



Advent (Part 4) – The Peace Jesus Brings

Matt Chandler – December 20, 2015

How are we? Doing well? Excellent. Merry Christmas. Let me start by just apologizing. I took my daughter to a concert Friday night and sang along, and that coupled with this time of year has cost me my voice, so if you've come longing to be yelled at, you'll more than likely be disappointed, yet I might just find the strength.

If you have your Bibles, Luke 2 is where we're going to camp out in our time together today. Several years ago now, about four or five years ago, I was invited by a dear friend of mine who pastors a church on Capitol Hill in Washington D.C. to come and preach at his church. My wife travels with me when I go to cool places and then doesn't if I'm going to, say, Houston. If you're from Houston, beautiful part of the country that I would just rather never live in. She would be like, "No, thank you," for that, but D.C or something like that, she would want to come.

We made a few days of it and went and saw all of the monuments and stuff like that and began to just get ready to preach. I was a little intimidated preaching there on Capitol Hill. In fact, the pastor has I think more than a doctorate, like a PhD from Cambridge. I'm way out of my space in regards of just intellect and style. I'm a little bit different style than that church is going to be used to, and I am definitely not on the same intellectual plane as some of those eggheads.

I'm a bit excited, nervous about what the Lord might do. We saw the sights, and then I showed up for church that Sunday morning. The church is on the hill. In every way imaginable, that church is conservative and old school. In fact, even its architecture demands they do church a certain way. If you're not a student of history, historically, churches have been built a specific way.

Post-Reformation, a gathering would... You would walk into an auditorium, more likely than not, that had high ceilings and a lot of windows, and the pulpit would be kind of the center theme of the gathering because it was meant to convey honor to the Word of God. That's a post-Reformation thing, okay?

Now, because of technology, churches resemble boxes, right? We don't want light in because you won't do any wall singing, as my grandmother calls it, in a church that is built like eighteenth and nineteenth century churches were built because there is too much light getting in, right? You're not interested in controlling sound a hundred years ago because nobody was playing the drums in church. The predominant sound of the gathering of the saints was voices...a piano and voices.

It wasn't even the organ yet, for some of you who think you're old school. You aren't old school with that organ. Even the organ was new school. They have a very traditional model, a very traditional way of doing it. When I showed up at church that morning, they presented the order of service. That's what it's called. I had really never seen anything quite like it. Here's what it looked like.

The service would begin with a welcome by a pastor. That pastor would not only do the welcome, but then he would enter the congregation into what was basically an 8- to 10-minute homily or pre-sermon. Right? It was the sermon before the sermon. I'm already now a little bit more nervous because what if the pre-sermon is actually better than my full sermon?

Now what am I supposed to do then? If the dude smokes it, what am I supposed to go up and do? Just refer back to him on repeat? "That guy earlier who I don't know well, what he said was awesome. Let's just think about that a little bit more." How do I do that? So he gave this homily, a little pre-sermon, and then he led the congregation in an extended period of prayers of confession.

The congregation spent 8 to 10 minutes just confessing their sins before God, and the man, the pastor led them through this, kind of gave them examples, gave them space to confess their own personal sins before the Lord. Then they sang two hymns. "Grab your hymnal. This page. This stanza." They don't have a worship pastor; they have a song leader or a service leader who then leads the congregational singing, so what you hear is the voices of the people.

Even the instrumentation is way in the background. Don't think, "Oh, yeah, I know hymns. 'The Old Rugged Cross.'" No, no, no. You're still in the wrong century. They're not progressive like that. They're singing more old Puritan, not a lot of melody, but really dense, beautiful, sound words. We sang those two hymns, and then another pastor got up, and he led in another long block of prayers, this time prayers of pardon.

We spent a lot of time praying prayers of confession, and then he came back up and led in prayers of pardon where we rejoiced in the fact that God has forgiven us of everything we confessed. Then from there, they sang another hymn, and then after that, a guy got up and read the text I was going to be preaching out of.

