

If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab them. We're going to be in Ecclesiastes 3. If you're a guest with us today and aren't familiar with how to navigate the Bible, there is a hardback black one somewhere around you. We've put the page number up there. For those of you who know your Bibles well, you have to be asking yourself, "Christmas out of Ecclesiastes? Are you serious?" Hopefully I can get us to a place where we can see how this fits where we're going and really how we should approach the coming season. I guess it's not coming. It's here, right? Black Friday has happened. Somebody did get beat up in Walmart, so we're full on.

I want to start today by doing an unscientific poll. Here's what I need you to do as we do this unscientific poll. What I need you to do is not give me the *correct* answer, but give me the *real* answer. Can we do that? I don't know if we can or not, but if you're church folk, you'll know the right answer. I'm not asking for the right answer. I'm asking for the real answer. If we can't be real, if we can't be honest about what's actually going on in our hearts, in our guts, then we have no real shot at ever going anywhere except exactly where we are. I want to ask a series of questions I think serve as a diagnostic that helped me get into what I believe we need to be aware of if we're going to exercise this season to its fullness.

I'm going to ask unscientific questions, and we're going to raise our hands if that's us. We'll move through those questions quickly. I think there are six of them. Maybe I'll use all six. Maybe I'll add a seventh. I don't know. I'm feeling crazy. It's Christmastime, all right? I get chipper. I'm going to ask some questions, and we'll go from there.

Here's my first question: How many of you, if you were honest, would say that maybe deep in your heart or maybe not even deep in your heart, maybe right in your heart, maybe visible physically, that you believe that if your schedule wasn't so busy or if your life wasn't so hectic, if somehow you could slow things down and create more space, that you would be more content than you are right now? Anyone? Does anyone think, "If life wasn't so crazy, I could figure out how to be more content"? You can put your hands down.

Maybe it's not busy-ness. Let's say maybe you have a relationship that is fractured or a relationship that doesn't have the spark, the heat, if you will, that it once did. Maybe you're in a situation where you're just kind of lonely or feel alone. That doesn't mean you're not around people, but in your heart, you just believe that if this relationship was made right, or for some of you who are single, you actually got one, that you would be more content. Anyone? "If I could have some relationships that were fixed, if I could

have some relationships that were deeper, more right, actually had some, then I would be more content." We'll do simple ones.

How many of you believe you would be more content if you just had a different job? Anyone? If you're sitting by your boss, don't do it, all right? But if you're not... When we were kids, what were we going to be? Rock stars and policemen and firemen. We were going to make platinum records, and we were going to be in the movies. Now we're in a cubicle. What happened to us? We would be more content if we had a different job. Let's just try to get real here. How many of you feel like you would just be more content if you had a bit more coin, a bit more money? "If we just had some more money, had a little bit more change, we would be content."

How about this one. I always want to do the reciprocity here. I always want to do the reciprocal because the Bible does. How many of you feel like you would be more content if you had less stuff? If you had less stuff, didn't have as much to manage, you would be more content? Anyone? How many of you would be more content if I just simply stopped asking these questions? The rest of us. Okay. With that kind of unscientific straw poll done, let's move into some things.

First of all, I believe you and I have been disciplined by our culture in discontentment. You and I have been disciplined, and we are expert in discontent. They say that you can figure out what a person or a people values based on what they celebrate. If you want to know what is really going on in the hearts of the people, what's really going on in the group, then what you watch is what they celebrate, what they value, what they make much of, what they applaud.

Hopefully, at The Village Church, what you see that we value supremely above all things is Christ being magnified, Christ being pointed to, Christ as our only hope. Week in and week out, what we want to celebrate in every venue possible, whether that be music, proclamation of the Word, baptism, Communion, we want to say, "Jesus Christ is the hero. He's who you need. You don't need me. You don't need anybody on this staff. You don't need a style. What you need is Christ."

