



Christmas 2019-Part 1

Christmas Controversy

Pastor Mike Fabarez

Well, I may not like the ice on the roads and the ice on the sidewalks, but I will admit to you that I like ice. I like crunchy, slushy, perfectly formed ice in a cup on my desk that I can chew on all afternoon. I love good ice so much that over ten years ago I went out and actually bought an ice machine and put it in my office. I know, addiction is real, but I have this ice machine in my office and I love to eat that ice every day.

I was coming back from lunch one day this week and coming through the parking lot, I saw someone from the church I was trying to address as I stepped off the curb and onto a pinecone that fell off the tree out here in the parking lot and I rolled my ankle really bad. It was so painful. And, you know, I tried to finish the conversation without crying and then I hobbled into the office, my briefcase in my hand and the caring, compassionate staff here at Compass says, "Well, what's wrong with you Pastor Mike?" And I said, "Well, I've twisted my ankle and it really hurts. Almost to the very last one of them that saw me said, "You need to put some ice on that. You need to put some ice on that." Even jokingly someone said, "Well, you know where to find the ice. Just go put some ice on that." (audience laughing) And I responded with, you know, I don't know, my Long Beach upbringing like, "Nah, I'll just walk it off. It's OK. I'll walk it off." So I sat there eating ice that afternoon at my desk and every couple of hours I tried to get up and walk down the hallway and walk it off. Well, that didn't really work. It just hurt so bad. It hurt all day. Next morning, I get here before anyone's here at the office and I will admit I came in and put some ice on my ankle and it was good. I know it was a day late and all that, but man, it felt good. It was a comfort. It was just what I needed, some ice wrapped around my ankle.

You know, our culture, they like Christmas. There's no doubt about that. There are some, I suppose, on the fringes that are fighting Christmas, but most people they like it. They decorate their homes and they play the music. They love the season. They call it the "most wonderful time of the year," many of them still do. But at risk of sounding arrogant, I just want to say to our generation, I mean, you're doing it wrong. I mean, you just are. This is not what Christmas is all about. They love the taste of Christmas, they really do. They like to have some Christmas in their December. But they don't apply Christmas the way it ought to be applied to solve the problem that Christmas was intended to solve. They just don't think that way. They don't live that way. It is very important for us to realize what Christmas is all about. And you're not going to realize what Christmas is all about, nor apply it the way it should be applied unless you understand the problem and the pain. You see it was the pain in my life that lasted for a whole day that ended up driving me to put ice in the right place and deal with my pain and trying to assuage and solve my swelling ankle.

In our day it's hard for us to recognize our pain, the ultimate pain and problem that we have in a culture where we are, I mean, we're doing fairly well. We don't forage for our survival every day. I mean, we feel relative safety. We live our lives and things are okay. Which, by the way, is not a bad way to describe what was going on in the first-century in Israel, particularly in Jerusalem, in



the walled fortress city of Jerusalem. I mean, there was safety. There was Rome. They had the state-of-the-art military that was protecting their land and had been for 60+ years by the time Christ was born. The money was flowing through the economy. Building projects were really going all into areas and into technology they'd never had before. It was a boom time for Israel and Jerusalem in particular.

And yet within that comfortable society, and it had its problems, obviously, but you had a man who understood the nation's problem. He understood that problem that he had even in his own heart and in himself he realized the problem was there. He was looking forward to something that the Old Testament had promised that would solve that problem. The man I'm thinking of that I hope that you and I would learn to reflect more in the 21st century is a first century man named Simeon. I'd like for you to turn in your Bibles to this man who I think provides a great example of how you ought to look at the incarnation and the coming of Christ, not only by the way he celebrated it, but by what he said about it.

Luke Chapter 2 verse 25 we're introduced to this man named Simeon, who's in Jerusalem. And I'd like you to look at the passage. Get your eyeballs on this text and understand something about who this man was. And it's not as easy, perhaps, as we might think as you read these words because the Bible has to be understood as a whole. And when we see statements like this that describe this man, Simeon, you've got to slow down and understand what they mean.

Luke Chapter 2 verse 25 says, "Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous." Let's stop right there. Righteous. Whenever you see a man, a woman, a person in Scripture who is called righteous, you understand that this is always in a relative sense. They are righteous in a comparative sense. They're righteous in the sense that they live a kind of life that's not like their neighbors and the average person in their community. They live a life that you confessedly can agree is more moral, it's more ethical, it's more holy, it's more godly.

But let me add one more thing. Everyone who's called righteous in Scripture understands that they are not righteous in an absolute sense. Everyone who is described as relatively righteous as it relates to their horizontal comparisons are always people who profoundly understand that they're not righteous in a vertical comparison. I mean, think of Job for instance. When we meet Job in the first paragraph of that big book in the Old Testament, he's described as a godly man, as a righteous man. And then the first thing we learn about what he thinks about himself and his family is he's concerned about sin. He's concerned about the sin that they've committed, maybe the sin that they've committed in his family even in the secret parts of their heart, he's really concerned about that.

Every time you see someone called righteous in the Bible, you know this: that they recognize that they're not. They recognize that in an ultimate sense, they're not. Isaiah can be a righteous man in his generation, but when he gets in Isaiah Chapter 6 and looks vertically and he says, now, here's the holy one. Oh, not just holy. "Holy, holy, holy." He's absolutely holy. Then I'm not holy. Matter of fact, "I'm a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips." Righteous people in the Bible are always described as righteous only in a relative sense. And those people are



righteous in large part because they realize that they are not absolutely righteous. They know they have a problem.

