



Enlisted-Part 6
God: The Tactical Recruiter
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We have made some steady progress through the book of Luke. So far, it only took us six weeks to get through the first chapter. Now that's a lot faster than you thought. Well, I mean, would you admit we're moving briskly through the book at this point—or not? Well, that's six sermons, one chapter. Twenty-three more chapters to go. Twenty-four times six, that's 144. That's 44% longer than the book of Romans. My kids will be in college by the time we're done with Luke at this pace.

So I'm trying—that was one of my goals—get through it, move, keep moving. And so at least we're getting to the end of something here. And the end of the first chapter of Luke is certainly important as we wrap up the series that I've entitled *Enlisted*. Now, if you've been with us, you know that—and one of the reasons I chose that, as you've I'm sure gathered at this point—is because when you look at and study the first chapter of Luke, it's hard not to be impressed with how God has assembled such a diverse crowd of people, a group of people, I mean, from John to Zachariah, Luke, Mary, Elizabeth, all these people, to do and play some very instrumental roles, to serve in some very important positions, to set the stage for the coming of Jesus Christ. And that is, you know, we look around in our generation, we realize—like the rest of the New Testament tells us—not just those guys in the first century, but us here in the 21st century have been called for our generation to serve in some very important roles, strategic roles. They may seem small by comparison, but they're important for the people that we interact with every week. God has called us to serve in some roles to promote the cause of Christ in this day and in this place, and we need not abdicate our role. We have a very important role and we better take it seriously and see ourselves as enlisted in the cause of promoting Christ.

Well, *enlisted*—if you haven't pondered it, I'm sure you have—but you know, when you look at this title for the series, it really is a military term, right? This is a term that's usually associated with the armed forces. And that was intentional. That was on purpose, because Christianity—if I get serious here for just a second—is not a sport, right? Christianity is not a game. It's not a hobby. It's not a club. In a very real sense, the Bible presents Christianity and the work that God is doing in the world as war. I mean, it's akin to warfare. And that's a serious thing—warfare.

Now, if you look at the campaign God has called us to, it is vitally important. And the battle, if you've been a Christian very long at all, you recognize is real. The consequences are real; the stakes are as high as they can possibly be. The stakes are life and death. The consequences, in terms of their pervasiveness and their term—I mean, they're eternal, the Bible says. If you take the Bible seriously, this is the most important battle that is raging, and has been raging not only since New Testament times, but even before that, where God is doing something in this world that we need to take very seriously. And if we have a role to play in it, that is super, super important.

Now, we've dealt with these five figures in the first chapter so far, but we haven't dealt with the most important figure and person and character, and that's the one who is leading the charge, the one who is at the helm, the one we've called in the subtitle of this morning's message the tactical recruiter. He's the one picking people to play a role and to fulfill a particular spot, or to serve in some way to get this battle advanced. And that is God—God Himself. He is behind the scenes; He is the one leading this. And it's important for us to understand what He's doing and how important it is that we faithfully fulfill our role.

Now, the two songs—I know we've kind of dealt with them quickly as we dealt with Zachariah and we talked about Mary. But I want to take another look at those two songs that we read in the middle of our worship time this morning, and look at those songs from the perspective of what they teach us about God, His agenda in the world, and our role in serving that agenda. So there's a lot to learn about what this thing called Christianity is all about and our role in it just by reading the songs with those things in mind.

Now, I understand Mary's song comes first—time chronologically comes first in our text—but I want to deal with Zachariah's song first because he goes and kind of sets the stage for us in giving us the biggest possible picture as to what God is doing and how these people in the first chapter are enlisted to specifically deal with that chapter in the battle.

Now, if you haven't found it yet, please turn to Luke chapter 1. Take a look at these words on your pages of your Bible, and let's start in verse number 67. Zachariah—you remember the context, right? He's been not able to speak for nine months because he doubted and stumbled there when he was told that his wife was going to have this child. And so here we are now after this whole naming situation, and Zachariah affirms what Elizabeth had said—that the kid is going to be named John and he's going to be this guy who's got this very important role to play. And he begins to speak. And in verse 67, the Bible says, "His father, John's father, Zachariah, was filled with the Holy Spirit"—this is Luke 1:67—"and he prophesied." Now, that's a big phrase right there. The Holy Spirit now is going to speak through Zachariah. So whatever we're reading now is a record of what God thinks on all of this. This is God's commentary. It's not just an accurate record of what Zachariah said or thought; these are accurate statements about what God is doing in bringing Christ and John the Baptist on the scene and all these people playing a role in making this happen.

So what does God say about it? What is this all about? Well, it starts with Zachariah's word of praise. In English—just like in Greek and in Latin (which was the Bible for the church throughout many centuries)—the song begins with the word "Blessed." That's why if you read commentaries or you were part of some liturgical high church that you grew up in, you knew this song as what was called the *Benedictus*, because in Latin, that's the first word that begins it. And by the way, down there in Mary's song—or up there in Mary's song—they called it the *Magnificat*, and *Magnificat* was the first word of the Latin song of Mary, which translates "magnify the Lord." And the word order is a little different in Greek and Latin, but the *Magnificat* and the *Benedictus* are the

two songs here. But if you didn't grow up in a high church, and you don't care about Latin, that was just a waste of time—but there you go.

So it starts off with a word of praise: “Blessed be the Lord God of Israel.” Now, here's what He's doing. All the prophetic concern about the coming of Christ is all going to be summed up in this phrase—ready? “For He has visited and redeemed His people.” Now, this is a big statement but seems to be in the past tense. Now you've been around and you've studied with me for a while at least, or anybody who knows the languages—you understand, there are some things that don't translate very well into English. One is the tenses of Greek verbs. We have three—past, present, and future—in English. They had five in *Koine* Greek, in which the New Testament was written. This is the one that has the least amount of emphasis on time—it's a weird way to put it—but this is the aorist tense, which is just a simple reference. It's in the past tense, but you understand that we still have just a newborn John, and Jesus—I mean, just the baby Jesus is about to be born, not even born yet. So the redemption hasn't happened yet, hasn't taken place yet. But the whole point of this—sometimes we call it a prophetic perfect—the sense in which God has said it, it's going to happen. But in time, when he's writing this, and when he's saying this, when Luke is pinning this statement in the mouth of Zachariah, it had yet to happen. And then really, from our perspective, only stages of it have happened.

Why? Keep reading. “Because He's raised up a horn of salvation”—which was barely getting started at that point. “Horn” was always the symbol of strength of an animal, and the picture of God's strength being manifested in that He's saving His people or redeeming His people—“for us in the house of His servant David.” You've been to Sunday school, right? You understand that the whole lineage of the great Messiah was going to come through the lineage of David, through the tribe of Judah. “As He spoke”—this is all happening because God had called this a long time ago—“by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old, that we should be saved from our enemies”—here's the totality of the promise—“and from the hand of all who hate us.” That sounds geopolitical, and understand that it is. And it hasn't even come to fruition yet because the kingdoms of the world still have not yet become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He's not resting on His throne forever and ever—not quite yet. But stage one of redemption is taking place. But the totality of it, when we look ahead, it's going to include all of those things.

