



**Christmas 2021-Part 2**  
**Bethlehem's Honor**  
**Pastor Mike Fabarez**

Well, it's hard to believe that it is Christmas week. I assume you are engaging or like with most people do exchanging presents with each other. If you look back at past Christmases, I wonder if you've ever had a really, really great present under the tree for you. I wonder if you think back, if you've ever had a really, really lousy present under the tree for you. If you did, I would ask, well, when did you know it was a really, really great gift or a really, really lousy gift? Well, you only knew that when you unwrapped it, right? Or maybe you had to unwrap it and figure out what it was to figure out whether it was a good or a bad gift. But you engaged in what we all engage in and that is we unwrap the presents, which has been going on historians say we've been wrapping presents that we give to each other as long as we've had paper. People like to camouflage or conceal or cover what they're giving so there'd be that moment of surprise when you unwrap it and then you get to see what you've got.

Christianity in many ways is like that. It is a very valuable thing, and yet it is wrapped in something that often belies the value of it. In other words, much like with a gift, you never know if the glitzy, fancy shiny wrapping is really commensurate or in any way comports with how great the gift is going to be. We don't often know. We've had some really great gifts wrapped in some brown paper or newsprint. You don't always know by the wrapping. And Christianity is a lot like that way, because everyone gets a taste of what they see, the trappings of Christianity, whether it's the ornate parts of Christianity, the cathedrals in Europe, or maybe it's a fancy Bible with old English words in it, or maybe it's just the ordinary things like the people or the church you grew up in.

You get an impression of what the core and value of all this is by what you experience. Maybe you come to church later in life and you get exposed to all the vocabulary. Vocabulary, of course, has been bouncing around in our culture. Words like Christ and salvation and redemption and justification. These are words that some are deep and they're complex and some are simple. But we all start to think about what that means, and it's really just the words we use to describe a reality. The reality is something that we would, of course, say, I would say as a preacher and one who studies the Bible for a living, that it is inestimably valuable. It is unthinkable valuable. But people don't often, they don't often recognize that. You've got to get past the trappings. You have to get your mind down into the meaning. And the only way we can know what the meaning is and see how great it is and how valuable it is, is if we are dependent on the giver's explanation of it.

It's like getting a gift, you don't know what it is. You got to read the instructions. You know how many times this week are people going to turn over the box and go, "Well, what is this? What is this for? What does this do?" And they might even spend, you know, half an hour on the Internet on Christmas morning trying to figure out if this is something that is going to be useful or valuable. Christianity takes time to figure out. You can't, at first blush, get exposed to Christianity, fall into some simple interpretations of what you think it is and then think you got it.



As a matter of fact. The Bible tells us that the problem with us human beings is we bring our a priori thoughts, our presuppositions about God TO what God has revealed and what God has done and who God is. And we start to as Psalm 50 says kind of project our own thoughts onto God. We start to think in the words of Psalm 50, that God is altogether like us. And yet here's what Isaiah 55 says, God reminds us, and it's a great warning, he says. "My thoughts? They're not your thoughts. My ways? They're not your ways." And the next verse, by the way, tells us how bad it is. "For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so much higher are my thoughts than yours. My ways, I mean, they're just completely different than yours."

You wouldn't disdain me if I were wearing an adjustable hat. We all have them in our closets. And if I had to adjust it to where there were only like two of those little tabs left because I got a fat head, let's just say, it's all just hypothetical. You'd say, "Well, yeah, this is what you have to do. An adjustable hat is be adjusted and put on your head. If it's going to fit right you got to use those tabs and make it work." We use a phrase so often when we're trying to figure something out, we say, "I got to get my head around that," remember that? "I need some time to get my head around this." If I had a hat that was, let's say, seven and a quarter inches, you know, in hat sizes, and I said, "Well, my head, you know, it's pushing eight inches. So what I'm going to do is I've got a hat here that was given to me. I'm going to try and get my head in a vise every night and try and get it down into the place where I can fit it into that hat." You'd say you're crazy. "I'm just trying to get my head in this thing." Well, OK, but that's dumb. Just go get a different hat.

It's like a belt. Go get a belt with like one hole in it, this is made for a thirty-four-inch waist and here it is. Trust me, I use a lot of those holes depending on what season of the year it is. I move it around a lot. And you might at some point disdain me, or in some way cast scorn my way, if I don't control my waist. You'd say, "Well, yeah, but I understand everybody has different shapes and sizes and everybody needs a different size belt." The problem is, God says when it comes to truth, when it comes to truth about those words that we're exposed to like "God," like "eternity," like "salvation," like "redemption," right? God says, here's what they are in his self-disclosure he's described all these things in the Bible, and that's why the church is primarily a teaching institution. That's why we spend so much time teaching in church because we're trying to teach what God has disclosed about himself in his written revelation, in this 66-book library that he said, "Here are my words, my thoughts on paper."

I mean, men can think a lot of things, but they're like the chaff. They're like the grass of the field, Isaiah 40. "It withers. It fades. But the word of the Lord, it stands forever." So this is transcendent. This is eternal. You need to study what it says because in it, God has revealed himself, and we need to rightly understand that. If you rightly understand that then here's your challenge, you got to get your head around that. Because what you naturally think about God is wrong. What you naturally think about God is wrong. What you naturally think about salvation and heaven and hell. In other words, it's not the way you would do it. Has God warned us of that? I already quoted Isaiah 55, "My thoughts, not your thoughts. My ways, not your ways."



