

# MESSAGE TRANSCRIPT //

**CHRISTMAS WITH TRADERS POINT 2023**

**AARON BROCKETT | DECEMBER 23, 2023**

Andrew Green, Shepherd Community Center

The Christmas Store is one of our largest events throughout the whole year. And it's really something that there are pieces of it happening all throughout the year. We are inviting all of the families connected to Shepherd to come and shop for Christmas gifts for their kids. And it's an incredible time of year here at Shepherd. We love it and we love the chance to interact with our neighbors and bless them in this way. They get to come in and shop for gifts.

Client

Right now this has been an overall blessing. This really touches my life in different ways. It's filling my life with Joy.

Andrew

There are a lot of different folks that will come and be a part of it, come and volunteer. They will wrap gifts; they will walk people through the store. It takes a lot of people to make this event possible. A big shout out to Traders Point Christian Church.

TPCC Representative

Because of the generosity of Traders Point we have the ability to come and bring 11,800 gifts to be a part of Shepherd's Christmas Store. We love our partnership with Shepherd Community Center. They are such a gift to the city of Indianapolis, specifically on the east side.

Jason Courtney, Shepherd Community Center

Over 500 of our families are coming through and over 1,500 kids will be getting gifts through this store this year.

TPCC Representative

This Christmas Store is all about helping parents feel dignity getting to come into the store getting to pick out the toys for their kids.

Andrew

Each family that is coming is paying five dollars. And that's not about raising revenue for Shepherd. It's about helping someone realize that they have something to give back.



We'll actually take that money and donate it to a missionary in Ecuador this year. It's all about saying to a neighbor, "There is value in who you are. There is something to give back. And this is one way that we give it to you."

Aaron Brocket

Hey come on. Let's give it up. I want to thank you guys for showing up big every year for the Christmas service project.

And I just want to say to everyone across all of our locations and everyone joining us online, Merry Christmas! Man, it's good to be with you guys. I love these services every year for all kinds of reasons. But one of them, I know, is that there are people who are gathered today at our Christmas services, and maybe you don't normally come to church, or maybe it's been a while since you've been and man, I'm so glad that you are here.

I have begun to kind of anticipate conversations that I have almost on a yearly basis. It's usually after Christmas several months, sometime during the year. Maybe I'll bump into somebody at the grocery store or maybe the lobby or my favorite is in this back hallway here where we are doing baptisms and I'll just ask someone, "Hey, man, tell me your story."

It is not uncommon for somebody to say, "Well, I came to a Christmas service for the first time. Somebody invited me," or, "I just kind of felt like I should go to church since it was Christmas," or, "Somebody kind of twisted my arm and gave me an ultimatum so I came and I had a good experience so I just came back and I came back again and again and again. And I eventually met Jesus."

And, man, I just never get tired of that conversation. I have that conversation every year to the point now as it comes to Christmas services, I'm just anticipating that there are more people listening to this right now who I'm going to have that conversation with later in 2024. So, I just want you to know that I am praying for you. I'm so glad that you are here. And I believe that if you're really listening and your heart is in the right place, that you just might have an encounter with God beginning today.

So, I just want to take this opportunity to invite you back. On January the 7th, the first weekend of the new year, we're kicking off a brand-new message series that I'm really looking forward to. And the reason why is that back at Easter I just took the opportunity to do a poll. And the primary reason why I poll our congregation on Easter is because that is the day, as well as Christmas, that you all decide to show up at the same time.

I take advantage of that. I just took a poll. And I just asked you what sermon series would be the most helpful for you in your spiritual journey, wherever you are? The number one answer was, "If you could do a sermon series on discovering God's purpose for my life."



I just thought, "Man, that is a great topic." We've all been in that situation. Or were wondering, "Should I go this way or that way?" "Should I start this relationship or not?" "Should I take that job or make that move?" "God, what is Your purpose and will for my life?"

So, on January the 7th, we're going to start a new series called Re-imagined. Discovering God's Purpose for My Life." I just want to encourage you to come back. It's going to be highly, highly practical and encouraging. And I think that it will be really useful for you.

