



Christmas Courage

Finding Calm Amid the Chaos

Pastor Mike Fabarez

Well, as you ponder Christmas this week and celebrate it, I would ask you to this year take particular attention to one aspect of this Christmas narrative. Namely, that would be I'd like you to think about how much courage was required by all of the participants in the story of Christmas. I mean, just start to think through the specifics of how frightening some of this would be, like being told that you as a young teenager were housing in your own body the messiah who had been prophesied about all throughout the whole Old Testament. But don't freak out, right? It's fine, everything's fine. Or being the fiancée, here you are, a young man and being told, listen, don't sweat the fact that the showing baby there in your fiancée, just don't worry that that's not yours. Right? It's fine. Just act like everything's OK. Or when they were asked here to obey a mandate to go on a four-day journey, just about the time this baby was due, take a four-day trip from Nazareth all the way down to Bethlehem, just to do what the census was requiring of you. So just go ahead and do that. But don't worry about it, even though you may not have a place for this baby to be born. Or what about the fact when the baby was born, listen, don't worry about the fact that the government and the head of the government want to kill this child. I guess you, in a protected act of defiance, just leave the country and flee until everything works out.

I mean, those were scary situations, and you can add to it the Magi, the shepherds. You can look back even in Luke Chapter 1 at Zechariah and Elizabeth and their role in all this. These were scary things. So much so that God was willing to discipline Zechariah when he wasn't willing to trust God in all of this. And I guess you recognize when you read the story in light of all that the Old Testament said that these were just pawns, really, players. Oh, important players and we think they're there to be applauded for their role in all this. But they're just bit players in something that God is doing. And you think, well, of course, the transcendent nature of what God was accomplishing in the incarnation of the Son of God and the redemption that was to follow, oh, of course, he's going to work that out and you shouldn't have to worry about any of this because I've got a bigger plan. I'm just utilizing you in this plan. Don't worry.

That's why so often in the Christmas narrative, there is that punctuated reminder, that declaration, "Do not be afraid, do not fear." You see it over and over again. Which didn't end with a nativity narrative, you understand, that was a recurring refrain of Christ. Because, of course, he had laid out to his disciples what he was doing, at least enough for them to know what they should be able to rely on. Even the scary predictions about the fact that you're going to be rejected and the chief priest and scribes are going to deliver you over to be crucified, don't get all in a fret about it. You just trust me. The transcendent nature of God's plan in the pages of Scripture become incompatible with fear, worry, anxiety, because, of course, God's working this out. He's going to work it out, he's got a plan, you're just part of that plan.



Well, I hope you realize that when the apostles then wrote what was going to happen for at least now the next 2,000 years, we ought to think the same way. God is working out a plan, and every successive generation of Christians, they're all just a part of that plan. You ought to have the faith to believe that God is working out that plan, even so far as to say things that seem as crazy as this, that God works together all things for good to those who love God and are called according to his purpose. He's got a purpose and he's enlisted you in it as his child. I hope you are his child as a part of the sheep of his flock in his fold. And so you just need to know this, your shepherd is working out a plan and so don't worry if things get a little crazy around you.

I want to take you to this morning, Matthew Chapter 8 to show you one scene in the life of Christ where he reiterates this point that is all throughout the nativity narrative. You see it in the birth of Christ and you see it in Christ's ministry as a bridge between where we are today and where Christ was in the manger. I want you to look at this scene in Matthew Chapter 8 and say, here is a revealing perspective of Christ to say to you, where's your heart? Where do you stand? And does your heart in some way belie the fact that you say in all the songs you just sang that Christ is king and that he's in charge, not just of the universe, but of your life? Do you really believe that and do your emotions show that? Are you one who recognizes no matter how turbulent, crazy, unpredictable, disruptive the world may become and my world may become, that I believe that Christ is king, and I know he's working out a plan and therefore I am not going to be bound up or held captive to worry or anxiety or fear? That recurring reminder, "Do not fear."

And if it does show up in your life, I think Jesus can say to you what he said to the disciples on this day in the middle of a literal storm on the Sea of Galilee, "Why are you afraid?" That's completely incompatible with you saying that you are a Christian. You can hear plenty of sermons this morning from people who will stand up with a Bible in their hand, you can go to plenty of Christian counselors who will sympathetically listen to you. You can have several of your girlfriends on the phone tell you it's OK that you're freaked out and you're worried. It's fine. It's normal. I realize that it's rational. I mean, there's got to be some allowance for that. And I'm here to tell you this morning, there is no allowance for that. There is just not.

