

## Advent: Why You Need the Glorious Christ

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If you have your Bibles, go ahead and grab them. Luke 2 is where we're going to camp out together today. I'll put two other texts on the screen, but we'll pretty much just walk in the narrative. While you're turning there, let's have a quick talk. How many of you are 100 percent ready for Christmas? Go ahead and raise your hand. I just want to see. Keep your hands up. This is... Check this out. Why do you have your hand up, bro? What did you have to do? He's ready.

I didn't mean you're ready to open your presents, boss. I meant like you've done all the shopping, got everything ready to go. Okay, no, see, it has changed. No, get your hands back up if you're done. "I'm done." That's amazing. Y'all are freaks. How many of you are say 90 percent done? You still have a couple of little things, just knick-knacky things here and there? All right. That's probably normal.

How many of you are like, "Pastor Matt, I'm in trouble. Pastor Matt, I am in a lot of trouble. I still don't even know what to get. My wife says she doesn't care. I don't believe her." We're about where you would think we would be. When we started, when we entered into this season of Advent, what I said was that you and I were going to have to fight not to get swept up in what I called an over-realized eschatology.

More than any other time of the year, this is a time when we are sold rainbows and lollipops just constantly. From every movie to every special on television to all the ads that are carpet bombing our existence, all of them have this message: 'This is the year where it all comes together. 'This is the most wonderful time of the year.

Really, what is presented before us is that we're going to get the Red Ryder BB gun. It's coming. Maybe not even that. Instead, we're going to get the bonus check from our boss that enables us to put a pool in the back. This is the year our dad finally stops neglecting us to sell bad children's books and is instead going to turn his affection to us and love us like we deserve to be loved even though we've been in the North Pole for the last 40 years.

This is what we believe, that it's going to happen this year, that finally, the rift we have in our family will be healed. Finally, we're going to get the gifts that are going to satisfy the longings of our hearts. So prevalent is this type of capitalistic campaign that sociologists have had to name what happens to us post-Christmastime. It's called the Christmas blues. Right?

What happens is that right now, there are lights everywhere, and there are trees. More than likely, you have done some things to your house that you don't do the rest of the year. You have stockings that are up. You have a tree that has lights on it, more than likely. Maybe not all of us do, but there is a brightness around the world right now, our world in particular, that is not normally there.

All of it will start to go away on December 26. By the new year, most of our lights will be down, or at least they will be turned off, and things will go back to normal, and it's starting to affect us in a way that doesn't really bring joy but rather brings disappointment. It is literally a season that has begun to weave into us disappointment.

What I said is that really we want to kind of engage that space, and as Christians, we're not just celebrating Christmas, although I want you all in on it. Trees and tinsel and songs. I want you to enjoy. I have three kids. We're having a blast. What I want us to steward as the people of God is not just Christmas but Advent.

Advent is what Christians have celebrated for a couple of millennia now. What we're doing in this season is we are turning with a laser-like focus our attention on things that will not change regardless of the time of year. What we want to do... *Advent* is a Latin word that means coming or arrival. What we're doing is looking backward, we're looking forward, and we're rejoicing in the now in a type of specialized way.

We're looking back at the coming of Christ in the first Advent as a baby, and we're marveling at the power of Christ made manifest in the Holy Spirit today, and we're looking forward to the return of Christ, because there is a day coming where all the desires of our hearts are satisfied, where all the reconciliation we long for in our families actually occurs, where the gift that comes finally does satisfy us once and for all. That day is coming.

All we're celebrating at Christmas is actually a shadow of a reality that is on its way, but all of that will not happen December 25. In fact, you're going to be reminded of why you don't like your sister. Oh, we can't have real talk in here? Do I need to lie? You're going to be reminded that new stuff is awesome for a bit. Regardless of how amazing the gifts are that you unwrap, you will grow bored with them, and if you are a kid, you will break them, more than likely before the first of the year.

Praise God for that week of, "Oh, how awesome is this trinket?" It gives way. It always does because it's the shadow. It's not the substance. What I wanted us to do in this season, in this month is... Yes, let's get trees. Let's get gifts. Let's sing carols. Let's not drink hot chocolate, because it's 80 outside and humid, but let's start to turn our attention to those things.

