

We started last week trying to prime our hearts and get ready for this season. Let me try to just condense 48 minutes into about 3. What we tried to explain last week is that the reason we are prone to either the Christmas blues or the Christmas hangover is because this season, more than any other season in our culture, carries with it unrealistic expectations. Those unrealistic expectations are going to slam into reality, and that's either going to cause some blues during the season or a bit of a hangover after the season.

So we walked through that last week, that this season doesn't always bring families together. In fact, sometimes it brings them together only to blow them farther apart. Sometimes you don't get everything you want or you do get everything you want and still find it lacking. We tried to expose the myths that we're getting sucked in by right now. By every commercial, by every billboard and by every promise, we are being given promises that will not match up to our realities.

So I challenged you last week that, if you were really honest and if you could really go back and dig around in your hearts, most of us, when all the presents are open and the meal is done, have a feeling of "Is that it? After all of this, that's it?"

And I tried to explain out of the book of Colossians, that Christmas, this season, the lights, the presents, the trees and all that's fun are a shadow, not the substance. You can't get your arms around a shadow. You can't get your heart around a shadow. It is a reflection of something bigger and something greater. So we said last week that the substance belongs to Christ, but the shadow of Christmas is a good thing and something to have fun with. But ultimately our hope is not in it, but rather in the substance that is casting that long shadow.

So we're starting our first week of Advent, which is far more complex than Christmas. It's trying to get your mind and heart on the substance and not just the shadow. Now I know full well that my 45 minute sermons with you in this holiday season don't really stand a chance up against the onslaught of sensory information you're going to get moving forward. Christmas lights are already up, and Christmas songs have been playing since the 4th of July. Already you're getting pounded with unrealistic expectations of what this season is, what it's all about and what is going to happen in this season.

So what we tried to do on top of trying to turn your attention towards the incarnation of God in the flesh, Jesus Christ, was to supply to you and for you information and things you can do at home and with your family. So we produced this Advent Guide. There is everything from personal devotionals to family devotionals to activities that kind of get our minds and hearts off of the shadow and get it onto the substance. So it only works if you use it. This is our attempt, being serious about your joy, to get you tied into what won't disappoint instead of you being tied into what will absolutely disappoint.

So with that said, we're beginning the first week of Advent. The task I've been giving in regards to proclamation or teaching is impossible. So the theme for this first week is hope. We've framed that in the first week of the Advent Guide by calling it "Promises and Patience." Now let me tell you why that's nearly impossible to do to a crowd of people in 2011. We, on the backside of a technological advance like the world has never seen, have become impatient and the idea

of long-suffering has been lost on our generation. Regardless if you're older or younger than me, if you're alive right now, you live in a world unlike the worlds ever before it.

I'll unpack it like this. I'm 37-years-old. So I'm not old, but I'm not young. But here's what I can tell you. When I was a kid, if you wanted to go to the movies, you had to look up what time it started in the newspaper. Do you know what a newspaper is? And then if you didn't do that, you were forced to call the theater. But if anyone in your town was simultaneously calling the theater, you would get a busy signal. The phone would just beep at you. And then you would have to hang up and hit redial a little later. If you still had a rotary phone, you couldn't hit redial; you just had to dial the thing again and hope that someone else in the town wasn't simultaneously calling the theater again. You would have to play this game 30-40 times until you were the one who got through. Or you could just guess what time the movie started. And that was life as I knew it as a kid.

If you needed information you had either a set of encyclopedias at home or you would go to a library. Right now, you have all the information there is to be had on your phone. We are trained in our current environment that we can get whatever we want whenever we want as quickly as we want it. So remember when there used to be a time when you were like, "Who sings that song?" You just had to wait until you remembered. That doesn't exist anymore. We live where we can get anything at anytime. And because that's true, most of us get extremely agitated when we have to be patient for something beyond what we deem is reasonable. Even secular scientists are beginning to tell us that our brains are being rewired by current technology that's really making us more impatient than ever.

So I've found myself with my phone clicking on a link, and after six or seven seconds going, "Forget it! If it's going to take that long, never mind. What kind of WiFi does this place have?" Does anybody else get frustrated when they're in a place that doesn't have WiFi? You're like, "What is this? 1992? Get some WiFi in here, and make it be fast." When did that happen to us? But this is the air we breathe.

So we can go now to the Word of God and go, "Look at these promises He laid out. Look at how they were fulfilled a couple thousand years later. And here we are again waiting like our brothers were waiting the first time. But God is good, He is true and He is faithful to keep His word, even though He operates on a time line that we don't really care for."

