

Advent: The Others

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Date: 21 December 2014

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[0 : 0 0] Okay, well if you are here for the first time, we're visiting family members here. I just want to say my name is Tobin Miller and I'm one of the pastors here.

I'm a teaching pastor. I actually do really like Australia. So anything that comes across like, wow, he really, you know, the Australians pay me every week just so I can pick on them.

I think, I'm not sure. And they pick on Texas, so that's good. Hey, so Merry Christmas. Wow, good. That's good. That's good. So I love this time of year.

I love the trees. I love the smell. Our house has a tree. If it's not live, we spray, you know, the pine smell everywhere because we love the decorations. And it's just something about just the festivities and the candles and the lights.

And so we put up this really special nativity scene in our house. And so I think I brought a picture of that. There you go. So you have baby Jesus. And then you have Jose or Joseph.

[1 : 0 3] And then you have Maria or Malia, Mary. And then you have angel, right? So you know the world is okay when you can do the nativity scene and Diet Coke, right?

It means something is good happening in the world and God is working there. But actually, so, yeah, my wife wouldn't let me put that up. So anyway, we have events and parties.

And I love just going to the parties. And, you know, it's interesting when you're a pastor and you go to Christmas parties, people always kind of take, they don't know what to do with a pastor, right? They don't know what to do at all.

So we were actually, I think we haven't had a free night in two and a half weeks. We've been out at parties meeting people. And so last night we were at this amazing party with our neighbors. They are not churchgoers yet.

We continue to pray for them. And it's so funny because when I go there, they know what I do. We talk. Our kids hang out and play. And there was probably 100 people, literally 100 people at least at one time and probably 50 kids and Santa Claus came.

[2 : 0 2] And so the host, who's our next-door neighbor, and he always gives me a hard time, he always introduces me as this is our next-door neighbor, Tobin. And so he did it again last night, you know. And it's just one of those things that's weird because it was his best friend he'd known since like seventh grade.

And so we're talking and it gets up to the first question, you know, that they always ask. Guys, whenever guys interact, they always ask the one question. And what's the first question? What do you do, right? Because guys can't live without knowing how we know what we do.

That's kind of how we define ourselves. And so this guy said, what do you do? And he's with the British Council teaching in Thailand. And I said, oh, I'm a pastor. And that reaction, you always kind of people kind of step back, you know, and they don't know.

Even when it's Christmas because it's supposed to be, you know, religious, you know, they're going to a rugby game. So I'm a pastor. And he looked at me and he just was fumbling with words. Like, what do I say?

You know, and I just, we talked. And he goes, so how many days a week do you work? Do you just work on Sunday? And I think, well, you know, people are drinking and there's alcohol.

[3 : 06] People are just, and so I said, yeah, you know, and the great thing is I only work three hours. So I just work three hours on Sunday. And the rest of the week I just play. It's goof off. It's the best job in the world. And he just kind of looked at me like, you know.

And then, so when I went on for a while longer, people were hanging out and people started getting more drunk. And they come up again and ask me, you know, what do we do? And so this time I thought I'd do something different. And the guy came up and said, what do you do?

And I looked at it. I started thinking, what should I do? Because I want to try to engage with this guy. And I said, I work for the most powerful and richest person in the world. Because we do, right?

God, right? But I didn't tell him that. And so he looked at me and he's like, the most powerful and richest person. He's a little drunk, right? And he's just all his mind.

And he says, you know, so tell me, who is that? And I told him, I said, I could tell you, but then I have to kill you. And he looked at me like, and for some reason I didn't see him the rest of the night.

[4 : 04] Like, he just kind of disappeared. I don't know what happened. So, but you know, you have to have fun as a pastor because, you know, it's always one of those things that you don't know. And we've been going to plays and I'm always watching when I talk to them, what's going on in their heads, what's going on in their hearts, and wondering what they're thinking in the midst of all this stuff.

