

Advent (Part 1) – Deliverer

Matt Chandler – November 30, 2014

How are we? If you have your Bibles, we're starting Advent, so flip to Exodus, chapter 1. That's where we're going to camp out. No joke. We're going to start there. It'll make sense shortly. As we get going here, I've always loved Christmas. I don't know that I've ever come across somebody who didn't. Really the whole holidays are a time in our home where we're hyper-aware of things, probably because of our history.

I always loved Christmas and loved the season and loved the lights, but I thought they had their place. So we lived staunchly by the rules in the Chandler home that you don't steal, you don't kill, you don't do drugs, and you don't decorate for Christmas until Thanksgiving is over, because Thanksgiving is its own... Those were rules we lived by.

Now my wife isn't wired that way. I'm glad she's singing and isn't here this morning. She's not wired that way. She would start celebrating Christmas in January if I wasn't such a strong bastion of "That's not happening." Now all of that began to crumble about five years ago. Five years ago on Thanksgiving Day, I had a seizure. That seizure revealed I had a tumor in my right frontal lobe, so on December 4, I had a resection of the right frontal lobe. They cut a malignant oligodendroglioma out of my right frontal lobe.

I woke up from surgery with some weakness on my left side. I stayed in rehab and was released from rehab on December 16. Gnarly scar on my head, hair already starting to fall out, getting set up for 18 months of high-dose chemo and some radiation. I was released on December 16, and the first real outing I had was on Christmas Eve to come to Christmas Eve services here. Josh Patterson was teaching our services because, graciously, the elders did not demand that I preach that weekend. I was grateful for that. So I sat in the back up there and just wept and marveled at the grace of God.

If you'll remember five years ago, it snowed like crazy. That Christmas Eve it was just coming down like crazy. And not like the ghetto snow that Texas normally gets. It's normally really ice, and

everybody from up north is like, "This isn't snow; this is ice," and the city shuts down and everything turns into a skating rink and we're trapped indoors and we stockpile weapons and bread. Well, that's just living in Texas normally. It wasn't that type of snow. It was legitimate, you could make something, kind of snow.

We woke up on Christmas morning. I was still banged up, still not completely there, still in a bit of a fog with a flat effect. We tore open presents, and we have these weird videos of me. Like the kids would open a present, and I'd be like, "Oh, that's great." Then they went out with their toys and played in the snow, and all I could do was watch, like a kid who got grounded, out the blinds as the kids played in the snow. I felt this loss in that moment. I felt this loss of the ability to enter into the joy of my children and the joy of my family.

That has made me hyper-aware and hyper-sensitive this time of year. Thanksgiving is a huge day, but it doesn't stop there, because it rolls right into the rest of the holidays for us as a family. As I become hyper-aware, here's what I can say. I really love Christmas. Cards on the table. Our house was decorated on Monday, which is several days before Thursday, which was Thanksgiving.

If you listen to our podcast show that Patterson and I do here, he dogged me out publicly, very publicly, for having Folk Angel Christmas music playing in my office two weeks ago and said that I had defiled the first floor of our offices by subjugating them to Christmas music two weeks before Thanksgiving. So I'm far more in now than I ever have been.

In fact, already it has begun. On the way to my house, there's a dead end street that every year decorates their neighborhood with Disney characters and Christmas lights. Right around 500 times in the next 25 to 30 days, my 5-year-old daughter will ask us on the way home to turn down that dead end street so she can see... Here's what I'm going to tell you. About 412 of those I'm going to say yes to, and we're just going to go down there and watch it. Just to show you how much I'm in, we've already watched *Elf* once. We've already started. "What are we going to do tonight?"

"I don't know."

"*Elf*. It's after Thanksgiving. Let's go."

So I'm all in. I love it. But because I want to serve us well and love you well, I want to lay before you the same fight I find myself in in the hopes we might fight well together. As fun and as amazing as

Christmas is... And I'm in. We have two trees in my house. That was a fight I lost. Don't be like, "Man, he's really..." No, I lost that one. I tried.