So now let's look at Genesis 3. If you're not a Christian and are not aware of Christian doctrine or how Christians view the world, let me catch you up very quickly. We believe that God created everything and that He created everything as good. So everything that exists was created by God and is good, but it was not created by God to terminate on itself, but rather to lead to greater joy than that created thing could bring as it leads us to worship God.

So let me give you easy word pictures to explain this. Christians believe that God created food. Not only does He create food, but He actually creates the flavors of food and what happens when you put together multiple kinds of flavors to create new flavors. All of that was God's gift to mankind, not only in sustaining their lives, but letting them enjoy the sustenance of their lives being sustained. Can we agree that food is good? Food is good. And according to the Word of God, before sin fractured the universe, food would lead to an enjoyment, but that enjoyment would kick up another level as the human heart and soul dwelt on the reality that God is good enough to give us food as well as create food to be enjoyable. So food and eating was meant to create worship in the heart of the man and woman. Now it's not meant to create the worship of food, but worship of the God who granted, designed and gave the food.

The same could be said of sex, and we could just go on and on. All that God created is good, and all that God created as good was meant to lead to a greater experience of joy than whatever that created thing was. And the Bible gives us two chapters of this shalom, this rhythm or this working of all things as God designed them to work. If you think of an

orchestra or a symphony, everything plays in such a way that it creates a singular rhythm, a singular song or this beautiful piece. That's how the Bible explains the universe and human reality before sin enters the world and fractures it.

Now Christians also believe that, in the middle of that, sin (or rebellion against God) entered into the music, into that shalom and into that rhythm and fractured it at every level imaginable. The cosmos itself was fractured, the human soul was fractured and every aspect of God's good, right and beautiful creation was fractured. So now instead of being drawn to the Creator, we are drawn to creation, and we will put the weight of our joy on creation, which can't bear it.

So let's take food. No longer does food lead us to a greater experience of worship of a God who is gracious, merciful and unbelievable creative to think that up. But instead it just becomes indifferent entitlement. "Yeah, it's food. It's mine." Or it becomes our god. It becomes gluttony. When we get stressed, angry or frustrated, we don't want God; we want pie. Why? Because you have taken what was created to lead you to God and you have made it into, "How spectacular is this?" That's a cheap joy, it's a fleeting joy and it will leave your soul feeling guilty. It's not that there is something wrong with food; it's that your usage of food is wrong. You're in the shallows with it.

And sex was a gift from God. It was not a trick of the devil. The devil didn't throw that in there at the last minute in Genesis 2. It is a gift from God, and God says, "Be fruitful and multiply." It doesn't sound like He's opposed to the idea. Later on in Song of Solomon it says, "Eat and drink your fill, you lovers." He doesn't sound repressed to me as I read the Word. It doesn't sound like He's anti-sex, He's a prude or that He wants you to button all the way to the top. It doesn't sound like that's what's going on with the God of the universe, but sex was meant to be an emotional, spiritual and physical mingling of souls within the confines of marriage. And in that, God would be glorified and we would be satisfied. If you play with it outside of those confines, you're going to get hurt and you're going to get a cheaper version of the joy that God has created for you to walk in. On and on I could go.

But sex became lust, and not the good kind of marital lust but the bad kind of lust that burns you up and causes soul wounds, emotional wounds and all sorts of other issues that really are wreaking havoc in our culture. Something is wrong when sex sells everything. Something is wrong when sex sells shampoo. I wash my hair all the time. There's nothing erotic about it. It's quick, I'm just trying to get it over with and I don't want any suds to get in my eyes. So how that works is mind-boggling.

In the middle of this rebellion against God's goodness and grace, God condemns the serpent, condemns Adam and condemns Eve, and He lists for them what that condemnation looks like. I want us to look at what He says to the serpent or this personification of evil, death, suffering and sadness. The Lord is going to judge the serpent or the personification of evil in the story.

Here's what it says in Genesis 3, starting in verse 15. "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." Now it sounds like the serpent is being cursed, but let's unpack the text a little bit better than just a cursory reading. He says that the woman is going to give birth to a son and that son is going to crush the serpent's head. He is going to destroy evil, destroy death and put to death once and for all all that went wrong in the fall. God is telling evil personified, "Your reign and rule will come to an end. I am going to crush your head through a man born of woman." And in the crushing of sin and death's head, sin and death will wound the heel of the One who crushes its head. This is not a big build-out of cross theology. This isn't a big build out of the suffering servant that you'll see in Isaiah. It's none of that. It's just a simple God telling Satan, death, sin and rebellion, "You will be crushed through a man born of woman."