But all of it—all stages of it—are based on verse 72: “To show the mercy promised to our fathers, and to remember His holy covenant, the oath that He swore to our father Abraham”—way back in Genesis 12, and reiterated in 15 and 17 and throughout the book of Genesis—“to grant us that, we being delivered from the hand of our enemies”—and that's a little bit of a double fulfillment, because there are some enemies that were political, geopolitical, and some that were spiritual (more on that as we develop this song)—“that we might serve Him without fear,” without threat, without any kind of hostility not only from our enemies horizontally, but even in our relationship with God (as we'll see as the song concludes in a bit), “in holiness”—which is not something we're all that great at quite yet; we've had a problem with sin—“and righteousness before Him all our days.”

Okay. Now that statement—let’s just stop right there between verses 75 and 76—is kind of the biggest statement that we can make about what’s happening in that time at that point that Elizabeth and Zachariah were a part of. And the whole point was that Christ came because He was going to, to put it again in the words of verse 68, “visit and redeem His people.” He was going to save them, which included in the end a lot of big things relating to the national politics of Israel and of all of God’s people. But more specifically, as we’ll see as we finish the song in just a minute, more importantly, the forgiveness of our sins and peace with God, and the kind of relationship that we need with Him that we often call from our perspective the mercy that we get in being saved.

Now, all of this—I’ve even titled the series *Enlisted* because I wanted to associate this concept in your mind with warfare. And we touched on that a couple of times in this series, but I want to bring it to bear as we focus on what God’s doing in the world. And though it doesn’t look like a war word, I want you to underline it or highlight it or bracket it or whatever you need to do to make it jump off the page in verse 68: the word “redeemed.” “He’s visited and redeemed His people.” He showed up—visited—it’s kind of a majestic way to say it, and He’s redeemed His people. That’s the point of the coming of Christ. And John was a forerunner to Christ, so He’s going to redeem. And “redeem”—that sounds so nice, right? It’s really not a nice word. You know what “redeemed” means, right? To free, to ransom, to save, to liberate, to rescue.

Now, that’s a word that, when you read what it looks like in Scripture, comes with a lot more violence than we may think. It’s not because God is a warmonger. And it’s not even as though God started the war. But it’s a reaction to a problem—to solve a problem. And that is summed up in the word “redemption”: to get back, to take back, to liberate. Now, I want to put it this way—number one in your outline, if you’re taking notes, and I wish that you would—just jot this one down to start with, and then we’ll unpack it a bit. If we’re going to look at Zachariah’s song, the first part of it, I think what’s helpful about this section of the song is it helps us understand the war—and I’m putting that all under the rubric or the umbrella of redemption. What is the war? Redemption.

Now, I know people don’t like war, right? I mean, we don’t like it. Who would like war? The only weird person would like war. But there are some people that really don’t like war and think war is never appropriate. And when I start talking about Christianity and making it somehow connected to—or germane to—the topic of warfare, people go nuts. That’s craziness.

When I leave my house every morning to come to the office and come to work, I pass a car in my neighborhood that sits out there—white car, blue bumper sticker—and it says, “War is not the answer.” Every day I see that: “War is not the answer.” Okay. Well, that’s a great thought. That’s super nice. Super nice thought. I love that thought. It’s a great thought. I wish we didn’t have to have any war. Let’s just all vote against war. Let’s just never have war.



See, you just need to understand this: when it comes to war, any just, equitable, fair, or righteous group of people—society, government, nation, economy, God, heaven, whatever you want to call it—war is not something that anyone takes pleasure in. Sometimes, though, particularly from the biblical perspective, war is necessary to fix a problem. To fix a problem.

I have to think when I drive past that bumper sticker in the morning, “Now what happens, sir, peace-loving man, when you come home from work tonight, and when you drive into your driveway, you recognize something’s disheveled, something’s out of place, something’s not right? And you come up to the door and you realize that you can’t get in the door—the door has been barred, the door has been blocked. And inside, as you try to get in, you recognize there’s some armed men in there that have your wife and your children held hostage. And as you peek through, you see them there with duct tape around their mouths and around their ankles and around their wrists. And they’re in there. There are armed guards guarding them—you’ve got kidnapers. They’re being held hostage by violent men.”

Okay—“War is not the answer,” man. That’s what you come home to. So what’s the answer? Well, negotiation. “Let’s negotiate. Please, sir, please let my family go. Please? No? Oh, come on, please? No. Pretty please? No.” Okay, so you’ve got a hostage situation. You’ve got a man with people that he loves being threatened here—and perhaps under the peril of death—by violent people. At some point, Mr. Nice, peace-loving man is going to pick up the phone when the negotiations break down and the meanies don’t do what he says, and we’re going to call the cops. And the cops, if we’ve got an armed hostage situation, are going to call the SWAT team—there: bang-bang, dangerous guns—and he’s going to stand out there cheering them on, is he not? If he loves his family, if he cares. Why? Because he’s a warmonger? No, not a warmonger. But he recognizes this: when you have a problem, and the problem has been caused by those who have done something egregious and illegal, and they refuse to stop, and persuasion and words and negotiation do not solve the problem, the just man, the righteous man, the good man will respond in some way that often involves force and even violence to fix the problem and make it right.

Can you imagine if, with the mounting evil of World War II—which I heard that our adult Sunday school class had just talked through—if the Allied forces had decided to say, “War is not the answer. Let’s talk, Hitler.” No. What happens with the totalitarian Third Reich, the regime that is conquering Europe, if everyone sits back and says, “You know, I’m not into guns and bang-bang and shooting and blood and death. Let’s not do any of that”? What does the old adage say? “The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing.”

Here’s the news: God is good. And because God is good, He doesn’t do nothing. He does something when He sees us held hostage, and He knows that our plight and our fate cannot be fixed through negotiation. He solves the problem through redemption—liberation, freeing, rescuing, taking us out of the bad situation and delivering.

Now, let's think about the beginning, the origins. The war—it didn't even start in Genesis 3. You understand that? If you're note-takers, you might want to jot down—though I've said it many times, you probably have it memorized—in a veiled, nuanced text in Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14 we have the beginnings of the picture of the war. And if you want a recapitulation, which is a great one-liner, you can jot down Revelation chapter 12, verse 7, which I understand basically recapitulates the idea of what happened in Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14. And it simply says this in the ESV, Rev. 12:7: “And there arose war in heaven.”

I remember reading that line: “And there arose war in heaven.” Why? Because God sat back and said, “Let's have a fight today”? Is that what God said? No—because He doesn't love war; He loves peace. But war broke out in heaven, which is what Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14 talk about. Before it ever broke out on earth, it broke out in heaven because there was someone who wanted to foist a coup d'état on the rightful, legitimate monarch of the universe. And he wanted now to overthrow the leadership—the rightful leadership—of heaven. And it caused the war, so much so that even as Rev. 12 explains, a third of the angelic beings—as any organized coup d'état will attempt to do—he then advanced and expanded the number of rebels. “We need a growing rebel base here.” And so a third of the angelic beings joined the rebellion.

See, when the rightful leader is now denied his rightful leadership—like the man with the bumper sticker in my neighborhood, who now doesn't just walk away and say, “Well, you know, I guess you're in charge of my wife and kids now; I couldn't negotiate my way out of it.” No—you belong in that family, not the hostage takers. You're the one who should be there. You're the one who should be able to enter your own home. You're the one who should be telling your kids what to do, not hostage takers. This is an egregious injustice, and it needs to be solved. And if it can't be solved by negotiation, it's got to be solved by force.