But apparently you have to one in the window where people can see it if they drive past your house, even though you're on a dead end street, and then you have to have one you actually put the presents under. If you're like, "You seem really passive-aggressive," I'm being passive-aggressive right now, so that's why you're picking up on that.

We're all in, but there is no holiday that those of us in the Western world will suffer more propaganda under and around than this season. It is only in this season where a type of over-realized eschatology is laid before us. Every commercial, every special, everything we see is going to lay before us that this is the year it's all going to come together.

Family strife and broken relationships... We're going to gather, and this year on Christmas morn the miracle is going to happen. Strife will dissipate and our depression will go away and all the sorrow of the last year will give way to cheerful joy on Christmas morn. This will be air-ward and ground-ward, and everything you will listen to, everything you will see, will present this before you.

What this season promises you is joy and reconciliation and restoration, and this year, when that family comes into your house or you go to your family house, this is not the year you will be reminded of why you do not like them. This is the year, this is the season, that you realize you were wrong all along for not liking them. In fact, they're going to apologize to you on Christmas morning as they give to you a present that is absurdly beyond their budget.

Your kids are going to be great. They're going to open up their presents and be like, "Thank you, Mother. It's so great," and they're not going to get bored at all within five hours of opening that gift this year. Not this year. We have so bought into and sown into this over-realized eschatology of the Christmas season that there's sociologically a type of Christmas blues that befalls a great number of our population after everything is over.

What I want to try to do in our time here is to offer you something better, not just for this season, but for every month of your life. What I want to try to lay before you is something that will stay long after the tree is gone, either dead gone or back up in the attic gone, that long after tinsel and trees and carols and lights and all of that has been put away stays in place. It's not an over-realized

eschatology, but rather it meets us where we are and provides hope for where we are, as we earnestly look forward to what is to come.

As Christians in this season, we're celebrating Advent. The word *advent* means coming or arrival. For us as Christians, it's far more than just some celebration of some historic moment 2,000 years ago. No, Advent is a celebration that Christ has come and that his power is at work in the present day and that he will return, this time not as a baby, but as a ruling King. So Advent for us isn't just, "Oh, isn't it great that six-pound baby Jesus was born into the world." That's not exactly what we're celebrating, although it is a piece.

See, in Advent we look behind us, but we also look forward to what is coming for us. In the Christmas season, there are all of the shadows of these realities that Christ came... You're going to see a lot of shadows of that. You're going to see manger scenes in people's lawns. You're going to see it in houses. You're going to find some that have Santa bowing down to Jesus in the manger. Those are shadows that Christ has come.

You're going to see shadows that he is at work in the world to this day, all these little specials we're talking about, even the hopes that start to churn up in us in this season of reconciliation and relationships made right. You're going to see shadows of that in this season. Then there will be the reality of disappointments, of hurt hearts and broken relationships that will make us long for a coming day when all has been made new in Jesus Christ.

Now to get our hearts focused on that as opposed to this massive type of shop till you drop, make sure everybody is happy, fear of man panic attack we call Christmas in our day and age, we're going to have to put up a bit of a fight. So here's our plan to walk alongside of you, to walk with one another in this holiday season, to turn our minds and our hearts and our hopes to Christ and the fact he has come, the fact he is at work in the world, and that he will return, making all things new.

When we come in here every weekend, we're going to look at some things that are true about the character of God. We're going to stop and breathe, and we're going to look at who God is. We're going to see who he is, what his character is like, what he's up to. We're going to see that play out in the Christmas narrative as seen in the Gospels.

Every weekend when we come in here, your children will be learning the exact same lesson out of the exact same texts, which if you have a first through a fifth grader gives you a profound and

beautiful opportunity to get in the car and go, "What do you think about Moses being used by God to lead the people out of slavery?" "How did you know?" Then you get your bluff in, folks. "I know everything. There are no secrets from me." You have this unique opportunity to enter that space.

But once a week would never be able to stem the tide of this almost insurmountable wall of propaganda that's coming our way, so we've provided for you an Advent guide. Whether you're an empty nester or you have a house full of children or just live with roommates as singles, we've given you a guide that during the week you could turn your attention and your affection to the coming of Jesus, the power of Jesus at work among us even to this day, and the return of Christ that is a day closer today than it was yesterday.

