



God With Us

Part 3 – Good News for The Lost and Lonely

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We're going to continue in Part 3 of this series *God With Us*. We just sang Isaiah 9: 6. We started with this a couple of weeks ago, and I want to start there again.

***For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.***

If you are visiting with us today, we looked at the fact that most of us have complained about the government our entire lives. But when you read Isaiah 9: 6 -7, we believe written around 735 BC, it says of his reign, of his government, and the peace and government, there will be no end. And we believe, as we celebrate in this season, Christmas, the first coming of Christ. As believers in Christ, we long for, we anticipate, we are waiting for the second coming of Christ. And we are in this in-between time. It gives these four descriptive names and we've been using this as our outline through this series these. Four descriptive names of Jesus, our Savior, the Lord, Messiah.

And he will be called

Wonderful Counselor... So, think wisdom. ***Mighty God...*** Scott McElvain shared last week on Mighty God – think strength. Today we are going to look at ***Everlasting Father***– think care.

Prince of Peace. – Think peace.

So, think about this. seven hundred years later, we read these words – Luke 2: 8-12, ***8 And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.*** You've heard about him, you know about him coming. The people have talked about this for hundreds and hundreds of years. He is coming. So, we are in this in-between time that yes, he came, he was born to be our Savior, and he is returning again one day. ***12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."***

One of the themes throughout this series has been that we don't grow tired. That's the best way I can put that. Grow tired of the Christmas message. I think Scott McElvain shared it perfectly last week when he gave us this line – "Don't let the extraordinary become ordinary." As soon as he shared that, I took a picture of it and that has been my sacred echo all week. I don't want the gospel to ever become ordinary. It's an extraordinary message. I don't want my salvation to ever become ordinary. It's an extraordinary message.

I don't want what we're doing here today to ever become ordinary, mundane, it's what we do. That we would always keep that extraordinary understanding of it. So, I went with it all week. So, last Sunday we heard the message and that night, 400 volunteers from Woodland Hills went to Silver Dollar City. Amy was on a trip so I went as party of one. I looked like that mall walker who decided to switch it up a little bit. I'm going to walk the City. I hope you never get tired of the lights in this town or the lights at Silver Dollar City.

I've been here over 20 years. It can become part of us and we can lose that extraordinary feeling, so I went out with the attitude to walk through mid-town slowly. It was cold, I was ready to get in the truck, but I'm like *this isn't something you run through*. I hope you never take for granted where you live. And if you're visiting, join us. If you can find a house, move here and do what you want to do. Wherever you live, take some time this week to slow it down as you drive. So that was Sunday night and I'm like, I'm going to walk through Silver Dollar City and the forty billion lights that they have going on here. I'm listening to dad's talk. I love watching the kids looking at the lights and being amazed. And dad's standing there going, "Do you think they are LED? I hope they are LED because I couldn't imagine..." I was just taking it all in.

And then the next morning, I went with a group of guys from our church to Dogwood Canyon. I love Dogwood Canyon. I love congregating the fish in small pools. It's very little effort, very little work for a 5 10-pound Rainbow trout. I had several moments. I always take a coffee bar out when I go, so I've got this big box and I pull cups out. There were several moments I was like, Don't let the extraordinary become ordinary. I put my fly rod down, which takes a lot for me to do when there are big fish just looking at you. I put the rod down and just sat there to watch the other guys fish and just slowed it down. Don't let where you live become ordinary.

And then, Thursday... True story. If you're looking for it, I'm telling you that you'll find it. I hope you understand we are talking about an attitude today. I'm driving across the Taney Como bridge. I look off to the right and I see this eagle circling. I've always been a bird watcher. I'm 50 next month which means smoked meats, WWII history and bird watching are going to be like my passion for the 50s. I slowed to down to about 15 to 20 mph going over the Taney Como bridge just to frustrate the people behind me. I rolled down the window and went, "Hey, look, it's an eagle." They couldn't care less.

I had somewhere to be, but I pulled around and went down into The Landing parking lot and parked to watch this eagle circle. I don't want to take for granted where I live. And then I to got see this happen. This is a picture I took of the- you can tell by the quality. Eagles are huge. Now, put in proportion with that this Rainbow trout. I'm going to say that's 16 or 17 inches. Listen, you don't question the preacher's numbers from the front.

