



Advent (Part 4) - Worthy

Matt Chandler – December 21, 2014

Hey. How are we? Doing well? If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab them. Matthew, chapter 2, is where we're going to camp out. In fact, I'll just keep coming back to this part of the narrative over and over again today. I'll reference a couple of other texts, but primarily we'll just camp out here in Matthew, chapter 2.

While you're turning there, I want to turn our attention to just a little bit of focused time of prayer here at the beginning of our service. Then from there, we'll dive into what I hope is the type of Christmas message that's helpful versus the kind that's not.

About three or four years ago, I was compelled via a study of the Scriptures that one of the things Christ has purchased for us is the death of homogeny, the death of lines around ethnic and socioeconomic status that kind of create subcategories of people. Out of Ephesians 2 in particular, although throughout the Bible, what you see is what God is after is building a new covenant community of faith that isn't drawn by the lines that have always been woven into human history.

In fact, he goes so far as in Ephesians, chapter 2, he said the dividing wall of hostility has been torn down. He has done something new. What Christ has done by the shedding of his blood is created a new man. The Greek word there is *kainos*. It means brand new. So not 2015 Ford Explorer but Model T.

I'm doing something that hasn't been done before. So compelled, driven by the Word of God, looking out at the more than predominantly white faces of the parishioners of The Village Church, I decided I was going to begin to press and move us toward a more Revelation chapter 7 congregational feel for The Village Church.

I started grinding on that end. I started seeking to understand. I began to lean into the relationships I have with African American men and women and going, "Okay, help me understand this. I don't."

Man, you want to talk about awkward conversations? Be a white guy... I am a white guy. The white is strong in me. That's all. I'm in a white family with white friends in a white part of the world.

I leaned in and said, "Give me something to read. Help me understand. I don't understand this. I don't get this. Please!" Some of them got offended by even the questions. Others of them actually began to dialogue with me and help me to understand. There has been nothing in 20 years of pastoral ministry that has felt as unwinnable as throwing your hat in this ring. I'll tell you why.

Not all, but some of our whites will go, "Do you not know where you live, bro? Where do you think these people are going to spring up from? I mean, have you seen the census information? You're in Flower Mound, bro. What are you wanting?" Well, I'll tell you what I'm wanting. I'm wanting a gospel work three exits down from us. I'm wanting socioeconomic lines to fizzle, and the working poor and those under the working poor would feel at home here and welcomed here and loved here and a part of our covenant community of faith.

Than I have some (not all) of our African Americans who don't think I push hard enough. If I was serious, I'd push harder with total and blatant disregard for how many whites would have to be cut off from a celebration of this to get there. From the left, from the right, I'm just incessantly pounded by people, the only area of life and doctrine I take this kind of beating. Yet undeterred I stand here as brazen today as I've ever been.

I've been scheming lately on how to help us serve us. In fact, on January 11, which is our Elder-Led Prayer here at Flower Mound, I've invited Joe Fields at New Beginnings Church, a large African American church here in Flower Mound, to come join us that night to pray as we consider ethnic lines and what to do with an obvious missing of one another in this country. This wound that goes back hundreds of years has not healed.

If you're watching TV, this doesn't look anything different than the 60s. I mean, some of you were there, right? I mean, forget progress. We've been on a treadmill. We've gone nowhere. We're obviously missing one another. I said, "Hey, come pray with us, Joe. Let's mingle our people for the hopes that we'll understand more fully."

Then this past week, because of the platform of this church and what God has done in this church, I was invited up to Memphis, Tennessee, to be a part of a panel on ethnic diversity and the fight for ethnic diversity among evangelical leaders. We were at the Lorraine Motel at the National Civil

Rights Museum on a panel discussing what the Who's Who of evangelical leaders on how to think about this, how to engage this, how to get past certain hurdles.

I came home just filled with all this hope that the ball was moving forward, that we have some clear lines for communication and how to seek one another out and how to further this conversation. Then I got up to my office yesterday at about 1:00 in the afternoon. What I do when I come up here Monday... We'll talk more about this once I get into this sermon. I was just praying. I started to hear my phone. It just kept going off, vibrating, vibrating, vibrating.