And that's why they are, as you see in this next phrase, devout. He "was righteous and devout," verse 25 says. Devout. What does that mean? He's bound himself purposefully and willingly to what the Scripture says. Devout. He's doing what the Bible says. He's doing what the Scripture has said regarding what he should do. This is one of the reasons he's here in Jerusalem at the Temple Mount, as we're about to learn. And even with Job, think about Job, the righteous man. What's he concerned about? Sin. So what does he do in that passage? It says he's frequently involved in bringing sacrifices, as the Bible would suggest we should do, certainly in the old covenant law, that we should bring sacrifices for the sins that we've committed. And so he's devout. He does what the Bible says. Other people say, "Well, you know, no one's perfect. It doesn't matter with Levitical law says. It doesn't matter what the Bible requires. It doesn't matter." No, it matters to the devout. They care what the Bible says.

Well, this man who was righteous, which means, of course, he recognized he wasn't righteous. When he wasn't righteous he knew he needed God. And he was devout as he read the Scriptures, as he understood the Scriptures, as he responded to the precepts of the Scriptures. It says this man was in the midst of a, I mean, relatively speaking, a prosperous economy, a secure place, plenty of food on his table. It says he was waiting, waiting for something, waiting for... Now, here's an interesting way to describe Christmas time, "waiting for the consolation of Israel." Not only because you've heard Christmas carols do you think of Christmas that way. The "consolation of Israel." Consolation: the assurance, the comfort, the kind of encouragement, the good news of Christmas, the consolation of Israel. Israel he knew needed help. Israel needed some kind of solution to a problem, a problem that he could easily see extended beyond his own need, knowing against the backdrop of complete and perfect righteousness and holiness, he was not righteous.

As Isaiah said, "I'm a man of unclean lips, and I live among the people of unclean lips." We all have a problem. And as Isaiah got that tong that picked up the burning coal from the altar and put on his lips and half his sins forgiven, he realized that was a problem that needed to be done and resolved in everyone's life in his community. And so he was waiting. He was waiting not only for the help and the comfort and the consolation of his own life, but for everyone around him.

"Waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him." And that's how it works. Right? People understand their need. They're waiting for God's solution. They look forward to it. I mean, the Holy Spirit, clearly, we see the Holy Spirit upon people like that. He's the one who causes all these things in people's lives who think that way. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit. I mean, somehow he had the assurance from God that he would not see death before he had seen, I love the way this majestically sounds, "the Lord's Christ." We get that same terminology in the book of Revelation as the Bible speaks of "The kingdoms of this world becoming a kingdom of our Lord," the Father, "and of his Christ," the Son. You have the Father, you have the Son, you have the Spirit in this picture of Simeon's life, and he's waiting for the Lord to provide the Christ.



"And he came into the temple in the Spirit." This doesn't mean he's floating on clouds as he's walking in. That means that God, this God who he loves and the Spirit who wrote this book is directing his steps. And as he trusts in the Lord, providentially, he's in the place that he should be at the time he should be there. The right place at the right time. He comes in guided by the sovereign direction of God in his life into the temple courts, where I'm sure he was often, "when the parents," that is Joseph and Mary, "brought in the child Jesus." Why? Because they were devout, too. They were doing for him according to the custom of the law. Several things you needed to do. You needed to dedicate your firstborn to the Lord. The first child that you have, your need to pay the redemption price, you need to have a purification sacrifice for the mom after birth. You had the circumcision. You had all these things you had to do according to law and they were being faithful to do those things.

And as Simeon sees this child, it says in verse 28, he goes over, I wonder how that conversation went, and "he takes this child up in his arms and he blessed God." Do you know that word bless God? He said good things to God. He said good things about God, good things about God to God. That's what it means to bless. And he said, what good things does he say to God? He says this, God, "Lord," verse 29, "you now," he says, "are letting your servant depart in peace," I can die happy, "according to your word," as it says up there in verse 26. He had the assurance that he wasn't going to die until he saw the Christ of the Old Testament that was anticipated. And he says, "According to your word, I can depart now, for my eyes have seen your..." Christ. Is what he says? No. Now he uses a parallel word to describe the Christ, "your salvation," this Christ is going to save us, "that you have prepared in the presence of all peoples," which is an echo of these great chapters from Isaiah 40 to Isaiah 60 of all the things God was going to do to let the glory of God be known in Israel and everyone would see it.

And then he describes it a second way, "A light for revelation to the Gentiles." That was a sign of all the way out, the whole world. Everyone's going to see this and everyone is going to understand something about this. He's not only our salvation, he's also our revelation. Our light for revelation. And then let's speak specifically to Israel. We know who this was. If we know anything about the Christ, he was going to be the son of David. He was going to fulfill the Davidic promise. He was going to be the king. He was going to be, here's a word used of Solomon in all his glory, it's used of his greatness, his regal authority. He would be "glory to your people Israel."

That's a mouthful. "His father and his mother marveled at what was said about him." Of course, they knew this was a special child. They knew it was miraculously conceived. They knew that the angels had said to them, as we learned in Matthew 2, that he was the Christ. But now to hear these kinds of words ascribed to their baby child just is mind-boggling.

Simeon sees the incarnation of Christ as a hugely important thing, but it's all under the heading of a word "consolation," it feels good. It is a joy. It is assuring. It is encouraging. And for Christians who understand the promises of Scripture, that's what Christmas should be. And you should understand that. Let's put it that way. Number one, you ought to understand the joy of Christmas, let's make this clear, not for the marketplace, not for our culture, but for Christians. "Understand the Joy of Christmas for Christians." It is a joyful time because we are celebrating the Lord's Christ and that he has arrived. It should be consolation to you. It ought to be encouragement to



you. It ought to be assurance to you. You ought to feel good about it. You ought to have joy and even happiness. You should rejoice in the coming of Christ.

That's an important thing to do. I want to echo that sentiment in my celebrations and in my heart and in my life to be the one who recognizes that Christ is the consolation, the solving of a problem. I'd never put that ice on my ankle until I recognized how bad my pain was and here was a solution that was going to comfort me, it was going to help me, it was going to get me back on track, and that is someone who recognizes their need. Jesus came on the scene, he said, "Listen, it's not the healthy who need a physician. It's the people who are sick." And of course, that wasn't because everyone out there either fell into two categories of being sick or healthy. They were all sick, all were unrighteous, all have turned away. All need Christ. Yet there was some who said, "I don't need that."

