



Christmas on a Budget
The Wealth of Those Who Don't Seem to Have Much
Pastor Mike Fabarez

Last summer, my family and I were on the East Coast, a little time off vacationing, and we stopped in at the Breakers mansion in Newport, Rhode Island. Have any of you been there—the Breakers mansion? If you don't know the Breakers mansion, it is just a little summer home for the Vanderbilt family. It was constructed a hundred years ago, which was the richest family in the nation at that time. And it's only 65,000 square feet of living space. Seventy rooms.

I gotta tell you, before I bought the ticket and walked into the Vanderbilt summer home, I was completely content with my Orange County house. I felt fine about it. I felt blessed. I felt happy. I felt comfortable. I thought everything was great. You know, with my house here in Orange County—about 30 seconds into it, I realized what a dump I live in. I mean, just a shed, a shack. I mean, I thought this: now this is living right here.

Now, you think, wow—65. That's crazy, man. Seventy rooms—what do you do with seventy rooms? The Vanderbilts had figured out what to do with seventy rooms. They had a purpose for every room. And by the time I was done with the tour, with a little tweaking, I had figured out what to do with seventy rooms: the morning reading room, the afternoon reading room, the electronic room, the music room, the bowling alley—I had it all arranged exactly as I would need it, right?

It doesn't take much, does it, to get us feeling like, you know, we just need a little bit more in this life. I mean, we just want a little bit—just a few more thousand dollars here, a few more hundred square feet there—and it'll be just the way we want it. You don't have to go to Newport, Rhode Island; you can go to Newport, California if you'd like to feel a little inadequate in your living. Sorry, some of you live there. But as you know—Aliso Viejo folks—never... scratch all that.

And if you don't feel it driving through the wrong neighborhood, you certainly—just all you have to do is open your eyes in our culture—and you can see that, you know, the whole advertising industry, for instance, is built on—predicated on—the whole premise of trying to make you feel a little bit discontented with what you have—no, frankly, a lot discontent with what you have—because all you need is a little bit of what they're showing you on their glossy, thick, you know, airbrushed pictures to give you a sense of: if you just had this, it'd be better; if you were just driving that, your life would be better; if you just lived here, or you went there, or you had this. And we just—we're always bombarded with these ideas: you need a little bit more and happiness is just around the corner.



And you may pridefully feel above all that—you're impervious to that: I don't follow the advertisers' tricks. Well, listen, this is more than advertising. This is a spiritual battle that started in the garden. Think this through with me: in the garden, back in Genesis 3, the picture is of two people that, frankly, have all they need. Or they had all they need. They had each other, they had a place to live, they had plenty to eat, they had a good, solid relationship with their God—they were doing fine. And Satan showed up, you can put it in these terms, to try to convince them: you may think you have all you need, but you don't have all that you want. And here, let me tell you, you really want this. And if you had this, your life would be better.

And Satan is at work in our lives. And it may not be a glossy photo of some new car that gets you, but there are those feelings of discontentedness. Satan has deep pockets, as I often say—he knows what it is that's going to get your heart off-center, to get you wanting just something a little bit more; just have something—if you just had this relationship, if you just had this body, if you just had this level of energy or health, you just had these relationships, if you just could be in that circle—it gets us feeling like we just need something more.

God was so concerned about this in Exodus 20, in the Big Ten that came down from the mountain on the stones—you know, the big laws—number ten was this: Thou shalt not what? Covet, right? We don't like to use that word much in our culture—covetousness. It's just when your heart is just not satisfied with what you've got.

Interestingly enough, when God breaks into time and space with his Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, giving mankind what they need, he does it in a package that really has nothing of what we think we want. Right? Think about it. He takes all of the trappings of material wealth, and of advantage, and of pleasure and comfort and convenience, and he takes it all out of the picture. And he presents the coming of Christ as simply and humbly—frankly, you know, just laden with poverty. And he's just here to give you the answer. And it has nothing to do with what you're so easily duped into craving in this world.

And in a sense, this sermon is nothing more than a long version of the Christmas musical, right? Which basically said last week, did it not? I mean, they were on the stage there, with one budding actress that said it so well: you know, it isn't about the wrappings, she so eloquently said; you know, it's about Christ. The coming of grace is what we really need. It's what we ought to treasure. It is the profound meaning of this.

So, if you don't, open your Bibles with me—if you haven't already—to Luke chapter 2, some of the most familiar and oft-quoted, oft-read verses in all of the Bible, describing a scene that, unfortunately, as we picture the Christmas card covers, we kind of romanticize this and we clean it up. I want you to try to get yourself in the sandals of those that would be watching this. This does

not look like it does in the nativity scenes that we look at on the front of our Christmas cards. This is really the most inconvenient, most uncomfortable setting that you could possibly imagine. And it begins with a decree that comes at the least opportune time. I mean, this is the most inopportune—this is the time when you do not want to travel. You don't want to leave your home, you don't want to leave your extended family, you don't want to leave the conveniences of your life.

And yet, in verse number 1 of Luke chapter 2, it says, "In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And they all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem." And if you know your biblical geography, to "go up"—we say we're going up to L.A. and down to San Diego—well, they were in Galilee up north, and to go down to the area of the Judean hills where Jerusalem was, and just six, seven miles south to Bethlehem—they always talked about going "up," because if you're on foot, you know you're going up, right? You had to climb up to the cities of Bethlehem and Jerusalem.

Why did he do that? Well, because he was from the house and lineage of David, the great king of the Old Testament. "He went to be registered with Mary," verse 5 says, "his betrothed," who was with child—she was pregnant. And the last thing—if you've been pregnant, or you are pregnant—the last thing you want to do, if you're pregnant in your ninth month, is to take an 85-mile donkey ride. Just thinking. My wife never said, "Let's go—I don't know—the Grand Canyon—take a donkey ride." That's not what you want.

But they had to do it, because they were under authority. Now, I know this is the ultimate authority, the emperor of Rome, Caesar Augustus. But they were faithful, obedient citizens. And even when it was uncomfortable, they were forced to go on a journey they did not want to go on. They were not free to do what they wanted. And there are a lot of times in our lives—jot this down, if you would, number one on your outline—when we are not free to do what we want. Let's just jot down the first half of this: when you are not free to do—and we love freedom, we love to talk about freedom, right? In our founding documents we talk about, you know, life, liberty, right? Freedom, and the pursuit of happiness. We want to be free. But we're not free. And you're not free to be happy? Oh, we can say it politically, in a political sense. Okay, I guess that's what we're striving for. But, you know, if I were really free, I would have moved into the Breakers this summer. I mean, that was it, man—I found it. That's what I wanted to do. But I'm not free to do it, right?