We stood, and we read that text together, and then I got up and preached. Only one service, no clock, no camera. I think I went like 72 minutes. I have not been asked back, if you're wondering. From there, they did an offering, sang another song, and then dismissed. Then I went with the pastor to the door and said goodbye to everyone who had come to the gathering that day, and that was church.

The afternoon was just kind of more Washington D.C. for us, and then after all of that, we went back for what they call a service review meeting. I went into the meeting, and the pastors of CHBC, Capitol Hill Baptist Church, were there, as well as some of their interns. They just began to critique the service. They started with the welcome and homily and what the dude could have done better and where they were confused, where it could have been clearer.

I'm thinking, "Hey, man, the guy is right there. Shouldn't we... Isn't this like a hallway, one-on-one conversation to be had? Are we really doing this right now?" The answer to that is yes, they're doing this right now. Then they went into the song leader and how well he did. Did he really kind of encourage the singing of the saints? "Here is how you could have done this better, brother."

I'm starting to go, "Oh my gosh. They're going to critique my sermon. I'm the guest guy, and they're going to rip apart my sermon." I had to gospel myself in that moment. "You don't have to be smart like them. You don't have to be pretty like them. God loves you like you are." I have to gospel myself. "You have been uniquely wired, uniquely placed by God."

I'm starting to gospel myself. Before they get to me, the pastor of that church, a good friend of mine named Mark, said, "Matt, what did you think of our service." I said it reminded me of my grandmother's church. No, no, I didn't mean that as a dog. Here's what I meant by that. Really, that was a profound moment for me.

A little bit about how I came to faith. I got saved in a Southern Baptist Church. By Southern Baptist, I mean Southern Baptist Church, all right? The liturgy was Southern Baptist. The dress was Southern

Baptist. If you're thinking, "They don't really have a dress," you're more progressive. Back when I got saved, there was very much a dress of the First Baptist Church of Texas City, Texas.

In that, there were all of these really... What I meant by my grandmother's church is there were all of these really beautiful things that were there back then. I just couldn't see them. I was just blind to the beauty of prayers of confessions together with the saints. I was blind to the beauty of the rich words we were singing, whether or not there was a good beat to them or not. I was blind to the realities of what it was like to rejoice in the pardon of our sins as the people of God.

See, there were a lot of really beautiful, deep, meaningful things that I thought were just crusty and old. What I meant when I said it reminded me of my grandmother's church was it was really... I got to clarify, but that has not stopped him from razzing me to this day about what I said. What I clarified is that I kind of understand now what I didn't understand back then.

That experience marked me in a couple of ways. Here's where it marked me. One, it marked me in how easily we miss really beautiful, profound realities that are right in front of our faces. We are prone to be blind or numb to spiritual truths, either because we've heard them too much or never heard the *why* behind the *what*. Right?

I think that's especially true come this time of year. It's especially true come this time of year because either we've been in church a long time or maybe we haven't been in church a long time, but we're a part of that massive group of southerners who, around this time of year... See, I am well aware that there is a massive group of people I see twice a year. I see them around this time of year, and then I'll see them again at Easter.

I don't know where they go in the interim, but they show up at those because it is culturally accepted, in fact, maybe even culturally expected that you go somewhere on Christmas Eve, right? That's where we are. They probably don't have that problem in Seattle. It's probably not an issue in Manhattan. Yet, here, the question still persists, "What are you doing Christmas Eve? Where are you going?" There are a plethora of options on what you could do on Christmas Eve.

Where we live in this place, you're going to come, and you're going to hear some texts that have been used over and over and over again to point us at the coming and toward the coming of Jesus Christ as a baby. I'm hopeful and have been prayerful this week that the Holy Spirit of God in his

mercy might lift some of the veil, and we might begin to see the beauties that are right in front of us for what they are.

To prepare our hearts for reading a text that almost all of us know very well, background in church or not, I want us to take a second and pray for ourselves, not for the guy or girl you've come with, not for the family member you know is coming to Christmas Eve services, not for any last minute things you have to knock out, because I know the next couple of days are going to be stressful.