Where I wanted us to look, what I wanted us to incline our hearts toward is not those things that will go away December 26 but those things that will always be true for us who are in Christ. Here was our battle plan so that we don't get swept away by the commercialization of this holiday. We're going to come in here every weekend and we're going to gather for 45 or 50 minutes of teaching from the Word of God that concentrates on an attribute of God.

We want to get our eyes up and look at God, not at us, but look at God. We talked about God as a deliverer. Last week, we talked about God being full of compassion. Today, we'll talk about how glorious God is. We're doing it all from the narrative of the Christmas story. Then I said, 'Hey listen, 45 minutes

out of the week is like a BB against a battleship if we're going to stay rooted and grounded in the things of God this season."

We produced and gave to you an Advent guide where you can, with your family, with your roommates, with your friends, open that up and, during the weeks, consider the coming of Christ, the presence of Christ, and eminent return of Christ, that you might consider those things together. We put your children, your first through fifth graders in the same text, in the same sermon you're in so that on the way home, you can be like, "Hey, those shepherds and angels, huh?" And they'll know exactly what you're talking about.

On top of that, we just try to encourage you in this season to be extremely generous. Listen. You've done it. The angel tree thing that we've done, you just killed that. You've slain there. You did awesome. We knocked it out. You are going to bless hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of families all over the Metroplex by your generosity, and yet, I think what I would love for you to do is to continue to keep your eyes up and look for ways you might bless and encourage and be generous to others, and that you might include your children and your friends in that process.

If you have a buddy whose tires look like he's racing in the Indy 500 series, then maybe you can swing around and bless that brother. All right? If you have a friend who you know is going through a difficult time, if you have friends who have no place to go, you might say, "Hey, come to our house.

Have Christmas lunch with us that we might just be a people who are overflowing with generosity."

Again, you might include your family in this. You might pull your kids into this because it really is more blessed to give than to receive. To weave into the fabric of your life an ongoing generosity will create dividends for you that pay long past your new trinket come December 25. If it has been a good year for you, and you have cash in the bank, rather than just upping the number of gifts, that you might instead have an eye for those in need.

We really thought that if we could put all of that together, if we could concentrate on an attribute of God, if we could give you a guide where during the week you could be sitting down with friends and family members and considering the coming of Christ, the reality of the presence of Christ even today and longing for the return of Christ, and on top of that, get your eyes up to be generous with one another that we might be able to kind of somewhat stem the tide of an over-commercialized holiday that has everything to do with, "Me, me, me. I want. I want now," rather than what the Christian should celebrate, which is the coming of Christ and the eminent return of Christ. With that said, let's look at God and his glory. Luke 2, starting in verse 8.

**"And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were**

filled with great fear. And the angel said to them, 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you 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 a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!' When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.'

And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them."

Now, there is a lot going on in this text, so we're just going to dive right into it. The first thing that would have been tremendously scandalous if you wanted people to believe the story of Jesus is the fact that shepherds are

involved here in any way. Although the imagery of the shepherd is redeemed in the Scriptures, and the Bible would talk positively about the role of shepherd... In fact, Psalm 23 says... What? **"The Lord is my shepherd..."** Right?

The imagery is redeemed, but in the first century, you couldn't get much lower than the shepherds. Let me tell you a bit about shepherds. I'll even quote some first-century sources that are extra-biblical, just first-century writings about how shepherds were viewed. What we know from history is that in this period of time, shepherds could not hold public office. Their testimony was not admissible as evidence. The most pious of Jews would not buy milk, kids (not children, kids, baby sheep), or wool from shepherds because they just assumed it was stolen.

What was occurring in this period of time is that shepherds would take the sheep and would head sometimes months away from the owner's property to find land upon which the sheep could graze. As those sheep had kids, there was no way to mark whether or not the flock had multiplied, so shepherds would steal the kids, and then they would sell the wool and the milk for their own, and they would make money off of their theft.

The first-century pious Jews had a boycott against buying things from shepherds, namely wool and milk and kids. Where you started really seeing systemic injustice really bubble up is that most of the time, the way an owner would pay a shepherd is via sheep. A good shepherd would be paid by the



owner of sheep in sheep. "Here is a kid. Here is wool. Here is milk for your work," but the shepherd would be unable to sell that to do anything for his family because he was viewed by society as a thief. He was the lowest of the low.

In fact, a philosopher in Alexandria, kind of the center of the intellectual world at the time, said, "There is no more disreputable an occupation than that of a shepherd." Now, listen. I can think of three or four just off the top of my head right now that existed back then, but this is the intellectual mindset of the first century when it comes to the shepherd. "They cannot be trusted. They are brute, thieving, deplorable men who prefer the company of animals and other men than they do community life."