I'm not free to do a lot of things because, you know, my bank account isn't big enough. Because I don't have the right strata and status in society. I'm not free to do whatever I want because I, like Joseph and Mary, have certain constraints in my life and obligations in my life—contractually, relationally. I can't just do whatever I want. And at Christmas time, it seems that often we start to feel all those constraints. A lot of times, I don't want to go to that party. I don't want to go to that dinner. I don't want to go to that thing. And, you know, I don't want to do a lot of things that I'm

constrained to do—sometimes socially, sometimes just familial in my family, and sometimes just legally, thanks to the I.R.S. I can't even keep the money—don't get me started on that. Sorry, it's the wrong discussion for this morning. But we're all under authority.

Now, I want to take an extended sidebar, if I can here, and get into history, and I only do this because—your Christmas party at the company or whatever—I just want you to think accurately about the scene. So I want you to drop your eyes to the bottom of the worksheet, and forgive me for this if history and all the technicalities of it all aren't your bag, but it would be helpful for you to think biblically about all of this, and to do that we've got to get into some secular history and try and do our best to harmonize that with what the biblical historian here, Luke, is trying to do. And he mentioned some leaders.

The first one there is in verse number 1: Caesar Augustus, and he is the emperor. So at the top of that, if you would, just jot down next to the word "Emperor" on that little chart—jot down the word "Caesar Augustus," right? And you know that story—Mark Antony and the suicide—and he becomes the emperor and all that. If you don't know it—whatever—doesn't matter. Rent the movie. Here, he becomes the leader, and he's way far away—obviously he's in Rome—and here we're talking over in Israel. He's in Rome; way over here in Israel we've got the census being taken. And it credits that, in verse number 2, to Quirinius, who is the governor of Syria.

Now, if you've ever read any skeptics, or anything really on this, you're going to find this is a bit of a confusing thing. Because if you're trying to look for the census that Quirinius did, you would find that around 6 or 7 A.D., and when you do that, you think, well, wait—that doesn't seem to match the timeline here. Now, here's the problem with it. Quirinius, as best as we understand, was actually serving as governor—and it should even say the governor is not the word we would expect here—he was the procurator, he was the legate—here are some technical words they used in the Roman Senate—for Syria, but not during what Luke is careful to point out: the first census. You notice that in verse number 2? "This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria." And "governor," like I said, not a technical term—not a term you would expect. It's kind of like this: he was in power and did things in the Syrian region twice.

If I asked you, "When was Jerry Brown the governor of California?" what would you say? Right? You might groan, and then you'd answer the question. Now, I'm just—two political statements in one sermon—that was not good. Veiled and as mild as it was. Well, you'd say, "Well, he was the governor twice." Okay.

By the way, if you do read secular history, especially from skeptics, you're going to see them trying to poke holes in this quite a bit. You need to recognize this: there is no doubt that Luke knows about the second registration—he talks about it in Acts chapter 5. He makes it clear that he distinguishes

the two. You do not have a lot of extra-biblical references—matter of fact, some would say you have none, though you have allusions to it—of the first registration talked about here. And they’ll say, well, Luke didn’t have his facts straight. Luke was a very careful historian. I believe he did have his facts straight. I believe this is not only God’s inspired, God-breathed text, but I believe all the history that we do have matches with what we see in this text.

So what I’m doing here, in his reign—or his leadership—I’m starting with his first go at it and the first registration and his first influence in the Syrian region, and all the way up to the end of his second—at the end of his second term, if you will—as the proconsul, the procurator, the leader, the legate of Syria.

Now, there’s a third person on this chart—did you put Quirinius next to “Governor”? Okay—there’s a third person in this chart that we get in chapter 1, verse 5, because when we start talking about the conception of John the Baptist, and we meet Zechariah there in the first chapter, it speaks of Zechariah there in the time of King Herod. Now, if we were reading, for instance, and studying Matthew’s narration—narrative—of Christ’s birth, he becomes a prime figure in that story. And he is a prime figure—clearly—he doesn’t mention him, Luke doesn’t mention him here in chapter 2. But he’s a third person; he’s called the king. And he called himself the King of the Jews. Actually, it’s one of the reasons he killed the children—because he was very threatened by anybody who might rival his leadership—even killed his own children, if you know anything about Herod. There are four of them in the New Testament. The worst one—at least in terms of his viciousness toward any threats—was Herod the Great, who dies just after the birth of Christ.

Now, this is a time chart that’s got weird dates on it: A.U.C. Do you see that? A.U.C.—some of you have heard me teach on this before, and if not then—even if you have—good refresher. A.U.C.—I put the Latin phrase up there in the corner just underneath the line: *ab urbe condita*. Do you see that? After making—the *ab* is the Latin word “from,” right? *Urbe* is the word we get “urban” from—that means “city,” right? *Condita*—that means “the construction” or “the founding of.” So “from the city’s construction,” “from the city’s founding.” They used to date everything by the founding of the city of Rome, as you might imagine from the Romans.

So if you look to the left, the left star—1 A.U.C.—was the year in which the city of Rome, they believed, was founded. Okay? All the way over to the other side of the chart, you see the star on the other side, you see 1278. In 1278, the calendar changed for good and we no longer used A.U.C.—it was starting to fall out of favor anyway. As a matter of fact, people were starting to date things in that particular time after the inauguration of Diocletian. If you’ve been to church for a long time, or you studied anything about the Roman Empire, you might know that he was one of the most hostile persecutors of Christians that there was.



And so the church—let me tell you this story about the church, as I told you the extended sidebar—the church had the problem that we have, and that is: when’s Easter this year? And what’s with the crazy date of Easter? They can’t settle into, you know, one date—it’s weird. And it always floats around. Why? Because Easter is always based on the Jewish calendar, and we have to pinpoint Passover every year. And like Hanukkah and Passover and Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur and all these other dates we have in our Hallmark calendar, they’re always shifting every year. And that’s because they’re based on a different calendar that doesn’t adjust quite the way ours does—shorter months—and it ends up making these holidays jump all over the calendar.

Well, we had the pope at this time, in 1278, who didn’t have Hallmark calendars, and he only had his, you know, people, and he needed to figure out when the next Easters were. As a matter of fact, he said, “I’m tired of all this. I need to get a really smart guy to figure out when the next hundred Easters are.” That’s what he said. So he picked a guy named Dionysius, right? Dionysius—which is Dennis translated if you don’t want to spell that. He was the one in 1278 that came up with a dating system because he was given an assignment to come up with the dates of Easter. And he didn’t like the fact that Diocletian was starting to find its way into the dating system. And he said, “Listen, we’re going to not only give you the assignment that you asked for—I’ll give you the next hundred years of Easter, that’s easy.” He was a mathematician and an astronomer. He says, “I’m also going to give you a new dating system.” And he presented it to the pope. And what he said is, “I’m not going to have our calendars anymore dated by Diocletian, or even on the founding of Rome. What we’re going to do is date the calendar based on the birth of Christ. So I need to determine that, and then we can set it up, and off we’ll go.” Okay?

