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Alright. Well, so good to be gathered with all of you today. I want to welcome our online crowd and those of you who are gathered at all of our physical locations. We're glad to have you today.

If you have a Bible or a Bible app, go ahead and meet me in Luke, chapter 2. Also have Matthew, chapter 1 ready. That's where we are going to be today.

But before we get rolling I've got an update and a challenge to give to you. The update is that as many of you recall over the last several weeks we've been talking about our partnership with Shepherd Community Center

This Christmas we want to come alongside of them in their Christmas store that they operate to provide for families in need in our city to give them a great Christmas with their families. But to do so in a way that they can have dignity and respect. Meaning that they would show up at the Christmas store, pick out items, take them home, wrap them and put them under the tree.

Our role in that is that we just wanted to stock the shelves. We wanted to provide the inventory for that store. Our goal for items that we wanted to gather was 5,050. I'm not quite sure how we arrived at that number, but that was the goal. And I just want you to know that we didn't meet the goal, we surpassed it big time. As of right now 7,174 items and counting.

Somebody told me today I don't know if this is accurate or not—somebody told me they are expecting another 1,000 items to come in.

This tells me a couple of things. First of all, you guys are crazy generous. You showed up big time for this. Thank you so much for your generosity. The second thing it tells me is that our goal was too low. That's what it tells me.

So next year we will increase the goal because we want to stretch the limits and I know that you guys will meet and exceed that. Give it up. We're super excited about that.

Last week I was actually hanging out at the North campus, and they filled the bins completely at first service so between services we had to empty all of the bins and put the gifts out in a truck to take away. It was a really cool sight to see.

The second thing that I want to do is I want to lay out a challenge to you. This year at our Christmas services... I know that many of you just heard about our Christmas service times, you're going to get the invite box on the way out of the door.

Can I just tell you this? A common conversation that I have throughout the year, I've had this conversation probably for the last decade, I'll meet someone for the very first time and I'll say, "Hey, man. Tell me your story. How has God been working in your life? When did you start coming to Traders Point?"

And a very, very common story is he'll say, "I came to Christmas service. I showed up with my family." Or, "I was dating this girl. I got roped into it. I got tricked into it. I didn't know that we were going to Christmas Eve and then we ended up coming and it changed my life." That story never gets old, and I hear it over and over again.

So, now, every year at Christmas that's what I like to pray for. As I prepare the messages, people will ask me, "Are you getting ready to preach all of these services?" And I'm like, "Yes, I don't mind preaching a jillion services because I know that somebody is going to walk through the door looking for hope and help this year, now so more than ever."

So I want to place that in front of you and I want to ask you to do something. I want you, later on today, to go to this link right here: [ChristmasWithTradersPoint.org](http://ChristmasWithTradersPoint.org) and here's what I want to ask you to do. I want you today to decide what service you are going to experience, meaning what service are you going to attend and worship with your family and friends and then what service are you going to serve at.

And I want to ask you, if you're part of our church family, if you would serve at at least one, maybe two services. The reason why is because we want to give as many people as possible a great experience, not just so they have a great experience, but so that they are open to the hope and help that can only be found in Jesus Christ.

So if you would, would you just text the word serve to 87221? We would love to plug you in and make this a really, really great Christmas. You guys in? Not as excited as I would hope, but I'll take it.

One last thing that I'll say before we jump in is as you are considering your year-end Christmas giving I want to ask you to consider a year-end gift to us as well. And here's why. We say no to more opportunities than we say yes to. And we have more vision than we have resources. There are still churches to plant, leaders to develop, and children and families to come alongside and serve. And we will move at the speed of your generosity.

You guys have been incredibly generous this year, but I want to ask as we close the year down, let's finish on a really strong note so that way we can bring hope and help to as many people as possible, alright?

Let me go ahead and start in Luke, chapter 2. I hope I've given you enough time to find it. Let me start in verse 1. I'll read through verse 12. This is the Christmas story. It says:

*"At that time the Roman emperor, Augustus, decreed that a census should be taken throughout the Roman Empire. (This was the first census taken when Quirinius was governor of Syria.) All returned to their own ancestral towns to register for this census."*

*"And because Joseph was a descendant of King David, he had to go to Bethlehem in Judea, David's ancient home. He traveled there from the village of Nazareth in Galilee. He took with him Mary, to whom he was engaged, who was now expecting a child."*

*"And while they were there, the time came for her baby to be born. She gave birth to her firstborn son. She wrapped him snugly in strips of cloth and laid him in a manger, because there was no lodging available for them."*

*“That night there were shepherds staying in the fields nearby, guarding their flocks of sheep. Suddenly, an angel of the Lord appeared among them, and the radiance of the Lord’s glory surrounded them.”*

*“They were terrified, but the angel reassured them. ‘Don’t be afraid!’ he said. ‘I bring you good news that will bring great joy to all people. The Savior—yes, the Messiah, the Lord—has been born today in Bethlehem, the city of David! And you will recognize him by this sign: You will find a baby wrapped snugly in strips of cloth, lying in a manger.’”*

Now the title that we’ve given our Advent Christmas series this year comes straight out of verse 10, where the angel comes and makes this announcement that a Messiah has been born, and this is good news of great joy that will be for *all people*.