Whether or not stylistically you prefer a piano and organ with a giant choir or maybe contemporary, that if we're straight, isn't really contemporary anymore; you're referencing the 80s. Whether you prefer high church/low church celebratory worship, just kind of watching, regardless of what your preference is, what you need in that preference is to see and savor Jesus Christ as Lord. That's what we value. That's what we're after. That's what we celebrate.

There are very few things here that get celebrated outside of that, and the things that are celebrated outside of that, we believe are trying to point you toward that even in the celebration of it outside of it.

What then does the Mount Everest of western holidays teach us about our culture? If we're straight, there is nothing like this season. No other holiday block gets the attention this one gets. There is a tangible shift. There is a feel. People started prepping for this thing long ago. It's getting earlier and earlier and earlier.

There used to be a thing called Christmas in July where you actually would raise money and raise gifts to give to people in tough situations in July, and now literally, there is Christmas in July. You have whole radio stations that shift what they broadcast from now before Thanksgiving through the first of the year. You will be without mercy pummeled by a billion ads from here on out. You have holiday in the park. You have tinsel and trees. You have cards and carols. You have just a tsunami of you and me being pelted by, if I'm straight, a very particular message.

I want to get underneath what you might think it is, and I want to point out really what's happening here and what part of your core scheme, what part of your soul is actually being baited and pled with in this holiday season. It's important we address this so we can go into this season and maximize. I love this time of the year. I really do. Look. We killed a lot of trees to make these trees. We're in. I like the lights. I like the carols. I tried to put the lights on my house on Friday until Lauren came out and said there was this thing that projected the lights on the house, and I didn't need to do that. She was looking into getting one of those. I didn't need to be convinced. I got off the ladder. That's dangerous. I put the ladder up. I'm done. Let's find this projecting thing.

Let's find this hologram that just shows the lights on the house without me having to risk my life for it. I'm in; we do Christmas. There are stockings on my fireplace. I don't think that's evil. We do presents and big meals. I love this season, but it is, I believe, for our culture in this period of time, there are some spiritual dynamics going on that most of us can't spot. Let me give you core schema, soul-level message behind the holidays. Are you ready? It's simple. It's an oversimplification, but I'll flesh it out. Are you ready? Your life stinks. Merry Christmas. Your life stinks. Hey, never fear. Never fear, because we're going to solve it in this season.

You're lacking. You know you're lacking. I know I'm missing out on life. You're missing out on life, but praise God Almighty, the season is here. This season is magical, and we're going to get our missing pieces. Families are going to come together, and there's going to be joy and harmony and holly, and by God, we're going to enjoy this. Our lives are going to make sense. The purpose we seek and the hope we have will finally be fulfilled. But all of the hope stems from the reality... Really, marketing is brilliant. I believe those who have been trained in marketing know more about the human condition than (God help us) some of our preachers and teachers.

If we approach this season and get swept up in the, "We know what you need. Here's what is is." That's not always stuff. Sometimes that's just an idea. It's just a really fragile idea. Sometimes it's Clark Griswold. It's the whole family there. The lights are perfect, and it's this kind of fake, revisionist history nostalgia they would have us believing that things at a different time and a different day were like they were in the movies. It's snowing outside in Dallas. I do believe that happened three years ago, but once in like a hundred years. The family was in, and everybody got along. Crazy Aunt Sally didn't cut anybody. It's this kind of revisionist history nostalgia.

Sometimes it's not stuff. Sometimes it's an idea, a really fragile, kind of untouchable idea. All the ads you'll watch, all that ABC Family special, "I'll be home for Christmas," stuff really has, at its root, that you're lacking, and this season will solve that. For whatever reason, every year, we push our chips in. We believe even when we don't want to. We just kind of get caught up in it. Have you seen what they did to Six Flags? It's holiday in the park. There are carolers. There is hot cocoa. We just get sucked into wassail and Christmas trees. It's hard not to get sucked in. It's infectious. When all is said and done, I want to try to give you some lenses by which to see the next five weeks in the hopes that you might wring out what really matters while enjoying yourself.

