Waiting for the World to Change: Deafening Silence

Aaron Brockett | Luke 2:1-7

Morning, it’s good to see you. If you have a Bible, please grab it and get to Luke, chapter 2. We are going to read a passage in Luke together and then we are also going to look at a passage out of Galatians, chapter 4 that says something very similar and sheds some additional light on what Luke tells us.

I don’t know about you, but if your household is anything like ours right now, we are in the midst of full-on Christmas season. And whenever I think about the Christmas season there are always two words that begin to emerge within my mind. They are the words busy and noisy.

Now, I don’t necessarily mean those to be negative. I know that they could be received as negative, but I’m not complaining. I love all of the activity around Christmas. I love all of the sounds that are associated with it, but it’s hectic, it’s busy, it’s full. And I think that many of us in the room would agree with that.

My wife and I sat down together two or three weeks ago to coordinate our calendars, which in our household is almost equal to a part-time job just to keep track of everything and to keep track of all of our kid’s activities. So we were like, “Now remember on this night we have this Christmas dinner to go to, and we have that party to attend, and did you get that gift for that person? And remember, we have to get our Christmas cards out.” And we have this flurry of activity.

In fact, the spirit around the whole church building all week has felt a little bit shell-shocked. Everybody is in the midst of all of the activity and all of the things that we know have to get accomplished between now and December 25th. It’s hectic!

Not only that, but I think about the sounds that are associated with Christmas. My wife, right after we get the turkey and the stuffing put away in the ‘fridge after Thanksgiving, will sit down at the computer and she’ll begin to update her iTunes play list. She’ll put all of her favorite Christmas songs on it. That way we have something playing in the background.

And we’ll sit down and we’ll cue up our Netflix or iTunes to get all of the Christmas movies we know we want to watch with our kids between now and the end of the year ready. So Elf is at the top of the list, and Home Alone, and my wife loves the classics like White Christmas and It’s a Wonderful Life. I’ve never seen either one of those all of the way through to the end, by the way. And then I’ll always try to slide in Christmas Vacation and she throws it out.

So there are all of these sounds, all of this busyness, all of this noise that fills the Christmas season. And the irony of all of that, as good as it is, is that it couldn’t be more different from the very first Christmas because the very first Christmas was actually very subdued and it literally was a silent night. When God introduced Jesus to this world on a fateful night in Bethlehem, the world was pretty quiet.

God came in an unassuming way. You can almost say that He slid into the side door of this world. He came in such an unexpected fashion that people largely missed Him. And even in the midst of the
busyness of the season and the noise of the season, statistically speaking more people say that it is during this time of the year that they wrestle with feelings of loneliness, and inadequacy, and depression more than any other time throughout the rest of the year.

So, I’m just wondering this morning, as we are in the midst of the Christmas season, if there are some people here who are just simply desperate for a word from God in their life – some sort of direction. If God would speak, they would be more than willing to listen. But it feels as if God has gone silent. It just feels as if God is somewhat dark in their world. I’m just willing to bet that there are some who feel that way to some extent.

Last week sort of surprised me – just the response to the message. If you’re visiting with us today, we have been in a series on John’s gospel. We’ve just been working our way through. And, last week we went through John, chapter 9 before taking a jump into this Advent series. And in John, chapter 9 the subject, the issue of pain and suffering gets addressed. Jesus addresses it and He says, “The reason why this blind man is going through this difficulty is not because he sinned, not because his parents messed up, but so that the works of God might be displayed in his life.

We just tackled this head on last week. We said, “Why do bad things happen to good people? And what does God think and feel about it? And what is God doing while we weep and we wrestle through these difficulties. What will God one day do?” And we just addressed this issue.

All week long I have heard story, after story, after story of what many of you are facing. And this kind of desperate cry, “If God would speak, we would listen.”

One of the difficulties about this is that, by nature, you and I are prescriptive people, meaning, “God, if You would just tell me what to do, I’d gladly go do it. God, if You would just give me a to do list, I’ll be diligent and I’ll mark my down the to do list. If You would just prescribe a solution, then I would gladly employ it.”

