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**Christmas Notes**  
**Part 4 – Joy to the World**  
Pastor Ted Cunningham

Since so many of you are new to our church and your visiting this holiday season, we're in this series called *Christmas Notes* and we're taking a different Christmas favorite every week. This week it is *Joy to the World*. I'm not a musician, but they tell me Christmas music is very hard. If you're a musician and you agree with that statement, would you raise your hand. I figured it out today after I saw Matt doing all those rounds over there on all of the instruments. Will you help me thank them for how hard they've worked putting all this together. November and December have been unbelievable months and they want me to tell you to lower your expectations for January, but we say NO! Right?

Today, we're talking about *Joy to the World*. We're talking about joy. What a great day, what a great season to talk about Joy. There's lots to celebrate at Christmas. The first thing that comes to mind is the day after Thanksgiving and is the joy of shopping. We all enjoy shopping and getting ready for Christmas. The stress with the crowds. Is anybody going to Silver Dollar City today? There are some crowds I just need to prepare you for.

A couple of years ago we were there on Christmas and I heard some of the best theme parks statements I've ever heard in my life. On the way in where that big wreath is, and people stop to take pictures, there are ladies that ask, "Would you like your picture taken?" This time, one of the ladies asked a dad of a group of like 15 people, "Can I get you picture?" I kid you not, word for word, that dad said, "I don't even want to be here with them right now. Why would I want my picture taken with them?" Joy to the world.

Then on the way out of the park, this is the best parenting moment I've ever heard. A kid was crying and whining and having a fit. It was the best line I've ever heard a dad give his child to discipline him. The dad said, "If you don't knock it off, I'm going to stuff you in that barrel over there." Joy to the world. If you go out there, you'll see the garbage cans are barrels.

It's not just the shopping; it's that time we get together to take Christmas card pictures. I love when we get to do the Christmas cards. How many of you say, "I never need to take another Christmas card picture again"? But you will do what your mother says, okay? If she wants you coordinated, you will coordinate.

Don't forget about the travel. Some of you are going to be going home for the holidays and you have that to look forward to. If you're not driving, these are some of my favorite Christmas scenes in an airport right here. You just take a little nap or spend the night.

On Friday, Amy and I took our last flight of the season and there were weather delays out of Chicago. We were at O'Hara. We were four hours delayed, and I'm not making this up. The pilot comes out to the gate area... They rarely do this, but he said, "Yeah, there's terrible weather in Springfield, 200 foot ceilings." What that means is the fog was so thick. He says this to a crowd of irritated, exhausted, ready to get home for the holidays passengers. He said, "We're going to try. We probably won't make it." He said this to a whole gate full of people. We were okay because we weren't stressed. It was Amy and I together and we're like, "Oh, no problem."

He said, "If we can't get into Springfield, we'll just go on ahead to Dallas," which I don't know if you know, but that's another hour-long flight. So, we all get on the plane and everybody is frustrated. They're on edge. There were six young marines at our gate. They were respectful young men. I loved watching them. They just treated people well. You know they let veterans and active duty military get on first, so these six marines go on first and they go to the back of the plane.

Then I get on and I'm sitting in my seat. Amy and I are right there. It's one of those small planes. My tray table is broken, and it has tape on it that says "inoperable." You know me if you've been around here, I kind of have fun with it. I go, "This is unacceptable." I say it in a loud enough voice. I go, "We are not taking off until I get my tray table fixed."

A guy... This was the best comeback I've ever heard. A guy standing in the aisle next to me, getting ready to find his seat, looks down at me and says, "If you say anything, I will get one of these marines to kill you." He's not even done; he has more to say on the issue. He says, "And I will drag your dead body off this plane." Joy to the world.

Then you have family to look forward to and family is here with you right now. I don't want you to raise your hand, but all of you have at least one person in your family that you'd like to serve eggnog, take out in the middle of nowhere, and leave for dead. That's Cousin Eddy. If you have a Cousin Eddy in your family, would you raise your hand. You know what? We're going to love them this Christmas season. Joy to the world.

When you think about this song... Isaac Watts wrote this song. It was first published in 1719. For the first hundred years of this song, you wouldn't have recognized it. It wasn't until the 1830s that Lowell Mason put with it pieces from Handel's Messiah and gave it the version that we know today and that we just sang.