I think you should enjoy yourself. This is fun. If you have kids, this season is a blast. If they're super young, just get them the paper. They'll eat it, and you'll be the champ. You don't even have to spend any money. Give them a box. If your kids are older, how magical is it for them right now? There is an energy level building in my house which is scary. I think you should enjoy all of that, I just don't want you to get caught up in things that aren't true and buy into lies that will leave you frustrated and disappointed rather than reinvigorating your hope in what actually matters and what this season should be about for those of us who profess and believe in Jesus Christ.

With all of that said, I want us to move away from the Norman Rockwell painting, and I want to look at a couple of verses. You're in Ecclesiastes 3. We're going to look at verse 11 here in a second, but before that, I want to point this out to you. In Genesis 1:27, the Bible says God created man in his own image. **"In the image of God he created them; male and female he created them."** God, as he's creating the universe, creates you and me, according to the Scriptures, in the image of God. In another text in Genesis 2, it says, **"Let us make man in our [own] image."** What sets you and me apart from the rest of the creation is not our thumbs, and it's not our conscience, but that you and I have been made in the image of God.

Although the rest of the creative order declares the glories of God, as mankind, you and I have a unique and more brilliant reflection of the glory of God than anything else in all of creation. We have been made in the image of God. As God made us in his image, there are certain untouchable, intangible things that he sealed inside of us that, in many ways, create little pathways we walk on, either for ill or for ultimate good

and salvation. We're going to read about one of those here in Ecclesiastes 3. We're picking it up in verse 11. **"He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end."** I want to stop there.

We will spend the bulk of our time together on that little phrase. Not, **"He made everything beautiful in its time."** That's a whole other sermon for another day. I want us to concentrate on, "He has put eternity into our hearts," so you and I from birth came out with a chasm, a gap of eternity. If you have a background in church, you've heard it said maybe something like this. There is a hole in man's heart that only God can fill. There a God-shaped box in every man's heart that only God can fill. They're pulling that from this idea that you and I have, in the core of who we are, a gap of eternity that we're longing to fill.

Unfortunately for you and me, we seek to fill the gap of eternity with what is temporary, and what is temporary will never fill the gap of eternity. The reason we're very apt to fall for this season with all of its promises is deep in the core of who we are, there is a, "What is life about? Surely there is more. Surely I'm missing out on something. Surely I can be more than I am. Surely I can be seen for more than I am." Marketers prey on this gap of eternity, because our default is to try to cram temporary things into that gap in order to calm the roughness of that gap down, to quiet that voice inside of us, that voice of discontent inside of us.

Here's the crazy thing. Temporary stuff works for a season, doesn't it? There are high watermarks in my life that were beautiful. Here's the thing about temporary things. Temporary things, although they can be good, are like contaminated gasoline in your car. Your car will run for a while, but eventually the sand is going to clog up your engine, and it's going to stop going. You might (if we could flesh this out) have a lot of high watermarks in your life. I think those are good. I think those are common grace. I think they're beautiful things. What I'm saying is they never last.

You don't even have to be a Christian. Even if you would consider yourself an atheist, secular humanist, you would have a hard time arguing that mankind doesn't perpetually push his hope forward, because what he hopes and when he gets it does not satisfy him. When we were kids, we just wanted a little bit more freedom from Mom and Dad. Mom and Dad gave us a little more freedom. Then we just wanted our car. Then we got our car. Then we just wanted to graduate from high school. Then we graduated from high school. Then we just wanted to get into the right college, and we got into the college. Then we wanted to find the one, and we found the one. Then we wanted to get out of college. Then we wanted to find a job. Then we wanted that promotion. Then we wanted that car, and we wanted that house.

At every turn, we got what we wanted and found that it was great when it happened. Just straight up, when you got that promotion, that was a great day, wasn't it? I see that most of you have never been promoted.

