

If you have your Bibles, why don't you go ahead and grab them? If you don't have a Bible with you, there will be a hardback black one somewhere around you if you would grab that. Two weeks ago before "Icemageddon" (or whatever we ended up calling that thing) happened, we had started our *Advent* series. What we looked at two weeks ago is that God had really made a promise very early on that he was going to intervene in the brokenness that is the world you and I know. Just to be clear, you and I are not victims of that brokenness but actually are active members of a rebellion against our Creator.

We are the way we are not because Daddy didn't hug us enough but rather we have rebellious hearts. Those rebellious hearts were present from our first breath of air. When we talk about the brokenness of the world, we're not talking about systems and structures alone but rather you and I and the brokenness that has occurred as we have actively rebelled against our Creator, which is also why we are unable to fix what has gone wrong on earth.

For every scientific advance, for every kind of growth in education, for every type of economic swell of resources, we simply reveal our hearts are wicked. We simply reveal our hearts are wicked! That might be offensive to you, but throughout the history of man, deep thinkers have pointed out this reality. If you want to go back to the Greeks, the Greeks pointed this out with the god Prometheus. The god Prometheus was who gave man fire. He saw man was in darkness and he was cold. He thought, "Let me give him the gift of fire," so the gift of fire was given to man.

Zeus grows enraged with Prometheus because man is a moron who did not know how to use the fire. He just kept burning himself and burning things down and made the world far worse. So Zeus condemned Prometheus to be shackled to a rock where an eagle came and ate out his liver, but his liver would grow back every day. You know, it was that chipper kind of story there out of the Greeks. What they're saying in that moment is what we have known biblically to be true from the beginning.

Man will not fix what's wrong with man because the systems, structures, and advances man makes, he makes with a broken and wicked heart. There will be a bent to his structures and systems. There will be a bent to his romantic notions that, when all is said and done, will simply reveal the brokenness of his heart. If you think about that, how quick are we to jump on the, "This will be the solution to everything. This is going to drive out darkness. This will start us anew"?

Right? All these kind of big vision-oriented things. "This is what's going to work." Yet time after time after time throughout human history, it has betrayed us. Simple little things are... At one point, we thought it would be a great idea to use asbestos to insulate stuff. At the time, it seemed brilliant. We're like, "Do you know what will hold this paint together? Lead. We should do that." Right?

These are just simple things. There are more complex things. For example, there are simple, everyday medicines that can cure things that kill people all over the world, but you can't get medicine into the hands of the poorest of the poor because of the greed that drives human hearts and structures. The structures might be in place, but the brokenness of man's heart keeps him from the ability to see those romantic notions occur because man is involved and men are broken.

The promise God has made is to intervene into the brokenness of man that will eventually heal the structures and systems that eventually bring about upon the second coming of Jesus Christ the new heavens and the new earth. The Bible paints a picture that what we're in right now is like the pains of childbirth that will give birth to a new reality that I don't have time to unpack in this sermon. That's what we covered, that a Savior was coming. God was going to send a Savior, and that Savior was going to fix this brokenness.

Then I let the cat out of the bag and just shocked everybody. I said, "That Savior is Jesus." There were audible gasps. Then last week before we all got iced in, we were scheduled to talk about the birth of Jesus Christ. Then this weekend we were going to do the shepherds and the angels. Let's go back and just cover the birth just so we can read this. Then we'll combine two sermons in one. If that makes you nervous, don't be. We're on it.

Luke, chapter 2. We're going to start in verse 1. **"In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria."** Now let's just stop for a second. I don't need to unpack that verse, but I do want you to know its historicity. The Bible doesn't read like myth. It doesn't read like some sort of religious, "...in the sky, and then there were angels who..." No, no, no. Caesar Augustus...historically, verifiable. First registration (not second).

You know the first registration by the one that occurred when Quirinius was the governor of Syria. This isn't idealistic stuff in the sky. It's rooted in history and fact verifiable. There was a registration that occurred under Caesar Augustus when Quirinius was the governor of Syria. Verse 3: **"And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed, who was with child."**

And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn." There are a couple of things I want you to see in this text, and I want to kind of put the big kind of "what you need to see in these verses" out before you. All right. There are a couple of things. One, I want you to kind of marvel at how God uses governmental authorities for his own purposes.

