



## Advent (Part 3) – An Unexpected Breakthrough

Matt Chandler – December 16, 2018

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[Video]

Hi, Pastor Matt here. Thank you so much for either streaming or downloading this sermon. I pray that every week you're challenged by the Word of God, you're built up in his love, and the Word of God kind of gets in you and rearranges things and draws your affections up to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

I want to remind you, as always, that although I'm so glad you want to hear what I have to say this week, or *we* have to say this week, this is never meant to substitute God's good plan for you to be in a community of faith where the Word of God is preached and proclaimed. I want to encourage you to use this like a vitamin, not like a meal, so that you belong to a community of faith where you're being shaped by being known, by using your gifts, by receiving the Word, by partaking in the sacraments, and by walking faithfully in accordance with the Scriptures.

Then this is something you're listening to while you run or you're watching when you have a few minutes. I just want to make sure we frame what this is and what it should not be. With that said, one of the things The Village Church wants to do is the things that are created here by the grace of God, we want to give those away. That's podcasts and vodcasts. That's family discipleship curriculum. That's Bible study curriculum. What we've tried to do for over a decade is just whatever we create here we want to give away.

To do that, though, we rely on the donations and generosity of those who believe in what we're doing and who have benefited from the things that have been created here. So before you dive into what I'm sure is going to be a 45- to 50-minute sermon, I just wanted to encourage you. If you have grown, if you have benefited from our resources, would you consider being a part of the team that helps this engine continue to produce and create biblical, creative, and practical discipleship

curriculum for men and women of all ages and all stations? If you'd pray about that and consider that, that would be amazing. Thank you so much. Enjoy the Word of God proclaimed.

[End of video]

Good afternoon. If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab those. We're going to be in Luke, chapter 2, looking at verses 8-14. One of the things I feel like I have tried to say ad nauseam for the last decade is that God's economics, or the kingdom's economics, are different than, say, *our* economics. We do things differently than God does them. That's honestly far more significant than most of us think.

If you can think to Jesus' Sermon on the Mount or how God operates, it becomes clear very quickly that the things *we* value and the way *we* think things get done are not the way God tends to do them. Jesus is going to say, "Blessed are the poor. Blessed are the meek. Blessed are you when people persecute you." That is not our economy, is it? We are, "Blessed are the rich. Blessed are you when no one says anything negative about you. Blessed are you who have 'likes' on Instagram."

We live in a world where these things aren't our economy. We don't see persecution as something that like, "Hey, I'm being blessed here. Someone dislikes me, and not because I'm a jerk but because I'm so in love with Jesus that I'm otherworldly, I'm other than, I'm different than." If you watch how God gets things done in the Bible, it's small over fast, weak over power, slow over speed. His economy is different than our economy, and that shows up in *this* passage in particular.

One of the things we have to be careful of as Christians in 2018... Last week, out of 1 Peter, I tried to point out that the prophets think you and I have a very privileged seat in the history of redemption, if you were here last week and you remember that. If you weren't, I'll just very quickly say you and I live in a period of time where we can see the fulfillment of Christ's coming and the mission of God given to Abram in Genesis 12 and 15 and the outflow of the mission of God reaching to the ends of the earth.

We see it because we're in Dallas worshiping Jesus. We have a privileged position. The prophets didn't get to see that. They saw it was coming and prophesied so you and I might rejoice in our privileged seat. One of the problems in that privileged seat is we will oftentimes read back the Scriptures through what we know right now that they certainly did not know then. So when we come to a familiar passage like the one we're about to read, we make all of these assumptions that

aren't true, and then we can miss out on the richness of the text. With that said, let's look at this together in Luke 2, starting in verse 8.

**"And in the same region [the region around Bethlehem] 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!'"**

Now, I want to chat. You have an explosion in the darkness of the sky outside of the city of Bethlehem, and because you and I are in 2018 and many of us have been in church our whole lives, we've been led to believe because the prophets said this would happen that there was this great expectation that this was going to happen around this time. That's not true. There is nothing in the Bible and nothing in the intertestamental period...

