



Advent (Part 3) – Living and Longing for the King

Matt Chandler – December 17, 2017

Good morning. If you have your Bibles, let's go to Luke, chapter 3. We will be looking at a prophecy Isaiah made that John the Baptist shows up and preaches about what would occur at the coming of Jesus, but before we do that, we have framed this Advent season around the themes of the "already but not yet," this space that you and I inhabit as believers in Christ.

At one hand, the first advent of Jesus, the first coming of Jesus, his life, death, and resurrection, purchased for us certain things. It gives us victory over sin and death. It gives us victory over oppression. It gives us freedom from sin, addiction, these kinds of things, and yet there's this "not yet-ness" to it all, while we simultaneously celebrate what Christ has done while we wait for the full consummation of that victory to actually occur in the second coming of Jesus.

So we're this really strange people who are simultaneously celebrating and walking in some sorrow. If you're a Christian, this has been your experience. We could testify of the "already-ness" of Jesus Christ. I could testify to the fact that Christ has saved me, that he picked me up, like David said, out of the muck and the mire and set my feet on a rock. I could tell of his goodness in delivering me from the sins that have haunted my bloodline for 150 to 200 years.

I could testify of his goodness and grace in my life in *this* area and *this* area and *this* area, and yet I could also, at the same time, lay before you things I don't understand, losses I've endured, sicknesses that have wrung the life out of my body, fears that have pursued me and haunted me. So I find myself, like you as a Christian, in this space between: the already but not yet.

What that does so often for us as Christians is it gives us this front-row seat to the kingdom of God breaking through the ordinary in power. What you and I get to experience as Christians as we're in this tension, in this space between, the already but not yet, and have a front-row seat to sorrow and loss and mourning and frustration and relational strife, the kingdom of God will burst forth into the

middle of that and show that God does not submit to the natural order but the natural order submits to God.

I was preaching the "already but not yet" two weeks ago, and on Saturday night after the 7:15... I just laid that idea out. "We're in the already. Here are evidences of the already. We're in the not yet. Here are evidences of the not yet." I walked off this stage right through there and went back. My green room is over here in the corner. I went in there and poured myself some tea, and then I noticed my phone was lit up.

I thought maybe Lauren had texted me. "Hey, I have the kids; we're going to do this," or "When are you coming home? How long did you go? Good Lord. Just go 40, Matt." I was expecting something like that. I looked, and I'd actually had a series of calls I missed and a series of messages and learned that one of our members, in fact, a man in a really high level of leadership... His 15-month-old daughter Lily had fallen into a swimming pool, needed to be pulled out, needed to be resuscitated.

They had rushed her to the hospital, and the doctors had said, "She is not going to wake up, and if she does wake up she'll be a vegetable the rest of her life." Remember where we are. We're in the space in between. We're in the already but not yet. We're in that space where at any moment the kingdom of God just burst into the ordinary and revealed that God is outside the natural order and he does as he pleases.

So we started to pray. We prayed and we prayed and we prayed, and then we got the MRI. The first MRI results came back, and it confirmed what the doctors had said. There was serious brain damage in the image. In fact, there's a 72-hour rule around these things, especially around swelling in the brain. We were at the 48-hour mark, so now there was this fear. "We have a whole other 24 hours of swelling, and there is no more room for the brain to swell."

So we prayed all the more. We actually got emboldened to pray all the more. We prayed at elder-led prayer. Our Home Groups prayed. I've been hosting a prayer meeting with some of our pastors at lunch during Advent from noon to 1:00. We prayed there. We prayed as a staff, and then we got a second MRI, and the second MRI revealed that the damage in the first MRI was no longer there. So then we freaked out. We're just charismatic enough to freak out.

Then we started praying bold, insane prayers, like the kinds of prayers that when you read in the Bible they make you a little uncomfortable. It's like the way Moses prayed, where he starts

reminding God what God said. That kind of prayer that makes you feel weird. Moses is going, "You said this. These aren't *my* people; these are *your* people, and you commanded..."

We just started praying crazy prayers like that, and then her eyes opened, and then we started praying even more. Every little victory emboldened us to fast more, to pray more, to plead more to see the kingdom break through. Then two days ago they moved sweet Lily out of ICU and into a room and now are talking about transferring her up to Dallas for rehab. You can rejoice in that. You *should* rejoice in that.