So he picks a date. Based on the reading of Luke chapter 2, he tries to find the governorship of Quirinius, and he tries to find the reign—which wasn’t hard to find—the reign of Caesar Augustus. So he takes those two and he picks the point where he believes that Jesus was born, on all of his research. Okay, now I know we’re all living under the B.C./A.D. timeframe calendar—B.C., “Before Christ”; A.D., *Anno Domini*. *Anno* means in Latin “year,” *Domini* “of our Lord.” That’s what it means. Right? So we are used to our B.C./A.D. dates—or in our politically correct world, C.E., “Common Era,” and B.C.E., “Before the Common Era”—and phooey on that. Whatever. It’s, to me, like the Diocletian dating system.

Sorry. Let’s use Dionysius, right? Let’s use his dating system and put some dates underneath the A.U.C. dates, okay? And you’ll see the problem that’s created.

Okay, let’s start now all the way over at the founding of Rome based on Dionysius’s dates: he dated the founding of Rome in the fall in 753 B.C. 753 under the star on the left side—that’s dated now as 753 B.C. He then, based on his calculations—which, by the way, you should be able to figure this all out now, if you’re a math major, really quickly—by his calculations he then figured that they were living in 525 A.D.—the year of our Lord 525. That is the other star in 1278. And they started to go away and not talk in terms of 1278 A.U.C. anymore. Now we talked about 525 A.D.

Okay, now let's take Caesar Augustus's reign. Do you see the canopy here of his reign? Okay. Instead of using the dates 724, let's put underneath that 30 B.C., because that's when Caesar Augustus came to rule—some would say in 31, but let's pin it at 30; there are lots of reasons for that—and it ended at—very little dispute on this—14 A.D. Go all the way over to the other side of the canopy there and jot, underneath 767, the number 14 A.D.

Quirinius was the governor from 12 B.C. to A.D. 6. Do you see that there? 742 becomes 12 B.C., and 759 becomes A.D. 6.

Okay? The figure here that causes us problems is Herod the Great. Herod the Great came to power in 40 B.C., so underneath 714 jot the number 40, and ended in 4 B.C.—4 B.C. So underneath 750, write “4 B.C.”

Okay, now I've got a problem. Because if I know what Matthew 2 is saying, and if I know what Luke chapter 1 verse 5 is saying—he's got to be alive, Herod has to be alive—at least when he's conceived, right? When Jesus is actually incarnate in the womb of Mary, Herod's alive. And now we learn in Matthew he's not only alive when Jesus and John are conceived, but he's alive when he's born—actually kills the babies because he's threatened by the birth of the one they call the King of the Jews, and he called himself the King of the Jews. So this date can't be right.

As a matter of fact, if you want to put it down, you can figure this out. But in 754 A.U.C., that becomes 1 A.D.—or A.D. 1. Right? And that's because he believed that Christ was born in the winter of 753; therefore the end of that first year—754—becomes A.D. 1. Okay? You only see one more hash mark and only one more date you haven't put down there yet, which you can fill in, right? Just do the math: 748 becomes—what year then? 6 B.C.

Okay, I put 6 B.C. there because, as I read the text—there are lots of reasons for this—if you want more on this, on the back there's a book by Harold Hoehner called *Chronological Aspects of the Life of Christ*, and every Bible school student, seminarian, has to read this book. It's very helpful, but it'll give you all the gory details—right? If this isn't boring enough, you'll get a lot more boring material in that book.

Six B.C.—do you remember when Herod was so threatened by Jesus's birth, the one the Magi called the King of the Jews? He had all the babies killed that were how old and younger? Two years old. Okay. So by the time that whole scene goes down—and he may be trying to pad this a little

bit—we've got Christ that's probably a year old, a year and a half, 18 months—I don't know how much he put a margin on this. But I know he died in 4 B.C., and we can kind of pin that for sure because Josephus was so careful in saying when he died, and he tied it to an astronomical event. He said it was the year just when Passover came right after the lunar eclipse. Now, any astronomer can figure out—as Dionysius could, but he didn't take the time to do it—to say, okay, well, wait a minute, we know then that he died in 4 B.C. because that's when, on March the 12th, we had the lunar eclipse before April the 11th, when we had the Passover. So sometime in that month period there, Herod dies.

And we also know—this is another side note, I'm getting way too deep into this—but over in Israel once, when they actually found Herod's burial place, not far from Bethlehem, they used Josephus's history to find their way through the whole burial lot—interesting enough. So we believe that Josephus was accurate as to when Herod died. But that means that Dionysius was not correct—Dennis wasn't right about the date of Christ. That means, I suppose—what's this worth?—and someone's gonna ask you at the Christmas party at your company, “You know, how long ago was it that Jesus—” they're not gonna ask you this, but let's just say they're gonna assume he was born 2012 years ago, right? That's not correct. Can't be right. Because we know that Herod had to be alive, and Herod died in 4 B.C. And since he killed the kids two years old and younger, we're assuming that Christ was born either in 6 or 5 B.C., which means that, you know, this was not 2012—we're talking 2017 or 2018 years ago.

Now that's a long historical sidebar—I warned you, right? Let's come back to the story now.

They cannot get out from underneath the decree. They dutifully respond to it, because they're not free to do what they want. You don't want to go on a traveling trip with your pregnant wife or fiancée when she's about to give birth. But that's what they do. And you and I are not free to do everything we want to do because we're under authority and under constraints as well.

Why did God do that? Why in the world would God make Mary—whom he's so highly favored, according to Gabriel—why would God make Mary take an 80-mile, 85-mile donkey ride when she was about to give birth? Why not have the baby—right? Don't you like this girl? Why don't you let this girl have the baby in her own home, in the familiarity of her own—and oh, she's just a peasant girl, but in the humble abode of her own house, with her family all around—do that. Why would you make her go all the way down there?

Well, the biblical prophetic answer is Micah 5:2—and you know that, but jot it down, Micah 5:2—and if you don't know that, you need to write it down. Micah 5:2 promised this: that the Messiah, the one who would be the ruler that would come forth for Israel and lead it, would come forth from the city of Bethlehem, because he was to be the fulfillment, the Bible says in 2 Samuel 7, of the



Davidic archetypal picture of leadership. A man after God's own heart was David, and from his descendants would come the ultimate leader—the one whose origins are from long ago, from everlasting.

Now, here's the thing: none of us pre-existed before our birth. Here's one that's claiming pre-existence, and he was to be born in Bethlehem of Ephrathah. Ephrathah was kind of like the county, the region—too small to be numbered among the clans of Judah. And he said, "I'm gonna have my Messiah born there," the Anointed One, the ultimate King, the incarnate Christ, in Bethlehem. Well, then why didn't you pick a virgin teenage girl from Bethlehem?

