from the arrest of Jesus and denies Jesus Christ openly to a man upon his death who says, "I'm not worthy to be crucified in the same manner." You have the explosion of Christianity in the urban centers. It's speculated that by 300A.D. 51% of the Roman Empire claimed Christ as Lord. But what you'll hear is that Constantine made Christianity. They'll say that the emperor of Rome said, "I've become a Christian, so I'll make this Christianity thing flourish." But what we know historically is that Christianity was flourishing and Constantine hopped on the wagon. Now I pray he was genuinely converted, but here's what I can tell you. When you're the emperor of Rome, you don't get voted out; you get shived in the shower. So here you've got this explosion of this religion taking over the ancient world, and Constantine goes, "Hey, I'm one of those. Please don't kill me. This should be the Roman religion. Let's go this direction, because that's the way the crowd is going." Now I hope and pray that he was genuinely converted, and then I'll get to meet him in eternity.

There are other things. Take the fact that women discovered the empty tomb. In the 1st century, a woman's word was not good in a court of law. So if you're going to hatch this plan to take over the world with a new religion, why are you going to let women discover the empty tomb? Wouldn't it be a better story if it was some official, some high-ranking man in either Jewish culture or Roman rule? But it wasn't. It was some peasant women that found Jesus' tomb empty. If they're trying to lie and make something up, they do a horrible job of it.

And so what you have is a ton of circumstantial evidence, and I haven't even mentioned the fact that Jesus' mother and half-brother James worshiped Him as God. In fact, James was willing to be martyred for his half-brother. History tells us that they took him up to the Temple Mount and told him to deny Christ as Lord. James refused, so they threw him off the Temple Mount and broke both of his legs. He still would not recant, so they pelted him with stones until he died. He never recanted that his half-brother Jesus was the God of the universe. On and on we could go here.

The focal day of worship moved from Saturday to Sunday. I don't know what you know about church people, but they don't have a tendency after a couple thousand years of tradition to go, "You know what? We should just move that day." Things become sacred cows to church folk in a matter of moments. And yet you have this transition. You have these sacraments that are introduced that celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Something went on that must be historically explained, and since it can't be explained that He was actually resurrected, we've got to come up with other theories. So there's the swoon theory where He didn't actually die. There is this kind of grieving apparition theory where they were so distraught that they imagined that He was among them. These

are the kinds of things that you'll see to try to explain away what exploded out of Jerusalem around the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

But for us, it's a much more simple matter. He rose. It wasn't grief. It wasn't a ghost. He rose. He ate with them. In a new, imperishable body, He embraced them, walked with them and talked with them. He ascended into heaven, and He'll one day return.

Now there are massive implications of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, and I want us to start to get into those now. So let's look at verse 12. "Now if Christ is proclaimed as raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied. But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive."

There are two things that stick out here that I think you need to know. First, the resurrection is the ace of spades that it's over. The reign of sin and death, the reign of the slavery to sin in your life and in mine has been conquered once and for all in Christ. If Christ was not raised, then maybe He paid for all of it and maybe He didn't. But since He was resurrected, we see that the debt has been paid in full. Without the resurrection, there has to be doubt in you and me. "Was all of it paid for? Was all of my rebellion absorbed? Because it seems like there wasn't enough in the sponge of Christ to get it all, because He is under the curse of death." But since we have a resurrection, we see that Christ is no longer under the curse of death. Therefore the curse of sin and death has been fully absorbed.

So those of you who think you've gone too far, you've done too much, you've hurt too many people, you've left too much carnage in your background, you carry too much shame, this can't be for you, this place couldn't welcome you and God could not have you as a son or daughter, you are believing absurd lies. The resurrection is the evidence that it has been paid in full. What has? All of your sins, past, present and future. It's why the book of Hebrews says He died once and for all for those who are being saved. We don't need another sacrifice. We've got the one we need.