And so we went to KK had a play Wednesday night. And it was just amazing to see, I think it's our 25th Christmas play, Nativity scene. And it's always amazing to me how at the end of the plays, you can always bring Santa Claus and Rudolph and some kind of Beatles music into the Nativity scene.

Because at the end, there's always Santa Claus, there's always Rudolph, and for some reason the Beatles are there. But one of the most memorable ones we had was a while back and was Kip and Rebecca's play.

And Kip was his shepherd and Rebecca was Mary and she took Mary very seriously. And we went and we watched the play and it was really good. And at the end, we all just took a break and we went to eat and eat cookies and drink.

And I was just walking around to school and so I thought I would go back into the Nativity scene. So I went back in to the Nativity scene and there's a little trough there and there's a little baby, plastic baby Jesus there. And Kip was there and he was with another boy and they're talking to each other.

[5 : 18] And all of a sudden this little boy reaches into the manger and he picks up baby Jesus by the legs. And he kind of holds him upside down. And he looks at Kip and he goes, so what do we do with the baby now?

What do we do with baby Jesus now? And I'm watching this and I'm like, wow, this is deep theology, isn't it? I mean, I'm being taught deep theology by a seven-year-old because he's grabbing Jesus and he's kind of asking the million-dollar question, what do we do with Jesus when the play's over?

What do we do with him? You know, is he relevant in our lives? What's next? And I think that some of us in here right now who aren't Christ followers yet, and you're here and you're being dragged here by friends and maybe you're just wondering why you're even here, and you're probably asking that same question, right?

You're listening to things, you're watching things, you're watching a crazy Texan talk about people getting drunk at parties and things like that. And you're probably thinking, what do I do with Jesus? How does he fit into my life?

What role should he have here? And I think that there's probably some of us here on the journey right now. We're on a journey. We've come to faith, and we're still probably wondering what we do with the baby Jesus.

[6 : 32] I mean, it's the million-dollar question, right? I mean, what do I do with Jesus in my job? And what do I do with Jesus in my home? And what do I do with Jesus out playing and at the rugby games?

And what do I do with Jesus moment by moment? Is he relevant to my life at all? Does having Jesus, the baby with me, Christ with me, does he change me?

Do I act differently than my colleagues because I have Christ in my heart? And I think that's the million-dollar question, and I think that's what these passages are about.

The passages are about God coming in and engaging us and pursuing us, pursuing us and showing us his glory and speaking to us.

And you know, the Bible says that God's speaking to us all the time. You're walking around his creation, and he's talking to you. He's speaking to you. He's showing you his glory.

[7 : 30] He's showing you that he's in control. He's asking you to trust him. And I think that sometimes we just don't hear that because we don't know what we're to do with the baby.

We don't know how he fits into our life. And so what I want to do, or what I'm hoping to do, or what I plan to do, is I wanted just to look at a couple people who received Christ, but they didn't receive Christ.

So the first week we talked about the shepherds and what they did when they received Christ. And they received Christ, and they went out, and they were evangelists. They were the first evangelists, and they were the nobodies that heard the greatest news ever. And last week we talked about Mary and Joseph, and we talked about what they did, you know, and the question we had, the challenge was, are we going to trust God?

Are we going to trust God, or are we not going to trust God? And that's what they did with this. And what I want to look at today is just really briefly three people or three groups of people who I think God was speaking to.

He showed himself to them. He was there in their world, but they said no. And I think that these three people actually are all of us. Because if we're honest, we're going to see ourselves in each one of these people even after we've started the journey.

[8 : 43] And I think that there's probably these type of people who are in your office today. And there are probably these type of people who are in your home today. There's probably these type of people that you're going to run into at work today.

They're struggling. They're hearing God speak, but they don't know what to do with him. And so I want to look at just the innkeeper, and I want to look at the priests, and the scribes, and the people of Jerusalem. And I want to look at Herod.

All three of these things, these people, these groups of people God spoke to, and all of them responded in an unfavorable way. And I want to see what we can learn from these people.