When you think about Joy to the World and you think about Christmas, you think, *Okay, we need to turn to the gospels; we need to turn to Luke 2.* No, we don't; we're going to turn to Psalm 98 where this hymn was written. It wasn't written as a Christmas song, it was written off of Psalm 98. Today, as the angel declared to the shepherds, I declare to you we bring you (at this church) good news of great joy for all the people (Luke 2:10) and all God's people said... Amen.

Here's why we should be the most joyous people on the planet. Here's why we should be the ones making sense out of all the mess that we see in our country today. We should be the ones that are able to give an answer. Why? Because in Psalm 98, we're going to see Jesus is our Savior, King, and Judge.

Turn to Psalm 98 and we're going to jump right in with Verses 1- 3. ***1 Sing to the Lord a new song, for he has done marvelous things; his right hand and his holy arm have worked salvation for him.***

I love this text because the Prophet Isaiah uses the word picture of God bearing his arm for salvation. Here's why that's important and why it's always been intriguing to me. When you read about creation in the Psalms, you hear and see it described as God's handiwork. It's like the finger work of God, the creation, creating the cosmos. But for your salvation and for my salvation, it was as though... and here's the word pictures we have. It wasn't the finger work of God; he had to roll up his sleeve and, the scripture says, bear his holy arm for salvation.

The Israelites knew they never won a victory on their own and they never defeated an army on their own; it was always by God's hand that they won. In psalm 98, we read that your salvation comes to you and it comes to me through God, through the work he has done through his Son Jesus on the cross. It's not by your works, it's not by my works. This work that's been done for us should put a new song in our heart. When it says, "new song," it's not just referring to this Psalm, although it can include that, it's talking about what happens in us when we become a new creation. We should have a new song.

The story Lee Strobel tells... If you've read the book *Case for Christ* or *Case for Faith* or maybe you saw the movie, you know Lee was a journalist for the Chicago Tribune. He was an atheist and wanted nothing to do with God. His wife came to faith in Jesus and started bringing Lee to church. Lee would go to church with her Sunday after Sunday and he said, "Then I get up on Monday and I'd be taking a shower and I would start singing those worship songs." He said, "I would catch myself saying, 'I don't believe any of this! Why am I singing it?' " Lee came to faith because a new song was being worked out in his heart and in his life. This is where it all starts for us with joy in our lives and happiness in our lives because we are saved, not because of something we've done, but because it's what Jesus has done as our savior.

***2 The Lord has made his salvation known and revealed his righteousness to the nations. 3 He has remembered his love and his faithfulness to Israel; all the ends of the earth have seen the salvation of our God.***

Isaac Watts wrote another song, on top of Joy to the World. He wrote a song I grew up in church singing. I'm going to put it on the screen and you can sing it with me. Let me tell you, we had us a lot of Baptists at 8:30, and they were belting it out. If you don't know the song, we want to invite you to sing it anyway because you're going to see the theme. That's why Isaac Watts is one of my favorite hymn writers. It's the same idea that he is moving forward. The song goes like this.

*Alas, and did my Savior bleed?  
And did my Sovereign die?  
Would He devote that sacred head  
For such a worm as I?*

Stop right there. We're not going to go to the chorus yet. I love that last line. You don't see that in a lot of modern worship songs, do you? This is why I love the theology of hymns. He's understanding his

place in salvation. It is about what God has worked out in me, not what I worked out for my salvation. That's why we get to the chorus.

*At the cross, at the cross where  
I first saw the light,  
And the burden of my heart rolled away,  
It was there by faith I received my sight,  
And now I am happy all the day!*

I belted that out as a kid and I love that word *happy*. That word happy has been lost in the church. Maybe you've heard pastors say this or teachers say this. It's the false dichotomy that we've set up in the church, and we have now put joy against happiness. You've heard people do it. You've heard Christian writers do this. Tons of Christian writers that I read say joy is on the inside and happiness is on the outside. Joy is from the Lord and happiness is something you get if all the circumstances line up in your favor from the world. I'm here to tell you that's not true.

I read a great book this week. I'm still reading it because it took him three years to write it. It may take me three years to read it, but Randy Alcorn wrote a book called *Happiness*. I encourage you to read it. Here's what he says in the book. It's a really simple line. *"The church has a misguided distinction between joy and happiness."* We've set them apart and we tell people, "Don't be happy; be joyful."

We grew up singing this song too. I got a great reaction in the first service; let's see what happens in the second service.