This is the war—the cosmic battle, if you will—that started in heaven in Ezekiel 28 and Isaiah 14, nicely stated as a very uncomfortable verse: “war broke out in heaven.” And then it spilled into earth. Like I said, any organized assault always tries to build its band of rebels. And so on the earthly scene in Genesis 3, we see the assault take place on earth of those who were loyal to the King, and we have temptation. And the temptation was what? “God is not really in charge, is He? He didn't really tell you what you could eat and what you can't eat. You listen to me; don't listen to Him. And really, all I'm going to tell you—you don't have to bow down to me; just bow down to what *you* want. Look at it. Isn't it good? Don't you think it will make you wise? Isn't it nice to look at and don't you think it'd be good for food? Why don't you just do what you want to do and forget that leader? We don't need to do what He says.”

And so what do we have in Genesis 3? We call it the fall of mankind. What was it? It was a rebellion—a rebellion against the rightful leader of the universe. And when He is not at the top of



everyone's org chart, everything is out of skew, everything is out of sync. And there are ramifications the Bible calls "death," which is not just biological—your pulse stops. This is something much more profound and philosophical than that, although it includes biological death. There's a lot of things that come on the heels of that as a consequence, as our Sunday school verse when we were kids taught us in Romans 6:23: "The wages of sin is death." And when you take the rightful monarch out of place—in heaven, on earth, or in your life—there are going to be consequences.

When I was a kid in elementary school, I went to Bixby Elementary School in Long Beach, California, and we had a carnival every year. And I don't know why it didn't start right after school, so we would ride our bikes home, we'd ride our bikes back, we'd come. You could buy some of these tickets, and you could spend the tickets on all the weird things they had going on. You could dunk the principal and you could do all these things. And we had this little corner over by the bike racks—there was a track they set up. And they had these bikes, these like carnival bikes, these wacky bikes. And then there was this really disturbing clown that led the thing and took your tickets. And you could give him a ticket. And all of us bikers—of course we all wanted to ride the wacky bikes. They had weird things; they were painted weird colors. And the weirdest thing about the wacky bikes at Bixby Elementary School were the wheels—they were made in such a way that the hub in the wheels was way out of sync. The spokes on one side were a lot longer; spokes on the other side were a lot shorter. And they had these big forks in the front and the back and a big banana seat and a flag on the back and all this weird stuff. But when you got on it, they had this little course—you'd give them your ticket for 50 cents or whatever you paid—and you'd get on this thing. And it was supposed to be fun. And you rode it for, you know, whatever—five minutes—to ride around this little track. But when you did it, can you picture that? When the hub is not in the center—whoooo—you know. And all of that was our entertainment for the afternoon in Long Beach.

Now the good news was when we were all done paying for that joy ride, we couldn't wait to get back on our own bikes and ride home. Why? Because the spokes on our bike—they're all the same length, and they all pointed to the center. And in the center, the hub was right in the center. The forks came to the middle and the wheel spun perfect. And it was great—it's the way it was designed to be. Whenever God is not calling the shots—if He is not the center that consults everything that we do, whether it's Satan or whether it's the economy of heaven, or whether it's the organization and culture and society of earth—when He is put to the margins and He is not in the center, life is out of whack.

By the way, that is the definition of sin. To use the very exacting Greek word in the New Testament—*hamartoma*—it simply means you've missed the mark. It's wrong. You built it wrong. It's messed up. Almost every time we touch on something philosophical as it relates to sin, I often—even just for reading the title of the book on the back of the worksheet, always give you some books on the back—I always like to add Plantinga's book down there. And when he talks about sin, he calls it this: "not the way it's supposed to be." It's a great, great summation in layman's terms of the philosophical problems of *hamartia*—sin—just "not the way things ought to

be.” We think of sin as these really egregious things in our society where we will watch tonight’s news and we’ll say, “Well, there’s the sin.” No, here’s sin: sin is when things aren’t the way they’re supposed to be. And for people, that means we were made not only to glorify God, but to look to God to call the shots for our lives—not do whatever looks good, whatever you think would taste good, whatever you think would make you wise. It is not about you calling the shots; it’s about you being submissive to the One that needs to be the center of your life, the top of the org chart. That’s what makes things right.

And when that gets out of kilter—though sometimes we’re intoxicated, as they were in Germany, to throw their loyalty to Hitler—at some point in life (and most of us, if we’re Christians here today, we could open up a mic and testify to this), you start to recognize, “This ain’t right.” You can only imagine the masses of people loyal to the Third Reich that at some point, as the effects of that totalitarian regime played itself out, they started to feel that inner conviction—“This ain’t right.”

Let me go to another passage. You can jot this one down—you learned this one when you were a kid too, I hope—John 10:10. Remember that verse? John 10:10—Jesus said this: “The thief comes only to kill, steal, and destroy.” That’s not how it looks because he’s pitching a good line: “Hey, this looks good. You ought to do it. This will make you wise; you ought to do it. This is what you really want. Do what you want. Don’t listen to God.” But the end of that is only, as the Proverbs say, death. The end of that—death. Steal, kill, and destroy—picture the hostage takers. If you want to live in that situation, that’s all that it is. But Christ comes as the Redeemer—the Liberator, the Deliverer—and Christ says this at the bottom of John 10:10: “I came that you might have life, and you might have it abundantly.” But that’s not just some prosperity verse for getting your yacht and your Jaguar or whatever. That’s a verse about what it means to have God back where He’s supposed to be—freed from the liberation and bondage of sin and the coming consequences of sin. Because two chapters earlier in John 8, He said, “Anybody who sins becomes a slave of sin.” It’s a tyrant. Not only is it habitual in our lives, but all we do is rack up more penalty for the coming judgment. He can free you from that. He can free you from the penalty of it; He can free you from the grip of it—albeit imperfectly in this life. You can be on a whole different trajectory in your life if Christ becomes the center, and you get reconciled to God. He calls it life, not death. He calls it light, not darkness. You get transferred from one domain to the other. It’s liberation. And if you understand something about what that means, you recognize—oh, that is the battle. That is the war. That’s really what we see going on throughout the universe. And it is something that should concern us. It’s something that we should elevate to a place of—it’s not just going to church and getting a few thoughts and improving my life or my relationships. This is about heaven and hell. This is about good and evil. This is about judgment or freedom or forgiveness. This is about enslavement. It’s about darkness. These are big, huge categories of reality. And the Bible says God, from the beginning, has been working this out.

Let’s read it again—Luke chapter 1. It says in the text there, “He has visited and redeemed His people”—not done yet; matter of fact, it’s just getting started when he’s saying this—“and He’s raised up a horn of salvation in the house of His servant David, as He spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old.” Now, that’s a mouthful right there. And oftentimes, whenever we hear



about something that's predicted or said prophetically about Christ, we turn to the easy texts and the obvious texts—Micah 5:2 (we may look at that one in two weeks) and Isaiah 53—and all these passages clearly speak of Christ, and we can see the parallels really easily. I want to turn you to one that's a little more subtle, based on what it says here, and that is that He's "raised up a horn of salvation in the house of His servant David, as He spoke with the mouth of the holy prophets from of old."