God did not just luck out here. God was not going, "How in the world am I going to get Joseph from Galilee to Bethlehem because I made that promise through Micah in Micah 5:2? Should I use a dream or a vision? Oh, do you know what? Never mind. Caesar came through. Thanks, bro." Here's the weightiness behind this idea. Are you ready? No one gets to decide whether or not their life glorifies God. No one.

Everyone's life will bring glory to God. We will glorify God by being trophies of his grace, or we will glorify God by being justfully and rightly judged and condemned, be his perfection for our rebellion. Even that hardened, angry, "Forget you, God" is going to bring glory to God with his life. That's what makes the thing so heartbreaking, that the most embittered, angry, "I hate God! I despise him!" is, with their actions, bringing glory to the One they so passionately hate.

No one gets to choose whether or not they'll glorify God. You're doing it right now. If in your head right now you're saying nothing but obscene things toward me you're still glorifying God in your rebellion toward listening, hearing, and submitting to his Word. I can make you angrier, but then again, at whom are you shaking your fist? Not me. I have no real authority. It's not going to hurt my feelings.

Then from there, the second thing I want you to notice... I want to point this out. I don't tend to get involved in things like this, but I was just so horrified that I felt like I need to this week as I prepped. What we read in this text is Joseph and Mary are from Galilee, and Joseph, in particular, is in the line of David. We know he is not just Jewish, but he is *super*-Jewish.

The reason I'm saying that is (God bless her), earlier this week, Megyn Kelly on *Fox News* said Jesus was white. I don't know if you saw this. I mean, it's been all over the place, but she was talking about how Santa is white. It's a historic fact that Santa and Jesus are just white, and we just have to deal with that. I just was so stupefied that someone could say that.

I've spoken publicly enough to know there are times you say things you wish you could have back. I only hope and pray Megyn is like, "Golly! Mulligan, please." Because finding a white dude in Galilee in the first century would be like finding Bigfoot riding a unicorn across a rainbow. There's not going to be one there. It's not going to happen.

We know Jesus is not a white guy. He is not blonde. He does not have his hair feathered. That's not who he is! He is distinctively Jewish. What we do know from the Bible is he was not all that good to look at. I mean, even the prophet Isaiah said there was nothing about his physical form that made us think he might be God in the flesh. That's for free. It doesn't even have a point. I just felt like I had to address it after Megyn. I was just like, "I can't believe someone said that."

Like street level, I mean, okay. I mean, you hear stuff on the street all the time. It's just absurd. But someone who has a show and says, "Jesus was white...a historic fact"? What book? "Whitey Whiterton" by the White Guys? I mean, that's the only book that could ever be said in. Jesus is not a white guy, because he is from Galilee. His parents are from Galilee, and they're of the line of David.

Here's what I want you to see here in this text. I want you to watch how all the promises of God are finding their *yes* in Jesus. Remember two weeks ago when we read the text out of Isaiah, chapter 9, where it says, **"The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light"**? He is talking about Galilee. Then we read in Micah, chapter 5, verse 2, when it said Bethlehem was the smallest of all the towns of Judah and that from Bethlehem, there would raise up One who would rule Israel, who was from Ancient of Days. He would be in the line of David. He would be acquainted with poverty. He would eat curds and honey.

That's the diet of a peasant. Are you looking at who Mom and Dad are? I mean, if we're writing the script... If I just gave you blank pieces of paper and I said, "Hey, draw out the script of the coming Savior who is going to push back all that is dark in human hearts and in structural positioning among mankind. Write the script," let me tell you who you're *not* picking to be his parents: a broke carpenter from a ghetto little town that has been invaded and burned to the ground hundreds of times, and you're not picking this little girl, Mary, who, at best, is a 15-year-old maid in a home, a borderline slave in the first century.

Yet out of this poverty... They're not people of position. The reason we know they're not people of position is (and you'll see this in other places in the teachings of Jesus) this is a high honor culture right here. We don't operate anymore in a high honor culture. What I mean by that is even in the last 20 years, it started to erode. There's less and less honor being shown to those to whom honor is due.