*I have the joy, joy, joy, joy,  
Down in my heart, (where?)  
Down in my heart, (where?)  
Down in my heart,  
I have the joy, joy, joy, joy,  
Down in my heart, (where?)  
Down in my heart to stay.*

Look at all the Sunday school... I'm in the Lord's army. I'm flying o'er the enemy. I'm marching. I love it. Yeah, passion.

How many Christians do you know would sing that song without any passion? We should be the most joyous people on the planet. We can make sense out of all this that is going. John Piper says this... I'm going to give you a couple of authors that I appreciate how they put this out there. *"The Bible is indiscriminate in it's use of the language of happiness and joy and contentment and satisfaction."*

Joni Eareckson Tada says it this way. *"I don't think God had any such hair-splitting in mind. Scripture uses the terms interchangeably along with words like delight, gladness, and blessed."*

You should be joyous because Christ, first and foremost, as we see today and it's why we're singing Joy to the World, is your Savior. As you sit around the table this week at Christmas, share with your children, share with your grandchildren the story of your salvation.

My son asked me yesterday... I don't know where this came from. He said, "Dad, are you going to be a fun grandpa or a grumpy grandpa?" I don't know what was going on when he asked me that question. I told him, "Let's see how parenting goes. Let's start with that." I hope I'm that old guy sitting down at The Landing with a smile on my face, waiting on Amy to come out of a store.

Now the scripture does say a day is coming where my body finds its way into the grind. According to Ecclesiastes 12:1, there's going to come a day where I find no pleasure in that day in that I'm having a difficult time even moving along. My body is breaking down and I'm having a difficult time.

I said, "Carson, I've been with several senior adults that even at that point of life, there is great joy in their heart. They're still proclaiming the name of Jesus and they're still professing faith in Christ. They are outspoken with it and they are full of delight and satisfaction and joy. That should be you and that should be me. Joy to the World.

A.W. Tozer said it this way: "The people of God ought to be the happiest people in the whole wide world (paraphrase)."

As you look through scripture, all the places... This is not an exhaustive list, but I want to give you just a few places where you and I should find joy.

First and foremost, we should find **joy in songs**. Psalm 100: ***2 Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs.*** In this town, we've sometimes been labeled as the feel-good church. I'm okay with that so long as you understand it means we're here to spread the good news of great joy. We can be celebratory in our worship and we should be. Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs. That we would be singing and celebrating the salvation that we have from the Lord.

This season, there's another place we should find joy. **Joy at the table**. This is a verse that Baptist wish would have been left out of the Bible altogether. Ecclesiastes 9 - ***7 Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine (sparkling cider) with a joyful heart, for God has already approved what you do.***

According to 1 Timothy, we should receive what the Lord has given us with thanksgiving. We receive it with thanksgiving, not with overindulging. Too much food is gluttony, too much wine is drunkenness. But this is a season where you should be gathered around the table with your family, expressing great joy.

Can I just encourage you? There may be some in here that been labeled the troublemaker in your family. We have all sorts of terms like black sheep, troublemaker. "I always cause my family grief." Will you please not be a joy killer this season? Would you participate and not make it all about you? How many of you want me to camp out on that for just a moment? Some or you are going, "This is why I brought them! I knew you would get to this part right here."

Shouldn't we recline and linger at the table, put our devices in the other room, sit at the table and enjoy the food and drink that has been provided to us because we have the ability to work? We receive this with thanksgiving and we should have great joy in this.

How many of you have a struggle at work and you can't stand your job? **Joy at work.** You should be the most joyous person on the job. ***13 That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil—this is the gift of God.*** Ecclesiastes 3 We see the word *toilsome* in Ecclesiastes and it means grueling, difficult. But in the midst of the grueling work that you may have with a difficult boss that you may have to deal with, that you would find joy, that you would express joy, knowing, as Colossians 3 says, you do your work unto the Lord, not as unto your boss. Find joy in what you do. This is a gift of God. The scripture actually says if you will stay busy at work – if I can just speak to the husbands for a second – providing for your family, God will occupy your heart. He will give you contentment in our heart. We can find joy in work.

**Joy in marriage.** You know me; I love this one. This week, I was looking through all of the scripture trying to find a verse that said parenting should be fun. I couldn't find it. I'm not telling you to have joy in parenting because parenting is challenging, and all the parents said... Amen. Some of you are like, "I'm going to look for it; I think it's there." No, what you'll find... As my son asked me about whether I would be a fun or grumpy grandpa, I said, "Let me tell you what the Proverb says. A sensible son brings joy to his father."