Just an opportunity to kind of quiet our hearts before the Lord and ask the Holy Spirit of God to give us eyes to see. I want to give you just a moment to pray for you. We can't decide to see what we can't see. We need the Holy Spirit to give us eyes to see. Will you pray for you just briefly? Just ask that the Holy Spirit would give you eyes to see some of the beautiful realities you may or may not be blind to right now.

Father, we just ask that in your mercy, you would help us to see and see clearly some of the beautiful realities that sit in front of us right now, that we wouldn't be overly familiar concerning the coming of Jesus Christ, that Christ has put on flesh and dwelt among us, that we would realize kind of the magnificence of that and the beauty of that that displaces all other beauties and all other things that could be considered, on a scale, magnificent. Tune our hearts to hear and sing thy grace. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.

I want us to read a familiar passage found in Luke 2. The passage is concerning the angels of God heralding to the shepherds in the fields at night, shepherding their flock, the coming of the Messiah. We're going to stand together and read the Word of God together. We want to do this again as I want to always give you the *why* behind the *what* as a way to boldly proclaim the truth of God's Word to us as his people.

When we read the Word of God out loud together and it fills the room, God is accomplishing something in the shaping of us, not in any kind of way we feel or sense, but just the Word of the Lord is shaping us and molding us. That's why we give ourselves over to the reading of the Word when we gather as a congregation. Luke 2. We're going to start reading in verse 8. I believe in you. You'll be able to do this loud and strong with bold, confident voices. Let's get it. Luke 2, starting in verse 8.

"And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!'"

May God bless the reading of his Word. You can have a seat.

If the voice will hold, I want to point out three things here that I think can, if the Holy Spirit of God would be merciful to us, lay before us the magnificence of the coming of Jesus in a way that will displace lesser beauties and really tune our hearts and minds in to the beauty of the coming of the Messiah in this given week.

The first thing is right out of the gate, this story is going wildly wrong in regard to normal economics. Tim Keller out of Redeemer Presbyterian in Manhattan introduced the phrase... Maybe he stole it from someone, but I first heard him use the phrase "kingdom economics." He talks about how the economy of God's kingdom is upside down. It's not the economy we operate where we would see power as worthy and admirable.

God would say, "No, no. Meekness, lowliness is actually, in kingdom economics, the thing to be valued. Humility over swagger is to be valued." That's kingdom economics. What I mean by seeing that this story is turned upside down is that in the heralding of the good news of the coming of Jesus Christ, it doesn't go to those who had epic quiet times that morning.

The heralding of the kingdom of God, the coming of Jesus Christ didn't go to those who tithed 12 percent over 10 percent. The heralding of the good news of the coming of Jesus Christ did not fall on those who were morally upright and astute but those who were broken, hopeless, and helpless. It comes to shepherds.

My guess is you probably don't know any shepherds. Wild guess. Maybe you do, are from Montana or something, have some family, I don't know. Shepherds in the first century were so not thought of that their testimony was inadmissible evidence in a court of law. They were so considered to be liars and thieves, so unclean and morally reprehensible that they were not allowed to testify in a court of law.

On top of this, they were fundamentally rejected by first century Jews. They were fundamentally rejected as being those who were outside the covenant promises of God. They believed this because shepherds, by nature of what they did, could not come to the temple for sacrifices because they were keeping watch over their flocks, and they could not obey the cleanliness laws of the Jewish people.

The religious elite of that day just saw them as unclean, as filthy, as unwanted, as those who were outside the good graces of God. Yet, when it comes time to herald the good news that all of the hopes of the people of God are now being realized, God chooses not to come to the moral upright and elite but rather the morally broken and hopeless. See, that's kingdom economics. We need to marvel at that.

Here's what I mean by marvel at that. What I've found to be true is people who are not Christians feel like God as just... In fact, a lot of animosity lost people feel toward God is because they believe God already hates them, so they might as well just hate him back. I don't know if you've come across this. People who are not Christians tend to think, "Since God's after me, forget him. I don't need him anyway."