Turn with me, if you would, to 1 Samuel chapter 2. Let me show you some of the interesting parallels here and get you to appreciate how God has been working toward this end from the beginning. And that is that He wants to liberate us from things being out of whack as it relates to who's the center of your life, who's in charge of your life, the penalties associated with your choices in life. And the Bible says He's been working to send this Liberator—to visit you, to redeem you, and free you from that—from the beginning.

Now, here's something unique about Israel that you understand, I hope. When God called this nation out, starting with Abram, and He started to build this nation, He started, by the way, with an infertile couple who seemed past their time to have any kids. He visits them and starts this great nation. And Abram gets a new name, and Sarai gets a new name. And they now are called, instead of Abram and Sarai, they're called Abraham and Sarah—"father of a great nation," "princess." They're going to lead this thing, and from their loins is going to come this great nation. And then things get started: they need a land, and you've got the whole thing going on in Joshua after the wanderings. And they get this land—the conquest of Canaan. So you've got a land, you've got people. You've got Moses—he gives them the Law, so they've got a law code; they've got people; they've got a land to dwell in. One thing they don't have—and God seems to be pretty down on—is they don't have a king. And for that, that's a bit of a contradictory statement. Because if you really know your Bible, you know that when Moses talked about the future of Israel, he kept mentioning a king. He kept even mentioning how the king ought to operate, what the king ought to do—even down to the fact that the king ought to take the Law of Moses, write a copy of it for himself, and keep it with him and read it every day—the king. And yet when they asked for a king, God said, "Ah, you don't want a king—I'm your king." They asked for a king—"Ah, you don't want a king; I'm your king," God would say through the prophets.

Matter of fact, it got so frustrating for them that they clamored for a king when the ark got captured at Shiloh and the armies were routed, and Eli died (which is about to happen in 1 Samuel). They were like, "We have to have a king." And Samuel, by the way, takes that so personally—he is just spiraling down in depression. And he goes to God in his frustration, and he knows that God does not want them to have a king, even though He talked about a king. And remember what God said: "Don't take it so personally. I mean, really, the slam is not on you; it's on Me. They haven't rejected you; they're rejecting Me as their King."

Okay. Now what's with all of that? You're just saying here now you're propping up David—is that Plan B? It's not Plan B. David is Plan A. But He wants to establish His king in His time, in His way, as a forerunner to the ultimate King—the template of the ultimate King—God incarnate, God Himself. John was to go and prepare the way for the Lord. God Himself was going to reign as the King in personal form. It's called the incarnation. Now that's a big deal. But when they get started—you know, Sunday school grads—the three kings of the united kingdom—who was the first one? Saul. I'm thinking of Israel here. Who was the next one? David. Who was the third one? Solomon. Then Rehoboam and Jeroboam split the kingdom. But those three guys—important people. Solomon kind of rides in the wake of David. David's the hero and always talked about from that point on in the Bible. The guy before him, though—Saul—was kind of like, you know, not a very good experiment in kingship. He was the one that the people wanted—“He's our man, this is what we want, this is the guy we want.” God says, “Okay, you can have your turn with him; it'll be a disaster. Then I'm going to give you one man after My own heart.” He's not the Messiah, but he plays the role and template of a good benevolent dictator. “I want to be your King. I'm the benevolent leader in your kingdom and your nation and your lives. But I'm going to give you a man who's a foretaste of the real King, who's the incarnate Christ, and He'll be the ultimate King.”

Now, God was preparing to bring David on the scene. In 1 Samuel chapter 1, we have the story of an infertile couple—does that sound familiar? Elkanah and Hannah—can't have kids. She's barren; she's infertile. She prays and prays and prays and prays to have a kid, and God finally grants this kid—Samuel is his name. Now remember, we're not even up to them asking for a king yet in such loud and clamorous voices that God says, “Oh, they're rejecting Me as King.” We don't have a king. We've come through the period of the Judges where there is no king, and God wants to have a theocracy, not a monarchy.

Now look at this song—and I wish we had time for the whole thing (we don't). Because if you were to—maybe there's a good homework assignment—read the second chapter of 1 Samuel, you'll see Hannah's song after she gets the baby, drops off Samuel after she weans him at the temple, and she goes on her way. But she's praying to God—a prayer of thanksgiving that sounds a lot like Mary and even a lot like, as you'll see here, the song of Zachariah, who speaks on behalf, of course, not only himself, but of Elizabeth, John's mother.

Look at the end of this. I said I'm going to show you a subtle messianic text—here's one—because I just want to make the point and underscore the point: He spoke this “by the mouth of His holy prophets from of old,” that He was going to “raise up a horn of salvation for the people in the house of David.” Verse 9: “He will guard the feet of His faithful ones.” Here's a little bit of the cosmic battle that's always going on—people that want God as their King. “But the wicked shall be cut off in darkness”—there's a theme of light and darkness; we see it everywhere in the Bible—“for not by might shall man prevail. The adversaries of the LORD”—we want to talk warfare here—“shall be broken to pieces; against them He will thunder in heaven.”

Now this is the important, very interesting part: “The LORD will judge the ends of the earth.” Now, we just kind of—again, you read stuff like that because you read a lot of things about “the earth” and “the ends of the earth” and “the whole world” and “everybody.” You hear these superlative phrases all the time. But contextually, you’ve got a Jewish girl—mom, right?—a lady that just had a kid who’s dropping a kid off at the worship center in a nation that doesn’t have a king, that’s pretty small compared to all their neighbors. This is not a big country we’re talking about. The text says the LORD is going to “judge the ends of the earth”—God will be in charge of the universe; He will be the monarch in the universe. And how is He going to do that? Through the mediation of the king—look at it: “He will give strength to His king, and exalt the horn”—there’s our word from Zachariah’s song—“of His anointed.” You know what “anointed” means, right? *Anointed* is the word in Greek *Christos*, or “Christ.” In Hebrew, it’s the word “Messiah.” That is a big statement—the Messiah is going to be this strong deliverer, the horn; He’s going to be the King.

You read stuff like that in your daily Bible reading when it’s the day to read that—you just read through it, you go, “Oh, it’s interesting.” Think chronologically—“King? What are you talking about? We don’t have a king.” As a matter of fact, when we ask for a king in a couple of chapters, you’re going to say, “Oh, you shouldn’t be asking for a king.” Because the ultimate King that’s in view here is Christ. Even the Targums—even the Jewish commentaries, right?—they have no interest in promoting Jesus Christ of Nazareth—keep looking at this text and writing about it in terms of its messianic picture of the King that leads over all the people—not just Israel—but over the ends of the earth, who will rise up.

Now I just want to point this subtle, interesting parallel: the infertile couple producing the forerunner to the type—the ultimate type—the archetypal guy, the king of Israel, the man after God’s own heart: Samuel, David; John the Baptist, Jesus. Infertile parents singing a song of praise about the coming of the great King. The parallels there are just too amazing that we often miss those. We could spend all day doing that. Why? Because from the very beginning, the prophets of old were telling a story about the redemptive work of God with a counter-offensive—winning back the enslaved people to sin.