I had a scholarly father who knows his Bible come up to me afterwards. He said, "You know, the payoff of parenting is a child who would bring you joy. The payoff of parenting is a child who will bless you in your later years. For some, they don't get to experience it here upon this hearth." He said, "But let me tell you. The payoff... put in the time and let him bring you joy later." How do you do this. This is why I'm so grateful to have a good marriage. Do you know why? It's because parenting is challenging. I want to be able to go in the room at night, lock the door, and be like, "Lord, deliver us. Lord, would you save us from the evil ones."

Look at what the scripture says in Ecclesiastes 9. ***9 Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun—all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun.*** You don't have to choose between life and a wife; you can have both at the same time. But many of us look to joy and we think that joy is something that will find us. "If we just play it right and get these kids raised, then we'll have a joyful marriage." We do the same thing with work. "I don't need to enjoy work; I need to get through it because the joy comes in retirement." That's not true either. Don't let joy be robbed from you in this season as you look forward to it in the next. Choose it in this season as well. Go after it in this season.

Amy and I enjoy life together even when life is challenging, when life is difficult, when life is painful. We've made the decision. Have you made the decision? We've made the decision that joy in marriage, happiness in marriage... Again, we have this false dichotomy going on in the church that God gave you a spouse to make you holy, not happy. I say not true. Go after it. You don't have to choose between holiness and happiness. You can both at the same time. Stop turning your spouse into the grind of life.

Look at the grind of life and then look at your spouse and be like, “Thank the Lord I have you to go through this grind with.”

I asked a widow in our church this week, “How come you never remarried?” With tears she told me, “Because I had this so good.” That’s not a statement on whether you should or should not remarry, but she experienced great joy in marriage in the midst of the grind. My grandma never remarried. She dated a man for 25 years, but never married him. Joy in a marriage is a decision you make. It’s not an outcome, it’s not a happily ever after that you hope finds you.

We say it around here. I don’t care how you meet. Some of you met on eHarmony, match.com, farmersonly.com, ancestry.com. We don’t care how you met. Hey, we’re reaching down into Arkansas now; we don’t want anybody to feel left out. Don’t judge if they met there. It’s not how you meet, it’s what you do after you meet. All God’s people said... Amen. It’s the choice that you make. Enjoy life together. Choose joy.

Again, you're like, “I can’t find it at work. I will never find it.” “I can’t find it in marriage.” Let me tell you, go back to Psalm 98: 1-3 and start there. Who is your source of life? If your source of life is your boss, you’ll never find joy at your work. If your source of life is your spouse, you’ll never find joy in your marriage. But if He is your source of life and you are grateful for the salvation that He has brought to you by rolling up His sleeve and bearing His holy arm for your salvation and doing that work for you... If you understand that and you live in that and that is your meditation and that is your thought process and that is your source of joy and source of gratefulness, you can find joy in marriage and you can find joy at work.

And even beyond that, you can find **joy in trials**. Gary Smalley loved to share this passage in James 1 with us. He did it all the time. ***2 Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, 3 because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. 4 Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.***

Another quote from A.W. Tozer. *“The Christian owes it to the world to be supernaturally joyful.”*

Some of you are like, “I am!” Tell your face! Let us see it. I’m not saying you’ve got to become all expression and charismatic and screaming and yelling. I don’t have a resting smile. I told you that. Sometimes you have to remind your face of the joy that is within you.

Just to quote one more theologian, Phil Robertson. He just says this: “Happy, happy, happy.” You didn’t realize how deep he is theologically. He knows there’s not a distinction between the two.

Let’s look at two more in Psalm 98. Jesus the Savior and now Jesus as King. In him we live and move and have our being. He is over all. We understand that he reigns supreme. ***4 Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music; 5 make music to the Lord with the harp, with the harp and the sound of singing, 6 with trumpets and the blast of the ram’s horn—shout for joy before the Lord, the King.*** He’s not only our Savior, he is our King. He is over all.

This verse kept coming to mind this week, as our Secretary of Defense resigned, how the stock market looked. You hear people talking about recession and many people start to get nervous and scared. Can I just remind you that he's not only your Savior, he's your King. Some trust in chariots, some trust in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. Rest in that. There's not an ounce of his sovereignty being sacrificed if we lose 10,000 points in the stock market next week. Even if you'd have to get another job, he's still King, he's still over all and in all.