"I am to be anxious for only the big things." No, be anxious for nothing. Even if it's crazy out there. Even if it's crazy right here. Even if you have to celebrate Christmas in a parking lot, you shouldn't be afraid. Even if you're threatened with a diagnosis that you don't like, that's going to bring pain and suffering into your life. Even if people around you are filled with all kinds of chaotic and frenetic thoughts and emotions, you should be OK. You should be fine. Internally you ought to have a kind of resolve that would never lead to the rebuke that we see in this passage. So I'm going to dare to preach on this text of Scripture this Christmas because I think we need it. I wouldn't have preached it in 2019. But I think it needs to be preached today. So let's look at the text.

A very short passage. Matthew, Mark and Luke all record this scene. Verse 23, you see the heading in your text, "Jesus Calms a Storm"? That's probably not how this ought to be headed. This should not be the label on it. I know we like that. "Oh, calm our storms Christ."



That's really not the point. We always knew, if you know anything about Christ, that he can calm the storm. He's actually rebuking his disciples for not trusting the fact that in the middle of the storm, they should have been able to have a kind of courageous confidence that they were his disciples and in the end, everything was going to work out just exactly how God wanted it to.

Verse 23, "When he got into a boat," talking about Jesus, of course, "his disciples followed him," which I hope you can sit here and say that's where I am. "I'm following Christ. I'm going to do what he says. That's why I'm a Christian. That's why I go to church. That's why I assembled together, because he told me to, he built a church. That's why I'm supposed to evangelize. That's why I'm supposed to do what God says. I'm following Christ." Great. Then it should be smooth sailing.

Verse 24, "And behold, there arose a great storm on the sea." How bad was it? "So that the boat was being swamped by the waves; but he was asleep." What are you doing sleeping? In our Daily Bible Reading this week, we read about another biblical character asleep in a ship during a storm. Do you remember that? Let me just tell you, Jonah was asleep for a whole different reason than Jesus was asleep. And everyone in the midst of the storm there it says the sailors were all crying out to their gods. I read another article this week which affirms and the numbers always shift a little bit, but at least 25%, and in this article, up to a third of atheists pray in the midst of a crisis. Which, again, you should just ponder that sentence. "I don't believe there's a God, but I'm going to call out to him because it's really stormy right now."

Now, those pagan sailors who could probably have a sailor's vocabulary back there in the Old Testament in Jonah Chapter 1, they laid aside all that vulgarity, I'm assuming, to pray to their gods, "We're perishing in this storm." And the Hebrew text goes to great lengths to show that Jonah was in the depths of the hull of that ship and he was in that ship to try and get away from God, and he just didn't care anymore. That's why he was sleeping. And it's funny because the Greek Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Hebrew Old Testament, and it happens occasionally in the Greek Septuagint, adds a word in that text and it says he was asleep and it uses this Greek word "snoring."

There are some of you who say, "I don't need a sermon Pastor Mike. COVID, whatever, shut down, you know, Biden, none of it. I don't even care. I'm not worked up about it." Well, you may not be worked up about it because you don't care, but that's not where we as Christians should be. Right? You might be a sleeping Jonah. I want you to be sleeping like Christ was sleeping, who was so busy doing ministry, so busy giving of himself because he did care about people that he could sit in the middle of a storm and say, "I'm such at peace, I'm going to take a nap." He's tranquil. The disciples, though, they weren't.

Verse 25, "They went and woke him, saying, 'Save us, Lord; we are perishing.'" Verse 26, "And he said to them, 'Why are you afraid?'" They replied, "We just told you why we're afraid, we are perishing. That's why we're afraid. That's a dumb question, 'Why are you afraid?' We



just told you. Take a minute to wipe the sleep out of your eyes. Can you look at what's happening to us? That's why we're afraid."