They were seen as vagrants, as thieves, as dirty. They were not allowed in the temple. Because of their handling of the animal and their supposed lifestyle, they literally were not allowed to come and worship in the temple and make sacrifice. They were despised and rejected. They were seen as wicked and depraved. Yet (this is crazy), moments after the birth of Jesus, the heralding of the good news of the gospel did not go to the ruling elite.

It did not go to the pious and religious, but in a sign of what Jesus was all about, the heralding of the coming of the Messiah went to those who could not come to God. Therefore, he went to them. What we see happening in this text is the glory of God shining around the shepherds. What you see

when you think about the glory of God is... Really, the best way to translate *glory* is weight. The weight of God showed up.

The reason I like that word being translated that way is because it's a kind of weight that is heavier than anything else. When the glory of God shows up, it reshapes and reorders. It pushes out, and it breaks free. There is nothing as weighty as it in the universe. When the glory of God shows up, it changes everything. The glory of God shone all around not those brothers waking up early in the morning to get their Torah out, not those who washed their hands 17 times before their meals, not those who tithed, not those who were in the temple every week, not those who made sure everyone behaved.

No, the glory of God shone all around the shepherds, those whom society said can't be trusted, those whom broader culture said, "They're thieves," regardless of whether they were or not. The glory of God, the weight of God shows up among... If I gave you a list of those who you would say, "This is who God would herald the good news to first," you would not put them on your top 100 list. What I want us to do is take a look at what happens when the glory of God shows up in the hopes that it will show up.

Now, the interesting thing about the glory of God is the glory of God was already there that night. You can use your imagination too. Set the scene. They're in the middle of a field. It's in the middle of the night. What we know because of really excavations of multiple sites is that they would take field stones and build basically a pen. Then they would put the sheep in the pen.

They would have one opening, and the shepherd would lay over the opening, so if a sheep tried to get out, he would grab it and pull it back in because if a sheep was lost, it comes out of his paycheck.

Then if a predator tried to get in, he would hop up and have to defend the flock. Now, if that's his job... We're talking the middle of the night. You have the glory of God... If we have a volume meter here, it's at about a 2. You have the stars shining. You have his ears, their ears attuned to any snap of a twig, any rustling of the leaves, because that could be a predator. If you lose a sheep, that's out of your paycheck. You have a heightened sense of awareness, of what is going on around you. Then out of nowhere, an angel of the Lord shows up, and the glory of God shines all around them.

In my car, I have a little plug-in for my phone. I don't have the little wireless Bluetooth yet. One day... I plug in my phone, and my radio will autocorrect itself. If I'm really blaring music, harming my future hearing, if you will, via the radio or via a CD, when I turn off my car, it self-regulates, and it turns it back down to like a 4 or 3, away from the 42 I like it on.

When I start my car, it doesn't terrify me. It just airs a little something, and then I can choose to turn it up. Now, if I get in the car, plug in my phone, and then turn on the car, then it's blasting at 40. If you've ever had that moment where everything is quiet, and then everything is loud, that's what just happened to these brothers. The glory of God was on a 2, and then all of a sudden, it was on an 11.

There is never a moment where the glory of God is not visible; there are just different amplifications of the glory of God in different seasons and different times. Let's look at it and consider some things we see here about the glory of God. Let's look at verse 9. **"And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great..."** What? **"...fear."** Okay, so this is the first thing the glory of God does when it shows up.

1. *When the glory of God shows up, it exposes us for who we are.* The most consistent thing people say to me in conversations about religion is that almost everybody thinks they're a good person. They really just have no concept of God ever being frustrated or upset with them at all. Now, some of you, by the grace of God, do understand. You do feel that weight. In fact, just an insight into the difficulty of preaching...

For those of you who are weary and ragged and so desperate for the forgiveness and grace of God, I so want to minister to your heart. Those who are hardened in your heart and walking, I just want to prophetically pound you with the Word of God, but I don't want to do that and bruise those who are limping into this place. You really just have to trust the Holy Spirit when you preach the Word of God.