That’s kind of an unusual thing today because not all pieces of information, not all news, not all announcements are equally applicable to everyone, but this one is.

It doesn’t say, “Hey, this is applicable to the Jewish people or to the Gentiles. This isn’t just for the religious people or even the people who believe in God. It’s certainly not for the moral people or the people who have it all together, but this is an announcement that is made for everyone.”

I started preaching regularly about 25 years ago. And I know what you are thinking. You’re thinking, “You don’t look old enough for that and you should be better at it than you are by now.”

One of the things I learned right away is that right after Thanksgiving people expect you to do a series on Advent and Christmas. So what that did is it really forced me to look at the story much closer than I ever had before.

Now, I grew up in a Christian home, so I knew the story. I knew Luke 2 and Matthew 1 and I knew the details on a surface level. I was familiar with the Nativity scene, but when I started having to preach it regularly, those 12 months just go by like that—it’s time for Christmas again. And it forced me to look at the story really closely.

One of the things I’ve discovered is that the power of the Christmas story isn’t just in what happened but it’s in how it happened. And there are a lot of peculiarities in the Christmas story that at first reading....

For starters, we just get used to the story, so it becomes kind of expected. But when you really look at it, man if I was hearing this for the first time, this is really unusual. There are so many peculiarities to the story.

And what I want to contend or put in front of you today is that the power is found in the peculiarities. God is trying to tell us something through this. Jesus was born to an unmarried couple living in poverty. He wasn’t born into royalty.

Jesus wasn’t born into the middle of one of the most powerful cities in the empire at the time, Rome. He was born in Bethlehem and grew up in Nazareth and nothing good came from Nazareth. It was a small, little, Podunk town with one stoplight. Jesus didn’t have the best education or the biggest platform.

Here's the deal. Jesus coming into the world changed history forever. And this is the most critical mission ever, that God would send His Son into the world to reconcile us back to Him, to bring healing and hope and help to a hurting world.

So, if I were God (and I think that we can all agree and be thankful for the fact that I am not) but if I were God and I was sending my Son, Jesus, into the world, I would do everything that I could to set Jesus up to be successful in His mission, wouldn't you?

I would want Jesus to be born into a wealthy family. I'd want Him to have the best education and the greatest opportunities. I would want Him to excel. I would want Him to have the biggest platform so that way He could accomplish His mission effectively.

And yet, the details around the Christmas story are so fragile. Jesus is born to a couple who weren't yet married, and they are living in poverty. They don't have anything.

Jesus would be born into an environment where Herod had just issued a decree that all of the baby boys should be killed. Everything just seems so fragile.

And you've got to step back, and you've got to look at it and say, "What in the world is God trying to say?" It's not just what happened, it's how it happened.

But out of all of the peculiarities that I want to place in front of you today, I want to highlight this one. And this is one that we hear in the story, we know it's there but how often do we really stop and think about how it would have felt.

And it's really found in this little phrase: Mary was a virgin, the virgin birth. And we just kind of say it like it's a normal thing. It's not a normal thing.

And the thing that I want to place in front of you is, I want to restate, is when we say that Mary was a virgin what we really mean is that:

Mary was pregnant and she wasn't married.

Now for just a minute I want you to stop and put yourself in her sandals and think about how that would have felt.

And maybe for some of you, you don't have to imagine. Maybe that is your story, maybe that's the story of one of your kids, or somebody that you know and love and there would have been a fair amount of shame that would have come alongside of that. There would have been a fair amount of fear and uncertainty that would have come alongside of that, especially in the culture in which they lived.

Mary was just a teenager. She had hopes and dreams. She'd met the man of her dreams. He'd popped the question. They were engaged. They were going to get married. And now, all of a sudden, she started feeling a little weird. She takes a pregnancy test. It's positive and she's like, "What in the world?"

It's one thing to feel bad about something that you've done. It's another thing to feel bad about something when you know that you haven't done anything wrong.

That's why Luke tells us that she was greatly troubled. That is an understatement. I'm sure she was incredibly troubled. I'm sure she was freaking out.

The angel says to her, “Hey, Mary. Don’t be afraid.” And she answers with this question—I love this question. She says, “How can this be?” That is a loaded question. Not just biologically, because she’s like, “Joseph and I, we haven’t been together. How can this be?”

