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Traders Point, how are we doing? Hey, it's so good to be with you today—everyone at our physical campuses and everyone watching online. So glad that you are spending part of your weekend with us.

Just want to kick today off with some Christmas announcements, alright? We're about a week and a half away from beginning to celebrate all that is Christmas. And we're going to have a bunch of opportunities, both at our physical campuses and online for you to catch.

And we just want to give you two ways to partner with us as we prepare and get ready to help us to create the best experience possible for everyone who is going to be with us this season.

The first one is, we have a RSVP system. It's not a complete reservation system where you're locked in, but really, it's just a chance for you to go in and let us know what service you're thinking about attending. It's also for you, because you will be able to see who else has RSVP'd so if you maybe are not a crowd person you can say, "I'm definitely avoiding that service. I'm going to go over here." So that's there for you. That just helps us be prepared.

And the second thing is serving. As you can imagine, it takes a lot to pull off a service, a lot to pull off that many services in such a short amount of time. And, really, we just want to be as prepared as possible, to remove as many barriers as we can, so people can come in and celebrate the birth of Jesus.

All of that, anything you need to know about Christmas—RSVP, serving, invitations to invite people to either watch with you online or to come with you to a campus—that is all on our website and our app. You cannot miss it.

I for one am excited that the conversation has fully shifted to all things Christmas. Anybody else in here with me? Excited to celebrate the Christmas season. I've always loved it. I have always been excited, even as a kid. Talk about an anxious Christmas, I was always the last one to go to bed and the first one to wake up, if I even did go to sleep.

I was the kid who would sneak into my parent's bedroom—any parents in the room ever been woken up with a stare at bed level—just see some eyes at the foot of the bed?

And you don't even say anything; you just stare into their souls until they wake up. And you just wait. And then your parents wake up like, "Who... What are you doing?"

"Oh, you're up? You want to go open presents?"

"No, it's three-thirty in the morning."

“Okay, I’ll go watch the *Christmas Story* one more time and then we’ll open presents when I get back.”

I’ve always loved Christmas. But we have to address the elephant in the room, right? This year there’s another conversation going on. How is Christmas going to happen? What’s is going to look like? How do Christmas and COVID mesh? There are lots of murmurs, alright?

And I think there’s a commercial that sums it up perfectly. Maybe you’ve seen it. It’s actually a Meijer commercial. And this family is sitting in the living room, they are decorating for Christmas, and there is a little girl sitting on the couch and she’s like, “Ugh, it doesn’t feel like Christmas. Why don’t they just cancel Christmas? They’ve cancelled everything else. Ugh.” And you just want to be like, “Listen, sister…”

But there is some truth in it. Anyone have that feeling going into the holidays? Like, “I’m just putting my head down, everyone is getting the minimum, don’t expect any big gifts, alright? I’m not wasting them on this season. I’ll get you in 2021.” We’re already looking ahead to the next thing.

No! Today, if there is anything we need to do in this season it is not to rush past it or to look ahead to what’s next, it’s to stop and to celebrate, when everything else is speeding up, to stop and to say nothing can cancel Christmas. There is no power strong enough to stop what God put into motion 2,000 years ago. This Christmas season, nothing can take it. It may look different, but nothing can take away the message of Christmas and all that it stands for.

And there are several things that God portrays perfectly in the Christmas story. But one that we want to highlight today, one that we want to focus in on is this. And maybe it’s going to sound different to you:

You are not forgotten.

And maybe you’re like, “I don’t know if that’s a Christmas message.” But it is. Maybe more so than ever. This is what it is. You are not forgotten. That’s what the Christmas story says.

That in the midst of everything… It’s not just bright lights and warm nights by the fire and hot chocolate with those tiny little marshmallows, the message of Christmas is that God is willing to do whatever it takes to make sure that you never have to feel alone or forgotten.

He would wrap himself in flesh and bones that he spoke into existence and join in on the human experience so that you could never have to feel it, because feeling forgotten is maybe one of the worst feelings in the world.

You ever been forgotten? You ever felt forgotten. Ironically, it’s a feeling you never forget. Honestly. I can remember being forgotten. It’s going to sound crazy to you, almost 30 years ago. I’m exaggerating a little bit, but it sounds better.

