

If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab them. Isaiah, chapter 9, is where I'll ask you to turn. If you don't have a Bible, there should be a hardback black one somewhere around you. Again, if you don't own one, that's our gift to you, so feel free to take that. We want you to have it. We'll begin today, for four weeks, our *Advent* series. You can tell we have decked the halls, if you will, so we're ready to get going.

I want to say this to you as a means of entering into this season. We are, by human nature, men and women who anticipate and have great expectations of what is to come. That's in our nature. We have done it our entire lives. We have habitually pursued the next thing. We have perpetually desired whatever is next. Even on our good days, we are haunted by the thought that there are better days ahead.

Our experience is not that today is awful and tomorrow will be better. Even when today is awesome, tomorrow is going to be better, and we have habitually been chasing that. Even in our "I'm not looking forward to that," what we're saying is, "I can't wait to get past this..." (Whatever *this* is.) "...to get to this." Sometimes that's simple. Sometimes that's a day off.

I don't know how you went into the Thanksgiving holidays. I'd been running pretty hard. I was tired. I was ready for the break. I was ready for a couple of days to hang out with my family. So I was looking forward. There was a great deal of anticipation, not only in my own heart, but even in the heart of my family. We have a mantra I particularly use with my son in trying to train him up to be a man. You could even ask him. It's "Work hard, play hard." We're going to play hard, but to get to play hard, we're going to work hard.

I had to go in and do some work on Wednesday. He had been out of school since Monday. He doesn't like that. He wants to party. So I have to sit him down and go, "We're going to get there, buddy, but Daddy has some work to do. Almost all daddies have some work to do. Most of your friends' daddies are not hanging out on Wednesday, because they can't. They're at work until work allows them to play." I walked him through that grid again. "Work hard, play hard."

I did what I had to finish up, finished Wednesday afternoon, sent it to who it needed to go to, and then I went home and we started to play, and by "play" I mean lay around and eat. When all is said and done, I was looking forward to that, but sometimes that anticipation, those expectations, are a lot bigger than a day off. Maybe they're a year from now. Maybe they're two years from now.

Maybe we have this anticipation that this place way out in the future is what we're really ready to get to, but we're all driven by anticipation and expectation. When I was being trained as a minister (if you didn't know we did that, we do, and if you don't know what that's like, rent *The Empire Strikes Back*; it's very similar), the guy who was responsible for the bulk of my training was a pastor in Abilene, Texas, named David McQueen.

David sat me down one day and said, "Matt, all frustrations are birthed out of unmet expectation. If you see a marriage that's on fire, if you see a person who's angry, if you see someone who's angry, busted up, bitter, here's what has happened. They have had expectations, they had anticipation, and then it didn't come to pass, and now their response to the frustration of unmet expectation is the outworking that you are seeing and working with in regard to the gospel in our lives."

I find this to be true in all of life, that if I get frustrated, if I feel those things surge in me that are prone to surge in me, God help me, they're almost always linked to the fact that I had an expectation, I had an anticipation that, once we got moving toward it, it turned out completely a different way than I had expected, and then that leads to me behaving like a child. All frustration is birthed out of unmet expectations.

With that said, I want to have a talk, because this whole season is built on anticipation. I want by the mercy of God to drop an anchor into some crazy water to make sure we get underneath all we're celebrating here in a way that will sustain, create awe and rejoicing in our hearts, as well as redeem anticipation and expectation to a place that it actually begins to shape our lives.

Now let me tell you what I'm not saying. I'm no Scrooge. I love this season. Cards on the table: lights were on my house before Thanksgiving. I'm not that guy. I'm not the "Christmas is a pagan holiday" guy. I'm not going to do it. Lights on the house, carols jamming off the Chandler iPod in the house. We're in. Look around you. We're in. I'm not an anti-Christmas guy at all. I'm just saying the message of this season and what you are already being pummeled with is what Mark Sayers, a pastor in Australia, calls "hyper-reality."