Sometimes the silence of God feels like an Indiana winter. You just wonder when it is ever going to end. And in the Bible, the longest season of silence for God’s people would have come just before the Messiah was born. It would have come just before Jesus was born in Bethlehem because you see the Messiah had been promised hundreds of years before. But, between the time the Messiah had been promised and the time that God would actually deliver was a span of 400 years. This is called the Intertestamental Period.

So, if you go to the very last chapter of the very last book of the Old Testament – that’s Malachi, chapter 4 – and it’s just one page that you flip to get to Matthew, chapter 1. But we fail to realize that that one page represents 400 years of history – 400 years where we didn’t get any word from God, 400 years where there were no more prophesies, 400 years where it seems as if God had gone dark.

So, God’s people are waiting on the world to change, they are waiting for God to intervene. Yet then, from their perspective just prior to when Jesus was born, it felt like God had fallen asleep at the wheel. It felt like God may have slept through the alarm and they were wondering where He was. Any of you ever felt that way?

See, one of the keys to understanding the message of Scripture is to understand the two threads that weave it all together. And the two threads could be described as promise and fulfillment. Much of the
Old Testament (and the reason why the Old Testament is somewhat difficult for us at times) fits, primarily, into the category of promise. These are the promises that God has given – they are not fulfilled yet, but these are the promises. The New Testament is largely the answer or the fulfillment of those promises, primarily found in the work and in the person of Jesus Christ.

So, did you know that there are more than 300 promises (they are often referred to as prophesies, because that’s what prophesy is – it’s a promise), there are 300 promises that God gave specifically as to how He would send Jesus Christ into the world. And Jesus fulfills all of those in His arrival to earth. But from the perspective of the people of God, it seems like God had forgotten about them. It seemed that God had gone silent.

One of the things that we are going to look at – we are actually going to look at one of the small fulfillments of those promises. It kind of looks like a small detail in the scheme of things but what it communicates to us is that God cares about the small details in our lives.

Here’s the tension for all of us. There will always be a gap between the promise that God gives and the fulfillment that He provides. And what you fill-in in that gap determines your joy, your perspective, and your health. There will always be a gap between the expectation that you have of God and the actual experience that God gives you. What will you fill-in in the gap?

Now, here’s the thing. We are at a large level the people of the gap. We’re waiting in the gap. We’re waiting for God to intervene. We’re waiting for God to respond. And some of us may feel like we are holding on by our fingernails. Some of us may feel that we are at the end of our rope. And we’re wondering where we can turn. The message of Christmas provides for us an anchor of hope that God has fulfilled His promises multiple times, over and over again throughout history. He will fulfill His promise to us again even though, at times, it seems like He is silent.

Listen, as your pastor, I have the joy and the incredible burden to know up close and personal some of the things that many of you in this room are facing. When I first started preaching here seven years ago, I just saw a crowd of faces. Now I see a family. When I started preaching here seven years ago, I just kind of looked over people’s heads and tried to get through the sermon. Now I look at you and I go, “I know what you are going through. I know what some of you are experiencing. I got that email last week. I heard your story.” And that’s one of the reasons that I can’t just offer trite and simple explanations in preaching because I know that the pain that you feel is very, very real.

One of the things that I will never do, as your pastor, is to look at you and say that your emotions don’t matter. They do. One of the things that I will never do is look at you and say, “You know, just suck it up and endure.” I’ll never say that. I’ll never look at you and just try to dismiss your problems and say, “Well, I don’t know. When God closes a door He opens up a window.” It’s not even that I don’t believe that is true, it’s just that it belongs on a coffee cup and should probably stay there because when you’re facing real life, painful issues you don’t need a trite explanation.

Sometimes you just need somebody to grieve with you. Sometimes you just need somebody to listen. But it shouldn’t stop there. You need to be reassured of the promises that God has given. Here’s the message of Christmas, 400 years of silence and then God broke through and said, “I can be trusted.” If God can be trusted once, He can be trusted again with whatever silence it seems as if God has given you in this moment in your life.
Here’s one of the things I want us to see from Luke’s account of the birth narrative. Whenever we read Luke – we’ve read what I’m going to read here in just a minute so many times that if we’re not careful, at this time of the year we’ll begin to tune out. What Luke writes will sound like white noise. “I’ve heard this before. I just saw the Christmas pageant. I saw the kids reenact the nativity scene.” But I want you to listen to it again with fresh ears and fresh eyes because Luke is giving us some clues that God has not gone deaf to our cries. God is at work while we wait. God is still speaking even when He seems silent.