I'm a little ADD. I don't know if you've picked up on that. Man, if I touch that phone, who knows when I'm coming back? I just didn't even acknowledge it. Then I had the thought, "Maybe it's my wife." I picked up my phone, and it wasn't from my wife. It was from multiple friends I have who are in this trench with me, who are serious about seeing a Revelation 7 type of community of faith where ethnic lines are gone.

Though I think you should never be a colorblind church... I think that's foolish language. We don't lay our culture aside. We don't cease to be black, cease to be white, cease to be Latino, cease to be Asian, but instead, we come in and are far more defined by the blood of Christ than we are of cultural backgrounds. But it doesn't mean our cultural backgrounds change.

Brothers in that fight with me just were blowing up my phone for the deplorable, despicable act of violence that occurred in Brooklyn yesterday. I read it, and my heart sank into my gut. If you're unaware of what occurred, be careful what outlet you're getting your news from. Not all of them can be trusted. Most of them are agenda-driven.

Yesterday, a mentally unstable man took a picture of a .45 automatic and put on his Instagram account, "I'm putting wings on pigs today. They take 1 of ours...let's take 2 of theirs. [...] #RIPEricGarner #RIPMikeBrown." He drove from Baltimore (where he shot his girlfriend first) to Brooklyn, walked into a neighborhood in Brooklyn and shot and killed, murdered, two police officers sitting in their cruiser.

Then, by the way, he ran into a subway, took a picture on his Instagram again of his bloodstained pants, stained with the innocent blood of two police officers, before he took his own life. I just felt sick and felt powerless and felt like all the progress we have seemingly made seems to be unwinding before our very eyes. I felt rage and sadness. Then immediately the police commissioner

did what he almost is forced to do in this instance, which is to say they're going to militarize their police, which is going to do what? Just escalate everything.

Now you have this massive racial storm, this war basically among ethnic people groups that God has brought together as one. I wanted to start tonight just by praying. I just wanted us to pray today. Here's how I want us to pray. First, there are two police officers' families now for whom Christmas will never be the same. It's just not going to be the same.

There is a widow who got married two months ago who thought she was about to have her first Christmas with her husband and, instead, will not. By the way, Officer Ramos was actually a believer in Christ and went to church at a church we know and partner with in Brooklyn. Not only was he a police officer, but he was a brother of ours as Christians who was shot and killed. His 13-year-old boy's Christmas will never be the same. Again, I want us to pray for those families.

Then I want us to pray for our police officers. Romans 13 is an entire chapter of the Bible that lays before us that the role of government and authorities, the role of police officers, is to hold back the worst darkness imaginable. Are there bad apples? Yes, in every domain everywhere. Is there corruption? In every domain everywhere.

But the purpose and practice of 99.9 percent of all law enforcement officers is to not be well paid, stand in the gap between you and danger and death. They do it daily, never knowing when they're going to come home. This man is crazy. I don't think it's politically driven, despite his hashtag. I think this kid was insane. Yet who is to say there aren't other crazies out there who look at this and go, "Yeah, this will work." I want us to pray for their protection.

Then lastly, I want us to pray that God would do a work in this festering wound between whites and blacks. If you're Latino or Asian, I'm not trying to exclude you from the wickedness of ethnic kind of categorizing, and yet the long, bloody history between whites and blacks doesn't take much at all to explode into violence, to explode into missing each other, a refusal to seek to understand a categorizing, a failure to listen, a pre-conceived agenda that refuses to hear and consider.

It's wicked, and it's demonic. We need the grace of God to intervene here. I wanted us to pray. If you're a guest here and you're like, "This is one of the worst Christmas messages ever," I'll tell you this. It's the best Christmas message ever, because if the incarnation has no solution for this, then forget the tinsel and the tree. If the incarnation of Christ can't come into this dark space, then I'm

not spending any more money on this nonsense. I'm not getting in my car and going to look at lights.

I'm not interested if the coming of Christ can't step into this mess. I want us to pray, and I want us to pray for our church all the more...*all* the more...for diversity. To answer the question of some of my whites, I don't know. I *am* aware of the census data. More than you know, I'm aware of the census data, but it's a fight we're going to stay in. If it's not a fight for you, there are great white churches all over this area that would love to have you.

We're going to fight on this front, and we're going to press on this front. We're going to lean in on this front. We're going to get offended. We're not going to push away from the table. We're going to seek to understand. We're going to praise God for my African American friends who had the grace just to go, "Hey, bro. Don't say that. I don't think you're a racist; I think you're ignorant. Let me help you. Don't say that. That's not helpful."