When you got hired to stock those shelves, that was a great day, right? Those are good days. Somebody better help me here. How about when you got that first car? Not the jalopy, not the backfiring, rusted out death trap that your parents bought you, unless you're silver spoons. That first car that you bought felt good. When you got in, and you're like, "I'm going to take care of this one." That felt great. You didn't want to roll down your windows, because you wanted to keep the new car smell in. That was a good day.

When you got the promotion, that was a good day. I remember my first \$20 bill. I thought I could live for years off of that thing. Good things, temporary things, satisfy. There's something about them, but they all give way. If you climb to the corporate ladder even where you are, if you're not at the highest level, you want to be at the highest level, because you found even at the level you're in now that you want more. You want to roll it up again. You're waiting for somebody to die so you can take this one. Here's what I'll tell you. Even if you get there, it'll be a great month. It'll be a great year. It'll be a great three years, but you'll grow bored, because what's temporary cannot fill the gap of eternity.

My wedding day is a high watermark day for me. I love Lauren. I like her. I think she's beautiful. She's funny. She's my best friend. I got to stand holding her hands, looking into her face, family and friends, a couple of guys who had poured deeply into both of us sitting there officiating our wedding. That was a high-level day. Look at me. It required no effort that day. This is spectacular. I'll be real honest. That gave way to delightful, disciplined work. Married folk, you better talk to me right now. Don't you be acting like I'm lying. It gave way to work I enjoy, but to keep my marriage where there is friendship and fun and laughter and delight, that is not just be lazy and that happens.

The ease of the wedding day joy gives way to the delightful work of maintaining what is healthy and robust in regard to marriage, because what is temporary cannot fill the gap of eternity. When we gave birth to our children... I didn't give birth to any of them, but I got to be in the room for all of that. In that, each time we had a kid, I marveled at the fact that God would actually trust me with this. I lose stuff all the time. Then God gave me a human to take care of. What I found is that as much of a high watermark as that was in my life that God would entrust three souls to me, that delight is not without frustration. Parents? Thank you, someone.

I didn't know what to do. I just read every parenting book I could, and just found out that most of it was bull. The people who write that have weird babies. They have babies that come out smoking a pipe and reading Shakespeare. Their disposition is just to be obedient and do whatever. My kids come out with a hatchet and a scar. Chandler babies don't come out obedient. They come out looking for a fight. In the end, what I have found is that my delight in my children is ever present, but that doesn't mean that God works on my patience and that I have to deal with frustration in the midst of that delight because what is temporary will not fill the gap of eternity.

No house, no car, no clothes, no relationship is going to fill this gap, because all these things are temporary; they're not eternal. What happens to us as we shove sand into the engine of our hearts and it starts to sputter out, we're forced then to start looking around at what appears to be making other people happy, what appears to be making other people satisfied. Again, marketers know this, and they start to play on this wound in your soul, on this gap in your soul, and we begin to be told, "This is what's going to work. This is what's going to satisfy. This is what's going to fill that. Do you want to make that go away? Here's how you make that go away."

It's brilliant. "You have some longing? iPad mini. No, no, no, not the iPad. It is, but it's smaller. No, no, not your phone small. It's between small and small. It's kind of small. No, no, it's not your laptop. No. It's kind of like your iPad, but what we did is we shrank it, and it's going to make you happy." I'm not dogging it. It might be on my list, but I'm saying this is how the game works. "You want to be satisfied? This is what you need. You want your life to be happy in this season? You need lights. You need snow. You need a scarf. And you need a Lexus." They started that run early, didn't they? It was like Halloween night I think I saw the first one. It's like, really? A Christmas bow on Halloween night for a Lexus? That sell has already begun?