Do you see that Jesus just doesn't tolerate that? No, no, no, you shouldn't be afraid. You shouldn't be afraid. In part, you need to realize there was so much prophetic statement coming out of Jesus' mouth prior to this, they knew what was supposed to happen. What was supposed to happen on the authority of Christ himself as he was supposed to go to Jerusalem, he was going to be rejected by the chief priest and scribes, he was going to be crucified on the tool of the Roman execution and he was going to die there as the redeemer of those who needed redemption, as the lamb of God that takes away the sin of the world. I mean, that was all the way back to John Chapter 1. They should know this, that his body was going to be torn down and in three days it was going to rise again. All of that was part of the plan, not a boating accident. Right? It wasn't page three on The Jerusalem Post he's going to die, you know, "Would-be Messiah Dies In Boating Accident." So they had enough to know that this is not how the story ends. And they should have known. And they didn't.

They were going to die by the way, premature deaths, you should know that. I mean, all but one of the disciples died a premature death. I mean, one that you would go to at their funeral and go, "Man, this is tough. I can't believe they died that way. "I'm not saying God's not going to have his people die in tragic situations. Of course, most of them did here in the first century. It's just that you should not be afraid, even when facing that, you shouldn't be afraid.

Matter of fact, I've come to take away that fear of death that enslaves the non-Christian, the book of Hebrews says, that you're free from that, you're no longer held captive to that. That's what Christianity is like. Why are you afraid? That's a good question. And here's the answer. "Oh, you," look at it, "of little faith." Where's your faith? You've got enough faith to get in the boat. You don't have enough faith to be calm as I take you across the lake. Some of you say you have enough faith to be saved and name yourself with Christ, but you don't have enough faith to go through this without anxiety, fear and worry. And all I'm just saying is I know everyone's hoping for a better 2021, maybe it'll be worse. Who knows? And that will not give you permission come February to say, well, now here's why I'm afraid, God. Surely you can see now why it's reasonable for me to be afraid. "Oh, you of little faith.

Then he rose and he rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was..." calm. Is that what it says? No, there was calm. No, it doesn't say there was calm. There was what? "Great calm." Great calm. Great calm. Even now as we sit outside, it's kind of calm, but it's not completely calm. In fact, I can hear stuff going on. Right? You do a cannonball in a pool and you get out of it real quick, they'll be calm, it'll be calmer than it was than when your rear end hit the water, but it's going to take a while for things to settle down. Luke and Mark both give us a sense of how immediate it was completely calm.

Now, how long is it going to take for the pool to settle down once you do the cannonball? It's going to take a while. How long does it take the Sea of Galilee to recover from a torrential wind? It's going to take a while. But no, there was a complete calm, a great calm, that was one of those deafening silence it's just like the birds stop singing and it was just calm, placid.



And if you're a skier, you're like, this is glass. I've got to get out and I got to ski on this. It's so calm. It's as though he actually had control over all the little bumps and whitecaps and all the ripples. It's almost like he controlled every molecule on that sea.

They got that, they marveled, verse 27. "The men marveled, saying, 'What sort of man is this? What sort of man is this that even the wind and the sea obey him?'" Christmas should answer that for you. What kind of man is this? It's not a normal kind of man. "It's a really smart man like Confucius, a really religious man like Muhammad. A really insightful man like Aristotle." None of that. This is a kind of man that the world has never seen. That's why this whole Christmas story begins with a virgin birth. How's that for what kind of man is this? I don't even know where half of his chromosomes came from. How did this body that you're living in, how did those teeth that I'm seeing when you smile, how do the vocal cords actually come out? I mean, how did they form? What do you mean? We did not have a normal conception.

I quoted Isaiah 9 for you last week after the kids sang up here. Two chapters before that, it spoke prophetically of the coming of this child who would be born of a virgin. And a lot of people like to say, "Well, that Hebrew word, 'Almah,' you know, that could mean like just a young woman. It doesn't have to mean that she hasn't had relations with a man." No, it means that she hasn't had relations. Why? Because that's what happened. Right? That was the whole point. As the theologians like to say, this is a shibboleth of whether or not you believe in the inerrancy of Scripture. Do you believe that he was born of a virgin?

They even accused Jesus in his day of being a bastard child. I mean, that's what they said. The leader said you are a child of an illegitimate relationship. But the reality was that this body that was born, that encapsulated the deity of heaven, all the fullness of deity dwelt in bodily form. How did that body even get there? What kind of man is this? It's the kind of man who could look at those critics and say, not only am I not the product of an illegitimate, like an illicit relationship, I'm the kind of person that when I was born and I came into to being, "Abraham," just before I get dispatched to the world, "rejoiced to see my day." They said, "You're not even 50 years old. You've seen Abraham?" Jesus says, "Before Abraham was born, I am."

