

# A Promise of Great Hope

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning. Wonderful to be with you. If you are a guest or new, my name is Kevin, and it's wonderful to bring God's Word to you this morning. Now, as a church watermark, we are working our way through Matthew's Gospel. We're going to do so from now until about Easter next year.

But at the moment, we're working specifically through the first two chapters of Matthew's Gospel as we come up towards Christmas Day. And over the next few weeks, well, today and next Sunday, as we work through the opening chapters of Matthew's Gospel, we are exploring the depth and the complexity and the richness of this good news of great joy that is Christmas.

Now, if you were here last week, you'll remember we looked at the first 17 verses of Matthew's Gospel, which is the genealogy of Jesus. Remember that long list of names that Gary read to us so well.

And we saw that Matthew writes his Gospel, or he begins in this way to show that Jesus is not just a flash-in-the-pan populist. He's not just this charismatic leader that got the crowds going.

He was sent from God. He is the faithful fulfillment of everything God has said for thousands of years to his people in the Old Testament. But to some people in Matthew's audience, or some reading the Word, they might have had the question, and maybe you have the question today, Okay, I get that Jesus wasn't just this kind of charismatic guy that got the crowds going.

[ 1 : 26 ] I get that he was God-sent. But what relevance does that have for my life right here today? We live in 21st century Hong Kong, not 1st century Palestine. What relevance is that to our lives?

And so Matthew's going to show us now that while Jesus is on the one hand the continuation of everything that God has spoken about to his people for thousands of generations, at the same time, Jesus is utterly unique.

And it's the uniqueness of his birth that reveals something about the uniqueness of his identity. And the uniqueness of his identity reveals why he came to earth and what relevance he has for your life and my life today.

Okay? The uniqueness of his birth reveals the uniqueness of his identity. And the uniqueness of his identity reveals why he came and what that means for you and I today. Now, let me ask this question.

How many of us here like to be interrupted, like having your plans interrupted? Okay, just one at the back. Thank you, Desiree. I must confess, as a parent, this is one of the hardest things I find about having young children.

[ 2 : 34 ] The incessant, never-ending interruptions. It is impossible to find five minutes of peace and quiet, of just trying to read that article, of trying to have a brief conversation with my wife, of just trying to send that important text message without some kind of interruption.

Does that sound familiar? Okay, great. Or maybe you know this feeling. You have these wonderful plans. This day is going to be your most productive day ever. You're going to accomplish a thousand tasks, right?

Or maybe you've got a big weekend coming up. Or a wonderful holiday you've been looking forward to for weeks. And you wake up in the morning and your kids are sick. That ever happened?

Or maybe you know this situation. You've got this date lined up. Okay? And you've booked the restaurant. You've got that bottle of wine. You haven't been wearing your favorite clothes for the last three days, because you're storing them up this date.

And at five o'clock, your boss says to you, I hope you don't have any plans tonight, because we're working late. Okay? Interruptions have a way of driving us mad. Well, let's look at how Matthew's, this passage starts off today.

[ 3 : 43 ] Matthew writes this in verse 18. The birth of Jesus took place in this way. In which way? Well, with a frustrating interruption. Because think about Joseph's life.

Joseph comes from this town called Nazareth. It's a small village. There are about 400 people that live there. It's a small community, a couple of families. And Joseph's parents choose a wonderful young lady to be his wife, Mary.

They probably knew the family that she came from. They'd been watching her. And they decided Mary is going to make a fantastic wife for our son, Joseph. And so the parents talk, and they make this arrangement.

And Joseph and Mary are legally engaged to one another. Now, in Israel, the legal age for getting engaged was 12 for girls, 13 for boys.

Mary is probably a mid-teenager around this age, maybe 16 or 17. Joseph, a few years older. And the way it worked is that if you were legally engaged, it was almost as good as marriage.