Almost 30 years ago, when I was in kindergarten, I remember going out to get picked up at the end of the day like I always did. And I’m standing there on the curb with my teacher and all of the other kids. And the rides are coming. Car pulls up, kid gets in. Car pulls up, kid gets in.

Very simple process. All the cars are gone, just me and the teacher. And there is that overwhelming feeling of, “They forgot me. What do I do? Where do I go?”

And I know that kindergarteners today probably have a cell phone so they can just call someone, send a text message, call an Uber—no, I’m getting home one way or the other. Thanks, Siri.

I didn’t have that. All I had was some lady named Nancy, with her hand on my shoulder trying to comfort me as we walked down a dark hallway not knowing what was going to happen next.

Being forgotten, even the feeling of being forgotten—we’ve all experienced it, whether you’re sitting at home looking through social media and you see maybe one, two, or three—all of your friends out and you’re like, “Huh, did they forget to mention it to me? Maybe my service is... Maybe I’m in a bad spot. Why would I not be asked to be there?”

Have you ever been forgotten? Abandoned? Looked past? It’s this feeling that is so hard to forget.

But Jesus comes in the Christmas season to make one thing very clear, even in this season—in this season of loneliness, in this season of darkness, in this season to say, “I’m going to start something. I’m going to begin something—a plan that is going to do everything that is needed so that you will never have to feel that forever. There will come a day when you will know beyond a shadow of a doubt that I was willing to do anything for you.”

And that started on Christmas. It’s a plan that we celebrate every single year at this time of the year—the Christmas story. But long before it was a plan it was a prophecy. It was a prophecy—maybe that’s a word that doesn’t sound familiar to you.

A prophecy is simply a promise that God has made that hasn’t come true yet, but it will. It’s a promise that God made. He says, “This is going to happen. It hasn’t happened yet, but you can take my word, it’s going to.” The Bible is filled with them: prophecies, promises that God would speak and then later on follow through with them.

Do you ever think about why? Why would God do that? It’s because he wants us to trust him. With all of the other voices, with everything else that is going on around us trying to take over our minds and distract us, God wants us to be able to look to him and he says, “Hey, I’m faithful. And I’m willing to put my name on it. And I’m going to take all of these things and you can look back and you can know, generation after generation, I was faithful. All of these prophecies.”

And then there are a handful of them targeted at one specific thing. It’s something called the Messiah. The Messianic King. This one who God would send forward. That he would actually restore the relationship between God and all of humanity. It was one that they looked forward to.

And there are all kinds of prophecies about this Messiah, about this King. Very specific promises as to where he will be born, what town? As to what family he was going to come through. To how he was going to be born of a virgin—kind of a bold call on that one, alright? You've got to be pretty confident going into it. All of the way to when this Messiah comes—these are the things that you can look forward to him doing. All of this. All of these promises. And what's wild is that:

Every promise of God comes true in Jesus.

Every single promise God ever made came true and is coming true in Jesus, which is wild. It's not just something that sounds amazing, the idea that this could happen is almost unfathomable.

There is a person much smarter than me, a professor of mathematics, who actually sat down and tried to do the numbers, to try to say, "If this were to be true, if this amount of prophecies could come true in one person, what would the odds be? And they are off of the charts.

So he starts with a really low number. Remember there are hundreds. But he said just eight, if just eight of these prophecies could be fulfilled by one person here are the odds:

8 prophecies fulfilled is equal to  $10$  to the  $17$ th power.

And maybe you're like, "What number is that?" It's this number:

1 in 100,000,000,000,000

One hundred bajillion catrillion million. I'm not going to disrespect you by reading the number. You know what that number is. It's a lot, alright? The odds are off of the charts. And that's with eight.

God is making it overtly clear the odds can be stacked against it. It may not make any sense in our minds, but God can come through. This number, it is so big and so wild—and remember it's for eight.

He actually gives an illustration to go along with that hundred billion, jillion, million. He says, "What is that like? What are the odds of that?" He said, "Picture this.