Well, one of the things that I've been told that is a good rule of communication is to know your audience. Have you ever heard that? That's pretty good counsel, especially on a day like today when there are a whole lot more people here than maybe is normal. So, maybe this is the first time that we've had a chance to meet.

What I want to do is I want to have a little bit of fun at the top of the message here. I just kind of want to know who I'm talking to. So, we're going to do a little Christmas tradition vote, is what I'm calling it. I'm going to throw out two options over very hotly debated issues. These are the things that divide us. And what I want to do is throw up an option and I just want you; whatever Christmas tradition is yours; I just want you to cheer for that.

Now, here's the deal. The loudest cheering wins. Now, let's raise the stakes. Alright? The loudest cheering wins the debate for good. We're not going to argue about it.... I know. That's wishful thinking. But it's kind of fun to think about so we'll just raise the stakes on that, maybe that will cause you to cheer a little bit louder.

We're going to go with an easy one right off of the top. How many of you would be fake Christmas tree people? Any fake Christmas tree people? There you are. Highly practical. You know the value of a dollar. One time purchase. Easy storage. No watering. Done deal.

How many of you have the true spirit of Christmas, Clark Griswald, we're going out with an axe. We're going to cut down our own real tree? Yeah. There we go. There we go. We've got people standing. They have sap dripping off of their fingers even now. I don't know, man. I think the real tree people won it. That's pretty impressive. That's pretty impressive.

How many of you would be Elf on the Shelf? You're like, "Hey, man. We'll play that game. We've got little kids at home. We're Elf on the Shelf people." There we go. It's been hilarious. Every single service there's a delay in the cheer. And my theory is that you are like, "Can we clap for that in church, Elf on the Shelf?" Alright.

How many of you are like, "You know what? Elf on the Shelf is like the Christmas version of Chucky? That's just a little weird." I've got to tell you guys, man, we did Elf on the Shelf every year when our kids were young. My youngest is 12. I am so thankful that we are



done with that because I couldn't sleep at night. That thing freaks me out. It freaks me out.

Alright, how many of you, you would be, when it comes to Christmas wrapping, you are the professionally wrapped, it's got to be pristine, Joanna Gaines, looks like Chula's town house. Come on. Where are you? There we go. There we go.

How many of you are like, "No, do it yourself. I don't care." Yeah, we know it looks like a kindergartner wrapped it blind folded. We don't care. Yeah, there we go.

How many of you, when it comes to Christmas decorations, you don't want to see a single Christmas decoration until Thanksgiving is done? Where are you? Where are you? There we go. This is restoring my hope because I was beginning to wonder, man, where those people were.

How many of you are like, "No, we want to celebrate Jesus as much as we can as soon as Halloween is over. Labor Day we're pulling out the boxes." Yeah, there we go. Alright.

How many of you, when it comes to Christmas movies you are all about Elf. Right? It's not Christmas without the elf. There we go. Yeah, we just had this on the other night. It's a good movie.

How many of you are like, "No, not only is Die Hard a Christmas movie, it is the best Christmas movie of all time. It is not Christmas until Bruce Willis throws Hans Gruber off of the tower. That's how strongly we feel about it. Alright?"

How many of you –one last one—you're like, "You know what? Just give us some Mariah Carey All I want for Christmas?" There we go. There we go. Hey, you don't need to be ashamed of that. You just blare that out loud and proud.

How many of you would be like, "Literally anything else. Literally anything else." There we go. There we go. Oh, man.

If there is anything that that shows us is we are a church divided. Man, just pray. Pray that God would unify us.

No, actually, that was a lot of fun. I don't think that any of that is a surprise to us, is it? I think all of us know that we kind of live in a pretty divided society and times. If there is anybody who has any sort of an opinion about anything, you just know somebody else is going to have the exact opposite, impassioned opinion. And we see just things from different angles. In fact, if we're not divided over it, we'll just find stuff to argue about, even just for fun.

Now, some of that can be good. I think that there is a lot of strength in the idea of having unity in diversity that we're not always necessarily seeing things the same way. We can learn from each other. But there is a difference between having some diversity around the way that we see things and us being divided in anger and anxiety.