It's not a one size fits all and that's the problem. People so often come into a church and if they hear the word of God taught accurately, a lot of times they go, "That's not a fit for me, man. I'm going to go somewhere else." I understand. There are churches that have programs and there are reasons to leave churches. I get all that. But if a church is faithful to articulate clearly what the meaning of Scripture is, to define things like God and eternity and myself and sin and heaven and hell, if all of that is clearly articulated and biblically and accurately presented, see then we have to recognize that we can't shop around for a kind of theology or church or emphasis that we like because we're just, as the Bible would say, deceiving ourselves.

Because many people projecting their ideas of God and heaven and hell and eternal life, they will come to him at the end of their life, these are the words of Jesus, and they'll say, "Lord, Lord." You're the boss, you're the king, you're the guy I've been serving and believing in and trusting in. And you know, that passage, right? They say all this stuff they've done for the Lord and he'll say this, "Depart from me. I never knew you." I never knew you. Now, of course, he knows his sheep, and here's the thing, and his sheep know him. So here's another way to say it. "You never knew me. You're calling me boss and lord and king, but you never knew me."

So the real challenge of Christianity, including Christmas, by the way, is to understand what this was, what actually happened here and make sure that my mind conforms to that. And the only way we can define that is not make Christmas cards, not make Christmas songs. Bing Crosby can't help us with this. Mariah Carey. We just got to get back to what God has said about all of this. What did God say about the first coming of Christ? What was the point? What was the purpose?

Now we've preached a lot of sermons in years past, and I'm sure you've heard a lot of sermons in years past about the coming of Christ. This year I want you to turn to Micah Chapter 5 verse 2, and I want to remind you that weird circuitous and long, confusing introduction of my sermon all gets down to this real question. In Micah Chapter 5 verse 2, there is a prophecy about Jesus being born in Bethlehem. This is 700 years before Christ. It says the ruler that would be the ultimate ruler of Israel, and every rabbi from that point on had said here is a messianic promise of the ultimate ruler of the world and the King of Israel coming from and it says he's going to be born in Bethlehem. We just sang a song about Bethlehem.

Bethlehem is going to be the place for Jesus to be born. And here's the question. Why? And if you say, "Well, he was born in Bethlehem because that's what the prophecy said." Well, we said, "That's great, but why did the prophecy say it?" "Well, because he would be born there. If you have that circular reasoning, you need to stop and step out of that logic and say, "Wait a minute. God could have had him be born anywhere." The Father could have sent the Son to be born into the world, take his first breath on any place on the planet, even if all the points of the redemptive plan were in place. Why here? And I know that some of you are going, "I know, I know, David." OK? All right. Well, that's a good simple surface answer, but we need to ask ourselves why? What difference does that make? "Well, that's David's town. That's David's hometown." You're right. That's true.



But I want us to think about what a weird thing it was that not only Jesus was born in Bethlehem, but that David, the man after God's own heart, the greatest king of the Old Testament, why was he from there? Right? Why did God have him be born there? "O little town of Bethlehem." We get the word and the description of Bethlehem being "little" in this passage, but look it up in your Hebrew Bibles and look up your Hebrew lexicons and find out what the word "little" means. Because what you think of when you sing the song "O Little Town of Bethlehem" is not what the word means. You think little means, Oh, it's really small. That's not the point. The point of this Hebrew word is it's a chump, right? It's little. You're weak. You're nothing. You're obscure.

Sometimes I pull a random city out of the hat and describe that city as typifying, at least in Southern California, a weak city. I won't do that. But, you know the one I'm thinking of if you've been around. We have a lot of listeners in that city, so I don't say it anymore on the radio. There are towns that are despised like the town Jesus grew up in many miles north of there called Nazareth. And you remember when they said, "Come see, I think we found the Christ," and there was that response, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Now you're not thinking because it's a small town, right?

Mayberry is like, "Ah, there are probably some cool people in Mayberry." It's a fictional city, but you get the point, and there is a real city in North Carolina that that was all modeled after. There are all nice people there. You don't think it's bad because it's small, right? You would think if there was never anything good that can come out of that city, you think, because it's a raunchy place, it's a weak place. It's an obscure place. It's a place where the people are backwards. This is not a great place, it's not a great place. It's just nothing. I don't even really recognize it as having any gravitas.

Now, when you say a little town of Bethlehem, you need to think that way. And I would ask, well why would God send his king, the King of kings, why would he send the king to earth and have him take his first breaths in such an obscure, that may be a good word for it, little puny, chumpy, other side of the track kind of place like Bethlehem.

Here is what I'm positing, and I know this is a very complicated Christmas sermon. You wanted a devotional, but, you're the nine o'clock crowd, you can handle it. Here it comes, ready? Because the value of salvation is a kind of value that's unexpected, and most people don't recognize it for what it is. Therefore, God wraps this present, and not just where he was born, but in all other aspects that seemed commensurate with that concept of him being born in a place like Bethlehem, the wrapping is a surprise. If you go to our house, we already have presents and thankfully, you know, some of you people, you're great, you bring presents over and we've got them under our tree and they're fancy. And some of you guys are trying to, I don't know, score points with the pastor with like big bows and they're shiny. So that's great. It's great. But if I had one under there that just had like just, I don't know, the junk you get in your mailbox and it's wrapped in that and it's got a shoelace around it. It would be like, OK, that one's different. And you would say, I wonder what's in that one? Why? Because it's not like the others. I wonder what's in that one? That one seems like a raunchy gift. I wonder



what's in it. You would take a special interest in that because it is not like the others. All the others are trying to be fancy and acceptable and ornate and glitzy. Well, this one's not even trying. Like, why isn't he even trying? It gets attention because it's an unexpected wrapping, because what's inside of it, we don't want you to assume it's like the others because it's not even close.