But the other thing is: How can this be emotionally and spiritually? How can this be good news? This does not feel like good news. And the angel is like, “Don’t worry, Mary. You are highly favored.”

“Wow, I’d hate to see what you would do to someone who is out of favor.”

And then you’ve got Joseph. Matthew actually unpacks what Joseph was feeling. It says in verse 18 and 19 of Matthew 1:

*“Now the birth of Jesus Christ took place in this way. When his mother Mary had been betrothed...” that’s just another word for committed or engaged, “to Joseph, before they came together...” that’s another way of saying before they were sexually intimate, “she was found to be with child from the Holy Spirit.”*

The comment I want to insert here is, they didn’t know much about the Holy Spirit at this point. Jesus wouldn’t be teaching on the Holy Spirit for 30 more years. But yet she had this child from the Holy Spirit. Verse 19:

*“And her husband Joseph, being a just man...” I just want to highlight this, he was “unwilling to put her to shame,” he didn’t want to do that to her and so he, “resolved to divorce her quietly.”*

Now, he’s not trying to abandon her. It’s that he knows that this type of thing would have been enough, quite possibly, not only to excommunicate her, but she could have been put to death for this. And Joseph is like, “I’ll just step out of the picture. I don’t want to put her to shame. I’ll just walk away.”

And the angel comes to Joseph and the angel says, “Hey, Joseph. Don’t be afraid. This baby that your fiancée is pregnant with will save not only you but the entire world from your sins.” Now we read that, and we go, “Cool, that’s what messiahs do.” But up until that point, how were they saved from their sins? Not through a baby, through a system.

We just got done talking about this in our Romans series. Throughout the whole Old Testament, the way that you dealt with your sins is that you went to the Temple and you made sacrifices on a regular basis.

It was through a system of laws, rules, and regulations. And now the angel comes and says, “Joseph, there’s a baby who is going to save people from their sins.” And Joseph would have been like, “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

It would have taken an incredible amount of faith. Put yourself in Joseph’s sandals for a minute. How do you think he would have felt? How do you think he would have felt when Mary nervously came to him and said, “Joseph, I’m pregnant, but don’t worry. It’s God’s.”?

I think Joseph would have been hurt and somewhat heartbroken. It would have been like, “I thought she loved me. God, I thought this was the woman I was going to spend the rest of my life with.” I think he would have been really afraid. I think he would have been like, “Man, what are people going to think? Who is going to believe our story? What’s going to happen?”

I think quite possibly he might have even, although he doesn’t show it, so I don’t want to project this on to him, but is he human. I would have imagined that he would have been a little bit angry. Like, “Man, I can’t believe she would have done this to me. I’m going to ruin her reputation. I’m going to put her to shame.” But Joseph doesn’t do any of those things.

In fact, Joseph demonstrates an incredible amount of faith by believing the angel and believing Mary. And he chooses to support her, be with her, marry her, love her—I mean after Jesus they would have other kids together. And yet Joseph would raise Jesus as his own. I think Joseph is one of the most underrated people in the Bible.

My friend, John Tyson, pastors a church in New York City. He recently pointed out that we don’t have any recorded words of Joseph saying anything. His obedience was his speech.

And he could have made a really difficult situation so much more difficult, but he didn’t, and he stuck with Mary even though they would have felt an intense amount of scrutiny and, yes, even shame.

Now here’s the deal. Mary and Joseph had not done anything wrong and yet they knew what it felt like to feel shame, even if it was just the looks and hushed whispers of people around them, “Did you hear? She’s pregnant. They’ve got some story about it’s from the Holy Spirit, but, yeah, that’s a whopper.”

Here’s the thing that I want just to kind of place in front of all of us, what does shame feel like? And how do you deal with it? What is the statement that is underneath the shame that we all feel? How do we capture shame in a statement?

Several years ago I set up a date night with my wife and made reservations at a nice restaurant, set it all up, had a babysitter. All of that.

What I had failed to let my wife know is that there was a small group here at the church that met at the Northwest campus in one of the classrooms and they had requested weeks and weeks ago for Lindsay and me to come visit the small group because they wanted to do a little Q&A, get to know us a little bit. So I set that up, but I forgot to tell my wife about it. I don’t recommend that, alright?

So the way it worked out is it was on date night when we were going to meet the small group. Lindsay and I go to the restaurant, have this nice meal. And I recalled, “Oh, man. I forgot to tell her that after dinner we had to go to the church and meet the small group.”

And while we were at dinner, she's telling me how long of a week she's had. She can't wait to get home, and to get into some comfy clothes and just relax. And the whole time I was just like, "I don't have the heart to tell you what we are getting ready to do." I was scared. I was scared.