What you're getting thrown onto you via every commercial and every television special... Even the classic movies we're drawn to in this season are promising you a reality that is not probably lined up with actual life. What we see commercial after commercial, what we see show after show is...what? I mean, we're all going to get a Lexus or something. Somebody is going to Jared. Often, apparently.

We can see that we're all going to gather as family, and even if there's conflict, it's going to end with us hugging and having a lot of Christmas joy as we carve the perfect turkey that came out of the oven with

hardly anybody even having to work at that. People come from far and near, and we gather, and there's a fire in the fireplace. There's a feel to this time of year, isn't there? There's a feel to it, and we love the feel.

I know we love the feel, because we keep trying to back that mug up. We keep trying to get started earlier and earlier and earlier because we like this feel. It's Christmastime. We're wearing our sweaters. We don't care. It's 87, but it's December. I'm wearing my sweater. I bought this sweater; I'm wearing it. We want to get into this season, and we want to enjoy it, but the predominate message given to us in it is a lie. There's an anticipation that is building in the lives of your children, and even in some of us, that will not be satisfied come Christmas morning.

So here's what I want to do. I'm just going to be really straight about what the next four weeks are about. I want us to look back and marvel at, have our hearts stirred up in wonderment at what's really going on, what we as Christians are really celebrating here, and then I want us to look to the future, and I want to have our anticipation redeemed by an expectancy that transforms the way we live and grants us a seriousness over sin and a passion in following the Lord rightly. That's my plan.

Let me start by saying this. There are times in our culture that I can spot the hypocrisy of the day I live in. Much is said about Christian hypocrisy. Much is said about Christian hypocrisy that I wouldn't argue with. But there is a secular hypocrisy that is just as goofy as any type of Christian hypocrisy I've ever run across. Let me point out something I've noticed. I noticed it awhile back, but it continues to be reinforced.

Let's just take one of the many non-spiritual spiritualists of our age. Let's take Oprah. I like Oprah. Oprah can stand in front of millions of people and say, "Here's what's wrong with you, and here's how you fix it," and everybody goes, "Oh my gosh, I love her. She gets me." No offense. No "How dare she?" No "Who does she think she is?" We even like Dr. Phil's brazen ridiculousness. "Well, it's happening because you're an idiot." We're like, "Gosh, that guy is amazing. We love that guy. He just called us idiots, and we *are* idiots."

But let someone stand behind the Word of God, let someone open up the Bible and say, "Here's what's wrong with us, and here's how it gets fixed," and all of a sudden people lose their minds. This is one of the telltale signs of spiritual blindness, that there is no offense if someone without ties to a deity says, "Here's what's wrong with you, and here's how you fix it," despite the fact there's no track record that what they're saying works at all.

But let someone stand behind the Bible and say, "Here's what's wrong with you, and here's how we fix it," and people get offended. So I'm going to risk that today, but know I'm not risking anything that Oprah and Dr. Phil and a host of others have not risked. Guard your own hearts and your own minds at how you'll hear

what I'm saying as opposed to the glad rejoicing you do in other people's diagnostic of what has gone wrong.

The first thing we have to simply state here is something *has* gone wrong. Something has gone wrong in you. Something has gone wrong in me. Something has gone wrong in the world. You would have to be a blind fool to argue otherwise. Something is broken. What we see in the Bible is that what's broken in you is a severed relationship with your creator God that has led to a brokenness in all of us that has overflowed into a brokenness in the systems we have built, in the governments we run, in the businesses we lead.

The brokenness in us, that severed connection with God because of sin, has overflowed out of us onto the structures we have built so that we live in a broken world. That's not even getting into the effects of sin on the creative order itself. That's just the damage we do as image bearers of the God of the universe. God, in the midst of our rebellion against him, in the middle of our accusation that we are smarter, more capable, and owe him nothing, responds not with destruction, but actually intervenes on our behalf for his glory.