Now, unlike the way I normally teach, but I'd like you to write down the first point, which you'll say, "I don't even get it." But here it comes. Not that the sentence doesn't make sense, it makes sense. But you're going to go, how does that...? Let me state this, and then I'm going to work this backwards. I haven't even read the text yet, but I want you to jot this down. Number one. Five words. "Detect Your Longing for Christ." Detect your longing for Christ. You jot that down. We'll read this text, and I want us to understand how much we actually long for Christ as romantic and sappy and unmasculine as that sounds, you do long for Christ, even though you may not know you long for Christ. And I think I can prove that. I can at least prove that what you do long for is not what you really want. And I think we're all old enough to know that and I can emphasize that. But I can say, theologically, I would present to you and posit, I think what Christ is and what he promises, what he represents and what he says he'll bring, that is what you want.

Micah Chapter 5 verse 2 and one of the most crazy introductions of any sermon I've ever preached. I find humor in that even if you don't. Let's read Micah Chapter 5 verse 2, just one verse, "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, you who are too little," that's the word, "to be among the clans of Judah." Too little, too obscure, too outside. "From you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days." Now you've all read that. Many of you are Sunday school graduates, your Sunday school postgraduates. You know that verse. You even know this is all about David, ultimately. Well, that's true. And that's good.

But let's just deal with this first line right here. This concept of him coming from Bethlehem Ephrathah. Beth Shean, Bethany, Bethsaida, tons of Beth compound names in the Bible. Cities were named Beth. Beth this, Beth that. In Hebrew, the word "Beth" means "house." "Lechem," it means "bread." And you've heard this before, some of you, "house of bread." So Bethlehem means "house of bread." Ephrathah, this other name for it is another word that means the "place of fruitfulness." OK, bread and fruit. If you've been to Israel, certainly with a palate trained in America, you go there and at least if you're like me with a very narrow palate spoiled with candy and hamburgers, plus up there, I'm not real keen on. But if I walked in and I saw a plate of fruit and bread, I can go with that. Matter of fact, that'd be great on my tours of Israel when I'm there. Hey, just that's it. The staple, staple then, staple now. I would like bread and fruit.

Ephrathah Bethlehem, this is a moniker, a title that speaks of something like that everyone wants, and yet I just want to tell you all the way back to Genesis 35, this was a city that was not, it's not even a city, a village that was not associated with that. Matter of fact, if you were to ask anyone in the Old Testament, what does Bethlehem remind you of? You would say, "Well, it's a really sad place." Matter of fact, there's a famous tomb there. Do you know whose





tomb is there? Think now Sunday school grads, the tomb of Rachel. Rachel died there. And how did she die? Tragic. She died how? Can you imagine this? Maybe some of you know someone who died in childbirth. It doesn't happen so much anymore, but that's really sad. Matter of fact, as she was dying and she'd given birth to this son, they say, "Wait, don't die, you have a son." She says, "I'm going to call him son of sorrow," and she dies.

This is Jacob's wife. Jacob's wife, right? Israel, the head of the nation and his wife who he loves, who he met there, the shepherdess who was beautiful and he loved her so much. She dies in childbirth. And they bury there. And to this day, by the way, Bethlehem is a hotly contested place. The Tomb of Rachel, all you have to do is look this up on Wikipedia and read through that or any document or journal article about Rachel's Tomb, it's filled with frustration because the Jews, of course, it's like their third or fourth most holy site. The Muslims, Christians, everyone wants access to this. It's in the West Bank, of course, which is a mess. One of the most famous checkpoints is there and it's up... I mean, when I've been there and I have been there several times and it's a scary place. So a lot of anger, a lot of frustrations. If you go there now, a lot of graffiti, a lot of hostility between Palestinians and Israelis. It's not a happy place now. It was a sad place in history.

Oh, by the way, in the time that Matthew describes the birth of Christ, he describes and reminds us of Rachel, and he talks about Rachel weeping for her children. And her children they are there weeping for was an enlistment of the passage about her crying. And this was a prophecy of the Old Testament in Jeremiah 31. The idea of her weeping and the sadness of Bethlehem because of Herod slaughtering the babies there. The wailing and weeping of people because all these children two and under were just killed. I mean, this is a place that is not a happy place, not only in the birth of Christ story, not in the Old Testament story. I mean, you want to talk about a feast of bread and fruit, it doesn't seem to live up to that.

So here's a little tag on the present that says "bread and fruit." This would be great. The wrapping looks horrific. It looks sad. It looks ugly. It looks bad. It looks negative. But inside, I'm supposed to understand there's something great there. Well, you need to look past the wrapping. As a matter of fact, the surprise and jarring nature of the wrapping of Christ being born in a place like this should get you to say I should approach the understanding of what's inside the present, the Christ child, and I should really not just hop on to whatever my easy, intuitive thoughts are about that child. I got to think hard. Matter of fact, I've got to get my head around whatever the truth of that person is.