Now, flip over to Genesis 12. God is putting together His chosen people. He is speaking to a man named Abram, who will soon be Abraham. He is beginning to tell Abram what's coming for him, that He's going to make him a great nation. Look at what happens in verse 3. "I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you I will curse, and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed." When it comes to the destruction of sin and death and all that went wrong in the fall, we know that a man is coming born of woman. Now that's broad. He's a man. Because every man here was born of a woman. But now He narrows it in Genesis 12 to being through the line of Abraham. Now we know He's going to be a Jew.

Now flip over to Genesis 17. Starting in verse 6, "I will make you exceedingly fruitful, and I will make you into nations, and kings shall come from you. And I will establish my covenant between me and you and your offspring after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your offspring after you. And I will give to you and to your offspring after you the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession, and I will be their God." So now we've moved from a man born of woman to a Jewish man to a man in the line of the Jewish kings. Now this is interesting because Israel doesn't have any kings at this point. In fact, the kingship of Israel is hundreds of years away at this moment. They're going to spend 500 years in exile in Egypt before they even head towards the Promise Land, which is an additional 40 years before they get their king. So this is a long way away from kings, but what we find now is that the man who is going to crush the head of sin and death and be wounded in doing so will be in the line of Abraham and will be in the line of kings.

Now go to Genesis 49. In Genesis 49, you get one of the more awkward family moments in Genesis. And if you've read Genesis, saying that this is one of the bigger ones is something else. Jacob is calling together his 12 sons who are going to be the 12 tribes of Israel. He is prophesying or blessing over the sons. Now the firstborn son in any patriarchal system is the one who gets the power, the money and the birthright. He will become the ruler of the family. So basically the firstborn son was the one who got all of that, and the other sons folded underneath him and kind of hoped for some of the scraps.

So Reuben was the firstborn and Jacob says to Reuben, "Hey, you are strong and bold, but you're kind of unstable like water. So the birthright is not going to you." And then he comes to Simeon and Levi and he tells them, "You know what? You guys are violent. In fact, I would never want to sit under your counsel." Now all of this is taking place with all of the brothers there.

And then he gets to Judah, the fourth born. And starting in verse 8, he says, "Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you." Don't you think that's a bit of an awkward family meeting? "All my inheritance, all my wealth and all my power, I know it's supposed to go to you, Reuben, but you're unstable like water. You other two fight too much. Judah is my man. And the rest of your brothers are going to bow down to you." Talk about awkward.

Now look at what he says next. "Judah is a lion's cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up." Now he's number four. He is prey. He is not the apex predator. That's Reuben. But now Jacob is saying to Judah, who will be one of the twelve tribes, "You are no longer prey. You are an apex predator. You have moved up the list." And then watch where he goes next. "He stooped down; he crouched as a lion and as a lioness; who dares rouse him?" So Jacob's going, "Don't mess with Judah. I'm just telling you guys. I'm just trying to get this out there for you so you understand. You don't mess with lions lest you be digested, and you don't mess with Judah. Judah is going to be powerful. He'll have his hand on the neck of his enemies."

And then look where he goes next, because this becomes extremely important for where we're going in regards to the Messiah. "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to

him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples." So a Messiah is coming who is going to crush sin and death and be wounded. He will be in the Abrahamic line and now we even know the tribe. He's going to be of the tribe of Judah and of the line of kings. Now this is at least about King David.

Now here's something to get your mind around in regards to advent and in regards to promises and patience. Here we are hearing at least about King David, and King David won't touch earth for another thousand years. Do you know what's happening all of this time? Death, destruction, loss, disease, plague, calamities and the reign and rule of sin over the fallenness of the world pushes forward and touches every part of creation. But God has promised, "I will crush his head." And He keeps pushing it forward, but He's not pushing it forward on 4G speed now. He's accomplishing other things. People would have to learn other things before they would even be ready for the Messiah.

Along these same lines of Him being a king, look at Numbers 24. Numbers is an interesting one. Balaam is an interesting prophet because he's a bit of a scoundrel, but God uses him. That should make a lot of us say amen. So Balaam is hired by the king of Moab to prophesy about Moab and what's going to occur in Moab. So here's what he prophesies. Keep in mind that the king of Moab actually paid for this. Verse 17, "I see him, but not now; I behold him, but not near: a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel." Now we know where the scepter is coming. What tribe is the scepter coming out of? Judah son of Jacob. So Balaam is on point here. Now look at what he says. "It shall crush the forehead of Moab and break down all the sons of Sheth." So the king of Moab is going, "Hey prophet, tell me what you see." "Okay, I see a king coming out of Jacob, and he's going to crush your forehead, bro. Then he's going to destroy all the sons of Sheth. Just know that that's coming." Again, this is at least David.