So regardless of what you think about God or how you believe God feels toward you, here's what the Bible tells us. The Bible tells us that from the very moment of the fracture of the universe, God begins to lay out his plan to send a Savior who would rescue us from the mess of our hearts that has spilled over into all of life. In fact, in Genesis, chapter 3... This is just as sin enters the world and fractures everything. Adam and Eve believed the lie that they would make better gods than God and that they could run things better than he could, and despite his goodness and his grace, they would prefer to be their own masters.

So sin enters the world and fractures it. God shows up, man and woman hide themselves, and God begins to pronounce judgment, first on the Serpent, the Devil, the embodiment of evil. Here's what he says to the Serpent. Genesis 3, starting in verse 15: **"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."**

This is what theologians call the proto-evangelical. It's the pre-gospel. It's the first messianic prophecy we get in the Bible. It's not complex. There's no build-out of the cross, no mention of atonement, no imputed righteousness, nothing like that, just God right in the middle of the fog of war, man and woman shamed, naked, distressed, world broken. He curses the Serpent and says, "One will be born of woman. You will bruise his heel, but he will crush your head."

Now I'm not a big UFC guy, but I have to believe a crushed head loses over a bruised heel. The world is still burning when God says, "I'm going to fix this." There's still the smell of smoke and death and destruction. Nothing has settled. The new normal hasn't even begun to work yet when God says, "There will be a man born of woman who will crush your head."

Then it moves forward into Genesis 12. We read this verse last week for our Family Worship Weekend. Genesis 12, verse 3. This is to Abram, who will become Abraham, the father of the nation of Israel. It says, **"I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed."**

Again, some of you are going to have to ditch what you think about God, because the God of the Bible simply won't line up with what you think about him. You have a God who, in the midst of man's rebellion, says, "I'm going to crush the head of the Evil One," and now we move just a few chapters forward and he says, "Actually, through the line of Abraham, I'm going to bless all of the families on the face of the earth."

So we don't have a God who's strictly vengeful against those who are disobedient but a God who is working on behalf of those in rebellion to save and rescue some for the glory of his name and the good of their souls. From there, we can get into some verses I think you'll know a bit more. Isaiah, chapter 7, verses 14-15 says, **"Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign."** That's a miraculous sign.

The Lord is going to give you a sign. In this workout of a Savior coming, in this promise that the Devil's head will be crushed, in this promise that the families of the earth will be blessed, a sign will be given, and here's the sign: **"Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel."** That means God with us. **"He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good."**

When I was in my undergraduate, I had a professor who pointed out (rightly, mind you) that the word *virgin* simply means young maiden. What he would say is that since all that means is young maiden, then Mary isn't necessarily a not-having-sex virgin, but actually, she's just a young maiden who gives birth to this man who will become the Son of God. There are a lot of problems with that, most notably the Bible itself.

Here becomes kind of rule one when it comes to reading the Bible. The Bible interprets the Bible. Some of you are like, "How convenient." This is true about every book you've ever read that has any kind of unity in it. If you want to take *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, pull one sentence out of it, and go, "By this sentence I'll decide all the rest of the book," then you're going to get off in your interpretation and your understanding of the story.

The Bible is 66 books telling one story. Verses must be read in light of one another. Even this text interprets itself in a way that would lead us toward believing what the New Testament clearly teaches about Mary's lack of physical sex before she conceives Jesus Christ; namely, that her conceiving a child would be a miraculous sign.

I believe in the miracle of life. I think it's a really beautiful thing. We've had three children. I've been in the room for the birth of all three of them, and in no way was the birth of any of my children a miraculous sign for anything. Cameras didn't run in. Nobody called wanting me to be on a show. They didn't want Lauren and me to sit there and go, "It's crazy. We don't know."

It wasn't a sign. Everyone knows biologically how this happened. It wasn't a miracle that there were two of us in the room and then there was a third. Yes. Is there a biological explanation for that? Absolutely. What's different about the one who would conceive Immanuel, God with us, is that she will not have been with a man. That's the miracle. That's the sign.