So we get done with dinner. We get into the car. And she's just like, "Oh, just get me home." I didn't say a word. I was just driving to the Northwest campus. And we pull into the parking lot, and she goes, "What are we doing?" And I was like, "Well, you know, there's this small group—I told you about this, right? This small group wants to meet us."

And she gave me this look. She thought I was joking at first and then she realized I wasn't. And then it became winter in the car really fast. So we're walking down the hallway and I'm just like, "Honey we won't be here very long. Just really quick."

And she's not saying much. I tried to reach over and hold her hand. That didn't work. So we get into the room and the small group, they were so loving, so kind. They came around us. We had these seats in the middle and they circled around. And the first question, I'm not even exaggerating this. You can't make this up. This lady looked right my wife and she goes, "Lindsay, tell us what it's like to be married to such a wonderful man of God?"

And I was like, "Ugh. Oh no." And my wife, she is so gracious, she gave this gracious, gracious response that I didn't deserve. But here is this statement that was going on in my mind:

If you only knew....

That's what shame feels like. If you only knew. "If you only knew the real me." "If you only knew what is going through my mind." "If you only knew what I've done—way back in my past." "If you only knew the thing that I'm trying to bury really deep, and hope that nobody ever finds out about."

And I just want you for a minute to just look at your own life. What is that for you? What is causing you shame right now?

See, I love everything about this season. I love Christmas. But I think that we have to be really, really careful because, especially in this westernized, consumer-driven Christmas society in which we live, it's very easy for us to create an atmosphere where we fake it. We put on a good face when underneath there is a lot of turmoil going on.

Statistics would just reveal every year that this is the time of year when depression, suicide, and anxiety all skyrocket. And yet, if you were an alien visiting our planet for the very first time in December all it would take is a look around to say, "These are the happiest people in the world." Looking at all of the lights and all the food and all the ugly Christmas sweaters and all of the movies and all of the festivities, it just looks amazing. But underneath the surface, not so amazing.

Now, I don't want to overstate this, but I just wonder—I had this thought last week. I wonder if at times the reason why so many of us love Christmas, we love all of the decoration and the cheer, maybe it's a way for us to sort of numb ourselves to the emptiness, loneliness, dissatisfaction, and shame we are feeling beneath the surface.

How else do you explain Christmas music before Thanksgiving? And there is nothing a good peppermint latte won't fix.

I'm not trying to be Scrooge about all of that, I'm just trying to be real. Are we trying to cover up some of the stuff rather than dealing with it?

There are a couple of ironies in Mary and Joseph's story. Like, this is the time of year when we sing *peace on earth*. And yet that very first Christmas I would imagine that they were experiencing anything but peace, at least initially.

There was nothing Norman Rockwellesque about that first Christmas from Mary and Joseph's perspective. They hadn't done anything wrong and yet they felt this immense amount of shame, even if in just the way others treated them.

Here's an example. Have you ever wondered why, when they had to travel to Bethlehem to register for the census, there was no room for them in the inn? That question has always bothered me.

I think we always take it for granted. It's like, "Well, Joseph is not much of a planner, he forgot to book the room, and then everybody was going to Bethlehem for the census and there was also a convention in town, so all of the rooms were booked." Is that what happened?

See, here's the thing. It's his hometown. If I had to make an unexpected trip to my hometown tonight and all of the rooms were booked in my hometown, I'm pretty confident I could find two or three beds to crash in, because I have enough friends and family in my hometown.

And yet Joseph couldn't find a place to stay? They had to stay in a barn. Here's what I think happened. I can't prove this, but what I'm thinking is that they knocked on a number of doors and were turned away. "Oh, Joseph. There you are. You and your pregnant girlfriend. Yeah, you're not coming in here."

I think they would have felt a wide variety of emotions, but let me just point out three that you might possibly be feeling this Christmas as well.

Here's the first one. I think that:  
They felt their lives had been disrupted

Ever feel that way? I think that all of us could say to a certain extent that 2020 and 2021 have been a massive disruption to all of our lives. But at an individual level, has there ever been a



time in your life when you had a plan, you were working the plan, and things didn't go according to plan?

And now by the age of 25, by the age of 30, by age of 40, "I thought that I would be at this place in my life but I'm not." "That dream job turned out to be a nightmare." "The man of my dreams turned out not to be." "There's this unexpected health scare that I never saw coming." "There is a major setback." "This just isn't where I thought I'd be at this point in my life."

I'm just wondering if there is anybody who is here right now who got a piece of information last week and it just came out of left field. It is totally disrupting your sense of peace. And if that is the case, you're in good company with Mary and Joseph.

If that is the case, you're in good company with just about every person who God used in a significant way in the pages of Scripture. I can't think of anybody who God did work through in the Bible whose lives weren't disrupted in some way.

And if your life is feeling disrupted, you might be closer to the center of the will of God than you might imagine. Mary and Joseph were.

