

## **Advent (Part 3) – God's Protection and Delight**

Matt Chandler – December 13, 2015

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Hey, how are we? Doing well? If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab those. We're going to be in the book of Zephaniah, so I want to give you a moment or two to find that one. If you don't own a Bible, don't have one with you, there's a hardback black one somewhere around you. Here we are in the third week of Advent. Some of you maybe with a background in church know exactly what Advent is, and some of you aren't quite sure.

Advent is that season in which Christians begin to look back at the coming of Jesus Christ and what's occurred in the coming of Jesus Christ. Simultaneously, we begin to gaze and look toward the future at the second advent or the return of Jesus Christ and acknowledge that our lives are playing out in what theologians call the "space between" or the "already but not yet."

In week one of Advent, we talked about hope. Josh Patterson here in Flower Mound addressed hope. I thought he crushed it. I thought he did a great job. He talked about that our hope is built not on probabilities but on promises. Our hope finds its root in the promises God has made and fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ. God is the source of our hope but also the sustainer of our hope.

Then we moved to last week, and we talked about the refining love of God. One of the things that occurs in the coming of Christ is God kind of invades. We had one point last week, and that's God is at work in the mess. Your life has a little mess in it. My life has a little mess in it. Maybe your life has a whole bunch of mess in it, and we just rejoiced in the fact that God is at work in the mess. As much as we long for a life of ease and comfort with no difficulty, it's actually in the mess that we see what we actually and most desperately need, which is a right relationship with God.

You know this. I don't know if you're real enough to say it to yourself, but if you're honest, when everything is going your way, you did that, didn't you? Right? You get that promotion at work. You killed it, right? You're healthy. It's because you "spinached" it up and you stretch out at night, right?

If things go well, we did that. Nobody praises God for great days, because we did that. We were responsible. We were disciplined. We were organized. We made it happen.

Yet on the difficult days when the illusion of control slips through our fingers, then we get what we most desperately need, which is right relationship with God and dependence upon him so that difficulty in one sense is a real gift from the Lord. But in our day and age, all suffering, all difficulty, all sorrow is a problem to be solved, never to be considered as a gift from God for a greater treasure.

We covered that last week. Some of you are like, "I'm glad I missed that one." Right? Where we are in Advent is now we step into that space, and we acknowledge the tension. What I mean by that is we step into the space where we look back upon the coming of Christ and all he has given to us and granted for us and acknowledge that all he brought into being has yet to be consummated.

We feel the sting of the refining love for God, and we eagerly hope and anticipate the second advent or the return of Christ where this place we are in (the space between where there is still anxiety and fear and worry and disease and hurt and loss) vanishes forever. To do that, we're going to look at Zephaniah, chapter 3. We're going to read that together here in a moment. We're going to do something a little bit different today. Maybe already today it's been a little bit too different for you, but let me explain what we're going to do.

I preach, we read, out of the English Standard Version of the Bible. We're not going to do that today. We're going to actually read out of the NIV (the New International Version). Maybe you don't have a background in church or you do but no one has ever explained to you why we have different versions of the Bible. If you've ever tried to share the gospel with a Muslim, they would very quickly bring to your attention that we have like 42 different Bibles. If you don't know quite what to say about that, let me try to explain it.

Here's why we have different versions of our Bible. Certain versions are word-for-word translations, which means they look at the Hebrew, they look at the Greek, and they write the English word. They make it as readable as possible. Okay? Then other versions are phrase-by-phrase. They look at just a phrase at a time and move over the phrases. Then there are paraphrases where they get the general idea and poetically write it.

The ESV and the New American Standard are word-for-word translations. They are as close to the original language as possible. They are oftentimes in certain locations more difficult to read. All right? Then the NIV is a phrase-by-phrase. What we're going to read today are the very words of God phrased out in a more readable way.

Then there's the paraphrase. If you read *The Message* or you read *The Message REMIX* or something like that, that's just... I'm not against those things. In fact, if you like *The Message*, praise God that you're in *The Message*. Eugene Peterson did not write *The Message*. It's the Word of God distilled in a way that's understandable. He is very poetic in his writing.

Here's my encouragement to you. As you read the Word of God, I would encourage you to have a word-for-word translation open. Then whatever you find most readable and most understandable for you, lay that before you. Just be in the Word of God. We're going to read this text together out of the NIV.