There is animosity and anger in their hearts toward God because they think God has written them off. Yet the good news is that God sent the angels to the shepherds. Then the other mistake in kingdom economics is Christians, over time, tend to isolate themselves away from people who don't love Jesus, who aren't surrendered to them. Then they just kind of build a protective layer of insulation around their lives so they don't catch the sins.

The only problem with that is you're a sinner, so wherever you are, there you are, right? You can build the wall as high as you want. Sin is still in your household because you're there. Right? You've been fully forgiven and freely forgiven and forever forgiven, but you still battle with your flesh, and if you don't believe that to be true, you are a blind person, a lost person, or a fool.

You have bought into some weird lie that is outside of the kingdom of God where you are no longer in any need of grace. Come on, man. That's absurd. That's absurd. Just ask somebody around you about you. Isn't that a scary idea? We see that God sending this angel and the heavenly host to the shepherds is actually a pattern of how Christ will do his ministry. In Mark 2, starting in verse 15, we see this.

"And as he reclined at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners were reclining with Jesus and his disciples, for there were many who followed him. And the scribes of the Pharisees, when they saw that he was eating with sinners and tax collectors, said to his disciples, 'Why does he eat with tax collectors and sinners?' And when Jesus heard it, he said to them, 'Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.'"

One of the patterns of Jesus' life... In fact, the most common accusation made against Jesus Christ was that he was the friend of sinners, that he had *table*. What *table* is is multiple hours strung together over a meal and good conversation, nearly a lost art in our culture. We're all about speed and efficiency. There is a loss in speed and efficiency. Tabling together is long. It's rich in conversation. It's rich in good food. Jesus kept doing that with tax collectors and sinners.

The Pharisees and scribes, the morally upright, the elite, those we would look at and go, "We would kind of like our kids to be like them," it really bothered them that Jesus' preferred hangout was tax collectors and sinners. That he would go to Zacchaeus's house was a great and incredible scandal. That he hung out with sinners was constantly murmured about. In fact, it was most often used to try to discredit the ministry of Jesus Christ. "He hangs with these kinds of people. Surely you can't believe what he says. Look who he hangs out with. He's guilty by association."

Yet we see Jesus Christ being serious about sin, serious about salvation, serious about holiness, serious about repentance, and yet the friend of sinners. By the grace of God, I've done with a good friend of mine for several years what we've just called Book Club. It's a gathering of men where we read books. It's a crazy idea, right? Everybody gets to pick a book. There are a lot of guys in there who are very lost. If you're like, "How can you be very lost?" I just mean lost to the tune of... Our moral compasses are set to different solar systems.

That dinner that is that is always about three and a half or four hours long is always built around talking about the things of God. Yet, because of the nature of the room, there can very often be

humor that is offensive and language that is offensive. Every once in a while, one of those brothers will drink just one too many Old Fashioneds. It's a room, if I was very honest, that I would not want my children to be in with me, nor would I want any women to be there as some of that conversation goes down like it is.

Yet, it's in that space that I've been able to share the gospel, that I've been able to answer questions. I wish I could tell you that in the middle of one of those dinners, tongues of fire came out of the ceiling and settled and revival broke out, and I just baptized them there in the restaurant Presbyterian style, but that is not what has happened.

Here is what has happened. Over the course of the last four years, we've seen men with no interest in God begin to grow interest in him. We have watched men who had no problem blaspheming the name of Christ now all of a sudden starting to pray about what to do about this job decision, starting to look into the Scripture, starting to come with questions about Bible passages they've read. We're watching God soften and move the hearts of men.

Jesus is the friend of sinners. He is serious about holiness. He is serious about repentance. Yet, Jesus is playing in this space where he's in the world and not of it. He carries himself not as a man who wants to be accepted by the cool crowd but someone who, confident in the truth of God's Word, is able to love and serve and engage and woo the hearts of men and women away from what is false and toward what is true. Marvel at this.