He started in the garden. By the way, let me go all the way back there—you won’t even need to turn there—but you remember the story. In the story of the fall, the first messianic prophecy we have is God speaking to the serpent—the embodiment of Satan there—and saying, “Here’s the deal: I’m going to put enmity—hostility—between your offspring”—right? Satan’s got offspring—“and the offspring of the woman.” Remember that story? Now, that’s a weird thing. There are people that will join your rebellion, Satan. They will fall to your rebellion just like Eve just did. “And your offspring and the offspring of Mary”—I’m sorry, of Eve, who would later be the offspring of Mary—“there’s going to be an enmity and a battle there.” It’ll be the great cosmic war of the universe—we need to understand that war. And you remember how that statement ended, right? “Your offspring,” Satan, “will bruise the heel of the offspring of Eve; but the offspring of the woman will do what?—will crush your head.” Now talk about the cosmic war. The enmity is the picture of all that has been carried out from Genesis 3 forward. The victory pronounced—oh yes, there will be damage to the offspring; there will be a crucifixion that sits there as the centerpiece of

our reminder of how God won the war. But the picture here of what it means to win the war—done deal. God called it from the garden: the crushing of the rebellion will take place.

That's the war we're engaged in. That's the war that God is carrying out. That's the war that the angels look to and said, "When is the Son of David going to be born? When is the Lord going to appear in human form? When will there be the King to which all people—if they're going to be right with God—will see as the Lord of their lives and the center of their lives? When will He be born?" Zachariah stands and says, "God's visited His people. God has redeemed His people in the house of David," just like He said "by the mouth of the holy prophets of old," that we will be "saved from all of those that are in enmity with us—all of our enemies and all that hate us." You experience a little bit of that now—that if you stand for what is right, and you call God the center of your life, the center of your morality, the center of all that you are, the world and the culture that you're at enmity with is not like that. That's the cosmic battle going on. And you're called not only to recognize what it is, but you're called to play a role in that, which is exactly where Zachariah goes next. Gets real specific with his own son in view.

Back to Luke chapter 1, verses 76 through 79. He now starts to speak specifically of his son, John the Baptist. And he says, "You know what, child? Listen." (He doesn't say "kid," but he says "child.") "And you, child"—you, John—"you're going to be called a prophet of the Most High"—a mouthpiece of God—"for you will go before the Lord to prepare His ways." John was the forerunner to Jesus. You want to find one of the first statements of the deity of Christ in the Gospel of Luke?—right here: "the Lord." We've already seen it, I guess it was earlier in the text too, but I mean we have that picture: he's going to go before "the Lord." And in that there's that sense of the arrival of God—the center of the universe, the rightful monarch—to restore order, at least in our lives.

Now what's he going to do specifically to make that happen? Verse 77 is worth underlining, highlighting, bracketing: "to give knowledge of salvation to His people in the forgiveness of their sins." To give knowledge of salvation to His people in the forgiveness of their sins. God's got some people that are not going to continue in the rebellion. Because in the house in which the hostages are held—that family keeps having kids, all under the armed guard of the kidnappers, the hostage takers—now there are some that are going to be liberated, and they need the message to get out to be saved. And the key for that is not just the geopolitical overtones of what's going to happen to the people of God one day, but it's the fact that we are forgiven. That's where it really starts—that's peace with God.

Why would God do that? Why didn't He just trash the rebels? Well, because of verse 78: "Because of the tender mercy of our God, whereby"—and it gets real poetic here—"the sunrise shall visit us from on high, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death; to guide our feet into the way of peace." This isn't a Christmas-card sentiment. This is right with God—forgiveness of sins, hostility freed, redemption from the slavery and penalty of sin. It's a great picture of



sunrise, by the way, because all the political overtones—all the real finality of this when the kingdoms of the world become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ—it's really not about the first coming. I mean, that pays the penalty; that sets the stage. But it's not until the second coming. That's why we can't ever celebrate Christmas without thinking of the Second Coming. Phase one was just the beginning. "The sunrise shall visit us from on high to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death; to guide our feet into the way of peace."

Now, John has got a job to do: "to give the knowledge of salvation to His people for the forgiveness of their sins." You've got a job to do. And we started with that premise. The rest of your New Testament says all of us—whether we're like Luke, or Zachariah, or Mary, or whoever, Elizabeth—we all have a job to do. It all comes down in commonality to this. I mean, all of our jobs, no matter what it is—missionary, pastor, businessman, mom—whatever your job is, you're called "to give the knowledge of salvation to His people in the forgiveness of their sins." That's the goal. We are called to be ambassadors for Christ, so people can be reconciled to God. And we need to—number two, underline—accept that task. Accept that assignment. You need to accept your assignment. You can't abdicate; you can't evade it; you can't dismiss it; you can't turn from it. This is what God has called you to do. Not just experience the forgiveness of sin, but now be called to do something about those around you. That's why when Jesus calls His disciples, He says, "Follow Me and I will"—He doesn't say, "forgive you." He says, "Follow Me and I will make you what? Fishers of men." You got a job to do. Everyone who's called to experience the grace and mercy of forgiveness is now commissioned and enlisted to get more people saved. You got to understand your task.

Now, here's one problem. Parenthetically—let me just take five minutes—parenthetical sidebar. And I'll set it up while you turn—and as you turn—to 1 John chapter 3. My concern as a pastor is what God clearly calls us to do. My job is to admonish and rebuke and exhort and try and do the best I can to get all of us to do it. That's my job: to rebuke, admonish, exhort.

As I think about this, I think, okay—by extension throughout the New Testament we have the job that John had. Whatever the form, whatever the platform, whatever the means, it is to give knowledge of salvation to people so they get their sins forgiven. Why don't you do it? Well, some of you do—I get that. A lot of you don't. Why don't you do it? And those of us that do it, why don't we do it more? Why is this not really the passion of our hearts, if it's not?

One of the reasons is we don't see the war as clearly as God does. And unfortunately, we don't see the world or the people in the world the way God does. If the picture is hostage-taking, it's pretty clear to know when someone is held hostage and someone isn't—someone who's free and someone who's enslaved. That's pretty easy to see in my illustration and in the imagination in my mind. But in the cosmic battle, it's not that clear. See, the Bible takes the entire human race and it splits it into two parts, and it says you're either here or you're either here. You're either in the category of the rebellion or you're in the category of the redeemed. You're either enslaved to doing life your way,



or you are submissive to the Lordship of Christ—having been forgiven and indwelt by the Spirit. You are one or the other. There are two categories in the Bible for people.

There are three categories in our minds: there are really bad people that we read about in the paper, see on the evening news; and really good people like us, right? And then everybody in between that we work with and see around town and, you know, the families on our kids' soccer team. Those are the middle people. "I don't know how they're going to fare on Judgment Day—I hope it works out. They seem pretty good. If I were God, I'd let them in. I mean, I don't know—who knows? I don't even think about it. But they're not bad people; they're good people. We see it all the time. I mean, we're the really good people—we're God's kids. But then there's really bad people and we hate those people. Then there's everybody else."

See, the Bible doesn't give us that luxury—to think that there's three kinds of people. 1 John chapter 3, starting in verse 8, couldn't make it more clear. I'm talking about the cosmic battle—you're on one side or the other. Either you're with us or you're against us. You're either on our team or you're not. You're either for the Lord or you're against the Lord. There are only two categories. And though we don't have helmets with insignias or uniforms with monikers on it, the Bible says you should be able to tell. And it is clear and there's only two categories.