That's that one page in your Bible between the Old Testament and New Testament where God is silent. That doesn't mean God is not working or active in those 400 years; it means there was no official prophet saying, "Thus saith the Lord." We know God is speaking because we know what happens when Mary comes to the temple to dedicate Jesus. You have these people who have been given these words by the Holy Spirit that they wouldn't die until they saw Jesus. So God is speaking; we just don't have the official office of prophet.

Four hundred years of silence. Nobody on that cold night was going to be going, "Oh, the Messiah is going to be here any minute now. The Messiah is going to be here any minute now." If you're like, "Well, I don't know about that," okay, well, how about *this*? We have all sorts of things in *our* Bible saying that Christ is going to return anytime now. Anybody expecting that that's going to be today, living like that's going to be today, expecting that to happen tonight in the night sky? We have more information than *they* did, and most of *us* don't live expectant.

So when this sky blows up, when the kingdom of God breaks into the normal, it does so in an unexpected time. They're not expecting... I guarantee you the shepherds weren't expecting out in the middle of nowhere for the sky to light up with what's called *heavenly hosts*. Not only do we see God's economy at work here, but you also begin to see a bit of a theology of breakthrough take place. You have God showing up in an *unexpected time*.

I want to share a little bit of my testimony with you. If you've heard it before, I'm sorry. I only have one. I can't make up anything. It's just the one I have. I was powerfully converted. I was running with my crew in the spring and partying, and then I got radically changed. I came back to school in the fall with an "I Heart Jesus" shirt on. I'm handing out tracts and inviting everybody to a thing called *JAM*, which stood for Jesus and Me.

People thought I'd joined a cult. They were like, "What happened to Chandler, man?" I'm like, "Jesus loves you. Come to church with me." It freaked people out, but here's what happened to me. Although I deeply loved Jesus, my background and some of the spaces I had been in had me still struggling with some things. I loved the Lord. I'll argue that until Christ returns and validates it for anybody who doubts it, but I was significantly struggling with certain addictions.

I had a good heart. I would do these things like, "I'm going to go tonight, but I'm just going to make sure everybody gets home safe. I'm going to make sure..." Then I'd blow it, and before I knew it I'd be right back into old patterns of sin. The church I was a part of just didn't feel safe to let that be known. I was in that place where everybody is smiling and everybody is like, "Jesus is awesome."

That will create a deep level of shame in people, to look around and go, "I'm the only one struggling like this. I'm the only one doubting like this. I'm the only one in this fight. Everyone else is just communing with Christ and free from struggle, and here I am stuck." That season was one of deep shame for me. I learned how to live a duplicitous life. I learned there was a time to put on Christian Matt, cape in the wind. Sit up front. Take my notes.

You didn't raise your hand in a Baptist church. That's called *disruption*, sowing seeds of disunity. You keep those hands down, bro, and you keep that "Amen..." You have one "Amen" a service. You'd better use it well and then shut up and let him talk. I knew that space, and then I would get myself into trouble in these other spaces. Then I would feel deep shame, so I'd kind of run from the Lord other than the outward, "Yeah, let me go to church still," but I was far from God.

Then I would have some Disciple Now or some youth camp or something like that, and I'd hear the gospel again. I'd believe it. I'd come down front. "O God, I'm never going to do that again. I'm just going to trust you, and I'm going to give my life to you." Then I would do really well for, like, eight to ten weeks, sometimes six months. I'm a pretty disciplined guy. I could control it...until I couldn't. That followed me all the way into college.

In college, I was invited to this conference called *Passion* in 1997. I went, and I'm with friends. Here's what I want. I want to sit next to my crew and next to that girl. Oh, y'all are going to judge somebody now. Right? That was what I was doing. "I want to sit next to my crew where I can see her." So I got that seat, and Louie Giglio came out. He's wearing skinny jeans and a scarf. It's like 107 outside. He preached, and it was amazing. I thought, "Man, that's incredible."