Then finally, one of the things we want to weave into your season as we weave it into our own is the opportunity to live generously and bless those who have not been as blessed as you have been this year. This year, across all of our campuses, we have set out tables in our foyers where there are organizations that are localized that are serving the poorest of poor in our area.

One of the things the Chandler family is doing is we are taking the money from one of the kids' gifts, and we are giving the kids that money and letting them walk by the table out there and choose how they're going to take the money that was going to be for one of their gifts and instead give that to another kid who has not been as blessed. We want to weave into the fabric of their lives and the fabric of our home a glad-hearted generosity that is overflowing in how God has dealt so generously with us.

Our hope is that as we come here and marvel at who God is... This morning we're just going to talk about our God as deliverer and that God is a deliverer. As we come and talk about who God is, and then during the week as we open up our Advent guide and pray and consider and do the little projects and the little family things we do, and as we go and look at Christmas lights, our minds will be turned to Jesus. Our hearts will be turned to Jesus.

Although we're going to have a good time with Christmas parties and the tree and the lights and all of it, we're going to drink deeply from all of it, we want to get underneath its false promises and see the promises that are being portrayed as what they are, shadows of what will eventually be true but we're just not there yet. With that said, we're going to quickly talk this morning in our time together about God as our deliverer.

Now when we say that God is our deliverer, here's what we're saying: that God is one who saves from danger or destruction. Some synonyms are that he is a liberator, a protector, a defender, a hero, a savior. Now to show that God is our deliverer, I want to watch what happens to the people of God in Exodus, and then I want us to go to Matthew, chapter 1, and see the promise that comes as Christ shows up on the scene.

In Exodus, chapter 1... If you don't have a church background, I'll catch you up quickly. The people of God, God's chosen people, find themselves in Egypt, not first as slaves, but because Joseph, who was a Jew through the sovereign hand of God who had made his way up in the ranks of the Egyptian ruling class, actually saves Israel out of a horrific drought, so Israel now has become a part of the Egyptian empire. This is before Jerusalem is established and before the Promised Land has been inhabited by the people of God. We pick it up in Exodus, chapter 1, starting in verse 8.

"Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph. And he said to his people, 'Behold, the people of Israel are too many and too mighty for us. Come, let us deal shrewdly with them, lest they multiply, and, if war breaks out, they join our enemies and fight against us and escape from the land.'

Therefore they set taskmasters over them to afflict them with heavy burdens. They built for Pharaoh store cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they were oppressed, the more they multiplied and the more they spread abroad." That sentence has been true about the people of God from the beginning to this very day.

"And the Egyptians were in dread of the people of Israel. So they ruthlessly made the people of Israel work as slaves and made their lives bitter with hard service, in mortar and brick, and in all kinds of work in the field. In all their work they ruthlessly made them work as slaves."

Now as I say often, in fact, almost weekly I want to try to point out to you that difficulty, hardship, pain, should not surprise you. It's everywhere. Here we have the people of God, those loved by God, called by God his own, who are being, according to this text, dealt with shrewdly. Now if we're honest, a lot of people in this room could be like, "Yeah, I could relate to that. I think there have been multiple times this past year I've been dealt with shrewdly."

They're afflicted with heavy burdens. Again, that will resonate with some of our hearts today. Oppressed and fully enslaved. That will once again resonate with our hearts. There are those of us who are like, "Man, I do feel oppressed." Maybe it's not by people. Maybe it's by this darkness you wrestle with. Maybe it's this lust of your flesh you seem to be enslaved by.

It's this reality that the people of God oftentimes are in situations that are difficult, and it feels as though, even to them, they have been abandoned by their God and that God is nowhere to be found and that his salvation is make-believe. Yet as the narrative progresses, we see in Exodus, chapter 2, starting in verse 23, these words.

"During those many days the king of Egypt died, and the people of Israel groaned because of their slavery and cried out for help. Their cry for rescue from slavery came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. God saw the people of Israel—and God knew."