Picture you took one person and you blindfolded them. And you put them in a room over here. And then while they are in the room over here, you went to Texas. And you filled the whole state of Texas two-feet deep with silver dollars—the whole state.

"Then you went in and you grabbed one of those coins and you put a checkmark on it. Threw it into the pile. Mixed everything up. Then you went back and got the buffoon that you blindfolded, dropped him in the middle of Texas and said, 'Pick up a coin.' The odds of him picking up that one coin in the two feet of coins covering the whole state of Texas on his first try, those are the odds of eight."

This is the kind of God that we are talking about. This is the kind of God who we serve, he is faithful, he has proven it over and over and over again, “I can do whatever it is that I say that I’m going to do.”

And the one that we’re going to pick up on today is just one, one of hundreds of prophecies that God made, promises that this is what the Messiah is going to look like. Promises—details, of who we believe to be Jesus. This is what it is going to look like.

We’re going to be in Isaiah, chapter 9, starting in verse 1. And it’s going to sound a little different. We’re going to have to do some work here to understand what is going on, but I’m telling you, it paints a beautiful picture of what God had in mind all along and what is in store for us so that we will never be forgotten. Take a look at this, chapter 9, verse 1—the heading is Hope in the Messiah. It says:

*“Nevertheless, that time of darkness and despair will not go on forever. The land of Zebulun and Naphtali will be humbled, but there will be a time in the future when Galilee of the Gentiles, which lies along the road that runs between the Jordan and the sea, will be filled with glory. The people who walk in darkness will see a great light. For those who live in a land of deep darkness, a light will shine.*

*“You will enlarge the nation of Israel, and its people will rejoice. They will rejoice before you as people rejoice at the harvest and like warriors dividing the plunder. For you will break the yoke of their slavery and lift the heavy burden from their shoulders. You will break the oppressor’s rod, just as you did when you destroyed the army of Midian. The boots of the warrior and the uniforms bloodstained by war will all be burned. They will be fuel for the fire.”*

And I know that’s a lot there. But I just want to start with the first line. Let’s read that one more time:

*“Nevertheless, that time of darkness and despair will not go on forever.”*

Can we just celebrate this fact? Darkness will not go on forever. Sadness will not go on forever. Loneliness will not go on forever. What you are experiencing now will not go on forever. COVID will not go on forever, because God is sending a great light.

God is going to illuminate the darkness. The darkness has nothing to do, it can’t stand against it. The darkness, as dark as it seems, as heavy as it seems, it will pass like the fog in the night. It will be gone, and a light will shine.

And then, as he starts talking, it’s starting to sound eerily familiar. This idea, we’re taking it as, “I’ve heard some of this before.” Even though this is in Isaiah, 700 years before the birth of Jesus, a lot of this is lining up. And the first word that it makes you think about this is:

Galilee

Galilee—well if you remember in Jesus’ life and ministry, that’s where a lot of it happens, in Galilee. That’s where they first see this light. That’s where Jesus begins to do all of these

miracles. And everyone who begins to surround him and follow him is in Galilee. That's where he says it's going to start.

Matthew actually connects the dots for us even more clearly. Look at this. It says:  
*"When Jesus heard that John had been arrested, he left Judea and returned to Galilee. He went first to Nazareth, then left there and moved to Capernaum, beside the Sea of Galilee, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali."*

Sounds eerily familiar. What Jesus is doing, where he's going, his ministry and what this lines up with, maybe this is just a coincidence. Maybe it's just be chance. Maybe Jesus wasn't really doing it on purpose. No. Matthew makes it very clear, this fulfilled what God said through the prophet Isaiah. There would be this great light that would come.

And then the rest of it describes what's going to happen when this great light comes. The people were in darkness but then they see this light. And you've got to think when God talks to people, he wants it to make sense to them. He's not trying to be this mysterious being.

So he gives them something that they can look to that would make sense to them. He says, "When you see this light, you're going to celebrate, you're going to throw a party." And then he uses the two best examples humanity, back then, could know. Like what it's like to throw a party.

He said that it will be like a harvest party. And if you know anything, you know that there is nothing like a harvest time party, because a harvest time party doesn't stop. I mean, think about it. These are people who lived and died off of the harvest. That's how they fed their families. That's how they took care of everything.