Well, a whole set of promises promised that the Messiah would be from a despised place. Matthew even calls it—he would be called a Nazarene, which means one who was from a place people despised. He was from Nazareth. I mean, and we've said it many times, it was from one of the despised places—overlooked. If you were born in Bethlehem, well, that's a noble city. That's a—you know, it's not a big city, but it's a place where David was from. That put it on the map. So it's not—you'd never be ashamed of saying you're from Bethlehem. But you would be ashamed to say you're from Nazareth.

And to fulfill the promise of where he would be from, he picked someone from Nazareth. And to get him born in the right place, in his sovereign plan, he brings her down—because of this decree under which she's obediently subservient and submissive to do—as Joseph and Mary go all the way down the Jordan Valley to the city of Bethlehem to have the baby. And then—even if we were studying Matthew, which we're not—we'd see he takes him to Egypt to even fulfill another allusion of God pulling him out, as the ultimate fulfillment of the promises to Israel—in many ways, the Christ child from Egypt. And he gets him into Egypt, he gets him in Nazareth, and he gets him in Bethlehem, all in his childhood, to fulfill the picture—that composite picture—of the coming Messiah.

So skeptics like you and I, with our open Bibles, could look at it and say, "Wow, the Bible is not just another book. It's not man's best guess at God. It's God writing through men to give us the truth of the gospel, so that we would have some assurance that we're not just following some man-made religion. This is God's Word to us." It's one of the reasons, in his sovereign plan, he had Mary in Bethlehem when she'd much rather be at home.

There's a lesson in there for us. I know you're not, you know, raising the Christ child. I understand you're not Joseph and Mary. But you can apply this principle to us on the authority of Romans 8:28, and that is this: that he works all things together for good to those who love God and are called according to his—what's the word?—purpose. God is a sovereign God in your life, just like he is in the lives of Joseph and Mary.

Number one on your outline, we said this: when you're not free to do what you want, here's what you need to do—second half of that point—you need to trust in God's sovereignty. You need to trust in God's sovereignty.

Now, here's the thing: when you're not free to do what you want, I'm assuming you complain, like most people do. I'm assuming you feel like this is a big detour: "I don't want to do this." I get that—we feel that way. But wouldn't it be neat to go up to Mary, you know, halfway through her donkey ride, and say, "Listen, I know you don't want this detour, but this detour—whether you've noticed or not—is God's way to sovereignly fulfill his purpose in your life, which is to make sure you have this kid in the place—the Messiah—in the place that he promised the prophet, you know, over 400 years ago. So we need you to be there so God can fulfill his promise—as inconvenient of a detour as this may feel like."

And the Bible says this—it's a great word, *synergeō*—he is going to work together in your life all the unpleasant things, all the detours, all the things that you don't necessarily care for, to do something good in fulfilling his purpose for you. And God is sovereign in your life. And the point of it is this: change your attitude about the detours, would you? Can you step back and at least say, "I'm not in the job that I want. I'm not in the relationship that I want. I'm not in the place in my career that I want. I don't want to work this period of time. I don't want to do these things. I don't want to go to this obligation,"—whatever it is that you feel like you'd rather not do because you're not free to do what you want—step back and trust in God's sovereignty.

You have to believe that God is putting you there for a reason. Mary eventually, and Joseph eventually, realized this. The Bible doesn't tell us they realized it when it was happening, and I don't know when they realized it, but they certainly know it now, do they not, that that detour and very uncomfortable trip in their life was for a very specific purpose that was bigger than them?

So even if you're in a job, for instance, that you're stuck in, that you don't want—ask the Joseph, the namesake of Joseph here that we're reading about? How about his namesake back in Genesis? He was in a job he didn't want because his brothers sold him as a slave to some traveling, you know, merchants, and he ends up in Egypt in a job he didn't want. Why? Because at the end of his life, when he saw God working out his purpose for him, he looked his brothers in the eye who had sold him into slavery and said, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good."

Now, that's the perspective we need while we're going through it. Is it hard? It's hard. But I know you're not all you want to be. You don't have all that you want. You don't get to do everything that you prefer to do. But in the limitations and the constraints and what you feel like is the lack of

freedom to be and do what you want—step back and trust in God’s sovereignty. God is sovereign. God is doing his job.

Job—I think about Job—and the catastrophes in his life. If you feel like you’re under attack or unjust things are happening, look at the big picture, which you can’t see. Job wasn’t able to read the book of Job while he was going through his trials, right? It’s hard when you’re in the middle of it. But God’s writing the book. As a matter of fact, he’s already written it for your life. So trust in his sovereign plan as uncomfortable as it might be.

Back to our text. So here’s a pregnant Mary, almost a hundred miles from her house. Well, at least she can check in to the Hyatt or the Hilton, you know, and it’ll be fine. It’ll at least be a comfortable place to have a baby, right? No—you’ve read the story. Verse 6, Luke 2: “While they were there, the time came for her to give birth.” Doesn’t seem like the best time to have a baby. “And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths.” You’d expect the baby blanket here, right? But she wrapped him up in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger—not such a—such a Christmas term. We think it means bassinet now, right? A manger sounds so nice. I mean, we didn’t grow up on the farm, so you’re not picturing, like, cow slobber on it. You do understand what a manger is, looking up—a feeding trough, right, for farm animals. Right? Especially moms—first-time moms—you don’t want your kid within 30 feet of a feeding trough, right? With oxen slobber and snot on it, right? Here is a place where the King of Kings is going to be laid, not with a beautiful baby blanket and not with a bassinet, but in a manger. They don’t sell mangers for babies at Babies “R” Us, right? You can’t register for one of these.

This is not right. I mean, let’s get a comfortable place for the kid. Well, I guess it’s adequate—it was hay in there—let’s just shoo the animals away, and we’ll just kind of build a little protection around the animal—we’ll put him there. Why? Why are you even near a manger? Bottom of verse 7: because there was no place for them in the inn. No place for them in the inn.

Modern commentators—you’ll read modern commentaries—I don’t understand; I guess they’re trying to sell commentaries. You know, this is obviously not a good thing. You’ll read commentaries that try to spin this into “it’s not all that bad.” It’s funny—all the commentators’ wives don’t have babies laying them in a manger. This is clearly a bad thing. As a matter of fact, where you want to be is in an inn if you can’t be home, and you want to have a room there that’s nowhere near the animals. You don’t want to have to lay your baby in a manger.

And what we assume from that is he’s born in a stable, and the old nativity scenes that we see perhaps are true, but a lot of the places where they kept the feeding troughs, and had the animals come in when it was raining, was in a cave. So that’s one of the theories of this: he’s in a cave, or he’s in a place where the animals are kept and the feeding trough is there—they happen to utilize

that and employ that to put the baby in. But whatever this is, it's a picture of just abject poverty. It's not a picture of being well taken care of.