The second thing to note in this text is that the Savior who is to come will be familiar with poverty. He will not be born in a palace. He will not be born with a silver spoon in his mouth. He will know curds and honey, which is the diet of a peasant. The Savior who is to come, who will crush the head of the Devil, who will bless all of the families on the earth, will be born of a virgin mother, and he will be a man who is acquainted with poverty.

Now we know just from looking at the historic data on Jesus that although he was born in Bethlehem he was raised in Nazareth. Nazareth was a town of about 200 around this time. That's small. Krum has more than 200 people in it. I'm not doggin' you. If you're from Krum, don't get upset by that. I'm saying you guys are bigger than I thought. I was like, "Maybe Krum." Nope. You're talking a small, impoverished place.

The prophecy that the One who is coming, born of woman, to crush the head of Satan, to bless all of the families of the earth, in line with the people of Israel (if we had time we could walk through), in the line of King David, who would be a king, prophet, and priest, a combination that never occurs in the Bible (in fact, when kings try to play the role of priest, it always goes badly for them) until this Savior who will come, because he will be all three offices in one: prophet, priest, and king. He will be acquainted with poverty.

Now let's look at Isaiah, chapter 9. We'll read verses 1-7. **"But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations."** If you don't have a background in church, predominately, Jesus does his three-year ministry in Galilee.

"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shone. You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. For the yoke

of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire." You'll know this one if you have a church background.

"For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this."

Now a couple of things to consider here. One is a real big takeaway from the text. For all the prophecies concerning this coming Savior... There was a huge turn in Isaiah, chapter 9, and here's what just happened. "Wonderful Counselor, Almighty God." For the first time in the prophetic literature, the promise of the Savior to come, we find out this is not just a mere man who's going to show up and assume David's throne, drive out Rome, and become an earthly king; this is God himself coming to fix what's wrong, crush the head of the Enemy, and bless all families on earth.

God is going to solve this himself, the incarnation of the Son of God, Jesus Christ, God in the flesh, Immanuel. How is he going to do this? How will he accomplish this? By the way, let me point out the historic reference in this text. Galilee is interesting, because Galilee is in the north part of Israel, and when Israel is invaded, particularly in the Old Testament times, it's almost always from the north, because they're hemmed in by mountains and sea. As invading armies would make their way through northern Jerusalem, they marched right through Galilee.

All this talk about darkness, all this talk about battle tumult and marching and blood garments going into the fire are references to the extremely violent history of Galilee. Galilee had been the point at which invading forces would rape, pillage, and burn to the ground on their way to lay siege to Jerusalem. They would lay siege sometimes for years, and then, on their way back defeated, would once again burn Galilee to the ground and rape and pillage and steal and take whatever they wanted, because the only thing more angry than an invading soldier is a retreating soldier who has been defeated.

This is Galilee's history. What we find happening in this text is this dark spot has become ground zero for the Light of the World. This dark, cursed spot in Israel's history becomes ground zero for the destruction of oppression, violence, slavery, and injustice moving forward, which is why all of a sudden he's saying, "A people walking in darkness have seen a great light."

These aren't people who are just having a rough season. This is a place marked by centuries of death, centuries of violence, centuries of a lack of safety, a lack of stability. Nobody is vacationing in Galilee by the sea. It's not a place you're taking your family. You're there probably because you're too poor to be anywhere else. Yet this becomes ground zero for the divine invasion. It's spectacular.

Now how is God in the flesh, the Son of God, going to come in and crush the head of the Enemy and bless all of the families on the earth and eradicate oppression, slavery, injustice, and the like? Well, flip over to Isaiah, chapter 53, and we'll read this, starting in verse 1.

"Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth. By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?

And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring [you and me]; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand.

Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant [Jesus Christ], make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors."

What's happening in Isaiah 53 is we're seeing just how God in the flesh will crush the head of the Enemy, will bless the families on the earth, and will destroy oppression, shame, injustice, and slavery forever, that God the Son, Jesus Christ, will come, put on flesh, humble himself, walk among us, and he will bear our griefs. He will pay for our iniquity. He will make atonement for our rebellion, and he will account to us a righteousness that is not ours, but rather is his.