It was like the parable he tells of someone who thinks he's righteous, goes up to the Temple Mount and he's sitting there saying, "I'm glad I'm so good." And he thinks he's doing his duty. And here comes this tax collector beating his chest, saying, "Have mercy on me, a sinner." And here is exactly the same concept, the same word used in that passage about a tax collector where Jesus said, "He went home justified." Same Greek word. He is now righteous. Why is he righteous? Because he realizes his need and he realizes that God can solve his need. Simeon understands this from the 39 books of the Old Testament. The solving of that problem is given to us in a person, 39 books looking forward to that prophetic fulfillment of a person all under the heading, the rubric of this phrase, "the Lord's Christ."

Now, let's think of that word for a second. Sunday school grads, what does the word Christ mean? Christ is a transliteration directly from the Greek New Testament. So it's not translated for us. Just like the word "messiah" that we often are familiar hearing is a transliteration of "Messiah" in the Old Testament, so Christ is the transliteration of the Greek "Christos" in the New Testament. They don't translate, they just simply transliterate. And you're saying a Hebrew word when you say "messiah" and you're just saying in poor pronunciation a Greek word when you say Christ.

But what does it mean? Well, to be very specific, it means to put something on someone like you might put paint on a mailbox if you're painting it. It means to put something on like you're putting, I don't know, lotion on your hands. But of course, in the context of the Bible to talk about this thing, this thing that has been poured on you, it was always a part of something very important in the law of Moses to set apart someone for a very specific job. To be the Christ or the one who had had this stuff poured on you, we might translate it into a word, that's old English now, and really doesn't communicate very well in most church circles even, but it's the word "anointed." To be anointed, to have this poured on you. To have something poured on you, if you had it poured on you in a ceremony from the Mosaic Law, then you would be an anointed person. To be an anointed person was to be in one of three very special classes of leadership in Israel.

And the first one that's so important, it's the first reference of it in Scripture, where they make a special anointing oil that has spices and perfumes in it and it smells really good. It was to be used to pour on the head of the priests. And if you became a priest in Israel, you would be an anointed one. You could be called the Messiah. You could be called the Christ. And you weren't THE Christ



or THE Messiah, but you were a Christ and a Messiah if you were a priest. The priest were all about helping people understand their need and that God would solve their need. It was all done through an elaborate liturgy of symbolism. At the apex of it was you bringing an animal to kill. That's a weird thing to do at worship. But you bring your animal, a sheep, goat, oxen, whatever it was, it was brought, depending on the sacrifice, to be killed and then to have that priest turn his back on you, think about this, and then go into this building called the temple and represent you before that holy, holy, holy God. You are now, because of this sacrifice, this innocent animal that was killed in your stead, in your place, the priest was going to go there and symbolically represent the fact that you can't enter God's presence, but I'll enter God's presence for you, and because of this sacrifice, I'll make you right in some liturgical way before this God.

So if you care about being acceptable to God, because that is your problem, you're not holy and he is, I can in this symbolic, mediatorial way, I can be this buffer between you and God. I'm going to be a priest and I'm going to go there and exercise this mediation between you and God and you can feel like you have this relationship with God because you can, by God's grace, have a relationship with him because of this sacrifice and my mediatorial role as a priest. They called that and we should call that, that you don't get punished for your sins the way you should, we call that salvation, which, by the way, is the first synonym he uses in verse 30, is it not? When he says, "My eyes have seen your..." Christ." No, he doesn't use the word again, Christ. He uses the word of what you would say that a Christ of the Old Testament was providing a picture of, and that is "your salvation."

And according to the book of Hebrews, it's not the blood of bulls and goats now that's going to solve your problem and expiate your sins. No, it's the blood of the Messiah himself. He would die. As John said, John the Baptizer, as here comes Jesus, he says, look, "There's the Lamb of God." That's the person who will be killed. He got that from Isaiah Chapter 53, that there would be a sacrifice in a person, a servant of the Lord, who would come and suffer and then stand before God, the holy God, and we would ride in on his coattails and have acceptance before God. It wouldn't be through an earthly temple and it wouldn't be through earthly sacrifices. It would be through the human sacrifice of Christ, who not only represented us because he was human, but the infinite and eternal worth of that human, because he was more than human. He was a completely 100% God. And because of that eternal worth, that life can be attributed to me. It can be attributed to you. It can be imputed to you so that you can stand before a holy God, fully acceptable, fully qualified.

And when Simeon thought through the biblical prophecy of the Old Testament, he could say, "God, I can die in peace now because I've seen a little tiny body that's going to grow up to be the salvation of the human beings, the people who have put their trust in you." The Lord's Christ has provided that. The ultimate priesthood solving our ultimate problem. "You prepared that in the presence of all the people," as Isaiah said would happen.

And he's not only that, he is, look at verse 32, "a light for revelation," not just to the Jews, but "to the Gentiles." You know what the word revelation means, right? Revelation: "to reveal," the word "to disclose," to give you information you didn't have unless God took the initiative to do it and provide it for you. Think that through. We need that. We always need that. We can learn



something from natural revelation, we call it, or general revelation. We can look at the world to learn some basic things about God. But what we need is the real information about God. We need more specific information about God. And so God sent a class of people in the Old Testament to give that information. They were called in Hebrew the "nabi" and the nabi were the spokespersons of God. They were literally, nabi means mouthpiece. They were like a megaphone that would be used by God to speak God's message to the people. They were the prophets.

If you were going to be a prophet, guess what would happen? We saw this in the Old Testament when Elijah anoints Elisha. The oil gets poured on his head and guess what you could call them? Messiah. The Anointed One. The Christos, the Christ. They were the ones who would speak the message that we did not otherwise know, as God picks up this human instrument and speaks to us through him. The Bible says Jesus was going to be born and be the ultimate and end and final mouthpiece to the world. God has spoken to the people in many portions and in many ways, "But in these last days he's spoken to us in his Son." Jesus becomes the ultimate prophet, the ultimate Christos, the Lord's Christ. "My eyes have seen your salvation." The ultimate priest has seen this light here embodied in this baby that would grow up to speak for God in complete accuracy.