A guy named Jeff came out. He had a sleeve of tattoos, just way grimmer than I'll ever be with my Howdy Doody self. He's talking about the nations and the glory of God going to the nations, and I felt provoked. Then this old man in a tweed jacket came out. I felt like, "Who let this dude in? Who is *this* guy?" You've got skinny jeans/scarf and you've got tattooed up. You're reaching Gen X-ers. (That's what I am.) And then tweed jacket man?

John Piper came up and put his hands on the side of that pulpit and preached a sermon that to this day roasted me. I mean, I could not physically move at the end of that sermon, and the only reason I know what was said is I've been able to go back afterward and listen. The Spirit of the living God put a bullet in the majority of my duplicity that night, unexpected. I had no idea it was coming for me. Just showed up at a conference, because it was the rhythm in which I'd been operating. The Spirit of God showed up at an unexpected time and changed the course of my life. He still does this to this day: breakthrough.

Now I want to make sure we're tracking with one another. Some of the most significant change in your life is going to occur over the period of decades, slowly, without you feeling it or knowing it. What that means is for 10 years you'll be like, "Oh, I don't feel like I'm growing. I don't feel like I'm growing. I feel like I'm stuck. I want to love God more." Then all of a sudden, 10 years later, you'll look back at you 10 years ago and be like, "Oh my gosh. He has been so gracious to me."

In the moment it kind of feels like a fight. Anybody? I can tell you as a soon-to-be 45-year-old that some of the more significant transformative acts of God in my life I haven't felt anything. I was just up early reading my Bible, and I was trying to be obedient. I was walking in community, and I was

showing my cards and letting people in, and I was confessing and repenting and moving forward, and God was doing more than I knew he was doing. Then, in the midst of all of that, at an unexpected time, breakthrough.

It's not that all my duplicity fell off on that day, but it *is* that my stomach for it was put to death on that floor in snot and tears, so when I get a sense of it now I want to kill it forever, and I drag it back into the light and find myself feeling aggression toward my own flesh and toward spiritual realities. I feel provoked toward spiritual violence, not toward myself but to my own flesh and to those that would tempt me and draw me in that direction.

That was '97 for me: unexpected time. I'm in college. I'm growing in my knowledge of the Word of God. I am switching over my major from political science to biblical studies, and God in his compassion just said, "Enough," and he met me in an unexpected time. We never know when God is going to show up. That's what makes this really cool. You just never know when God is going to show up.

It's not just unexpected time; it's also *unexpected places*. Once again, you and I, because we're in 2018, are like, "Bethlehem, of course. O little town of Bethlehem. I totally get it. The whole world is looking at Bethlehem and going, 'Yes! This is the spot.'" The truth is there's nothing in the Bible or in the intertestamental writings of the Jews where there was any expectation that Bethlehem was the joint. They didn't get that until Christ did the work of illumination on the road to Emmaus.

The Scriptures needed to be illuminated post-ascension and the sending of the Holy Spirit. That's when all of a sudden we're like, "Bethlehem. There it is. Oh my gosh." Bethlehem when Jesus is born is barely a village. It's off of...not *on...off* of a first-century highway, from Jerusalem to Hebron in the south. The best way to explain what Bethlehem was is to talk about a town west of here called Thurber.

Anybody know Thurber? Go ahead. Raise your hand if you know Thurber. All right. Let's chat about Thurber. Thurber's current population is 48. If you know it, you know it probably because there's a SmokeStack there that's also a pretty good restaurant, and you stop there on your way to somewhere else. No one is like, "I'm heading to Thurber." You stop in Thurber on your way to somewhere else.

This is Bethlehem in the first century, although its history is magnificent. You have David. You have Boaz. If you're not a church folk, you're like, "Bo who?" Don't worry about it. Boaz is amazing, though. Read up. It's an incredible story. The book of Ruth. You have this long history, but in the first century it's a village off of a highway. It's Thurber.