[ 4 : 42 ] You couldn't just break off that engagement without an official legal divorce. And so Joseph and Mary are engaged, and they're still living with their parents. But in a year's time, they will go through the official marriage, wedding ceremony, and they will be married.

Except somewhere along the line, Joseph's plans get interrupted. And not just slightly interrupted, properly messed up, right? Because he finds out that this lady that he's engaged to is pregnant. Now, in our day and age, being unmarried, being a teenager from a small rural village, and finding out you're pregnant brings on a lot of shame, right? Think of a small rural village in China, maybe 7 million people or something, or maybe the U.S.

You know what it's like, right? Well, in first century Palestine, of a small village of 400 people, everyone is going to know about it. And so here are Joseph and Mary facing the shame and the disappointment that they're expecting society to bring upon them.

Now, Joseph has the legal right to take Mary to the elders at the city gates and say, here is a lady that has not only been engaged in premarital sex, because she's obviously pregnant, but I know that I haven't been involved with her, and so she's been unfaithful to me.

[ 6 : 02 ] And so legally, Mary was allowed to be stoned at the gates, sentenced to death by stoning. Except Joseph does something remarkable. Well, he decides not to do that. And the Bible says that he decides to divorce her quietly, which means two things.

It means maybe taking her to another village, but one, it means covering her shame. He's not going to publicly expose what has happened to her, but secondly, it means he's going to give her a certificate of divorce, an official certificate, which would mean that Joseph, everyone would know that he had called off the wedding.

It was his decision. He would bear the shame, but secondly, because she got a certificate of divorce, it meant that she could go and be married into the future. And so Joseph does this remarkable thing.

He says, listen, this marriage is over, but I'm going to, as far as possible, preserve your dignity.

Except Joseph then experiences a second divine interruption. Not only are his plans for marriage interrupted, but now his plans for divorce are interrupted as well.

Because while he's hatching these plans, he has a dream. It's an extraordinarily vivid dream. And in this dream, an angel comes to him and says this, Joseph, do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife, for the child that is growing inside of her is not the result of intimacy or passion or some love affair.

[ 7 : 21 ] It is conceived of the Holy Spirit. Friends, very often God's plans don't fit very well with our well-orchestrated and structured plans, right?

Amazingly, God doesn't seem too concerned about the inconvenience that this is going to bring to Joseph or Mary's life. We can imagine that an angel coming to Mary and saying, Mary, I bring you good news of great joy.

You're going to have a baby. The Messiah is going to be born to you. Now, let's just look at your calendar. How's 2020 looking for you? No holiday? 2021 maybe? But the angel doesn't do that.

The angel comes and says, you are with child. And again, I can imagine Joseph and Mary going saying, Mom, Dad, wonderful news. Mary's pregnant. But it wasn't our doing.

It's the Holy Spirit, right? And you can imagine how well that was believed. Friends, very often God's plans don't fit in well with our well-orchestrated, neatly arranged schedules.

[ 8 : 18 ] But that doesn't mean that His plans aren't good. And that we shouldn't trust Him. His plans are good. Now, you may think, come on. Virgins don't have babies. We know how this thing works.

In the first century, they didn't have ultrasounds and technology. But these days, we know these things. This didn't work, right? But in fact, the truth is that first century people knew just as well as we do how babies are made.

Right? They knew about the birds and the bees and they understood all these things. And Joseph, when he hears that Mary's pregnant, he has this crisis. He has this difficulty. Not because he didn't know how things work, but because he does.

Now, the angel comes and says, Joseph, don't be afraid to take Mary. For the baby that is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. Now, what does this actually mean? What does it mean that this baby is from the Holy Spirit?

Well, it means a whole bunch of things. It means that Mary is definitely a virgin, right? She's not pregnant because of some passionate love affair. And we know this because in Luke's gospel, the angel comes to Mary and says, Mary, I bring you good news of great joy.

[ 9 : 22 ] You are going to have a baby. And Mary's response is, how can this be? This is impossible. I am a virgin, right? So first, he tells us that Mary is a virgin.