And not only that, but for glory. I said this is the word that's used of Solomon. It's certainly a reference to the descendant of David to be the glory of Israel to us, to be that person who would be the person, not only a man after God's own heart, but God's own heart embodied. The actual person who would there fulfill the Davidic covenant and be the person who everyone on the planet during this kingdom would bring their wealth to Israel and they would come and say, "Yeah, we're Gentiles, but we're coming to give homage and honor to the glory of Israel, the great king." Which, by the way, if you wanted to become a king in the Old Testament, you better have an anointing of physical oil poured on your head that was made by a special blend of ingredients that was done in a ceremony. When you were the king, one of the words used for you was the messiah, the Christ.

And the Bible says that Simeon was waiting for the consolation of Israel. He knew the ultimate need was that you were not right before God, you need salvation and God's going to send the ultimate high priest to be that salvation for you. You have a real problem because we're human beings separated from God. We need information. We need a prophetic word. We need to know exactly what goes on behind this veil that dwells in unapproachable light, the God that we can't know in our own being. We need some kind of communication from heaven. We need information. In our ignorance, he's providing the final word from heaven in Christ, the great prophet, and then ultimately the glory of Israel to be the king.

One of our problems is we're wayward. We do what we want. We wander like sheep. And the Bible says that Jesus was going to be the anointed one, the Christ who would come and bring to us the leadership that we all need, human leadership in the king of Israel. And when that picture, embedded as it is in this passage, of priest and prophet and king, the Lord's Christ is spelled out here. Joseph and Mary "marveled at what was said about Jesus," and I'm sure that you would too.

How in the world, though I've heard a lot about this special child, I'm thinking about the ramifications of not just being the son of David, but being the solution to sin and being the one



that everyone in the world is called to submit to and follow and do the dictates of what he taught. That's a huge thing and it's the joy that should be brought to your life and mine as you've submitted your life to him, as you think about the fact that he solved your ultimate problems, not only of ignorance being the prophet, not only leadership being our good shepherd and our king, but also the sin that makes us rejectable before God has been reversed and the sacrifice of Christ, our great high priest, the Lord's Christ.

That's what Christmas is all about, but not everyone responds well to it. You would think that's great, the Messiah is here, everyone should rejoice. But Simeon gets real serious after several verses of being very positive about how joyful he is about the consolation that has arrived in Christ. He now starts speaking some pretty scary phrases here in verses 34 and 35. Scary in the sense that you'd think everyone would rally around the king of Israel, the great high priest, the prophet of God. But instead, Simeon, while he's saying good things and they're truthful things and blesses them, he then turns to Mary, the mother of Christ, and says, "Behold, this child is appointed," is designated, is decreed, "for the fall and the rising of many in Israel."

Now I'm thinking if he's the consolation of Israel, he should be appointed for the **RISING** of everyone in Israel. But that's the problem with Christ. Not everyone sees Christ for who he is and once they start seeing Christ for who he is, they don't like who Christ is. As Jesus tried to illustrate in his parables to us, it says that there is that sense in which a lot of people say, we don't want this man to rule over us. A lot of people say, like the Pharisee on the Temple Mount, I don't need a sacrifice for sin. Or like a lot of folks in our day, "I don't need your information about God. I got it figured out. I intuitively feel it." There are people who reject it. The Bible says those who reject it, they're going to be cast down. They're going to be fallen.

Here's the thing about Christ, the Christ of the Bible that's presented to the world, it polarizes the people of this planet and this child is going to separate and bifurcate the population of Israel and the population of the world. One of the reasons is when they separate they're not going to be neutral about this polarizing figure. They're either going to embrace him and be risen as Colossians 3 says, "seated in heavenly places," and God is going to adopt us as his children or they're going to oppose him. He is a sign. He's a picture from heaven of all that God knows we need and all that we need to understand and do, but people are going to oppose it. He is a sign that is opposed.

Now, let's skip the parenthetical statement for just a second and look at verse 35 when it says that sign that is opposed, that sign that bifurcates, that sign that polarizes, one of the reasons and here's the ultimate reason and the deep-seated reason in people's lives, "The thoughts of many hearts are revealed," which is the real problem when the human heart has fallen. When you start revealing what's in the human heart, people don't like that.

That picture of the light, even the light, the light shows things that are hidden in the darkness. It's like an X-ray. You go, you'll look fine on the outside, you start counting these rays through a person's life, you do the magnetic resonance. You do some kind of test that looks beyond the surface of who you are and you see things inside. If it's not good inside, you don't feel good about that being exposed. Unless, of course, you know the problem's there. You're just getting the X-ray



to confirm the problem, and then you're saying, doctor, what's the solution? But a lot of people that think they're healthy and don't need the physician, they don't like the X-rays, they don't want the X-rays, and if you took an X-ray, they wouldn't like the results and they would fight you on it. And that's exactly what is going to happen with the Christ, not only in the first century, but in the 21st century.

He's not only going to be polarizing, but we need to be ready as Christians who understand the joy of Christmas that people are going to reject him and not just reject him in a neutral sense and be passive and wash their hands of him, they're going to say, "I don't like him. I don't like that Christ that you're telling me about." Number two, you need to definitely "Realize How Offensive Christ is to the World." To real Christians, I understand that. And Christians in name only, really, you start talking about the Christ of the Bible, they're not going to care for that.

Matter of fact, the more our culture drifts down this path toward a kind of anti-Christian, anti-God mentality, not that our nation's ever been a Christian nation, but to say that they reflected the biblical principles, I get that, and you see them drifting further away. You can't even stand up and quote, I don't know, you can't even quote Matthew 19, the red letters of Christ when he says you want to talk about marriage, let me define marriage for you. Here's marriage. "Have you not read in the Scriptures that says God created them male and female?" Wow, what a bigot, cisgender bigot. Yeah. Male and female. Two genders. He's called them together to be one flesh in a marriage forever in a covenant. I can't even read that in public. I can't go to the city council meeting this week and read that passage and say, "Yes, I stand with that definition of what Christ said, human relationships in marriage are all..." I can't even do that.