Here's what I wonder if you know about Thurber. From 1888 to 1921, Thurber was the largest coal mine in the state of Texas and, depending on which historian you read, had tens of thousands to a hundred thousand in population at the time. Now it's 48 with a SmokeStack restaurant where you usually stop on your way to hunt to eat something. At least that's where we stop on the way to hunt. (Don't email me about that. We use the meat and the antlers.)

God shows up in an unexpected place. It's Bethlehem. Nobody knew it was Bethlehem until post-ascension. So you have breakthrough happening, kingdom of God breakthrough, lights shining in darkness, Devil being destroyed, salvation entering the world at an unexpected time and in an unexpected place. This is how breakthrough works. Breakthrough most often shows up in unexpected places.

I talked about going to Passion in '97, but oftentimes, breakthrough shows up in those places where there's resistance in our spirit to who Christ is as King of our lives. I'll use this example, because I think it works well for this idea of the Spirit of God showing up in an unexpected place and there being breakthrough.

A friend of mine at this church... He has been here for a while, a leader, a godly, incredible man, a business guy. He travels. He got stuck in pornography. He just got stuck in it, on the road by himself, and it was devouring him and devouring things in his marriage without either of them even knowing it. His testimony is one that he was in a hotel room on a business trip and had watched and had been in the darkest thing of it all, and after everything, the shame washing over him, the Holy Spirit showed up and just broke him.

His testimony is he just laid on that hotel floor (which is gross) and in snot and tears could not put himself back together, and Jesus broke the bondage of addiction to pornography in that man. He was able to go home and tell his wife. His wife had some things to say, as she's able to say, so they had to call some friends. It was a long work-through, but then redemption and recovery and spiritual power infused into his life.

But where did it happen? Mine happened at Passion. You have epic worship. You have skinny jeans/scarf, tats, tweed jacket. You might even think, "Yeah, probably there," but not in a hotel room after you give yourself over to your addiction in the midst of such horrific shame that you feel crushed by it. Yet I want to keep pressing you that that thing you're most ashamed of is where Jesus wants to work. That's where breakthrough happens, not by you burying it even deeper. *That's* the spot. *That's* where, not when you keep pushing it down and being quiet about it.

That's that place where we need to ask the Spirit of God to come and to move and to break and to work and do what with your best efforts you can't. Come on! Anybody here go, "I have struggled with something I have not been able to beat with my own discipline"? Anybody? Maybe it's not now, because you're awesome now, but back in the day. Yeah, this is part of it.

The Spirit of God and the glory of Christ and the power of the kingdom show up in unexpected places and unexpected times, and on top of that, to *unexpected people*. The shepherds. Goodness. If you're going to do this... Here's kingdom economics. If you're throwing your kid a party... You're like, "Oh man. Firstborn Son of God, Jesus. Let's throw a party. Who are we going to invite? I've got some ideas. Let's start with the shepherds."

"Aren't they thieves?"

"Yep."

"Aren't they kind of filthy?"

"Oh, absolutely."

"Drunkards?"

"Probably."

A group of men who live out on the frontier... Do you know what's outside of Thurber? Me either. What's on the outside of Bethlehem? Yep. So if you have a group of men that what they do is they're out together around a fire by themselves for long stretches of time, my guess is it's not a haven for righteousness, that around the fire they're not reading the Torah together. The shepherds were

outcasts. They were considered thieves. They were not welcomed into normal society, which is why they tended to stay out for extended periods of time.

In God's economy, who needs to hear first that there's good news of great joy for all peoples? Well, if it's truly for all peoples, then you need to start with the shepherds, because they're the ones who think they're outside of it. The good news of great joy is for *all* people, not just the put-together ones, not just the strong.

Is everybody getting these Christmas cards in the mail? How happy does everyone look in their Christmas cards? You don't pick the picture that's a true representation of what might be going on. Like the dog wilding out. Maybe it took a dump right there in front of the pictures. Is that too much? You scowling at your wife, your kids angry that you made them get off their device in order to be a part of this picture. No one puts *that* on and shows it. No, it's us at our best.