Who was predicted, by the way, it says in Isaiah, to be the person "who was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." I mean, we don't even want the personage of Christmas to be sad. We want the jolly old St. Nick would work for us. We don't want Christ who went around without a house, without a home, Luke 9, saying, I don't have a place to "lay my head." He's always there lamenting. He goes when they bring him lunch, "I can't eat. I got work to do," in John 4. He goes up on a ridge and looks down at Jerusalem and he starts weeping and crying, like what's wrong with this guy? Everything about him is the description in Scripture that would make you think, well, I know there's value there, but it's hard to see that value because what I want, it's not there. It's not immediately perceivable.



And that's where I'd like to get you to think. God provides a child and he says this child, to quote a contemporary prophet of Micah, Isaiah, this child, this mighty God, "Everlasting Father, Wonderful Counselor, Prince of Peace," he is this eternal being who is now born and this child is going to be the answer to everything. Matter of fact, look down a few verses here, verse 4. "He shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord his God." So this will be a powerful leader. I mean, everyone's going to be like submitting to him. And there's majesty, that's a bigger word than you think, of the glory of this leader. And what about his flock? What about his people? "They shall dwell secure," they shall dwell secure.

Did you lock your car in the parking lot? Why? Did you lock your car? Why would you do that? Did you do that? You're at church, man? We're not going to steal anything from you. You know, I was preaching one day and it was when my office was down the hall. Someone went into my office, into my briefcase, stole my wallet. I preached twice. By the time I got off the platform and noticed my wallet was gone, they had run up all my credit cards. My wallet can't even dwell securely in the study of the pastor. I was just, I mean, I'd like to think we're doing everything, we're living by rules, we got leadership standards, we have ideas and expectations of highly committed participants. I'm doing all we can to make this a great place, and I can't even make sure that my credit card doesn't get ripped off at church.

None of us dwell secure. And yet there's a promise of one who's coming that just by being enthroned, everything's going to be copacetic. You will not even have an alarm system on your house. You will not lock your cars. If you're a locksmith, figure out something else to do in the kingdom. There's no need for that. Matter of fact, I should read the rest of this. It's so good. But I want to go back to Chapter 5 verse 4. It says, "For now he should be great." How far? Just in our little enclave and the walls of the compound of the church? No. "To the ends of the earth." And he himself, just he being there, him coming and leaving, "He will be their peace."

Now that's a summary of what he's unpacked in Chapter 4. I got to have you at least look at Chapter 4. Micah Chapter 4 verse 1, "It shall come to pass in the latter days." This is not now, and it's not even in Micah's time. And it, by the way, is not even in the first century, 700 years later. We've yet to see this. "That the mountain of the house of the Lord shall be established as the highest of the mountains, and it shall be lifted up above the hills; and the people shall flow to it." And we're not talking about tourists on tourist busses. "And many nations shall come, and say: 'Let us come and go up to the mountain of the Lord, the house of the God of Jacob, that he may teach us his ways that we may walk in his paths.' For out of Zion."

Now whenever we start kicking Jerusalem and the mountain of God into the word Zion, we're not just talking about one of the seven hills of Jerusalem. We're talking about this idealized place where the Messiah is reigning, the capital city of Christ when he takes his power and exercises that power and shepherds his flock. Not with some little group of people in little churches around the world with their wallets getting ripped off while they preach. We're talking about a worldwide peace because the ruler is ruling, "For out of Zion shall go forth the law,



and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." Law. God's going to speak, "You do this." The jurisdiction, the ability to speak the law to the people, is going to be fully realized and fully exercised. "He's going to judge between many peoples."

He'll arbitrate between, he'll mediate, he'll make things right. "He shall decide disputes for strong nations far away." They're going to sit there and they're going to say, "What does the CEO of the world say?" Whatever he says that's what... Talk about binding arbitration. Here it is. You will do what the king says. "And they shall..." Because no one's going to say, "Well, he may have said that, but I'm going to break the law." "They shall beat their swords into plowshares, their spears into pruning hooks," like no locksmiths, now there are no weapons, there are no swords, "nations shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore." Can you imagine? Not a standing army among any of the nations of the kingdom when the ruler steps up to lead. How good is that?

"Well, they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree." That's the picture, by the way, of the blessing in the Old Testament of someone who has a luxurious life. I've got my backyard with the palm trees and the chaise lounges and everything is peaceful and prosperous. "And no one shall make them afraid, for the mouth of the Lord of hosts has spoken." I bet you have locks. I bet there are times you're afraid given the circumstances of life. I'll bet there are plenty of things that remind you that if a nation is going to be strong and peaceful, it better have a strong army unless you're a crazy thinker. You know that all of these things are important. Why? Because of the evilness of men's hearts. Evil has to be restrained.

The best of what we could offer. Put your favorite candidates at the City Council with the county supervisors. Get Newsome out. Put your perfect guy in place there. Go to D.C., right? I'm assuming you're not a big Biden fan. Put your favorite president in there. Right? Then let's go to the United Nations and do whatever you want to with that so that you can have something that you think should be going on in the world and make this world with all the people, make it what you want it to be and let's see how that goes.

Here's the indictment. Jesus was born in Bethlehem to indict all of us for investing in something that doesn't work. We are hoping in something that cannot provide. We are wanting the satisfaction of fruit and bread from something that cannot provide that. You can't build higher walls and bigger gates and better alarm systems. You can't have bigger armies. You can't do any of the things you think that are going to make you happier, which is usually more money, better health. None of it will provide.