Which if you know linguistics "I am" in that passage, 'Ego eimi' in Greek, is the verbal form, this verb "to be" of what constitutes the name of God, Yahweh in the Old Testament. When he reveals himself in the book of Exodus, he gives us that word and it means "I am." It becomes his name and almost, what, 8,000 times in the Old Testament that name Yahweh is given. "I am." I am someone who not only controls the waves, I made the waves. I not only control the wind that sweeps down these ridges here in the Galilee, I created the Galilee. I created these hills. I, yes, every molecule reports to me. What kind of man is this? Christmas answers that question. The kind of man that's not just the man.

Actually, here's how it's put in Daniel 7, "One like a son of man." That's what he's like. He's like a son of man. He presents himself before the Ancient of Days, the Father, and the Father gives him dominion over everything, all dominion over everything. You have dominion over everything. Does he exercise that dominion yet? No. Was he planning on exercising that dominion here? Well, yes, in the ultimate plan of God. But in the circumstantial narrative, the



answer is no. What he expected was his disciples to man up and not be afraid. But instead he has to get up and say, let me remind you of something, oh you of little faith. Let me boost your faith to remind you that you should not freak out in the storm. I'm going to show you that I have all dominion. "One like a son of man." I mean, that's the Christmas story.

Philippians Chapter 2, "Though he existed in the form of God, he did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped," to be hung on to, "but he emptied himself." What does that mean, he emptied himself? Here he was taking, here's what the next phrase says, "Taking the form of a servant," of a man being found in the human appearance, in a human likeness. He takes the form of such a man that he becomes a servant. He's born in a manger and he ends up not even owning property. He's an itinerant rabbi floating all around the Galilee and then down around Judea. This is an amazing thing, the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form, and yet, of course, he's the one who controls the waves on the Sea of Galilee, the storm patterns.

Oh, by the way, that's the same one you sang about just a little bit ago. You said that you are believing in his birth, the virgin birth, and that you think that he is God incarnate and that you think that he solved your problem with the Father. And you really think that he's the one who controls all things and your life and you're committed to him. That's the one, you need to remember that if you start to get freaked out in the storm of the current events of 2020.

Number one on your outline, if you're taking notes, just to answer that question from verse 27 to work our way backwards through this text, you need to remember the "Power of Our Captain." And I hope he is your captain. If he's not your captain, well, then you should fear him because he will turn on you at the end of time. That's what the Bible says, the book of Revelation, we're reading it now in our Daily Bible Reading, and it's ramping up to be a real dramatic and terrifying book. Make peace with him. If you make peace with him, then you have nothing to fear in this world, nothing, nothing to fear, because you remember the powerful one is your shepherd. He is the one in charge and you are in his flock. You are a citizen of his kingdom. He calls you his own. You're an adopted child in his family. What are you afraid of? Well, you're letting the storm. Well, yeah, of course I'm letting the storm. There are all kinds of reasons for the storm, all kinds of reasons for the storm. Your job is to not be freaked out by this storm.

That, by the way, is the real issue. Let me say this, if you look back up in this text, verses 24 through 26, the problem is not the storm, even though he calms the storm. The problem is the reaction and response to the storm. Let me say that again. The problem is not the storm. The problem is his disciples' response to the storm. And the problem right now is not COVID. The problem right now is not political anarchy or chaos or riots in the street. The problem right now is not governmental overreach, the problem right now is not the loss of your business, the loss of your income or that you're unemployed. That's not the problem right now. The problem would be your response to that if you're not willing to have confidence and trust in him so that he doesn't look at you and say, "Why are you afraid?"

And you say, "Well, because I just lost my job." Again, "Why are you afraid?" "Because I may get sick?" "Why are you afraid?" "Because I could die?" That's not a reasonable answer. It is



illogical to answer that way if you believe that he is all-powerful and he is sovereign. You may not believe that. But if you believe that, then there's no reason for you to be afraid. The problem is, let's put it this way, number two, the problem is fear and doubt. "See Fear and Doubt as the Problem." And if that's what you're facing, well, then we do have a problem and we need to solve it. And there's no lack of Christians or at least people who are going to say that they're Christian professionals telling you that it's OK for you to be afraid. It's OK for you to be worried. It's OK for you to be anxious "because everyone's that way." Oh, I love that line. Well, if everyone's that way, OK, then, I'm going to do it, too.