Almost completely gone is the, "Yes, sir," "No, sir," "Yes, ma'am," "No, ma'am" reality. Almost completely gone is the, "Mr. Chandler," "Pastor Chandler," "Mrs. Chandler." Almost all of that is gone. It's like, "What's up, Matty?" It's like, "Wow! I'll punch you in your throat. Who are you calling *Matty*?" What I mean by it is like my daddy (maybe it was the Navy in him) but even if you gave me permission to call you, "David," my dad was like, "Mr. David. That's the best I'll give you. That's a grown man."

We're a low honor context, but they're high honor. Here's what this means. If Mary and Joseph had any semblance...just a *grain*...of respectability among their peers, there would have been room somewhere. Remember Jesus' story? When you come into a banqueting feast, sit yourself at the lowest seat at the table and let them go, "Hey, no, no, no. That's not where you sit. You sit up here." Don't sit yourself at the head so the host has to go, "Hey, bro. Why are you sitting there? You belong down there."

It's better for you to be moved up than kicked down. In this culture, if Mary and Joseph have just an inkling of respect or upward mobility, someone else is getting kicked out of the inn so they can come in. What we see in the story is there's just nothing about this couple that's powerful at all. In fact, the Son of God, the Savior of the world, is wrapped up and laid in a manger.

My 10-year-old daughter is all about horses. We've been around them a little bit this year. It's nasty. There's nothing in the barn that goes, "I'd like to lay down in here. I'd like to just make myself a little bed here and just get a nap." No! The Creator of all things, the One who spoke all things into being, is swaddled and laid in a stank, filthy manger. See, there's something going on with Mary and Joseph and Jesus being born in the barn and not in the palace or in the inn that becomes significant when we consider kingdom economics, but we'll talk about that more in a second.

The thing I want you to note by and large about these first few verses of chapter 2 is God is a God who keeps his promises, even the small ones that don't seem to maybe matter all that much. Let me tell you why that should move us and why I think it doesn't. The fact that God keeps his promises to his people should move our hearts toward worship, move our hearts toward gladness, and anchor us in confidence. The reason it doesn't is two-fold.

First, there is an ignorance about what all God has promised. Second, you don't tend to marvel at the promises of God if you don't think you need them. See, you and I have the ability to distract ourselves from how fragile we are. We have the ability with trinkets and toys, vacations and hobbies, to distract ourselves from how fragile we are. You and I live under a near-constant illusion of control, that we control things, that we protect things, that we can keep everybody safe, that we have it all together, and it is a mirage. You are so weak, so frail, so easy to destroy that it can happen at any minute and come from any direction.

How many of you have been sick this year? Of those who have been sick this year, how many of you take vitamins (like one-a-day vitamins)? How many, when you first started feeling sick, started drinking 8,000 milligrams of that Emergen-C stuff a day? How did that work out for you? You are lying on the bathroom floor asking God to kill you. That's how that ended, right? So here we are. "I'm going to control this. I'm going to be healthy."

There are good things about stewarding your body, about working out, about eating good food. All of that is smart and right and, I think, pleases the heart of God. It will not elongate your life. Your days are secure in the Lord. All the days God has for you were gifted to you from the beginning. No one dies early. No one! So control is, "I'm going to eat spinach and blueberries and do Pilates, and I'll never get sick." Wrong! You're just wrong!

"If I just make sure the brake pads are set and I don't let my kids do *this* and I manage *this* and if I just do *this* or *that*..." It's all an illusion. You don't control it. Because you think you do, you don't marvel at the promises of God, because who needs the promises of God? We're our own sovereign. We'll nail this thing. This is why people who have suffered cling so tightly to the promises of God and find him to be so gracious in their suffering.

I believe it was C.S. Lewis who said the prostitute is in no danger of thinking her life turned out like she desired it to. In this area, in this place, with our nice houses and a couple of cars and just a little bit of money we can play with on top of paying our bills... We're a very young congregation. I mean, how difficult is it to know we *do* need to trust in those promises? Because right now we have this. There are more weddings than funerals. There are more babies than cancer.

I mean, this is the world you and I currently live in, but if you live long enough, the illusion of control will evaporate. That's why I think it's so important for us to know these promises now, cling to these promises now, trust in God's promises now. God keeps his promises...even the small ones. You'll need that in the day of trouble.