I have two things to do at that point. I could be like, "Man, what are you talking about?" Or I can just go, "Oh man, I'm sorry. Help me understand. Why? Why is that offensive?" "Well, because of *this* and *that* and *this* and *that*." "Oh, okay. Well, praise God. I never want to offend. If the gospel offends, that's it, but I don't want any other offense other than the gospel to come out of my mouth. Thank you, brother." Any other place I can learn more about this, figure out more about this...

Because I'm white, I'm going to see the world like a white man. I can't *not* see the world like a white man. I happen to be in this period of human history a part of the predominant culture, which means everyone knows about my culture, and I'm not stressed on many fronts to know about anybody else's. I'm just not!

Lauren and I were in Philadelphia preaching (I was preaching; Lauren was just with me) at one of our partner churches in Philly. We were walking around downtown Center City, and we had stumbled across a couple of blocks. We ended up in a part of Philly where we were the only white people as far as your eyes could see. It was the first time I had ever felt that in my life. Here's what I thought, just so you know my thoughts.

I'm like, "Man, am I supposed to be here? Am I allowed to be here? Am I safe? Do they know I'm friendly? I'm for this good fight." You know, I want to kind of... Like some credentials to be laid out so I might be trusted. Listen. I'm 40, and that's never happened to me before. Yet many of my

brothers and sisters live in that world. "Am I supposed to be here? Is it safe for me here? Do they understand I'm not going to steal anything?"

I felt it, and I'm a white guy who felt it for the first time at 40. I want us to pray. If any of this is offensive, I promise I mean no offense. I only want to lay this before the Lord, because if he will not help us here, we have no shot at this. There is no answer for this other than the gospel. There is no answer for this except for the coming of King Jesus.

Will you join me in prayer? If you're not a believer and all this is weird, listen. You came to church. You had to know we would pray, right? You can stare at me awkwardly or just fake pray. A lot of people will do that in the room. Let's pray for just a couple of minutes here. I'll lead us out in prayer, and then we'll get started in what I hope to be an extremely helpful Christmas message. Let's pray.

Father, we're a mess. We speak past each other. We don't understand one another. We see the world through different lenses. We are guilty of atrocities against one another. There are issues of personal responsibility and issues of systemic breakdowns and no clear path but you. I pray for the families of these two fallen officers. I pray you might grant the peace that passes all understanding in this season.

I pray for the police officers in this room who serve and protect us, who restrain the worst parts of evil simply because they can be called. For their sacrifice and service, I praise you. I pray again that you would heal this giant wound, that maybe this little church here in Dallas, Texas, might become a sort of light of what the gospel does, this kind of place we might lean in and seek to understand, that we might feel empathy in the struggle, there would be no paternalism or any talking down to but a unified brotherly front of love and defining of identity by the gospel of Jesus Christ. Help us.

In our turn here, our little run, might we be faithful to look like Revelation 7. That every tribe, tongue, and nation on earth, all these ethnicities represented, all these socioeconomic statuses represented, that the wealthy and the working poor, if not the homeless, would find a place within your covenant people here and all the more that we might look like glory will look. Help us. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.

There is a great juxtaposition that occurs when we think about Christmas. We're just a couple of days away from celebrating baby Jesus coming into the world, right? Six pound, 8 ounce baby Jesus.

We're celebrating this baby, and we end every Christmas Eve service with the same song. We end with "Silent Night."

Now if we think about "Silent Night," look how meek and sweet "Silent Night" is. "Silent night, holy night. All is calm. All is bright." Right? It's sweet, kind of dainty, maybe even borderline sweet. I mean, it's just a kind of romantic thing. The reason I say there's a bit of juxtaposition here is, yes, you have this infant child being born in this no-name little town outside of Jerusalem in an insignificant part of the world in this time in human history.

Yet the birth of this child is the most militant, aggressive, violent divine invasion into the brokenness of the world that the world will ever know. On that night, the death of death was assured. On that night, all that binds us, all that destroys us, all that oppresses us, all that is going to functionally destroy us, the beachhead was established in Bethlehem to drive out of the world, as the kingdom of God is more fully realized, everything that is dark and sinful.