We talk about life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Here's another phrase we toss around from a Broadway show, right? "Money makes the world go round." Now we know—oh, come on—it doesn't. Doesn't make the world—but it sure makes the trip a lot nicer, more comfortable—as the Vanderbilts—ask the Bible, right? Proverbs 10 says this: a rich man's money or his wealth is a strong city; it's a fortress, some translations. But the poverty of the poor is their ruin. Now, that's just an indicative statement, a commentary on the reality: you have a lot of money—things go better for you. You don't have a lot of money—it didn't go so well.

For me—if you've ever been stranded in a city because of an airport, you know, closure or weather—and you know what, I've done it, I've done it—and I thought about it as I was preparing this: wow—being in a city that you're not prepared to stay in. I've done it. I did it recently, about three years ago, when I got stuck and the plane didn't go out, I missed the flight and all that, and so I had my family, and I was stuck. Now the good thing is, a few years ago, I had a wallet full of credit cards, right? I also—when I was 19 years old—I didn't have any credit cards, and I got stuck in a city I could not get out of. I literally went around trying to scrounge up money, hitchhiking—which my parents told me never to do—right?—to try and get to a place because my car had broken. It was a mess. I'll tell you the story sometime, if you haven't heard it.

Bottom line was—it was horrible. I ended up getting the only place that I could afford to get that hadn't been inhabited for—I don't know—centuries, right? This is from a Hitchcock movie I went into. It was awful. It was gross. And I finally said, "Well, at least I got a place to stay tonight." I remember getting ready—I could picture myself on a—I don't know—a zit-cream commercial—washing my face. I could picture that moment of "ahh," and I turned on the faucet and literally—I'm not kidding—sludge came out of the faucet. That kind of put an end to that refreshing picture of revitalizing my face. It was the worst night.

You know what? Here's the thing: I was stuck in a town that had nicer places—just couldn't afford it. Now, there is no room in the inn. And I tell you what would have solved the problem: money. Money would have solved the problem.

Here's the thing that we've already learned about Joseph and Mary: they didn't have much. We learn later in this chapter—as we'll read and study later, Lord willing—when they're there on the Temple Mount sacrificing so that they could dedicate their firstborn to the Lord, the law required you bring a lamb—and then, like a footnote, well, if you're really poor, you can bring two pigeons or two turtledoves. And the Bible says they brought the poor man's sacrifice. When you didn't have any money, and when you're stuck in a place and you can't buy your way into a place—I mean, it's



terrible. Why didn't God give them some money? Have them open up something—and oh, come on, this is a great time for a miracle here, right? Give them what they need. Credit card shows up on the floor of the manger, and off they go to the nice, you know, Bethlehem hospital and have this baby in a sterile... But it doesn't happen.

There are a lot of times in your life too you'll feel like: if I just had more money, things would be better. Number two on your outline—let's put it this way: when you can't afford better. And you look at this, and you say, the only reason Mary and Joseph had this baby in a stable or a cave was not because they were trying to present some kind of, you know, virtuous picture of poverty. It's because they couldn't afford any better. If they had more money, trust me, they would have spent it and got a place—you can buy your way into a place if you have enough money. Right? They didn't do it. Why? Because they couldn't afford it.

And in this picture of Christ bringing what we need into the world, he gives it to us through a couple, in a narrative, that don't have enough money to have even a place to have this baby—which, by the way, becomes a theme throughout Christ's life. Luke 9:57–58—those verses—somebody comes and says, "I'll follow you wherever you go." And Jesus said, "You know, the foxes have holes, the birds of the air have nests—they keep going back every night to their nest—but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay his head. Do you even understand what you're saying?" Here's the deal: you don't know this about me—when it comes to my life, it's not characterized by financial prosperity. And if you want to follow me, there'll be no promise of financial prosperity. Luke 9—for all the TV preachers today that are going to tell you it's about you being financially prosperous—God never promised that to us. Are there rich Christians? Absolutely. God gives blessing, and sometimes it's amazing what he gives to people, right? Nothing wrong with being wealthy. The problem, according to 1 Timothy 6, is wanting to be wealthy—or, worse yet, thinking that godliness is a means to get wealthy. It's not. There's no such promise.

So this baby may starve to death in a stable? No, no—there's no way God is gonna let Christ starve, and there's no way Mary and Joseph aren't going to have dinner. They're going to be taken care of. Why? Because God is faithful to take care of his children.

Number two—let's put that down as the complement: when you can't afford better, you need to stop and remember God's faithfulness. Because God has promised to be faithful to you, to give attention to you—even though he won't fill your bank account to the level that you want. Right? What you need to do is to recognize this: maybe my want's in the wrong place. I need to go back to the promise of God that he'll take care of my needs. And when he brings the ultimate solution to our problem to earth, he makes it clear: it isn't about what you guys want. It's about what you need. And what you need is the basic necessities, and I'll provide that for you.

One passage on this, if you would—Psalm 37. Psalm 37—once you jot all that down, turn to Psalm 37. David—when I think about David, he spent some time in a cave. David was anointed by Samuel to be the king of Israel. Now, if the prophet shows up and says, “You’re gonna be the next king,” you immediately start to think about, okay, this is going to go well. I can think of all the things I want to buy as the king because I imagine I’m going to be rich. You know, it took years between the anointing of David and the inauguration of David—his installment as king. Years and years went by, and most of those years were characterized by poverty. Matter of fact, he was hanging his hat in the back of some cave—the cave of Adullam—when we run into him in 1 Samuel 22. He’s running from Saul for his life. He’s spending time in a cave.

What’s with that? Well, here’s the deal: is God gonna let his king starve to death in a cave just because it’s not time for him to be inaugurated? No—absolutely not. God is going to care for him, and he did—cared for him every step of the way. Didn’t give him all that he wanted, but gave him everything that he needed. David reflects back on that. He writes this psalm later in his life, and he says this—and as we’ll see, in his old age he writes this psalm. Look at verse 16—just to jump in the middle of it—he says, “Listen, I’ve been there: better is the little that the righteous has”—this is Psalm 37:16—“better is that than the abundance of many wicked.” And a lot of wicked people—a lot of people who don’t care about God—they got a lot of stuff. It’d be better for you to have whatever God gives you than to sit there and crave the abundance. “For the arms of the wicked,” verse 17, “they’re going to be broken.” Because they’re not in sync with God. They’re not in step; they’re not reconciled; they’re not at peace with God. But God—underline this now—this is the refrain of the psalm—“upholds the righteous.” He hangs on to them. He sustains them. He takes care of them. He focuses on them lovingly.

