

Merry Christmas! It's good to see many of you. Many I haven't seen since this time last year, maybe Easter, but I'm glad you're here. It's good to see you again. I've missed you. It's just a joke! Golly! Everybody is wound up today. If you are here, grab your Bible. Luke, chapter 2, is where we're going to start out. If you don't have a Bible (don't own one), there should be a hardback black one somewhere around you. Again, if you don't own a Bible, that's our gift to you. Please feel free to take that.

I want to just, right out of the gate, tell you what my plan is for our 40 minutes together here. If you're here today from a church that usually goes about 25 minutes, I can't say my name in 25 minutes. I've condensed it just to go 40 minutes for us. I want to tell you right out of the gate, here's my plan. Here's my hope. Regardless of how you've come in here today, I want to try to elevate your confidence in who our God is. That's my hope, and I'll tell you why. For many of us, this is just a really sweet spot right now. I mean, we have family coming in we like. Not just *family* but the family we *like*. The outlier, the black sheep, couldn't make it this year. Celebration has ensued.

It's been a good year. Everybody is healthy. For now, the world is in a balance, and we're just really looking forward to the next couple of days. I know that's not all of us. This is a large church, and as I preached our five o'clock service last night, a woman sat right up here right in front of me who was just diagnosed two weeks ago with a malignant brain tumor. They had done operations, and the operation didn't make things look like it was going to last longer. It made it look like she was in a lot of trouble. I can tell you, her Christmas is going to be different than my Christmas this year.

There are others. This is our first Christmas after a significant loss, whether that loss was a divorce, whether that loss was a death in the family, whether that loss was an older mother or father who has gone on. Grandma and grandpa aren't here for the first time. There are all these issues for others of us. So simultaneously in one room you have a lot of giddiness around the season, and you have a lot of sadness around the season. The good news of the gospel is regardless of how you've come in, confidence should be raised in what we believe and what we proclaim, especially who we proclaim Christ to be.

So my goal is simply to elevate that confidence by reminding you of things I believe you already know. I'll start basic and then build on some complexities, but it will never get majorly complex. If you have any background in church whatsoever, I don't believe I'll say anything today that you'll be like, "What?" We're going to stay ground level and just kind of rejoice in some things.

I have a lot of respect for whoever at Disney decided to put all the princesses together and invade my bank account. I mean, I'm not even angry. That was such a brilliant move, I don't even know how I could be frustrated. Who else can simultaneously set up our daughters for future frustrations while vilifying step-moms? I mean, who else could do that? Who else could put in my little girl's heart an expectation that will never be met while simultaneously vilifying stepmothers and then make me pay for it. I'm looking at that, but here's why I'm introducing with this idea of Cinderella and Sleeping Beauty and all these myths.

If you're not careful, one of the things that will happen to you is the thing we're really celebrating here and all the implications of it will get filed away under that same banner of kind of myths, kind of wishful thinking, kind of never fulfilled, always longing for realities. That's not where we stand. So let me read Luke, chapter 2, starting in verse 1. I love this one because of the history in it, because you'll see... C.S. Lewis, who was a professor at Oxford and Cambridge, actually was drawn into the Scriptures because he said... He was an expert in medieval literature. Bless his heart. He would read the Bible and say the reason it bothered him is it didn't read like myth. This is an example of a text like that. Luke, chapter 2, starting in verse 1.

**"In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn."**

Now you can tell already from this text that this isn't "once upon a time," is it? This isn't "once upon a time." This is under the reign of Caesar Augustus during the first registration when Quirinius was the governor of Syria. That's time, location locked. All right. So how can we know, some of the ways we can know, whether or not the Bible is just good men trying to help us be moral or how it's the inerrant Word of God? You just look at texts like this that bind it to a time and a place as to not pretend in any way, shape, or form that they're not trying to clearly articulate and communicate, "Thus saith the Lord."

Here's something that's very simple but something that if we could get our hearts and minds around it, I really think confidence in our lives regardless of our situations and scenarios would actually grow if not explode outright. Here's the thing I keep trying to draw your attention back to, and I have been for the last five weeks. Jesus actually showed up. He came. He arrived. It wasn't wishful thinking. It wasn't fingers crossed. He showed up. You will not find a historian, whether they are of religious persuasion or not, who

would deny in any way that Jesus of Nazareth lived, breathed, walked, and was arrested, tried, and crucified by the Roman Empire. No historian would question that.