Here's what happening in these prophecies. God is taking the covenant He made with Abraham and the covenant He made with David and He's joining the two together to be one in the same. So the promise made in Genesis 3 and Genesis 12 carries on into the promises made in Numbers and Deuteronomy where Moses says, "There will be a prophet among you, a king raised up among you and a priest among you who will deliver you from the reign and rule of sin and death." Although in the Old Testament those three offices are always separate from one another, what we see in Jesus Christ is the combination of all three offices where you have a prophet priest king in Jesus. He is the prophet who speaks the true words of God to us, He is the priest who atones for our sins and He is the king who reigns and rules over all things.

Now flip over to 2 Samuel 7. One of the interesting things about Messianic texts, particularly in the prophets, is the prophets have this strange way of intertwining current things with future things, sometimes in the same sentence. So the only way to really get to the bottom of what's being said is to lay it on history, look at what is occurring and then look at what happens in the coming of the Messiah Jesus Christ. You're going to see a perfect example of that in 2 Samuel and in Isaiah, which we'll look at in a bit.

2 Samuel 7, starting in verse 12 says, "When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son. When he commits iniquity, I will discipline him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men, but my steadfast love will not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure forever before me. Your throne shall be established forever."

Now there are two things happening here in this text. One is a promise to David about the sons of his body. We see those promises are fulfilled. His son Solomon absolutely builds the temple. God does deal with his iniquity in a way that doesn't spare him the rod but loves him throughout. But the throne of David is most assuredly established forever

through his boys. In fact, Judah and Israel, in just a few generations, will actually cease to be as nations. They will be in exile, they will be deconstructed and destroyed and they will be dispersed to the ends of the earth as slaves and as small pockets of minorities in majority cultures. And yet you have this promise here to David that his line will endure forever, that his throne will endure forever and that in the line of David and Judah a scepter will come that will reign and rule forever.

This is why, after they're dispersed and dragged off into slavery, you'll find certain Psalms like Psalm 89 where the people are crying out, "What about the promise You made to David? What about the promises You made for us? What about this promise that sin and death would be crushed once and for all?" And Psalm 89 is this huge, "What happened to our King?"

So let me tell you what we know and what we don't know. Right now, what we know about the Messiah is that He will be born of woman, that He will be in the line of David out of the tribe of Judah and that all that ails and destroys mankind, He will destroy. Let me tell you what we don't know at this point. We don't know how He's going to destroy sin and death. We do not know how this is a blessing to all the nations on the earth. Those two things at this point are a mystery. God has continually pushed the promise forward and He has not let people forget the promise, but we don't have all the pieces just yet. And by the way, this is just a very cursory reading of Messianic prophecy.

Isaiah 7, starting in verse 14 says this, "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good."

Now, a lot of people who are skeptical about the Old Testament pointing to Jesus Christ will say, "Well here's the problem, Chandler. That Hebrew word there in Isaiah 7 simply means 'young maiden.' It does not mean that she hasn't been with a man; it just means that she's a young girl." And here's what I would say to that. You're absolutely right. That's what that Hebrew word means. It simply means "young maiden," but here's where you've got to look at the context of the text itself. In Isaiah 7, Isaiah is telling the people that God is going to give them a miraculous, epic, cosmic sign so that they would know that they have not been abandoned and they have not been forgotten.

Now, seeing a child born is pretty epic. I've been in the room for it three times. It freaks me out every time. It's like there are three of you in the room (you, your spouse and the doctor) and then all of a sudden there's a fourth. And he/she didn't come in through a window or come through the door. There's just another soul in there. So every time, I got all teary, prayed and thanked God. And here's what happened. We celebrated. Do you know what didn't happen? The stars didn't change. Wise men did not come from afar. Nobody in Dallas stopped the presses and let everybody know that a baby was born to a young maiden. Because yes it's miraculous, but not miraculous on the stage of cosmic miraculous. Isaiah's point in this is that there is a cosmic sign coming when a virgin will give birth to Emmanuel, God with us.