That's a profound little text there in Exodus, chapter 2. Here's what it'll lay before all of us. First, God *knows*. God knew. Regardless of what you're walking in, here's the great news of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the great truth about our God as deliverer: God is not a stranger to where you are. God is not ignorant of what's going on in your heart, in your life, in your mind, in your relationships. He is not surprised, not shocked, not shuddering, not wondering what to do. God knows.

Then in this text we also see he *hears*. It is most often in our difficult times we feel like our prayers are going nowhere, that we're crying out and no one is listening. Yet we see in this text that God not only knows... Don't get juked by this idea of God remembering the promise he made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It wasn't like God forgot and now the people are crying out and he's like, "Oh yeah, I forgot. I'll bail you out. Let's do it."

That's not what's happening here. This idea of remembering is not that God had forgotten, but rather that now it's time. It's time now to move, which leads me to the third point that not only does God know, not only does God hear, but God *intervenes*. We know this because how God intervenes is so spectacular they keep making movies about it. In fact, so unbelievable is God's intervention upon the slavery of his people that this time we had to get Batman to play the part.

Now if you're thinking that *Gods and Kings* is going to be biblical, you're going to be disappointed, but it'll probably be awesome and entertaining. (I don't even know why I said that. It's going to

cause me some grief this week.) God intervenes on behalf of those who are his children who are enslaved. Again, if you don't have a church background, I don't think this will be news to you.

Moses, who was the second Hebrew now who has worked his way up into the elite of Egypt, one day sees that one of his countrymen is being dealt with harshly by an Egyptian guard, so he kills that man with his bare hands. The Bible is grimy. He doesn't think anybody sees. He hides the body in the desert, and he thinks he has gotten away with it.

The next day, he sees two of his countrymen fighting one another, and he breaks them up. One of them says to him, "Will you kill me now like you did the Egyptian?" Now he knows he's busted, so he runs and hides in the mountain. He becomes a shepherd. This man who had been a ruling elite in Egypt is now a shepherd in the hills.

God comes to him through a bush that is burning but not being consumed, and he says, "I've heard the cries of my people. I'm going to deliver them. You're going for me." Moses says, "I stutter." God says, "I don't." Moses says, "Well, this and that and this," and God intervenes at every one of his excuses and says, "You are weak and frail, I know. I'm not. I'm going with you. Let's go. If it makes you feel better, take Aaron. He's going to be an idiot. He's going to cause some trouble. I'm going to handle him a little bit later, but Aaron is going to go with you."

Then Moses shows up, and the great confrontation between Pharaoh and the God of the universe begins. Pharaoh, who likened himself to a god, which is always strange, especially in ancient cultures that felt as though their kings were gods despite the fact they kept dying... Pharaoh, who likened himself as a god, who believed he was in some sense divine, digs in his heels against God's command to release the people of Israel into the land he had promised them.

So God, through his servant Moses, has all the water in Egypt turn into blood. Now that's all it would take for me. I'm going to be really straight. Like if Lake Lewisville, Ray Hubbard, everything in Dallas, all of our rivers, all our water, all is blood? Gone. Take your people and go. But Pharaoh's heart is hardened toward the Lord, and he sees himself as somewhat a god himself, so he digs in his heels.

Next there's the plague of frogs. Frogs everywhere, in your cupboard, in your bed, in your bath, in your shower, everywhere. A plague of frogs. Not, "Oh, there are a couple of toads in our pool." No, a

plague of frogs. Then after the frogs, you have gnats. After gnats, flies. After flies, the livestock begin to die. After the livestock begin to die, all of the Egyptians break out in boils.

Then hail comes and destroys half the city, then locusts, and then it just stops being day. The plague of darkness sweeps over, and day disappears. Think about this. There was no more day in Egypt. When you think about Egypt, what do you think about? The pyramids, the desert. Not anymore. Daytime, gone. Brothers just woke up, tried to go to work, but the sun wasn't shining in Egypt.

Then finally Pharaoh, back and forth, like, "Yeah, yeah, go. Get out of here. Take the people and get out," and then all of a sudden decides, "No, no, no. I'm a god. I'm going to dig in my heels." Listen. Before we're too quick to judge Pharaoh, think of how often we dig in *our* heels against God, how often we're confident that we know better, how confident that our victory will be sure over the ways of God.