Now I'm not a man with over-realized eschatology. If you don't know what that means, I'll say it like this. The road she will need to walk next is long and difficult, but won't he do it. We've already been told she would die, and she did not die. We've already been told she wouldn't wake up, and she is awake. We were told she would not leave ICU, and she is out of ICU. We want to believe.

We've been in this season in the life of our church where there seems to be a lot of this right now, and I want us to rejoice. I want us to get better at rejoicing. I talked to Danny Spencer, who sits right over here at 9:00 a.m. and has my entire tenure as the pastor of this church. He was radically saved out of horrific alcoholism that had destroyed his life, destroyed his marriage, and isolated him from his kids.

The Spirit of God saved him early on in my time here, and he has been one of the more faithful, servant-hearted brothers. He, just a few months ago, learned he had lung cancer. Danny has smoked like a chimney for 40 years. The tumor in his lungs was about five centimeters, and he just walked up to me today and said, "Hey, they did a test on Wednesday, and that 5-cm tumor is now a 1-cm tumor, and we're believing that will shrink."

This is what I'm talking about. This is that front-row seat we have. Now does it always play out this way? No, because of the *not yet*. We've experienced this. Lily lives long enough and she's going to die. Danny lives long enough and he's going to die. Yet in *this* moment we get to rejoice, because the kingdom of God has broken through the ordinary and said, "Not today."

If you're new here, I had brain cancer eight years ago. They cut out my right frontal lobe, which is probably helping you make sense of what you're seeing right now, and then poisoned me for 18 months. It was awesome, and now twice a year I have to go in and get MRIs. I go June and

December. Last June the doc walked in and started asking Lauren questions without acknowledging me.

I don't know if you've ever been in a room where people are talking about you but you're in the room. She's just asking Lauren, "Hey, is he acting abnormally? Is he acting any different than he normally acts? Have you noticed in him impulsive behaviors that are out of step with his character?" I'm being straight with you. I was a little panicky. I was like, "Okay, when does she turn to me and just go, 'I'm sorry; it's back?'"

But instead of that she said, "You're fine. There's no evidence that a tumor has recurred, but let me show you this." She put up the image of my MRI, and what you saw was the shadowing pushing itself back to the back parts of my brain. It's basically called *radiation flaring*, because they did radiation around the resection wall of my brain.

Their concern was that as that radiation continued to spread across my brain I was going to begin to have some residual effects to the spread of that radiation, so she was just checking with Lauren and then warning Lauren what to look for if this began to progress. So we went in on Tuesday and had the scan. We sat in Karen's office, and she put up the MRI from Tuesday. She flipped on the light from the MRI last June, and the radiation flare was just gone.

She said, "As a doctor I'm not allowed to say this, but it's just not there. Radiation doesn't just vanish, and yet it has vanished." I could just keep going about the generosity of God to our church at this time, all the while being able to acknowledge honestly that not everybody has gotten those readings. Not everybody has gotten that message. Not everyone *had* good scans. Not everyone's relationships *have* been put back together. Not every marriage *is* in a good place.

I don't want you to panic, but Christmas is a week from now. If you're like, "Oh my gosh. Is it really?" you're fine. You don't need to order any presents with your phone while I'm preaching. You'll have plenty of time to hop online and knock that out after service. Here's what kind of hit my mind this week as I've navigated both sides of the already but not yet.

I'm excited about Christmas. We'll do our services here in Flower Mound all on Sunday, and then Christmas morning we'll wake up. We'll open up our presents. Everyone is coming to my house, my family-wise, for Christmas. I'm doing prime rib on the Big Green Egg. I plan to sear it so people get the gift of tongues when they take a bite of that. That's my plan: to just grill that mug with

perfection. Then when that's over it'll be time to clean up, and another Christmas will go in the books.

As I've thought about what's coming this week, as the anticipation builds in the hearts of my children, as there's excitement to come that's going to give way Monday afternoon to needing to pick up trash, needing to clean up kitchens, needing to try to put together their brand new toy they broke by 2:00 that afternoon... As I'm ready to navigate all of this, my mind has been on the second advent, where there will be no comingling of joy and sorrow.

At the return of Christ and the consummation of all things there won't be the mingling of sorrow, anxiety, doubt, and fear, but we will have what Christ has fully purchased in our face forever. In light of that, in light of the fact that we have this celebration coming that is, as epic as Christmas might be for you this year, a poor shadow of the celebration that is to come at the consummation of all things, I wanted us to look at Luke, chapter 3, together, starting in verse 4.