This is the perpetual lie you and I are fed. Hear me. It works for two reasons. It works because we have the hole of eternity in our hearts, and it works because when all is said and done, we do believe there's more, and we're hungry for it. We're forced to look around and go, "Okay, that makes them happy. I'll take that." Now we've entered into what the Bible calls *covetousness*. We begin to covet the lives of others. We begin to covet the stuff of others, and coveting works its way downhill very, very, very quickly. Coveting, when all is said and done, is an accusation against God that he doesn't care about you, provide for you, or give you what you need.

When people read the Ten Commandments and go, "I just don't know why this would be so frustrating for God if I did this, or this little white lie, or if I just looked and liked somebody else's stuff." Because under all of your breaking of those commands is an accusation against God's goodness and sufficiency. Coveting in particular is, "You don't love me. You don't provide for me. You don't care for me like you do these other people. I deserve more than you're giving to me." When coveting takes root, now coveting turns into envy, turns into jealousy, turns into rage... Just follow the line all the way down.

I would argue that almost every dark chapter of human history, almost every dark chapter of your life and mine, every act of rebellion against a holy God could be boiled down to this cavern of eternity in our hearts and us trying to take temporary things and jam it in the tank in the hopes it'll make life run. It makes life run for another block, and then it putts out and makes us cram even more of the temporary in there so you

and I get stuck in a cycle of silliness. If we could honestly put lenses on and see it, we would feel foolish. It's into this mess, into this cycle of silliness, this, "I have something. It makes me happy for a while, and now I need more of it. I have this. It's making me happy, but it's fading. I'm getting bored, so I need more." It's into that cycle with thousands of years of heartache, pursuing in vain.

The writer of the book of Ecclesiastes would say the eye is always seeing but never full. The ear is always hearing and never satisfied. This is the idea that you'll always want more. You'll always be chasing. You'll always be like a dog after its tail, running and running and running and never able to catch it. Even if you do catch it, you'll wonder, "What now?" Into this madness, a child is born. Into this madness, a Son is given, and the government will be upon his shoulders. Christ is born. The divine invasion begins, and Jesus is going to solve this problem of not only eternity, but he's also going to solve the problem of what to do with stuff.

While you turn to John 1, I want to read you a quote by Clive Lewis, C. S. Lewis. Some of you will know C. S. Lewis predominantly through *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Some of you know him because *Saturday Night Live* did a spoof on *The Chronicles of Narnia*. But C. S. Lewis was a professor at Oxford, and later on, Cambridge. He says, "If I find in myself desires which nothing in this world can satisfy, the only logical explanation is that I was made for another world." Lewis, using logic, sees that empiricism doesn't work. Empiricism is a philosophical school of thought that you'll hear all the time in our culture that says knowledge, *true* knowledge, truth, can only be experienced via the five senses.

If I can't see it, touch it, taste it, hear it, or smell it, it simply doesn't exist. By and large, you begin to talk with God around people, you'll always find the guy who says, "Well, you show me God, and I'll believe in him." That's empiricism. That's the way our culture by and large operates. The senses have to tell me what's true. Lewis says, "If I find by using my senses that nothing satisfies me, the only logical conclusion is that I was created for something more than this world." The arrival of Jesus Christ puts a bullet in the head of empiricism by solving what haunts your heart and what haunts my heart.

In John 1, I want to point out a couple of things in this very well-known text. John 1, starting in verse 1. "**In the...**" What's that word? Beginning. There you go. "**...beginning was the Word...**" Notice *Word* is capitalized. "**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.**"

There are two things we need to talk about in this text. This first thing is, "**In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.**" This just said that Jesus is not a creation of God, but

rather is God, has always been and will always be. Therefore, if Christ reigns and rules in our hearts, he fills the gap of eternity. Let me show you this out of Colossians 1:27. **"To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is..."** What's the mystery God's revealing to the world? **"...Christ..."** What? **"...in you, the hope of glory."**

When you and I submit our lives to Jesus Christ, when you and I are reborn, made new in the gospel, the Bible tells us we are sealed in the Holy Spirit, the promise. You have what theologians call a *union with Christ*. Just to unpack that as simply as I can, what happens in union with Christ is all of your sin, rebellion, angst, past, present, and future, not just your former, your frustrations today, your sins today, your rebellion today, and...listen to me...your rebellion tomorrow, taken from you and put on Christ and his cross. Christ's perfection, his righteousness is imputed on you so when God sees you, he sees Christ in you. This is the hope of glory. When God looks at me, he sees Jesus.