So "Silent night, holy night. All is calm. All is bright." Yes, but also the death of death, the destruction of demons, the driving out of wickedness, the eradication of oppression, the destruction of poverty, the pushing back of everything darkest. See, these things are happening simultaneously, right? You're like, "Really? Just in the manger?" No, no, no. Listen. The manger cannot be untangled from the cross. Do you know why? Because if Jesus doesn't die on the cross, who cares about the manger?

If it's not for the death and resurrection, then some poor, illegitimate child was born in a manger. He might have turned out to be a good prophet, might have turned out to be a good teacher, but he was not the Son of God. You cannot untangle manger and cross. Without the one, you do not have the other. You have them both. That's why I'm saying on that "Silent night, holy night. All is calm. All is bright," you had a divine invasion that was militant in its heavenly bent to destroy everything that's from hell.

The reason I think this is hard for us in this season and why we tend to be more "All is calm. All is bright. Sweet baby Jesus" during this season is we forget who it is who is lying in that manger. Let me remind you out of Colossians, chapter 1. You're there in Matthew 2, but Colossians, chapter 1, starting in verse 15 says this:

"He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or

rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

And he is the head of the body, the church. He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in everything he might be preeminent. For in him all the fullness of God was pleased to dwell, and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross."

That's who is in the manger. See, in your "Happy Birthday to Jesus" song... I mean, it works, but it kind of doesn't work because Jesus is coeternal with the Father. He has always been, so this little 6 pound, 8 ounce baby Jesus has always been. He is coeternal with the Father. He is the active agent in everything that exists. He created it, spoke it into being, and, according to the writer of Hebrews, holds everything together, even now with the word of his mouth.

According to Philippians, chapter 2, he put on flesh. He became creation (the one who spoke creation into being) and lowered himself in order to ransom us from sin and death. That's who is lying in the manger. So moving into this week, once again I want us to focus on an attribute of God. This week, we want to focus on this: He is *worthy*. He is our *deliverer*. He is *compassionate*. He is *glorious*. Now he is *worthy*. We're going to talk about his worth via the story of the wise men or the magi visiting from the East. Let's look at this. Matthew 2, starting in verse 1.

"Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, 'Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.' When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled..." When you're a king and you hear a new king has shown up, you tend to get nervous. Right? He is troubled. Not only is he troubled, but look.

"...and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, 'In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet [he quotes Micah]: "And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel."'" Verse 7:

"Then Herod summoned the wise men secretly and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the

child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.' After listening to the king, they went on their way.

And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh."

Don't think I don't know that you essential oil folks already have that one underlined. Don't think I don't know you've already gotten... You're like, "See? I told you!" Don't think I don't know that's going on. Don't email me. Don't hate me. We have some at the house. **"And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way."** Here are four things out of this story about the worthiness of Christ. Of course, this is never ending. I could say everything here, have one point, and be done. But that wouldn't be any fun at all.

1. *God is worthy of our attention.* Look back in verse 2. **"Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."** I want to stop. This is the Bible sitting right *here*. I'm going to walk over *here*. Let me tell you what we know about "These three kings of Orient are." That's it (what we read). That's all we know.

The best laid conjectures... We do know what is east, and we do know the chosen people of God in Israel have been to the East. You had Daniel go to the East, and you had the 10 tribes exiled to the East. Our best-laid guess at what these brothers saw and why it drove them to Jerusalem is either they had read Daniel or they had remembered and had paid attention to some of the prophecies concerning the coming Messiah.

They paid attention beyond just mere knowledge, but rather when they saw the star, they acted upon their knowledge and began to move toward Jerusalem. Let me explain what I mean by kind of teasing out *paying attention* and *knowledge*. They're not the same thing. They're not the same thing! Paying attention to something is not the same thing as knowing something, right? Do you get that?

In fact, I'll give you the example. I don't have to make one up. There's one right here. Look at verse 3. **"When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief..."** Who? Priests. Pulling all the chief priests and the scribes, the experts

on the Law, the experts on the Prophets, those who were tasked by God to teach and to lead, the preachers of the day...

Herod the king called the best of those, the chief priests and the scribes. They come, and he said, "Hey, where is the king? Where is the Messiah supposed to be born?" They don't need to go look it up. They don't go, "Well, let me log on to Logos really quickly and see. Let me hop on to Bible Gateway. Let me try to find some Wi-Fi here, and let me research this. Let me go find a scroll."