But what does that actually mean? What is the significance of this? It means a bunch of things. But maybe just three of them briefly. It means that everything about Jesus' life is supernatural from beginning to end.

David Mathis said this, On the one end of Jesus' life is his supernatural conception and birth. On the other end, his supernatural resurrection and his ascension to the right hand of God.

And this is what Matthew's telling us. He's telling us that Jesus wasn't just a good man with good morals and good teachings who came to tell us how to live. Jesus was the ultimate divine son of God himself.

And from beginning to end, everything about his life is orchestrated by God. His birth and his death are both the result, not of carefully orchestrated planning by human beings, but planned before the creation of the world and brought about by the sovereign will of the majestic God.

[ 10 : 28 ] Even before he's born, God has planned and orchestrated these things. And Matthew's telling us from the beginning, from before his birth, his very conception is nothing less than supernatural.

And everything about him, from his life, his message, his teachings, and ultimately his death on the cross, is nothing less than supernatural. It's the uniqueness of his birth that speaks to the uniqueness of his identity, which tells us who he is and why he came and what that means for you and I.

There's a second thing this virgin conception means for us. It means that Jesus is nothing less than the God-man. He's fully God, fully man. Now, if you're new to church this morning or you're kind of new to the Bible, I know that might sound strange and it takes a while to get our heads around it. But this is actually quite central to Matthew's teaching and central to the gospel. The virgin conception speaks not only to his supernatural life and origins, but the fact that Mary's pregnancy is conceived of the Holy Spirit says more than that Jesus was just supernatural.

It speaks to the fact that he's divine, that he's fully God, that he's not just here to show us the way to God. Jesus is not just a guru that is going to teach us about spirituality.

[ 11 : 41 ] He is God himself. And because Jesus is fully human, he understands our weakness. He understands our temptations. He understands our suffering. He understands our difficulties.

He understands our pain. Friends, there's no area on the spectrum of human emotion and difficulty with which Jesus Christ is not familiar and knows what it feels like and experiences.

And yet because he's fully God, he's perfect. He's just. He's without fault. He's without error. His judgments are perfect because he's God.

And therefore, he's trustworthy. He's trustworthy. But the virgin conception actually means something else. And this is the heart of this passage. So I want to listen up. Okay. It means that humanity, we cannot save ourselves.

The virgin conception tells us that you and I, we needed a savior. We needed a rescuer. We needed someone to come from outside of ourselves and to rescue us because none of us are sufficient to save ourselves.

[ 12 : 42 ] Remember a few months ago, there was that story that captured the world's attention of the Thai soccer team in Thailand. They got stuck in the caves. Remember that? These boys, they go for a soccer practice.

And afterwards, they go for a walk in the caves. And they go a little bit further. And then it starts to rain. And so they climb up a bit to get away from the rain. And they go further and further and further into the caves.

And before they know it, they're hopelessly lost. They are completely lost. And so they decide to wait it out. They think the rains will end and the waters will subside.

And things just go from bad to worse. And soon they realize they're not just in a difficult situation. Their situation is utterly hopeless. The waters have risen.

The oxygen is dropping. Their food is running out. And they are completely lost. Now imagine one of them had said, guys, I've had a good life. I will take the fall for you.

[ 13 : 38 ] I will stop eating. I will stop breathing. Consuming more oxygen so that you can live. I will lay down my life for you. Well, he would have been a hero. He would have had a good heart.

And we would have thought of him as very selfless. But he wouldn't have saved them. What they needed wasn't just one of them to rise up and say, I will take the fall for you.

What they needed was somebody to come from outside and rescue them and get them out of the situation. Friends, that's exactly what the Bible says our situation is. We don't just need one of us to say, let me show you the way.

We don't just need a great human being to come and say, I will lay down my life for you. What we needed was someone to come from outside of ourselves to us to rescue us from our situation. The Bible says we are trapped.