If you're like, "Well, I ain't got no NIV," I got you. All right? I'm going to put it up on the screen. In Fort Worth, don't think I don't know that some of you seminary boys are going to email me this week. I look forward to dialoguing with you. By dialoguing with you, I mean just send that email to Anthony.

What I've done is we're going to put the NIV on the screen, and we're going to read it together. We read the Bible out loud together. Sometimes we even stand to honor God's Word, not because we're conservatives or because we're old school but rather the Word of God is how God has ordained to shape and mold his people into his image.

When you come into the gathering, you have not come as spectators but participants. Are you tracking? You have not come as spectators. I'm for spectating. I went and saw the movie *Creed* this week. It was awesome. I recommend it. Now the way I approach the movie *Creed* is not the way I approach the gathering of the saints. The Word of God would not have me be a passive spectator but an active participant.

One of the reasons we stand and we read the Word of God together and over one another is to participate in the formation of God's people via the power of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God. Here's what we're going to do. We're going to stand momentarily. I'm going to put this on the screen. I'm going to start us off. We're going to read together, and then loudly, boldly, rhythmically,

I'm going to bow out, and you are going to fill this room and fill the rooms represented across the Metroplex in our campuses with the very words of God.

Something really cool happens when we do that. The Word of God begins to rest over us and on us, begins to form us as a people. That's a lot better than just watching. So will you stand with me as we read the Word of God together? Again, Zephaniah 3. We're going to start in verse 9. I'm going to start us, and then you're going to boldly, loudly, rhythmically read this and let the Word of God fill this room. Hey, I believe in you. You can do this. Let's get it.

**"Then I will purify the lips of the peoples, that all of them may call on the name of the LORD and serve him shoulder to shoulder. From beyond the rivers of Cush my worshipers, my scattered people, will bring me offerings. On that day you, Jerusalem, will not be put to shame for all the wrongs you have done to me, because I will remove from you your arrogant boasters.**

**Never again will you be haughty on my holy hill. But I will leave within you the meek and humble. The remnant of Israel will trust in the name of the LORD. They will do no wrong; they will tell no lies. A deceitful tongue will not be found in their mouths. They will eat and lie down and no one will make them afraid.'**

**Sing, Daughter Zion; shout aloud, Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, Daughter Jerusalem! The LORD has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy. The LORD, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm. On that day they will say to Jerusalem, 'Do not fear, Zion; do not let your hands hang limp. The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.'**

**'I will remove from you all who mourn over the loss of your appointed festivals, which is a burden and reproach for you. At that time I will deal with all who oppressed you. I will rescue the lame; I will gather the exiles. I will give them praise and honor in every land where they have suffered shame. At that time I will gather you; at that time I will bring you home. I will give you honor and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes,' says the LORD."**

May God bless the reading of his Word.

Why don't you go ahead and have a seat? What we see happening here in this chapter of Zephaniah is we see really what the first coming of Christ has brought about and then what the second advent of Jesus Christ will consummate forever. Like I said earlier, you and I find ourselves in the space between, in this space between the already and the not yet. Christ has brought these things about, and yet the refining love of God is purifying and burning off and chiseling away at us so that at the second coming of Christ, all these things will be consummated fully.

There are two things in particular here that I want you to think about and consider as we enter into what could be called the home stretch of the holidays. Here's the first one. The promise we see in Zephaniah, chapter 3, concerning the coming of Jesus and the ultimate return of Jesus is that discord and conflict will vanish. Discord and conflict will vanish!

You see starting in verse 9 a stunning promise of the restoration of unity, a world that gets put back together away from the discord it walks in. Now one of the things social media has enabled us to do is be outraged about everything, to really see the discord that exists not just in our own hearts, not just in our own interpersonal relationships but in the world. Right?

A writer for the *Atlantic* coined the phrase two years ago "outrage porn." For whatever reason in our day, we're just looking for something to get angry about. By the grace of God, Facebook has given you plenty of reasons and plenty of fuel and plenty of opportunities to just grow enraged about something. Maybe it's true; maybe it's not. It doesn't even matter. Just furious!

This idea of discord... You see it especially in an election year, where caricatures and false arguments and just outright lies are spread all across our society to do...what? To fuel outrage. Because if you don't think with your mind but you think with your emotions, you actually become a puppet for silly agendas. That's why we need a more intelligent people who don't think just emotionally but actually can patiently and steadfastly seek out what is true before they make decisions, right?