And think about what does it mean for us as we go out. And so the first one is just the innkeeper. We don't know much about the innkeeper. He's in Luke 2. All we know is that when he was there, he's confronted by a young man and a very, very pregnant young girl, and he turns him away.

He says no. He actually says in Greek, there's no suitable space for you. Now to be fair, you know, the census had happened. Caesar had put this census out, so everybody had to go to their hometown.

[9 : 45] I mean, it was like a circus. Bethlehem used to be a sleepy little village of about 300, and now there's like 3,000 to 5,000 people there. So from 300 to 3,000 to 5,000. I mean, Jerusalem, probably 80,000 normally, but when the Sabbath's happened, it's up to 1.5 million people.

So it's crazy. It's chaotic. And so this innkeeper probably was just, he probably had the business opportunity of his life because his customers went from 300 people to 3,000 to 5,000 people, and we don't know much about him.

All we know is that she came to him in labor, and he turned her away. Now, if I were to share this story, even today in the Middle East, saying that I saw it happen in another village next door, everybody would be incredulous.

They would say that's impossible. That would never happen. You're making that up. That is because there's these rules. The rules of culture and customs were so strong in Eastern cultures that you had these strict guidelines on how you treated people.

You had these strict guidelines on how you treated people in need, and even foreigners, and to turn away someone who's in desperate need. She's about to deliver a baby. I mean, that would just never happen. I mean, you think about it. She goes into a stable, and if we were in Hong Kong, we were put in a stable, we'd be going, okay, so where's the hand sanitizer?

[11 : 02] Are there little things around here that we can sanitize our hands? But there's no hand sanitizer in a stable. And so this innkeeper just says no.

Now, we don't know a lot about the inn. In the Greek, it actually could be a massive building with 20 to 30 beds, or it could actually be just a small little bed and breakfast, or it could actually be just a small little room on top of a house.

But all we know from the passages and from historians is that he didn't show any hospitality. He didn't comfort them. He didn't help them. And the result that we learn from this is that he missed God speaking to him.

Some of the early historians, when they read this and they went back and they look at these places, they actually used the words that he was preoccupied. Some of the early church fathers, they were writing like 10, 20 years after this happened.

They just said, well, he was just busy. He was preoccupied. And I've been thinking about that. How many of you in here today are busy? How many of us are preoccupied this month?

[12 : 12] I mean, my schedule is crazy. I mean, if I were to look at your schedule and we could compare them, I'm sure that we would say that we all were very, very busy. And sometimes we, I use this terminology, hurry sickness, because I think it's really applicable to Hong Kong.

We have hurry sickness. And we're running from place to place. And these things we're doing this month, they're not bad things, are they? I mean, they're not evil things. They're just things that keep us busy.

They're things like work and kiddos and friends and studies and shopping and school performances and office parties and social gatherings and church stuff and vacations and extra projects and end-of-the-year travels and family meals.

And again, if we looked at these calendars, if we looked at our lives, we'd probably say none of those things are bad. But if we brought them all together, we would just say that we are incredibly busy.

And I realized as I walked through Hong Kong during this season that often I miss God speaking to me because I'm preoccupied with other things.

[13 : 30] What are you preoccupied with? What were you thinking about before you came into this service? What's going to take up the majority of your time when you leave this next week?

I mean, all we know is this innkeeper, he was incredibly busy and he was incredibly preoccupied. He was incredibly overwhelmed with hurry sickness during this time and he couldn't focus on Christ.

He couldn't focus on the message. He couldn't focus on God speaking to him. He didn't hear God's voice and sometimes that's the problem that I have also.

How about you? Are you going to slow down this holiday season? I mean, usually when I ask people, they usually say, well, it's incredibly busy but it'll get not busy later on, just a special time.

But when I realized in Hong Kong and in the world today that it's always just special time, the message of Christmas the message of the baby, the message of the manger is that God is always speaking to us.

[14 : 49] He's always going before us. He's always taking care of us. He always wants to show us something about his character and about our relationship with him but we're too busy. The next group of people I think that stick out to me over and over and I think this is amazing because even as I read it, it's hard for me to get my head around.