We are slaves to sin and to selfishness. You may say, I don't feel very trapped. I feel quite free. Friends, don't you realize that we cannot help but live for ourselves? We are slaves to our self-centeredness.

[ 14 : 38 ] And Colin Smith said it like this. From the very first human being onwards, human race has never produced a single human being who is sufficient to save us from our selfishness.

We produce great athletes, Michael Jordan and Lionel Messi. We produce great business leaders, Jack Maher, Stephen Jobs. We produce extraordinary minds, Pythagoras, Newton, Einstein. But the human race has never produced a single person who is sufficient to save us from our sins. Christ came to do on our behalf what we could not do for ourselves. This is the great meaning of the virgin birth.

He did not come from the human race. He came to the human race because he's a gift from God for us. And this is what Matthew is showing us. The significance of Mary's miraculous conception is that Jesus is not just one of us.

He's not just the strongest or the most enlightened or the most spiritual. He hasn't just come to show us the way to God. He is God. And he came to us to rescue us and to redeem us and to bring us back to himself.

[ 15 : 44 ] Friends, this morning we had the privilege of watching a multitude of children getting dedicated. Right? Wasn't it a joy? And standing up here with the six families and seeing their children.

The reason why we do this is because these wonderful gurgling, smiling, laughing, burping, sometimes vomiting bundles of joy.

What these bundles of joy most need in life is not just a wonderful education. It's not just extracurricular activities. It's not just a trust fund set up so that they are financially secure in life. What these ten children most need in life is a revelation of how lost they are. That apart from Christ they are completely and utterly helpless. But because of the amazing love of Christ that God has come into the world to rescue them and save them and to fetch them and to bring them to themselves.

Because of God's love for them. They need a revelation and a realization that their hearts are self-orientated, bent on themselves. But that God has not abandoned them. Friends, if you're here this morning and you're not a Christian, you may think that Christmas is about pursuing joy and peace and love and kindness and forgiveness.

[ 17 : 00 ] And it is about those things in some ways. Or maybe you think being a Christian is about being religious, doing the right things, obeying the rules, or being very dutiful and devoted.

But Christmas actually tells us that at the heart of the Christian message, it starts off with bad news. And the bad news is that we are more lost and more hopeless and more destitute than we like to think.

It tells us that our situation is hopeless. It tells us that we're in a worse situation than we think we are. Because the natural default setting of our hearts is to live for ourselves in our own glory.

Friends, I do it and you do it and we all do it.

Friends, I was just thinking on the bus on the way here this morning, how self-centered I am, that even my preaching is marked by self-centeredness. Friends, you don't know this, but I go home every Sunday and I wonder how good was I?

What did people think? Were people impressed? Even this act of trying to be spiritual is marked by self-centeredness. Friends, that's why I get so frustrated when people interrupt me.

[18:01] That's why it drives me mad when my plan's interrupted. Because I want to be king of my life. I want to live my own glory. And I want my plans to work my way so that I can get the glory when things go well.

I want to be my own God because I'm a sinner. Friends, I'm not the only one. We all like that. But the good news of Christmas is that though we are lost and hopeless and without hope in the world, because of God's profound love for us, because God's extravagant love for you and for me, God did for us what we could not do for ourselves.

He came and rescued us. He saved us and He redeemed us. Not because He had to, but because He chose to and because He wants to. And we see this in what the angel says. The angel comes to David and the angel doesn't say, David, don't divorce Mary because what's conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit and she's feeling sick.

And so just be gracious and kind to her. That's not the motivation. The angel comes and says, David, don't be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For that which is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit.

She will bear a son and you must call His name Jesus. And the name Jesus means the Lord saves. Jesus, Yeshua, Joshua, salvation is from the Lord.

[19:20] For He will save His people from their sins. John Frame said it like this, The birth of Christ in which the initiative and the power are all from God is an appropriate picture of God's saving grace.