Here's what I'm trying to get you to see maybe if you can't see it. If you're not a Christian, I want you to hear me show you and point out to you that the coming of Christ is about God's friendship toward you and not him coming with a new set of commands that you had better obey. Jesus in the manger is not holding commandments 11 through 20. That's not what has happened. He's wrapped in swaddling cloths.

We read in John 3:17... I know John 3:16 gets all the press, but it's John 3:17 that says, "Christ has come into the world not to condemn the world but rather to save the world from condemnation." Jesus is the friend of sinners. Non-Christian, Christian, this means as lights to the world, we don't build giant walls with drawbridges. We don't consider ourselves better than anyone, but rather rescued, redeemed, and now an agent of that reconciliation, which means our doors and our lives are open.

I can assure you, as I have felt the sting many times myself, that self-righteous people will very quickly judge you for rooms you enter, friendships you possess, and those you walk with who they deem to be too far gone. Right? Yet, this is the same accusation made against Jesus time and time again. It's the accusation that is happening here. It grows more aggressive as the Gospels continue in their accusation of Jesus' friendship with the world.

If you're not a Christian, Jesus is the friend of sinners. If you are a Christian, you should be the friend of sinners. Lost people are not projects or pets. Are you tracking? Lost people are not projects or pets. Might you ask the King of Glory to give you deep love and affection for those who are not Christians, feel the burden and the weight for them, cry out for them.

You can't save them. You're a terrible god. You can't save anybody, yet you can pray and cry out and plead with the Lord to save. You can answer questions. You can have them into your home. You can engage in deep, meaningful friendships. What is the incarnation of Jesus Christ except God dwelling among those who have rebelled against him? You have Jesus coming into the world engaging shepherds like us.

That's not all that is happening here. We see here that the coming of Jesus is about the glory of God, right? The song the angel busts into and that the heavenly hosts join... I would just like to read this text with my imagination. Let me set the Bible over here and walk over here. God sends an angel to tell these shepherds this, so the angel has to be somewhat confused. Yet, the other angels kind of want to party with him.

Here's why. This is pretty big news. Surely you've been to a funeral where the person who has died is now an angel looking over us. Please, if you get an opportunity, don't ever say that. It's just not true. The angels wish they could be us. Angels (praise God for them) do a type of battle in the heavenly realms that we'll only know come glory, but we should not long to be them as they simply desire to be us. We are sons and daughters, not just servants. The book of Hebrews says they look upon God's affection for us and love for us and are astonished by it. Here we go.

At one of the apexes of history, God calls an angel over and is like, "Tell them."

The angel is like, "Them?"

"Yeah, the shepherds."

"Do you hear what they're talking about?"

"Yeah, I hear because I'm God. Go. Tell the shepherds."

"What?"

Seriously. Here's how I want you to read your Bible. What are a bunch of roughnecks out in the middle of nowhere talking about around the campfire? How many of you played sports and have been in a locker room? Probably that. God is going, "Angel, go tell them." "Them?" "Them." The other angels are in on this. All of this is conjecture. The Bible is over here. You're like, "I can't find that." You can't because it's not in there.

"Hey, can we go?"

"No, I'm giving it to him."

"Yeah, but we really want to be a part of this."

"All right, fine. Go, but show up late. You can show up late."

The first angel shows up. "I have a message. First of all, don't be afraid." That's necessary because if you're sitting around with a bunch of crass roughnecks, having those kinds of conversations, and all of a sudden, an angel shows up, don't you know you're thinking there's about to be an execution? Yet, what is heralded is actually good news. Then the sky explodes with heavenly hosts saying, "Glory to God in the highest."

The idea of glory... It carries like an ultimate beauty or magnificence. On top of that, it carries the connotation, specifically in the Old Testament and some in the new, of being weighty. The glory of God is heavy. What the Bible means when it talks about the glory of God being weighty or heavy is that it has the power to displace things, to move things out of the way.

When the angels show up and say, "Glory to God in the highest," what is being declared is, "There is a beauty on earth now that displaces all other beauties. It lessens other beauties because of how

beautiful it is, and there is a magnificence now visible in Christ that lessens the magnificence of other magnificent things."