I mean, I could do it. But guess what I'm going to be? Opposed. Well, who are they really opposing? They're opposing Christ. Yeah, but you're holding up a sign that says, here's what Christ said. They're going to fight me on that. Not to just mentioned the sanctity of life, not to mention the exclusivity of the message of salvation. You're telling me that he's salvation, he's revelation and he's the king. And what if I'm a Hindu? What if I'm a Buddhist. What if I'm a Muslim? No, no, no. I'm saying Jesus said, I'm holding up the sign, "I'm the way, I'm the truth, I'm the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me."

Do you want to talk about the exclusivity of Christ? Do that with a mixed crowd of people who are devoted to Christ and those who say, "Hmmm, I'm not interested in that," and you're going to have a war on your hands. And we have one. It may be at your Christmas dinner. It may be at your corporate Christmas party. It may be when you start saying, I love Christmas time, because here's why, the Lord's Christ came to Earth to solve my ultimate problem of sin, to provide me information that's reliable from heaven and to be my good shepherd so that I might follow him dutifully, devoutly.

"Well, what's at stake here?" Well, if you don't do that, you know what? There's a problem of you being cast out of the presence of the Lord and the glory of his power. All those who do not know God and obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus, that's the problem. You start speaking in those terms, you're going to be opposed. Jesus used phrases like this in Luke Chapter 6, he says, "They will



hate you. They will exclude you. They will revile you. And they will spurn your name as evil on account of the Son of Man!"

Now you can so curtail the message of Christ in the Bible by simply taking your scissors and cutting out sections that you don't like, so that you will never be an offense standing with the Christ of your own imagination. But you will never avoid the offense of the world, nor the hostility of the world, nor, to use the words of Christ, "the hatred, exclusion, reviling, and spurning of the world," if you stand with the biblical Christ of Scripture. That is inevitable. Why? Because he is a sign that is opposed that puts people into two radical categories. You either love him or hate him. If you're neutral about him, you don't understand it. You can't be neutral about the Christ of the New Testament. You have to be one or the other because those words are so extreme, you're stuck in one of two camps. And if the world is going to oppose him and you're holding him up to this world, you're going to get a lot of collateral damage.

You invite me over to your house this afternoon and say you're a really good archer. "Pastor Mike goes stand in the back yard in the corner there. Put that apple on your head. I'm going to shoot that apple off your head." I'm going to respectfully decline. No offense, but why don't you put it on your fence posts and let me see if you can hit it. I'll stand behind your shoulder and you shoot that arrow. I don't want to stand near the target. I certainly don't want the target on my head. "Well, go hold the target." I'm not interested in holding the target because I don't want to get hit.

Jesus said this: you got to make your decisions. You got to make your decisions. And here's a mind-boggling principle from Christ. He said, "I didn't come to bring peace. I came to bring a sword to divide up," he starts talking about families now, "mothers and daughters, fathers and sons, brothers, sisters to split them up." He says, "The members of one's household will be his enemies." Then he says this, penetrating. "If you love your father or mother more than me, you're not worthy of me. If you love your children more than me, you're not standing with me."

You've got to stand with Christ and say I'm willing to sacrifice relationships over this. Are you suggesting I jam my religion down people's throats at the corporate Christmas party next week? I'm not saying that, but I am saying this, that you provide a reason for the hope that's in you without any compromise. Love them? Sure. But love is not taking your Bible and cutting out with an X-acto knife the pieces that you don't like. Love is speaking the truth, doing it with gentleness and respect, but an unwavering, uncompromising commitment to everything that Jesus taught, everything that he, through the Spirit, expressed clearly through the miraculously authenticated word of the apostles. And we say it, and we don't bend on it, and it doesn't change, and it cannot be adapted to our culture, and we stand firm on it, even if the world wants to hate us.

Jesus said, "What made you think that the servant is greater than his master? If they hated me, don't you know they're going to hate you also?" What about the raising of it? "Well, if they kept my word they're going to keep yours also." And sometimes, you know what, they do. Sometimes they rise and become children of God. And sometimes, and frankly, it's the majority, and it's sad, but it's the truth, the majority of people, the way is broad, "the gate is wide, it leads to death, and many of those who enter by it." And guess what they say about the Christ of the Bible? "Don't like it." Controversial figure. And according to Simeon's prophecy to his mother, you need to be ready



for that. He's going to be a polarizing figure and you need to be ready to stand firm with Christ, because the things that he does, just like light is going to reveal where you're at and you start echoing the truth of Christ with the word of God, guess what it's called, "the sword."

I know you know the passage, but Hebrews Chapter 4 verse 12. The word of God, it's living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, it pierces and divides between marrow and bone, between the thoughts and the intentions of your heart." It separates all that. And then the next verse, we don't quote as often as we should, verse 13 says, "All things are laid open, naked, revealed before the eyes of him to whom we must give an account."

Here's the thing. The reality of the truth of the word, as we echo it, as we present it, as we represent it as ambassadors in our generation at the Christmas parties, at the Christmas dinners, as we stand with the biblical Christ uncompromisingly, it exposes the realities and the intentions and the motives of people's hearts. It does, as this passage says, "the thoughts of many hearts are revealed." And as Jesus put it to Nicodemus, some people hate the light simply because they love their deeds, their wicked deeds more than they love the truth. It's only those who are willing to step into the light to see that they need to have their deeds worked out. A rod or manifest are made by Christ himself. We need a new heart and you know what? Simeon knew he needed it. He knew Israel needed it. And if you're a Christian and you understand Christmas, you know that Christ provided what we needed. The problem is the world's not going to understand that and you need to be ready for the conflict. Realize how offensive Christ is to the world.