It teaches us that salvation is God's act, not our human effort. And so this is why Jesus is given the name Jesus. Not just because it's got a nice ring to it or, you know, it rhymes with something else that rhymes with Jesus.

But because it means the Lord saves. God has come to save. Now, last question I want to ask this morning is, What does this actually mean? What does this feel like?

What does it look like that God saves? Well, good question. I'm glad you asked. Now the question is, Who does God save? Does He save the devoted? Does He save the religious?

Does He save the wealthy? Does He save the poor? Is He like Father Christmas that saves those that have been good all year and have not disobeyed their parents? Well, let's read on and see what happens.

[20:25] Verse 22. So the angel comes and says, You're going to have a son. Name Him Jesus, which means the Lord saves. Verse 22. All this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken by the prophet Isaiah.

Behold, the virgin will conceive and will bear a son, and they will call His name Emmanuel, which means God is with us. Now, last point here is, when Matthew, the New Testament is forever quoting the Old Testament, and when it does so, it often just quotes one sentence.

But it's kind of like a footnote or a hyperlink to the Old Testament, because the readers would have understood the background to that Scripture. They would have known what that one sentence refers to. Now, in our day and age, we don't often understand the full context behind the story, and so we may need to just explore it a little bit.

But Matthew's audience would have understood exactly what this quote refers to. The quote refers to Isaiah chapter 7. And Isaiah chapter 7 gives us a far richer, deeper, more complex understanding of this passage.

You see, the situation is like this. Now, you're going to need to concentrate, because there's some strange names, okay? I think we've got a map up here. Hopefully, I don't know if you can see that. So the situation is this.

[ 21 : 37 ] The nation of Israel split into two kingdoms. The southern kingdom, which is the more faithful of the two, is called Judah. And the king of Judah at this stage is called Ahaz, A-H-A-Z.

The northern kingdom is called Ephraim, or sometimes Israel. And the king of Ephraim is called Pekah at this stage, okay? So you've got these two kingdoms, Ephraim and Judah, Pekah and Ahaz.

And the king Ahaz in the south is in a difficult situation, because the world's superpower at the time is Assyria. And the king of Assyria is called Tiglath-Pileasa.

And so Tiglath-Pileasa has ascended the throne, and he's flexing his muscles, and he wants to expand the Assyrian Empire, not just from Nineveh and Assyria, but to the whole known world all the way down to Egypt, okay?

And so he's starting to flex his muscles, and he's sending his army to conquer nation after nation all the way on the way down to Egypt. And so Ahaz, the king of Judah in the south, knows that this army is coming to invade them and conquer them.

[ 22 : 41 ] But at the same time, the kingdom above him, the northern kingdom of Ephraim, and the nation just above them called Syria, these two nations decide, let's see if we can fight off Assyria at Tiglath-Pileasa.

Let's see if we can stop his advances. And so they form this unholy alliance. But they say, we need Judah in the south to help us, because otherwise Assyria can just go around us, come to the south, and attack us from the bottom.

So in order to stop Assyria demolishing us, we need to get Judah on our side. But Judah doesn't want to go on their side. And so these two kings, Pekah and Rezin, they decide, let's invade Judah. We'll overthrow Ahaz, we'll kick him out. We'll install our own puppet king on the throne. His name is Tabeel. And Tabeel will give us the armies, and then the three of us can stand against the advancing army of Assyria.

Does that make sense? You sort of get what's going on? So Ahaz is in a difficult situation. Because on the one hand, Assyria is coming from the north. This mighty, ruthless army is coming to destroy them.

[ 23 : 47 ] But at the same time, his two neighbors are also trying to attack him at the same time. So he's got these two kings, Pekah and Rezin, that are trying to overthrow him. And on the other side, he's got Tiglath-Pileasa that's trying to overthrow him.

And he's stuck in the middle. And so what is he going to do? How does he respond? On the one hand, he's terrified of these two kings that are right at his doorstep. But he's even more terrified of joining them against the mighty, ruthless Assyrians.