Solomon, by the way, speaking of the lineage of David, had all of that. He wrote a book about it and here was the line and I know you know it. "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity." It's all chasing after the wind. "I have everything. I have sex with as many beautiful women as I want. I have all the money I could possibly want. Talk about sitting under my fig tree here. I've got all the gardens, all the plants. I got all the servants. I got everyone waiting on me. I got gold galore. I got everything." And he says "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity." Because here's the thing you're old enough to know that even if you won the lottery, you understand your life





would not be what you want it to be, which includes just a little bit of what we just read here. You want all the things that are here.

And here's my point. You, at the core, desire Christ even if you don't know that Christ is the means to get it all. Jesus comes on the scene and he says in John 6, he's talking to people who had just had their stomachs filled, they came to him because they heard he could turn a sack lunch into a huge feast. And he says, "You didn't come to me for what you need to come to me for, you came because you got your bellies filled and you want to sit back on the rolling hills of Galilee here on the Sea of Galilee and you want to just sit there with that full feeling that you feel, you know, with the afternoon siesta. That's what you want." He said, "But you don't get it." He said. "All that was a sign to show you something.

Now, he says, speaking of Bethlehem, "I am the bread of life." If anyone is going to hunger and thirst, then hunger and thirst for me. If you really put your hope in me, he says, "Whoever partakes of me, he will never thirst, he will never hunger." Now, here's the problem, if you don't know theology and you don't know sequence and chronology, and if you don't know that one thing comes before the next, you're going to think that that's the kind of thing that we should be offering to our neighbors and friends, become a Christian and you will be satisfied. So let me help you dismantle your house alarm and let me take your keys and throw those away and I'll permanently jerry-rigged your car so it's always open. You wouldn't do that.

You'd continue to do everything that you do in a fallen world, even though you have a relationship with Christ because it is not, has your pastor ever said this to you before? It's not about the "here and now." It's about the "then in there." What you need to do is get right with the King of kings, who was born in Bethlehem in a brown paper wrapping to prove to you that how you think things ought to be are not the way things ought to be and how you would do it, it is not the way I would do it. And I want you to rethink who Christ is because if you trust in him he will bring peace to the nations and you will sit under your vine and all that you desire will be fulfilled. The desires of your heart are all "in the presence of God," to quote Psalm 16:11, "is fullness of joy."

But that's "then in there." We're seeing through a glass dimly now and from here to the kingdom, as Paul had to remind the people he led to Christ, we must endure a lot of tribulation. Jesus himself said, "In this world," John 16, "you will have tribulation. But take heart." Why? "I've overcome the world," which means what? "I am the Christ, and I am the one who is going to usher in a kingdom where everyone going to take their swords and beat them into plowshares. They're going to take all their spears they would use for killing people and protecting their nation, and they're going to go fishing with them. That is the world I'm going to bring in. You better trust in me, but you better understand who I am. The problem with the world is sin. I came to solve the problem of sin."

And it isn't just, hey, you'll be satisfied if you become a Christian because you'll relieve your guilt. I agree. Your guilt, you'll have your guilt forgiven. It'll be great. But what we're really wanting is a set of desires that cannot be fulfilled by anything in this world. You have to trust in Christ because the day Christ takes his power and begins to reign everything will be as it



ought to be. Matter of fact, that's a good inverse definition of sin. Sin is that things are not the way they ought to be. How would you like things to be? Right? More money. That's not going to solve the problem. More exercise. That's not going to solve the problem. A lower number on the scale. That's not going to solve the problem. The right guy in D.C. That's not going to solve the problem. Do I want all those things? Desperately. Right?

But I know this. I'm still living under the fall. I'm still living with Christ enthroned at the right hand of the Father and not here. He's not in Jerusalem. He's not in D.C. He's not in any place on this earth, except through the presence of the third person of the Godhead. But I am someone who's waiting for the coming of the kingdom. I'm supposed to be praying for it every day. That's how Jesus taught us to pray. If your Christianity is not forward-looking, again, you've opened a package hoping that you consume something now. It's like getting a certificate that says, here's the gift, now value this piece of paper. Well, it depends on what the piece of paper says and what it can verify and what it can guarantee. And then I maybe can get excited about it, even though I got to get up and still live my life without the realization of what that piece of paper says. That certificate is not yet cashed in. Christ has not taken his power and begun to reign.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem and not in Jerusalem where they would expect a good king to be born because God, I think, wants us to stop and say none of this is the way you think it should be. Because the way you think it should be doesn't work. Even when I give you David, think about this. I give you David. I give you the best that humanity has to offer, and then I'm going to pull the curtain back to make sure that you know all of his flaws that you don't know about all the other people you think are great. I'm going to show you what kind of lustful person he is. He's a stinking peeping Tom. He takes another man's wife. He kills a man to cover up for it. He writes Psalm 51. He writes Psalm 32. He is a bad and sinful man who laments his iniquity, transgression and sin.

Even our best is not really what we want. You don't want that. And yet we're all fallen and we're all sinful. What you really desire is Christ. What you really desire is for Christ to accomplish his redemptive plan, which is not going to be culminated until he comes back. You want the first coming of Christ to get the certificate so that you can have him come back a second time in glory on the clouds and establish the kingdom that you really want. So what you really need and what you really desire is Christ. You need to start to detect that. When you hate the world and I trust that you do, and when you look in the mirror and you hate yourself. When you feel like David, who was the best man God could provide for the nation, the best non-deity. Here he is, David. And he still looks, and he says, "I groan under the weight of my sin."