Okay, here's what I need. I need someone who is good at math and geometry to take this picture this week and tell us... And I'm going to announce next week for the naysayers out here in that middle section. How many can tell that's a big trout? Okay, thank you. Three pounds is huge. You know nothing about where you live. Get a book. You guys are taking this message in a place it's not supposed to go. We're taking the extraordinary, and not letting it become ordinary. But I watched this eagle swoop down and get this trout. When do you see that? How many of you have ever seen this? "I saw it Friday, Ted."

Two members of the church walk up to me while I'm taking this picture. They asked what I was doing. I told them "I'm here to feed the pigeons. I'm at that age too." I showed them the picture. And then we ended the week with this right here. If you don't know what's going on with this... (Buc-ee's) This is like Chick-fil-A showing up to your town for the first time. It's not even our town; it's Springfield. But it's worth the drive for the barbeque. Let me tell you. Not making the extraordinary become ordinary filled me with about as much joy as this guy right here.

I hope you don't lose it for the gospel message as we talk today about *Good News for The Lost and Lonely*. The good news that causes great joy for all the people, for your salvation, for this church, for all that God is doing. Let me just encourage all of us in this message., starting with the lost. As we celebrate the birth of Christ and wait for the second coming of Christ, let's not give up on lost people. I've seen it happening within churches and among believers. If I were to name for you cities in our country... Let's do it. New York, Chicago, San Fransico. Some of you right now just had a moment where you're like, *I hate those places and everything they stand for*. Follower of Jesus, may we never give up on lost people. This is what we know. Christmas reminds us that people still seek Christ. You understand this is the season. This is even different than Easter. At Christmas, pagans will find themselves singing *Joy to the World, the Lord has come. Let earth receive her king*. People who don't believe the message sing it or hum it.

My wife and daughter have always wanted to go see the Rockettes in New York. So, after church last Sunday, I dropped them off at the airport for a two-night trip. Now, sending my wife and daughter to New York, I had a big ole dad lecture with them on the way up to the airport. You would have thought that I work for the CIA because I'm like, "Alright, what are my two words? Corynn, from the back seat, "Be Aware." "That's right. I need you guys... especially because you are going to be leaving that show at night, going back to the hotel. I need you to find a family and like a snowplow on the highway, get behind the family and let them get you safely to the hotel." "I'm mean find a dad with a Green Bay Packers jersey on and a Green Bay Packers hat or some sports team. Some dad who really doesn't even look like he wants to be there on that vacation." "Get behind that guy. He's safe."

Amy said, "Ted, we went to the show and something I was not prepared for happened." I don't know how to say this, but you know every city you go represents different values and I don't think I have to say this, but I might as well. Branson and New York are very different. And at the end of the Rockettes show, they opened the Bible and they read Luke 2. They read the Christmas Story. And Amy, like me, sits down here on a lot of Sundays and just kind of looks back to see how people are engaging and responding. She said, "I looked around and at first, there was shock." Do you understand that's what this time of the year does. People on stage who don't live by this book, don't believe this book will read this book. That's what's special about this message and this time of year.

She said, "I looked around and there was shock, and then like two people started slowly clapping and it got faster and more people joined. And she said, "Thunderous applause at Radio City Music Hall in Manhattan for the gospel being clearly proclaimed."

That's a big deal This is why when you hear what's going on in cities around the country, you're first thought, follower of Jesus, should be there are lost people still seeking Jesus. And that should be our heart.

John Piper puts it this way. And this is what's so spectacular about the Christmas message. *"We have a message of spectacular rescue. The love of God has rescued us from the wrath of God. Christmas is about the creator of the universe coming into this world that he made in order to save those who are in active rebellion against him."*

That is the message we proclaim at Christmas. And so, the first week, we looked at Wonderful Counselor. Last week, we looked at Mighty God, today, let's spend some time with Everlasting Father.

This is important. We shared it two weeks ago. When you see the descriptive name for Jesus, Everlasting Father, this is not speaking of Jesus and his relationship to the Trinity. It's speaking of the fact that Jesus is God, and he will return as a fatherly ruler. That's the key. He will care for us as a father cares for his children. And by the way, Jesus cares for you now and forever. It's a very important distinction between now and until the end. He's not going to care for you until the end because there is no end. He's going to care for you forever. That is your Everlasting Father.