Here is what is going on in the text. The glory of God shows up, and it exposes these men. They're terrified. Everybody thinks they're a good person, and they think they're a good person because good is a sliding scale. It's

relative. Here's what I mean by that. If it was just Norah and me (Norah is my 5-year-old daughter) in a room, here is what I could say with impunity. I am powerful. I am fast. I am strong. I am unstoppable. I am wealthy. I am brilliant.

Oh, you don't think so? Throw me a basketball. I'll dunk all over. She wouldn't be able to stop it in any way. I'll show you her piggy bank and my checking account. She'll look broke. She has some pennies and a few quarters. I have a few dollars. I'm just smoking her. Right? Do you want to do pushups? I'm going to just destroy her. Do you want to read? What do you want to do? I'm going to dominate this little girl.

If it's just the two of us in the room, I'm looking at Norah, and I'm going, "I'm brilliant. I'm powerful. I'm fast. I'm strong. I'm unstoppable." The door opens, and LeBron James walks in. All right, now that the king is here, am I fast? No. Am I strong? Am I unstoppable? In fact, how quickly, just with one person walking into the room, did I turn into the 5-year-old girl? Just a second ago, I was King James. All it took was somebody to walk in the room, and I slid down.

Now I'm broke. Now I'm easy to dominate. Now, in every measurable way, I'm the little girl, and he's the king. All it took was one other person to walk in the room. That's all it took. All it took was someone else to show up. See, we think we're good because more often than not, we're comparing ourselves to 5-year-olds. When the glory of God shows up, we see us as we are. Every

bit of our swagger, every bit of our confidence, every bit of our self-justification melts in the light of his glory.

The glory of God exposes us. It's why these brothers were terrified. I mean, sure, you could make a case that, "No, it was just the middle of the night, and all of a sudden, there was an angel there," but the glory of God surrounding them exposed them for what they were. I've been in enough locker rooms and have hung out with enough men now at this point to know that when sinful men get together, their conversations are rarely righteous.

They're in the middle of a field in the middle of nowhere. Nobody sees them. Nobody knows what is going on out there. I just have to believe that the glory of God did not interrupt a small little Bible study on the Torah. "Oh, funny that you should show up, angel. Can you help us here with Deuteronomy 7? We were just memorizing it."

I'm hard-pressed to believe that is what is going on that the angel interrupted. The glory of God exposes us for who we are. Who we are... Oftentimes, we can justify that we're good and are doing great, but when the holiness of God, when the King steps in the room, all of a sudden, all that confidence melts away, and we see this repeatedly throughout the Word of God.

When Isaiah lays his eyes on God, what does he say? "Woe is me. I am a man of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King." What does John, the disciple who Jesus loves, say? What happens to him when he sees the

resurrected Christ bringing Revelation to him in Patmos? He falls on the ground like a dead man. On and on I go.

When the glory of God shows up, it exposes us for who we are, and we are acutely made aware of our deep and desperate need for a Savior. The glory of God exposes, but that's not all it does. Look at verse 10. **"And the angel said to them, 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you 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.'"** Now, I love this.

2. *When the glory of God shows up, it drives out fear and replaces it with joy.* The glory of God shows up, and it exposes where we have fallen short. It exposes where we are wicked. It exposes where, in our minds, our thoughts are evil. It exposes those duplicitous secrets we think no one else knows. You know you have no secrets from God, right? There is no area of thought or life that God is not absolutely tuned into. You have no secrets. Secrecy is a myth. It's a myth.

Those things you do behind closed doors... That door is not closed, brother. Those secrets are not hidden, sister. God knows all things, sees all things, knows the motives behind the things you do. Listen, I'll be straight. I don't even understand some of the motives behind some of the things I do, but God knows them all. The glory of God not only exposes it, but when that fear grips us...

Listen. I remember what it was like to come to church before I was a Christian. I remember what was like to come into a church not being really quite sure what this is all about and thinking, "If there is a God, and he looks down and sees that I'm here, surely he's going to be frustrated that I'm in his joint because I have not followed him, I have not pursued him, and I have my own ideas, my own ways of doing things. In fact, I've verbally mocked him for years. Now, all of a sudden, I'm sitting in his living room."

I had an understanding of the wrath of God and an understanding that if there was an in and an out, I was most definitely out. I can remember coming into a room like this and feeling the fear. Then the Word of God bore its weight on me. As the preacher preached, I could see, "Oh, man. I am doing all the things he's saying I should not be doing." Yet, in the preaching of sin, in the preaching of judgment, in the preaching of wrath, in the preaching of hell, what is happening in that moment is a type of spiritual MRI that will reveal in you and me whether or not we truly need a Savior.