"As it is written in the book of the words of Isaiah the prophet, 'The voice of one crying in the wilderness: "Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled, and every mountain and hill shall be made low, and the crooked shall become straight, and the rough places shall become level ways, and all flesh shall see the salvation of God."' He said therefore to the crowds that came out to be baptized by him, 'You brood of vipers!'"

John the Baptist isn't like a seeker-friendly guy. He's not like, "Oh, I want to tone this down so the people will hear." If you start your sermon with "You brood of vipers," just know you have a bit of a prophetic edge about you, I think is how they would describe that.

"Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruits in keeping with repentance. And do not begin to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our father." For I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.' And the crowds asked him, 'What then shall we do?'"

And he answered them, 'Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.' Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, 'Teacher, what shall we do?' And he said to them, 'Collect no more than you are authorized to

do.' Soldiers also asked him, 'And we, what shall we do?' And he said to them, 'Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.'"

You're seeing a lot of poetic imagery here out of the book of Isaiah. John the Baptist is preaching a sermon to masses who have gathered, and he's using Isaiah as his primary text, as we're using Luke as *our* primary text. In this text he's quoting the prophet Isaiah about what the coming Messiah is going to do. He is the forerunner of the Messiah, and he says *this* concerning the coming of Jesus: he will make the path straight for the coming of the Lord.

Now he's not saying he's going to make the path easier for Jesus. The path doesn't need to be easier for Jesus, because, well, he's God in the flesh, Immanuel, co-eternal with the Father, has always been. What could stay his hand? He told a storm to stop, and it obeyed. He told a dead little girl to get up, and she got up. You don't need to smooth things out for Jesus. He's saying that in the coming of Jesus the path of salvation will become straight, will become easier for you and me.

He's laying out, "Hey, the Messiah has come, and the Messiah is not coming with tablets. He's not coming with new rules for you to follow. He's going to make the path to God easier for you." Then he begins to explain how and why that is, using this poetic imagery. The first thing he says here is, "Every valley shall be lifted." This is poetic imagery around one of the themes of Jesus' ministry; namely, that the low or the humble, the lowly, will be exalted. Jesus is all about exalting the broken in the world. We see this even in one of his first sermons, Matthew 5:2-11. I love this.

"And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying: 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when others revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.'"

That part of the text is huge, because sometimes you're spoken ill of not because you love Jesus but because you're a jerk. You can't look at this text and be like, "You tell them, John! I'm experiencing

that right now. I'm going to read this passage to the guys at work." No. Stop being a jerk, and maybe people wouldn't talk about you in your "jerkness." This is talking about persecution that's leveled on the person who's fully surrendered to Jesus and convicts the hearts of others via their devotion.

When you are sad or you are confronted by another person's righteousness, the way you comfort your own soul is to tear them down. It's called *self-righteousness*. More on that later in the sermon.

"Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you." This is an upside-down economy. Do you see what's happening here? Everything we don't want to be, the Bible is saying, "This is the blessed life."

"Blessed are those, happy are those, who are poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when you're reviled. Blessed are you who are pure of heart." Now we haven't thought a lot about it, but to be pure of heart is to be open for all sorts of heartbreak. To not armor up and self-protect but to have a heart that's pure before the Lord and pure before others, to not ever armor up but have the ability to really be hurt by others?

The Bible is saying, "Blessed is this man. Blessed is this woman. Happy are these people." Tell me we don't believe... I know you're in church and you won't say I'm right here. Tell me we don't believe that, actually, the blessed life means I'm *rich* in spirit. Tell me you don't believe the blessed life is that people love me, the blessed life is that I'm rich in stuff, the blessed life is people praise me, the blessed life is that I am not hungry and thirsting for righteousness but I full-on have it.

Jesus shows up, and he's bringing the low things up. This is good news. If you're in a season of mourning, this is great news, because the valley is being filled. My diagnosis and prognosis of two to three years was given to me this time of the year. I'd had brain surgery. I sat up in that back corner, and everybody was having this epic, happy Christmastime, and we were distraught as a family. My kids were distraught. My wife was distraught.

We thought I had maybe one or two Christmases left, and during that time they were going to try to poison me to death to keep me alive. The Lord met us in that space, and although I never want to do that again, the Lord was kind to us in that space, and sometimes I miss his nearness to me, as I felt so powerless and hopeless and desperate. This kingdom economics...it's upside down. This is why the prosperity gospel is so insidious and so evil. It makes God a butler rather than a king, and he is no butler.