So, look with me at Luke, chapter 2, verses 1 – 7. If you know anything about the Gospel of Luke, Luke was a physician. Luke was well educated. Luke had been hired by a wealthy benefactor named Theophilus to give an orderly account of the history of things. So Luke gives us details that the other gospel writers don’t give us. That’s why we oftentimes go to Luke for the Christmas story because Luke is the most detailed. What I want you to notice is that some of the interesting details that Luke writes about concerning world history help us to understand that God is at work while we wait.

Starting in verse 1 it says, “In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. And all went to be registered, each to his own town. And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, to be registered with Mary, his betrothed,” or you could say engaged, “who was with child. And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.”

Now the problem with that passage is that is sounds so familiar to us that we just kind of read past it and we fail to see the peculiarities that are in it. We’re actually going to unpack them in our Christmas Eve message and see what God was trying to communicate in some of these odd details. But even more than that, we see that Luke tells us that Jesus was born at a unique time in world history. It’s almost as if, when you take a step back and look and see what was going on in the world, it was actually as if God was orchestrating some things, orchestrating these pieces of history for the prime time when Jesus would be born.

If you notice the first three words of verse 1 “in those days”, in those days, you see that Jesus was born at a unique time in world history. During the time between when the promise of His birth had been given to the time in which it actually happened there was a group of people known as the Persians who were gaining more and more influence around the world and it was a threat to the Greeks.

So, maybe you saw the somewhat trustworthy documentary on this – the movie called 300. Maybe you saw that – I’m not recommending it, it is another one that my wife threw out. This is the whole idea where the Persians are gaining influence, the Greeks are getting nervous about it and so they rise up to resist them. And they are led by a guy named Philip of Macedon. And Philip has a son named Alexander. So, when Philip dies Alexander assumed control and he ends up becoming known as Alexander the Great – you’ve heard of him.

He did pretty well for himself. He conquered the known world in about 12 years. This was around 350 years before Jesus was born. So, remember the Intertestamental Period of 400 years? About 350 years before Jesus’ birth Alexander the Great conquerors the world. So the Greek influence goes through the known world and it is said of that time that everybody spoke a little Greek as a result.
One of the things that God was doing while the people waited is that He was unifying everybody in language, so that everybody spoke a little bit of Greek, preparing the world for the gospel message to be spread.

Another thing that we see in addition to that is that about 280 years before Jesus was born, the Greeks took the Old Testament Scriptures, which up until that point had been primarily reserved for a small group of people known as the Israelites and had been written in Hebrew and a little bit of Aramaic, and they translated it into Greek and that became known as the Septuagint. The Old Testament Scriptures translated into Greek is the Septuagint. So now that everybody could speak a little Greek, they could read about the promises of the coming Messiah, and they could have this expectation that Jesus would arrive.

During the 400 years of the Intertestamental Period the Romans built this elaborate highway system so that everybody could travel freely. So, people could travel around the known world more easily than they ever could before.

Then, about 63 years before Jesus was born, the Romans defeated the Greeks, took over power in the known world, and one of the most well known emperors ruled, a guy by the name of Julius Caesar. Under his rule things get really volatile and he ends up getting murdered about 25 years before Jesus’ birth and a new Caesar takes over, the man that is mentioned here in Luke’s account of the birth narrative, Caesar Augustus.

Under Caesar Augustus’ rule there was an unprecedented season of world peace. Just imagine that. Prior to Jesus being born into the world was all of this world peace. Those poor girls in all of those beauty pageants had no idea what to say in their little speeches because world peace had already been accomplished.

So, you have the highway systems, you have the unity of language, you have the Old Testament Septuagint, you have this world peace and then Luke says, “In those days Caesar Augustus.” Under all of this world peace (things had calmed down), and he says, “It’s time to take a census.” Why would he do that? Well it’s financially and politically motivated. He wanted to know how much he could tax and he wanted to know what kind of an army he could call upon if he was ever attacked by outside forces.