I used to love to demonstrate this with my kids. I would go into my kid's room and go, "Carson, how much does your dad love you?"

"You love me a lot, dad."

"Show me how much I love you."

"You love me a lot."

No, I put my arms out and say, "I love you this much."

You can tell I watch way too many Liam Neeson movies, but I said, "If we're walking down the street and a car jumps the curb and it's coming at us, what am I going to do?"

"You're going to throw me out of the way, jump in front of the car, and take the hit."

"That's it! And all I ask for that is you to clean your room. I'm laying down my life for you and I'm just asking you to pick up a few articles around here."

What does a father do? A father protects. A father provides. Jesus cares for us by protecting us and providing for us now and forever. He is the Everlasting Father.

Let me ask you this question. It's a good question to ask moving into 2024 election time. What qualities are you looking for in a leader? What makes a good leader? For the government, for the home, for a church or organization.

Let's just go through the list that we've been going through in Isaiah 9:6. **Wisdom.** Nobody wants to work for a fool. Now one wants to be led by a fool. You want someone who is wise, but wisdom alone is not enough.

You also want someone who has **strength.** And I want someone who is wise and the strength that they have... Why is strength so important? You want strength because you want someone who will make the right decision when it's not the popular decision. And that requires strength. You want someone who doesn't check polls before they do the right thing. You want a dad who is wise and, frankly, some of you were raised by a father who was a fool. Or maybe you had a wise father, but he never had your back.

he never stood up for you. He never protected you, he never took your side. You never felt he was on your side.

Today were looking at care. I want someone who thinks about the needs of the people. And it's not just about maintaining power and keeping power. It's a big conversation in the church today. People believe that leaders get to a place where they have power and they have money and then when they get to a certain point, all it's about is maintaining that power and money. No. it's about leveraging your wisdom and strength to the benefit and blessing of other people. That's the key.

And then you want someone who, when they enter a room, it is peaceful. You don't want the guy that's coming in just like a bull in a china shop. I'm looking for the leader that's wise, strong, caregiving, and peaceful.

I found this video this week and I said to Katie, "This is about the most awesome thing ever of a grandfather. Because I read Anthony Bradley. He's a research fellow at the Acton Institute. He said, "The number one determinant of faith persistence, like a child continuing in the faith, is the relational warmth of their father and grandfather. We don't think about this a lot and so I saw this video and Katie edited it for us. It's of this grandfather who was left in charge of his granddaughter. I can't wait for this day. I promise you they'll be alive when you get back, but I'm not going to say no a whole bunch. You know what I'm talking about. So, I'm not at that season yet. Maybe I'll be there one day, but this is a grandfather laying... Talk about getting into it with the grandchild. This is a grandfather attempting to lay his granddaughter down for a nap. The only thing that would make that video better is him not getting out. And hours later, his children come home and there they sit in the crib, waiting to be rescued.

I don't know the model that you've had in a dad, but Gary Smalley always put it this way that if you were to look at it on a slide, you have the dominant and the permissive. Some of us were raised in a home that was dominant – my way or the highway. And ruled with the iron fist. And some of us were raised in a home that was permissive, almost to the point of being neglectful – anything goes, do whatever you want.

Gary would say, "Either extreme alone is bad." If you're looking for that loving, firm, kind, caregiving dad. Some of you know that one of the struggles in marriage when raising children is that you'll have one parent over here and one parent over there. And when the kids learn that it's on. And the goal in marriage is that you be a united front in raising kids. So, some of you had the extremes and in Jesus, we don't get extremes, we get complete. The Everlasting Father, the one who cares for us.

In Isaiah, a little bit later on, we read in Isaiah 40: 10-11,

***See, the Sovereign Lord comes with power,
and he rules with a mighty arm.***

See, his reward is with him,

and his recompense accompanies him. And then watch. You get the all in one. It's not one or the other, it's all.