And so he's sandwiched in the middle, and he doesn't know what to do. What would you do? Well, Ahaz decides he's going to try and stave off the attack of these two little kings north of him.

And he's going to hold out for the king of Assyria. And he's going to try and beg him to be lenient. And he's going to join Assyria's side. So he's going to hold out against Ephraim and Assyria. And he's going to join the king of Assyria and try and join his team.

Well, God sends Isaiah to go and speak to him. But Isaiah gives him a radically different message than what he's expecting. Because Isaiah goes to this king, Ahaz, and says, Ahaz, this is what I want you to do.

[ 24 : 56 ] Do nothing. Don't support Ephraim and Assyria. Don't support Assyria. Just do nothing.

Stand fast. Don't throw your weight behind those kings. Don't throw your weight behind those kings. Because God will look after you. Okay? And so the challenge is clear cut.

Ahaz, will Ahaz seek salvation by scheming and politics and planning and alliances? Or will he simply trust God's promised goodness? And then Isaiah says to him, ask for a sign.

Ask for any sign. As high as the heavens or as low as the grave. Ask for any sign. God will give you a sign to prove that he's faithful. But Ahaz refuses Isaiah's advice and his offer for a sign.

Ahaz says, no, no, no. It's fine. Thank you. I won't ask for a sign. I could never do that to God. Why does Ahaz not want a sign? Why does he refuse the offer and refuse for God to confirm his provinces?

[ 25 : 57 ] Friends, he refuses it for the same reasons that you and I refuse God. And the reason is this. Because he doesn't want to believe God. Because if he trusts, because if God proves himself faithful to his word, you'll have to let God in.

You'll have to hand over the reins of his life to God. And so he almost doesn't want to give God a chance to prove that he's faithful. And so shrouded in pious words and diplomatic hypocrisy, he says, oh, I would never do such a thing as put God to the test.

I won't do that. But actually, he's trusting Assyria. He's going to throw his weight behind Tiglath-Pileasa. And so Isaiah warns him of the gravity and the hopelessness of the situation. So Isaiah says to him this. He says, And this is the sign.

And before that son is even a few years old, before he can tell the difference between what's right and what's wrong, Assyria will attack these two kings, will destroy Ephraim, will destroy Assyria. [ 27 : 13 ] But before you think that you're safe, next he's going to turn his eye to you and he's going to come and destroy you. God will be with his people, but he won't be with you. And straight off this in Isaiah chapter 8, Isaiah's wife conceives and gives birth to a son.

And before this son is even a few years old, before he can even say mother or father, Assyria has come down and destroyed Israel. And Pech is out the picture. He's destroyed the other nation, Syria, and Rezin is out the picture.

And just as Ahaz thinks, I'm safe, Assyria turns its attention and comes and overthrows Ahaz off the throne himself. But God in his kindness has not forgotten his promises to Abraham.

He's not forgotten his promises to David. Because Assyria doesn't destroy Judah. He just overthrows Ahaz. And God keeps the nation of Judah alive. And he keeps them safe. And there's a small number of faithful men and women who are unharmed.

Those who trusted God all along. And God comes to rescue them and he saves them from both the enemy out there, but also the enemy within. And from the small remnant, from the small group of men and women that trusted God, the bloodline of the Messiah continues right down through the ages until many years later, a true virgin does have a son.

[ 28 : 28 ] In a small town called Bethlehem. And that son is given the name Jesus. God saves us. Or Emmanuel. God's with us. God has come to save us.

Friends, it turns out that Assyria's word was not just a word for Ahaz. It's a word for all of us throughout the ages. Because Matthew picks up on this a few hundred years later. He says, Remember how Assyria said that a young woman would give birth to a son, a virgin, and that he would be God's sign that those who trust in him will be saved, or those who refuse him will be brought down?