Now the second part of this verse is just as important as the first part. The second part says, "He shall eat curds and honey when he knows how to refuse the evil and choose the good." Let me tell you why that's significant. Curds and honey are the diet of a peasant. A king, someone wealthy would be eating marrow and fatness, meat and wine. But the Messiah will be born of a virgin and eat curds and honey. He will be intimately acquainted with the plight of the poor. It should have been no surprise that Jesus was laid in a manger. It should have been no surprise that Jesus was the son of a carpenter. It shouldn't have taken anybody off guard that Christ was homeless as He walked around on earth. Even the prophet Isaiah, a thousand or so years before, says, "He'll eat curds and honey."

So now let's look at Isaiah 9. Verse 1, "But there will be no gloom for her who was in anguish. In the former time he brought into contempt the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, but in the latter time he has made glorious the way of the sea, the land beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the nations." This is a reference to northern Israel. The majority of the times that Israel is invaded by an occupying army or a threat, it comes through the north. So this little section that's being mentioned here is up north, and every time an army comes through, they are murdered, raped and burned to the ground and their stuff is taken from them as the army marches through to lay siege to Jerusalem. If they didn't succeed in their siege of Jerusalem, on their way back out, they would simply do it again to this part of the country. It's not where you want to live. You don't want to build a home here. You don't even want to visit. It was a place in the northern part of the country that, for centuries, had known loss, bloodshed and murder. It was a horrible place, so much so that Isaiah says that it had historically been such a place of contempt that even the Jews looked at it as though God had contempt for that part of the country. But then he says, "No longer." And then he begins to mention a place called Galilee, and if you've read the Gospels at all, then you know Jesus primary place of ministry was Galilee.

Let's keep going. Look at verse 2. "The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light; those who dwelt in a land of deep darkness, on them has light shined. You have multiplied the nation; you have increased its joy; they rejoice before you as with joy at the harvest, as they are glad when they divide the spoil. For the yoke of his burden, and the staff for his shoulder, the rod of his oppressor, you have broken as on the day of Midian. For every boot of the tramping warrior in battle tumult and every garment rolled in blood will be burned as fuel for the fire."

The promise is a simple one. The promise is that, with the coming Messiah, peace will reign and rule where war, death and loss once did. So for a people who have walked in darkness, for a people who have been oppressed, for a people who have been enslaved, for a people who have endured hardship, freedom is coming and peace is coming. The tools of war, the stench of death and all of that will be used to heat our fires. It will be over.

And then he's going to go on and actually create some problems in the 1st century when Jesus walked the earth. This is some of the reason why people would attack Jesus in years to come. Verse 6, "For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, . . ." And this next one is crucial. ". . .Mighty God, . . ." So we just turned a corner there, and it's the first time we turned the corner.

Because what we had in Genesis 3 is a man born of woman, who is going to be in the line of Abraham, who will be in the line of Judah, who will be in the line of David, whose house the scepter will never leave and He will be acquainted with the poor. But now He is also God. So He is a man born of woman, but He's also God, God in the flesh. You had Emmanuel in Isaiah 7 or "God with us," but now He's not just Wonderful Counselor; He is Mighty God. God Himself is coming, and that is huge.

Let's keep reading. ". . .Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there will be no end, on the throne of David and over his kingdom, to establish it and to uphold it with justice and with righteousness from this time forth and forevermore. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will do this." One of the reasons that they thought Jesus was going to be a King who overthrew the Roman Empire with a mighty army and rule and reign like David did for his 30 years is because of this kind of prophecy. They just misunderstood what God's kingdom was vs. what it wasn't.

So until the second return of Christ, there will always be another Rome. Rome wasn't the problem. Rome existed because sinful hearts existed. Tyranny and oppression exist where hearts are bent because the fall of man in Genesis 3. So what we have to solve isn't just the right kind of government or the right kind of liberty, but rather it's a heart that

has been liberated. And a government is never going to be able to do that. You will never legislate morality, and you will never legislate men being good. Law doesn't bring about good men; law reveals that we're criminals.

So now flip over to Isaiah 53, because the last problem we have to solve is how this God/man crushes the head of the enemy and gets injured and how that sets us free from sin and death. Verse 1, "Who has believed what he has heard from us? And to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed? For he grew up before him like a young plant, and like a root out of dry ground; he had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him. He was despised and rejected by men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not. Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted."