I mean, I hate to sound like your mother, right? But if everyone jumps off the bridge, are you going to jump off the bridge? No, I am going to recognize what's right and wrong. It doesn't matter what people say, even if they're wearing a Christian t-shirt. What matters is what God says. And God is going to ask you, even if you point at circumstances, fear-inducing circumstances, if you actually become afraid he's going to say, "Why are you afraid?" That's the problem. Why are we afraid?

Certainly we're accused in preaching a sermon like this of several things, but one in particular is, "He doesn't seem to care if things get better." I care. I would like things to get better, I hope 2021, I've said it, I hope it's a better year for everyone. I really do. I want that. I pray that. Matter of fact, when you call and say, "I got COVID," I say, "I hope you get through it. I hope you get better." I'm not like, "Oh God is sovereign, enjoy that." That's not my response. That is not my response. Do you think that's my response? People that leave the church think that's my response. That's not my response. That's not my response. I love it when things go well. I love it when your business thrives. I love it when your family is healthy. I love it when the government stays out of our business. I love that. OK? Stop with your Amens on that one [audience laughing]. I love it, I love that. And you know what I call that? Green pastures. And when we don't have chaos and riots in the street, I call that still waters. I love it when the shepherd takes us into those things. And I hope that for 2021.

But you know what? Sometimes the Good Shepherd does, he takes his people through the valley of the shadow of death. And David's conviction is, if I'm part of his flock and he is my good shepherd then I know I don't want anything, I don't lack anything, I have what I need even in death, I have what I need, even in suffering, I have what I need. Even in sickness I have what I need. Even in unemployment I have what I need. Because even though "I walk through the valley of the shadow of death," here's my resolve, "I will fear no evil." Do you know the next line? "For you are with me."

Some of you have not cultivated enough of your relationship with God even to feel that in the midst of all this. "You can't tell me how to feel, Pastor Mike, you can't tell me how to feel." No, you're right. I can't tell you how to feel. But God can tell you how to feel. And he says you're not to be afraid. You are not to be anxious. You are not to worry. Matter of fact, you ought "to walk through the valley of the shadow of death," and you ought to, with David, say, "I will fear no evil for you are with me." And then here are two things. "Your rod and your staff, they comfort me." I'm thinking of those two things.



And one of them is displayed here in Matthew Chapter 8, and that's the staff. The staff was the thing that was used defensively to protect the flock. If a wolf or whatever came to attack the flock, the shepherd could use that big gigantic stick and use that as a tool, a defensive tool, to protect them. And if the shepherd wants to protect the sheep, he's got tools to do it. And if Christ wants to eradicate COVID, he does it with a snap of his fingers. If he wants to, he does. Your staff comforts me.

But the first word is not the staff, it is the rod. And the rod, as I've often told you, is a tool that was often used for the discipline of the sheep. It was used to poke and to prod and direct. It was used when you really had an unruly lamb to smack that lamb right here on the snout and make that lamb's eyes water because they were doing wrong and they needed to be corrected. Even the discipline of the Lord should comfort us. Christ shows that he's got the staff in Matthew Chapter 8, and he shows all throughout biblical history. He's also got the rod and even the rod itself should bring you comfort.

I'm going to give you a couple of passages. I know most small groups are not meeting this week, but I'm giving you a couple of passages on the back of your worksheet, on our digital worksheet, on the second page to make you think about what God promised would happen to Israel back in the book of Deuteronomy under Moses' leadership saying, you're going to have hundreds and hundreds of years from now discipline. It's going to come by way of a foreign nation, which we later find out is Assyria and Babylon to discipline you. And it's going to be hard and you're going to have these feelings of dread. And when it's morning, you're going to want it to be night. When it's night, you're going to want to be morning and just be like, I can't handle this and you're going to feel that in discipline. But if you in the midst of that discipline, repent, I then will take you to passages that show you the kind of experiences we can have internally, even when we're experiencing the rod.