Then they even have to play some games, because here's the thing. If you get outside of just Christian history, you even look at those who don't believe what we believe and how they view the person and work of Jesus, they have to play games with him because the Dude broke time in half. Even now, right now, on the cover of *Life* magazine (got that going for them this year, birthday and all)... I guess they decided to put him on there, right?

So what you have happening in secular history in looking at Jesus and what we can find is even those who aren't believers, don't want to call him deity, will acknowledge he walked in a weird kind of power. So the theory becomes when Jesus with Mary and Joseph fled to Egypt away from Herod killing all boys under the age of 2, while he was in Egypt, he picked up magic. He learned magic in Egypt. So then when he came back to Galilee and started doing card tricks and stuff, he had actually learned that back in Egypt.

So the way the secular histories deal with the profound Man (Jesus Christ) is to say he was a magician. He was a teacher. He was a prophet. I've always scoffed at that because a man cannot be a good prophet and teacher if you think what he taught was false. So if Jesus is saying, "I'm God," and your position is, "Well, I think he was a good teacher," then I don't know how you reconcile your good teacher calling himself God. Well you say, "I don't believe he is God. I have no intention of submitting to him as God, but I think he was a good prophet. I think he was morally onto some things."

You're actually warring against yourself, and it would be every bit as hypocritical as anyone who was ever hypocritical in a church. You've just chosen to be a hypocrite *outside* of church. See, the great news about hypocrisy *inside* the church is we all acknowledge it. Yeah, we all fall short. How amazing is God? We're a bunch of idiots, but still he loves us. I mean, you ought to join. Instead of being an idiot on the *outside*, be an idiot on the *inside*, right?

So you have Jesus Christ who came and walked and all the implications of that. The implications of that are profound. It means God knows you need a Savior. It means God is not surprised by your stumbling and bumbling. It doesn't matter who you are in this place. It doesn't matter how you came in. Your waywardness has not surprised God. I mean, the whole point of Immanuel, God with us, is we were going to need a righteousness that was greater than our righteousness. We were going to need a purity we did not possess. We were going to need a loveliness that is not inside of us.

So Immanuel, God with us, God in the flesh, came and lived the perfect life so you and I might not only be given, imputed to, his righteousness and perfection but that he also might take from us in the cross our

sins, our shortcomings, our failures. Then really where we start to separate even more with secular history is then around the idea of resurrection. All right. Now you have to do something with the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It doesn't matter how hardened you are, you have to do something with the resurrection because there are all sorts of theories now that have to handle the resurrection because something happened. Something happened!

You have Christianity that explodes. You have all these disciples who were cowards and weak all of a sudden becoming bold and ferocious. You have guys who weren't willing to be mocked and belittled now willing to die pretty gruesome, awful deaths. You have Christianity exploding in the urban centers. By AD 350, 51 percent of the Roman Empire claimed Christ as Lord. That is fast growing, global domination of the gospel message.

Jesus arrived to rescue, to redeem, and to forgive fully, freely, and forever those who would put their faith and trust in him, to take from us our hearts of stone and give to us our hearts of flesh, to seal us with the Holy Spirit, to beat that new heart of flesh, to transform our lives in such a way that darkness is pushed back, and we are salt and light to the world around us. Jesus showed up, and there's nothing that's going to happen in the next 48 hours that's cooler than that. Nothing!

You and I are uniquely placed in a time in history where our confidence in the Word of God and our confidence in who God is should be growing not shrinking. I'll try to explain why. In Genesis 3, you have your first messianic prophecy. You have your first prophecy that a Man will be born who will crush the head of the Serpent. So a Man born of woman, born of Mary, is going to crush the head of the Serpent. Then you have in Genesis 12 God coming to a man named Abram and talking about through Abram, he is going to bless all the nations on earth.

Now if we're just being straight with one another, Abram has no idea how big that promise is. I mean, what does that dude know of the nations? There isn't a globe. He knows nothing of the continents. He knows nothing of North America, knows nothing of South America, knows little of Asia, even in the first century, and this was long before the first century. Even when it talks about all of Asia new, it's not thinking of it as the continent of Asia you and I know. They have no concept of how big that promise was, but God's promise was through the line of Abraham that would turn into the line of David (the lineage of David, if you will, I believe is what we just read out of Luke, chapter 2), all nations would be blessed.