Enter Mary and Joseph. Mary, this young teen-aged girl, has an angel come to her and say, “You’re going to get pregnant even though you’ve never been with Joseph and I know that it’s going to look scandalous, I know that you’re not quite ready for this, you are going to give birth to Emanuel, God with us. Mary, do you have the faith to trust me in this?” And she goes and shares this information with Joseph. And then Luke says that she is great with child, which is another way of saying that she’s ready to deliver any day – about nine months pregnant.

Here’s the thing. The prophecies, the promises of God say that Emanuel would be born in Bethlehem and Mary and Joseph were living in the dumpy town of Nazareth, about 100 miles away. And so you look at what seems like a small little promise and yet God would fulfill that promise. It didn’t look like He was. Mary was nine months pregnant. She was ready to give birth and all of a sudden Joseph walks in one day with something in the mail, “Hey, I just got this thing from Caesar Augustus. I have to go get registered for this census.”
Joseph was a relative of David’s – in Matthew 1 it says that the Son of God would be born of the line of David. If you go back to the Old Testament book of Samuel, Samuel tells us that David was from Bethlehem. So the way for Joseph to file for this census is to go to Bethlehem, “Mary, I have to go back to my home town and I have to get filed.” She’s like, “Now?”

“Yeah, now.”

“Well, have you made travel arrangements?”

“No.”

“You got us a room at the Hampton, right?”

“No, I kind of forgot that detail.”

“Do you think there is a family member we could stay with?”

“I don’t think so. There is not going to be anyone.”

It’s horribly inconvenient and yet what seems like an inconvenience, a small detail is God making good on one of His promises. Really, think about it. What difference does it make whether Jesus was born in Nazareth or Bethlehem? The difference it makes is that God can be trusted, even in the small things. And if God can be trusted in fulfilling the smallest of promises, even the geographic location of where the Son of God would be born, then He cares about every promise that He’s made to you.

Some of you don’t look convinced. Some of you are like, “Aaron, thanks for the history lesson. That was informative. But you don’t really know what I have going on in my life. Fine, Jesus was born in Bethlehem and not in Nazareth – but I have real life issues, real life pain, real life struggles and I just don’t know if that’s enough to cause me to put my trust in the promises of God this Christmas Season.”

This is where the Galatians passage will help us. If you would, flip over in your Bibles – hang a right and get to Galatians, chapter 4. Galatians is a letter that Paul writes to a church in which he is trying to put some corrective lenses in place, he’s trying to help them to understand what it means to have a right relationship with God. In fact, if you’ve ever read Galatians, Paul is like, “That is the wrong way to view God. This is the right way to view God.” And in the midst of that, Paul actually brings up the Christmas story. We don’t often go to Galatians to read the Christmas narrative, but it’s a parallel passage to what Luke has just written.

Here’s what I want us to see as I read Galatians, chapter 4. Luke tells us what happened. Galatians tells us why it happened. Galatians tells exactly what that promise of God means in our lives. Galatians 4 starting in verse 4, “But when the fullness of time had come,” now that sounds very similar to what Luke has written when he says, “In those days.” This is what Paul is referring to. One translation says, “When the time was fully pregnant.” It’s the idea that God is not running late, God is saying, “It’s time.”

And he says here, “...when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law, to redeem those who were under the law, so that we might receive adoption as sons.” From my experience both personally and corporately we often forget the end of verse 5. We fail to see that in the power of the gospel message. We’ll come back to that. Verse 6, “And because you are sons,
God has sent the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying, “Abba! Father!” So you are no longer a slave, but a son, and if a son, then an heir through God.”

So Luke tells us what happens. Paul tells us, in Galatians, why it happened. And I want you to notice, there is a word that is mentioned two times in this passage. It’s the word “sent”. Find it in the reading there. Underline it if you have something to write with. Not cent, sent – God sent. God sent His Son. God sent His Spirit.

The word “Advent” means arrival. It is God incarnate, God in the flesh, arriving to us. And so Paul says here that God sent His Son into the world – why? Well, to redeem those of us who are under the law, to ransom us back, buy us back from the bondage, the slavery, of our sins. But he also goes on at the end of verse 5 and he says, “So that,” and this is what we oftentimes forget, so that we might receive the full rights of sons and daughters. That’s part of the gospel message that we often fail to fully grasp. We fail to believe, to receive, only to our detriment.