It's the priest and the scribes and the people in Jerusalem. You know, Jerusalem's sole purpose was to worship God. I mean, the temple there and all the people around it, most of the people's sole purpose was to do things within the temple that would worship the Lord and prepare for his second coming because they all knew he was going to come again.

And so like 80% of the inhabitants, their whole responsibility is to take care of the temple, prepare for the Lord, worship the Lord, allow people's worship to happen and they're there but they're not there.

I mean, they knew all the prophecies. They knew for 400 years there's been darkness, there's been silence and God hasn't spoken. They've been waiting. When the king comes, Herod, and he asks him where is he going to be born?

I mean, they rip it off like that. Micah 5, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. I mean, they know they've been studying for 400 years because they're waiting to hear God but they're waiting to hear a different God or a different God to speak to them and they miss Christ coming into the world.

[16 : 14] They miss his voice talking to them. It's amazing. You think about this. These wise men, we don't know how many they were. Maybe there's three like the story. Maybe there's 50 of them.

All we know is that they were very gifted. The words actually mean that they were great leaders, not scholars, they're just great leaders and they came from the east, maybe Persia, and they come into Jerusalem and they're expecting everybody's worshipping this new king.

Everybody knows about the new king. Everybody's ready for the new king because that's the whole purpose of God's people is to prepare their hearts for the new king and they come in there and they ask the question, well, where's the king? Where's Emmanuel?

And no one can answer them. I mean, and the passage doesn't say they go to Herod first. They actually go to Herod near the end of their journey and so you can imagine these wise men, they're looking for Jesus just like people in your office or in your home and they're looking and they're asking questions and where's Christ and what does he mean to you and where is he because we've seen these things and we want to be a part of these things but the people of God, the people who should have known, the people who knew everything, they didn't know.

They didn't answer. I mean, the amazing thing to me about this whole passage is that none of them even went to look for Jesus being born. You know, Bethlehem is only five miles away from Jerusalem.

[17 : 36] If you go with us to Israel next year, you can walk part of it and if you're going from Jerusalem to Bethlehem, it's all downhill because everybody knows you go up the hill to Jerusalem and so it would have been just an easy walk five miles.

On a horse, you would have got there in less than an hour but the priests and the religious people, they didn't send anybody. They didn't even send their scribes or their interns. They just don't go and you know, in all of Jerusalem at that time, there's 1.5 million people.

There's only two people the Bible says who are even looking for Jesus. There's this little old lady from a very wealthy family and her husband died and she's been a widow for a long time.

Her name is Anna and she's been in the temple just waiting for Christ, waiting for Christ, waiting for Christ. She's a prophetess. She's teaching God's word to the people and there's this little old man, Simeon and these two old people, they're the only people in all of Jerusalem that are waiting for Christ because everybody else, they're waiting for something else.

No one goes to see the baby being born. You're going to learn later when we go back and study the gospels more and more that what Christ says about these people is that they are just too too religious.

[18 : 53] That the people in the temple, they were caught up in rituals and the people in the temple were caught up in self-help and the people in the temple were caught up in working out their salvation and they were so caught up in doing the right thing that they miss God.

Did you hear what I said? They were so caught up doing the right thing that they miss Christ. My worry is that for many of us in our lives today that that's true of us.

Especially as pastors and staff people. Sometimes we can get so consumed and focused on doing Sunday and doing studies and helping people move along that we want to do the right thing but we miss Christ.

And he's speaking to us and he's talking to us and these people they wanted a different God. They wanted a God who was victorious. They wanted a God who was powerful. They wanted a God who was a king.

They wanted a God who was in power. They wanted a God who was in control. They wanted a God who was going to give them wealth. They wanted a God who was going to give them their best life now. And so when this baby's born they have no place for a baby.

[20 : 05] They have no place for a sacrifice. They have no place for a relationship. They have no place for grace. Jesus doesn't fit into the religious people's schedule because you can't control Christ.