Then it goes down to verses 7-9 where we see Jesus as judge. I always love the kind of modern Christian thought of "Don't judge me; Jesus wouldn't judge me." Hold on just a second. **7 Let the sea resound, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. 8 Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy; 9 let them sing before the Lord, for he comes to judge the earth..** We say it in the Apostle's Creed. We believe, as we celebrate this time of year, in the first coming of Jesus. Actually, most scholars believe Joy to the World does a better job speaking to the second coming of Christ as it does to the first coming of Christ. In the Apostle's Creed, we say we believe Jesus is coming again to judge the living and the dead. He's coming back again and he's going to judge all evil, he's going to make all things right, he's going to restore all things. Every false religion will be exposed, every knee will bow, and every tongue will confess. He comes to judge the earth. **He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity.**

If you read in Revelation 21... I was reading it this week and as John sees the vision of the new heaven and the new earth and the new Jerusalem coming down, it says, **4 'He will wipe every tear from their eyes.** I like to read it, "He will wipe away every tear and every Twitter account. And he will make all things right. He will make all things new."

Now, when we speak of the second coming, which this song speaks to the second coming – Jesus as Savior and Jesus as King and Jesus as Judge – it's very important to understand. As that song says, "Let every heart prepare him room." At the second coming of Christ, there are two responses. He is a source of joy for those who received him, a source of great joy, but he is to be feared. One commentator I read this week said, "... a cause of horror for those who have rejected him."

The question for you this morning and Christmas, as we head into this season and the last few days of the year, is have you received him or have you rejected him? I think about this time of year and many of our family... I was in quiet time this week, praying and reading, and I just kept coming to all of those folks in our church who have lost family members this year. It's always a visual of what I call the empty chair.

Many of you, this year, for the first time, have an empty chair at your table. Many of you have been adding empty chairs every year and you think about all the family who are no longer with you. I'm praying this week for the Herschend family who have two empty chairs at their table this season. As I thought about this chair, I was thinking about... My kids give me a hard time all the time. They say, "Dad, you think about death way too much." I said, "I'm a pastor. It's a big part of the job. I'm not just helping people in the end and not just doing funerals, but I'm preparing people for death, preparing people for the second coming of Christ."

When I think of the second coming of Christ, I'm filled with joy. There's no fear, there's no horror in me. As I read Ecclesiastes 7... and it's how I start every funeral. ***1 A good name is better than fine perfume, and the day of death better than the day of birth. 2 It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of everyone; the living should take this to heart.*** There it is again. Let every heart prepare him room.

When you go to a funeral, you start asking all the right questions. There's nothing wrong with going to a party or a house of feasting; nothing wrong with that at all, but you don't walk out of a comedy club going, "That changed my life; I'll never be the same." You should walk out of a funeral that way. As you sit around and enjoy food and drink and fellowship and all of that around your table, there's going to be an empty chair and it's okay to think about this. I'm actually going to encourage you. When you think about the empty chair, I want you to speak the person's name. Tell a story or something they said that inspired you or something that made you laugh. Sometimes we come to this season and we think we don't want to make it awkward. "I know it's already hard for mom." "I know it's already hard for dad or my brother." "I don't want to bring it up." Oh, they want you to bring it up. They want you to share the name and they want you to share a story.

When I leave a funeral, I think about the empty chair, I'm thinking about how I'm living and how I'm loving. One of the greatest tragedies at a funeral is that we hear someone being spoken of so well, words of high value spoken over an individual... I always sit there as a pastor, thinking to myself, *I hope they didn't wait until now to say that.* What a great lesson that is for us this Christmas season. As the joy is around your table, may the high value that you spoke over this person when you said good-bye at a funeral... May you speak that high value over the people you're with right now. For those that may be joy killers in your family, maybe start a new tradition this Christmas and instead of making it all about you, you find something, words of high value to speak over those that you love. Don't wait until the chair is empty. Say it now. Speak it now.

I was going through our prayer team and the requests they receive and just thinking of funerals I did this year. I just started praying for some of the widows and the widowers in our church, some of the parents who lost children. I thought about my friend Bob. Bob went to be with the Lord this year and his wife Roberta was in our first service. I wanted to share something that I wrote.