Now let's get to this kind of kingdom economics here that occurs next, 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."** Understatement.

"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!' When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.'

And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them."

There are a couple of things I want to point out out of this text rather quickly to you. The first is the only group that makes sense in this entire narrative is the angels. They are the only ones! If we're talking about Savior of the world healing the human heart and pushing back darkness, the only ones that make sense are the angels. It's not Joseph and Mary, broke peasants from Galilee. It's definitely not these shepherds.

Shepherds in this period of time were nomads. They were almost universally known as thieves and really men of ill repute, men who would not have been trusted, men who would have been pulled out of the TSA line randomly and searched yet again. They were not well respected. They were despised. I would even say *rejected*.

Just to get your head around the scene here, it was commonplace in the first century when you had your firstborn son to hire a herald to pronounce the good news. Why? Because this culture viewed the firstborn son as a blessing because the lineage was intact. It was viewed God was blessing your family if he gave you a firstborn son. Upon the birth of a son, a family would hire (if they had any means at all) some sort of herald.

If they only had a little bit, it would be a little herald. If they had big money, it would be monstrous, kind of like we do now with pictures. You take pictures of your baby, and then you mail them out to people. People who have millions and millions of dollars do that bigger than you. We just posted ours on Twitter. "New baby." Other people are like full-on mail out, with gold leaf into the paper, right? I mean, you have these ways of heralding the birth of a child.

Well, Mary and Joseph are broke. Not only that, but they're not even in their hometown anymore. In fact, they're in a stable. God heralds, and he heralds just like you would expect God to herald. The angels line up. One breaks into the darkness of the sky. I do want you to think about this for me because them showing up for the shepherds is scandalous in and of itself. But let's just do this. If you are a shepherd, a known thief, a nomad, someone of ill repute, more than likely you've given yourself over to that.

What do you think happens when God shows up in the sky? You're behind a rock with your meth pipe, counting up the stuff you've stolen from town. An angel is like *bam!* and explodes in the sky. I mean, what

do you think? The reason the Bible said they felt great fear is because you're not expecting (if you're in that line) for God to show up and say, "Good news!" Right? You're like putting out your cigarette, kicking it behind you. "What? What?"

The sky explodes, and here's this den of thieves, these social outcasts. The angel says, "Good news, joy for all people!" Again, I think our default posture toward the creator God of the universe is such a goofy one. The Bible clearly says God did not send Jesus into the world to condemn the world but rather to save the world from their sins. The angels crack open the sky, and their message to these thieves is, "Good news, joy for all people! A Child has been born in Bethlehem. Here's the sign. You'll find him wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger."

What I mean by *kingdom economics* is we have an economy of scale here. We have a way of doing things that is honestly right and good. God is doing the opposite of the way we operate in order to bring glory to himself. What I mean by that is I'm responsible for building team. Here at The Village, there are four campuses now, 11,000 people. I was putting together the team early on. Now I have a lot of other voices in that. I'm looking for extremely competent, godly, driven, monstrous men and women who can work for the glory of God in a way that shows they feel called to this, because you're not going to get rich doing this.

Most of our staff can make monumentally more money out in the secular world but feel called to love the Lord and serve you. My job is to build the team. Then I also work for a church planting organization (Acts 29) and had to build teams there. I'm not looking for incompetent people. I'm not going, "Okay, who is going to run our finances? Well, this guy is a thief. This guy embezzles. 'Would you like to manage our accounts?'" That's definitely not how I'm building a team.

Any businessman, businesswoman, entrepreneur in here doesn't do it either. You identify sharp, gifted people who add value to the organization, right? Yes, that's what you do. No one in the business world looks for incompetent morons to staff their company with. "This guy can't zip his pants. Make him a vice president." That's not how it works. Yet Jesus' team, the team God is putting together, blows the imagination.

Mary and Joseph and then these thieves? The herald of the good news is this den of thieves? Yes. Here's why I rest in this. God brings glory to himself by being the power, the authority, and the presence by which all things happen. When God calls, rescues, redeems, calls to himself, he calls among the weak and the broken so *he* is most glorified.