And sometimes in church we want to control everything. Does that make sense? You struggle with that? I do.

I mean at the end of the day I can get done and I've done all my things I needed to do and I say oh I feel so good about myself but then I realize that I didn't spend any time talking to God. I didn't spend any time praying.

I didn't spend any time reading God's word. I didn't listen to his voice talking to me. I mean he's talking to you right now. He talks to you through creation.

He talks to you through his word. He talks to you through his spirit inside of you. He talks to you to other people. Maybe he's talking to you through me. I hope so. But sometimes we can become so religious and so worried about the externals that we forget the relationship and this passage says that Jesus Christmas is about a relationship with our Savior and Lord and relationships are messy and they take time.

[21 : 27] they take a long time and in Hong Kong we want things done quickly but you can't do anything quickly with Jesus because he's not going to fit into our box.

So what is your relationship with Christ? If I were to take a snapshot right now here's you and here's Christ or here's God and here's you where would the circle be?

Where would the dot be? Would the dot be close to the circle? Would the dot be inside the circle? Sometimes the circle and the dot can be right beside each other they can be doing all the right things perfectly but we miss God and that's what happened to these people and you're going to read about that later on in the Gospels because Jesus always goes back to them and talks about their heart their heart their heart not outwardly their heart their heart the last person that we're going to look at is just King Herod and he's a very interesting person he says here that when he heard this news in Matthew 2-3 he was troubled the word in Greek actually means that he was agitated he was angry he was on the edge of panic he was stirred up he had rage I mean what we know from historians is that Herod was this amazing ruler he was brilliant he was shrewd he was a great financier he was resourceful he was a capable diplomat but he was a crazy man

I mean he called himself Lord and King he didn't want any other lords and kings in his world and so when he heard this news even though Jesus was still a baby he knew that his kingship was threatened he knew that his authority was going to be threatened he knew that he could no longer be king if there was another king because another king was going to come and he was going to take over everything his heart his mind his soul everything and that drew Herod into a rage and he just was out of control because he was so fearful of losing control because he wanted to call the shots he wanted to decide how he was going to use his resources he wanted to understand and plan out his future he wanted to be king you know I realize as I think about that that's me maybe it's a lot of you in here that if we're honest we live our lives like we're the only king we don't have room for another king and then when the other king speaks to us in those quiet gentle moments we get all frustrated and flustered and we want to get busy again because somehow the busyness prevents us from hearing the true king speaking to us

I mean Herod is like many of us we don't want to give in we don't want to listen because we're fearful that we're going to lose control we're fearful that God's going to tell us to do something that's radical we're fearful that God's going to say hey go here and do that God's going to say hey give all that up hey do these things and we have this incredible amount of fear in our life and because of that we don't trust God at all but the story of Christmas is the story of trust in God speaking to us and talking to us so the question I have to ask us is what do you fear what is there right now that you fear if you were asked to give it up what would that thing be that you don't want to give up what is the thing that controls your life what is it the message of Christmas the message of Christ the message of the gospel the message of grace is that

[25 : 38] Christ has come to relieve us of those fears he's come to relieve us of the darkness he's come to relieve us of our worry and our shame and our guilt because all those things we hold on to all those things we grab on to all those things we own they actually kill us they send us into darkness so we've seen these three characters we've seen the innkeeper he is too busy we've seen the scribes and the priests they are too religious we've seen Herod he is too fearful of losing control in his life and if we're honest the Bible says that all three of these people they encompass all of us and they encompass all of our condition that the human condition is that the passages at the beginning are in Isaiah and I know it's I put them in there because I think it sets up everything the passages in Isaiah say this our condition is darkness this darkness surrounds us this darkness is in us over 200 times the Bible says that darkness is in our lives darkness and the way we define darkness is it says the Bible says darkness is a life or a picture of a life without God or darkness is a picture of a life that God is not in control so you can be in the darkness if you don't know God and you can be in the darkness if God is not in control of your life but either one of those things basically says that we walk in darkness