1 John 3:8: "Whoever makes a practice of sinning is of the devil." Now, I thought "of the devil" meant those really weird, whacked-out, thrash-metal-concert-going, blood-sucking, tattooed, inverted-pentagram-wearing people—those are the people "of the devil," right? Ozzy Osbourne fans or something (I'm dating myself there with that)—but those guys, those are the devil guys, right? It's not true. And again, part of the problem is the mystique we've added to the word "sin." The text says whoever practices sinning is "of the devil." We've got a mystique and a weird picture of Satan. Then we've got a mystique and a weird picture of sin. And we don't recognize this: that sin is having things not the way they ought to be. The rightful monarch of the universe is not the monarch of your heart. The rightful King of the universe is not the King of your life. That's not the way things ought to be—that's called sin: missing the mark, falling short.

The devil is leading a rebellion. And here's the thing: we picture some people "of the devil," that they're in loyalty to the devil—"Hail Satan!"—and that's what we picture. That's not what Satan needs. You're a part of Satan's rebellion not because you're loyal to Satan; you're part of Satan's rebellion if you choose to cast off the leadership of God. You see that.

And that means there's a lot of good people you work with—good people you work with—who do not have Christ as their Redeemer, their God; the Spirit doesn't indwell them; they're not regenerate people. God is not their God; they live for themselves. But you see, Christ came—2 Corinthians

5:15—so that we would no longer live for ourselves. That’s Satan’s thing. That’s what he pitched in the garden. He came so that we might live for Him who died for us and rose again.

Keep reading. So the uniform should be obvious. If you practice sinning—if that’s your thing, you just live for yourself, do your own thing, you’re your own king, master of your own fate, captain of your own soul—then you’re “of the devil,” you’re in the rebellion. “For the devil” (the leader of the rebellion) “has been sinning from the beginning”—way back when—Ezekiel 28, Isaiah 14, Revelation 12. “The reason the Son of God appeared”—the reason He visited us—is to redeem us, to liberate us, to “destroy the works of the devil”—that rebellion, that do-your-own-thing mentality. “No one who is born of God”—no one who’s on the team of the liberated—“makes a practice of sinning.” Now, he said in the first chapter, if you think you’re sinless, you’re a joke—you’re kidding yourself. Of course we all stumble in many ways, as James said. But what’s the point here? The point is, it’s not the practice of your life. The uniform you’re wearing now is, as it said in Zachariah’s song, to “serve Him in holiness and righteousness.” That’s the moniker of your uniform. Albeit imperfectly, but that’s what you do. “No one born of God makes a practice of sinning because God’s seed abides in him; he cannot keep on sinning,” verse 9 says, “because he’s been born of God. By this it is evident who the children of God are and who the children of the devil are: whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God”—and then he parlays and segues into his topic—“nor is the one who does not love his brother.” There’s one expression of righteous living.

And the Bible says that’s it—you’ve got two categories. Now, if you go through life thinking there’s three categories, you probably won’t be engaged in the war. You probably won’t pick up arms to fight this battle. You probably won’t engage in the war—you won’t. But if you understand that there are only two kinds of people—those that are still held hostage and captive to the problem of living their lives for themselves (and that makes them qualified for the rebellion), and those who have Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior—if you don’t see the world that way, you’re likely to go through thinking, “It’s not that bad. They’re good people anyway. I hope it works out for them.” It’s not going to work out for them. They need the knowledge of salvation for the forgiveness of their sins. They need you to bring that to them.

That’s the war. Warfare—don’t like all the warfare talk? The Bible loves it. New Testament—of course, we’re not talking about, you know, Islamic radical warfare with bombs going off. We’re talking about radical Christian warfare, which in 2 Corinthians 10 says this: “The weapons of our warfare are not worldly or earthly.” They’re not swords; they’re not catapults; they’re not Roman armor. That’s not the point. He says—but here’s how it reads—“The weapons of our warfare... have divine power to destroy strongholds.” What are they? “We are destroying arguments”—listen to this now—“and every lofty opinion that’s raised up against the knowledge of God. We’re trying to take every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.” That’s not our thoughts—and we always use that about our imagination and our thoughts. This text is about us in the world fighting a battle. And the battle is the people that you work with, the people in your family, the people in your extended family, the people in your neighborhood—they’re not living a life in submission to and obedience to Jesus Christ. They don’t look to Him to have their sins forgiven. You’re going out

there, for all their reasons and excuses and arguments against it all. And they raise up their lofty arguments against that. Your job is to tear that down—with gentleness and respect, not being bombastic, not being rude, not being brash—but you’re to engage in the battle.

And some of you don’t engage in the battle. Some of you listen to—I don’t know how many of my sermons—and you’ve yet to even let your coworkers know that you are a faithful follower of Christ. You’re some underground, camouflage Christian. It’s time for you to come out of the foxhole and to engage in the war. Speak up. Tell them. Let them know. Because you have no idea when this war is going to be over. You have no idea. You do not want to stand on the other side of this life and have people looking at you going, “What—you were on their team, and we were all lost, and you never opened your mouth?” You want that—for all the families that know you on your kids’ baseball team? You really want that—for all your neighbors that you live next to and wave to all the time and talk over the mailbox about the weather? You want them looking at you saying, “What kind of ambassador were you? What kind of soldier of Christ were you?”

And by the way, if that sounds familiar—“soldier of Christ”—common motif. Here’s one worth looking at—2 Timothy chapter 2. I know this is uncomfortable—this is the part many of you have fought. I don’t know what your excuses are, but you probably have some well-worn excuses—those of you that are underground Christians. You don’t share Christ. You don’t talk about the gospel. You’re not—when it comes up in the lunchroom at work you go underground because you don’t want the confusion, you don’t want the argument, you don’t want all the people thinking—you don’t want it costing you. Listen, I know it’s uncomfortable—that’s why it’s called warfare. I know it’s going to inconvenience you—that’s why you’re called a soldier. That’s just how it is.

Verse 3—get ready with your pens here, you’ve got to underline some things here: “Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus.” You are a soldier. The question is, are you a good one? As a good soldier of Christ Jesus—are you a good one? That means you’re willing to suffer to do the right thing. I’m not talking about being purposefully offensive at work. I’m not talking about really just trying to be brash with your neighbors. I’m talking about being strategic and careful and thoughtful and gentle and wise and intelligent—but engaging. “No soldier gets entangled” (entrenched, pulled down) “in civilian affairs”—acting like you’re not in the army. You just act just like everybody else at work. No. Why wouldn’t you get entangled in civilian affairs? Obviously, we’ve got to pay our bills; we’ve got to go to Costco; we’ve got to get our kids to the doctor; we’ve got to pay our mortgage—I get all that. We’re not talking—it’s not a missionary verse. This means: you understand that you’re a soldier, and you’ve got to pay the price of standing up to represent the King and fight this battle. Why wouldn’t you get entangled and laden with all the civilian affairs everybody else does—“since his aim” (underline this now) “is to please the one who”—here’s where I got the word for the series, by the way—“enlisted him.” You are enlisted to be a soldier. The question is, are you a good one? And the difference between a good soldier and a bad soldier in the economy of the New Testament is whether or not you’re accepting your assignment—and faithfully, in effort under the Spirit of God, looking to Him for opportunity, speaking up and standing up for the gospel of Jesus Christ in our generation.