I talk about the pain in my ankle and the need for ice to put on it. Some of you say, well, I think I'm making progress with this guy at work or my extended family member or my immediate family member. I feel like they're talking more and more, I had someone say this to me yesterday, about their need, the problem, they feel unsettled, they feel discontent. It's kind of like Augustus said, their hearts are restless and they're starting to see that. That's all a good sign. I'm with you on that. But just note, because you have the first part of the problem checked off your list that they see their need, don't think that the solution is going to be as well-received as the problem is. In other words, the problem may be understood. They may say, I get it.

It reminds me of a story in First Kings when there was a young teenage girl. We can assume a young gal in Israel that got kidnaped by the Syrian raids. The Syrian army came in from Damascus and they took this young girl off as a prisoner. They put her to work in this house, it was an important house. She must have been a sharp gal. She had experienced a lot of what had gone on in her childhood in northern Israel and now she was there serving this commander's wife as her servant girl. And she knew from her childhood the big things that God was doing. He was moving from, not just the information of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, but we had this whole season of the prophets kicking in. God was authenticating his words through the miraculous signs of the prophets, two in particular that started the season of the prophets, the speaking and writing prophets, was Elijah and Elisha. She lived in the day of Elisha. Her mistress's husband was a commander in the Syrian army and he came down with a skin disease. And it was so bad, I'm sure he'd been to the doctors, he'd done all he could in his day, and he was desperate for help. So this girl says to her mistress, "Hey, too bad your husband doesn't live in



northern Israel, because if he did, there's a prophet there and I'll bet, the things I've heard that he's done, he can heal your husband's leprosy.

Well, Naaman hears about that. He goes to his boss, Ben-Hadad, we talked about him in Second Chronicles 16, the king in Damascus, and says, "Hey, I hear in Israel there's some healing going on down there. I'd like to get healed." He's an important commander in the Syrian army. So, Ben-Hadad writes King Jehoram of the northern tribes of Israel and says, "Hey, I got a guy who is really important in my cabinet here and he's got a skin disease. You guys need to heal him." Jehoram rips his clothes as the king. He goes, "What? What am I now, the healer of the nation? What am I a god that I can make alive? I can't do that."

Elisha hears about Jehoram's reaction and goes, "What are you talking about? You don't think God is at work here, establishing his word, authenticating with miraculous signs? Hey, you know what? There's a God in Israel and there's a prophet in Israel. And you know what? That's a silly response." Well, word gets back to this commander. His name is Naaman. And Naaman hears that the prophet is there and even perhaps willing to heal his disease. So he comes in his entourage. Now, picture this, it's almost comical how this plays out. Picture it today in a limousine with an entourage. You got a motorcycle, cops around, little flags on the corners of the, you know, the limo and stops there at Elisha's house. Elisha must have lived in a big house. He had some servants there in his house and Naaman gets out, knocks on the door of Elisha the prophet and it's like, "Hey, I'm here. I hear you can heal me."

Elisha doesn't even come to the door. I don't know, he's busy working through the scrolls or something and he's like, "Send him a message." A messenger comes from Elisha to the door, opens the door to the entourage, and tells Naaman and his guys, "Hey, here's what Elisha said. Elisha said go to the Jordan River, dip yourself in it seven times and your skin disease will go away." The Bible says as the door closed, that Naaman was angry. He was angry and he stormed off. As he got back in the limo and the guys get back on their motorcycles and they start to ride back to Damascus, the servants said, "Hey, boss, why are you angry?" Naaman says, "Well, because, I mean, we got rivers in Syria. This muddy river in Jordan, is that any better than the rivers we got in Damascus? That's ridiculous. I thought the man of God would come out, wave his hands around, there would be some really grandiose solution. He would be really magnificent and this is ridiculous." And the servant says, "Boss, did you hear what he said? He said you'd be cleansed. You'd be healed."

Well, they prevailed upon Naaman and they convinced him, take a right turn and go to the northern part of the Jordan River, south of the Sea of Galilee. And sure enough, the Bible just says he did it. He obeyed. He dipped himself seven times in the Jordan River and he comes up, and I love the way the writer of the book of Kings puts it, it says he came out of the water, "his flesh was restored, it was like the flesh of a child." Right? Talk about your mud mask really working well (audience laughter). Right? He was like a 10-year-old skin. It was like, wow. And everyone was amazed.

Interesting little pericope story in the middle of Kings and I think that's an interesting story. It's a story that reminds me how I might have someone in my family, in my workplace, in my



neighborhood who finally comes to me and says, "Hey, you're the Christian guy, you're the religious guy. I feel like I have a problem. My marriage is falling apart. My kids are on drugs. I got issues with my finances. I just feel restless. I need the God thing." And they say like Acts 2, "What must we do?" I mean, that's what Naaman said to Elisha's servant at the door. And he got an answer. He didn't like it.

Peter had an answer, we have an answer. And our answer is submit yourself exclusively, devotedly to the Savior. Repent. Put your trust in Christ. Call on him as Lord. And, you know, the Bible says even when people have the ache and the seriousness of a problem, they come to the right people for the answers, just like the rich young ruler in Matthew 19, comes to the right person with the right question and he leaves. He leaves upset. He doesn't like the answer. He doesn't want to give up everything and follow Christ. I just want to warn you that Christ is offensive to the world at so many levels and you can get discouraged. But you're here. God worked in your heart. If you're a real Christian, you've submitted to him. Maybe you were the Saul of Tarsus and now you're like Paul. You're all about the message of the gospel and all of that was worked in a heart that a lot of people thought I'd never going to become a Christian. Don't lose heart. Christ is appointed and determined and decreed "for the rise of many in Israel" and in South Orange County. You just got to keep at it uncompromisingly, giving the message of the gospel to our generation.