There should have been no confusion at Christ not being a military leader. He was never going to be a military leader. The coming of the Savior wasn't going to be about military might; it was going to be about something altogether different: a hard restart in the soul of man, a wrath-absorbing, righteousness-giving Savior of the world.

Then, for a couple more promises, we see Micah, chapter 5, verse 2: **"But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days."** If you ever want to do a study, that *Ancient of Days* idea is a brilliant study.

What we just learned now is, once again, we're not talking about some mere man who ascends a human throne; we're talking about something bigger than that. We're talking about the eternity of Jesus Christ. He has always been. He will always be. He is not a moral philosopher. He's not a teacher. He's not just a good ruler. He's God in the flesh. Then in Matthew 1:21: **"She [Mary] will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins."**

From the very beginning of sin, our rebellion, fracturing our relationship with God that overflows out of us into systems that are built but broken, the promise repeats over and over again of a Savior who is coming who's going to crush the head of the Enemy, who is going to bless all of the families on the earth, who will right our relationship with God and enable us to have a relationship with God that isn't built on religious practice but actual intimacy in walking with him as an adopted son or daughter of the King.

We read that this Savior, on top of that, will bring about the ultimate destruction of darkness, slavery, and oppression, that he will institute a reign of peace, that our sins will be atoned for once and for all, and that he will account us as righteous even though we're not. We will have a new ruler over our hearts, and we will be saved from our sins. That's the promise.

Now I want to let the cat out of the bag. That Savior is Jesus Christ. *Selah*. What we're celebrating over the next four weeks, what we're looking back *toward* and in the future *to* is that God has kept his promise to send this Savior, and that Savior is Jesus Christ. He is our only hope for any of these things to ever take place. We are powerless to accomplish what God has said he would accomplish alone in Jesus Christ.

Let's walk through it again. You are powerless to crush the head of the Devil. I don't care how much you've been CrossFitting lately; you're going to get worked. You running on the treadmill for 30 minutes doesn't... You have a Super Soaker filled with some holy water? You're still going to get worked. You have a cross and some Latin you'll spew out? Head turning around, pea soup... It's going to go badly for you. You're not going to crush the head of the Devil.

What about blessing all families on earth? That's pretty big. Let's just do this. How about blessing *your* family? Let's have a real frank talk about this. I love to bless my family, but I cannot control the insidious aspect of their hearts that takes those blessings and perverts them. Are you tracking with me? Let's talk. I love to give to my kids. I don't want to say no. I save "no" for when it matters. I love to say yes.

Something I've noticed is that as God has allowed us to bless our children, they have not always responded in praise but have responded with entitlement. They very quickly take a blessing and begin to operate like they were owed that. "I ate all my dinner. You owed me ice cream." "No. No, I didn't." I can't control that aspect of their hearts.

Now can I do what God has asked me to do as a father? Yes. I took my oldest out for a manicure. Not me. But I took her out and got that done and hung out with her. I laid on the couch yesterday watching *Tangled* for the 4,892nd time. I tucked Norah's hair behind her ear, kissed her face, just totally trying to ruin that little girl for whatever dirtbag is out there trying to pursue her. I just want her to be so unimpressed. "You brought me flowers. So what? Yeah, punk; earn it. You're going to have to be godly. You're going to have to be patient." Right? I'm just totally trying to ruin her.

But I can't transform their hearts. I really can't. So often Lauren's and my desire to bless our children has backfired on us. It has led to entitlement. It has led to selfishness. It has led to those types of things, because only this Savior can change their hearts. I can bless them with transient, temporary things. That's all I have.

If eternity is true, well-adjusted, good American children who say, "Yes sir, no sir, yes ma'am, and no ma'am," and clean their rooms is no victory. If eternity is *not* real, then good citizenship is a great goal. If eternity *is* real, we've lost everything if they're polite and lost. I need *this* Savior to intervene, and this Savior will bless not just my family, but all of the families on earth.