That's good news, because I know me. Huh? Because I know me. It's good news that when God looks at me, he doesn't see me; he sees Jesus. This is the hope of glory that God did not leave us on our own, but rather invaded. He did not leave us broken with this chasm of eternity in us, but rather he came as a baby, lived, died, and was resurrected to fill the chasm of eternity to set me free. The second part of this John passage I want you to pay attention to is that Christ is the creative agent in all of creation. Not only does Jesus show up and fill the gap of eternity, but then he reorders creation. Not only do I get the joy of the common graces, but then I get to roll it up and celebrate even more, because I have a good, gracious, loving God who has granted me common grace in his goodness toward me.

I get to not only enjoy the reality, but get to enjoy the greater reality that God is good and loving and has provided for me these things. To flesh out maybe a couple of ways I think it's really good news that not only Christ fulfills and fills up this gap of eternity but then reorders, rightly orders, creation for us is to go back and talk about some of those common graces. When I'm standing across from my wife on our wedding day, I have the joy that almost anybody else on their wedding day has. I said almost, all right? Most people on their wedding day, that's an easy day. They're not trying to muster up affection for who they're marrying. They're not thinking, "Do I really want to do this?" Usually by that point, they're in.

I've had a couple over my 20 years that weren't like that, but predominantly, on that day, they're experiencing the same common grace I was given. A wife, excitement, joy, love. What happens when the gap of eternity is filled is I get to go a step higher than that. You see, when things get reordered because the gap of eternity is filled, I'm now set free to understand that I'm getting a lot of things in this woman, that he who finds a wife finds something that is good. I get a helpmate.

Not only do I think she's attractive, not only does she make me laugh, not only do I enjoy my time with her, but I have a viable helpmate for all that God has for me in the future. God has given me a woman who is going to speak into my life, who is going to love me well, who is going to know my weaknesses, and like an image of the gospels, says, "Despite your shortcomings, I love you anyway, and I'm not going anywhere." I get someone that in my most tender, vulnerable moments will still love me.

Here's the thing. I get a hammer in the hand of God to beat out every ounce of selfishness in me. That's a gift, because I don't want it in me. On my wedding day, I get to celebrate the common grace. I have a wife. There is a woman who knows me who said yes. How crazy is this? I get to now roll it even more and see all God has for me. On that day, it's not just about Lauren, but it's about God's goodness and grace toward me.

Let's take Thanksgiving. If you have a family dynamic that when everyone is in a room around a table, and that's not a powder keg, you're an outlier. For most families, if you get everyone around the table at Thanksgiving time, that's one insult wrapped in a compliment away from a hand grenade going off in your dining room. For me, this was the first year we did Thanksgiving at our house. It's the first time I've had to cook a bird. I'm 38 years old, and I've never had to cook the turkey before.

I did a ton of research and figured out how to do it. If you'll ice the breasts for about 30 to 45 minutes before you put it in the smoker, they won't cook as... Oh, research it yourself. The turkey was on me. It's the first year I've ever had to do that. I got up early. Thanksgiving is a quirky holiday for us. If you don't know my background, three years ago I had a seizure. They found a tumor in my brain. It ended up being malignant and all of that. It's a strange holiday for us, because there is a lot of gladness there, but there is a lot of weight. We got up and watched the Thanksgiving Day Parade, which my wife and I love and my children hate. They feel like it's torture, but we don't care.