For more on the sign that is opposed, we skipped the parenthetical statement in verse 35. Let's look at it now. He's speaking directly to Mary and no one wanted to be closer to Christ, at least emotionally and familiarly, than Mary. And he says to her, "a sword will pierce through your own soul also." They're going to be gunning for Christ. They're going to be trying to take him down. Though this passage doesn't say it we know how it ends. They're going to want to crucify him. They're going to shout out, "crucify him, crucify him." And you know what? When they're gunning for Christ, you're going to get hit, too. And not with a .22 or a .38. You're going to get hit with a grenade. It's going to be big. The word "sword" here, by the way, is the word that is used only in the book of Revelation of a huge sword that Jesus wields in the book of Revelation. Every other time you see "sword" whether it's a Roman soldier or anyone else, the sword is a different word and it's a smaller sword. Not the dagger, it's a sword. But then there's the BIG sword. And metaphorically, it's enlisted here. The only time outside the book of Revelation to talk about something painful, piercing your soul.

That's not a very encouraging thing to say at a baby dedication. "Hey, Mom, you are going to be in a lot of pain when this kid grows up." And yet it's the kind of news if you look at the proportional relation of these two verses and even that one parenthetical statement based on all the things said in verses 25 through 33, you've got to keep in mind verses 25 through 33 so you can get through the reality of the sign that is opposed that you want to be close to and it's going to hurt. You just got to get through that based on the fact that he is the consolation of Israel. The consolation should get you through the wounds of the sword. That's the point.

And I want to remind you, as I say something for the last 15 minutes here that's so negative about the polarization of Christ and the opposition in our culture against Christ, I want to encourage you this. You can get through all of that conflict if you keep your eyes on the joy of what Christ



came to do for you. Number three, "Let the Joy Power You Through the Conflicts" because you're going to have them, you're going to have more of them, you're going to have the truth of the separation of relationships, the loss of a client, perhaps the loss of a job, or one day, perhaps like in the book of Hebrews, you will have your property confiscated. Who knows? Some of us will be arrested, perhaps, in our lifetime over speaking the truth of Christ, whether it's on the sanctity of life, whether it's about the definition of marriage, whether it's about something related to the exclusivity of Christ alone. Who knows what it'll be? But you need to power through all the conflict, so like Paul sitting in a dungeon in Philippi, you can sing hymns even after they whipped your back and flayed it open. You can sit there in stocks with Barnabas. You can sing. That is hard to do, but it's possible.

Let me take you to one last passage, Hebrews Chapter 12, and show you that this is the ultimate example provided for us in Christ. You may not be looking forward to standing up for Christ at your work party, in your extended family gathering, maybe just in your neighborhood, your daily life. But listen, you can do what Jesus did. And what Jesus did is he put the joy that was beyond the conflicts clearly in his sights. We are supposed to "Look to Jesus," verse 2, Hebrews 12:2, "who is the founder and perfecter of our faith," and here's the example and template he laid down, "who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross." Guess what the joy wasn't? It wasn't the cross. He looked beyond the cross. He looked through the cross. He looked about what the obedience to going to the cross would accomplish. And for us, we look at the fact that he solves our ultimate problem, he is our salvation. He gives us reliable information as the spokesperson of God. He is a revelation to us and he is the glory of Israel that we submit our lives to. He solves our problem of sin. He solves our problem of ignorance. He solves our problem of waywardness. All of that is something that gives us consolation. It's the thing that we focus on to get through the conflict when people hate us, spurn us, revile us, or exclude us because of our alliance with him. "For the joy set before him he endured the cross."

Now, here's a very important word. He despised the shame, "despising the shame." Oh, it made him sweat in a garden as he prayed about it. And it's going to make you sweat thinking about the cost of standing in faithfulness to Christ. But he says this: think less of it. That's what the word means, "Kataphroneo." It's a great Greek word. Think down on it. Think less of it. Make that small in your mind compared to the bigness of the joy of what you have in Christ, about where we're headed. He looked beyond the conflict to the crown. We look beyond the conflicts in our lives. We consider verse 3, the "endurance" of Christ. "He endured from sinners such hostility against himself." We think of that. We think that he died naked on a cross. And we think, wow, look what he did. "So that..." why do I consider all that? Why do I think about that? "So that I won't grow," weary, I won't be "fainthearted."

And then he says this. Think about what he was doing, he was dying. And we can look not only at Christ, we can look back in Chapter 11 at all the people there who were martyred. We can look through church history now for 2,000 years of people who have lost their lives. We can look around the world in China. We can look around in countries around the world where Christians are being persecuted and killed and we can say this: I know the things I'm dealing with this December. It's not like that. In my struggle against sin, my struggle against compromise, my struggle against giving in and hiding in the shadows, like Peter in the courtyard of Caiaphas, I



haven't resistant to the point of shedding my blood. I mean, I haven't I've been strung up. I haven't been having my limbs cut off. I have a long way to go to prove my faithfulness to Christ in a culture that doesn't like the Christ of the Bible.

We've got to keep our focus clearly on this. You ought to consider it a privilege to suffer with Christ. As First Peter 4 says, "Since Christ suffered in the flesh, you ought to arm yourself with the same way of thinking." You ought to think like, "OK, I'm going into this. It's going to be difficult, but for the joy set before me, I'm going to endure this. I going to think less of the pain and more about the prize."

There's a tender moment. I hate to even describe it that way when Christ is dying on a cross. But there's a tender moment on the cross when Christ gives one of his seven statements from the cross. One of them, he looks down to Mary. And if there's ever a time the large sword is piercing her heart, it's when they're gambling for the clothes, the undergarments of Christ, as he's dying naked on a cross. As she sits there in the shadow of this cross, watching her son being crucified and she's grieving over it and that sword is piercing her heart, one thing Christ said that had to be part of the comfort that comes from making sure we endure the struggle, he looks to her and he says, look, look, look there to your right. John records this because it's speaking of John, the disciple whom Jesus loved. "Look," he said, "Woman, behold your son." Look, here's your son. And then he says to John. He says, "John, look, behold your mother." This is your mom.