Well, don't you realize that that sign was just a black and white picture? It was just a foretaste. It was a foretaste of the situation that all of us are in. It's a situation that you and I are in.

Because friends, we don't have Assyria knocking at our door, and we don't have Rezin and Pekka about to overthrow us. But we've all got an enemy that's knocking at the door of our hearts. We've got the enemy of self-centeredness.

We've got the enemy of self-sufficiency. We've got the sin of self-reliance and self-sufficiency in our hearts. It's the sin of not wanting to trust God. Because when he proves true, it'll mean we have to hand our lives over to him.

[ 29 : 35 ] But friends, the good news of Christmas is that God has not abandoned us. Because he's given us not just a sign, he's given us himself. He came to help us trust him. Though it requires an act of faith, though we cannot see him, those who forsake salvation by scheming and planning and alliances and politics will find that God is good on his word, that God stands by his promises made all those years ago.

And friends, the question was this. Joseph, will you trust him? Will you trust the word of God from the angel? Will you take Mary to be your wife? Will you trust that God is good on his word?

And so in verse 24, we read this. Friends, what about us today?

What about you and I? Will we take God at his word? Will we trust him? Will we cast ourselves upon him? Or will we resort to self-reliance? Will we trust in our own schemes and our planning and our self-sufficiency?

Will we try and save ourselves? Or will we trust in the one whose name is the Lord saves? Will we trust in Emmanuel, the God who's with those who trust him? Friends, what about this week?

[ 30 : 45 ] Will you trust him this week? Will you trust him when temptation comes your way? Will you trust him when you sense God is asking you to make a big sacrifice, to do what's right and it's so hard?

Will you trust him with your finances? Or will you store up bolts of self-sufficiency? Will you trust him with your life and your future and your identity, with your forgiveness, with bitterness, with anger, with your hurt?

Will you trust the baby in Bethlehem, who one day ended up on a cross to take our sins upon himself? Will you trust him to save you? Friends, what the angel of the Lord spoke to Joseph those many, many years ago on that fateful day, he speaks to each one of us today.

He says, Let's pray together.

Father, thank you for the complexity and the depth and the richness of Christmas. Thank you, God, that Christmas is so much more than just jingle bells and carols and presents and tinsel and good food.

[ 31 : 58 ] Christmas is the wonderful story that our God saves, that our God has come to be with us, that though, God, we were lost and utterly hopeless, that you, God, because of your love for us, came to rescue us and to fetch us, to bring us back to yourself.

Father, I pray for the watermark. I pray for us. I pray, God, give us faith. Lord, I pray that we won't be like Ahaz, trusting our own schemes and our own self-reliance, but that we, God, will surrender to the babe of Bethlehem, to the man upon the cross, that we will trust you and cast ourselves upon you.

God, I pray for those of us that don't know you. I pray for those of us, God, that are still in our sin.

God, won't you give us faith to reach out to you?

God, won't you both humble us and open our eyes to see you, that you, God, are the one who saves. That, God, all the money in the world can't save us, all the reputation in the world can't save us.

God, all the business connections and the things that our hearts long for will never save us. They won't save us in this lifetime and they won't save us in the next. God, help us to trust you, I pray.

[ 33 : 05 ] Cause us to be born again. Cause us to be saved, God. Cause us to experience the light on the life of Jesus. Friends, if you're here this morning, you're not a Christian, it's free.

It's free. You don't need to pay a single cent to become a Christian. In one sense, it'll cost you everything because you'll have to hand over your life to King Jesus. But in the other sense, it's free.

Friends, if you're not a Christian this morning, I want to ask you to, why don't you become a Christian today? Why don't you put your hope in King Jesus? Why don't you come to him and confess your sin? Acknowledge that your situation is utterly hopeless apart from his salvation.

You cannot save yourself. You cannot forgive your own sins. There's nothing that you can do to atone for your self-centeredness and your selfishness. But Jesus' blood is sufficient.

Why don't you do that now?