It sounds a bit ridiculous honestly, and yet here we are in 2012, millennia between us and that promise in Genesis, chapter 12. Here's what we've seen. We've seen the gospel spread all over the world. You and I (most of us) are not of Jewish descent. You and I (most of us) did not grow up in a synagogue. You and I (most of us) came to know Christ because a neighbor shared the gospel with us, because a friend engaged

us, because in college we had some potluck weirdo hyper-spiritual roommate who was always reading their Bible. We got suckered into going to church. We were minding our own business when new neighbors moved in and started having us over for dinner.

We got rescued. You and I got rescued because Jesus showed up. So I want to give you some verses around this. Luke 19:10 says, **"For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."** You and I are in this really unique spot to grow in confidence because God is keeping his promises. All over the world, the gospel goes out, is pushing out. Men and women are being rescued and saved regardless of backgrounds and regardless of life story and testimony.

One of the real high watermarks of my time here at The Village Church was several years ago when I got to fly with my wife to Southern Sudan (not on vacation). It's not a vacation spot. There is no beach there. We flew into Southern Sudan, and I spent several days just teaching and training pastors who had come from all over that part of Africa. Several things really stood out in my head. One, I don't have much in common with these guys at all. I'm a 6 foot, 5 inches gangly, white guy. "Quadja" is what they would call me. It means ghost or whitey, which is racist.

I'm "Quadja," and I'm teaching guys who, at great cost, have walked for days, traveled for days, suffered for days, just to come in the hopes they might grow in the knowledge of the Word so they might more faithfully steward it in places where the gospel is working just like it's working here. I have never milked a goat in my life. I have never had to kill anything in order to eat. No one has ever threatened the life of my family because I love Jesus. I have never been beat up for the gospel.

In the end, I was profoundly challenged and shaped by the fact that whether it be in India or China or Africa, the same gospel I'm preaching to you has been preached in those places. It's taken root, and churches have been born. Even us...just us...one church in Dallas, we're a part of a church planting movement in Asia. I saw 16 churches planted in a very large city in Asia and pulled out only when those churches actually started planting other churches. So our role was done when we had educated, trained, planted. Then those guys raised up guys and planted. Then we've done that in Africa, and we're working with churches in South America. We were in India.

God's gospel is going out, and all of that started in this little bitty sliver of land in the Middle East on the day of Pentecost (although promised well before that) that the gospel would bless all nations on earth. He is doing it, and he is drawing, and he is saving. This is what God does. He did it with us, and he is going to continue to do it. That's where not only are we unique in that we get to see so many of those promises being fulfilled, but we get to be a part of seeing them fulfilled all the more in our day, in our age, both by the proclamation of the Word of God and by pushing back what's dark in the world.

Another real high-level mark in my 10 years as pastor here came just Friday night. Friday night, Chestnut Farms (which is a farming deal down in Dallas where they grow local, organic produce and then they sell it to restaurants in the area) was putting on a Yuletide concert. My wife was kind of one of the opening acts. Where she goes, I go. Where she is, I will be. That's not really my deal (concerts that start at 8:30). That's not where I am anymore in life. By 10:30, I want to be in a dream inside a dream inside a dream. I mean, I want to be deep in. I want REM by 10:30 or I'm angry. I definitely don't want a concert that starts about the time I start getting ready for bed.

I go to this thing, and as we pull up (it's downtown in Dallas, just a few blocks away from Baylor Hospital), I get down, and there was a valet there that was going to valet our car. The guy who owns the valet company is a member of The Village. Then we go inside, and they have this coffee bar thing set up. The guy who owns the restaurant that is serving the coffee that night is a member of The Village Church. The guy who is running Chestnut Farms is a member of The Village Church. Champions of Hope are there, and Carly is from The Village Church.

The room is just filled with them. The band that's playing...Folk Angel...all those guys are members of The Village Church. I'm sitting back here, and I'm watching. All of these are lay men and women at The Village Church who are using business savvy, entrepreneurial gifting and a passion for the gospel of Jesus Christ to proclaim the gospel as well as push back what's dark in the world. All those groups came together to put on this deal in order to educate and be a part of raising the level of education in South Dallas, mentoring students, providing jobs for those who are making their way out of homelessness or coming out of being incarcerated.