We see here in the text that the low will be exalted. You mourning, you reviled, you hungry and thirsting for righteousness, blessed are you. But that's not all that's going on here. Look at what happens next. The next poetic bit of imagery is that the valleys are being lifted or filled and the mountains and hills will be made low. This is the corresponding truth. Those who are low will be lifted, and those who are arrogant, who walk in self-righteousness and pride, will be lowered. You have this kind of creation of level ground.

Now here's what's hard about talking about pride. First, pride is really insidious. We can rarely see it in ourselves. It's just hard to see if you're self-righteous. And do you know who hates self-righteous people? Self-righteous people. There's no real litmus test we can make. Pride is insidious. I heard a friend of mine say, "You are never more dangerous than when you feel spiritual." Right? You are never more dangerous than when you feel spiritual.

Think how quickly your victories as you live out the Christian life...your morality, your victory in *this* space or *that* space...lead to a puffing up in your own imagination rather than a gratitude for the God who sustains. John the Baptist is saying, "Hey, in the coming of Jesus, the lowly, the outcasts, the marginalized are coming up, and the self-righteous and those who exalt themselves are going to be brought low."

"You will not buy or earn your way into my kingdom. I will gift you in, but you will not earn with your talents, with your ability, with your discipline a spot at my table. I'll give it, but you don't get to earn it." Again, these are themes in Jesus' ministry. In this very same sermon in Matthew 5 that we just read the Beatitudes out of, Jesus is going to say, "Unless your righteousness supersedes that of the Pharisees..."

I've said this to you before. Let me remind you. The Pharisees are better than you. They're just better than you at this whole moral thing. They just are. We don't really need to argue unless you have the Torah memorized. If you have Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy fully memorized, then I'm more than willing to entertain this conversation about how much better you are than the Pharisees, but I'm just going to take historic precedent and say you're not even on the team.

So how disheartening for Jesus to say, "Unless you do better than them, you don't have any spot in my kingdom." That doesn't sound like the road got easier; that sounds like it got monumentally harder, except what Jesus is saying is that the low are lifted, the high are lowered, and there's level

ground at the foot of the cross. "You are not low enough to be welcomed, and I will bring you down from your heights to put you on the level ground of the cross." This is what's happening in the coming of Jesus.

I love where he goes next with this. He starts talking about crooked paths being straightened out and rough paths being smoothed out. This language is "Hey, he has come to straighten out the crooked." I love this, because I was a crooked brother. He's saying, "I've come to smooth those rough edges." I love that, because you catch me on the right day and my rough edges are still pretty rough.

I love this promise that in the coming of Jesus Christ what's crooked will be made straight, or, if we use the right kind of Greek here, are *being* made straight in Jesus. Not that we're there yet but that he's starting to straighten us. I love this story. If you grew up in church, you might have seen this thrown on a felt board or learned a song about it, but it's in Luke 19.

"He entered Jericho and was passing through. And behold, there was a man named Zacchaeus. He was a chief tax collector and was rich. And he was seeking to see who Jesus was, but on account of the crowd he could not, because he was small in stature. So he ran on ahead and climbed up into a sycamore tree to see him, for he was about to pass that way. And when Jesus came to the place, he looked up and said to him, 'Zacchaeus, hurry and come down, for I must stay at your house today.'

So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully. And when they saw it, they all grumbled, 'He has gone in to be the guest of a man who is a sinner.' And Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord, 'Behold, Lord, the half of my goods I give to the poor. And if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I restore it fourfold.' And Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, since he also is a son of Abraham. For the Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost.'"

I think one of the reasons we don't see Jesus interacting with the tax collectors... I think when we read texts like this we kind of put ourselves in the story, and we're like, "Golly! Those self-righteous, religious folks of the day. Leave little Zacchaeus alone. Had I been there, I'd be pouring that wine of gladness at Zacchaeus' house, and I'd just be sitting with Jesus, rejoicing that he came to save sinners." Look, I love you. No, you wouldn't have. "You don't know me." I don't need to know you. You wouldn't have.

Here's something that got lost in the whole Zacchaeus being a wee little man thing. At this point in human history, Rome rules the known world from India to England. Let me ask a question. How do you do that without an air force? That isn't a problem in the US. I know some of you dudes go out in the woods and practice just in case. I so appreciate your little semiautomatic AR-15 you've tricked out. I just wonder how that's going to do against a Predator drone.