Let's talk about our ability to eradicate destruction, oppression, and violence. Let's just do the last 60 years or so. In the 40s, the great evil that befell the known world was the axis powers, the Japanese and the Germans, the Italians there for a while, but not long. From there, if we could just conquer Hitler and that

evil empire, if we could just overthrow them, then we would usher in a reign of peace. In fact, has anybody ever thought of the irony that World War I was called "the war to end all wars"? Well, that's a big failure.

We roll up our sleeves, we harness American ingenuity and passion, and we churn out more weapons, more tanks, more planes, and we handle our business. Victory in Europe Day, Victory in Japan Day. We celebrate our victory. How long did peace last? About three weeks. Now we enter the Cold War. Now we're in Korea. We don't even hardly get out of Korea before we're back into Vietnam. We don't hardly get out of Vietnam before we have to deal with the Middle East. Now we're back in the Middle East, and now the enemy is the Taliban.

Do you know who's next? I don't, but there's someone. We will not by might or education usher in peace on earth. Surely you know this. It's not coming for us. *This* Savior can institute it, but *we* most definitely won't. In fact, I would be hard-pressed to say this. For every advance we've made, we simply reveal our wickedness more quickly. For every scientific breakthrough, for every technological advance, all we have done is created faster venues by which to sin and rebel.

You show me a breakthrough in medical science that creates a drug that saves people, and I'll show you the most oppressed and poor on the planet who have no access to that drug because there's a profit to be made by not getting it to them. This is two steps forward, one step back, always and forever. We need a Savior who can usher in legitimate peace. There can be no legitimate peace without the transformation of hearts that leads to the transformation of structures and systems, and then, when all is said and done and God makes all things new, we have ourselves a remade new earth.

We have been unable to fulfill our lives in a way that our souls cease to chase the dangling carrot. Here's why I worry about us. We're never going to suffer as much as Job and we're not going to be as rich as Solomon. Do you know where that puts us? Directly on the treadmill, running to whatever is next. If you think about your life, your whole life has been a series of "What's next?" Where there's not a "what's next," we get super restless.

We just wanted to get to high school. Then we just wanted our driver's license. Then we just wanted to get out of high school. Then we just wanted to get into college. Then we just wanted to get out of college. Then we just wanted to find the one. We wanted to get married. Then we needed to find a job to support this marriage. Then we wanted kids. Then we wanted a promotion at work. We're constantly punting down the field of our lives the next thing.

That glittery, sparkly little thing out there in the future continues to drive us while never satisfying us. We're not even going to get tuned into that, because new stuff and advancement is intoxicating like a drug.

We'll run and we'll run and we'll run, and there will always be something that's next. You'll continue to punt the fullness of life down the field of your life until your run is over. Only something that's beyond the sun and not underneath it can solve that issue with the human heart. We need *this* Savior. We need the Ancient of Days to help with that.

I've said this for years. I just so passionately believe it. There's always one or two who get upset when I say it. I mean not to upset you, I promise, but I want to make it very clear that I believe no one has lied to you, deceived you, and betrayed you more than you have. Despite the fact that there are mountains of empirical data that you make a crummy god over your own life, my bet would be most of us feel very confident in our "godness" over our lives and see any sort of authority or boundary as an affront to our sovereignty.

Of course, all we have is evidence that we really stink. We lie to us and betray us and trick us and don't tell us the truth and don't show up when we say we're going to, but we really make awesome gods. We need this Savior to rule over our hearts.

The last thing he talks about is atoning for our sins; that this Savior would atone for our sins, eradicate sin. If we were honest, many of us in here, even now, are slaves to sin in our lives. Probably what I can comfortably say is that you have two different lives going on. You have your life at church, where you're great and you love the preaching and the singing, but you have this whole other life that maybe one or two people know about, or maybe nobody knows about but you, and you are actively being owned and dominated by your sin.