They planted, they prayed, they waited and waited, and when the harvest came in, they threw a party. You could not stop it. He says, "That's what it's going to be like. That's the closest thing that I can tell you that your mind can wrap around. That's what it is going to be like."

And then he says it will be like a warrior coming home from battle, being able to enjoy the plunders. The war is over. And then he gives this beautiful picture of a soldier sitting down and taking off his blood-stained clothes and boots and throwing them into the fire. He says, "It will be fuel to the fire." That's what is going to happen when this great light comes.

And we begin to see all of these connections between who Isaiah is talking about and who Jesus claims to be. Maybe he's the same one. Maybe this bright light is the Light of the world, which Jesus claimed to be. It's looking pretty good.

*Look at how Isaiah closes it. He said:  
"For a child is born to us, a son is given to us. The government will rest on his shoulders. And he will be called: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. His government and its peace will never end."*

This is the Christmas message. This is why we get together and why we celebrate. Our God came. And we celebrate him as a baby, eight pounds, twelve ounces or whatever he was. But that is not the end. That is just the beginning, because that great light would shine and grow brighter and brighter and God would be described not as just a baby, but this bright light would become: Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

And his government—he's ushering in this government of peace; it will never end. This is why we celebrate Christmas the way that we do, because to us a child is given.

And the words that really stood out to me as I was reading this was:  
Wonderful Counselor

Wonderful Counselor, and I think we can understand wonderful, right? I mean I get that. But Counselor, what does that mean? Is it like a therapist? Is it like someone you can go to and talk with about your problems? Kind of.

But what's fascinating is a lot of times when this word was used, this counselor word, especially in the Old Testament, it had a war connotation to it. It was a counselor of war, someone who specialized in tactics and strategies.

The picture I get is of someone in the tent, you know the military tent, where they bust in and they are like tapping on maps and they are like, "Hey, we need to go this way. We're going to flank left, move right, everyone is going to..." That's a war counselor. Someone who knows the tactics, someone who knows the strategy, someone who can lead the army through the way. It says, "This Son is going to be a Wonderful Counselor."

Maybe you're thinking, "What war?" It's the war that has been going on from the beginning. The war from the beginning of humanity, where humanity rebelled against God in a garden and then from that point there has been this gap that separated us from God.

And you've got to think, "How could that happen?" Well, there is another counselor. And evil counselor we call the Devil. And I know that as soon as I say that you're immediately starting to be like, "Okay. Do you really believe that? It's 2020, bro." I do.

But I'm not talking about the devil from the cartoons. I'm not talking about the devil with a pointy mustache, I'm not talking about the devil who seems to be playing weird tricks on people and pushing bricks onto their heads.

That's not the way that the Bible talks about the Devil. They call him the Accuser more than anything. Just filled with lies. They call him the Father of Lies. He's deceptive. He's creative. And he's strong. And he's really good at what he does, whispering lies into our minds to get us to believe lies, to get us to believe things that aren't true.

Three big areas where the Devil works the best—three areas. Lies about:

Who I am  
Who God is, and  
Who other people are.

If you think back in your life, and maybe you're living in it right now, if you think back to your lowest moments, your darkest moments, areas where you felt forgotten, you probably believed lies about at least one of, if not all three of these.

In your lowest moments you had doubts of who you were. You believed that no one wanted you, that you weren't worth it. You didn't even like being around you, why would someone else want to be around you? And you find yourself with that toxic thought thinking about it over and over and over again. That's the work of the Devil.

Who God is—in our darkest moments, in moments when we feel separated from other people and from ourselves and from God, we have a distorted view of who God is. We believe these whispers and rumors from the Devil that God has left you, God has abandoned you, “Why would God love you? Have you met you? He's not putting up with you anymore. He's gone. It's just me and you. You're alone.”

Lies about other people when you begin to believe so much about who you are, that you're not worth it, and that God has abandoned you, you immediately begin to project that upon other people and to say, “You know what? If you don't want me around, I don't want to be around.” And we move ourselves deeper and deeper into darkness.