Some of the guys involved actually work with those who are falsely accused in prison. There are all these guys who are just using their gifting to push back what's dark in the world. We would have never been able to hire a missions guy who thinks like that, who thinks, "Do you know how we're going to preach the gospel and reach the nations? We're going to grow organic bok choy down in Dallas. No, in the city, bro. Bok choy. It's a bok choy ministry." Right? I'm never going to think that, but do you know who is? Guys with a passion for Jesus Christ who want to see him proclaimed and have a unique gift set and passion.

I think of Free City International where Clarke left his work in the fashion industry and set up this organization that ministers to refugees who come from all over the world like this. We've been invited to play. Not only should our confidence grow that Jesus showed up, not only should our confidence grow that we see God is at work and doing exactly what he said he was going to do, but then on top of that, our confidence should grow because he has invited us in.

Christians should never be bored...should *never* be bored...with the playground we have before us with its many needs and hurts and with your level of gifting. It doesn't matter if that skill set is artistry or business. It doesn't matter where it is. God has uniquely wired you and gifted you and then invited you in to the greatest epic story the world will ever know. When we were launching the Dallas Campus, we really wanted to partner with the school across the street (Cary Middle School). When we originally went down there, they weren't really open. They were a little bit hesitant about letting a church partner with them on anything. So our play in that moment was just to serve and pray.

So Steve Hardin who is the campus pastor down there just started really intensively praying for that middle school, praying for that area. We just simply began to serve. "What do you need?" We began to paint rooms and re-sod fields and just do whatever we could do to love that place. It's a very low socioeconomic school. There were a lot of issues at the time, and then slowly but surely, they began to invite us in.

Then our home groups down there began to adopt teachers, sponsor teachers. They began to help them set up their rooms, began to pray for them actively, began to meet the needs of families whose students were represented in their classrooms. Just home group leaders, not a program of the church. Just men and women at the church beginning to love the community they are in. Then that led us to praying for educators at Elder-led prayer. That led to us providing backpacks and school supplies for needy students. That led to some of our businessmen with connections down in Dallas getting computers.

That led to one home group... I want to highlight this one just because I thought it was so odd and such a beautiful picture of such a simple, small act of love making such a difference in a climate. The Cary Middle School cheerleader girls didn't have uniforms. They just were wearing black shorts and white tee shirts. A home group at The Village decided to buy the girls cheerleading uniforms. Now I've done a lot of reading on missiology and missiological thinking. I would have never gone, "Do you know how we're really going to push forward the cause of Christ in the Metroplex? Cheerleader uniforms."

Yet because someone was present and someone was on the ground and the environment was difficult, such a simple act of love (and you'll hear it from the principal) began to change the climate of the school. So Cary Middle School shot us this video and sent it to us to say thank you for how we've walked with them. So I want you to check out the principal, one of their teachers, and then the cheerleaders will say something themselves. Here's a video.

[Video]

**Female:** If I could speak to every single member of The Village Church and all its members, I would say, *thank you!* Those two words are so overused, but just the miracles that have been happening here at this school, the prayers that have been coming for this school, for me personally, they've changed the energy of this school.

**Female:** The Village Church has donated some uniforms to our cheerleading group. When we first started off, they only had basic black shorts and some tee shirts. Through one of our teachers communicating to The Village Church, we got some uniforms donated. It's been a huge blessing for the girls as well as for the program. I mean, I see the cheerleader group as kind of like the heartbeat of this school. They're the ones who bring all the cheer, just trying to get them upbeat. So it's been amazing to see the school come up and have that program.

**Female:** If I could meet the people, I would say thank you for everything, and thank you for your support, and we appreciate it.

**Female:** I would thank them. I cannot express how grateful we are to have such amazing uniforms. The girls love them, and we wear them all the time as much as we can.

**Female:** So there are so many positive things happening, and honestly it's not just what I'm doing. It's not what my teachers are doing. It's what the *community* is doing. It's what the *church* is doing through prayer and through donations, through the support, which my teachers desperately needed from the very beginning. So it's a blessing. It's a blessing to have such a wonderful group of people right across my street.

**Females:** Thank you, Village Church! We appreciate you!

[End of video]

I think people have a tendency to over-think what it means to be the people of God. I mean, we are men and women who herald the gospel of Jesus Christ and live lives where our hands are opened, listening where we are for hurts and hang-ups and frustrations. Then we enter the fray. That's what we talked about last week. We're not people who look at the brokenness of the world and wish someone would fix it. We're people who enter into the brokenness of the world and become, in many ways, the hands and feet of Jesus Christ.