I would say that we live in a pretty divided time to where what one group of people sees as good, another group of people sees the same thing and says that it is bad. And maybe you're even beginning to sort of wonder if peace is even possible in our world? Things just seem so dark and divided and people are anxious, and their mental health is struggling, and they are angry. Is it even possible?

And one of the things that I want to encourage you with today is that when you look at the original Christmas story in Luke 2, which we're going to do in just a moment, you will see that things weren't so different then as they are today. The world then, 2,000 years ago, was just as dark. You might even argue darker than what it is today. They were just as divided then, if not more so, than what we are today. And it was in the midst of that darkness and division that God sent His Son, Emmanuel, to be among us.

You know, when it comes to the Christmas story, in order to truly understand it, in order for it to impact you, you've got to understand two primary elements to it. One is the message of Christmas, Emmanuel, God came to us. Jesus came into the world. He didn't wait for us to come to Him. He came to us. That's the message of Christmas.

The second thing, though, is just as important. We just often overlook it. It's the messengers of Christmas. In other words, what God said and who God said it through. And one of the things that you see is that they were just as divided, they had differences of opinion. They couldn't have been more different from one another. They had a lot of things to be fearful of. Check it out with me in Luke, chapter 2, beginning in verse 8. It says:

"And in the same region there were shepherds,"

Hold on to that, we have a tendency to take them for granted. We're just kind of like, "Oh, yeah. They were there." But we're going to circle back to that in a minute and show how strange this fact that Luke included them is.

"There were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were," here's the statement, "filled with great fear. "

And I'm just guessing they are not the only ones. I'm just guessing a fair amount of people here today listening to this would agree, "You know what, there is a lot right now that is fearful of in the world." Verse 10:

"And the angel said to them, 'Fear not,'"

Some of you know that that's the most common command given in the Scriptures. Those two words: fear not. Something tells me that God knew that we not only needed it then, we need that reassuring today. It says, "Fear not." Here's why:

“...behold, I bring you good news,” notice the progression, “of great joy that will be for all the people.”

That is unexpected. Verse 11:

“For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” (ESV)

I want to circle back to that statement: good news of great joy for all the people. When was the last time that you heard good news that brought great joy to everyone; that everyone cheered at the same news?

In fact, you can turn on the TV to a news channel and one news channel will report some activity that happened in the world and they will take it from the angle that this is good news. Then you switch over another news channel and they report the exact same story through the lens that it is bad news. We're so divided.

And yet here we see this announcement in Luke 2 saying this is good news, great joy, for all people. What this is, what the Christmas story is in Luke 2 is an announcement. It's an announcement of God's answer to the hurt and hopelessness, the division, and anger, and fear that we all feel. And this announcement would have been one that the Jewish people, in particular, would have been anticipating for a long time.

How many of you like to wait? I don't like to wait. Man, I go to a restaurant a 20 minute wait, “We're out of here. We're going to the next one.” I can't wait. I can't do that.

Do you know how long the Jewish people had been waiting for the Messiah? Four hundred years. They had been waiting 400 hundred years for the Messiah to come. The word Messiah just simply means deliverer somebody who would set them free. So, this announcement is huge.

Therefore, they would have felt that it was for them and for them alone. After all, who else has been waiting for 400 years? And I can't blame them for feeling that way. However, they heard that there was this Messiah who had come to deliver them, but it says that this is good news of great joy for all people. It hadn't occurred to them that this would be for everyone, even the people who voted the exact opposite of the Christmas tradition vote, even the people who think that Die Hard isn't a Christmas movie. It's for them too.

And did you notice that Luke makes the effort here to tell us some of the very first people to hear the news of this announcement were shepherds. Maybe that doesn't seem too unusual to you but actually it should. That should be unusual.

Here's why. Did you know that there were four gospel writers: Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John? They all tell us about the birth of Jesus. Luke is the only one to mention the shepherds. I mean, they've been in every Christmas pageant that I think I've ever seen.

I always had this image that shepherds were like older and wiser and I don't know, like retired Navy Seal types, like Gandolf from The Lord of the Rings. They'd have this long beard and a staff. Well, there might have been a few of those. But, in reality, most of the shepherds in the first century were homeless boys.