The Christmas message isn’t just that you and I are pardoned from our sins; it is the message that says that we are adopted into the family. Jesus was willing to become fatherless in this world so that you and I could receive a righteous Heavenly Father. Jesus was willing to give up the communion that He had with His family, the Trinity, so that we might be received and be adopted into a family. He says we have full rights as sons and daughters.

That term “full rights” is actually translated into Greek as just one word; it is this idea, this legal transaction that often took place in the Greco-Roman world where a wealthy person, who had no kids, could adopt an heir and say, “I’m going to transfer all of my wealth to you if and when something happens.” That’s not a bad deal. Your own personal Daddy Warbucks. This wealthy person who has no kids comes to you, it doesn’t have to be a small child, it could be a grown adult and he comes to you and he says, “Would you be my heir?”

“Let me think about that for a mille-second, yeah. Yes I will.”

And they file the papers. But this was much, much more than if something happened to them you get all of their stuff, this was actually becoming a part of a family. You actually just received the full rights of a son or a daughter which is infinitely better than receiving stuff when the benefactor dies. This was, “I’ll be your covering. I’ll get your back.”

There is a guy by the name of Francis Lyall who, in his book Slaves, Citizens, and Sons, provides some clarity on this. He writes about this transaction. He says, “The profound truth of Roman adoption was that the adoptee was taken out of his previous state and placed in a new relationship as a son to his new father. All of his old debts were instantly cancelled and in effect the adoptee started a new life as part of his new family. However, the new father became the owner of the new heir’s property as well and had oversight and enacted rights of discipline. The father was liable for the actions of the adoptee and each owed the other reciprocal duties of support and maintenance.”

So, this is not some sort of a big brother sort of a thing, this was, “I didn’t have a family and now I have one. I didn’t have anybody watching my back and now I do.” And every parent in this room knows what it is like, at one time or another, to have children and then to end up having to be responsible for the decisions that your children make. That is what it means to cover them with full rights and responsibilities.
I remember, as a young child, getting a bit of a taste of this – that my parents were actually held responsible for my actions. I was six or seven years old and I went with my mom and my sister to the grocery store. We walked around a corner and somebody had stacked up a giant pyramid full of jars of mayonnaise. This was during the time when they put everything in glass, not plastic like it is now.

I don’t know who the genius was who said, “Hey, this will be a great marketing ploy. I think we’ll sell more mayo if we just stack it up to the ceiling like a giant pyramid. There it was in all of its glory and, as I walked by, I grabbed one of the jars off the bottom. The whole thing collapsed and it crashed all over the floor.

Do you know what my mom did? She didn’t go, “I have no idea who you are.” She didn’t say, “That’s somebody’s kid, I don’t know him.” I think she probably wanted to, right? Like, “You fend for yourself in this.” But no, her face turned red. I remember watching her panic. I remember her going to the manager asking, “What can I do? How can I pay for this? How can I cover it?” I don’t think that they made her pay for it, but she felt liable.

So, here is this idea in Galatians that you and I have not just been pardoned of our sins but we have been adopted into the family. That’s the gospel message and so much of the time we have a tendency to view what God offers us one dimensionally. Here’s what I mean. For the longest time, as I was growing up, if you were to ask me, “Aaron, what does the Bible teach about God’s salvation? What is the gospel message?” Here’s what I would have said to you in as many words. I would have said, “Jesus died for my sins so that I can be forgiven.”

Now, essentially, that’s true but it’s not complete. In fact, it’s only half the truth. And if you’re only living with half the truth then eventually it will suffocate your relationship. Here’s what I mean. If somebody came up to you and asked, “How much do you owe on your house?” And you told him. Or if he said, “Hey, how much do you have left to pay on your car?” And you said, “Here’s the amount.” And he said, “Here’s a check. Go pay it off. You don’t owe me anything.”

Now you know that he has given you that check, but still you would still feel an obligation to that person, wouldn’t you? Every time you saw him you would be like, “Man, he paid off my house.” You see him in a restaurant. There is no way that he is paying for his dinner. You’re going to pick up the tab. You have this feeling that, “Even though I know I don’t owe them, I still really owe him.” And, if you’re not careful, that will really eat you up.