You have bought into the ridiculous lie that you're controlling it, that you can stop whenever you want, and you would never cross this certain line, and you have everything under control. How long have you been trying to stop? A decade? Two? Bro, you're not in control; you're being driven. Only this Savior can set us free from the hooks of sin that deep into the soul.

Here's what I want us to do in this season. I need us to drop this anchor in this hard-flowing river of consumerism and lights and tinsel and trees and presents and all things that are good. We need to drop the anchor and look back, that God has fulfilled his promise to rescue us and save us in the person and work of Jesus Christ.

We want to fix our eyes there. We want to get our family's life there. The reason we made the Advent guide is to help you as families gather your kids around and say, "Hey, this is what we're celebrating here. This is what we're looking at. This is what we're marveling at, that our God is able to keep his promises, that he has intervened on our behalf, that he has rescued us, ransomed us, made a way." We want to put that before our families over and over and not get swept up ourselves.

Then we want to redeem anticipation. Let me explain that. This whole season is built on anticipation. You roll out the decorations, and then my 4-year-old is already asking, "How many sleeps until Christmas? How many sleeps until our presents?" Now the tree isn't up in our house yet. The outside is done; the inside is not done. When the tree goes up, that anticipation is going to build. Once you put the presents around the tree, kids start to lose their minds.

I'll tell you what. I get kind of excited. I've done Lauren's shopping. I kind of want her to know. I'm proud of myself. There's a lot of anticipation that will build in this season. It'll build to that crescendo on Christmas morning. Then you will very quickly realize there was a false, shadowy crescendo, and you'll feel, "Oh, that was it." Anticipation, expectation, redeemed is when we begin to believe and embrace that the same God who promised Jesus would show up and accomplish these things said that Jesus would return, and this time not as a baby.

In the first Advent, Jesus comes as a baby in a manger. When Christ returns, not to inaugurate the kingdom because that has already happened, but to consummate the kingdom of God, to make these things happen in their fullness, when *that* day comes, he will not come as a baby who needs to be swaddled; he will come with a tattoo on his thigh and a sword out of his mouth. You don't swaddle a brother with a tattoo on his thigh. That's a way to get cut.

Jesus comes to judge the living and the dead, to bring judgment on the nations. He will not show up to shepherds on a hillside; he'll crack open the sky. The Bible says men will flee to the mountains but that the mountains will flee before the Lord. That sounds terrifying, doesn't it? That men want mountains to fall on them but there is nowhere to hide. That's the return of Jesus the King, not Jesus the baby, and we are a day closer today than we were yesterday. Most of us do not have our expectation and anticipation set on that moment, so we live silly lives.

I'm telling you this. If you think Jesus can return at any moment, I think you'd find more strength in the fight against sin. If you think Jesus is really coming back, that there's a day coming as certain as the arrival of the Messiah as a baby boy... If you believed that the coming King was going to crack open the sky and that could occur at any moment, you would begin to dial your heart into the things that eternally matter and find that the transient things have less a hold on your life.

My goal with our season here, our four weeks, is let's look back and marvel, and let's set our faces to what's coming down in the future and live lives of gratitude and hope, not getting swept away in the tinsel and trees; enjoying it, but keeping our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith. Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for these men and women. Again, the opportunity just to sit under your Word and have it read us. I pray for those who are here who are entering a very difficult season. For many, this will be our first holiday season without a loved one, our first holiday season as a divorcee, our first holiday season in a new city, a new town. I pray that you would strengthen us, that you would, again, let us cling to that anchor that is Jesus Christ and you fulfilling the promise to send a Savior into the world.

I pray that you would turn our eyes to your imminent return and that you would adjust our anticipation not to some kind of transient, trifling thing in the future, but *the* thing coming for us, which is a face-to-face meeting with you. I thank you for your grace that enables us to walk toward that day without fear, trusting in your forgiveness and grace. Its for your beautiful name I pray, amen.

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