And in this detail Luke includes the shepherds. The announcement was made to them first. You've got to understand that would have been unusual at best and it risked discrediting the whole account at worst.

Now, it wasn't always that way. During the time of the patriarchs, shepherding was a noble occupation. The earliest mention of them is in Genesis, chapter 4. Yet, when the Israelites were enslaved in Egypt, they encountered a lifestyle very different from them.

Here's why. The Israelites were primarily shepherds. The Egyptians were primarily farmers. And the Egyptians looked down on shepherds. I think some of this may have had to do with the fact they considered sheep and goats worthless. They were hard on the crops. They weren't good for food or sacrifice. So, as a result, the Egyptian art forms and historical records portray shepherds in a negative light.

The first murder in human history ensued when a farmer's resentment of a shepherd caused him to take his life, when Cain, the farmer, took the life of his brother, Abel, the shepherd, in Genesis 4.

Genesis 46, later on in life when Joseph gets reunited with his brothers, I don't know if any of you recall this story, he kind of gathers them up (they are in Egypt now) and says, "Hey, guys. Just a little tip. The Egyptians despise shepherds," which is what they did for a living. And he goes, "When Pharaoh asks you your occupation, save yourself some grief, tell him you are a farmer."

As a result of this, over the course of 400 years, the Egyptians prejudice the Israelites attitude toward shepherding. Shepherding had not only lost its appeal, it forfeited its social acceptability. Many of them became victims of a cruel stereotype.

The religious leaders took shots at shepherds in an effort to discredit them and Rabbis banned pasturing sheep and goats in Israel except on desert plains. Judaism's written record of oral law also reflects this prejudice, referring to shepherds in belittling terms. One passage describes them as incompetent. Another one said that no one should ever feel obligated to rescue a shepherd who had fallen into a pit. That's just low.

What is that? That is first century cancel culture. And the reason why I'm mentioning all of that is that Luke includes them as the first group of people to hear the announcement that this good news of great joy was for them too. It was into this social context of class prejudice that a handful of marginalized, unpretentious shepherds were hand picked by God to be the first ones to know and to announce Jesus' birth.

Now, here's the question you've got to ask. Why? Why?

I mean this is huge news. The birth of Jesus split time into two. Now, you would think that God would pick a group of people who had a bigger social platform to tell the news to first, somebody a little bit more prominent. Maybe a king. Somebody who had more social acceptability. Why in the world would God tell a group of shepherds news of this announcement first?

I don't know. I think for the same reason why God chose a teen-aged girl who was unmarried, named Mary, to give birth to Jesus. Same reason. I think it's the same reason why God would take a middle classed carpenter named Joseph, the same reason why God would have Jesus born as a helpless baby in Bethlehem.

You've got to understand that the message of Christmas and the messengers of Christmas to begin to see how God sees you and me. You see, by including the shepherds here's what God is saying, "To anyone who has ever felt excluded, judged, or written off—to anybody who has ever felt discredited, dismissed, or despised—to anybody who has ever messed up, blown it, or failed—to anybody who has ever felt like he is not measuring up or the pressure of life is beginning to crush him the news of this Messiah, this deliverer, is for them too. The hope of a new beginning is for you too.

This would just be a truth that Jesus would clarify over and over and over again in His ministry. In fact, one of my favorite passages is Mark, chapter 2, verse 17 where Jesus just has to keep reclarifying why He came on this rescue mission. And he says this so clearly here in verse 17. He says this:

"I have come to call not those who think they are righteous, but those who know they are sinners." (NLT)

In other words, He came for those who don't think that they are okay, but for those who know they're not.

Would you not agree that there is a big difference between the words think and know. Here's what I mean. I think I can still dunk a basketball at 47 years old. But I know that I've never been able to. I think it would be really cool to have six-pack abs. I know those donuts are going to be really good. That's the difference. That's the difference between those two.

Here's the thing. Many of us are gambling on our eternal future between those two words, "I think I'm okay." No, you need to know it. "I think I'm good with God." No, Jesus says, "I've actually come for those who don't think they are okay, I've come for those who know they are not."