Then finally you get the institution of the Passover meal that will be the full-on shadow of what will come in the person and work of Jesus Christ. The people of Israel are told to slaughter a spotless lamb and to take the blood of that lamb and wipe the blood of the lamb across the doorposts of their homes. There were several other things they were asked to do, but that was the main thing.

The angel of death was coming through to kill the firstborn of every family in Egypt unless the door was marked by the blood of the lamb. Sure enough, here comes the angel of death that night, and the firstborn son of every family in Egypt dies that night suddenly, except for those in the house of Israel who obeyed the command of God and had put the blood of the lamb on their doorposts.

The Bible says there arose out of Egypt a great cry as men and women woke up to their firstborn sons being dead. There was sorrow upon sorrow and mourning upon mourning. Pharaoh's own son was not spared in the death of these boys. Upon this, Pharaoh relents and releases the people of God to go. Then as you can imagine, grief, especially grief like this, would turn into rage. It certainly would in *my* heart, sans the grace of God. So Pharaoh, bloodthirsty, enraged, gathers the army, not to bring Israel back, but to destroy them outright, and begins to pursue the people of Israel.

Now maybe you're thinking at this point, "Okay, all right, Chandler. You had me at 'God hears.' You had me at 'God knows.' But you're losing me on this 'God intervenes,' Chandler, because let me tell you, in my life, in my world, in the kind of brokenness I'm walking in, in the frustration, the anger, the depression, and the anxiety I'm walking in, this kind of divine, miraculous intervention is

nowhere to be found. There has been no water turned to blood in *my* world. There has been no plague of flies. If there has been a plague, it has been on me. This miraculous God of yours has not intervened in *my* life." Yet you're here.

When I think back on the last 20-something years of my life, following the Lord by his grace, I'm struck, of course, by the miracle. The doctor said I would be dead two years ago, and I'm not. I'm here as healthy as ever. I'm struck by that miracle, but I'm also reminded of all of these little miracles that didn't seem miraculous at the time but turned out to make all the difference in my life.

The first miracle was when I started playing football I fell in with this group of guys who were serious about Jesus but open to love me despite my sinfulness. I think of how crude I was, how offensive I must have been to mature Christian people, yet they kept inviting me out, kept asking me to hang out, kept bringing me along.

I mean, I'm in an environment where no one cusses, no one drinks, no one is getting high, and no one is sleeping around. I mean, that's their world. They're going to serve the Lord, love the Lord, make much of the Lord. They're quoting Bible verses together. They don't even see rated-R movies. I'm foulmouthed. I'm partying. I'm in fast pursuit of the ladies. I don't even know how to relate in this world I'm in. They're arguing on whether or not it's biblical to see *Terminator 2*. I'd already seen it four times.

Yet their patience, their refusal to condemn me, their ability to, particularly Jeff Faircloth, after those types of settings, circle back around, and ask me about what I was finding satisfying and what wasn't satisfying me, and if the scene I was running in simply made me feel dirty and ashamed and embarrassed, maybe that was God's grace on my life to consider that there's something better. That was a miracle.

So maybe you being here today, with all of that baggage you're carrying, to simply hear me say, "God knows, God hears, God works, God is at work in the mess..." Maybe just you being here today is a miracle. You stumbling in here today is a miracle. Think, in the vast unchurched-ness of our culture, what are you doing here but maybe for God trying to minister, trying to encourage, trying to love you where you are? Who invited you if you're not a Christian? It seems like God is miraculously intervening at some level.

It was in a locker room that I started hearing about the gospel of Jesus Christ. Have you thought about that? Fellows, any of you play sports, been in men's locker rooms? Okay, ladies, not a lot of righteousness goes on in those places. It's not high level intellectual discourse. Women are talked about cheaply. There is a lot of lying that goes on in locker rooms.

Yet it was in this place that a young man boldly and in front of everybody said, "I need to tell you about Jesus. When do you want to do that?" and then lassoed me into his crew that put up with my offense, that extended grace to me, and became a very visible picture of what the kingdom of God looked like. Those are miraculous things.