I mean, I know God can get His job done without you—and that may be one of your theological lame excuses for not doing anything about the gospel. “Oh, God’ll get ‘em saved anyhow.” That’s true. But aren’t you glad when we read texts like this it’s “Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John”—not “Matthew, Mark, Philip, and John”? Think about it. Luke could have abdicated his role, but he didn’t. He did the hard work. He got associated with Christ. He was willing to stand with Him and put His message in writing. Or how about Mary? She’s rejoicing in this thing as we turn to her song now. And she rejoices in the privileged fact that she’s allied with that. Why? Because it was easy? It wasn’t going to be easy. When we looked at her life, we realize she’s going to suffer. She’s going to be called crazy—the mother of a nut, of a man where they would hang him on a cross, and they would spit at him, and they would beat him up. And she would stand there with the pangs of pain and humiliation of everyone against her own Son as she watches Him be executed by the Romans. It’s a hard thing. And yet, she’s eternally grateful for the privilege of being enlisted to be a good soldier in the task of promoting and advancing the cause of her Son, Jesus Christ. Think about that—big deal.

Look at her song, verse 46: “Mary said, ‘My soul magnifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for He has looked on the humble estate of His servant.’” Speaking of herself now in the third person: “For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed; for He who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is His name. And His mercy is for those who fear Him from generation to generation. He has shown strength with His arm; He has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts. He has brought down the mighty from their thrones”—we looked at who’s back there in 2 Chronicles, if you remember the time we went through this the first time—we saw some of the implications of this text—“and exalted those of humble estate”—people like Mary. “He has filled the hungry with good things, and the rich He has sent away empty”—this picture of complacency, that they don’t need anything, versus those that hunger and thirst. “He has helped His servant Israel”—that’s her one broad statement about the battle—“in remembrance of His mercy, as He spoke to our fathers”—just like Zachariah’s—this is nothing new—“to Abraham and to his offspring forever.” Nonstop—He’s been talking about the coming of the Deliverer.

And while the last two verses kind of echo what Zachariah said, her song is basically about her overwhelming joy—her gratitude, as we spoke to it when we preached on her—her humble worship that she would be a part of God’s plan.

Number three on your outline, if you’re taking notes, jot this down if you would: we need to be grateful for your inclusion. You need to celebrate, like Mary in worship, that you would be included—that God would look to the humble estate of your life. By the way, there’s a word in here that’s repeated four times in the two songs that we just read, and I want you to underline them or circle them or something. Look at the first one in verse 50 in Mary’s song: “And His *mercy*”—there’s the word—“is for those who fear Him.” Drop down to verse 54: “He has helped His servant Israel, in remembrance of His”—there’s the word again—“*mercy*.” Looking at verse 72 back down in Zachariah’s song: “to show *mercy* promised to our fathers and to remember His holy covenant.”

Jump to verse 78: “because of the tender *mercy* of our God.” You get a theme here in these two songs? Songs about mercy.

Here, Zachariah is primarily looking at the broad mercy of God to deliver the nation of Israel and forgive people of their sins. Mary is celebrating the mercy—second reference to the nation of Israel and to the broader community of the redeemed—but she starts by celebrating the mercy just toward her. Mercy. I know we sometimes bifurcate that with the word “grace,” but really when we define grace from the Sunday school definitions—“unmerited favor”—the “unmerited” part is really the reflection or the embodiment of the idea of mercy. And what is that? You don’t deserve it. That’s her whole point—“I’m a humble servant girl. Why should I be favored?” Remember her initial statement to Gabriel? “Who am I that this should happen to me?” And Elizabeth echoes that to her in her contact with her in the hill country. She’s overwhelmed by the fact that God would include her.

I just want to say—that’s really what worship is all about. And it’s the kind of gratitude that should really empower your kind of response to God. It’s something that you’ll see reflected in passages like Ephesians 1, which continually reminds us that one of the reasons He saved you was “to the praise of His glorious grace”—that you would sit back and say, “Huh—it’s amazing that God would include me in this.” See, when someone comes up to you and says, “Hey, you’re a Christian, right?” There’s two ways to look at that: “Yeah, I was smart enough to figure this out,” or “Isn’t it good that I got this right with God,” or—like Mary—to say, “Wow—who am I to be a part of this?” This puts credit to God.

This is called the *Magnificat* because in Latin it starts this thing, but it is a key word. And like in Latin and in Greek, it starts the sentence for emphasis. And in our text, it should be underlined—it’s the whole point of her first statement: “My soul *magnifies* the Lord.” That’s a word used eight times in the New Testament. Let me give you one of the times that—if you’re into the word studies—this will be a telling reference to jot down: Matthew 23:5. In Matthew 23:5, the same word is used. It’s not used very often—only eight times, as I said. One of the times is in Matthew 23. And if you’re a Sunday school graduate, you know that’s a terrible chapter—He’s just lambasted these Pharisees for their bad actions. Well, here’s what He says when He enlists the word here—the Greek word “magnify.” He says in verse 5, “These Pharisees—they do all their deeds to be seen by others. They make their phylacteries broad”—those were the boxes with the Scripture—to make sure everybody saw that they were religious—“and their fringes”—remember the fringes they were to have on their robes? You’ve seen that in their outfits, even in Israel today—the Orthodox? He says they make their fringes—literally in Greek, here’s the word—*magnified* (translated in the ESV “long”). What’s the point? “Make sure that people see this.” I have an outfit and I have symbols and monikers and pictures of my righteousness so that everyone—I want to make sure that it’s on display. “Can you see this?” That’s the picture of “magnify.” When people look at Mary, what Mary says is, “I am, in my soul—and my concern is—that people *magnify* God.” The greatness of God is seen. That they would look at me and God’s inclusion of me in the plan of God, and would say, “Isn’t God great to include her?” Not, “Isn’t Mary great.”

That's a big thing for us to get through our thinking when we think about our inclusion in the redemptive plan of God. But the message has been more about the enlisted part. And both of those, I think we should celebrate. But let me close with this text—turn to 1 Timothy chapter 1, please. I want you to celebrate that—and some of you do it, and you do it so well. I mean, you get here, you read texts of Scripture, you study the Bible, you sing worship songs, and you're like, "I am so overwhelmed with gratitude that God would include me in forgiveness." And you've got that part wired. But unfortunately, many of you are not grateful that you've been given a task to do. Paul demonstrates both here, and Mary obviously includes both in her song. But look at the way Paul does it so dramatically—such a contrast here (I mean, a complementary contrast).

Let's jump into the middle of the statement—verse 14 (right in the middle of the sentence, I realize, in our English text and Greek as well): "And the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus." It's amazing that I'm included. "The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I'm the foremost." I got my sins forgiven; I got liberated; I got redeemed; I got taken out of my sin and the penalty of my sin. And it's amazing because I was the worst sinner of all, he says. "But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display His perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in Him for eternal life." And that breaks him out in a word of praise: "To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever." Here's the fuel for his worship—that God would forgive him. Some of you are good at that part of it—praise God. "I'm grateful—humbly grateful—that I would be saved."