Jesus had said earlier when Mary wasn't on board, and Mary, you can read this is the Mark Chapter 3, Mary and the brothers of Christ thought he was crazy. They came to pull him out of the scene where he's there teaching his disciples and Christ says, "Listen, you tell my mom and my brothers, they're not locked on here. My mother and my brothers are those who know the will of God and do it." So it's my relationships that bring me strength, that encourage me, the strength of the fellowship of community and numbers, it's those who have the same commitment and loyalty to Christ.

At this point, Mary, she ends up in the Upper Room as we've been studying in the book of Acts. She's one of the 120. And I recognize the thing that had to pull her through this was that community, in particular John, had to be so close to Mary. It's like I'm going to take up the support that you need in the absence of Christ. The Bible says about the forecast it's going to get hard, it's going to get dark, it's going to be rough. In the last times, there will be difficult times, terrible times. But it says this, as you see that day approaching, you ought to be committed all the more to not forsaking your assembling together. You ought to be connected to the body of Christ. I don't know where you are right now with the body of Christ, but stop pulling away. Stop pulling out. You need to press in. You need to lean in. It needs to be your support. You cannot stand with all of these conflicts in the world, all the offense that Christ is going to bring in your life and not be shoulder to shoulder with your brothers and sisters in Christ. Are you in a small group? Do you just come on the weekends? Are you connected in enmeshed relationships in the church? You need that. You have to have that.

You want the joy to get you through. There's a lot of joy in the fellowship. How blessed, how happy it is when the brothers dwell together in unity. There has to be a portion of your life that is



so big, this thing we call our church life. We got our work life. I get that. We've got our domestic life. You've got to have relationships in the body of Christ. They're going to help spur you on to love and good deeds. Let the joy power you through the conflicts, and there'll be plenty. This is a message about no compromise, really. If you let your light shine in the darkness, there'll be some controversy, but I don't want you to back down. We need to be fully in.

Speaking of ice on the sidewalk, I was in Chicago recently. It made me think of the story that D.L. Moody told about his four-year-old daughter, Emma. He came home from work one day and his wife had gone out and bought little Emma a hand warmer. You know, those little hand muffs, they call them I guess. They got all the fur around it. Well, she's four and she got one and when D.L. Moody came home, she said, "Poppa," that's what she calls him, "Poppa, take me for a walk. Take me for a walk." And so, D.L. Moody, loved kids. He was, I imagine, a great daddy. He takes little Emma, she has two older brothers, but he takes Emma out for a walk. He sees the ice on the ground and he says, "Emma, hold my hand." And Emma goes, "No, no, no, daddy. No Poppa. I've got my hands in this muff. I want to keep my hands here, nice and warm." And sure enough, a few steps down the road, she falls down. D.L. Moody picks her up and says, "Emma, Emma, hold my hand." She said, "No, Poppa. I want to keep my hands warm in this muff." They walk a little further. Sure enough, she falls down even harder. Moody looks at her sternly and says, "Emma, you have to hold my hand. You're going to fall down." And Emma, Moody says, said, "Papa, can I just hold your finger? Put your finger down here? And she tries to link her little finger with D.L. Moody's finger and they start to walk, and I'm sure I can imagine. Right? He doesn't say but I'm sure he's rolling his eyes, "Ah, Emma." And sure enough, they go a little further down the street. She slips and she falls down again.

We can't be halfway in. We can't give him our finger. To meld a couple of biblical analogies here, James says, "if we draw near to God, he'll draw near to us." You've got to take your hand and grab onto Christ. You have to say I'm fully in, I'm hanging on and I trust you. If we do that, we can look at passages like John 10 and say this: "If that's the case, no one's going to snatch you out of his hand." We have to be fully in, in this slippery, vulnerable world we're in. And it's not as though we're just walking down a slippery path. There are people throwing rocks and snowballs at us. You better hold on tight.

In December, I know some of you, when the world's singing, "it's the most wonderful time of the year," you're thinking about the trials and the struggles and the conflicts you might have. If you really do half of what I've talked about in this sermon, standing up for Christ, speaking the truth, I'm saying you got to be fully in. By the way, you know the verse that precedes that in John 10. Jesus says about being in his hand, it starts with this. He says, "I know my sheep. They know me. They hear my voice and they follow me." "And no one will snatch them out of my hand."

As the writer of Hebrews says in Chapters 3 and 4, today, "If you hear his voice, don't harden your heart as they did in the wilderness." If God is saying to you, let's take hold of me, stop with this halfway Christianity. Stop with this one foot in and one foot out. Be fully in. Stop with putting people outside of your life. Get in the body of Christ. Be fully in. Then you can weather all the conflicts. You can understand what it is to have joy in a Christ who is your priest and your prophet and your king. But you've got to hold on tight. We are vulnerable in our slippery world.



But today, if you hear his voice, don't harden your heart. More than a message of salvation for you to give your life to Christ, it's a message of resolve to not compromise. Christian, don't compromise this December. Speak the truth in love, but speak the truth.

Let's pray. God, help us in a world that is increasingly hostile toward the message of Christ. His exclusivity, his definitions of life, of marriage, of all the other things we have to deal with in our culture as they mock us, as it gets harder for us to say that Jesus is the only way. And pray that we would be unyielding, uncompromising. That we would speak the truth. We'd speak it in love. We'd answer people with gentleness and respect as we give them a reason for the hope that's in us. God, let us give that reason. Let us be more versed in the things that matter for eternity. Let us recognize what it is to stand with you uncompromisingly as churches and organizations and seminaries and schools seem to give up on the battle every day. God, I pray that we wouldn't. Make us strong. Let us be able to stand firm on your truth, unwavering. God, let us get through all the controversy of standing with Christ as we let our light shine, we don't hide it under a bushel. We set it like a city set on a hill, we put it on the lampstand. We let our light shine this Christmas. Let us do that, God, for your glory, may you strongly support us as you promised you would.

In Jesus name. Amen.