How do you defend that land mass without an air force? Well, you do it with a massive army made up not just of Roman soldiers but also of conscripts and mercenaries. Okay, third question. How do you pay for that? Anybody want to guess how you pay for that? Taxes. Here's what we know about Rome. We know Rome rules with fear and violence. We know it's not uncommon for them to sack a city and then crucify men, women, and children along the roads leading into that city to quell any rebellion that might spark up in that city.

There are few things that are going to discourage you to lead a rebellion against an occupying force like seeing your wives and sons and daughters hanging from crosses outside of town. You have this brutal empire that's occupying Jerusalem. Zacchaeus was a man who had purchased the right from Rome to take taxes up to pay for this occupying force that was responsible for the murder, rape, and plundering of all the Jews would consider sacred.

I don't know the moral equivalent to this in our culture. Can you imagine the guy three houses down from you not just taking money for this force but taking more than he should in order to line his own pockets and be the one who's funding this brutal regime that's governing over your neighborhood, over your city, over your state, over your country? This is a despicable, gross human being. This is a self-indulgent, self-righteous, proud, disgusting human, and Jesus...

Let's use our divine imagination. It's not in the text. Jesus is walking into town. He's surrounded by thousands of people. Keep in mind he's driving out demons, healing people, telling people who have never walked to get up and walk. Not *praying* for them. Just going, "Get up here, Matt. Let's walk. Let's go. Follow me." That's just a different thing.

You have to believe he rolls into town, and the players in town are like, "Hey, Jesus, where are you heading tonight, man? You want dinner? I have a sweet bottle of Opus One at my house. Why don't you come to the house? I have some 20-year Pappy Van Winkle. Get into my house. We'll just celebrate tonight. We're so glad you're here." Jesus ignores all of the invitations from the elite and

walks up to this tree. "Zacchaeus, what are you doing? Hey man, get down. I'm eating at *your* house."

This was unbelievably scandalous, because to eat at someone's house was this picture of being *with* them and *for* them. Why this is such a scandalous thing is because Jesus has rejected the pretty and the elite and has leaned into the ugly, because he has come to seek and save the lost. I love this about Jesus. In fact, the most common accusation made against him is he's the friend of drunkards and sinners. "What's Jesus like?"

"Gosh, he's just always with the drunks and the sinners. He won't even come to prayer meeting. Can you believe that? We keep asking him to come to Home Group. He won't go to Home Group. Guess what he *does* do? I just don't get that guy. In fact, I'm going to post on my Facebook that we should watch him closely and be skeptical." This is what he's doing, but what does he come for? The crooked, the rough. This is good news. The low lifted, the proud brought low, the crooked straightened out, the rough smoothed over. This is what's coming in the coming of Jesus.

I love this last one. I'm going to let you see that this has happened. "All flesh shall see the salvation of God." That's another picture of the nations knowing. There's this great story at the birth of Jesus Christ, where there's this old man named Simeon. In fact, here in Flower Mound, Lauren read from *The Valley of Vision* earlier in our singing portion of worship, and in that *Valley of Vision* prayer it addressed Simeon. The story of Simeon, if you don't have a church background...

He's this man who was told by the Holy Spirit that he would not die until he saw the Messiah. The problem is he started to get old. They'd been waiting for the Messiah for thousands of years and hadn't had a prophet in Israel for 400, and yet he's unmovable. He's this weird, charismatic guy at the church who maybe is growing a little senile, and people are trying to talk sense into him. They're like, "Man, I don't think so, Simeon." He's like, "The Spirit told me."

"Where's that in the Old Testament? I don't see that."

"The Spirit told me. The Spirit told me I would not die until I saw the Messiah."

He's just hanging out, just a weird dude hanging out at the temple all the time. My guess is security is shadowing him, just making sure he doesn't get in the plate, making sure he doesn't start any static. Then here come Mary and Joseph, a good, young, Jewish family. If you remember back to our

study in Exodus, the firstborn son who opens the womb of a mother... You go to the temple and sacrifice two turtledoves with a certain amount of pence, or money.

So they're in to do that, and the Bible tells us that Simeon, filled with the Holy Spirit... When he saw Mary and Jesus, he ran and just snatched baby Jesus out of Mary's hands, and he sings this song. This is Luke 2:29-32: **"Lord, now you are letting your servant depart in peace, according to your word; for my eyes have seen your salvation that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light for revelation to the Gentiles, and for glory to your people Israel."**

We're going to do this really quickly. Don't make this weird. Look around and make eye contact with two or three people. Go ahead. Don't make it weird. You don't need to wink or anything like that. Just make eye contact with a couple of people. You got it? Okay. Look up. That's objective evidence that what Isaiah prophesied about, what John the Baptist said Christ would bring, what Simeon saw in the temple that day has come about.