Look at the next line: “The LORD knows the days of the blameless.” Now, we use the word “know” in such a, you know, unidimensional way. To “know” in the Bible can mean “to know,” but it also means to have an intimate, loving acquaintance with. And here he says, “I know your days—I care for them.” Jesus went on to say later he’s even got the hairs on your head numbered. How focused is he on the righteous—on the people that he loves? “Know their heritage will remain forever. They’re not put to shame in evil times.” Oh, it may be lean—and David’s thinking back at the cave of Adullam saying, “Well, it was tough.” “In the days of famine,” though, guess what? David leaned back—even in the cave of Adullam—with a full stomach, because God took care of him. Maybe not every night, every meal, but God fed me. Didn’t starve to death. “The wicked will perish; the enemies of the LORD are like the glory of the pastures—they vanish; like smoke they vanish away. The wicked borrows; they don’t pay back. But”—listen—“even in the little that the righteous have,” it’s funny how generous they are and how they continue to give. Verse 22: “For those blessed by the LORD shall inherit the land.” David knew what it was like to have a sense of importance in God’s eyes but not experience the inheritance now—having to look forward to it. That’s in the future. “Shall inherit the land”—it’s coming. “Those cursed by him, though, they’re going to be cut off. The steps of a man are established by the LORD”—you want to talk about the first point? There it is again. God is sovereign. He’s taking care of—he’s, I mean, David’s in the cave of Adullam for a reason—“when he delights in his way.” He’s taking—you know, he’s got a purpose; he’s working it together for good. “Though he fall”—right, here’s point two now, right? Even though there’s difficult times—you can’t get a room at the inn, you don’t have anything you want—“he shall not be cast headlong.” Why? “Because the LORD sustains”—the Lord upholds—



“his hand.” He takes him and cares for him. “I have been young, and now am old; yet I have not seen the righteous forsaken.” God continues to care for them, to focus on them, to know their days. “Nor his children begging for bread.” Matter of fact, just the opposite—“ever lending generously, and his children become a blessing.”

There’s a picture. We could repeat it—maybe you should jot it down just for homework: Luke 12. He says the same things, only in much more specific ways. Jesus says, “Don’t worry about what you’re going to eat. Don’t worry about what you’re going to wear. Look at the birds; look at the lilies of the valley. God takes care of them.” And you know what he claims is the problem? “Oh, you of little”—what?—“faith.” You don’t trust me. Trust me.

Here’s the neat play on words: we need to trust in his faithfulness. And we need to have faith that he will be faithful. Number two is: when we can’t afford better, remember God’s faithfulness. That’s what I need to focus on. And it’s more than remembering it. It’s really trusting in that. It’s being confident and letting my heart rest in the fact that God has promised to take care of me.

“Well, what if I get killed?” I mean, in light of the events this week, you think, where’s the concern and care of God? Here’s the deal: if you’re a child of God, even in death—and you can jot this one down, because it’s the front part of Luke 12, all in that same passage—he talks about the lilies of the field and all that in verse 22 and following. But up at the beginning of that he says this: “Don’t fear the one who can kill the body.” Why? Because after they kill the body, that’s all they can do. “Fear the one that can kill you, and then cast you into hell—yes, I tell you, fear him.” And then he goes on to say this: but he’s the one who cares for you. He says, look at the sparrows—they’re sold for two cents. He said, you’re worth more than many sparrows. So what are you concerned about? God will care for you even in death. And did not David say that in his own way? “Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.”

The point of this is this: I don’t care how much you lack, what you can afford, what you can’t buy that you want, what you can’t experience because of your standing in terms of financial wealth or health or anything else—the Bible says God’s promised to be faithful to you.

Remember Mary and Martha when they had Christ over—remember that whole thing? What did he say to Martha? “Martha, Martha, you’re worried and troubled about so many things. Few things are needful—really only one.” Remember that? And Mary was there—and Martha was so mad at her sister because she was just sitting there at the feet of Christ. I mean, you want to talk about the essence of what we tried to communicate through the play last week—really about your relationship with God, his attention toward you, your attention and love for him—the rest of it’s superfluous. The rest of it is not essential. The rest of it’s not necessary. It’s nice when we have it—it’s great when God grants it—but either way, God has promised to take care of you.

Verse 8, Luke 2—we enter another party into this, which we won't have time to finish; we'll actually deal with the rest of this next week, Lord willing. But in verse 8—we'll cut it off at a weird spot in verse 12—but let's just read this. Verse 8: "And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night." I should say this—another historical sidebar; this one will be shorter and less boring. When we're all little and we experience Christmas, everybody thinks Christ was born on December 25. Then we go to church, we read this verse, we get real proud and tell everybody, "It didn't happen on that day," right? Why? Well, because this verse says right here, they were, in the same region, the shepherds out in the field keeping watch over their flocks by night—you don't keep your flocks out in the outside at night in December.

Then you feel like a real, you know, smart person. Careful with that. A couple things that lie in there—that begins this sense: "in the same region." Even today, if you go to Israel and you, like, take the road from Jerusalem and you're heading to the Dead Sea—let's say—and all the tourists do that—watch in the summertime. If you go in the summertime, or any time that it's not the wintertime, you will see the old shepherds and their flocks—I'm talking way out in the middle of nowhere. Now, the Greek word in the New Testament for that is "wilderness." When the shepherds go out in good weather, they go out into the wilderness. And they're like *Survivorman*, right? Like John the Baptist—they're out there. They're stinky, they're smelly, they're in the middle. They camp out there. They pitch their little tents. And they spend time looking for pastures for their sheep. And off they go way out into nowhere.

The text here says "in the same region." Even that is a little bit of a hint that—now wait a minute—what are they doing so close to town? Isn't that the well-worn, you know, pastures? And there's nothing really... No, no. It could be wintertime. And plus, it's like when you tell your relatives in Michigan you play golf, you know, in December. They say, "Oh, you can't play golf in December." Well, you don't remember where we are. You're in Michigan; we're in California—Southern California. And we can play golf in December, depending on the weather—some days you can, but a lot of days you can. Why? Because we're in a warmer climate than you.

You do understand that if you take the latitude of Bethlehem, guess where you end up? Same latitude as Orange County, Southern California. We're right in the same spot. As a matter of fact, the climate, because of the Mediterranean Sea right next to Israel, is just like our climate here, not far from the Pacific Ocean. This is really the same kind of weather. And if someone said to you they played golf in December, you wouldn't go, "Oh, that's impossible. You didn't say December; you must have been July." Right? No—definitely can happen. Not to mention that there are a lot of other reasons that we can safely say it's possible that this is in December.

"Well, why are you trying to defend a December date?" Because it is the oldest, longest-standing tradition for the date of Christ's birth, dating all the way back to the end of the second century.

Hippolytus was one of the first to chronicle the fact of the belief of Christ being born on December 25, and he wasn't guessing—he was, you know, just stating the tradition of the church, and he wasn't far from it at all. December 25. Chrysostom—who's no slouch—comes along in the fourth century, and he tries to solve a little dispute because some of the churches started to say, "Well, he was born on January the 6th," right? And January the 6th became the date to recognize and commemorate the coming of the Magi to visit Christ and the birth of Christ. And Chrysostom said, "No, no, no—no. That is the right date for the Magi visit; it's not the right date for the birth of Christ." And Chrysostom continues the long-standing tradition of saying Christ was born on December 25.