Maybe you're so busy looking for water to turn into blood and plagues of flies and gnats, maybe you're so hell-bent on seeing some kind of "Show me your bending-the-laws-of-nature type of miracles," you've forgotten to look at the small little miracles that are right in front of you even in this moment. Then Moses leads the people of Israel right up to the Red Sea, and you know what happens, but let's look at the text. This is Exodus 14, starting in verse 29.

"But the people of Israel walked on dry ground through the sea, the waters being a wall to them on their right hand and on their left. Thus the LORD saved Israel that day from the hand of the Egyptians, and Israel saw the Egyptians dead on the seashore. Israel saw the great power that the LORD used against the Egyptians, so the people feared the LORD, and they believed in the LORD and in his servant Moses."

Now here's something to note. This is what's going to take us into what this has to do with Christmas, because it's not every Christmas season you start off with, "And all the firstborn sons of Egypt were killed, and then the army was drowned in the Red Sea. Merry Christmas." That's not a normal progression, right? So what does this story of God delivering his people out of slavery have to do with Christmas?

Well, first, let's be really honest about what's actually happening here. First, we see that Israel is fearing the Lord, they're remembering the Lord, and they respect their servant Moses. So they're now led out of slavery and into the land promised to them, a land flowing with milk and honey. How long is this going to last, this free from slavery and into this good land God has provided for them? Three chapters or two? Not long.

See, Moses did this external deliverance of human beings out of physical slavery and into a good

land, but what we're going to read about in Matthew 1:21 is so much bigger than that. In Matthew 1:21, Joseph is visited by an angel, and this is what the angel says to him concerning his betrothed Mary. **"She will bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus, for he will save [deliver] his people from their sins."**

Moses saved and delivered the people of God out of physical slavery, but the coming of Jesus Christ is not the deliverance of your life and my life from mere difficulties in the here and now, but rather the salvation of our souls from the root issue that causes the devastation that plagues our lives, namely the plague of sin and death. The coming of Jesus Christ sounded the death toll of death itself, the death of sin once and for all.

The coming of Jesus is the eradication of works-based righteousness, where Christ comes in and becomes our righteousness. He shows up and invades the idea of having scales tilted in our favor. Instead he shows up and destroys the scales and becomes our perfection. See, the coming of Jesus and the power made available even to this day in Christ is freedom from the real root issues of the heart that lead to all of these other broken spaces in our lives.

If you're like, "So are you saying that if we're Christians we don't struggle and suffer?" gosh, no. You must be a guest here. No. No, I would never say that, because it's not true. See, here's where I said in the beginning that we find ourselves as Christians in this really unique period in human history. What we're doing at Advent is looking behind at the implications that Christ showed up, that Christ arrived, that he didn't send Moses this time, but God in the flesh came, Jesus the Christ, the Son of God.

He comes and shows up, and this time he's not delivering us from symptomatic enslavement but rather is freeing our souls forever. It has been paid for in full, and now we eagerly wait in the power of the Holy Spirit the consummation of all things at the return of Christ. So in this season we're looking backwards. Christ has come, and because Christ has come, I have been delivered from all of my sinfulness.

Now that I've been purchased by his blood, now that I am a son purchased by the death of Christ, I am forgiven of all my sins, past, present, and future. That simply could not be true if Christ wouldn't have come. A man couldn't lead me out of that unless he was perfect and spotless, and there was no man who was perfect and spotless until Christ came into the world.

Now I struggle, but I struggle with the power of Christ, with the gift of the Holy Spirit that ensures I don't have to give in to my sin. I still do because of my flesh, but I don't have to. Over the last 20 years, there has been great progress made in my external moral sinfulness. I still stumble and fall, but I know I can just get up and that the Lord's affection for me hasn't been rattled by the past week. Then finally, I find my heart, my mind, my hope, with a lot of angst for the return of Christ once and for all.