Start in verse 12, though. This whole statement of gratitude was prompted by his gratitude not for being saved (although that's where he ends up), but his gratitude for being included in the service of God first. Verse 12: "I thank Him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because He judged me faithful, appointing me to His service." I'm glad I have an assignment. I'm glad I have a role here. And if you had time, you could look at his full statement of that calling in Acts 26 when he stands before King Agrippa and he says, "I wasn't going to be disobedient to my calling." "I was going to do it. God said it would be hard, but I'm going to do it because I'm privileged to have an assignment in the kingdom of heaven." "Though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, insolent opponent," he says. "But I received mercy"—there's our word, verse 13—"because I acted ignorantly in unbelief." I didn't trust; didn't believe God. And then just to re-read that great sinner verse—verse 14: "And the grace of our Lord overflowed for me with the faith and love that are in Christ Jesus."

You need to be grateful for your inclusion. And for you, it may be easy to be grateful that you're saved. But you need to be grateful that you have a task to do this week—to represent Christ, to give the knowledge of salvation to people for the forgiveness of their sins. That's your job. And that's something you've got to be equally grateful for. Because if you're only grateful to be associated with Christ, and you're not grateful to have the opportunity and privilege to represent Christ, you're like a lot of people, unfortunately, that are decried by the faithful military in our country.

Just going back to that military thing—in my studies from time to time I stumble across General Douglas MacArthur’s speech at West Point—1962 (he got an award), and he gave this speech that became—you know, he starts by saying, “I’m not a very eloquent man and I’m not good with words,” or whatever—and he just lays out this amazing speech for the military there at West Point, the cadets that were there—on that title *Duty, Honor, Country*. Some of you know that—if you’re in the Marine Corps, certainly you know that speech. I mean, it became a rallying cry for anybody in the military. They’re so committed to duty and honor and country. And you know people like that. And having had a lot of ministry in and around the Marine base here locally, and obviously in my ministry with a lot of people in other branches of the military—they have a real dignity to that devotion to those things. And those guys not only at West Point, but people who take their oath seriously in the military—they despise those who don’t take it seriously. As a matter of fact, they are the subject of ridicule and military court censure and judgment when they bail out on that. I mean, they’re called deserters. They have all their little acronyms for AWOL—absent without leave—or UA—their unauthorized absence. They split in the middle of a responsibility. They leave—they desert. And they hate that. Matter of fact, they don’t like to talk about deserters other than to curse at them or to show their disdain for them.

The sad thing is, for all the great people in our armed forces that I’ve met, who have served their country in honor and duty, there’s about—well, at least during the Iraqi war, you can look these stats up—about 5,000 to 6,000 people that deserted every single year during the Iraqi war. American armed military—5,000 to 6,000. Here’s the thing you may not know: those were 5,000 to 6,000 who were in the armed forces but had yet to be deployed. They didn’t desert in the arena or theater of war; they deserted stateside. There’s only one—in the records that I’ve read—only one recorded desertion on the battlefield in the Iraqi war (as we went in to liberate Kuwait). Only one.

Now think of that. You had thousands that, in anticipation and in fear of the coming battle—“I don’t want to do it. I’m out of here.” That’s really—hardly even qualifies for desertion. I know they committed to it. It’s almost like the draft dodger. It’s someone looking ahead: “I don’t want to do it. I don’t want to do it.” But what’s amazing with that statistic is those who were actually engaged in the battle—once they got involved in the work of liberating Kuwait—they didn’t bail out. The difference there—same thing I find in church. There’s a lot of you out there—I’ve already spoken to you in pretty harsh terms, and I don’t mean to be mean to you—but you listen to sermon after sermon; you sing worship song after worship song; but you do not stand up and get counted with Christ at your workplace or in your family or in your neighborhood. You don’t want to talk about it. It’s too costly for you. You’re like a draft dodger; you’re like a deserter. But you’re really not like a deserter because you haven’t even engaged in the war. It’s people that pick up arms to fight this battle—not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers—that all gets played out when we talk about Christ and stand up and speak up for Christ. It’s funny that people that I watch doing that—rarely do I see them bail out. It’s just like the stats in the arena of war: you pick up arms and you realize what the battle is about, and you engage in that, and you start suffering hardship like a good soldier—I find very few people say, “I’m going back to civilian life.”

So I guess my final exhortation in the series called *Enlisted* is for you to dive in. The question isn't whether you're a soldier for Christ—the question is, are you a good one? And you're not a good one if you haven't accepted your assignment and you're not actively, vocally involved in representing Him in one way or another in this world. And I say it that way with some emphasis because I didn't plan to have the first chapter of Luke end up looking this way. I didn't have the knowledge or the insight to know this is where this was all going to land months and months and months ago when we decided, “Why don't we start the fall with Matthew 28?” But to see the juxtaposition of those two series and to see the emphasis that God has providentially put on this church—I've got to think this is what we desperately need. Because I can't tell you—and I'm going off the script, way off script now—but listen: how good would it be for us to be at a church filled with disciples engaged in the battle? It ain't good when half of you are sitting on the sidelines. I mean, that just produces—I don't want to start listing those things—it isn't good. How good would our worship be if we all came in after a week of really standing up for Christ in this community? How great would our fellowship on the patio be? I mean, if really we were coming in from a week of really engaging in tearing down every thought that raised itself up against the knowledge of God in our workplace, in our sphere of influence? How different would your response to preaching be if you came in and really you'd spent the last six and a half days working on representing Christ and advancing the cosmic battle, which is to extend the Lordship of Christ over more and more people? It'd be a different experience for all of us.

You're enlisted. You're a soldier. It's a battle. Let's be good soldiers for Christ.

Pray with me.

God, I know having perspective—going to look so different—things will look so different from that perspective. And I know we've kind of made a caricature of being in Your presence, like everything's going to be so peachy, and it'll be awesome, and high-fiving and dancing and all the stuff we sing about in our silly Christian songs that don't give us the sobriety of what it means to stand at the bema seat of Christ and give an account for the deeds done in the flesh. God, I know there's no condemnation for us, but there will be accountability for every steward who has been commissioned with a job and a task to represent Christ in his or her generation. And God, we want to be good soldiers. We don't want to get entangled in civilian affairs—oh, we've got to live life on this earth—but we've got to have a different agenda, eyes to see the harvest, a heart that earnestly prays that workers would be thrust forth into the harvest. God, give us eyes for that. Give us a heart for it. Give us opportunities. I know that's the scariest prayer, I suppose, to hear—for people to hear their pastor praying for them. But I pray You tee up the opportunities so obvious that if we walk away from them this week, it'll be clear we've walked away from something You've clearly orchestrated for us. Open up our mouths. This could be the last week of earth life as we know it—who knows? Let us do our jobs. Let us be faithful in the task. Let us get out there and do what we're called to do. We're not all obviously apologists or preachers or missionaries, but God, we can speak up. We're supposed to—we're ambassadors. So make this the reality as we turn our attention here next week to Christmas and the Advent and all that goes with that. We want to end this study with a



real sense of responsibility to be Your spokespeople in this generation, in this place—fearlessly, boldly proclaiming the message of Your Son. In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.