I see the darkness in my life you know in my life when I struggle with shame fear greed pride deceit anger coveting I don't know how you hear the pastor saying that but that's my condition I said it once I'll say it again I'm probably the most broken person in here darkness is around us and sometimes if we're not careful the darkness can control us and sometimes when I hear things like somebody got in trouble or something happened to other people all of a sudden inside of me I feel satisfied and justified and better about myself

I don't know if you've ever done that the Bible calls that darkness I came home last week and I was in a bad mood I mean I was in a really bad mood I got so angry at the kids because the house was such a mess and I started just really going after them just getting on them and then Christina came alongside and she tried to defuse the situation and I just got angry at her and I hurt her really badly in my words I walked out of there and I walked back into my bedroom and I'm thinking to myself and sometimes I feel like Charlie Brown because you know Charlie Brown walks around and sometimes when things happen all he can say is good grief and I said good grief to myself and I said okay what do I do now I mean what should I do right now and this little voice inside my head said these things it said to me you know you can be a man you can be the spiritual leader you can go out and apologize everybody you can tell everybody that you're sorry you can tell everybody you're being sorry for being selfish you can tell everybody that you're sorry for being wrong you can tell everybody that you're preoccupied you can tell everybody that you're self-centered you can tell everybody

Tobin you're stubborn you can tell everybody sometimes you become mean you can apologize to them now you know I thought to myself, I thought, man, I don't like that voice. I don't like that voice at all.

But the passage says that's God. God's speaking to us. And he's trying to bring us out of the darkness. He's trying to show us what it means to live without him.

[30 : 00] You can't share that with anybody, okay? I'm just trying to be honest. But the Bible says that there's darkness all around us. There's darkness in me. There's darkness in you. There's darkness in the world.

And you know, the reason I'm talking about this, and you're going, why the heck is he talking about darkness during Christmas? And this is the reason. The reason is I don't think you can understand Christmas until you understand the darkness. You can never understand how good it is until you understand how bad it is.

If you don't understand the darkness inside of you, if you don't understand the darkness around you, if you don't understand the lostness of people without Christ, and they walk in darkness, then you're never going to go to them and share with them the greatest news that you ever have.

Because you're going to think, well, it's not really that bad. And they're going to be okay. But the passage says that we walk in darkness, and this darkness is called sin. And this sin separates us from God.

And sin is a massive deal to God. Did you guys know that? Sin is a massive deal to God. And I think the innkeeper and the religious people in Herod, the reason they didn't continually run to God, the reason they didn't continually go to God, the reason they didn't go find a baby is because they didn't know what kind of trouble they were in.

[31 : 09] I think that's true of us. The reason we say I became a Christian, but we don't ever talk to God anymore, we don't read the Bible, we just forget what it meant to become a Christian.

We forgot the darkness that we escaped from. We forgot what Christ did on the cross. We forgot the cost of freeing us from the darkness. And the scripture says that we are to be people of God who remembers grace over and over and over.

And as we remember God's grace, as we remember his goodness, as we remember everything he's done for us, we escape the darkness. And we enter into the light.

But the reason we don't do that, the reason we think this way, the reason that we worry about these things, the reason that we don't hear God's voice is because we don't want to lose control of our lives.

And so we walk in darkness. The message of Christmas is this. God looked down.

[32 : 19] And you and me were like, and we didn't even see God, we didn't even want God, we didn't even want to come to him. If we knew God was over there in a stable like everybody else did, we'd say, that's great, but I'm not going there.

And God came down. And what's amazing to me, he didn't just come down and give us a new philosophy, he didn't give us this new self-help plan, he didn't give us this new body, he just, he comes down and he gives us a baby.

He gives us a relationship. And this relationship is with his son, Jesus Christ. And Christ comes and he lives exactly as we are. He lives except for without sin.

And one day he's nailed to a cross and he pays the debt for our darkness. And now each one of us has a choice. Are we going to keep living in the darkness or are we going to keep living in the light?