The purpose of wrath and judgment and all of those things is to lay before you the good news that drives out fear and replaces it with joy. Look at the declarations again in this text. **"Fear not..."** How is that possible? How is it possible to not fear if there is a holy God who is righteous, who is just, who hates sin, and who rages against injustice? How am I to not have any fear before this God who the most righteous men in the history of the world have fallen down terrified of?



Well, the next declaration helps us. "Fear not..." Why? "...because I bring to you..." What? "...good news." What is the good news that drives out the fears of our hearts about the wrath of God? Well, everybody knows John 3:16, but I'm telling you John 3:17 is just as epic if not more so. John 3:17 says, **"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to..."** What? **"...save the world through him."**

When Christ shows up, Christ is coming into the world. This is why the shepherds are getting good news. Jesus wasn't born with a little sword and a list of people to kill for not obeying the law. No, no, no, Christ is born as the life raft in a sea of condemnation, death, and destruction, to climb in for all who will, to be saved from the condemnation that is already present in the world. The good news is that God has made a way where we could not make a way for ourselves. That's the good news.

This good news brings about great joy. It only tends to bring out great joy in those who really understand that they're sinners. If you think you're awesome, that doesn't sound good to you at all because you're awesome. If you feel beat down, if you're aware of your sin, don't ever despise that. It's such a sweet gift from God to be aware of your shortcomings. I'll talk more about that in a second on how I don't want it to steal your joy. The glory of God drives out fear and replaces it with joy because Christ came not to condemn but rather to save the world from condemnation.

3. *When the glory of God shows up, it creates trust in the Word of God.* Look at verse 15. **"When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, 'Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.'"** Now, I love this, just his reasoning in this text, what we see happening among the shepherds. He says, "Let us go see this thing the Lord has made known."

What I found in my heart as I was studying and getting ready to preach this message is that if I'm not careful, my faith can kind of develop these crusty edges. Are you tracking with me on that? I can just get a bit crusty on the edges of my faith. My childlike wonderment on the glory of God can fade and be replaced with a kind of rote routine of, "I know this is right. Let me do it."

What I love about these shepherds is, upon hearing from the Word of the Lord, they didn't stop and go, "Did that really happen? How is that? Let's theologize about what happened there. Is God able to send angels? What do angels do? Do angels..." That's not what they did. They said, "The Lord revealed it; let's go see it." There is this childlike wonderment that builds a confidence in what God said that now is driving them to see what God has said would be waiting for them.

I want my life to be marked by that. I want my life, if I get to be 80 or 90 years old, I want that childlike wonderment that said, "The Lord said it; let's go see it." When I read in the Word of God that generosity changes the inner

man and that generosity pleases the heart of God, I want to say, "The Lord said it; let's go see it." When I read about what God calls a husband to be, where I will love my wife like Christ loves the church, that she will look like a well-watered vine that produces much fruit, I want to say, "The Lord said it; let's go see it."

When I think about my children and what God says happens when a parent puts kindling around the souls of their children, no guarantees, but kindling around their hearts, but I want to go, "The Lord said it; let's go see it." When I read in the Scriptures that the arms of the Lord are not too short to save, I want there to bubble up in me confidence in the Word of God, this sense of adventure that says, "The Lord said it; let's go see it." The glory of God builds our confidence.

When you see the weight of God, the splendor of God, the might of God, you're driven into confidence that what the Word of God says is true. My hope is that rather than being crusty around the edges, you would, like a child in awe, say, "The Lord said it; let's go see it." Now, here's what's interesting to know. If you just plow through these verses, then you won't catch all I think the Lord wants you to catch.

Here's what just happened. These brothers are in the middle of nowhere, and an angel said, "Here's the sign. Here's where you find baby Jesus. He's going to be wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger." Their response is,

"The Lord said it; let's go see it." Now they have the long walk to Bethlehem. Then they have to find the stable.

Then they have to find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes. We have no idea how long this takes, but this is the nitty gritty of the biblical narrative. If you're reading this like a newspaper and not using your imagination, then you're going to miss out on the fact that these brothers, by faith, had to leave sheep they were given charge of and go find it. There was sacrifice. There was risk. There was faith, and it was rewarded.