Now, when you went through A.W.A.N.A. or whatever, you tossed out the possibility of Christ being born on December 25 because you were so much smarter than, you know, our culture. Maybe we got it right. Wouldn't it be funny to get to heaven and realize we were celebrating it on the right day all along?

Right—even in the Mishnah—you know, the Mishnah is the part of the Talmud that, you know, has all the rules for what you do. This is—we're going too deep on this. But listen—I said it wouldn't be that boring; I'll try to make it as boring as... The Mishnah said this: that when you are getting all those animals ready for the Passover—the Passover, you know when the Passover is—that's when Easter is, and sometimes it can be early, early as March, right? And if you've got that timeframe for the Passover, the Mishnah said you keep those animals that are going to be prepared for the sacrifice at the Passover—which was the biggest celebration there—you do that, and one of the places was in the region around Bethlehem. You do that for thirty days—keep them out in the fields. Okay, you go back thirty days, you could be into February—one of the rainiest, coldest parts of, you know, the year for Israel—and then to say, "What are you doing with your flocks out in the field in early February?" Well, that was part of the tradition. So this verse right here is not any deathblow to the date that has been the longest-standing tradition for the date of Christ's birth. We might actually have this one right. I'm not defending it emphatically or dogmatically—I'm just saying.

When I read that verse, I always think, "Oh yeah, I'm guilty of it, too—you know, can't be this date." Maybe so. "In the same region," not out in the wilderness, "the shepherds were out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them," verse 9, "and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear"—as you would be. "And the angel said, 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news'"—*euangelion*—there's the word we get evangelism and evangelical and all of that—"right? This is the next reference now to the good news—'of great joy that will be for all the people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find the baby wrapped'—not in a baby blanket, but in strips of cloth—'and lying in a feeding trough.'" And there are not many of those in Bethlehem. So go find this kid.

And off they go. And what's interesting about this—and let me underscore this part of it—okay, you've just had the King of Kings born, not in a hotel, not in a hospital, not in the family home; in an outback cave or a stable. And the kid's in a feeding trough. And they're not even at home—they're a hundred miles, almost, from home. And now you're going to call for a baby shower, and who do you invite? You invite the shepherds, right?

You know anything about the socio-economic classes in the ancient world? It's kind of like today—you see a shepherd, it's like, "Wow—what kind of job is that?" Not a very good one. It's the minimum-wage kind of job. It's for the kind of outdoorsy-type people. And it was not highly respected. These weren't merchants; they weren't in the marketplace; they weren't sailors; they weren't anything that was up here—they were down here. It's the lowest, most uninfluential class of people that you could find.

He doesn't call the Magi first. He calls the shepherds first. Well, what good are the shepherds? I mean, they're not bringing any gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Now's the time I want to get into a hotel here. That hasn't come for a couple years. What is it? It's a reminder to us about the cohort—the party, the team, the gang—that God calls together, and reminds us that oftentimes—maybe when, if you think, you've just had the King of Kings—you want some influential, powerful friends around you. God doesn't call any of those. He calls the poorest, most uninfluential people in society.

I put it this way—number three: when you don't have powerful friends. When you're not in the circle you want to be in; you're not in the in-group; you don't have the connections you want.

Okay, and let me stop with that for a second. We're talking about slogans we try to live by as Americans: life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness; "Money makes the world go 'round." Here's one: "It's not what you know; it's who you know." That was one I remember hearing as a kid thinking, "Wow—whatever—that's kind of weird." Well, then you're in college, you're working hard; then you get out of college, and you think, "You know, I'm working hard in school because it is supposed to be what I know." And you realize—no. And that adage has got some truth to it. You watch people who you think don't know half of what you know excelling, and you think, what's going on with this? Everybody's experienced that, in whatever line of work you're in. You see that the connections are so important.

God does not bring those connections. See, he wants to make it clear that the point of the birth of Christ has nothing to do with the people that associate with it. As a matter of fact, go back to the line there in verse 10: "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people." Now, the good news of the birth of Christ was not good news for all the people, if you mean all without exception—because for a lot of people it ended up being bad news. Just like we've

been reading in the prophets—we've been reading the Minor Prophets about the coming of the Day of the LORD, and it will not be light for people; it will be darkness for a lot of people. It will not be joy for a lot of people; it will be sadness and sorrow for a lot of people. And the arrival of Christ wasn't good news of great joy for every person without exception, but it was good news for every person without distinction, right? We often talk about the old-time preachers: "All means all, and that's all 'all' means." You've heard that from the pulpit before? No? Okay, let me introduce you to this phrase: "All means all, and that's all 'all' means." That's not all that "all" means, because in the context, sometimes we're talking about "all" meaning everyone without any distinction—in this case of class, of wealth, of importance, of influence, right? It'll be great news for those—not all without exception. Of course there are some people... This is another—I've been interested in the news, right? Because not everybody is attached to or receives the benefits of the coming of Christ.

Paul went on to say about the church this: not many of you were wise, not many of you were noble, not many of you were, you know, these powerful people. He picks the low things, the base things, the simple things, the "stupid" things in the eyes of the world, and he shames the wise with it.

Here's the point: it doesn't matter who your friends are; it doesn't matter what connections you have; it doesn't matter who's in your contacts in your cell phone—it really doesn't matter. What matters is whether or not you're allied with the Christ of that manger. Because that Christ is the Son of God. Now, I know we so think about us being the children of God—that was such an amazing thought, that we would be called, as John says, "have the right to be called the children of God." Think this one through now: if you're rightly allied with the baby of the manger, see, you have all the things that he has. He is the heir of all things. In Romans 8 it says that we are not only sons, but we are heirs because of our relationship to the Son. You have all that he has.

As a matter of fact, I don't want to make too much of this, but in verse number 7 it says she gave birth—verse 7 says—"to her *prōtotokos*," her *prōtotokos*, her firstborn. That's—in theology, as you read the rest of the New Testament and these theological statements—that means he's the heir of all things, the heir apparent. He's the one who gets it all. Of course, we know it's the first kid Mary's had—that's a designation of his high status, that he is the rightful owner of all things, the firstborn. I mean, it was her firstborn, but he's also the firstborn of all creation, as Colossians 1 says. And what's the point? I connect with him. If I'm really connected with him—if I'm allied with Christ—I am a child of that King, and I'm an heir, an heir of all things, Paul says.

So, though what doesn't matter is the team you're on, the cohort you're part of, the influence that you have, or the people that you have that are influential—what matters is whether or not—let's make this the second half of point three—whether or not you're a child of God. And that's what you need to make sure of: are you a child of God, having all the rights and privileges of being a child of God? Then it really won't matter what your circle is. As C.S. Lewis said, we're always wanting to get into the next inner ring, right? Stop with that. It's nice to have, you know, friends in high places, but really what matters is whether you're a child of the King—whether or not you're associated



with Christ; whether or not you can look at the fact that God pays attention to you—not for your own virtue or your own righteousness, but because of your alliance with Christ by faith. Therefore, he says, you have all things. You have all the riches of heaven—in reality. You may not experience it here, but in the next life all that comes to fruition.