I'm just saying what we really want is the perfect one to make us perfect and we will not be made perfect until the glorification and the redemption of our body, to quote Romans 8. We ought to be looking forward to that. Now we're all going to get around our families and our tables and our trees and presents and all that, you might have a great Christmas. But all it really is a certificate of what is yet to come because you're still going to have cancer or you're still going to have relational problems, or you're still going to have physical problems or you're



still going to have issues with your neighbor and you're still not going to have as much money as you want and you're still not going to be as thin as you want and your skin and going to be as tight as you want it to be, or whatever your desires are. They're never going to be there. NEVER in this life. What you long for is Christ. Because he's the answer.

You will Bethlehem - House of Bread, Ephrathah - fruitful land. "Who is too little to be among the clans of Judah." I'm back here in Micah 5:2 obviously. Little. I would like you to realize that what God valued was Jesus being born in a place that made this statement about a set of things that are much deeper than the kinds of wrappings we all like and desire. Eliab. Eliab. What we need to do is to adopt God's values, and even if you're a good Christian, even if you're a pastor, even if you're a prophet of the Old Testament, you can look at something and not see it the way that God sees it and think, "Well, there's our solution." You need to adopt a whole different value system and that's a hard system to adopt because the world doesn't get it.

You know the history of the monarchy, if you think back to Israel having a king, they wanted a king and God was frustrated with that, right? And Samuel was frustrated with that. And Samuel says, "God, I don't like it." And God says to Samuel, "Listen, they're not rejecting you," they're rejecting what you're saying, you get that, "but they're rejecting me. So give them their king." Matter of fact, I'm going to point out the guy that they want and they're going to love him. Talk about they're going to love him, everything about him. He can be taller than anybody else. He's going to be handsome. He's going to be the guy to fight their battles for them. So go, go pick him out. Pick the guy they want. And so they pick Saul of Benjamin, a Benjamite. By the way, he was perfect because as the fighter, the fighting tribe. So let's give them the fighter, and let's make sure he's the most handsome guy in the tribe. Give them what they want.

And so they get Saul. And Saul turns out to be what Sunday school grads? A disaster. A disaster. So then God says to Samuel, "I want you to go to a place, a little obscure town, a town that no one would want to get their king from. Go to a place called Bethlehem of Ephrathah. And I want you to go there. I'm going to send you to the house of a man named Jesse. And Jesse is going to have all these people there. And in his household, one of his sons is going to be the king. I want you to pour the flask of oil over his head and appoint him as the king." So he goes and he goes to Bethlehem.

He's about to put Bethlehem on the map to be something hopefully that'll be better than it's the place where Rachel is buried. And he says, "OK, Jesse, I'm here and we're picking a king." And so they all come in, and of course, they start with the oldest. And do you know what the text says? Eliab is there and Samuel says, the text says that Samuel says, "Surely the Lord's anointed is standing before me." This is him. Well, this guy knows that Saul was a disaster. And yet, he says, "Well, I know the world's not it and all that stuff that the world likes, but here I'm going to turn now to God's solution. And guess what? I want it to look just like that. This guy is him." He had a hard time adopting God's value system. And so he goes through all the sons and I'm sure with everyone they're getting lank here and skinnier and not



as, you know, mature looking. And so they go through them all. You know the story. And none of them, he doesn't get the green light from God on any of them.

And so he says to Jesse, the dad, "Hey, Jesse, is that all the kids you got?" Jesse says, "Well, I got another one but," I mean, reading between the lines, "you don't want him." How do I know he thinks that? Because he didn't even invite him to the interview. He's out watching the sheep. He could have hired a neighbor to do that. But no. "You don't want him. He's just a teenager, just a kid, lanky and you know, just... I mean, he's a good-looking boy, but just whatever. You don't want him." Samuel says, "Call him in." So you can see Samuel sitting on the sofa in this little Bethlehem living room. I'm just wondering what's going through his mind waiting for this kid to come in from the field. He's got to send someone out, call him in. He's coming. He smells like the field. He's the shepherd of the sheep. He comes in. He's not dressed for the job, and he's got no gel in his hair at all. And he goes, "Yeah, dad, what do you need?" Jesse says, "Well, we got the prophet here, the prophet from Jerusalem and BAM! God says that's him.

You remember the lesson that God had to teach to a very godly man. God teaches to Samuel, he says, I just want to remind you God does not see as man sees. "For man looks at the outward appearance, but God looks at the heart." The reason Jesus is hard to recognize and the value of Christianity is hard to recognize is because all the things in the wrapping remind me that what I am looking for, what I would expect, is not what I should be expecting because who Christ is a lot different than what I expect. And what he is is something that is not about the external trappings of what the world wants. I'm telling you this is happening right now across the spectrum in Christianity.

The Christian Church, Christian colleges, Christian institutions are all trying to make sure that they look really respectable and attractive to everyone outside of it. They act as "I want to make sure that they'll applaud. We'll change our doctrine about clear things in the Bible that are as clear as God could..." I could take a fourth-grader and say read this English text to me and then read that English text to me in Scripture and everyone goes, "Well, it seems to say what it says." We have pastors in big places and presidents of seminaries in big places saying, I don't really care about that anymore. Even though the church has taught that for 2,000 years. Even though the Bible clearly says that but you know what? "I'm getting a lot of grief from people out there. I don't know if they're going to send their kids to our school. I'm not sure people are going to come to our church. We're going to change our doctrine. I guess I've been wrong for 40 years of ministry. I guess I haven't thought straight about this. Now I'm finally enlightened because I've read enough articles from USA today and we're changing our views." Why? Because of the pressure of the world. You don't want David being the king.