That's why Paul says, "**...we have this treasure in jars of clay...**" We being the jars of clay; God being the treasure inside of us. We're fragile; he is not. We are transient; he is not. We are weak; he is not. We need

sleep; he does not. We need food; he does not. We grow weary; he does not. We lose patience; he does not. God oftentimes, if not always, calls people to himself who are undesirable. They are unlikely. They are unhealthy. They are the last people you would ever think God would go, "This is a brother I'm going to use."

In fact, if you pay attention throughout the Bible, this is almost his MO. In fact, being super strong might disqualify you. Where Israel had numbers, the Lord often would dwindle those numbers, in Gideon's case, just so God was the one being mighty. "Gideon, your army is too big. They stand a chance. You should get rid of a couple thousand of them. You know, when I'm looking at it now, it still looks like if everything fell in line, you'd stand a chance. I need you to understand there's no possible way.

This isn't Sparta and Thermopylae. This isn't the Alamo. I need you to know that, but for me, you'll all die. Get rid of more of them. Get rid of the horsemen. Get rid of more of them. Okay, now there are just a few hundred of you against several hundred thousand. Now you know I'll give you victory." He glorifies himself through the weakness of men. What does that mean for you and for me? Well, it should mean gladness of heart because God has redeemed and rescued us, being the shepherds we are.

Here's where it gets interesting to me. I don't know if it's just doubts or if it's human nature. We play this just ridiculous game where most of us don't think we're bad people. We know bad people, but we're not them. Look. We do this all the time. You're a liar, right? I mean, you're a liar. You're not somebody who lies. You are a liar. You can't go, "I'm not a liar. I mean, I lie, but I'm not a liar." No, you are a liar. It makes your heart angry when good things happen to people you don't think good things should happen to. It makes you happy when bad things happen to people you think bad things should happen to.

Of course, all you deserve is good, and you never deserve bad. You love things, pursue things, and cherish things more than you cherish the God of the universe. You've had anger and rage in your heart. You do lust. You lust physically and sexually, or you lust emotionally and romantically, but there is lust in your heart. Go through all 10. You fail. Every one of us...wicked and depraved. When the angel shows up and says, "Good news, joy for all people," that means for us too. That means for us too!

Now some of you don't need to be convinced you're wicked. You've come in here today because you know you are. Your way continues to bankrupt, and so you're here today not in the proudness of your heart but in an understanding that God finally in his mercy has shown you your way is dumb. On that ground, you have a chance. On that ground, you have a chance! But some of you still here, in your pride, you know bad people, but you're not one of them. I'm telling you, by what standard are you judging yourself?

I would say it's by your own. It's definitely not by God's. I would say, by and large, it's not even by the law of the land, lest you bend those laws to be serious laws and non-serious laws. I don't know what grid you're judging yourself by, but by most normal historic grids, you're in need of a Savior. The good news is the angels blew up the sky and said, "Hey, good news, joy for all people." Now it's interesting to note this is the message given the shepherds. What the shepherds do with this is they...

I mean, the sky goes black again. Angels are gone. I have to believe they had to clean themselves up a bit. Then in this circle, they go, "Let's go see this." Then they go and see. They apparently just wander through the stables in Bethlehem until they find the one with Mary and Joseph and baby Jesus. They sit there, worship, and then they immediately become heralds. The first evangelists in the Bible are thieves who had been given good news in the midst of their thievery.

Likewise, you and I fill the role of those shepherds (sinners saved by grace) and now become in our neighborhoods, workplaces, and families the heralds of this good news of joy to all people. Again, if you have any kind of church background, I'm not telling you anything you don't know. I'm not saying in this moment that you and I, as recipients of grace, should be telling others about that grace. I don't think anybody is going, "I've never heard that" if you have a church background.

You *have* heard it, so we have to do something with the fact we know this to be true, but we struggle so much to do it. I think there are two reasons that stop us really from actively sharing our faith with other people and actually heralding this good news that joy has come for all. The first is we've bought into a weird kind of lie that says we have to have all the answers before we ever open our mouths. We don't want to share the gospel with anyone.