And He took care of all of it. In fact, the book of Hebrews also says that the altar is closed and He is no longer taking offerings for sins. So your "O woe is me," your penitence has no place in the throne room of God. It has been paid in full. Your penitence (if possible) is confusing to Him. It has been paid for. It would be like you trying to pay for a bill that has already been paid for. It's done. And this is one of the massive implications of the resurrection of Christ.

But the other one in this text that is pretty spectacular is this. Since Christ has been raised, we too shall also be raised. So there wasn't just a physical, bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ, but there will also be a physical, bodily resurrection of you, me and everyone else ever who has been in Christ. So as much as I can war against the ethereal you wearing a white robe and playing a harp idea of heaven, I'm going to. Because it's not biblically accurate. But it's not the type of body you have on now. It's not the type of body I'm wearing today.

So let's look at what it is. Verse 42, "So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body."

I want to stop there and let an uncomfortable truth set in. Here it is. You're easy to kill. You are impossibly fragile. No matter what precautions you take, no matter what safety things you build around your life, you are simple to kill. A car ride, an airplane ride, a jog around the park or one cell in your body going rogue is all it takes. It takes the right virus, the right bacteria, unseen substances in the air, on a surface or in a sneeze and you're gone. You're easy to kill.

So please spare me all the things you're doing to stay healthy. Eat your greens and get your workout on. That is good stewardship. Get a juicer, get a food processor and only eat grass-fed meat. There is a level of stewardship around your body that is important, but don't think for a second that it's going to save you. As one of the pastors here, we have a front row seat to tragedy, and it is no respecter of how healthy you are. So whether it's been how we have been going back and forth between here and Parkland on a consistent basis lately or the multiple funerals we've had the last two weeks, we are fragile, easy to break and easy to kill.

Because as he's saying in 1 Corinthians 15, our bodies are weak. He's saying that we won't be like that at the resurrection. What is sown in weakness will be raised in strength. So the things that make me weak now will be gone. What is sown in dishonor will be raised in honor. There is a certain bit of dishonor that comes in death. It's ugly. I don't know if you've been in the room or been around it, but death is ugly. The Bible is saying that the resurrected body doesn't have to worry about death anymore. Death will be gone. That dishonor will be gone. We will be raised in honor.

So you can walk through this text and see some of this in Jesus Christ. Jesus has a physical body. He lets them touch Him and He eats food, but He also goes from Emmaus into the room where the disciples are almost instantly. So that's different. It's pure speculation, but it says He appeared among them. Nobody appears among you through the door. So there's this aspect of resurrected bodies that they're extremely different from the body you and I have now. You're not going to be able to get sick, you're not going to get tired and you won't grow weary.

I don't want to get into conjecture in regards to sleep and food, but what we do have in the Bible is this picture of a great feast, a wedding supper of the Lamb. So part of me is led to believe that there will be the drinking of new wine and the eating of great food. That is even a holy moment on this side of eternity if your mind and heart is in the right place.

So there will be a resurrection, but it won't be this body, this body that needs a cup of coffee first thing in the morning. Ultimately we're not going to need things like that. One of my favorite quotes is by Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo, that says that all of the vitality required by the liver and by the other functions of our body to keep us alive won't need the energy to do that anymore, and that energy will be freed up for us to make much of the Lord. You've got this physical bodily resurrection on a new earth that has been purged of darkness, sin and despair and has been made right by the grace and mercy of God.

And then there's one more thing I want you to see here. Let's look at verse 50. "I tell you this, brothers: flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." So you've got this picture of, in an instant, at the apex of history, the dead in Christ rising with imperishable bodies, and those of us who have not died at the time will be transformed into those imperishable bodies also.

This past week, I did a funeral for an eight-year-old boy. There were a lot of tears and a lot of heartbreak in the room, rightly so. There was grief, and there was loss. The dad got up and shared his heart. He did such a great job. The grandfather got up and shared his heart. One of our elders, who is friends with the dad, got up and shared his heart. It was heavy, it was thick and it was not without hope. Not only was it not without hope, but it was not without this strange, thick joy.