This is not complex. This is people who live around this area being mindful of what's going on and being able to simply serve and love the community they're in, offering a cup of cold water in Jesus' name, if you will. Have we seen a lot of salvations? No, not necessarily. Will we? Man, I certainly hope so. I'm certainly praying that way. To meet a felt need but not meet the deepest need of the soul really is an exercise in futility, but we're commanded to reflect the love and mercy of Christ and be, as the church, ever present in the city.

Because of all these kinds of people (I'm not naming by name but kind of touching on here), Dallas is a safer place. Graduation rates are going up. Property value is increasing, not to the point of re-gentrification which would marginalize the poor but rather just increasing enough for them to have a fighting chance to grow. You know, there have been multiple families who've actually moved down into South Dallas for no other reason except to love and serve and encourage the men and women down there.

This is what we've been called into, and this is what you've been invited to participate in. It's much more life giving than any movie you'll see, and it doesn't take as much time as *The Hobbit*. Right? I mean, you can spread that three-and-a-half hours over a month and do an unbelievable amount of gospel ministry in and around our city. Your confidence should grow in the fact that Jesus has shown up, Jesus' mission is being accomplished. As it is being accomplished, you've been invited in with all your gifts, all your abilities, in where the Lord has placed you.

That brings me to kind of where I want to land the plane. Here's a place where we have to put our hope and our confidence for the good of your heart and the good of my heart. Here's where we have to put it. It's the one where we don't spend a lot of time, but it's also the one that will reveal idolatry more quickly than anything else. That is not that just Jesus has shown up and not only has Jesus accomplished his mission and is accomplishing his ministry while inviting us into that process, but then you have the reality...not the myth, but the *reality*...that Christ will return.

He didn't just come once as a baby, but he'll come twice, the second time as a ruling, reigning King. He will not be wrapped in swaddling cloths the next time he shows up. Again, this sounds like myth, but you have to be careful not to file it under *myth*, because Jesus steadfastly proclaims he is going to return. If you have your Bibles, flip over to Revelation, chapter 21. I'm going to read just one other verse to you for time's sake before we read this verse together. Revelation 21. We'll read verses 1 through 6, but before we get there, I want to read 1 John 3:2 to you. So turn there, and then I want to show you this verse in 1 John 3:2.

So let's get to Revelation 21. That one is just in the back of your Bible. It's all the way back. If you've found words that are leading you to other verses, you went too far. Go back to your left, and you should land on it. All right? Revelation 21. No dragons eating babies in this text. It's just the consummation of all things.

Before we get there, let me read 1 John 3:2, because it's going to help us understand kind of this push and pull of some of us being in a really good spot and some of us being in a really tough spot in this season.

Here it is out of 1 John, chapter 3, verse 2. **"Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is."** Now this verse creates what's vitally important for you and me to understand lest we begin to believe God is some kind of genie in a bottle that we control. Like I said last week, you and I are in the narrow place, the space between. You and I are living in that narrow place between where Christ has purchased for us all that is good and right but has yet to consummate all of that in his return.

So this text kind of fleshes that out. We are (even though we are children of God right now) not like we will be. So let me unpack that. My body is dying. Your body is dying, unless you're a kid. If you're a kid, you're on the upward swing to the cruising altitude. You'll hit the cruising altitude for a few years, and then there's the descent. You know what I'm talking about if you're over 35. You've hurt yourself *sleeping*. You have woken up, and something went wrong. All you did was go to sleep! That doesn't happen when you're a kid. I mean, remember? You could ride your bike for like 14 hours, climb a tree, and get hit with a bat and not even be sore the next day.

Now you'll wake up and you've strained your back. "What happened?" "I slept too long. I slept for like eight hours. I'm all jacked up." Right? Although you are guaranteed in the resurrection of Jesus Christ a resurrected body that cannot get sick, that will not die, that does not grow weary... You have been purchased that in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. You're not wearing that body right now, are you? You're wearing that grisly, old, beat down, broken down... Even the young ones are like, "Not me!" Just give it time, bro. There isn't enough spinach. Ecclesiastes is clear. There will be a day where you're like, "Dang it! I woke up again." It's coming for you, coming for me regardless of age.