What I just want you to know is, it's not going to sound super comforting at first, but I mean it to be comforting, God always disrupts our lives but in the best possible way.

As I begin to look back on my own life, it isn't the times when things just seemed to be clicking, things seemed to be where I've got my own set of plans and everything is coming together that I feel close to God. It's usually in the disruptions where I feel the closest to God because they require me to be solely dependent upon Him rather than anything else.

And God will refine and He will redirect and He will form you more and more into His image through the disruptions. Culture will lull you to sleep. Satan just wants to get you to go with the flow just to be happy, to have the least resistance as possible. And that is why the pages of Scripture say, "Narrow is the way." God will meet you in your disruptions.

The second thing they would have been feeling is, I think:  
They felt all alone

I think they would have felt like the weight of the world was on them at this point in more ways than one.

Not only is everybody looking at them with intense scrutiny, with a smirk on their face like, "Yeah, right. We're not going to believe that story." But if this really is true that the Messiah was going to be this baby that Mary is going to deliver—that's a lot of pressure, don't you think?

I mean, all of us have sort of a parenting guilt anyway. All of us are like, "I hope I'm not messing up my kids." Imagine raising the Son of God. How in the world would we be able to...? I wouldn't even know where to begin.

And I'm just wondering right now if you feel alone. If the statistics are correct a fair amount of you listening to this right now feel that way.

Here's the deal. We feel alone and isolated from each other more than ever. It is endemic among young adults, it's endemic among older adults—all of us feel the sense....

Here's what alone feels like. It feels like, "Does anybody really care? Does this really matter?"

Oftentimes at Christmas it feels like you look around and everybody has someone, but maybe you're reminded that you don't. I think one of the most challenging things about life is when you have a really close relationship, whether that is a family member, friend, a boyfriend, girlfriend, husband, wife whatever and they are no longer in your life.

When relationships end it's just that feeling of aloneness. And Christmas may be a reminder of how lonely you feel. And if that is the case, God is closer than you think.

I think:

They felt some level of shame

Not necessarily because they had done anything wrong, but because of the circumstances that they were in. So if you feel shame, you are good company with Mary and Joseph.

Here's what I want you to hear. This Christmas, the thing I want you to know is that whether you feel like life has been disrupted because of some unexpected news right now, if you feel all alone even if you're in a crowded room full of people right now, if you feel this sense of shame, this statement of, "Man, if you only knew..." I just want you to hear this: God will meet you in all three with His love and His grace. That's the power of the Christmas story.

And Jesus was born into this world to actually give you hope through the disruptions, to help you know you are not alone in this dark world, and that shame does not have the final say.

I remember when I was in college one of the most powerful messages I ever heard in my life came out of a chapel that I attended one Tuesday morning. One of our professors was delivering a sermon. It was a sermon on forgiveness. And he got to the very end, and he was telling this story to wrap up the sermon that he gave on the subject of forgiveness.

He said when he was in college he shared a room with three other roommates. And he was working on this big project for a class. It was a notebook he'd put together. He worked on it for weeks and weeks and weeks. It was part of his final project for the semester.

He said that he got done with it early. He set it on the counter of his dorm room, and then left one evening. When he came back, the notebook was gone. He asked all three of his roommates if they had seen it. All of them said they didn't know what he was talking about.

He looked, and looked, and looked and didn't find it anywhere. He had spent weeks and weeks on this project and there was no way he was going to be able to redo it and get it done on time. So he went to the professor and explained to the professor what had happened. The professor said, "Well, I'll give you an extension. You can redo it for half credit."

So he redid the whole thing, turned it in for half credit and he said, "I've always been frustrated by that because I never knew what happened to my original notebook. All three of my roommates said they had no idea what happened to it."

And he goes, "Fast forward 25 years later." He's speaking at a CIY conference. We send our students to that every year. And he was up front speaking at this conference and afterward a man walked up to him who looked vaguely familiar. As the guy walked up and began to speak to him, he realized that this was one of his old college roommates.

The guy was now a youth pastor in another state somewhere. And he came up to him and he said, "Hey, could I talk to you in private for a few minutes?" And he was like, "Yeah, sure."

So they go into a room, and he said the guy got really emotional and he was looking down at the ground, and without even looking up he simply said these words. He goes, "I took your notebook."

And my professor was like, "What are you talking about? Just now? I've got my notes right here." He was like, "No, no, no. I'm not talking about now. Twenty-five years ago when we lived together on campus in the dorm room, that project that you worked hard on and put it together," he was like, "you left for the evening, and we were in the same class."

He was like, "You're so smart. There was no way I could do the project as good as you." He goes, "I took the notebook, I took out the title page and swapped it out for my own and turned it in as my own."