How? I think part of it is a clear understanding of the resurrection. Part of it is the fact that we're going to come out of the ground with a new, imperishable body, and we will not longer fear death, no longer fear disease, no longer get tired, no longer walk in any type of weariness, unforgiveness, bitterness or rage and we'll be set free to love Him forever.

So this is where we as believers in Christ put our hope. You already heard Paul saying, "Our hope is not in just today. If our only hope is in today, we should be pitied more than all men." But our hope isn't just in today. Our hope is in tomorrow. This transforms the way we live our lives. It transforms the way we view our money, how we view one another. This affects our willingness to absorb the wrongs of towards us and to work for the glory of God's name. Because we don't just live for today. We're not, "Eat, drink and be merry, for tomorrow we die." We're storing up treasure where moth, dust and rust won't take away from us. We're storing up treasure in heaven. We understand that at the return of Christ, He is bringing His reward with Him. So we put our hope on that day.

Do we enjoy today? Sure. But ultimately our hope is not in today, not in this life, but in the life to come. Which is why I love verse 58. He begins to explain the implications of believing this. "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."

Christmas is a week away. I know that creates some panic in some of you. So some of you are getting ready to go out of town, and some of you are getting ready to host people coming in from out of town. There are gifts to be bought, and there are stocking stuffers to hurry up and get. Since Christmas falls on the weekend, a lot of us will work a bulk of this week. So it's going to get busy over the next couple of days. The speed of life will be ratcheted up over the next 120 hours or so.

So here's my fear in all of it. My fear is that this is the week where we'll take our eyes off, our hearts off and our meditations off the substance and start worrying about the shadows. So instead of really having our heart and mind engaged on the fact that He came for us, He rescued us, He will resurrect us and He is returning, we find ourselves in the same spot that our brothers in the Old Testament found themselves where they wait, they long and they yearn. They cry out, "Maranatha. Come, Lord Jesus. Come and fix this once and for all," because the promise implicit in this entire chapter is that the Jesus Christ who was born in the manger will not return in a manger. When He comes again, He will be meek but all-powerful. He comes this time not to peasants to pay the price for sin, but to claim what He rightfully purchased on the cross – His sons and daughters and the resurrection and reconciliation of all things to the Father. And all that has gone wrong will be set right.

Hear me plead with you today. If forgiveness is available for you in Christ, wouldn't you be a fool to say no to it? If you don't think you need forgiveness, that's a whole other story, and I don't have time to deconstruct that again. But if you're here today and you only come around church when it gets close to Christmas time and your kid starts acting up or you can feel that you fall short or you feel that you and God aren't cool, hear me when I say it's available for you. You have not strayed too far. You have not gotten yourself at such a distance that the arm of the Lord is too short. You just have to submit and ask for forgiveness and repent. It's available for you. My hope is that you wouldn't get caught up in this last wave of business, but that you would steadfastly fix your gaze upon the Author and Perfecter of your faith.

Let's pray. "Holy Spirit, for my brothers and sisters, I pray that You would remind their hearts that You have not abandoned, but that You are here and that You will return in bodily form. You will not return as an angel or sort of spirit, but You will come in the flesh to redeem and rescue once and for all all of the things that went wrong in the fall. I thank You that You've already paid the price for us and that You are working out salvation in the hearts of millions. From every tribe and tongue in the world, You are wooing, calling and saving from among the nations. So I pray that our hearts would be encouraged today. For those who are a bit skeptical, I thank You that they're thinking, and I pray that You would awaken their hearts to the truth of the gospel. We need You to do this. A sermon is not going to do it, and songs aren't going to do it. Will You do it, Holy Spirit? It's for Your beautiful name I pray. Amen."

© 2011 *The Village Church*