Now what the promise of the coming Messiah is going to bring and what will ultimately be fulfilled at the return of the Messiah is that discord vanishes. You get this picture of unity. We're shoulder-to-shoulder. We've been brought back together. Then here's what happens that makes discord and conflict vanish. There are several things here in the text.

The first you see is our lips are purified. Think about conflict. How much conflict is birthed out of things that are spoken, things that are said? How many of you remember, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me"? Lies! Absolute lies! I would rather have some broken bones than have to deal with some of the wounds that exist deep in my soul because of words.

A truer version of that is, "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can crush my soul." I mean, the Bible is very clear that words hold the power of life and death. They build up and encourage or they functionally destroy and devastate. Jesus would say it this way. **"For out of the overflow of the heart, the mouth speaks."**

Since we believe as Christians that the heart is broken, it should not surprise us that so much discord occurs because our hearts are broken. Jesus steps in, and he heals our hearts. That begins to change our lips, and yet it doesn't change them as fast as we would like. Everyone who got in a fight at home this week said, "Amen!" Oh, you don't want to say *amen*. Ha-ha! Right? I see what you did there. You're just leaving me up hanging. I can. I'll do it. I'll just carry the weight of it for all of us.

Our hearts are purified. Our lips begin to change. The apostle Paul writes this (Ephesians 4:29): **"Let no corrupting talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for building up, as fits the occasion, that it may give grace to those who hear."** A lot of people will go, "Corrupting talk... So you shouldn't say cuss words." No, that's not really what's going on here, although I do think, again, be more intelligent than to need those adjectives to make your point.

Ultimately, this isn't about corrupting talk but really building up those and using your words for life. This is what happens as the heart and soul are transformed by the gospel of Jesus Christ, and yet we're not there yet. But we can look back on our lives and see growth. We're in the already but not yet. Christ has brought... In his coming, in his life, in his death, in his resurrection, he has started to erode out from underneath discord its foundation.

My broken heart leads to my broken mouth. Then from there, he goes on to say not only will lips be purified but shame will be vanquished. Now what does shame have to do with discord? What does shame have to do with conflict? Well, we'll see if we're able to be honest. I know we're in church and all, so this is where we are all put together and smiling, with candy canes, right? But in reality, shame birthed in a broken heart drives all sorts of strife, all sorts of discord.

If you have in your life a perpetual sin... What I mean by that is not that you're constantly doing it but it's something you consistently stumble over. Does anyone just want to go, "There's a thing in my life. I mean, I feel like I'm making progress, and then I trip over the same thing. I'm like, 'Dadgummit! I can't believe I...'"?

Then all of a sudden we get frustrated with ourselves. We get angry with ourselves. We can't believe we did that again. Golly! We made all these promises. We broke those promises. We swore with tears and snot, "Lord, I'll never..." only like six weeks later to do it again. It's this thing. It's the monster we're fighting.

Now what happens when you're frustrated with yourself, you're angry with yourself, is you feel shame and guilt? Shame and guilt have a tendency to strike out at those around you who are closest to you. If you have secret sin, you definitely know this is true. When you give yourself over to those sins, you start to become, for whatever reason... You have hyper-vision on everyone else around you, what they should be doing. So your heart is disjointed, and you begin to blame those around you for that lack of integration.

When shame is removed, then self-hate is removed. When self-hate is removed, your destruction of relationships around you ceases. Christ has brought that about, but we're in the space between. We're not all the way there yet, but he is at work. He is moving. He is sanctifying. He is changing us, not as fast as we would like, but it's happening.

Then lastly, he says here that the arrogant boasters have been removed. See, to surrender your life to Christ is an act of humility. To become a Christian is to say, "I cannot fix what's wrong in me." It's to finally be exhausted with one's self. That's why I've said at times in preaching that I know some of you even today, you're just not tired enough. You know? You're just not tired enough yet. You can fix it. You can do it.

If God loves you, if he would be merciful, he will lead you to the end of yourself. It's a humbling thing to surrender our life to Christ, to acknowledge, "I cannot do this. You can." If you're still a little bit confused about the refining work of God and how Christians might rejoice in difficult times, it is those difficult times that remind us our deep need. It's why sometimes it's not the mercy of God to bless us with a bunch of toys and wealth and those things but rather to, in his mercy, wound us for our good, for our eternal good!