We don't want to give the good news, don't want to herald the good news because, "Man, what if they ask me a question I can't answer? I mean, what if they bring up science? There are some issues with science and faith. What if they bring up what to do about *this* in the Bible or where *this* came or whether the Bible should even be trusted? What if they bring up some other religion that I don't...?" We become paralyzed in sharing our faith because we feel like we don't know enough.

How many of you would say, "That's me. I just feel like I don't know enough"? Look around. We all get stuck in this trap. Let me try to encourage you this way. There is a place for apologetics. There is a place to argue the sufficiency of the Scriptures. There's a place to get into arguments about a historical Adam. There is a place to talk about the historicity of the Scriptures. But those things remove hurdles; they don't save souls.

The best results I ever saw personally as an evangelist were not as a learned man who knew all I know now about the Bible but as a young man freshly saved from my sins with little to no knowledge at all about what had actually even happened to me. I have a friend in here. He is right over here. His name is Mark. We went to high school together. I literally got saved, came back to high school wearing a shirt that said, "I (heart) Jesus" and was tract bombing everybody.

We started worship at my house. We just started sharing the gospel with everyone. Look, I didn't even have the Romans Road. I didn't have the illustration of, "We're on *this* cliff. God is on *this* cliff. This is a deep chasm. The cross (Jesus) is the bridge we walk over to be reconciled to God." I didn't have that. I knew God had done something in my life, couldn't quite explain it, but I was *en fuego* about it. Early on, evangelism to me was, "Come and see."

You know, "What happened?" "I'm not sure, but they'll tell you. Come on!" I had a deep conviction of the reality of God not built around intellect but rather built around the transforming work of the Holy Spirit in my heart. God doesn't need you to answer all the questions. He doesn't need you to. "Well, what if I'm asked?" Well, then that has presented a great opportunity for two things. One is for you to say, "I don't know," which is awesome to say, "I don't know."

If you're not saying, "I don't know" and you don't know, then what you're trying to say is, "I can be smart enough to save this person." You're a crummy savior. Your intellectual answer will do nothing to save a soul. Our confidence is in the message of the gospel itself. We can get asked a question, say, "I don't know," and then we're afforded the opportunity to go study and learn. There are answers to be had. Our faith is not a blind faith. It is a historically informed, historically tested faith.

We're not crossing our fingers and hoping here. We're relying on eyewitnesses. You want to prosecute this thing like a court case? We'll win it every time. So, "I don't know. Let me find out." Now we're in ongoing dialog. Here's the second reason we don't. That's the first, but I think a more common one is (God help us) we, for whatever reason, still want to be cool. What is that? I don't even know what it is. I've tried to even get my head around what it means to be cool.

In seventh grade, it got you invited to the skating rink with a certain group of people. I'm not quite sure the benefit it now provides for you as grown men and women. To want to be liked, to want to be accepted is natural, but be careful you don't become a slave to it and sell out on your deepest-held beliefs for the approval of others. "Well, I just don't want things to get weird." Look at me. Don't make them weird. Don't make them weird!

I don't think this is complex. Do you want to get really practical? Here's a very non-offensive way to begin to speak about faith. "Hey, how can I pray for you? I was praying this morning. God put you on my mind (neighbor, coworker, friend, family member). How can I pray for you?" "Well, I'm not into that Jesus." "I'm not asking you to be. How can I pray for you?" Yet even the people I know who are adamantly opposed to our faith never lost their mind at me because of asking how I can pray.

Then that starts up other dialogs because I get to circle back around and ask how that's going. "How is your marriage, bro? Better? What about your son, man? Still stealing money and getting high? I'm praying for him, asking God would reach his heart and save him." "Well, if that will keep him off the drugs..." "I hope it will, brother." How about this one? "Hey, come over to the house to eat." I don't have like anointing oil waiting for them when they come in. "Hey, before you eat that steak, let's put that on." Right? No! "Come over. Eat. Let's talk."

One of the things Jesus was accused of often is tabling with sinners. In Mark, chapter 2, we read about some accusations that were levied against Jesus because he was tabling with Levi the tax collector and a group of sinners. These are men and women of ill repute. They were either diseased, or they worked jobs that were viewed as unclean. In our day and age, if you think strippers, drug dealers...those who are kind of on the fringe of society, Jesus was hanging out. They were tabling with him.