You know what we call that? Religion – it’s this idea, “Yeah, Jesus died for my sins. He’s forgiven me. He’s pardoned me. But I still owe Him. So, that’s why I have to go to church. And I guess that’s why I have to read my Bible. I guess that’s why I need to pray. I guess that’s why I need to strive to be a good person. I mean I don’t really want to be. I don’t really want to do some of these things. But, He died for my sins so I guess I kind of owe Him.”

I’m just telling you that will never last. You won’t be able to go the distance. You’ll eventually suffocate the relationship. You and I have to get to this place – and here’s what I love about the Christmas message – the Christmas message looks at you and says, “Listen, you are not just pardoned, you’re adopted. You’ve been given full rights as sons and daughters. I have you covered.”

So many Christians go through life; so many people go through life, just feeling as if God is peering down out of heaven gravely disappointed in them. We get this in the story of the prodigal son in Luke 15. You
have two boys, the older and the younger. The younger goes to his father and says, “I’d really like my share of the inheritance.” Basically, this is another way of saying, “You can die now. I don’t really need you anymore.”

It was a great offense to the father. But the father gives him his share of the inheritance and the young boy goes off to a distant country and squanders it in wild living. He reaches the end of his rope (and we always will) and then he says, “I don’t know what other option I have. I need to go back to my father.”

He goes home but we mistake that in the story for repentance. That is not repentance. It is just that he is desperate and he doesn’t know where to go. And he looks humble, but it’s really not humility. Here’s the reason why. Nowhere in that young man’s thinking does he believe that the father will accept him back as a son – it’s not even an option. He goes back and he thinks, “Maybe my dad will give me a part-time job. Maybe he’ll make me a hired servant.”

He walks back. His head is hung low. And if you have heard the story you know that his father sees him from a distance and he sprints toward his son. He wraps his arms around him. He throws a robe on his back, he puts a ring on his finger, and he kills the fattened calf and he says, “This son of mine is home. He was lost and now he is found.”

Tim Keller says it this way, “Many of us live our lives under what is called a prodigal suspicion. We believe that God will forgive. We believe that Jesus has died on the cross for our sins. But, basically, as far as we take it is as a pardon, not acceptance.” God says, “You’re not just pardoned, you’re received.” Meaning God is not the judge and you’re a defendant. God is not the boss and you’re an employee. God is Heavenly Father and you are a son or daughter.

I know that for many of you in this room, the analogy that God being you’re Heavenly Father doesn’t do a whole lot for you because you didn’t have a very good example of an earthly one. And yet God says, “Let Me be that Father for you. I don’t have the weaknesses of your earthly father. I’m your Heavenly Father. And I don’t just have a desire to forgive you of your sin. I actually desire to cover you, to have your back.”

Yet, so many of us have the status of sons and daughters but we go on living with the mindset of a servant. And this mindset reveals that we might say that we believe that we are forgiven, but we do not yet live like we are accepted. And the message of Christmas says, “Hey, listen you’re not just forgiven you’re accepted and you’re received.”

Here’s why we have that second “sent” in the Galatians passage. The first “sent” is God sent His Son into the world to buy you back. But He knew that wouldn’t be enough for some of you to feel accepted. So what did He do? He sent His Spirit into our hearts. There is another passage of Scripture that says that the Spirit often intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express.

And he says, “The Spirit, sent into your heart because you are a son or a daughter, cries Abba.” Do you know what Abba means? It’s the most primitive word for daddy that you can get. It’s not even daddy, it’s more like dada. It’s one of the first words you ever utter toward your father on this earth. It’s a picture of arms stretched up high. It’s utter dependence. See, kids are naturally born into this world trusting their fathers. They have to be taught otherwise. They come into this world, and by default, they immediately trust their fathers.
Here’s the thing. My kids make requests of me and demands of me. And at times I have to say, “Hey, you need to phrase that differently because I need to teach you good manners.” But, I’m actually very pleased when they come to me asking things – almost demanding things of me because they believe that I’m a good father and I will give it to them.