No, they already knew, and they quoted the prophet. "Bethlehem. He is coming to Bethlehem. Bethlehem is where he is going to be." Here's what's interesting to note. These men from the East who we know so little about and our best guess is that they somehow had a copy of Daniel or remembered some things that were covered by the 10 tribes were driven toward Jerusalem and then driven on into Bethlehem.

Those who were experts in knowledge of the Prophets and Law were unmoved. They were unmoved! They knew it but weren't paying attention enough to do anything with it. I've tried to faithfully press you for years that reading the Bible like a newspaper doesn't do you any good. No, we pay attention to what it says.

See, I think the *real* fight of this week is not going to be getting everything done and checking all the boxes and making sure everybody is squared away. We know who is sleeping where if we have company. Everybody has to have the same number of presents, or somebody is going to burn down the Western Hemisphere, so let's make sure. Right? We have to get all that settled.

The big fight this week is not all of that that I think probably needs to be done. The big fight is to pay attention to the incarnation in such a way that our hearts are inflamed with the reality of what we're celebrating.

On Saturdays, I get here about 1:00. I don't get here at 1:00 to write my sermon. I get here at 1:00 to (what I've called historically) "pray myself hot." Here's what I mean by that. Something spiritual happens, something supernatural happens, when the people of God gather. God is up to something. He is shaping us. This thing we're doing here is sacred. God is at work, and I don't want to default to just lecturing. I want to feel eternity. I want to feel the weight of it.

I take our care list. We have an internal care list, and on that care list are all the needs we are aware of. If we know your son or daughter is struggling with drugs and alcohol, if we know your marriage is all busted up, if we know you yourself have lost your job and this is a really tough season, if we know you're struggling with doubt, if we know you're loving on neighbors and hoping they come to know Christ, we have that information, and we actively are praying for you. We cover that.

I grab that care list, and I get on my face right back here. I'm like, "Okay, God, work. How do you do this? How do I engage the meth addict at the same time I'm trying to engage the one with a difficult marriage at the same time I'm trying to encourage the brother who lost his job at the same time I'm trying to plead with so many of you who are kind of weekend Christians versus really believing and trusting in Christ for the direction of your life?"

I want to feel small and powerless and desperate. I want to pray myself hot. See, the fight for Christmas morning is the fight against, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah...Jesus" knowledge. "Yeah, yeah, yeah...Jesus. Yeah, I mean, I have the manger scene. We'll read Luke before we open presents. Pastor, get off me." No, it's past knowledge. It's the fight to be moved by. It's the fight to be ignited by.

It's meditation. It's thought. It's gathering the family and considering. It's counting our blessings. It's the fight. We will not easily flow in that direction. We will flow toward the "Yeah, yeah, yeah...Jesus" place, won't we? Don't you feel that pull? I mean, you tell me. Do you feel the pull toward a deep inflamed worship of Jesus Christ, or do you feel a pull toward getting all the boxes checked?

"Just because we're good Christians, let's make sure we read Luke 2 before we open presents." The "Yeah, yeah, yeah...Jesus" is where the pull is. But Jesus is worthy of more than that. He is worthy of our attention, not just in our implicit, "Yeah, of course, Jesus is the reason for the season." No, no, no. Our attention. That moves me to the second thing.

2. *He is worthy of our pursuit.* Look at verse 1. **"Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem..."** Look down in verse 8. **"And he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, 'Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.' After listening to the king, they went on their way. And behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was."**

I love that these men had paid attention, and that attention had turned into pursuit. They were pursuing after a knowledge of the Lord. Let's not miss the Christmas miracle that's in this text that nobody acknowledges. Three dudes stopped and asked for directions in Jerusalem. Three men got to Jerusalem and were like, "Uhm... Hey, do you know where the king is supposed to be? We headed this way and somehow got turned around."

I mean, what man does that? I mean, don't men usually go, "Oh, do you know what? This is looking familiar. Just a little bit further out this way. I think we'll find it"? Right? No, they stop and ask. They inquire. "Where is the king? Where do we go?" See, there's a pursuit of Christ that flows freely out of paying attention to Christ. He is worthy of our attention. He is worthy of our pursuit.