Here's what that does. I'm not saying take a Christmas card with your worst. That would be crazy. I *am* saying that Christmas card puts pressure on us, not just the giver but also the receiver. "Oh gosh. Look at how pretty everybody's family is. Look at how together everybody's family is. Look at how happy everybody else is." The good news of great joy for all peoples is for the weak and the broken and the frail and the exhausted, and this is the place that breakthrough happens.

I would love for us to eventually get to the place where we understand the people of God are messy. Gosh, they're messy. They're being sanctified mostly over long periods of time, which means at any given moment the people of God are messier than we want them to be. We ourselves are messier than we want to be. Amen? Gosh, *I'm* messier than I want to be. I'd like to be farther along than I am, but I am secure in his process of growing me into the fullness of Jesus Christ. It just moves more slowly than I would like for it to move.

I love this quote by Robert Farrar Capon. He says, "Grace cannot prevail...until our lifelong certainty that someone is keeping score has run out of steam and collapsed." That is awesome. Grace cannot prevail, grace can't be our default mode of living in the joy of knowing we are freely and fully and forever forgiven until we can get past the notion that someone is keeping score. "How did they do this year? I wonder how they did today. Did they read their Bible? I guess they didn't. Well, that's a *D*, a spiritual *D* from on high." This crushes us.

Joy is found in the fact that breakthrough happens among an unexpected community of people: us. If this is true, if this is how it works, what does this mean for you? I'd like to say something that nobody says. It's not bad. You'll be all right. My guess is that most of us can maybe accept grace from Jesus and most of us are pretty good, in fact, almost demanding and entitled of grace from others, but most of us really struggle being gracious to ourselves. We should be more. We should be farther along. We shouldn't struggle with that. We shouldn't be weak like this. Says who? Who said you should be that? How's that working for you?

Those questions lead only to self-condemnation. Satan would love to fight you in the dark, and in the dark he is going to kick the trash out of you, but you drag his scrawny self into the light. We already covered it in John. The light has shone in the darkness, and the darkness will not overcome it. What does this mean for you? What if the thought, "I should be better than, I should be more than, I should be farther along" gets replaced with what's true in the Word of God, that Jesus has been for us? Our righteousness is from him, not from ourselves. What if we could punch back with truth?

Then another step farther. What does this mean for the people you love, for people who seem beyond the saving work of Christ? If there's one thing the Bible and Christian history teaches us it's that God's economy looks for that place where you're not guessing, and that's where he pours it out. Shepherds. Have you ever studied the history of revival? Did you know there was a massive revival among the Welsh? In Wales! Do you even know where I'm talking about in the world?

You can't even understand them, yet the Spirit of God poured out in such a significant way that a revival was born all over Europe that eventually trickled over into some of the great awakenings here in the United States. The Welsh. In Acts 29 we have a guy who has planted a couple of churches there. His name is Dai. It stresses me out to try to understand what he's saying to me. I just have to stare really hard and then ask for... I need context clues.

This is the place where the Spirit of God poured out in such a profound way to push back darkness and establish light, like the shepherds, like Uncle Bob's house, like that place you're thinking can't be there. Maybe you're even thinking, "It can't be *my* home." "I'm not a good enough parent. I haven't done *this*. I'm not *this*. I struggle with *this*." Okay, yeah. And do you know who's not surprised by that? The one who showed himself first to shepherds at an unexpected time in an unexpected place among unexpected people.

I want to do something a little bit different today. It'll be fine. It's a little bit more charismatic, but I think we'll be safe. Why don't you bow your heads and close your eyes for me. Just a quick question. If that makes you uncomfortable, you can awkwardly stare at me. I can handle that. I just want to ask a question. I want to give you space to consider the Word and think about your own lives. Even if you're watching here on one of our other campuses and you're watching it on video, I'm talking to you also.