4. *When the glory of God shows up, it changes our outlook on the monotony of day-to-day living.* Let me show you this. I love this. Look at verse 20. **"And the shepherds..."** What? **"...returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them."** Let me tell you again why I like this. Again, I always want to encourage you to read your Bible with your imagination, not imagining there would be things there that aren't there, but imagining in the text how it must have played out.

Here we have the shepherds having shown up, found baby Jesus, and recounted what the angels have said. Mary stores it up in her heart, and there is this, *"But Mary,"* because everyone else there was thinking through, "Oh my gosh. Why are shepherds here? Can we believe these shepherds?" "But Mary stored up all these things in her heart." Right? "Then the shepherds left and returned..." To what? Shepherdng.

Here is what is important to note about what the glory of God does in the day-in and day-out of our worlds. Nothing has changed in the social standing of the shepherds. It's not like all of a sudden, since they had heard from angels and had gone to the manger and seen the Messiah, that all of a sudden, their testimony can be accounted in a court of law. It's not like all of a sudden, they can hold office. It's not like all of a sudden, they can be trusted in society's eyes.

None of that was fixed, yet they left rejoicing. Here's what the glory of God does. The glory of God injects gratitude in the highs and lows of our lives so that joy becomes a foundational element in the Christian experience, having beheld the glory of God and now being intimately aware of how good and gracious God has been to us, regardless of life's circumstances.

The shepherds leave rejoicing. The shepherds leave praising God, but where were they going? Back to being shepherds, back to sheep. See, the glory of God invades our space. Here is what should be true about us who are in Christ. Having experienced the grace of God, having experienced the generosity of God, we should be all the more aware of what is good and right in our world rather than being an expert on all that has gone wrong.

One of the things we're doing for Advent this year as a family is I gave each kid and my wife and me this piece of paper. We just numbered it 1 through 24. Every night, when we're doing Advent or having to like double and triple up because we missed a few nights, we are... Oh, y'all haven't missed a night.

Okay. We're just writing on that piece of paper, "Here's what I'm thankful to God for."

What I'm trying to cultivate in my own heart as well as the hearts of my children is a growing expertise on the goodness of God in our lives because here is where we have it backward. Here is what we have backward. We think that when our lives are like we want them, then we'll be grateful. Once we're happy, once we're filled with joy, then we'll live lives of gratitude.

In reality, the inverse is true. When you learn to be grateful, when your eyes begin, shaped by the glory of God, to recognize all the good in your world, it's in that moment that things start to change in your life. Think about how different things are at home when you look at your spouse and are grateful for all they do and all they bring rather than being an expert on all they don't do and all you wish they would.

Think about how different things are at work when you're grateful for the opportunities that you've been given rather than being more dialed in to the opportunities you feel like you missed out on. Think about what happens in the lives of your children when you are an expert in the good they're doing and the ways they are growing rather than being an expert on all the things they do wrong.

Think about what happens when you're dialed in to the billions of ways God is good and merciful to you rather than that one area you feel he has robbed

you in. See, gratitude shaped by the glory of God begins to reshape every aspect of our relationship with others. It's those who will do the disciplined work of growing in gratitude who will wring out of their lives the most joy.

I just have to wonder, if I gave you a piece of paper right now, as you walked into this place, if you could fill it up more with complaints than you could with blessings. If I gave you a piece of paper, if you could knock out complaints on both sides long before you could list out what you're thankful for, the mercies of God in your life, the graces of God in your life.

Yet, it's those who will do that discipline work shaped by the glory of God who will ultimately lead lives of joy, being intimately inflamed with zeal for how God has been good to them and the gift other people are to them and the kindnesses of the Lord that have been stacked upon each blessing. The apostle Paul says this, and I hope to encourage you with it. It says in 2 Corinthians 3:18, **"And we all, with unveiled face..."** We all who are believers in Christ... **"...beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image..."**

We're beholding Jesus, beholding the glory of God, the weight of God, and by beholding the glory of God, we are being transformed one degree at a time into the image. What image? Into the image of Christ. We are being made more and more like Jesus...look at me...one degree at a time. Isn't that awesome and awful? Can I get a, "I'd rather have 10 degrees," from anybody?

Can a brother get 90 degrees? Can a brother get 180? One degree? A one-degree change from beholding?

Okay, a couple of things on the one degree. The reason why it's important for us to come together and gather as the people of God, the reason why it's so important to get into the Word of God, the reason it's so important to do life in Christian community is each one of those is just a little degree. It's not angels exploding in the sky. It's just this degree that makes us a little bit more Christ-like.