Here arrogant boasting is removed. I said this last week. Let me say it again. If you are a Christian who walks with a swagger (like *you* saved you, *you've* sanctified you, *you're* the one driving this), I would... I'm giving you permission. I'd be very nervous, because the Lord tends to break hips and hands in that arena. God will not tolerate you touching his glory. What he has accomplished in you, *he* has accomplished in you. *You* have not accomplished it in you. You have not done that.

If you're smarter than other people around you, at what point in your mother's womb did you rap on the uterine wall there and go, "I'd like to be really smart"? My guess is you didn't. That's the third time in history I've used "uterine wall" in a sermon. You didn't. All you are has been given to you by God for the glory of God. Listen to me. I'm pleading with you. Don't touch it. Praise his name!

If you're a good businessman, praise his name. If you're super-intelligent, praise his name. Are you athletic? Praise his name. Do you have a motherly heart? Praise his name. Are you hardworking? Praise his name. Wherever your gifts lie, whatever good work has occurred in your heart, praise the name of God. Do not fail to acknowledge him. He is the author of all you are.

Now you might work hard, and praise God for your hard work, but I can introduce you to people who work as hard as you do in that domain and don't get anywhere near the success you do because God has wired you and anointed you that way. See, God will break the hips and hands of the arrogant. When all is said and done, if you remember back to the text, it's the lowly and meek who remain. The lowly and meek remain!

If you feel the sting of discord, this is that tension we want to walk in (in the sting of discord). Here's what I know. There are some of you here, and you're in your... Well, we don't really do "Sunday best" here, I guess. I mean, this is my "Sunday best." I laughed. We showed that video, and I was like, "Golly! I'm wearing that shirt, the same shirt." I literally have three shirts I wear on a cycle until Lauren throws them away.

You know, as I'm watching the video and marveling at what God has done here, what I know is that in this very room, here we are, and there's discord in our homes, whether it's in our marriages or maybe with one of our older children or maybe with a sister or brother. Many of us, there is discord in our hearts, in our homes. Maybe it's global discord where there's anxiety and fear based on all we're seeing in the world around us right now.



Maybe it's internal discord. We have a really strong hate for ourselves and a frustration with where our lives are. But more than likely, there's legitimate discord in our homes. You have people coming in for Christmas, some of which you're really excited about, and some of which you're just not really excited about.

Or you're heading to someone's place for Christmas, and you know you have to spend a lot of time fasting and praying so you don't lose your mind while you're there and say what you shouldn't say. But you can't fast too much because your blood sugar will crash, and you'll say something you shouldn't say. You have to have like a peanut butter cracker that you eat right before you walk in the room so you don't lose your mind on somebody. This is it! It's discord, and it's there. This is very real. When I'm talking about the tension, guys, this is what I'm talking about.

The discord, conflict, is going to vanish, but right now, we're in the already but not yet, which means Christ has come. He has lived. He has died. He has resurrected from the grave. He has sealed us as children, and the discord is starting to lose its weight, starting to lose its power. But right now, we're being refined by the love of God, and that refining work takes place in discord. Discord reveals some things about us. It shows us some things we wouldn't see otherwise.

No one thinks they're a jerk. Everybody thinks they're awesome. It takes seven or eight people to tell you you are before you'll believe it. Discord begins to reveal some things that are true about us that we would never admit are true about us. That gives us opportunity to confess. That gives us opportunity to repent. That gives us opportunity to grow.

We're in the already but not yet. We look back, and we thank and praise God for Christ's coming, for saving us, for loosening the power of discord and conflict. We trust in his steady hand, his refining fire, to burn away the dross, to pull out from us our idols, and to make us more and more and more like Jesus while simultaneously looking and being anxious for the second coming of Christ where this is consummated in full.

I'm no longer in this space between wrestling, fighting, and clinging. I get to finally just breathe, and it's done, which is why in Revelation, you see him say, "**It is done.**" Not, "**It is finished.**" "**It is done.**" "**Behold, I make all things new...**" Not, "**It is finished.**" "**It is finished**" is what he said on the cross. "It's finished," and then, "It's done." We see here that discord loses its power.

This is what Advent is all about. This is what Advent is! We look back, and then we look into the present. Then we look toward the future. That's what the season is all about, but that's not the only thing that happens here. We see not only the discord or conflict vanishes, but we see that joy becomes our default mode of living.