Please see this. This is why Jesus came. It took a counselor of evil to bring us into this situation that we have. God would send a Counselor to bring us out of the situation that we are in. A Counselor who would meet the lies of the Devil with the truth of God. When we're in that dark place, when we're in that lonely place, when we're trying to understand why—God would reach down through his Spirit and meet the whispers of the Devil with the truth of God.

When we have these conversations about, “Who am I?” And our minds begin to circle back, we can stand on the promises of God, the Christmas story, and what it tells us.

“Who am I? I'm worth everything to God. I'm the one who God said he would send heaven to come here—that Jesus would live this life for me because he loves me.”

“Who am I? I'm made in the image of God. I'm not forgotten. God knows how many hairs are on my head. He hasn't forgotten me, nor will he ever forsake me. Who am I? I'm a child of God. I'm a son of God.” “I'm a daughter of God. That's who I am.”

Who's God? Lies say, “God's abandoned you. God's walked away. God doesn't exist. God isn't real.” God says, “Look at Christmas. I said 700 years before what I was going to do and then I came and did it. I sent my only Son. I'm not far away, I'm close. Immanuel. God with us. I am with you every step of the way. There is nowhere that you can go to get away from me. That's the kind of God I am.”



Who are other people? They no longer become enemies. We begin to see them through the lens of God, which means every person, even the people who hate you and despise you, the people who you have a hard time liking—they are people who God loves, and Jesus died for. That changes how I interact with them. That changes my posture.

That changes the way we can interact with one another, with ourselves and with God. And this is what Jesus came to do. To show us, to meet all of the lies all of the things that we're holding onto and to say, "No, no, no. You don't have to believe that. I want to make it overly clear; this is the truth. I am a Wonderful Counselor."

And he doesn't stop there. He says, "I'm not only a Wonderful Counselor, I can meet every objection the Devil has. I not only have a strategy and tactics, but I'm also a Mighty God. Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God—meaning everything that I say, everything that I tell you that you can do, you have the power to do it because you have my power. You are backed by a Mighty God and nothing can stop it, nothing can cancel it, the darkness can't do anything with it—a Mighty God who we get to look to this Christmas.

And then this one, an Everlasting Father. Who is God? It get's distorted sometimes but no, no, no. He's not only a Wonderful Counselor, he's not only a Mighty God, he's an Everlasting Father.

I know that I'm not a perfect father, but I am a father and I have three kids—three kids I love so much. And as a father there is nothing that I wouldn't do, there is nothing that could stop me, there is not a person in this room or watching online who could stop me from protecting them if something would try to come against. There is nothing they could do to ever make me stop loving them—nothing!

And God, when he could have said anything he said, "I'm an Everlasting Father who you can know. Cut through the lies. I'm a Father who will never give up on you. I will pursue and chase you down and meet you with love over and over again."

Is there a lie that you're believing in? A lie that is stopping you from being able to celebrate this Christmas season? A lie that is holding you back from your relationship with God? A lie that is holding you back from yourself and being able to experience the life that God has for you? Jesus came to put an end to all of that. To say, "You are loved more than you know, and I'm going to show you how."

That's what gets us to Christmas. There is this fascinating thing about Christmas:  
Christmas not only shows us the character of God...

We can trust him to fulfill prophecies of God, but it also shows us:  
The creativity of God.

You see, Christmas not only shows us the character of God, but the creativity of God, meaning I can trust God to do what he said he's going to do, but I'm going to trust that I have no idea,

I'm not going to know how God is going to do what he said he's going to do. I've got to trust, not just the prophecy, but the process in how he sees that he is going to handle it.

You see, I mentioned earlier that when I was in kindergarten that feeling of being forgotten. I was not forgotten that day, not by a long shot. In that moment I felt forgotten. In that moment it felt real to me that someone had forgotten me. But the truth was it was the farthest thing from it.

You see, every day my grandpa picked me up from kindergarten. Every day he left General Motors in downtown Indianapolis and made his way out to Avon. That day was no different. He was very excited to come and pick me up. He was so excited that he was going just a little bit too fast and the police officers wanted to stop and talk to him and ask him some questions about why he was going so fast.