I think we don't like that because there is something in all of us, me included, that just wants to minimize our need: pride—honestly, it's fear. Here's what admitting that you have a need is. It's that you've got to get vulnerable. And that actually means that people can hurt you.



Maybe for some of you, you got vulnerable, you opened up, you confessed something. You said, "Hey, here's the reality of me." And somebody used it against you. And you said, "Never again." And you closed yourself off to not only people, but you closed yourself off to God.

And you said, "You know what? I'll do this on my own. I think I'll just live a good life; I'll try to be kind to other people. And I think I'll be okay with God when all of this kind of washes out in the end. Because, after all, doesn't God grade on the curve? I'm not as good as some but I'm not as bad as most. So let me just kind of stay in the middle of the pack and I think everything will be okay."

It sounds like a good theory, but then a guy named Paul just totally ruins it for us. Romans, chapter 3, he says, verse 10:

"As it is written: 'There is no one righteous, not even one;'"

Whoa. Turn to your neighbor and say, "I think he's talking about you." He's talking about me. He's talking about all of us. No. Don't say that.

No one is righteous, not even one. Think about that for a minute. Not even the best person you know. Not even your grandma, not Mother Teresa, not that person who is so generous and kind and gracious. He says, "There is no one who lives their life in such a way that they can carry all of this and be justified by their own actions. Nobody."

Then he goes on. He's got more good news for us:

"...there is no one who understands;"

Think about the smartest person you know. Not even them.

"...there is no one who seeks God."

Not even your favorite worship team. No one seeks God.

"All have turned away,"

That's bad news but it's actually news that you've got to embrace before the good news can begin to be good. And he goes on in verse 20 and he says:

"Therefore no one will be declared righteous in God's sight by the works of the law;"

In other words, by anything good that you can do. In fact, there is another passage that says that all of our righteous acts, you take them all up from birth to death, are just filthy rags in the eyes of God. Nobody can be declared righteous by living a good life:

"...rather, through the law we become conscious of our sin." (NIV)

So here's what the law is. The law is not a magnifying glass where God is kind of zooming in to see if you've lived a good life, the law is a mirror that shows you that you can't live up to God's righteous standards.

That's when you can have incredible relief because you can drop the baggage and you can simply receive what Jesus died to give you. And you can lay down all of that effort.

Because, here's the thing, the reason why we are divided right now as people and as a society, the reason why we are so anxious, the reason why we are so angry is if you dig down deep enough you're find fear, because shame and guilt is simply crushing us.

And you can go on kind of carrying the weight of your sin, or you can let Jesus carry it for you. You can go on wandering through this life, or you can let Jesus walk you through it.

There are only two options of response to what I just told you. You can either receive it or reject it. Those are the only two options. There is not a third. There is not a third option that says, "Hey, that's good information to know. I'll tuck that in my back pocket. Maybe pull that out later." That's actually rejection.

Every time you kick the can down the road, every time you kind of push off that decision, here's what the Bible says. In your heart, it gets harder and harder and harder and harder to the point that it is no longer responsive. Hard hearts don't beat. The Good News just becomes white noise to you.

Every time you respond to the prompting of the Spirit, your heart becomes soft like flesh. And you become more and more responsive to God.

So, I want to urge you to be responsive today. To not walk out of here rejecting it but to receive it. And Jesus wants to actually be invited... Just as 2,000 years ago He was born into the darkness of this world, Jesus wants to enter into the darkness of this world right now and guide you through it and provide a light.

Things are really dark right now. I don't know why, but I popped wide awake at 5 a.m. this morning and I jumped up and I went and ran four miles. I don't know why.

I came back in and my wife is making coffee and she was like, "What were you doing?" I was like, "I ran four miles." And she was like, "Why? You've got to preach like 40 million times today." I'm like, "I really don't know."

But I know it was foggy and dark. That's what I know. I figured that out on the run. I had one of those head lamps on. I literally could not see two feet in front of me.

And, I don't know, maybe this is why God woke me up a 5 a.m. this morning to do it because as I was doing it I was like, "Man, this feels a lot like life. I'm just running. I'm just trucking through. And it's so foggy and I don't know what 2024 is going to hold for



any one of us. And I don't know what is going to happen on the other side of the world tomorrow. Things just feel so fearful and scary."