The reality is if you pay attention to yourself or you're paying attention to people around you, I would encourage you much more to pay attention to yourself than people around you. It's a sad thing to be an expert in other people's flaws and not be an expert in your own. Grow in your expertise of where *you* need work rather than meditating and growing on your expertise on how other people need work and need help. One is self-righteous and wicked, and one brings about life and transformation.

We see that joy becomes the default mode of living. Back in verse 14, here's what it says. **"Sing, Daughter Zion; shout aloud, Israel! Be glad and rejoice with all your heart, Daughter Jerusalem!"** I love the language of *daughter, son*.

**"The LORD has taken away your punishment, he has turned back your enemy. The LORD, the King of Israel, is with you; never again will you fear any harm. On that day they will say to Jerusalem, 'Do not fear, Zion; do not let your hands hang limp. The LORD your God is with you, the Mighty Warrior who saves. He will take great delight in you; in his love he will no longer rebuke you, but will rejoice over you with singing.**

**I will remove from you all who mourn over the loss of your appointed festivals, which is a burden and reproach for you. At that time I will deal with all who oppressed you. I will rescue the lame; I will gather the exiles. I will give them praise and honor in every land where they have suffered shame. At that time I will gather you; at that time I will bring you home. I will give you honor and praise among all the peoples of the earth when I restore your fortunes before your very eyes,' says the LORD."**

You have this second term when we're talking about the default mode of our lives being joy. You see the shift here in this pronouncement of blessing to now be, "Hey, sing and shout and rejoice and be glad with all your heart." Now if we stop for a second, there is something that happens in singing that integrates us as whole people. Singing has an effect on human beings. Music has an effect on human beings. If you just stop for a second and get your head out of church mode, you see this all the time.

A couple of times a week, I'll head over to LA Fitness and work out. Almost everybody in there is wearing headphones. My guess is that no one is listening to Beethoven. It's just my guess (unless you're a serial killer)... My guess is you're going into the gym. You're not getting all pumped up to do squats listening to Beethoven. You can hear it. You have hip-hop and rock 'n' roll. People are just... It affects you. It amps you up. It gets you ready to roll.

If you're trying to woo your girl, there's a different kind of music you play. You're not trying to woo your girl with Metallica or DMX. Maybe you have some John Legend on or something. Oh, never mind. You have some Kenny Chesney. I'm sorry. I forgot where I was for a second. You have some... I don't know. Who's country who is wooing? I'm off the rails.

Music has this effect on us. When the Bible commands us to sing and rejoice and shout and be glad, it's not doing that because God has had a bad day, he is really melancholy, and what would make his heart happy is for you to sing to him. No, no, no. When we sing, for whatever reason, God has ordained that the heart and head connect, that the affections are stirred.

I think singing and how we approach singing and rejoicing and shouting and enjoying God is a testimony to just how free we are in Christ. Think about it. What limits our singing and rejoicing and shouting and clapping and getting after the Lord in song? Is it not we're a little nervous about the dude sitting in front of us? I mean, he is going to think a seal is dying behind him or something. Isn't it, "Well, I don't want to..."? Right?

I mean, if you think about what stops us, it's all about fear and about us. One of the things I've loved... For whatever reason, God has done a really cool work here, and I can speak mainly of Flower Mound. The Lord has started to bring us families with a lot of special needs kids. At the 9:00 a.m. service earlier, I mean we had just... It was like a special needs mosh pit up here where they were just loving the Lord.

Let me be straight. I was a bit jealous. They are freer than I am. I was jealous. They are freer than I am. I mean, they had their hands up, yelling. There was not good pitch, not good tone, not the right words, but they were having a blast with their God. I was standing over here like *that*. That's all I had. That's all I had! Some of you, you're giggling, but you're like down *here*. It's like, "Look. I'm not there yet. I'm right *here*."

There's something that happens when we give ourselves over to sing and praise and rejoice. It marks how free we are and how bold we are to rejoice, how connected we are in head and heart, which is why on repeat the God of the Bible commands, "Sing! Rejoice! Shout! Clap your hands! Bow your heads! Rejoice and be glad in me!" There's this command that our bodies are involved in the act of worship.

Now what's the motivation? What's the *how* and *why* behind this sing and shout and rejoice and be glad with all your heart? Well, I'm glad you asked, because that's what the text answers. In verse 15, the text answers the question of, "Why do we sing and shout and clap and rejoice with all our hearts?" It's because, according to verse 15, our punishment has been removed.