And even five years into this, he pours the flask of oil on his head, where does David end up? Think about it. It's a 15-year gap between God's saying that's the guy and the time he finally puts his rear end on the throne in Jerusalem. 15 years. And the Bible makes it very clear as he's running around as a fugitive and his face is on every poster in every post office in Jerusalem, he's got an army trying to track him down and kill him. He's hiding in caves and clefts of the rock. He's writing psalms about how horrible it is to be hunted by the powers that



be. And it says in the Bible that the malcontents and the distressed and those in debt were coming and saying, "Oh David, we're for you." They're the fringe, the outcasts of society.

Jot down First Corinthians Chapter 1 and do me a favor and just read that text for me at some point today. First Corinthians Chapter 1, you can start in verse 18 and go to the end of the chapter. It reminds us that everything that we are called to be faithful to do, to value, to believe, to teach is not going to be popular. They're going to call us foolish. They're going to stumble over it. If you talk about justification through penal substitutionary atonement, that the Father's justice would be absorbed and spent in a raft-filled afternoon in Jerusalem on a cross. They're going to call it cosmic child abuse and the cool guys, they're going to stand up and write theology books now are going to say, "That's passé. I know the church thought that for a long time. But finally, the enlightened, you know, iPhone-carrying crowd is going to figure out what real theology is and we're going to say that just seems bad. That seems like God is harsh.

And that hell thing, we're not big on that either. Let's just do away with that." You've got to make a decision based on the second half of First Corinthians 1 that you're no longer playing to the Jews or the Greeks that stumble over what we think, the debater of the age, the philosopher. You've got to say it's the foolishness of God that they called so foolish that becomes the wisdom and the power of our salvation. And you want to trade that in so that you can have a respectable church experience, a respectable college or a respectable Christian ministry or a respectable missionary outpost? You can trade in that, but you lose the gospel.

And I'm just saying this, I do want to be on the right side of history, and it's not about what they say in history books in the United States of America. It's about what they're writing in heaven. And I'd sure like to be on the right side of that because Christ is going to come back and separate the nations as a shepherd separates the sheep and goats. And he's going to say, "I wanted you to do what I said, and I was very clear and it was about heaven and hell and sin and redemption and repentance and faith. And it was about the things that you started to despise because you were so concerned that we have an organization, we have a doctrine that looks like Saul."

Stop. You've got to decide what you want. Do you want Christ who has all the answers and will satisfy your heart in eternity? Or do you want a value system that will allow people to applaud? And I'm just saying I don't really care. We sing songs about the world's applause, man's empty praise. Really? For what? And yet it's happening all the time. And you're right, we could lose our tax-exempt status just by reading Romans Chapter 1 in some circles. We can have people flee the church because we're not cool. Sure. We can have people who are going to report us. Watch the nations around the world and watch what's happening in Europe. Watch what's happening north of the border in Canada. We're going to have a hard road ahead.

But you got to make a decision. And I'm saying I'd rather have God's value system because in the end that's what wins. And I know that it's not just what wins so I can be on the right side of history and be vindicated in some intellectual way. It's so that I can have the desires of my





heart because I don't want to hear, "Depart from me, you accursed ones into the fire prepared for the devil and his angels." That's what Jesus taught. Loving Jesus, gentle Jesus meek and mild. He said that repeatedly, by the way. And I just want to say I want to be hearing the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant." And that means I've got to wrap my mind around good biblical theology, I got to wrap my mind around the fact that my savior was born in a place that everyone despised and he didn't own anything, didn't write any books. I mean, this is a leader who is disdained.

Now, the Jesus of people's imagination. Yeah, Oprah is all about that. There are plenty of people who like God, but not the God of the Bible, the god of their own projections, the Psalm 50 God, that's a lot like them. God is not an adjustable hat or a belt that you can cinch up to a comfortable place. We have to adopt God's value system, and that really is the decision that stands before us at Easter, at Christmas and every other week of our year.

It's a little clan. But it's the best clan ever. What did I call this sermon? Bethlehem's Honor? I mean, there's an oxymoronic phrase. God's kingly village, do you see the paradox in that intentionally? Well, what comes from that little clan that can't even be named among the clans, it's to just dismissed in people's minds to even be seen as a clan of Judah. Well, "From you shall come forth for me one who is to be the ruler," the marshal, the Hebrew word the king, the one in charge, the Lord, "the ruler in Israel, who's coming forth is from of old, from ancient days." By the way, when you were born, where were your origins from? Where did you come from? Right? Well, you didn't have a preexistence. That's what makes you mortal. There's only one immortal person ever born, Christ.

You could say, "Well, this is about him kind of tracing his lineage back to David." Great. Plenty of things we can look to that say yes, of course, that's the point. Right? He is the son of David. I get that. But his goings forth from long ago, match every other passage that say things you can't say just mean that, it means much, much more, that he's the everlasting Father. Right? The mighty God. There's nobody born who can look back at their preexisting days, and yet when they asked Jesus about how he gets off saying what he says with such authority, he says, "You know, Abraham rejoiced to see my day." You're not even 40 years old. You've seen Abraham? Stop with your nonsense. He said "Before Abraham was born," you know this line, "I AM." That's bad grammar. We're going to mark you down on that paper. That's the point.