The Bible says here in this verse that when he appears, we will not be as we are, but we will be all that he is. So the Bible says the dead in Christ will rise first and those of us who are here will be changed in the twinkling of an eye. Now don't make that verse mean something it doesn't. That's not Jesus shows up in the X-wing fighter and Death Stars the earth. That's not how that plays out. It means all Christ has purchased for us will in an instant be here. It will be in place. Resurrected bodies. The death of death. The disappearance of sorrow and loss. The eradication of tears. In the twinkling of an eye. In an instant at the return of Christ. You'll see that in Revelation, chapter 21.

I eventually want to teach through this book. Revelation 21. We'll pick it up in verse 1. **"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more..."** This is off topic but kind of on topic. The idea of newness here, the Greek word there is not like

*brand* new but rather *renewed*. So when you read in 1 Peter about this fire that falls to the earth (do you remember the first time with water, the second time with fire, for those of you who are familiar with your Bible?), that fire is a refining fire not a destructive fire. It purges and burns off of the earth that which is fallen so what is not fallen can be renewed at the coming of Christ. So let's look at now verse 2.

**"...and I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.'"**

Verse 5: **"And he who was seated on the throne said, 'Behold, I am making all things new.' Also he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.'"** Verse 6: **"And he said to me, 'It is done!'"** How is that possible? Because, **"I am the Alpha and the Omega, the beginning and the end."** So it's an interesting play on words here because Jesus on the cross cries out what? "It's finished! It's paid for! It's finished! I bought it." Now in Revelation 21, you don't get, "It's finished." You get, "It's done! All things are new. See, I make all things new."

No more mourning. No more pain. No more laws. Every tear now making sense. Every heartbreak eradicated. Everything being seen now through God's redemptive moving forward of his glory and his grace. All those heart wounds in us are gone forever. All the losses being lined up with how God providentially has governed, and the sad things become untrue. On this day, the myth becomes all the sadness and loss of our time in the narrow place. This is where our hope is. This is where our hope is!

The Bible is really honest. The world is broken. I mean, in all of his teachings, Jesus often comes back to this reality, right? **"In this world, you will have trouble."** You shouldn't feel like there was a bait-and-switch and this is a tough season. **"In this world, you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world."** So our hope is this. Although we work to push back what's dark in the world, darkness dies on this day. Although we give our lives, we enter into the fray of a sinful, broken world. It will remain by and large sinful and broken until this day.

So our hope is here, steadfastly, day at a time, trusting, believing Christ has come, watching Christ accomplish his mission and holding fast until he comes and rescues us all, once and for all. There will be (again, I think I've said this for the last five weeks) nothing that happens in the next 48 hours, no family gathering, no gift you open (even if it's in the driveway), *nothing* that compares to this. I just love you here.

You're going to get bored with everything you open very quickly, but this calling, this invitation, the confidence we have in this, can make us bold in evangelism and bold with our gifting.

If you're a lawyer, a businessman, in your neighborhood, for this city, in this place, what part of that does God not rightfully rule and reign over? All you need to do is gladly submit to not the myth but to the man Jesus Christ, who imputes to you righteousness, who bore your sin and shame, and who resurrected and is at the right hand of the Father, has sealed us with the Holy Spirit, and is accomplishing exactly what God said he would accomplish. Anything else is a sad shell of a life. It's investing in temporary things, investing in what cannot satisfy long term. It's a foolish exchange. Let me pray for us.

Father, for many of us, this is just the message before Christmas. Things are sweet, and life is good, and all the moving parts aren't overwhelming right now. There's no deep sense of loss. There's no difficulty regarding just the normal stresses of prepping for people and meals. So God, we thank you for your grace on us this season. Then for others of us, God, the difficulty of this season rings true. I know in our last service here at Flower Mound, there was a couple who had lost their 18-year-old son just a month ago. So this will be a tough one.

We know for those who are sick, those who are maybe enjoying Christmas without a loved one for the first time, maybe in the throes of a lot of marital difficulty, and on and on I could go. God, increase our confidence. God, point us to, remind our hearts once again, that you showed up. Remind our hearts once again as we look around that you're accomplishing. You're a God who can be trusted. You're doing what you said you were going to do.

God, turn our eyes and turn our hearts to the fact that you have not abandoned us but that you are going to return. Where there's idolatry in our hearts and where we would like for you to come back but not before *this* or not before *that* happens, God, I pray you would expose that idolatry, that our hearts might be fully set on the hope that is your love, mercy, and forgiveness bound up in the gospel of Jesus Christ. We love you. It's through your beautiful name I pray, amen.

I love you guys. Merry Christmas.