Now that's awesome. Our punishment has been removed. We are lawbreakers. We have rebelled against God, and in Christ, all of our punishment has been removed. That's true right now. Your judgment day, Christian, has already occurred. Now you will stand in front of God, and you will give an account.

I don't know... For illustration points only, when they open up that file and pull your file out and slap it down, it will be dripping with the blood of Christ. When they open up the first page, it will say, "Holy, spotless, blameless," not because of you but because of Christ. **"Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ..."** Yeah, I'm preaching. You can clap!

This is what God has done. This is why we look back upon the first coming of Christ, and we sing and we shout and we rejoice with all our hearts in the God of our salvation. Because there is no punishment for us, we will never again fear harm. Now again, we're in the space between. We're in the already but not yet. It's a scary thing to live in a Genesis 3 world.

I had to go get an MRI this past week. It was nerve-racking. Why, though? I mean, if I die, don't I gain? Yeah, but I was still nervous. I had no control over it. I was still nervous. I met with a woman and her teenagers last night whose husband died Tuesday morning. There was some fear there. We're in this space between. We're in the already but not yet. We know what Christ has purchased. He is refining us, working us, moving in us, revealing in us, churning our hearts, stirring up affection.

We look forward to the second coming of Christ where all of this has been consummated completely. We rejoice because punishment has been removed, and we will never fear harm. Then I

love verse 17. Our God is a "...**Mighty Warrior who saves.**" I love the imagery of God being a mighty warrior. The reason I like that language is because of who Jesus actually defeated...

There was a big fight last night if you follow MMA. McGregor knocked a dude out in like 13 seconds. Just epic. The Irish all over the world celebrated. I mean, he knocked the dude out in 13 seconds. Jesus is like, "Well, that's cute. Remember that time I killed death?" Our God is a warrior. Think about that. God killed death. That's incredible. What enemy could you and I have who the warrior God of the universe wouldn't smirk at? Our God is a warrior. He takes great delight in you according to the text. He will no longer rebuke you.

Then I love this. I just have a question about it. It says God rejoices over us in singing. Here's a quick question I don't have an answer to, but it's a great question. If the spoken Word of God created the expanse of the universe, so powerful was the, "**Let there be light...**" that the universe continues to this day to expand in every direction, what does the singing of God do over the hearts of men and women?

In verse 18, we see there will be no mourning. In verse 19, there's no more oppression. The lame will be rescued. The exiles will be gathered. Then in verse 20, we will all be brought home. I love verse 20. See, if we were honest, all of us have a bit of a restless heart, right? We have this anticipation that one day that restlessness will end. We've been paying it forward our whole lives, have we not?

I've tried to do this. We have some time, so I want to do it again with you. You just can't wait to get to high school. Then you can't wait to get a car. Then you can't wait to get out of high school. Then you can't wait to get to college. Then you can't wait to get out of college. Then you can't wait to get a good job. You can't wait to find a man or a woman to marry. You can't wait to make a certain amount of money. You can't wait to buy your first home. You can't wait to have a kid. You can't wait for that kid to go to school. You can't wait for that kid to get out of your house. You can't wait to...

You just keep paying it forward, and yet that "I'm not quite there yet" is persistent. It just doesn't go away. Bono nailed it, didn't he? "But I still haven't found what I'm looking for." Then some Christians grabbed that and brutalized great theology and... They sang, "I finally found what I'm looking for." No, no, no. You're ignoring the theology of the song.

The theology of the song is that we're in the space between. All this is true about us right now in Christ, and yet in the space between, the refining fire of God's love is purifying, transforming, working for our good. What we long for is the second advent, and in the coming of Christ, his life, death, and resurrection, our hearts have found their home.

They breathe, they rest while we anticipate the coming of Christ. Listen. This is what Christmas is all about. Chandler manor is decked out. Stockings are up. Trees are up. *Trees...*plural. I lost that fight about eight years ago. I don't even get into it anymore. I'm just like, "All right. How many? Just two? Okay, let's go get them." Trees are up.

It honestly looks like *Christmas Vacation* vomited in my house. We're ready to roll, and my 10-year-old (for whatever reason, it's him right now) is just geeked out of his mind. A couple of times a day we'll get asked, "How many more days?" There are a couple of presents wrapped. They're under the tree. Every little movement forward kind of ratchets up the anticipation.