And at that moment I just kind of stopped and I threw my arms open and I just go, "God, this has got to be on You because I can't carry it. You are the light to light our path. You are the one who wants to come and guide us through these dark times."

There is a word for that. The word for that is shepherd. And isn't it interesting that after learning about all of the ways that the shepherds were looked down upon and despised in the first century, the number one analogy, the number one word that Jesus is often referred to through the Scriptures is shepherd.

You just go through the Scriptures: Hebrews 13:20, "He's the Great Shepherd." John 10:11, "I am the Good Shepherd." 1 Peter 5:4, "He's the chief Shepherd." David pours out his heart in Psalm 23, "The Lord is my Shepherd."

I think the reason we are so divided and angry and anxious is that we don't have a shepherd. We're just wandering. We're bumping into each other, yelling at each other because we're scared to death.

And the message of Christmas is that He came for you. He came to be your shepherd and to shepherd you. He came to lift the weight of condemnation that you've been carrying and it is crushing. He came to take on your sin so that you can put on His righteousness. You are that valuable to Him.

And what's keeping you from responding to Him is you don't think He sees you, and you don't think that you have any value to Him, but you do. That's why we make such a big deal of Christmas, because Christmas is God's announcement of how much value you have to Him.

When I was in junior high I collected, primarily, basketball cards because I just love basketball. So I have a few cards left over from those days. A couple of these are mine. A couple of these are on loan. This is actually—I don't know if you can see this, if the camera can zoom in on this—this is a Shaquille O'Neal rookie card. That's kind of cool.

This one right here, though, this is not mine. Somebody loaned this to me. This is a Kobe Bryant rookie card. A high amount of trust that... Merry Christmas to me actually. That's actually pretty cool.

This one right here though, what I am about to show you, this is the holy grail of basketball cards. I wanted this card so badly when I was growing up. I could never get my hands on it. This is on loan to us. This is a Michael Jordan rookie card.

Now, some of you, this doesn't mean anything to you. You need to understand just how incredibly valuable this is. I practically had to sign my life away to get this. This card at most ever sold for over \$700,000 at auction. So, super, super valuable. [Aaron drops it]

Oh, just kidding. I'm just kidding. This is a fake. For those of you... Breathe, breathe—we need a defibrillator over here. Yeah, it's a fake. Some of you were on to me from the beginning, "There's no way. There's no way that that is real."

Now, here's the thing. This actually makes my point. When you look at, if you've ever seen an authentic Michael Jordan rookie card, and a fake, the fronts look pretty similar; it's the back that gives it away.

Now, here's the deal. Actually the real thing will go for over \$700,000—the most I think it's ever gone for. I don't know what this is worth. Just a few... In fact, the person who owned this who loaned to me, when I said, "Hey, can I drop it?" He said, "You can burn it for all I care. It's not worth much." So, Merry Christmas to me also.

Now, here's the deal. The difference between the real and the fake is what somebody is willing to pay for it. They are both cardboard and ink. The value is what somebody is willing to pay for.

I want you to hear me really, really closely. The message of Christmas is that God saw you as valuable and He said, "What I'll pay for you is I'll send the life of My only Son.

In Luke, chapter 2, verse 11 it says this. And he gets really personal. He could have said, "For unto them," he could have said, "Unto that group over there." It actually says this:

"For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." (ESV)

Unto you. Unto you. He was born so that you might be reconciled to God. And John said that Jesus came into the world at a dark time and He came as a light and that light shown among men.

So, what we're going to do today as we close out our Christmas service is we're going to do a candle lighting service. This is my favorite part of our Christmas services. Here's why. We're going to take our candles and we're just going to begin to light them and watch them spread across the room. And the way that the light of the candle spreads is the same way that the light of the gospel spreads.

You want to know how we become unified? You want to know how we achieve peace withing the world? It's not by yelling at people who we disagree with. It's by allowing the light of Jesus Christ into our life that fundamentally changes us and then it gets passed on to another and another and another and another. That is how it spreads. And it begins with the church.

So, I want to encourage you to take your candles, light them, and stand to your feet and then we're going to sing some Christmas carols together.