Maybe this will work. I don't have a problem with beef jerky. I like it, but if it's between beef jerky and filet, I'm choosing the filet. That's like a no-brainer. "What do you want for dinner, a Slim Jim or a medium rare filet?" See, that's like a no-brainer to me. I want the medium rare filet. It's not that I hate beef jerky. It's just there's something better. "Glory to God in the highest."

There's something better than... Yeah. You name it. There is something more beautiful than what? Everything. There is something more magnificent than what? Any other magnificent thing you name. Glory to God in the highest. Everything else gets displaced. What is this beauty? What is this magnificence? He actually says it. The angels actually praise it in the next line. **"Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"**

"Glory to God in the highest." What is the beauty? What is the magnificence that has come? That God, in the sending of Christ and in the coming of Jesus, makes peace with mankind. See, you and I, the Bible is clear, are broken from birth. We are brought forth in iniquity. We are rebellious against our Creator. Every one of us. **"There is none righteous, not even one..."** All have fallen astray. There is not one of us.

Any righteousness that could be forged with your hands is a false righteousness and not acceptable to God. You and I, fractured in relationship with our Creator, facing the wages of sin, the punishment for sin. Now, what is the punishment for sin? I'm glad you asked because I have that text in mind. No. It's Romans 6:23. It says, **"For the wages of sin is..."** What? **"...death..."** Here's what that means.

Yes, yes, yes, physical death, but on top of that, the inability to experience the fullness of life in any given domain. Let me unpack the wages of sin to you. I have non-Christian friends who have a great marriage. They have a better marriage than some Christians I've come across. He loves her. She loves him. They're older and flirty, which can kind of be gross, but as I get older, it's not as gross.

Yet, here's what I know. Although I would never say that non-Christians can't have good marriages... I believe they can. I've seen it with my own eyes. I don't think the Bible teaches that they can't. What I will tell you is the fullness of what marriage is meant to be cannot be experienced by those outside of Christ.

If the scale is one to ten, outside of Christ, maybe you can be a seven, but you'll never be a ten. You can't be because in order to get to the fullness of all things requires reconciliation with your Creator. You will hit the ceiling without Jesus. You will because everything God has given to us, he has given to us to the praise of his glorious grace so any of life's experiences that don't roll past that experience into praise of God makes us hit a ceiling.

You can come together emotionally with your wife. You can come together intellectually with your wife. You can come together physically with your wife. Yet the Bible talks about a mingling of souls that only occurs when two sinners have submitted their lives fully to Jesus Christ. When that happens, now reconciled to our Creator, we're able to walk in an intimacy with one another that is impossible outside of that. That's the reason we fight for right relationship with God, to the glory of God, as it rights everything else horizontally.

God makes peace where the wages of sin is death. You read in the second part of that text, "**...but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.**" The coming of Christ is about the bringing of peace between the hostility of your rebellion against God and God's just, right wrath toward your rebellion. Jesus steps into the middle of that and brings the peace of his blood, shed on the cross, absorbing all of God's wrath toward those who would believe and replacing it with God's pleasure in the imputed righteousness of Jesus given to us upon salvation.

In conclusion, I want to read one text to you. This is how I've been praying for you this week. Literally on the floor, right there on my face and earlier today with our staff in these seats, just pleading and praying for you these things. This is Colossians 3, starting in verse 15. "**And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts...**" I'm going to just stop there for a second.

My prayer for you this week on the floor right there, my prayer for you as the staff gathered last night and then again this morning as we prayed for you, not necessarily by name, but those chairs you're sitting in, people have prayed over those chairs, knowing someone would sit in that chair. "Whoever is going to sit in this chair, we just ask, Holy Spirit of God, that you would grant them the ability to hear and understand." You have been prayed for in this place.

We have prayed, "Let the peace of Christ rule in their hearts." If you're not a Christian, that means surrendering your life to Jesus. Let's be really honest. You're a really crummy god. I say this often.