But in that moment, I couldn't see all that was being done on the other side of town. I couldn't see my grandpa's intentions. I couldn't see what he was doing, but there was something going on. And in that moment, when I felt alone, my grandpa was in a Silverado chasing me down, in that moment he was coming after me.

Left and right, when we look at Christmas, we have to come to this spot and just say, "I'm going to trust the character of God. That he did what he said he was going to do. But I'm also going to trust the creativity of God and trust that it's not going to look the way I think it will.

Look at this. Just think about it.

When God could've sent anything to save us, he sent a baby.

He could have sent a pack of rhinoceroses. He could have sent a sea-monster. He could have sent at least a grown adult. But he chose to send a baby. Think about that. That's not how we would have played it out.

And:

When God could've sent anyone, he sent himself.

There was no shortage of angels, no shortage of things that he could have created to send, but he sent himself showing that it is going to look very, very different than anything that we could possibly dream of or imagine.

If you look at this book [the Bible] and you open it up and you read the stories, I tell you, nine out of ten times you open this up and you're reading through an account of someone's life, it does not end the way that you thought it would if you were writing the story. It does not end, because it seems like there is no answer, it seems like the odds are too high, but God shows up in the last minute, or God works in a way that no one saw coming, to do something that no one would have expected.

Think about Moses. God wants to free the people of Israel from Egypt, from slavery. How's he going to do it? "I'm going to send a baby in a basket down some water."

And then what? "Well, then he's going to kill a guy. And then he's going to get kicked out of Egypt. Then he's going to be alone for 40 years."

"Okay, then what?"

"Then he's going to go to Pharaoh."

"And then Pharaoh is going to say, 'Yes.'?"

"No—he's going to say no a lot."

"No? Okay."

"But then the people get to go."

"They get to go free?"

"Yes, they leave."

"And Egypt never comes after?"

"No, they do. They follow them. They follow them to the sea."

"And then what happens?"

"They are at the sea. There is nowhere for them to go. God opened up the sea. There are a million things he could have done. Only God knows why he did it that way."

We come to this spot in this Christmas season where I just want us to look and say, "Maybe." Maybe in 2020 there is something that God is doing. Maybe in 2020 there is something that we've tried to push past. Maybe in 2020 there are some lies that we've been buying, holding onto. There has been some darkness kind of pushing us out of who we believe we are and who we once were.

And there has been a lot of pain and a lot of horrible things that have happened in 2020 and I don't want to discredit any of that, but I just want to ask, is there anything that God could be doing in this? Is there a centering of God's people? Is there a refining of God's people? Is that bright light still shining even in the midst of COVID, even in the midst of 2020?

Because I believe no matter what we face, there is no match for what God is coming with. He is the Mighty Counselor. He has a plan through all of it. He is a Mighty God who has the power to go through it. That he's the Everlasting Father who is going to hold our hands all the way until we get to the end of this thing.

I just want to leave us today with an exclamation point. Maybe you're still sitting there going, "I hear you, but I don't know. I feel alone. I feel forgotten. I feel looked past."

I just want to go to Isaiah one more time. But this time Isaiah 49, verse 14. Jerusalem was asking the same question, thinking the same things, believing the same lies. It says:

*"Yet Jerusalem says, 'The Lord has deserted us; the Lord has forgotten us.'"*

Why not just cancel Christmas? Why not just put our heads down and wait? Look at God's response:

*"Yet Jerusalem says, 'The Lord has deserted us; the Lord has forgotten us. Never! Can a mother forget her nursing child? Can she feel no love for the child she has borne? But even if that were possible, I would not forget you! See, I have written your name on the palms of my hands.'"*

*"I've written your name on the palms of my hands." You ever written something on the palm of your hand? Why did you do it? So you'd never forget, right? You wanted to make sure that you remembered. God says, "Would I forget? How could I forget? Everything that I do, every move that I make, I'm seeing your name. I'm doing this for you."*

And this picture becomes even more clear when we think about the palms of God and we think of Jesus, that Son that was given to us, that bright light in a dark place. He wouldn't stay a baby.