And speaking of that now—because, you know, we’re frankly maligned and blasphemed and belittled and ridiculed in our society; just get used to that. As a matter of fact, that’s one reason the powerful in our world will not associate with us—because to be a Christian and to follow Christ in this world is to invite a lot of insults into your life. Why? Because we’re still in the cave phase. Remember I said David, in 1 Samuel 22, was out in the cave of Adullam. Here’s an interesting thing about that passage: it says those who came to him were the distressed, those in debt, and the malcontents—one translation puts it that way, I love it, the malcontents. These guys were the frustrated people. And it says, “and they made David their captain.” Well, think about that: if you wanted to be someone back there in that period between the anointing of David and the enthronement of David, well, you better be on Saul’s team. Then you get all the accolades and everybody thinks you’re smart and great. But if you’re out there with David, following the real king before his enthronement, you’re going to be an outcast, a malcontent—ridiculed by everybody else.

You see, right now, to rightly ally ourselves with Christ—Christ paints the picture by pulling shepherds, the lowest class in society, and saying, this news is for you. This is good news, and it is unto you that this child has been born—not just you, but you, and including you—because it’s good news for all kinds of people.

One passage I’d like to close with—2 Corinthians 6. Would you turn to this one and look at this, please? You may be feeling like, God’s blessed me, you know, I have a lot of what I want—obviously all that I need. That’s great. There’ll be times your heart hurts because you will be diagnosed with a terminal disease, you’ll lose a loved one in death. There’ll be times where you feel like, I don’t have all that I want; I’m not free to do what I want; I don’t have the right connections and alliances. And when you feel those things, remember that all that really matters is whether or not you’re a child of the King, rightly aligned with Christ.

Paul autobiographically says this of himself, starting in verse number 8—we’ll jump into the middle of this sentence—this is 2 Corinthians chapter 6: “Through honor and dishonor, through slander and praise”—people have honored him and people have dishonored; people have slandered and people have praised him—“we are treated,” certainly by the majority, “as impostors,” right? “Yet,” right? “We are true.” We are true. We know the truth. We speak the truth. We live in the truth. They can think whatever they want. Verse 9: “as unknown”—right? We’re not important to this society; they don’t really care about our opinion; they’re not calling us, right, to figure out our commentary on things—“and yet to God we are well known.” We’re the important people. He knows intimately our days. He upholds us by our hand. “As dying,” right? They count us off as weak and nothing—“and yet, behold, we live.” We have forgiveness, we have life, and the light—what’s the light of life?

“As punished”—and certainly they do—they’ll ridicule us and mock us, and for Paul they’re actually throwing literal rocks at him—“and yet not killed.” And even if they did kill him, he said it would be gain. “As sorrowful”—there are a lot of reasons when you do things to us that it hurts us—and it really does hurt—“yet always rejoicing.” I always picture that picture of Paul there in the Philippian jail in stocks with Silas after a beating, at midnight, in the dungeon, and they are singing, right? Hymns to God and praise to God—even in their pain and their tears—rejoicing. “As poor,” right? We don’t have a lot. I picture him being, you know, lowered out the city wall there in a basket, with nothing but the shirt on his back. “Okay, Paul, run—escape—they’re after you.” What did he have? Nothing. And yet he’s going out to do what? I love this: “to make many rich.” Not talking about finances here—talking about that alliance and that relationship with Christ—to become heirs of all things.

Here’s the one you’ve got to highlight and underline—the last one in verse 10: “as having nothing”—that’s how they might see us, and certainly if you looked at that picture of the Nativity and you really put yourself in the sandals—these people have nothing. Look at their friends—they’re shepherds. Look at their bed for the baby—it’s a feeding trough. “Yet possessing”—great line—“everything.” Everything that matters. And what matters is not a bed at the hospital, or a room at the hotel, or being around friends and family, or having a big bank... None of that really matters. What matters is whether or not you’re allied with the King of Kings, and you have the forgiveness of heaven, and whether or not you’re an heir apparent—an heir of the coming kingdom of God. That’s all that matters.

That great line, when he says in Luke 12—the homework assignment I gave you there in that passage—he says here, don’t worry about all that stuff. The world’s chasing after it all. Don’t chase after it. Trust me. “Seek first the kingdom,” right? “And I’ll provide all these things that you need.” He says, “Fear not, little ones, for I have found it good—in my Father’s pleasure—to give you the kingdom.” The rest of the world—as rich as they might be—they’re not getting the kingdom unless they put their trust in Jesus Christ.

That old song we used to sing: “Now let the weak say, ‘I am strong’; let the poor say, ‘I am rich,’ because of what the Lord has done for me.”

Would you stand with me? Dismiss you in prayer.

Let’s pray together.



God, it's hard—especially at Christmas time with the Norman Rockwell pictures in our minds—to be jobless, or to have our house in foreclosure, to be sick, have a diagnosis of cancer, to be in trouble, to have lost a loved one, to be in pain, to be weak. But God, that old song based on Joel 3 is good for us: when we are weak, we should say we're strong; when we're poor, we should say we're rich—not because we're playing word games or pretending to be something we're not—because even when we possess nothing in this world, we possess everything if we're children of the King. And you made that point dramatically clear in that nativity scene. It wasn't as glossy as our Christmas card covers—it was really a smelly, stinky, poor, poverty-laden picture of two people a long way from home—couldn't even get a room in the travelers' inn. But God, you made it clear: though we don't have in this life all that we want, because of Christ we have all that we need. And what we will be, as John said in 1 John 3, is yet to be seen. But we know this—we're children of God. And we recognize that the best is yet to come for us.

So let us, by faith, revel in that truth. Let us enjoy it in a way that makes us, with the Apostle Paul, say what matters is not what's seen, but the things that are unseen—because the things that are unseen are eternal; they last forever and they really matter. Or, as Jesus said there in Luke 12, therefore we'll store up our treasure in heaven with money bags that don't have holes, where thieves can't steal it, moths can't destroy it—because where our treasure is, our heart will be also.

So put our hearts this Christmas not in the parties, or the gifts, or the frills, or the clothing, or how we look, or how healthy we are, whether we've got an intact family or a lot of money in the bank. Let us revel in the fact that we have as our God a God who cares for us and loves us because, by faith, we recognize our sin for what it is, we trust in Christ's provision, and we see ourselves as related eternally to the Lord Jesus Christ. Make that our joy. Make that our riches. Make that the reality of our lives. Let that be the constant priority—we seek first the kingdom and let you take care of the rest.

In Jesus' name we pray, Amen.