I'm not trying to be scandalous. No one has betrayed you, deceived you, or made a mess of your life as consistently as you have. You are perpetually your own worst enemy, right?

I'm not saying there haven't been difficult things that have occurred to you. I'm not saying your parents weren't awful people. Maybe they were. Maybe they weren't. I'm saying no one has wounded you more than you have. No one has not followed through and broken their promises to you like you have. Can we just agree upon that?

No one has lied to you more than you've lied to you. You might even be doing it right now. "That's not true." That would be you lying to you. Because that's the case, a lot of the angst and lack of peace you feel because things don't seem to be going your way are because you're trying to be God, and you're a terrible god. The peace of Christ ruling in our hearts takes place when we surrender our lives to Christ.

If you're not a Christian, the Christian life is about surrendering our hearts to Jesus, just a glad confession that, "I cannot, and I'm trusting that you can. I am making a mess of things, and I trust that you will not make a mess of things. I give my heart to you, my life to you. I lay it all down at your feet. God, help me."

The non-Christian, letting the peace of Christ reign in your life is about laying your life down, becoming a Christian, crying out for the mercy of God, seeking forgiveness, repenting of your sins and believing God is a better God than you. I'm earnest and prayerful that that will happen in many hearts today.

Christian, I always want us to be honest with ourselves and with people who aren't Christians. There are a lot of us who aren't Christians, and the peace of Christ is not ruling in our hearts. What happens when a Christian doesn't have the peace of Christ ruling in their hearts? I think two things, in the most popular sense. Here are the two most common.

The first is, for whatever reason, we think we should be God for a little while. You're not saying to yourself, Christian. Right? You're not going, "You know what? I'm just going to be God this week." No one does that, but here's what we do. We begin to take on weight and take on responsibilities that aren't ours to take on. Let me give you an example.

You can't fix anyone. You know that, right? You can't fix anyone. Let me tell you why anxiety and fear and stress start building in the life of a Christian. You start to believe you can fix someone. Then that crazy sister of yours is coming into town, and all the weight of fixing her life that she so jacked up is on your shoulders, so you're stressing out. You're fearful. You don't want it to explode.

You can't. You can't even fix yourself. How are you supposed to fix someone else? All of a sudden, you're trying to control. You're trying to manipulate things at work, things at home. Oh, that husband of yours. Oh, that wife of yours. Oh, that crazy kid of yours. You start to take on places and things that aren't yours to carry, and you can't do anything about it.

Let's do this exercise together. I want you to say it loud and proud. "I am not God." If you'll believe that, I'm telling you you'll be able to rest. You'll be able to let the peace of Christ rule in your heart. See, when I'm coming up here to preach, here's what I know. I can't convince you. I might be able to motivate you until you get to your car. I might be able to make you go, "Oh, that's insightful. I never thought about it that way."

I cannot do anything here but preach the Word of God and pray that the Holy Spirit does something. That's awesome because I don't have to feel anxiety about what you think about me or whether you stay. I don't get to feel any of that. I get to just rest and go, "God, I was faithful to you. You be you and let me be the leaky, broken vessel I am, and use me for all of my weirdness." Praise God. This is what I'm trying to tell you you are also.

That weird thing with your in-laws, you can't do anything about that, but you can pray because there is one who can. That thing at work about what you want to see happen, I'm telling you you can't do anything about that. You can pray. You can work hard. You can do the things God has commanded us to do in Scriptures. Then breathe and rest. You're in his hands. You get to just melt into being his.

The second thing we see in this text that we've prayed for you this week is not only the peace of Christ ruling in your hearts but that you would grow in thanksgiving and gladness. By the grace of God and because I'm a pastor and because I'm a pastor here at The Village and because our elders have been extremely generous to my family and I, I take a Wednesday every month, and I block the whole day. No meetings. I don't turn on my computer. I don't turn on my phone.

I just use that day to pray, to seek the Lord, to fast, to come in here and pray over this room, pray over our building, pray for our city, pray for our elders, pray for our home group leaders, pray that God would do a profound work among us that is marked by the Holy Spirit's power and not by the intelligence of man. That Wednesday for me was this past Wednesday.