Are you not evidence that this passage has been made true? Are you not Gentiles? (Now there's a service earlier I can't say that in. We have two messianic Jews there, and they would blow up my... "Well, actually..." That's why I didn't say that in that service, but I'm thinking I'm safe here. If you're a Jew, you can just email me later and go, "Don't say that nonsense in the 11:15," and I'll know that you're here, if this is where you usually go.)

You and I are the fulfillment of this promise that what Christ was bringing wasn't something for one ethnic group, one part of the world, one socioeconomic status, but rather what Christ was ushering in is low being lifted, high being brought low, level ground at the foot of the cross, crooked being straight, rough being smoothed over, to the ends of the earth, and you and I are in here as evidence that that's true.

We have been crooked and made straight. We have been rough and made smooth. We are Gentiles who have seen the light, and here we are celebrating the birth of Jesus Christ. Have you ever thought about how weird that is? A baby born in Bethlehem a couple thousand years ago, and here we are singing about it, rejoicing in it, coming together to marvel at it. It's because this is true.

Since this is where we are in this space in between, how are we, then, to live in light of all of this? Well, John the Baptist goes on, because the people respond this way. They show up at church, and John the Baptist opens up Isaiah and preaches Isaiah, and then here's how the people respond.

"Okay, what are we supposed to do? Okay, we've heard the Word. Now what?" So John fills in some application.

Here's the first thing he says: "**Bear fruits in keeping with repentance.**" Since Christ has come and the low has been lifted and the high has been brought low, making level ground at the foot of the cross, and since he plans to take the crooked and make straight, and because he plans to take the rough and smooth, and because there's a light beaming to the ends of the earth, how should you and I live?

I think this truth is revolutionary to those who will have ears to hear. If you think repentance is something you do once to become a Christian and then you put on the weight of needing to be a neat Christian man or a neat Christian woman and cannot keep up the practice of repentance, you rob yourself of what Christ came to bring. We are a continually repenting people, and that doesn't bother God.

I am not what I will be. I'm not. I'm 43. I've been following him for over 20 years, and I am not what I would like to be yet, and I am not where I am going to be, and yet his love for me, his dedication to me, his commitment to me is unwavering. If you don't get that and you don't get that God loves the broken and contrite in spirit and you won't give yourself over to a habitual practice of repentance, you will miss out on God's gracious acceptance of you and hide it behind the weight of trying to be a good Christian person.

I'm going to be straight. I'm not interested in that. I want a heart inflamed. I want a life consumed. I want to be overwhelmed and overrun with Jesus. I want to be a stranger and alien. I want to take with me the light of the gospel wherever I go and hold all things lightly, because there's something better. There's just something better. You don't get that if you don't bear fruits in keeping with repentance, because what happens if you're not keeping with repentance is you'll buy the lie of self-righteousness or you'll buy the lie of lowness.

"I screwed up again. There's no way God wants anything to do with me. He can't use people like me. Good Lord! I can't even consistently read my Bible." Okay, I love you. Get over yourself, will you? I know you're uppermost in your own affections, but the sooner you'll get over yourself, the more likely you are to seriously pursue Christ, resting in his acceptance of you based on the merit of Christ and not your own merit.

Or if we don't do that, then we exalt ourselves and we're the opposite of that. We're like, "I don't know what you're talking about. I'm in my Bible every day. Gosh, I'm in my Bible right now." Okay, bud. We all are. Proud of you, but we all are. We all are doing that right now together, but kudos to you. "I have multiple versions open on my iPad." Well, congratulations to you. You don't win.

This is what happens if you're not continually bearing fruits in keeping with repentance. I'm not saying we keep coming to Home Group every week and confessing the same sin over and over and over again. That's not what I'm talking about. That's not repentance. Repentance is to change our mindset, to change our direction, to turn our backs on. Repentance isn't just "Dang it! I did it again." It's longing to be filled with grief over our sin.

The Puritans... I love them. They're quirky. I love them, but I don't know that I want to party with them. They would pray for the gift of tears. They would find these spaces in which they knew they were half-hearted or had sin in their life that wasn't breaking their heart, and they would beg God to break their heart over their sin.