Have you been reading the Book of Revelation with us in our Daily Bible Reading? God is described as the "God who was, who is, and who is to come." Here's the shorthand for it. "I AM." That's what the angel of the Lord said, who was God, who perhaps even was more specifically the voice of the second person of the Godhead, saying to Moses, "Tell him, I AM sent you." We derive the word entomologically we believe "Yahweh," which is his name conflated in the word Jehovah people use, but the word Yahweh, meaning the ever-existent one. Christ came as the ever-existing one.

He is Lord, we ought to think that way. We ought to live that way. Number three, real quick. "Live Like Jesus is Lord," is boss, is king, is eternal, is deity. Believe that he is the exact



representation of the nature of the Father, to quote Hebrews Chapter 1 verses 1 through 3. That "In him dwells the fullness of deity in bodily form." The cult groups are wrong. Jesus is Lord, and that means more than the fact that he's just some human leader who is going to lead the world. He's God. I mean, that's what we're left with.

After all this great statement in John 1:1, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." We have in verse 14, "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." See, that means that there was this pre-existent reality. We've got to be unashamed of that. It's a distinctive doctrine "from the beginning." It's what God said would happen in Daniel Chapter 7 that this one, like a son of man, was going to come and all the nations were to submit to him. This is a pre-existent person who we are worshiping, which would be blasphemy if he's not God. He speaks of his experiences before he was born, and you can't speak of any unless you're Shirley MacLaine and then you're making it up. And all I'm telling you is that you are someone who worships the King who has all the authority of heaven who will come and establish his kingdom. We ought to live like he's the Lord. We ought to champion his deity. We ought to respond to his lordship.

Jesus said one time to a group of people in Luke 6:46, he said, "Why do you call me boss, boss and not treat me like a boss? Why do you call me Lord, Lord and not do what I say?" And even as I say that out loud, maybe there's something in your life, you immediately go, "Yeah, there is something I am not doing what he said, because it was hard, because it's difficult, because it's embarrassing, because I don't think I can afford it, because it's too risky, because I'm afraid. You ought to obey the King because one day he is coming back and we want to anticipate his arrival and not shrink back in shame at his coming because we're not doing what he said. I love that line in Psalm 25. The coming of Christ is the arrival of the King and there should be a joyful anticipation of his welcome. Triumphal entry was just a precursor for all that.

I prayed with the pastors this morning and some of my prayer team. And I prayed, I said, you know, I feel bad about this message in one sense, because it's a not very festive message. Matter of fact, it came out last night when I preach it a lot more intense than I thought it would. And then two weeks ago, I'm preaching about all this, you know, festivities and joy of the celebrations. I told you to eat fudge, right? I mean, I was going two weeks ago about that, and now I'm thinking, "Oh, here's this rough sermon." And I had them pray, and I prayed maybe it would be different this morning, and then I'm now at the end of the sermon going this is worse than last night.

But all I can think is it's a lot like you wanting your football coach, you're an NFL player, you want your football coach to come into the locker room and charge you up and encourage you to go out there and get them. Now, if we're playing a Pop Warner team from Downey, I think, OK, we can slap each other and cheer and sing songs and grab a Gatorade and all that. No problem. Even if we're playing a college team, right? We're bigger. We're stronger. But you understand that we're like the Pop Warner team facing the NFL in our culture. We need sometimes more of these locker room discussions, even at Christmas, where we say, "Wait a



minute, this is hard. This is hard because what we're promoting is something the world does not like."

And I'm sorry that so many of the sermons here this last year or two have felt that way, but I think even as the strictures of our culture have pressed down upon the church, which I know is kind of a slosh over from a lot of governmental overreach and other things that are going on. But I feel like there's this pressure in the sense of "Wow, we need to be strong." There needs to be a bit of sobriety about all this. And maybe I'm just justifying the fact that this sermon didn't turn out as festively as I thought it would. I thought we could sing O Little Town of Bethlehem and it would be a feel-good. But I realize it's not how this has turned out. It's not what we expect.

But I pray that nothing would be more fulfilling for us than to look back from heaven's perspective. But you're only going to be there for a while. We're going to come back on earth. Christ is going to rein. But I wanted to say that we thought the right things. We did the right things. We promoted the right things even at Christmas time. During our stay on the earth during this epic. There's a lot of groaning involved. We can celebrate. We can be joyful in what God will do. We can rejoice in what God will create to quote Isaiah. Even though it's a hard time now, we take comfort in that.

I mean, the worst, most dour named book in the Bible, the book of Lamentations, has that scene in it about the fact that we need to realize his mercies are new every morning. He's going to get us through this. Second Peter 3, that God knows how to sustain even Lot, living in Sodom and Gomorrah, even though his righteous soul was tormented. God can get us through this. He's going to get us through it. I just want you to know what we're celebrating, who we're celebrating, and even why I think, I have good biblical reasons for thinking it, that he was born in an obscure place called Bethlehem.

Let's pray. God, help us not only to think rightly about the incarnation and what it means, think rightly about the fact that Jesus was despised and rejected of men, but he was like one from whom men hide their face, that he was a "Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," that "He was like a sheep led to the slaughter," not any description that we would want in voting in a leader in our lives. But all of that to remind us that he was not of this world, his kingdom was not of this world and that we now are citizens of another place. And that we need to live as ex-pats in this world, joyfully celebrating the victory that is to come. Christ has conquered. Take heart, your son told us, because he's overcome the world. We believe that we want to celebrate that even this December, this Christmas week. So enable us to do that, please.

In Jesus name. Amen.