He would rise up. He would live this perfect life that none of us could ever possibly live. And what did he get for his perfection? He was met with darkness. He was arrested, beaten, ridiculed, mocked.

Then Jesus, our Savior, was taken to a cross and I want you to see this, he hung on a cross, executed like a criminal, where were the nails? In his palms. Those are the palms of God, meaning those nails went into our names, those nails went in. And Jesus paid every bit that we owed, every bit of sin, every mistake, anything that could ever separate us from God, God took care of it on that cross.

And when you think about this, the creativity of God—the reason so many people missed Jesus is because they thought he was there to claim war against Rome. And they looked out and they said, "Look, this is your King. He's being killed on a cross." Jesus was not there to do war with Rome. He was going after the counselor from the beginning, the father of darkness the father of lies. He had his sights set on something much, much higher.

*Humans, other people, are never the enemy. It is evil forces, not flesh and blood. And Jesus went to the cross. Think about the creativity of this. What God was able to do with a thing like the cross, which was a tool of execution, now it is a sign of hope and love. The biggest sign the world has ever known. And it was once used to slaughter people. But God said, "No, no, no. Now it will be a mark of my love that you can never forget."*

Think about this. He was not going after Rome, he was going after our worst enemy, our strongest enemy. The one who whispers in the back of our minds over and over again that one day you will die and one day it will all be darkness one day you will be swallowed up with death and you will be forgotten, and you will be left alone.

Jesus on the cross—after he died he's thrown into an empty tomb. And in the darkest place—that tomb—a great light shown through and in the darkness came this light defeating death, death. The one who boasted that he would forever take us away from God, that nothing could reconcile us back to him, Jesus said, "Not on my watch. They are coming with me. Their hands, my hands are together.

We are reconciled once and forever. Jesus would defeat sin and death; darkness would be removed. We can place our hope in the hands of God. Your name is already there. All we have to do is place our faith next to it.

And if that's you for the first time and you're seeing who Jesus really is and who God really is and what he's all about and that he is closer than you think, if you want to place your hope in him, that can start today. If you want to place your hope in him, we are here for you. We're going to have people up front. We have a number you can text.

*Text:*

JESUS TO 87221

We want to begin this process with you. This walk of trusting the character of God and trusting the creativity of God.

And for all of us, I don't know what is coming next. I don't know if 21 will be any better than 2020, or if we'll get to 2021 and be like, "God, take us back to 2020. This is even worse."

But what I do know is that no matter what we face, we face it with a powerful God, we face it with a God who defies the odds, we face it with a God who can't be stopped, we face it with a God we've seen move mountains. We've seen God.

When people thought that we're just trying to get to heaven, God said, "You want to know creativity? I'm going to bring heaven to earth. It's not going to be a waiting game. We don't wait for darkness to dissipate. We go into it. We are the light that goes. We are bringing heaven to earth. And we believe that no matter what we face, God is with us. And it doesn't matter because it can't stand against us when we go. It's light in the midst of the darkness.

I'm not saying there will be no frustrations, there will be no pain, but I will say that it can't match who is coming with us. And let's go, believing that God is able. We've seen him do it and we believe we're going to see him do it again.

I just want to pray that right now. Pray with me and then we're going to respond and we're going to celebrate all that God is and all that he's done. And we look ahead believing that he's not done yet. Would you pray with me?

God, we thank you for today. God, we thank you for not just your character, not just for the fulfilled promises. God, we thank you for your creativity. God, in doing what we could never ask or imagine, you exceed expectations, you prove that there is always a way, that the darkness can never overcome the light. That you went to war and you won.

We celebrate your victory. We celebrate you. And we believe, God. We believe because we've seen you move, we've seen you move mountains, we've seen you move relationships, we've seen you move our hearts, we've seen you move our minds.

And, God, we know that you don't always show up the way that we think you will. But, God, help us to trust you in the process, help us to trust you along the way, help us to trust you when it's dark, help us to trust you when the lies come in. Let us meet them with truth. The truth of who you are. The truth of who you say we are.

God, we look to you for all things and we trust you. We don't know what is coming, but we know you're coming with us. Jesus, we love you. It's in your perfect name we pray. Amen.