One of the great things that happens in God putting on flesh and dwelling among us is that we get an empathetic high priest. We get someone who knows that it's scary to be us and who know the weight of living in a fallen world. So if we just tracked Jesus' life, Jesus has family members that are a bit crazy. Can anyone relate? Jesus is betrayed by someone close to Him. There are those of us who can relate. He is constantly falsely accused and attacked, and some of us can relate. He suffers loss in the death of His friends and the betrayal of those closest to Him. There is nothing you can point to and go, "He doesn't understand where I am." Because the Bible says He bore your griefs, He is a man acquainted with sorrows and we have an empathetic high priest, someone who can relate to the fear of a fallen world. "Well Matt, He was God." He was God, but He was also 100% man. "Well I don't understand that." I don't either.

Let's keep going. Verse 5, "But he was wounded for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned—every one—to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth; like a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and like a sheep that before its shearers is silent, so he opened not his mouth." If you remember the arrest and trials of Jesus Christ, remember that He would not answer Herod or Pilate. He was quiet. He did so to fulfill what was prophesied.

"By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living, stricken for the transgression of my people?" He's basically saying in this verse that the Jews are just absolutely clueless that in Christ's arrest, His trials and His execution, He is fulfilling all that was going to be prophesied about the Messiah in that moment. So even Isaiah is saying, "They're not going to see it. They're not going to get it. They're not going to understand."

In fact, Isaiah's whole task as a prophet was a bit of a miserable one. Do you remember how he's called? "Go and tell them, but I'm not going to let them hear or see." "Well for how long?" "Well until Israel is like a tree cut down with the stump ground up into ashes." "Thanks for that task."

Let's keep going. Verse 9, "And they made his grave with the wicked and with a rich man in his death, although he had done no violence, and there was no deceit in his mouth. Yet it was the will of the LORD to crush him; he has put him to grief; when his soul makes an offering for guilt, he shall see his offspring; he shall prolong his days; the will of the LORD shall prosper in his hand. Out of the anguish of his soul he shall see and be satisfied; by his knowledge shall the righteous one, my servant, make many to be accounted righteous, and he shall bear their iniquities."

So there's the great exchange that we talk about week in and week out. How is the head of sin and death going to be crushed by the Messiah? He is going to take on to Himself our iniquity, our sin, our rebellion and our hate, and He's

going to extend to us His righteousness. So we look like Him, He takes on God's wrath towards us and we are holy and blameless in His sight. This is being prophesied about in Isaiah 53. We will read about it in Matthew, Mark and Luke.

Verse 12, "Therefore I will divide him a portion with the many, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong, because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and makes intercession for the transgressors." So how will the nations be blessed? How does God solve our heart issue and the sin issue? It's not a Rome issue or an oppressive regime issue. How does He solve the heart issue? By taking the sin and iniquity of our heart onto Himself and extending to us His righteousness if we would repent, believe and trust in His life, death and resurrection.

Now this is the substance that is sitting behind the shadow. This is the substance behind that longing to open presents, that longing for the day to get here and that longing for a reunion with family. That shadow goes back to the substance of this promise that was made before Eden was closed, the promise that God would repair and right all that has gone wrong and that He would do it through a son, a man who would crush the head of the enemy in our hearts.

And so our longing, our hope and our desire is for Him. Because the Bible tells us He will return. This time, it won't be in a crib, it won't be in a manger and not as baby. When He returns again, He will come as a King to judge the living and the dead, and He brings His reward with Him. So our hope in this time of the year and any time of the year is that God keeps His promises, has always kept His promises and has not left us or abandoned us. Sometimes we just don't like His time line.

Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo, wrote that to be finite, to be small and here for a second is like having your face pinned up against a stained glass window. You can see some colors and jagged edges, but you have no idea how beautiful the picture is. So for you, it's red, it's blue and jagged, but you don't get to see all that God is doing all and all that God is accomplishing.

For those of you who are like, "It has been 2000 years since the ascension, Matt. It has been 2000 years since Christ rose from the grave and ascended!" I want to encourage you that God has made it clear why He tarries. There are more to be saved, more to be drawn in and more to be rescued. Until His rescue mission is complete, He'll tarry. So sin and death have been defeated, but the consummation of that defeat is yet to come. So think of us as the bride of Christ with a wedding ring on our finger, waiting for the wedding supper of the Lamb, when sin and death will be no more and all the benefits of the crushed head of the enemy will be ours forever.

So my hope is that your attention, your heart and your hope will dwell on those things this week. Let's pray. "Holy Spirit, help us. Stir up our hearts and attention towards You today. Remind us that You are good and that You do good. Remind us that You have always kept all of Your promises and that it's impossible for You to lie. Thank You that You don't abandon us and You will provide for us all that we need in our season of waiting. It's in Your beautiful name we pray. Amen."