How many of you would say, "The bondage of sin and death has been broken in me in that I know I'm a Christian, and I'm in the Bible as best I know how and I'm praying as best I know how and I'm showing up to services and I'm in community as best I know how, and if I'm really honest, even as I'm trusting that God works in those things in slow ways over a period of time, I find in me some struggles that I am desperate for the Spirit of God to break through on"?

If that's you, would you raise your hand right now and just go, "I need breakthrough in my life"? Keep your hands up. Here's what I want. Go ahead and open up your eyes and look around. Oh my gosh! It's all of us. Wait. What? No way! It only had to be a few weary souls among us. No, no, no. What if *this* is what it's like to be a Christian? What if what it means to be a Christian is to trust the long-game process and that we're secure in it and then simultaneously cry out and pray and plead for breakthrough?

What if *this* is what it means to be Christian? Do you think you could celebrate that a little bit more, rest in that a little bit more, rejoice in that a little bit more versus looking around and going, "Oh gosh, that guy is so godly; I'm such a bum"? What if you're both bums? "Oh, I'm such a terrible mom. She's such a great mom." What if neither of you are great moms and God is going to bless both of you because he's good, not because of your skills?

Gosh, this is what it means to be the children of God: trusting the process, getting in the Bible as best we can. Some of us can dive in, and we have our little Hebrew/Greek skills, and we're just working it around. Do you know that God doesn't love that guy any more than the guy who has *The Message* and is like, "I like these words; they're simple"? You know that, right? God doesn't love the guy who knows Greek and Hebrew more than he loves the man or woman who needs a paraphrase to understand it. Trusting the process, praying for breakthrough.

Here's what I want to do. This is the charismatic part. I think we're going to be fine. If we're not, that would be even cooler. Why don't you cup your hands and put them in front of you. We're just going to ask. I'm going to pray for us. I'm going to pray that the Spirit of God would do that breakthrough.

Whatever it is, whatever you want him to break loose in you, free up in you, create space, I'm just going to ask him to do it. Maybe he will. It's an unexpected time. My guess is you didn't show up today thinking we were doing *this*. It's an unexpected time. It's Advent. My guess is you weren't thinking I was taking the shepherd in *this* direction. You're an unexpected people. Let's ask. Let's see.

Father, I bless these men and women in the name of Jesus Christ. They have confessed that they love you as best they know how for where they are in this season. Father, they're in their Bibles as best they know how for where they are in this season. They're praying as best they know how in this season, and you rejoice in that.

I pray you help them believe it. I don't know what's going on in those hands cupped in front of them, but I ask, Spirit of the living God, that you pour yourself into the hearts, minds, and souls of these men and women and you break it loose, whatever it is. We're trusting in the process.

If we don't get free from whatever this is in our hands for another 40 years, you are good and faithful and kind and generous and beautiful, but we're asking because you're able in this season for an outpouring of your Spirit that breaks loose in us this bondage to corruption. Help us. Set us free. We love you. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.

It's the week before Christmas. Your flesh will be tested this week. It's going to be chaos out there. You're going to be prone to forget everything I just said by tonight. The coming of Jesus Christ makes this breakthrough not just possible but probable for the sons and daughters of God. We ask. We seek. We expect. We wait. It's not just possible; it's probable. Let me pray for us, and we'll sing.

Father, thank you, thank you, thank you for your grace, for your mercy, for your kindness and your care. We thank you that no one is keeping score, that you have paid our bill in full. Help us. Remind us. Root these things in our hearts. Haunt us with sentences, phrases, and ideas for the rest of our lives.

Father, maybe the breakthrough comes at an unexpected time, later today, maybe tomorrow, maybe Christmas morning, maybe Christmas Eve, maybe just driving in our car on the way. I just ask that you light us up and you do it for the glory of your name and the beauty of your kingdom. We thank you that you break through. We thank you for our salvation, the greatest breakthrough any of us will ever have. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.

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