See, if he just spun the dial, it doesn't produce all that just one degree at a time tends to produce. Do you remember back in geometry class, the proof that was like, "An airplane took off. If you were one degree off, what happens over a period of time?" It was always used as kind of a negative motivation. If you were one degree off, everybody dies. In this case, one degree changes everything. One degree changes everything.

Here's what is true about the Lord. It's one degree at a time day after day after day. It's in the routine of today, being faithful to gather with the saints that God has just done a degree. I can't feel that degree today. I don't know if you can, but I'm just going, "Man, it was awesome to be with the family. It was awesome to be with the people of God today. It was awesome to sing, awesome to sit under the Word of God, awesome to proclaim the Word of God. I had a great time, but I don't feel like every bit of my life is going to change walking out that door."



Do you know why? We just did a little degree. I'm going to get together with friends tonight who love the Lord, and we're going to laugh and have a good time. We're going to talk about the things the Lord is stirring in my heart, and then we're going to watch the game. Just a little degree. Tomorrow morning, I'm going to get up, and I'm going to open up the Word of God, and I'm just going to read it. I'm not expecting lightning bolts. I'm not expecting the Holy Spirit to just hover above the dining room table and help me understand it all the more. I'm not expecting that.

What I believe, because of the glory of God that I have experienced and seen, is that there is just going to be a degree. There is just going to be another degree. In a microwave day and age where we want all our issues, all our pain, all our frustration, all our misunderstanding and doubts to evaporate in a second, the Bible says, "No, no. Behold the glory of God one degree at a time. I'll change everything about you."

I'm 20 years from my initial seeing and savoring the glory of God. I feel like I need to live another 4,000 years if I'm going to get anywhere close on this little degree scale to looking like Jesus Christ. If you would have told me 20 years ago that I would be who I am today, I would have thought you were a fool, and I would have thought that would be impossible. The bondage I wrestled with, the sins I tripped over, the rage in my heart, the lust of my flesh, the tendency to give myself over to sinful things, the wickedness of my imagination...

If you would have said, "You're going to be a preacher. You're going to gather your family together and are always going to be talking about Jesus. People are going to feel awkward around you. They're going to even avoid you in some senses," I would have been like, "You're out of your mind." I probably would have put an adjective in there that I won't use today. Yet, here we are. How did we get here?

If you've ever been around godly people and are like, "Gosh, I could never do that. I could never be that." Listen. Yes, you can. What, they have like a special version? They have like the varsity Holy Spirit, and you have the JV one? No, it's just one degree at a time. Let me just encourage you one day at a time, one degree at a time. Don't neglect the gathering. Don't neglect pushing into Christian community. It's going to be difficult. Christians are hypocrites. That should make you feel welcome.

One degree focused on the glory of God makes all the difference. If we leave here today savoring, thinking on, being blown away by the goodness of God and coming not to condemn the world but to save the world from condemnation and feeding off that glory through the disciplined work of growing in gratitude... Imagine your car ride home if you'll do this. Imagine your car ride home just getting to look at your spouse and say, "You just do this so well. Thank you so much."

To turn around to your children and go, "Hey, man. I just see that... I'm so grateful for this in you. This brings such a light to our home. Thank you for

that." You could say to your roommate, you could call your mom, you could have this interaction with a sibling and just go, "I'm grateful for this in you." Just think of what that begins to do, think of how that wars against the business and the stress of this season.

I know we have things to do. I have things to do. I get that. I'm not trying to say you don't need to do those things, but more that as you do those things, our mind should be stayed in a spot. One degree at a time, and over time, beholding the glory with an unveiled face, we become more and more and more like Jesus. Let's pray.

Father, I ask that you would be merciful among us. Most of us in here have a ton in common with the shepherds. If we don't have anything in common with the shepherds, we probably have a lot in common with the Pharisees. I thank you that you come not to condemn us but rather to save us from condemnation.

I pray that you might stir our hearts to gaze upon your glory, that in that supernatural, mysterious way that you sanctify, that there would be just a degree of glory turned today that makes us more and more like Jesus. Help us. We just have a lot of things going on outside these walls, a lot of things going on in our hearts right now. We just ask that you would be merciful to us, that you would remind us, that you would fix our eyes on you. It's for your beautiful name I pray, amen.