They knew this area of their life, this thing in their heart, this idol they trusted in broke the heart of God, and yet they felt that their heart was *not* broken, so they just asked the Lord, "Break my heart. Break my heart for my sin." What an incredible prayer. **"Bear fruits in keeping with repentance."** The second thing he says... It's an interesting concept. I'm going to teach on it more in the spring when we do our series on the kingdom of God.

He answers this question, "What do we do?" with "Well, if you have two tunics, give one to the brother without it. If you have two coats and there's somebody freezing, give that dude your coat. If you have all kinds of food and somebody is starving, then give that food away." He's not an advocate for socialism. That's not what's happening here. Instead, he's lining us up with the kingdom.

Jesus will quote the prophet Isaiah to John the Baptist when John the Baptist is in prison for this teaching in the wilderness, much of which is against Herod who is kind of an adulterous scumbag. He ends up in prison. He's actually going to get his head cut off per the request of a stripper, basically. Now what you have is Jesus sending word back to John while he was in prison that he's the fulfillment of what Isaiah said would come in the Messiah.

What Jesus quoted is that the kingdom of God is not just spiritual but also physical. In 2017, we think of kingdom dynamics, specifically Christian kingdom dynamics, as something that's spiritual,

spiritual authority, those kinds of things, and yet if you'll read the passage in Isaiah, it's not just that men and women are saved but it's that the poor are cared for. It's the oppressed are set free. It's those in the margins are heard.

At the coming of Jesus Christ and the kingdom being made visible, he calls us not just to spiritual realities but also physical realities. In fact, I want to just praise you as a congregation. Over the course of the last month, you...not just The Village Church organization, although we've done some of this...*you*, as individuals, have given hundreds of thousands of dollars away to the communities around our campuses.

You have fed the poor. You have provided Christmas presents to families in need. You have shared the gospel with refugees. You have put furniture in homes without furniture. You have come alongside the poorest of the poor, and you have spent your money and your energy and your time to push back what's dark. You have lived our story, a people who have received the generosity of God, and have extended it to others.

I've been rejoicing in God over you this week once we started gathering the data of how much you've given away, how much you've sacrificed, what you've done across our campuses. The gospel has gone out to thousands of people, and hundreds of thousands of dollars have left your homes and your wallets and your houses, not in an offering to *us* but to reach the poor, marginalized, oppressed, and broken of the Dallas/Fort Worth Metroplex. That's you living out the kingdom.

Lastly, I love what happens next. Think about this. You have John, and he's preaching in the wilderness. God loves meeting his people in the wilderness. Was it not in the wilderness that we read about in the book of Exodus where God powerfully met his people? Then here at the coming of the Messiah, the fulfillment of all we read in Exodus, they're back out in the wilderness.

Tax collectors went out there, I'm sure with guilty consciences, and Roman soldiers are out there, I'm sure making sure that doesn't turn into a riot or a rebellion. Here they go. They come to church. They're not at church *for* church. They're coming either to ease their guilty conscience or to make sure this doesn't turn into a rebellion against Rome. They hear the Word of God, and it cuts them to the heart, and both the tax collector and the Roman soldier ask the question, "What about us?"

The tax collector says, "Okay, what about me? What am I supposed to do? Surely this good news isn't available to me. I'm a tax collector. What about me?" The Roman soldier says, "Okay, what

about *me*? What do *I* do?" It's surprising to me that John the Baptist, who is not trying to win friends and influence people here, doesn't say to them, "No longer collect taxes for Rome. No longer be a soldier for Rome." That's not what he says.

Instead of that, he builds around their life a call to integration. I'm not using the word *integration* like a psychologist would use the word *integration*. Maybe a better idea or phrase would be to be wholehearted. The tendency of humankind is to compartmentalize things into different areas. So we have our work life, we have our church life, we have our recreation life, we have the life with our guy friends and girl friends, we have a life with our family, and you have these different...

The call here that John the Baptist is making is to integrate all of those under the lordship of the coming Messiah. "Don't extort money. Don't take any more than you're supposed to. The principles you're hearing, the reality of the gospel... Apply those to your life from beginning to end. From the moment the alarm goes off to the moment you lay your head on the pillow at night, make this a thing...*your* thing."

Now I also need to address the aspects of the sermon that John is preaching about brood of vipers and the ax being laid to the root. Here's how I want to do this. After 15 years here, I am continually amazed at how this is like a hobby or something for so many of you. I don't even understand what you're trying to accomplish anymore.