And he was like, "I've lived with that secret that has veiled me in shame for so many years."

And he was like, "I'm a youth pastor. I'm teaching my kids to be honest and to be men and women of integrity." And he goes, "Knowing that I've got this thing that goes all the way back to college," he was like, "I've asked God for forgiveness, but I've never squared it with you."

And my professor said, "What can I do for you?" And he goes, "Will you forgive me?" And my professor looked right at him, and he said, "Please know that you are 100 percent forgiven. Please don't live with this weight any longer." And the man began to weep. And he gave him a hug and he just squeaked out the words, "Thank you." And he walked out.

My professor was wrapping up his message on forgiveness and he's got all of us leaning forward. And he comes to the very edge of the stage, and he says, "As I was standing in that empty room by myself I was sort of stunned.

"But what I'd just experienced," he goes, "it kind of seemed like a little thing. It was a notebook from college a long time ago. There are probably so many of us who would go, 'Man, I've done way worse things than that.'"

And he goes, "But yet, shame still feels the same way regardless of the specifics." And he said he was standing in that room, it was the middle of July, but he goes, "I thought I could hear a little baby crying in a manger."

See, the story of forgiveness, or the story of Christmas, is that God would send what we needed the most. He would send a baby into the world, a Messiah, to save us from our sins.

What does that mean? Not just at a theological level to save us from our sins, but from a very practical level to deliver us from our shame. God says, "You don't need to continue to pay the same price for what I've already paid for you."

See, it's not just what happened on Christmas, it's how it happened. And Matthew, when you look at his version of the Christmas story, the way that he wants to tell us what happened, Matthew does a really great job of bring home the point that the news of this Messiah is meant for everyone, there is nobody who is excluded.

Matthew does this by introducing the birth of Jesus to us in what is called a genealogy. And a genealogy is just a record of one's family tree. And honestly, it doesn't make for really compelling reading. This is the way that Matthew chooses to tell us the Christmas story and it is the way that the New Testament begins. It says in verse 2:

*"Abraham the father of Isaac, Isaac the father of Jacob, Jacob the father of Judah and his brothers, Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar, Perez the father of Hezron, Hezron the father of Ram, Ram the father of Amminadab..."*

The question is, you're like, "Why in the world would you begin the New Testament this way? You've got 300 years of silence between Malachi and Matthew; it's called the Intertestamental Period and now all of a sudden you're going to break the silence with material that could be used as a cure for insomnia? Why would you do that?"

Well, we need to understand a couple of things. First of all, during this time, you didn't have picture IDs, you had genealogies. A genealogy was the way that somebody communicated who they were. It gave you credibility. If you wanted to know who somebody was, then you looked at his family tree.

So, it's not surprising, given Matthew's audience, that he begins to introduce us to Jesus by giving us a record of Jesus' family tree. What is surprising is who he chooses to include on the list.

We've all got that family member we'd rather not be associated with. You know the one. Jesus has a whole bunch of them.

Let me give you a sampling of a few. Matthew begins with the name of Abraham. Well Abraham was a great man of faith. But did you also know that he was a prolific liar? The Bible doesn't skip over some of the lies that Abraham told.

The next in the line of the genealogy was a guy named Isaac. He is Abraham's son and apparently the apple didn't fall too far from the tree because he repeats the same sin and is guilty of lying in order to get what he wants. Next you have Jacob. Jacob was a swindler and a cheat. He deceived his father and ripped off his brother.

Next we read in verse 3, Judah the father of Perez and Zerah whose mother was Tamar. Now those names may not be as familiar to you as the previous three that we just read and that is because this story is found in the Bible, but we oftentimes just skip over it because we don't really know what to do with it.

It's found in Genesis, chapter 38. And if I could give you the CliffsNotes version it goes like this. Judah married off his oldest son to a young lady named Tamar, she's his daughter-in-law. But Judah's oldest son is killed and now it falls to Judah to take care of his widowed daughter-in-law, Tamar, to provide for her.

Well, he doesn't want to do it, so he kicks her out of his house and sends her out on her own. Well, Tamar is desperate. So here's what she does. She dresses like a prostitute. She disguises herself, stands on a street corner knowing that her father-in-law will pass by.

One night he does. She is veiled. It is dark. He doesn't recognize her. He falls into her trap. She got onto his camel—I don't know how that works. And he still doesn't know who she is. And so he's with her that night and he gives her his staff and his seal and he says, "I'll come back and pay you."

Fast forward a few months, word comes back to Judah that his widowed daughter-in-law, Tamar, is pregnant. He is furious. And he says, "You bring her to me and burn her to death."

And so Tamar comes out and do you know what she is carrying with her? Mm-hmm. His staff and his seal. And you're like, "Wow! I didn't know that story was in the Bible." Well as a general rule it doesn't make for great Sunday School or VBS material.