My favorite text around pursuit is Matthew 13:44, one of the smaller parables. It says this: **"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and covered up. Then in his joy he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field."** Here's the kingdom of God. This is the pursuit of Christ and why he is worthy of our pursuit.

A man finds a treasure in the fields and then goes and with joy sells everything he has. He loses everything he has to gain the field. Christ is so worthy, is so excellent, is so beautiful that a loss of everything that gains us him should turn the loss of everything into joy. I'll gladly sell it all if I get him, because there is nothing more worthy than him.

Real talk because I love you. You have nothing you won't ultimately lose. Nothing! I've been in this area for 12 years now. Some of you are like, "Well, actually, I've saved up commodities, and I'm going to pass those on to my children." Okay, look at me. Somebody down your line is going to be an idiot and is going to cash in all your silver for a flat screen.

Am I a liar? It might be your great-grandkid. It might be your great, great-grandkid. They're going to take those commodities. They're going to hock them, and they're going to buy an Xbox 1700 or whatever it is then. They're going to spend all their days online with all your hard work, saving up. "Leave a legacy for my children." It's all going to a landfill after a garage sale. Merry Christmas! Right? That's where it's all headed.

But that is not so with Christ. That is *not* so with Christ! Here in a bit, everything is going in a box, but he is not. All of the lights are coming down, but he is not. All of the carols will go away, but we

will still be praising his name. He is not going anywhere. He is the only one who, regardless of circumstances, regardless of life or death, doesn't move. He *can't* be moved. He is worthy of our pursuit.

In fact, listen to me. He is the *only* pursuit worth pursuing. Everything else on earth is meant to make you yearn for him or praise him, which is why if you think your marriage is going to satisfy you, your marriage is probably a wreck. If you think work is going to satisfy you, why you are restless at work.

If you think people's approval of you is going to satisfy you, you become a slave to people you don't even really care for. The only pursuit that is eternal and unwavering is of him. It's the only one that yields dividends for eons. It's a pretty smart investment. I'm not dogging your commodities. I'm just saying this one is better.

3. *He is worthy of our faith.* Look at verse 2. **"Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him."** Look at verse 11. **"And going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way."**

I love this. Again, I'm constantly going to push you to read the Bible for its details and with your imagination. Here's what we have. You have three men from the East (Babylonians, Arabs). They have some shadow of this Messiah who is to come. They put their wealth on. They get on these beasts of burden, and they start to head toward this king, somewhere toward this star.

Listen. Because I've followed Christ for 20 years, this is total conjecture. The Bible is over there. Surely there's a moment where, on those camels (that's conjecture), one of them looks over and goes, "Bill, are we sure about this? What did your wife say about this? Are we crazy? I mean, we're following this light in the sky toward a king we read about from literature that's thousands of years old or maybe even just the oral traditions of this tribe we enslaved."

Yet faith brought them to Jerusalem, and faith brought them to Bethlehem. Then let's look at this little aspect of faith. By the grace of God, I've been able to be in the presence of really powerful men and women, people who when you walk... They change the room when they step in. Has anybody

been in a room with somebody like that? The authority that's just intrinsic in them... They step into a room, and you can feel, "This is the most important guy in the room."

By the grace of God, I've been able to do that a couple of times. That's not what just happened to the wise men. They show up, and they walk into a house. What did they see? A throne with a yoked up King of Glory ready to slaughter the nations? A regal royal court? Do we see the emperor's guard? No! It's a baby. Oh, y'all hadn't thought about that? "What did you bring our baby? Gold?" Who gives a baby gold? At that point, why would you do that?

Now let me tell you why we don't think that way. You and I are looking back through the resurrection through the cross through the life of Jesus and onto the baby. That's not how the magi are seeing this. They are three men of Orient who have come all the way across bearing these ridiculously lavish gifts that they give to what they believe by faith is the King of all things.

When they get there, it's a baby. They give the baby these gifts: gold and frankincense and myrrh. Again, here we go, essential oil folk. You're like, "Yeah, because if they put that on the bottom of that baby's feet, he'll be a genius and a professional athlete. You just take a little bit of that, rub it on the temples, and that kid can fly! That explains the miracles. It's the myrrh."