The kids were still in school, and my wife was in the studio, so I spent the day at home, and I was reading the promises of God in the Bible, and I began to claim those promises around my house. I prayed over my bedroom, that the Lord would continue to increase intimacy between my wife and me as we continue to grow into the fullness of all God has for us, that he would continue to keep the fire and the heat between us alive and focused on him, that he would keep our marriage focused on serving and loving others.

I prayed over our dining room table that the conversations we have around our dining room table would please the Lord, and that as my children begin to bring their friends into our home, that their friends would feel loved and valued and cherished maybe coming into our homes from homes where they're not really paid a lot of attention to, or their daddies haven't spoken life into them or encouraged them. I asked for supernatural ability to see and sense that I might be able to encourage and speak life into.

I prayed over the foyer of our home that as people walked in, if there was any type of demonic strongholds or oppressions on their lives, that it would fall off of them, that they would feel a supernatural peace in our home. I prayed over our living room. I laid on the door of my daughter's room, and I pled with God for her growing and maturing in the things of God and that she wouldn't feel any pressure from you to be anything other than what she should be before the Lord. It's a terrible thing to be a pastor's kid. There's a weird sense of expectation on them that is absurd.

I prayed that the Lord would save them from that and protect them. I prayed over my son's room. What began to mark on my soul on Wednesday was just how good God has been to us. That night at dinner, Lauren and I, because it's a beautiful thing when your oldest kid gets old enough to babysit for free, yo. Can I get an, "Amen," on that? That's incredible.

Someone needs to tell younger parents about that. "Here's the deal. Make them do a Red Cross class so they know how to save someone from being choked out or something and then take your wife out. Free babysitting." Room and board, right? Other than that, free babysitting. Lauren and I went out on a date, and I was just able to sit with my wife, and for all the weirdness that is involved in

family and the craziness of this week because of Christmas Eve services and things like that, we got to just sit there and recount how good God has been to us.

Hear me say this, and then I really do need to wrap up. I am not naïve to how difficult this week will be for many of us. I personally know those who this will be the first year of Christmas since a significant family loss by death. There will be families this year who will be having Christmas without one of their children for the first time. There are those who will be having Christmas this year without a spouse for the first time, either because of death or really nasty divorces.

There will be those who will be a little bit more alone because the children will be with the other spouse. There are all sorts of things here that make this season difficult. I don't want to take anything away from that. I understand those things. I promise you I'm not naïve to the brokenness that is represented among our body here.

That you might give space to think about and consider God's unbelievable graces to you, his goodness toward you, the way he has blessed you. As this week begins to progress, that you might become more and more and more in tune with the generosity of God in your life, and your heart might grow in thanksgiving, and that you might rejoice in being part of a bigger family than just your immediate family.

See, I love Christmas Eve services for the reason that we get to come together as the greater family that makes up the kingdom of God and just rejoice in the God of our salvation, in the coming of Jesus Christ as a baby in the manger, representing that peace has been established between us and the Lord. Let me pray for us.

Father, we ask by your grace and by the power of the Holy Spirit that the peace of Christ might rule in our hearts. Where we've tried to be God, Father, we confess that. Where we've walked in unrepentant sin, we confess that. Where we're not Christians and long to be made right with you, we confess our sins, repent of our sins, and ask you to be Lord of our lives.

I pray even now, Holy Spirit, that you would begin to flood our minds with your goodness and grace to us, those periods of time when you provided, when you all of a sudden delivered us in the last moment, when we worried and fretted and were anxious about something, that you so miraculously handled on your own.

I pray even now, as we prepare to sing to you about this night, this holy night when the angels showed up and harked to us that peace has come into the world, and the example we see here is that heralding of the good news goes out to those who need the good news, those who are hopeless and broken and helpless and desperately in need. Let us see those beauties that are before us today. Shield not our eyes from them, but draw us into the realities of those graces. We need you. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.

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