11 He tends his flock like a shepherd:

He gathers the lambs in his arms

and carries them close to his heart;

he gently leads those that have young. I miss this part of parenting and I look forward to in grandparenting, but I used to get on the ground on all fours when my kids were small and be like, “Ten bucks to the first kid that can get me to the ground.” That was so much fun, and they couldn’t. My daughter would always come up to me like... “But Carson was like “Game on, you mess with the bull, you get the horns.” He was ready.

I remember once he got up from the table and put me in a head lock. So, he's got me in a headlock. And he goes. “If you can’t break this...” You know, it was ten bucks or whatever the going rate was at the time. I can still remember the day that he put me in that headlock, and I couldn’t break it. I think he was like six. I had just eaten; I was pretty full. You're not supposed to swim or do any heavy exercise right after eating. I couldn’t break it.

So, you understand what we have in Jesus, the Everlasting Father, with that fatherly roll. I am a picture of it, I represent it, but I will never represent it perfectly. Dads, this is not the time to go on a guilt trip. That’s not what this message is about at all. But I want us to look at, for just a moment, how Jesus cares for us, how he protects and provides for us.

Just quickly five ways that we can go through.

1. Jesus saved me. Don’t let that become ordinary. Don’t lose sight of that. And today, if you’ve never placed faith in Jesus, Romans 10: 9 says, ***If you declare with your mouth Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.*** Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord will be saved. Don’t let your salvation become ordinary this season. Don’t let the gospel message become ordinary.

2. Now we move from the lost to the lonely. For those of you that have been through a bad breakup this year or you’ve never really fit in. You’ve never been able to find your crowd. You’ve never been able to find a group that accepts you and brings you in and you're like, “I know I’m weird and I’m socially awkward, but I’ve never found a group.” Well guess what? Upon salvation, you become part of God’s family. And if you look around this church, we have all different types of people, starting with me. I’m different, I’m odd, I have my quirks. Just like those who just amened. This is a family. Jesus saves you and Jesus brought me into his family. In Ephesians 1: 5 we read, ***God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing him to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure.***

Welcome home. giving your life to Jesus, becoming part of a family, jump in there. In January, we’re going to talk a lot about the family, we’re going to talk about our gatherings. It’s kind of a vision time in January for us as a church. We do it every year. I just want to encourage you. Be part of the family. If you're like “Hey, I’m a believer. I just talked to someone who has been attending for a while and they’ve not really plugged in...” That’s what I love about this time of year. They’re starting to think through – *I love this place, I love these people and it’s time for me to get more serious.* I love that. You're part of the family.

3. Jesus gives my life purpose. Ephesians 2: 10 - ***10 For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.*** He has a plan for you. We're going to talk about this January 7. Come on back for that. He has a plan for you, he has a purpose for you.

I was just talking to a friend out in the lobby about retirement. Not mine, but his. He's like, "I'll probably still work once I retire. And I go, "Good, keep that..." Whether it's work or not, Don't lose purpose. Until you draw your final breath or the Lord returns. Jesus gives my life purpose.

4. Jesus offers me rest. For whatever you are carrying, whatever burdens you're walking with... Matthew 11: 28, Jesus says ***Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest.*** And part of your exhaustion is that you've been trying to do it all yourself and you can't. Your salvation comes through Christ.

5. Jesus is preparing a place for me. In John 14: 2-3 we read, ***2 My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.***

I heard a pastor share this week that Christmas is a great magnifier. All it does is magnify what you've been going through this year. It magnifies what you're feeling right now. For some, it is joy. It's been a great year. It's been a great year and you're entering into this season of rest and peace and family and schedules change and it's full of joy, but that's not true for every person in here. That's not true for every member of our church family. That's not true for all of our guests today. It's true for a lot but not for everyone. Some people this year have been in a season of deep grief. They lost a loved one. And what Christmas is going to do is shine a spotlight on that empty chair at the table. And their grief will be magnified. For others, it's been a stressful year, and now, going to be with your family feels like not joy, but stress. It's just been too much. My family is too much. The expectations that we place on ourselves in this season can cause greater stress.

It was a tough year at work, and you have a lot of dysfunctional relationships at work, and you had to go to a work christmas party and put on that smile. Some of you have been through financial crisis. This one we probably hear the most. You've been through a financial crisis and now the expectations of a magical Christmas or whatever you would call it... "I just need to make it big and the kids need this and the kids need that." All December means for you is more spending. And that adds more stress.