I don't know why I'm even doing that. I'm going to get myself in so much trouble by doing that. In the end, they do it, and they are justified by history and by the Word of God as we look back on what appears to be a no-brainer. It was not a no-brainer. It was step by step, acts of faith. I have to believe that along the way, they questioned, "Are we sure about this? Are you serious?"

Maybe even at that moment where they're bowing down and worshiping a baby, I wonder if they're just looking over at each other, going, "Bill, I hate to bring this up again. This is a baby. Are you sure? Is your girl going to be all right with you giving away that myrrh to this baby?" It's like, "What are you talking about, Chuck? You're giving him *gold*." "Yeah, well, okay."

I mean, there has to be this... Do you know why I know that? Because I've followed Christ for 20 years, and I still have some of that in me. Hear me putting my cards on the table so I might love you well. In 90 percent of the areas of my life, I just trust the Lord has it, and I'm not worried about it. "What are you going to do about *this*?" "I don't know. The Lord has it. I'm not concerned about it."

But I have 10 percent I'm nervous to loosen up on. Anybody else? I have 10 percent where I go, "Okay, I trust you. I believe you, God. I can look back and see your faithfulness, but for whatever reason, it's hard for me to trust you with this one. It's hard for me to fully believe you're for my good in this. It's hard for me to believe you're going to do this thing in the way I'm hoping." I cling to it a bit more tightly. Anybody else? No? All of you have such great faith. Well, praise God for you. Come on up. I'll take it off. You got it. You finish this up.

No! Of course we do. In fact, one of my favorite stories in the Bible goes along these lines of encouraging us as we wrestle to believe what we believe. The Bible tells us of a father in Mark, chapter 9. It tells us of a father who has a son that is demonically possessed. That demonic possession has manifested itself in physical seizures. Not just physical seizures, but the demon will manifest itself by throwing the boy into fires and trying to kill the boy.

The father, who is now out of hope, has nowhere else to go. Nobody can help his son. Again, reading the Bible with detail and imagination, here's how I want to read Mark 9. "I have a son. He is 9 years old." Where's my heart? Where's my mind if this is my boy and there are no answers? You start reading the Bible like *that*, and you'll start reading the Bible. Are you tracking with me?

He takes his son to Jesus and says, "Hey, he has seizures. He throws himself in the fire. We have no hope. Can you help?" He asks the question, "Can you help?" Jesus responds, "If you believe, all things are possible." Look at what the father says immediately. I know he says it immediately because of the first word in Mark 9:24. **"Immediately the father of the child cried out and said..."** Listen to what he cries out. **"I believe; help my..."** What? **"...unbelief!"**

Now that's a life verse right there. For all are more than conquerors through Christ. Right? How about *that* one? **"I believe; help my unbelief!"** I don't know of another verse that is more really dialed in to the reality of my pursuit of Christ than that verse. **"I believe; help my unbelief!"**

"I know you're good. I know you're right. I know you won't betray me. I know you're for me. I know you've purchased me by your blood. I trust you're good in this, but help me because part of me is wavering. I can't make sense of this. I don't know what to do with this. I'm afraid. Help my unbelief!"

See, the incarnation anchors us regardless of life circumstance. He is worthy of our faith, because if this is the year that, forget presents, you're just trying to keep the lights on, he'll anchor your soul. If

this is your first Christmas without a loved one, gosh! It's terrible. I know. He'll anchor your soul as we trust him. He cannot betray you. It would be betraying himself.

If this is a Christmas where things have come together and you're really excited... You know, your kids have kind of grown out of the "eat the paper and go back to sleep" phase, and they're like amped right now. I mean, they're shaking boxes, and you're having to say, "Stay away from the tree!"

You're having to engage. You're super excited about what's to come. Well, that should be wind into the sails of your worship. See, the incarnation makes sense regardless of life circumstance. He is worthy of your faith. May our mantra always be, **"I believe; help my unbelief!"**

4. *God is worthy of our gifts.* Look halfway through verse 11 there. **"Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh."** First Peter 4:10 and 11 say this: **"As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace..."**

Those gifts have been given to you by God. We're to steward them according to God's grace bestowed upon you in those gifts. **"...whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that..."** Here's the goal. **"...in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen."**

I've said at length that I believe you are born with intrinsic gifts and abilities that you possess long before you give your life to Christ. You don't need to be a Christian to be a great businessman and entrepreneur, right? You don't need to be a Christian to be a good teacher. You don't need to be a Christian to be a great artist.