We have lost the art of tabling in our culture and society. This is pre-Industrial Revolution, pre-light bulb. This is for the next three or four hours, we're going to eat slowly, drink slowly, get to know one another. We're going to laugh. We're going to tell stories, and we're going to get to know one another deeply. That's not what we do anymore. In fact, every commercial you'll see from here on into the future about food will have a part of that 30-seconds bit being built on how fast it is to make. It's not how great it tastes, although that will be in there. It's more about, "In nine minutes... A full meal in nine minutes!"

Tabling is not Chick-fil-A in the car when you're screaming into the backseat, "Eat your fruit cup before your fries." That's not tabling. Tabling is a slow meal. With whom is Jesus doing that? Tax collectors and sinners. This is kingdom economics. Jesus will gather those to himself just like you and me (weak, wounded, our own baggage), and he will profoundly use us for his glory, drawing others unto himself. Open up your home. Have people in.

Do you know how countercultural even that is? I mean, aren't we a back porch people? Do you know anybody who has spent a ton of money on their front porch so people can hang out on the front porch? No one. Probably one of you in all these services is like, "No! Liar!" All right. Well, congratulations, 1 of 11,000. In the end, just open up your home.

In fact, I'll make it even more pragmatic than that. If you take notes, just go ahead and get your notes ready. If you don't take your notes, grab one of those thin, white cards in the seatback in front of you. If you're more technological than that, then pop open Evernote or whatever you use to do things where you won't forget. Here's the way I want to encourage us for the next few weeks, next month. I want us to actively begin to pray specifically for certain people and look for opportunities to share the good news of joy for all peoples, to those around whom God has placed us.

On your notes, on your phone, on your little thing, I want you to write the name of three people who are in and around your life, either coworkers, family members, neighbors, old roommates, someone you know. I want you to write down their names. Here's what I want you to commit to. I want you to commit in the next season (the foreseeable season) to just pray for them daily. Just pray God would grant them belief, that he would open up their hearts to understand and believe.

Then I want you to begin to look for opportunities to speak into their life the truth of the gospel. I think if we're actively praying for specific people, then we will much more likely engage those specific people with the gospel message. What we're going to do over the next month or so is we're going to spend part of our time at the beginning of the service just praying over this group of people. We're going to ask God to be mighty to save, to rescue from among them.

If right now you're saying, "Chandler, man, the people who are on my list have known me for years. They would have no idea I am a Christian right now I have lived such a double standard. I just don't know how this would be helpful at all." Listen to me. I think those type of people are the easiest to talk to. Here's what I mean by that. You simply owe them an apology.

I would sit down and just apologize. "Hey, I need you to forgive me, friend, because I have not esteemed our friendship high enough to share with you what I believe is the most important thing in the universe. I've been embarrassed. I don't know what all has driven it. I don't have all the answers, but here's what God has done in my life. Here's how he has worked in my life, and I believe he wants to do that in you also." You will be surprised at how God uses all you do and do not know to draw men unto himself.

It is the gospel that is the power of God unto salvation, not your uncanny ability at salesmanship. Now will you believe this? I don't know. I do believe if I can get you praying about it, you'll be more dialed into it and more hopeful for it. The angels cracked open the sky into a group of thieves, said, "Good news, joy for all people!"

Now we find ourselves as recipients of that good news, being placed in neighborhoods, workplaces, among family members, to herald this good news, to pray God would move on their behalf, and to speak that good news where opportunity presents itself. May we not waste our lives by not doing it. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you and praise you. So many of us are in this room today because someone understood this, heard this, experienced your grace, and were so moved by your mercy toward them that they couldn't help speaking about it. So a mom or a dad, a brother or a sister, a coworker or a friend told us about you, invited us to a place of worship, and you won our hearts over.

I pray now, Father, that we wouldn't grow quiet or fearful, that we wouldn't look toward intellectual robustness as a prerequisite for sharing our faith, but rather, in the confidence birthed in prayer and the confidence that comes in knowing the gospel itself is the power of God unto salvation, we would prayerfully, humbly, lovingly engage those around us with the good news that was born in Bethlehem so many years ago. We love you. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.

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