And for the lonely, for those who just went through a breakup... There are some here that have been through a divorce this year. Now, this is the first time ever with our kids that I'll take them on Christmas eve, and he'll take them on Christmas day or vice versa. There are going to be moments of loneliness. I just want to encourage you with your Everlasting Father. That you run to him.

Did anybody ever have to call their dad after they did something dumb? How fast was that phone call? It's still my favorite story with my brother with his two-wheel drive truck deciding to go mudding in the corn fields of Illinois. We got stuck hundreds of yards out in this cornfield, and we had to run home. It was about a mile run. It gave us enough time to get the story straight. I'm sorry I said story... The lie.

There are two ways we think about it when we get in trouble or we're dealing with chaos that we created. For some of you, your first thought when you're in trouble is, *My dad is going to kill me*. That is not your Lord. Some of you have been holding back because of what it's going to mean. You have this very religious idea of who Jesus is. Like I'm going to bring this all to him and it's going to be boom, boom, boom. No, we would hope that when you are in trouble, whether you're in stress, lonely, crisis, whatever it is, caused by you or not caused by you, that your first thought would be, *I need to call my dad*.

Again, I'm an earthly dad. So, when my kids call me to get out of trouble, I receive them with open arms. They know a lecture is going to come at some point, but I receive them with open arms.

I just want you to see that that is your heavenly Father. You know the story of the Prodigal son. I wish we had time to go into it today. I've been re-reading this story because I feel like every time I read that story, I get something new. Sometimes we read that and we think he missed his dad. I don't read that in the story that he missed his dad. I read in the story he was at his end. I read in the story that he had no where else to turn. He was starving and had no more resources. *I need to call my dad*. Sometimes, as a parent... Let me go back to what John Piper said just briefly. "He rescued us while we were in active rebellion against him." That is the heart of your heavenly Father. I want that heart for my kids too.

In Luke 15: 20, we read, as he returned to his dad, ***20 So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.*** Many of you know the song or remember it. This is decades old and it's one of my wife's favorite songs, called When God ran. I love the lyrics of this song.

Almighty God the great I am
Immovable rock omnipotent powerful
Awesome lord
Victorious warrior commanding king of kings
Mighty conqueror and the only time
The only time I ever saw him run
Was when
He ran to me
He took me in his arms
Held my head to his chest
Said my son's come home again
Lifted my face
Wiped the tears from my eyes
With forgiveness in his voice he said
Son do you know I still love you
He caught me by surprise when God ran.

After the 8:15 gathering, a lady came up to me. This is what I love about the body of Christ and the stories. There are stories right now that are bubbling up in here. She walked up right here on the stage and she said, "We own a construction company and my ex-husband passed away this past summer. In a

dumpster one time, he found that song on a cassette tape. He plugged it into his truck and in his truck, he gave his life to Jesus. He was saved by a song. It was the first time it ever really made sense to him.

That's why we know some of you are here today seeking Christ because it's what you do in this season. You're here with family and it's part of family tradition. We welcome you. We're glad you're here. Run to the arms of the father. I'm thankful today. I never want this message to become ordinary for me and I hope it never become ordinary for you. Jesus saved me, brought me into his family, gives me purpose, offers me rest, and is preparing a place for me. And all God's people said... Amen.

Father, let us never grow tired of the Christmas message. How hard this team has worked this week to put together worship for us that brings us to this place of glorifying you and honoring you. For those who are lonely, lost depressed, broken, hurting, stressed, in crisis, that they would run to the arms of the Father today. That they would declare with their mouth that Jesus is Lord, believe in their heart that he has been raised from the dead that they would be saved and today would be the day of their salvation.

I pray for the believers. The gospel is not just for the lost, it's for believers too. That the believers in here would be reminded of this great message. Slow down this week. Drive slowly across the bridge. Walk slowly through Silver Dollar City. Park in a parking lot. Spend a little time reflecting on all that He have done for us. We thank you for our salvation. We thank you for our family. And we thank you for the fact that you care for us now and forever. We long for the day of the return of Christ and spending eternity together. We pray this in the name of Jesus and everyone agreed and said... Amen.