We sat there. We had to do it when we were kids, so they're going to do it. We watched the Thanksgiving Day Parade. My little daughter climbed up in my lap, and we snuggled for a while. There were tears. It's a weird day. I don't know how else to explain it. All of the family was coming to our house. Here's what this means. My little quirks are going to be challenged. It's going to get messy. It's going to look like somebody let off a Lego bomb in the playroom. There is going to be food in the hallway. There's going to be food on the floor. There's going to be a lot to clean up. I know that's coming, and I know how I'm wired and what happens when the gap of eternity gets filled.

I get to just breathe out and go, "You know what? It's going to be a mess. I need to lay that down. When all is said and done, it's not about that. It doesn't need to be Clark Griswold. It doesn't have to be perfect here. I can just enjoy family, enjoy my nieces and nephews, and I can enjoy good food. Let's feast, and then we'll

clean up the mess afterward." I really got set free to just enjoy the holiday, because I wasn't in it for identity. I wasn't in it for purpose and meaning. I just got to enjoy it for what it is. This is Christ reordering creations.

You and I are in a real scrap here for the next four or five weeks. Every time you come in here, I'm going to try to, by the Holy Spirit's power, put lenses over your eyes that enable you to walk out of here and see what's true and what's a lie. What I want to press you into over and over is the real celebration here is that Christ has come, and he's coming again. The real celebration here isn't winter solstice. It's not that the weather has changed. It's not that we get to put on sweaters, and it's not that we get to buy a bunch of toys; although, I'm in for all of that. I want you to enjoy all that. It should be fun. Get you some wassail. Enjoy yourself.

But we can't get swept up in the lie of this kind of glad tidings, peace... What we need to get caught up in is the fact that God in his great love for us did not abandon us in that gap of eternity, but invaded, fills that gap, and now reorders all around us in such a way that all of our rejoicing should roll up into the ultimate rejoicing, that Christ has come, and that he is coming again. Christ comes born of a baby. When he returns, he will not come as a baby. Right? He doesn't come in swaddling clothes and in a manger next time. He comes with a crown, tattoo on his thigh, with a sword. That's a different Jesus than the one you read. That's Jesus in his fullness, no longer (Philippians 2) emptying himself, but rather coming in the fullness to claim all he's already purchased.

Christ, in his life, death, and resurrection, has put death to death. He has killed sorrow and loss. He has destroyed disease. He has eradicated loneliness. He has created gladness of heart for all who will believe and put their trust in him. Upon second advent, at the return of Christ, what has already been paid for will be redeemed in full. As we begin to sing Christmas carols, as we begin to sing "Joy to the World" and "Come, Thou Long Expected Jesus" and "O Come, O Come, Emmanuel," don't get caught up in some childlike nostalgia. Remember that he has come, and he is coming again.

If we could walk out of here with those lenses on, what I'm saying to you is your amount of joy, your amount of gladness, and your peace in the hustle and bustle of this five weeks will exponentially grow as you celebrate what needs to be celebrated while enjoying all the external, cultural icons that can be celebrated. "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given: and the government shall be upon his shoulders: and his name shall be Emmanuel, God with us." Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for these men and women. I just know, for some of us, this holiday, by all measurable, is going to be a great season. We'll be surrounded by loved ones. We'll laugh and enjoy and rejoice. For some of us this year, it's going to be hard. We've lost loved ones. We're fresh off a divorce. A mom or dad is

no longer with us. A son or daughter is no longer with us. I thank you that you enter into the darkness. The darkness has not overcome it. I pray as we are lambasted by ads and promises and even a feel, God, that you would protect our hearts, and that you would draw our hearts up into you, that we might rejoice that you have come, born the King of angels. As an infant, you came out of the womb the King of angels.

I thank you, Father, for coming, for saving us, Jesus, for rescuing our souls from the gap of eternity, for filling, promising fulfillment. God I pray we would pursue all the more in the fullness in you rather than medicate our souls with other things that are temporary. Take the sand out of our hearts and let us run on the fullness of gladness in you. It's through your beautiful name I pray, amen.

Love you guys.

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