You don't need to be a Christian to be whatever your domain is. You don't, but upon conversion, those intrinsic gifts are used and harnessed in a way that yields dividends that push back what's dark in the world as the kingdom of God is more and more and more established. Let me just take one for sake of time.

We have a ton of teachers at The Village Church, really at all of our campuses. I remember being a student, and I feel badly for the teachers who had me. In fact, one of the great ironies of my life is

what I used to get detention for and whipped for growing up, I now actually get paid for. They're like, "He is loud and passionate. Put him in detention." "He is loud and passionate. Give him a face mic." That's where I am now, right?

Ultimately, before Christ, you have a problem kid in your room. You just handle it. You handle the situation. You handle the kid. But after Christ, knowing what you know, being the recipient of God's grace, now the gospel forces, presses, us to consider what's going on in the soul of this boy. What's going on at home for this kid? What's happening that this is how he is showing out?

Although we do not excuse behavior and although we kind of create structures and consequences that have to be had, we're prayerful. We're engaging. Our classroom becomes maybe just the safest, most encouraging environment that kid has. The gospel drives that. It pushes that. It redeems that. When the alarm clock goes off at 5:00 or 6:00 or whenever you have to get up, we're not slapping it and going to get a paycheck.

See, this is the eradication of boredom for us all, because it means, regardless of what our gifts are, we leverage those gifts for the glory of God and the establishment of order in the pushing back of darkness in the world for the glory of the name and renown of Jesus Christ. We do the same thing with our spiritual gifts. There are those of you who have been entrusted by God with beautiful, supernatural gifts...intercessory prayer, prophetic word.

You've been gifted, and yet even those gifts must be laid down lest you find your identity in them. See, the Giver of the gift is always better than the gift, regardless of what the gift is. He is worthy of us laying down our gifts and seeing all that we have and all that we are as an opportunity to make much of him, because as this text closes in 1 Peter, "**...in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ. To him belong glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.**"

Okay. So we're a couple of weeks away. What I mean by that is you have Christmas. Then you have your New Year's. You'll party and have some resolutions you will not keep. Then somewhere in all of that, you're going to start putting stuff up. Some of you really quickly. Some of you, it will be like February. The lights are going to come down. Say it after me, "The lights are going to come down." Then the decorations.

The world is about to be less bright in regard to just legitimate lights. Disney characters with presents aren't going to be in your yard for the rest of the year. Look at me. They're not going to be

in your yard the rest of the year. Right? We're going to get back into old routines and old rhythms. The manger scene is going to be boxed up and put in an attic or in some other storage space. We'll take down garland, and we'll put everything up.

Yet what we've covered this month isn't going anywhere. We said in week one, God is our deliverer. For some of you, that's just an idea. This next year, some of you are going to understand that he is your deliverer. We said God was compassionate. Some of you are like, "Yeah, yeah, yeah. God is compassionate." This year you're going to find out how compassionate he is. We said last week that God is glorious. Some of you got kind of a hint of that. This year you're going to see he is glorious.

Today we're saying God is worthy. Christ is worthy. Those things will never be put up, cannot be put up. There is no attic that can contain the immensity of God. In fact, the heavens can't contain the glory of God. In fact, the universe continues to expand in every direction because of the unfettered, unstoppable, really dominant glory, worth, and value of God in the universe. That will never change, which is why we've tried to dial in to Advent and not into Christmas trees and presents.

We pay attention. Might we pursue, might we ask him to help our unbelief as we believe. Let's lay our gifts down, because the coming of Jesus Christ wasn't just some sweet holy night. It was the establishment of a beachhead that would drive out all darkness that will eventually be consummated at the return of Christ in the second advent, this time not as a baby. But that's next week. Let's pray.

Father, you are the center of all things. You and you alone are worthy. You and you alone are our great treasure. There is no other pursuit, no other trophy, no other accomplishment, no other hope, that can compare. Settle our hearts in that today. Let our hearts rest in that today (you being the center, you being worthy, you being our great treasure).

Comfort us today. Remind us today. Anchor our hearts in this today. In the days to come, there's much to get done. In the days to come, our attention will be pulled to other places. Let us fight the good fight of paying attention. For our own joy, for the depth and richness of our own experiences this season, help us. We need you. Help us. Amen.