I don’t want my daughter to come in – she’ll be three next month and we’ve not quite gotten the potty training fully down yet. So, she can speak in full sentences but I have to change her diaper. That’s odd. The other day she came into my office and she said, “Daddy, I need you to change my diaper.” I’m like, “Honey, here’s the rule. If you can speak in complete sentences, you should be potty trained.” So I got her on the changing table, I’m changing her diaper, and she looked at me like, “Are we done yet?” It was like, “Come on, really?”

But when she comes, she assumes that I will say, “Yeah, absolutely sweetieheart. I’ll change your diaper. Yeah, absolutely I’ll fill your cup full of juice. Absolutely I’ll read you a story.” I want my children to come and almost be borderline rude, if you what I’m saying, because they know that I’m a good dad who will give them what they ask. I don’t want my kids to treat me like a judge. I don’t want my kids to treat me like a boss. I don’t want my kids walking on eggshells around me.

See, here’s the thing. I can look at one of kids objectively and say, “Hey, son. I love you.” I can look at one of my three girls and say, “Hey, sweetieheart. I love you.” And she will say, “Thank you daddy, I love you too.” That’s the equivalent of God sending Jesus into the world. That is Him saying objectively, “Hey, I love you.”

But that may not be enough for some of you to feel it. So, that’s why God sent His Spirit into your heart to cry out, “Dada.” You know what that is? That’s God getting down on His knees, wrapping His arms around you and kissing you on the cheek. The body language of my kids fundamentally changes when I show them that I love them, not just tell them. You serve a God who did not just make a statement that He loves you, He showed you.

So, at Christmas, in the midst of the busyness, in the midst of the noise, in the midst of the seemingly silence of God, or in the darkness – hold onto the promises of God and remember the word “Advent” the arrival of the King. And God fulfilled all of the promises, even the smallest ones, to say that He loves us. And God sent His Spirit as a deposit.

Here’s the message of Christmas. God came once. He’s coming again. Right now, we’re in between, in the gap. We’re in between the Advent and when He comes again. Jesus came quietly the first time, as a helpless little baby in Bethlehem. He will come dramatically differently the second time. He won’t be sneaking in the side doors the second time. The sky will rip open, the trumpets will blare. He will be a reigning King sitting on a white horse with a sword coming out of His mouth, fire coming out of His eyes, and a wicked tattoo on His side. And I’m with that Dude.

And God says, “Listen, I know that you are struggling, I know that you are wrestling, but I’ve sent my Son into this world to redeem you, to buy you back out of the slavery of your sin. I’ve sent my Spirit into your heart so that you might cry Abba Father. I will return. You can trust Me. You can trust Me.”

So, the message of Christmas gives us this expectant hope and it is a message that you cannot keep to yourself. We refuse to as a church. That’s why we’ll do the Christmas Eve offering that we do every year.
We’re not just trying to give money to meet a tangible need – that’s part of it. What we’re trying to do as a church is to say, “Here’s the gift of the gospel message.”

This year it’s IJM – it’s caring for those who are stuck in trafficking and slavery around the world. See, if you just receive the gift and you hold on to it, it spoils. You have to give that gift to others. And, as a church we want to shine that light. As a church we will not only say to the world, “You can be pardoned from your sin.” We will say to the world, “Welcome to the family because of what Jesus has done.”

Let’s pray.

_Father, we come to You now grateful for the message of Christmas. I pray that You would give those of us who are struggling the strength to hold on in the midst of it. God, I pray that all of the activity, that all of the noise that surrounds us would not distract us away from the heartbeat of the Advent message, the arrival of the King. It is You saying, “I am not running late, I’ve not overslept, but I am right on time.”_

_An God, because You have proven Yourself faithful over, and over, and over again, we can trust that You will prove Yourself faithful again. Some of us struggle. For some of us it’s not just enough to hear the content of the Christmas message. We need to feel it. So, God, I pray today that Your Spirit would enter into our hearts, would stir within us and develop within us this complete trust and dependence upon You._

_In these next few moments as we lift our voices in worship and as we lift our hearts and spirits to You, may You meet us in this room and do a transformational work within us. We ask this in Jesus’ name. And the church says, “Amen.”_