In 1976, coming to church every weekend made sense, because all you had to do was put a little ichthus on your muffler shop, and everybody was like, "Oh, I want a Christian to fix my muffler," and people in the community were like, "Christians can be trusted. Let's get our muffler fixed there." We don't live in that world anymore. It's 2017. You might *lose* business over being a Christian more than you're apt to *gain* business from being a Christian.

One of the things that has helped me from being too self-righteous (I'm still prone to tip that scale every once in a while) is I can feel the powerlessness of so many of you who sit in here every week and listen to me plead with you for eternal things. Some of you sit up close. You take notes. You even lift your hands while we're singing and simultaneously are cheating on your spouse or stealing money or addicted to pornography or addicted to opiates.

There's this kind of front being made, and I'm just not quite sure who you're trying to trick. You certainly haven't tricked God, and who cares what *I* think? Right? Who cares what I think about

you? Does that matter? It shouldn't. I don't get to judge you. When all is said and done, I won't be on a throne going, "Explain to me 2017." I'll be *with* you. Remember? Level ground. On my face, pleading the blood of Christ, because I have nothing in me worthy of salvation but Christ.

So what is this half-heartedness, this giving Jesus 8 percent of us? If you are not hungry to know the Lord or curious to get to the bottom of the Lord, hanging out in church is one of the most dangerous things you could do, and I would encourage you to pick a hobby like hunting or boating rather than this. When you put yourself in a position to hear the Word of God when you have no intent of obeying it, you are actively hardening your own heart toward the very thing that can save you.

When you make the conscious decision, "I'm going to go to church..." Especially a church that's going to preach to you the Word. I'm not trying to win friends and influence people. I'm pleading with you for your soul. If you're going to come in here and bring in the "Eh, whatever," you're just setting your own self up for hardness of heart and eternal damnation. You have a better shot at not doing any of this and letting your life fall to pieces, if God is merciful to you.

What's interesting to know is in Romans 1 the wrath of God is revealed in him just giving you what you want. Isn't that a weird twist on the wrath of God? "Oh, you want wealth instead of me? Okay, here you go. Oh, you want everybody to like you? Here you go. I'll make you the king of the town." How terrifying is the idea that the wrath of God is revealed by giving you the things you want, not just tornadoes and earthquakes and sickness?

If you're like, "Man, this is not a very Christmas message," I'm trying to tell you it is the most Christmas message there is. The path has been made easier for you to come. Are you low? The ground is lifted. Are you self-righteous and the Spirit is revealing that to you? Praise God. Just come on in. Are you crooked? There is nothing but crooked people. There's not. Are you rough around the edges? Take a look at who Jesus picks for his team over and over and over again. It's almost like that's a prerequisite.

So, on Monday morning, my guess is Norah will be up first. It'll be right around 3:20 in the morning or something like that. We'll head to the living room. I will immediately make a pot of French press coffee, and Lauren will probably do the cinnamon roll thing, where you pop the can and whatever. We'll do that, and I'll turn on the Netflix fire thing, even though...

I don't know if you've seen this. We have a shot at a wintry mix. You should pray that in. You should pray with me that we get that wintry mix. I know we're Texans and we're used to 73. We should rebel this year and just ask the Spirit of God to let it snow, let it snow, let it snow. We have a shot right now. It might be the day after, but let's just hope for it.

Then we're going to open presents. I'm going to begin to feel the anxiety of nailing that cook with the prime rib. I don't know if you've ever felt the anxiety of "There are 30 people coming to the house. The primary thing we're eating is on me." I'm going to feel that weight. Then I'm going to nail it. I'm going to char it perfectly at the end, let tongues break out like Pentecost at our table, and then the afternoon will give way to Christmas afternoon life.

We'll begin to think about cleaning up. We'll begin to wonder when they're going to pick up the Christmas tree, how you do that. We'll try to find a lost toy that was opened just hours previously, and another Christmas will be in the books and another year closer to the second advent of Christ, where there will be no comingling of sorrow and joy. Until then we wait. Let's pray.

Father, thank you for today. You're generous and kind to us. I ask for my brothers and sisters who are in a low spot. Encourage their hearts. For those who are self-righteous, that you would reveal to us our self-righteousness. I ask that in your mercy, God, you would lead us back to bearing fruit in keeping with repentance, that you would, in the way only you can, soften our hearts.

We want to be wholehearted men and women. We want to belong fully to you. Help us even understand what that means. What does it look like to be fully surrendered to you? In flame our hearts with zeal. Spirit of the living God, let us walk in power and in hope. We need you. Help us. It's for your beautiful name, amen.