I just finished a book on laughter and I wanted to read this because I didn't know if I'd be able to hold it together. At the end of a chapter on 50 mental, relational, emotional, physical, and spiritual benefits of laughter, I realized I needed to talk about the limits of laughter because Ecclesiastes 7 says sorrow is better than laughter. He's not saying laughter is bad or joy is bad; he's saying laughter is medicine, something we can do. It's what I love about how we use laughter at this church. It helps the medicine go down. But sorrow is a teacher. Laughter is not a teacher. Sorrow is a teacher. That's why sorrow is better than laughter.

What are the emotions that we're feeling? We feel two extreme emotions when we lose someone. I'll just quote John Piper again. I like what he says. *"Our sorrows at the death of a believer are joyful sorrows, and our rejoicing at the death of a believer is a sorrowful rejoicing. There is nothing hopeless about the sorrow and there is nothing flippant about the joy. The joy hurts. And the sorrow is softened*

*with invincible hope. This is why one of the most common watch words of the Christian life is 'sorrowful yet always rejoicing.' Sorrow and joy are not merely sequential. They are simultaneous... This is the complex harmony of the Christian soul."* It's something we feel at the same time.

When I read that, I thought of my friend Bob and this is what I wrote about Bob. I would like to share it with you.

Mark Twain once said the best way to cheer yourself is to try to cheer someone else. That was Bob Copeland for me. I lost a friend and a long-time church member the day Bob Copeland went to be with the Lord.

Bob always refreshed me. He never shared strong opinions about organizational decisions at the church, or at least he never voiced them to me. He had doubts and lots of questions. Engaging Bob in theological discourse was always a highlight for me.

We laughed a lot together. His last days were no different. I visited him three times after he went into hospice care. The first two times, Bob's body was weak, but his mind was sharp. We told stories and we howled with laughter. I once had to shut the laughter down and say, 'Bob, stop. I'm not going to be responsible for your heart giving out.' Bob slept on my last visit. He was in bed on his side. His wife and daughter gathered around his bed with me. I held his hand and prayed one final time. Many pauses filled the prayer as my emotions got the best of me. Bob ministered to me in that moment. After our good-bye, he went to be with the Lord about an hour later. Bob entered the presence of the Lord and experienced a joy that overflows with singing, praise, rejoicing, and, yes, I believe laughter.

In his book *Happiness*, Randy Alcorn puts it this way. *"In heaven, I believe our joy will often erupt in laughter."* And all God's people said... Amen. *"When laughter is prompted by what's appropriate, God always take pleasure in it. I think Christ will laugh with us, and his wit and fun-loving nature will be our greatest source of endless laughter."*

So, the question for you this morning, as you think about Jesus as Savior, King, and Judge, as we have sung today in Joy to the World, is have you received him? Do you place faith alone in Christ alone? Do you know for sure he is your Savior? If you say yes to that, you should be one of the most joyous people on the planet. If you have not and you are wondering, *What's this longing for in me?* Here's what we want to share with you as we head out for the holidays.

**You'll find in Jesus the joy, happiness, satisfaction, and contentment you've always longed for.** As we pray today, I'll just invite you to take a moment. As I'm praying, you take it straight to the Lord. If you will confess with your mouth and believe in your heart... Confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe that he has been raised from the dead and place faith in him alone, it's no longer about your works... because some of you think it's going to church, giving, doing the right thing, stopping the bad habits. No, it's by the arm of almighty God that salvation comes to you. It's not by works so that you cannot boast about it. I pray that today would be the day of your salvation so that at the second coming of Christ, when he comes to judge the living and the dead, that also will be a great joy to you. And all God's people said... Amen.

Father, in the name of Jesus, we worship you, we celebrate you, we have joy and happiness and contentment and satisfaction and delight in you this Christmas season. We are grateful for our salvation. We are grateful that we do not put our trust in chariots, horses, or leaders, but we put them in the name of the Lord our God. We're grateful that we know that when Christ returns... As we celebrate this season, the first coming, as we think about the second coming, we know that will be another time of great rejoicing and great joy for us.

I pray for those here that are with family and they're here because this is just part of tradition, part of what you do at Christmas. I pray that today would be a different day for them this season, that the word of God spoken to them... I pray that the Holy Spirit would call them by name and they would place faith in Jesus. We're praying for the salvation of many today and for that we are grateful. Thank you for this season.

It's in the name of Jesus that everyone agreed and said... Amen.