You keep reading and you come across Rahab, who was a prostitute, and Solomon who married multiple women and strayed from God's commands.

Then you have David. We're a little more familiar with his story. Listen to how Matthew puts it in verse 6:

*"David was the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife."*

Now, it doesn't mention her name, but maybe it's somebody you recognize. Her name was Bathsheba.

See, Matthew doesn't skip over any of the messy, embarrassing, shameful material that is found in Jesus' family tree. His lineage contains men, women, adulterers, prostitutes, heroes, and Gentiles. He is intentional to include them in the genealogy of Christ for a reason. And I'm so glad that he did.

And here's why. For all of us who have had our Judah and Tamar moments, for those who have ever done anything that they thought they would never do or could do, for those who have ever made a mistake that they hope never becomes public knowledge, God sent a Savior.

It is His gift to us at Christmas because He knew it was what we needed the most. And through this train wreck of a family tree, Matthew is saying that Jesus came from sinners for sinners, which means nobody is beyond His grace.

Listen to me. Whatever your situation is right now, it can be redeemed. It can. It may not feel that way. You may have had other people tell you it can't be that way. But that's why God didn't just beam Jesus down here as a transaction to pay for our sins on a cross. It was the way He came. God is saying, "There isn't anybody who is beyond My reach, and I will do anything to reach him."

In fact, I love the way that Jesus illustrated it. When Jesus was illustrating this very point He said, "It's sort of like a rebellious son who tells his father to die, and he takes his share of his inheritance and goes and blows it on wild living. And then the Father goes and pursues his son." He says, "That's what it's like."

It's like a shepherd who has 100 sheep. One of them wanders off. The shepherd will leave the 99 to go find the one. He goes, "You are the one. God will do anything to come after you."

And I always knew that theologically, but when I had kids it really came home to me. I have four kids, three are teenagers now, but when they were really little, before the days when they had cell phones and devices....

Now, I know where all of my kids are all of the time because I've got the Find My Friends app and the creepy parent apps where I'm hovering all of the time.

So I've got all that now, but before they had phones and devices and they were really, really little, my worst nightmare was losing one of my kids. And actually I did several times.

I lost one of my kids in Home Depot one time. I lost one of my kids at Disney Land. I lost one of my kids in an airport. I lost one of my kids at home and I was just home alone with him. Dad of the year right here.

And I've got to tell you that every time I lost one of my kids, I couldn't focus on anything else until I found that child. And if I lost one of my kids and my wife came home and I was just sort of kicking it—watching TV and she said, "Where is Conner?"

"I don't know."

"Well, why aren't you looking for him?"

"Honey, relax. We've got three others. It's quality not quantity."

No.

Here's the thing. That's how God views you. He pursues you. He's running after you. He sent Jesus into this world. He's making a dramatic statement.

The question is: Are you listening? Are you aware of the great extent of His love for you? This is a gift of grace that is meant for anyone and everyone. And you are not too far gone. There isn't anyone who is beyond the reach of God's grace.

I want to wrap up this way. Several years ago, just doing my own study on all of this I did this little exercise. I was actually challenged by a friend of mine to do this. I just opened up my journal and I took the alphabet, and I was listing all of the people who God sent His Son for. Just to visually understand this.

I actually shared this list with all of you. It's been a few years ago now, but I think coming back to it can be powerful. And I know that there are a whole bunch of you who weren't here a few years ago. So let me just conclude by going through the list again.

God's gift of grace that is for everyone includes all people beginning with the first letter of the alphabet.

God sent His Son Jesus for:

**A:** Airplane pilots, attorneys, ambulance drivers, artists, acrobats, astrologers, auditors, the Amish, Anglicans, adulterers, agnostics, atheists, addicts, the arrogant, and the Oakland A's.

God's gift of grace is for:

**B:** Babies, Baptists, boy bands, blonds, brunettes, and old women with blue hair, bullied and the bullies, brave, bossy, bitter, bummed out, broken, and burned out.

God's gift of grace is for:

**C:** Canadians, Cambodians, Cubans, and Mark Cuban. Congressmen, crooks, creeps, card players, cheaters, criers, cutters, crystal meth junkies, and cat lovers (barely).

God's gift of grace is for:

**D:** Dads, Democrats, dishwashers, deadbeats, drag racers, drag queens and drama queens, disc jockeys, and the dude sitting right next to you.

God's gift of grace is for:

**E:** Elvis impersonators, environmental activists, evolutionists, e-cigarette smokers, exaggerators, the emotional, and Eminem.

God's gift of grace is for:

**F:** Faithful, faithless, fearful, fearless, and the forgetful. Finland, France, and those who think the Philippines is spelled with an "F."