So we're not far. I'll come up here, do around 6,000 services, collapse and sleep, wake up. We'll open up presents. Family will come over. We'll laugh. We'll have a great time with family. Then everyone will go home, and we'll (not that night) start to take everything down. Nobody is allowed to say this, but we all feel it. There will be a tinge of disappointment. "That was it? That was it? Since Thanksgiving we've been gearing toward this. We've been amped about this."

You'll be frustrated with your kids because of their little selfish heart. They'll just do something with a present that you spent good money for. Then it's like, "Well, really I wanted the Xbox One not the Xbox 360." You'll do what godly parents do, which is threaten, "I'll take all your presents back! I'll start a fire, if you know what I'm saying."

What's wired into this season is a sense of anticipation. It's almost magical what occurs if you're really into Christmas. I mean, we're slated this week to go out and look at lights. We're already three-deep into Christmas parties. We have another one tonight. On Thursday, the Flower Mound Campus and elders... We're going to go around this neighborhood and sing carols and hand out Advent guides.

I mean, we're all in. My kids are all in. There's this great anticipation for what is to come, and we're all going to be disappointed. The reason we're going to be disappointed is that all of this is a shadow of a greater reality. What's going on right now is meant to dial me in to an anticipation for that day

that being disappointed is impossible. So rich and deep is the love of God that at the consummation of all things 10 billion years from now, it will be just as fresh, just as beautiful, and just as freeing as it's ever been.

That's the inexhaustible well of God's grace. You know how you experience something the first time? It's just incredible. Then the more you experience, the more it kind of loses its luster. Well, according to the Word of God, according to what happens at the consummation of all things, the apostle Paul tells us in the book of Ephesians that it will take the coming ages, millennia, for us to even get a sense of how deep the love of God is for those he loves, the treasures of his grace.

I don't know how you're wired. I think of 10 billion years, and I'm like, "I don't care what it is. I'm going to be bored out of my mind." I can't even now do something more than a day or two before I'm like, "All right. What's next?" Yet so deep is the inexhaustible well of God that for eternity our delight increases, our joy grows. This is what Christmas is all about. We look back upon the coming of Christ, and we rejoice in what's true right now.

We sing, we shout, and we rejoice because these things are true right now. Our punishment has been removed. That's true right now. Fear is losing its power over us right now. We've moved farther. We've grown. We've seen God work in us. God is a mighty warrior who has saved and continues to battle on our behalf. There is a loss of power of mourning over our lives. We mourn but don't mourn like those who don't have hope. We mourn like those who have hope.

The woman last night Michael and I met with who lost her husband on Tuesday felt guilty for not sobbing and breaking down in our conversation. I'm like, "Sister, everyone is praying for you the peace that passes understanding. Don't feel bad about this. Rejoice and be glad that you're mourning like someone who has hope."

This is true right now. Yes. No more oppression. Oppression is losing its power. The lame rescued, disease losing its power. The exiles will be gathered. Brothers, sisters, we are aliens, strangers, exiles in this world. Whatever you want to do with the refugee situation we have (and I know that's a point of contention), just know that spiritually you are like them. Yet Christ, the great rescuer, the great redeemer, gathers. We have been brought home now.

We sit in that, and we rejoice in that while looking for the second coming, pleading for the second advent. This is why John ends the book of Revelation with, "Come, Lord Jesus. Maranatha." I thought

the way to end our time together is in doing what this text would ask us to do...to rejoice and sing and shout.

I want to pray for us, and then we're going to practice that. All right? We're not great at it, so we're going to just ask the Lord to grow us. We're in the space between. I get it. We're growing. We're going to practice singing and rejoicing because these things are true. We look back, we look to the future, and we're comforted where we are. Let's pray.

Father, I thank you for these men and women, an opportunity just to make much of your name. I thank you that we are closer right now than we've ever been. The second advent is closer than it was yesterday. It's closer than it was when we woke up this morning. It's closer than it was when we started this service. We are closer than we have ever been to all things being made new, to all things being restored and repaired, all things being brought fully into the consummation of what your Son has purchased for us.

Remind our hearts. Free up our hearts to sing and shout and be free and rejoice and be glad with all our hearts. Thank you that our punishment has been removed, that the fear of harm is waning, that you are a mighty warrior who saves. Thank you that you have transformed our mourning, freed so many of us from oppression, and then you have settled our hearts into their home. We eagerly anticipate your second coming. Help us. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.