Earlier, I said all of these things that pop up at Christmas are shadows of what will be true. The idea that eventually we'll open the Red Ryder BB gun, that eventually we'll get the bonus that lets us get the swimming pool, that at the last moment all of our greatest hopes are going to come true, that at the last moment Dad is going to choose what is right and he's going to tell his boss he can take his job and do what he wants with it and he's going to go with his son from the North Pole and they're going to...

That moment all of us are so hungry for is coming. We're closer. But it's not going to be Christmas morning. It'll be at the return of the King of the universe, and he will not come a second time like a baby. He will invade for the final time the darkness of this world and this time make all things new. On that day, there will be the glad restoration of all of our relationships, and on that day there will be no more depression, no more anxiety, no more loss.

In fact, he says the former things pass away. There will be no remembrance of them. All that is sad, all that is dark, all that has gone wrong, there won't even be a remembrance of it. All that has been confusing, all of the moments we thought, "Where are you, God?" will vanish. As we see now the jagged glass of the stained glass window, we will then be far enough back to see the beauty of it all.

We're a day closer. Until then, by the power of the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Christ in this world working in our hearts, we fight against our flesh, we remember the coming of Christ and its implications, and we eagerly anticipate that coming day where the King has returned.

My wife's step-grandmother came in for Thanksgiving, and she brought a present. So we have this one present sitting in our living room right now on the shelf. My kids are... You can just catch Norah, in particular, just staring over at it. Like the TV will be on, but she's literally just staring at the present. She just can't wait to open it.

In fact, it's like 20 questions about this present. "Whose present is this? Is this present for me? What does this say? Is this my name? Do we get to open one on Christmas Eve?" I'm like, "It's not even December. You're asking questions about Christmas Eve?" There's this kind of giddy "I can't wait to open it" in her.

May we be marked like that. May there be this type of giddy, "We're a day closer." Not a type of anticipation that paralyzes us from engaging and walking in this world, but the type of anchoring hope that knows we are even now, in this moment, an hour and eight minutes closer than we were when we walked in. And as sure as Christmas morning is going to show up before we know it, so will this day show up before we know it.

This is the nature of time itself, is it not? I turned 40 this year. That doesn't freak me out. That's what happens when you get sick. You're like, "Made it." But it feels weird telling people I'm 40, because I feel like I should be saying, "36." But I'm 40, and it'll just be a minute or two before I'm like, "I'm 50," and then a minute or two after that, "I'm 60," and then a minute or two after that, by the grace of God, "I'm 70." It's just going to go like that. It has for every generation that has ever been alive.

Lord willing, somewhere in that space, he's going to crack open the sky, and I want to be looking for it. If that's not his plan, not our generation, if I get to, according to the New Testament, fall asleep like other saints, then so be it, but I earnestly hope I get to be a part of that generation, whatever generation it will be, that meets him in the sky and is transformed in the twinkling of an eye and doesn't taste that first death at all but rather has his new body established in the middle of the sky and then reigns and rules alongside of my King forever. We remember, we rejoice, and we look forward to his return. Let's pray.

Father, we ask for your help, knowing that as soon as we leave this place, we will begin to be bombarded with the false promises of the holidays. We will be pulled and pushed, and we will have commercial after commercial, radio spot after radio spot, special after special, movie after movie, making promises that cannot be kept outside of your grace and your return.

We thank you for how you work in the mess. We thank you for your presence in the mess. We thank you that for some of us, we really will have relational reconciliation this side of your return, that for many of us, owning and absorbing and seeking forgiveness will occur and you will be good and

gracious in that. For that we thank you and praise you. But ultimate reconciliation, ultimate making right of all things, is found only upon your return. Let us look earnestly to that day.

Father, in homes and in apartments and in townhomes all across this place, represented by your people in this church, might we turn our eyes and our hearts toward you this Advent season. Might we marvel at and think upon and discuss at night at dinner the coming of your Son, the power of your Son, and the return of your Son. Let us celebrate and be glad.

For those of us entering into this season for the first time with great difficulty without a loved one, without a good friend, for the first time by ourselves on our own, we pray you would meet us in those places in a really special way. May the body be the body in this season, as we open up our homes and show hospitality and have in the stranger, have in the one from out of town, have in the one who's new to the area to love and serve. Be mighty among us. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.