God's gift of grace is for:

**G:** Gardeners, good, grateful, generous, greedy, glamorous, gullible, gum-chewers, gullible, grouchy, and the goofy.

God's gift of grace is for:

**H:** Hard workers, the hardly working, the homeless, homosexuals, homophobic, and all the homosapiens.

God's gift of grace is for:

**I:** India and Indiana, introverts, intense, the IRS, and the ironic.

God's gift of grace is for:

**J:** Janitors, jugglers, and late-night jammers. Late night talk show hosts named Jimmy Fallon or Kimmel, pop singers Justin T. or Justin Bieber.

God's gift of grace is for:

**K:** Khloe, Kourtney, Kim, Kendall, Kylie, and Kanye Kardashian.

God's gift of grace is for:

**L:** Lazy, lousy, lethargic, librarians, landscapers, lawyers, and lunch ladies.

God's gift of grace is for:

**M:** Mimes, Mennonites, missionaries, moms, Moroccans, meticulous, mischievous, malicious, Miley, Madonna, and Marilyn Monroe.

God's gift of grace is for:

**N:** Nicholas Cage, Nick Jonas, Nick Nolte, and Nicki Minaj, the NY Knicks, and those who love Nickelodeon.

God's gift of grace is for:

**O:** Orthodontists, obstetricians, OB-GYNs, ophthalmologists, and every name you read in the obituary.

God's gift of grace is for:

**P:** Preachers, pimps, police officers, pornographers, prostitutes, pill-poppers, and the prideful.



God's gift of grace is for:

**Q:** Queen of England, the band Queen, and Queen Latifa.

It's for:

**R:** Russians, Rwandans, real estate agents, Republicans, realists, responsible, and those filled with regret.

It's for:

**S:** Sassy, spunky, and sarcastic. South Africa, South Carolina, and South Side of Chicago, smokers, strippers, serial killers.

God's gift of grace is for:

**T:** Telemarketers, television reporters, trainers, teleporters (that would be cool), transgendered, timid, and those who are a train-wreck.

God's gift of grace is for:

**U:** United Kingdom, United Arab Emirates, United States, ungodly, unjust, used car salesmen, and movie theater ushers (I don't even know if that's a thing anymore).

It's for:

**V:** Victorious, victims, vegetarians, and people from Virginia.

God's gift of grace is for:

**W:** Will Ferrell, Will Smith, windshield washers, waitresses who work at Waffle House and the lady who weighs you in at Weight Watchers.

It's for:

**X:** X-ray technicians, X-Men, and those with the X factor.

It's for:

**Z:** Zookeepers and those preparing for the zombie apocalypse.

Finally, God's gift of grace is for:

You... young you, adolescent you, old you, you without makeup or muscles. You at your best and you at your worst, confused you, content you, timid you, silly you, self-conscious you, arrogant you, unemployed you, entitled you, fearful you, lonely you, guilt-ridden you. Adorable you and unlovable you. Single you, divorced you, separated you, or widowed you. Angry you, sad you, bitter you, cynical you, cowardly you.

God so loves you....

That is the message of Christmas. And it is a message that is for all people.

Now, here's the tragic thing. It's that you would leave any gift unopened, especially this one. So what I want to do is give you an opportunity to receive this gift today.

And it's more simple than you might imagine. Here's what it requires. It requires a repentant heart. It requires an open posture. And it requires a dependent leaning upon God through Jesus Christ.

Here's what I want to ask you to do if you're joining us online or if you're at one of our campuses, if you would, just bow your head and close your eyes. I just want to lead you in this prayer. If you are ready to receive this gift, to not leave it unopened this Christmas, would you just simply pray this prayer with me?

Father God, I come to You today and I am exhausted from trying to be good enough. God, I'm tired of managing my image. I'm tired of dealing with my shame. I'm tired of wondering if I'm enough. So I come to You with open hands and a repentant spirit and a willing heart.

God, I trust that You are who You say You are, and that Jesus is Your Son, that You sent Him into the world as the Messiah to save us from our sins.

God, I want to be delivered from my shame and my sin and my brokenness. So, God, I receive You today and I place my faith and my trust in You.

Thank You for all that You have done for me. So today I declare that Jesus is both Lord and Savior and I want to follow You the rest of my days. And I ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Right now, I trust whether online or at one of our physical campuses that there is somebody who prayed that prayer. And if you did, we just want to love on you, and support you, and celebrate you. Way to go. That's not an easy thing to do.

So if that is you I want to ask you to just follow up. You can text the word *Jesus* to 87221. You can talk to somebody in the room immediately after. You can email my office. We would love to come around you and help you take your next steps in your relationship with Jesus Christ this Christmas.

So what I want to ask you to do at all of our campuses, would you stand to your feet and we're going to wrap our time together by lifting up our voices in worship to Him.