And we have a choice every day because even after we come to the light, we still struggle with the darkness because it's in us and it's around us. And we have to decide, am I going to follow and listen to God or am I going to just do my own thing?

[33 : 23] Does that make sense? Someone go like this. Because everybody's really quiet. The amazing thing about Christmas is that God never gives up on us.

If it were me last week, my kids did that to me, I would just get out of here. I'm tired of you. I'm not going to do this anymore. But the passage says that Christ, God, continues to come to us.

He continues to love us. He continues to woo us. He continues to show us our darkness. He continues to open our eyes to our need to Him. And He continues to ask us to choose to invite Christ into our life and to follow Him.

And the question of Christmas and the question of this passage and the question of everything we're going to do is what do we do with the baby? is the question everybody around you is asking right now.

It's a question you need to decide before you leave here. What does it mean for you to follow Christ? What does it mean for me to escape out of darkness into light?

[34 : 42] What does it look like for us? I'm going to pray for us. And I'm going to pray, first part of it, for anybody in here who's heard this message.

You've been struggling. I've talked to a lot of people and they've been struggling for a while about Christianity. Is it true? Is it real? Is it what it should be in their life? And this prayer is just for you. If this time in your life you feel like, hey, I'm tired of walking in the darkness.

I want to become a child of God. You can just, it's not anything magical about this prayer. It's just a prayer that I prayed and you can just repeat it after me. And if you do, if that happens, please come share it with me.

Please share it with somebody who brought you. And the second half of the prayer is for those of us who are already on the journey. For those of us who stumble. For those of us who forget.

Let's pray. Father, we just thank you for this day. And we just come before you in awe of the message of your son, Jesus Christ. We come in awe of you of the darkness that you've saved us from.

[35 : 51] And what I pray that there's anybody in here right now who've never prayed and invited you into their life that they would just follow me. Lord Jesus, I admit that I'm weaker and more sinful than I've ever believed.

But through you, I am more loved and accepted than I ever dared hope. I thank you for paying my debt, for bearing my punishment and offering forgiveness.

I turn from my sin and I receive you as Savior. Lord, I pray for the rest of us in here. Some of us who aren't willing to make that prayer yet, I pray that they would just, I pray the Lord that you would open their eyes and their ears during this season.

You do it in many, many different ways. Sometimes you do it through drunk people at parties. Often you do it through people who love us. Sometimes you just do it through your spirit talking to us gently in the quiet moments when we reflect on life and realize that we're not probably heading or acting like we want to act.

Lord, I pray that this Christmas would be a very special Christmas for them, that they would see your son and they would fall in love with him. They would enter into your kingdom. Lord, I pray for those of us who have been on this journey for a while, who have been struggling and worrying and just forgetting what it means to be your child.

[37 : 28] And I think, Lord, I confess, I repent, I'm so sorry that I light the darkness so often. And the light of your son is so beautiful.

Please forgive me. Please forgive us. I thank you that you don't give up on us. You give us messages and Christmases and carols and children and voices that point us to your son and how incredibly beautiful he is.

Father, I pray for us as a church that we wouldn't be a church that would be so inwardly focused that we would just build up ourselves and that would be it. But we'd realize that the message that we've talked about, this message of grace and the gospel and this message of light penetrating darkness, it's been given to us to be stewards of, to be faithful with, just like you've called us to be faithful with everything from our finances to our time to our health to our relationships and most of all to the gospel.

Lord, help us to be a church that's faithful to the gospel and to love the people around Cyberport and this western side of Hong Kong Island and wherever you send us this holiday. Help us to love them well and to continue to point to them to this little baby who came and that one day would stand up and say, I am the light of the world and whoever believes in me will not walk in darkness but help eternal life.

Lord, help that be a message that we carry with us often and freely and never be ashamed to share that with the people we love, even the people we don't love.

[39 : 11] So Father, we love you and we thank you for your son and it's him and him alone that we come today to worship. We pray all these things in his precious, precious name.

Amen.