And let me give you some names. How about Esther, you know about Queen Esther, right? Esther could, with God's provision, have a peace even in the midst of a threat that was going to stamp out and kill her people. Israel was going to be destroyed in the middle of that Persian dominance. What happens to Esther? She not only has peace she becomes the tool. She was born for a time just like this to give people hope. You got Daniel, here's another name, hauled off as a prisoner. He could not grow up in his own country. And here he is in Babylon under Nebuchadnezzar and later, under Darius the Mede and what do you have? You have him having peace, so much peace that even at the threat of being thrown in the lion's den, he can kneel down with a window open and pray in defiance of the government and he can do what he's supposed to do. In doing that, he can internally have peace.

Even if they have to hang their harps on the willow branches in Babylon, as Jeremiah said, and to weep and no longer be able to sing the songs of Zion because Zion is a mess. Jerusalem is absolutely torn up. And yet I know this, I can have peace. As Jeremiah said, I can go into those towns and pray for the welfare of my city. And I can have children and my children can be given in marriage and all that. Just continue to do life. And in the midst of the storm, you don't have to freak out. Just live life, follow the shepherd. "Even though I walk



through the valley of the shadow of death, I'm going to fear no evil for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me."

The end of that psalm, by the way, Psalm 23, I keep quoting here. It says, I know this, that what's behind me, even though it's not right here in front of me and it hasn't caught me yet, he says, "Surely goodness and mercy are going to follow me." And any time I quote that passage, I like to point out to you that the word follows a really weak English translation of the Hebrew word, "Radaph" and radaph is the word "to pursue," to chase after like those videos you watch on YouTube where the animal's going after the gazelle, you know, and that lion is going to eat that gazelle, and it is chasing and they're running fast. "Goodness and mercy are chasing after me." You're saying, "Well, I wish it would hurry up and catch me." Right? "I need that now." I get that and I want that and I'm praying for that. I want more still waters and I want more green pastures. But as I'm going through the valley of the shadow of death, I know what's behind me and what's behind me is going to overtake me. And it ends this way. "And I'm going to dwell in the house of the Lord forever." I know that's coming. But in the meantime, I'm not going to freak out.

What I'm going to be concerned about is not the valley I'm going through or the tranquil waters I'm drinking out of, or the green pasture, it doesn't matter what the circumstances are. I'll say with the apostle Paul, "I've learned the secret of contentment in any circumstance," whether in lack or in plenty, "whether I'm hungry or I'm full." I know the secret of contentment. That's what Jesus wanted from the disciples in the storm, and that's what he wants from you in the midst of this craziness we're going through. Content.

Your neighbors aren't going to be content. They got no reason to be content. They believe they're the product of chaos and time and random chance. They think they're slime. Right? There's no transcendent value to their life, at least not logically. They live in this paradox. But you believe there is a God, he specifically created you. He's got a plan and he's working toward the end of that plan. And you're a part of that plan and in everything, if you trust him, you know this, it's all going to work out for good, even the evil in this world. That's what the Bible promises and that's what God has proved all throughout biblical history. And the question is are we going to believe it and see the problem not as the problem, the problem is not the problem here. The problem is, whenever I start to fear and when I doubt. "Why are you afraid, oh, you of little faith?" I want us to have greater faith this Christmas.

And I can say, "Faith in what, faith in God?" Well, yeah, that's true. But let me be more specific because that's how I started this and that's what's going on in this passage. They did not have faith that Christ was going to work out his plan. And the plan wasn't a boating accident.

And so here's what I would say to you. Number three, they were following him, I get that. But here's number three. You need to "Trust In His Plan." You need to have a courageous trust in Christ's plan. And the plan is ultimately we're going to get across this lake and we're going to do the things that God has designed for me to do, and if you're with him, you're going to be a part of that group. You're going to be a part of the Church. The Church is going to be



triumphant. Let's call it this, three sub-points. It's the eschatological plan. The eschatological plan, the eschaton, the end, is when the kingdom, First Corinthians 15, is delivered up to God. Christ does all the work, delivers it to God.

And there are two component parts of that. Evangelizing the world. Right? That's why I'm not giving to saving the chipmunks. Right? Do you like chipmunks? That's great. But my neighbors will give to that. I'm giving to world evangelization. I want churches planted. I want missionaries going out. I want the Bible translated. I want to see churches spring up. So I want to see the world evangelized. When they wanted the kingdom in Acts Chapter 1, you remember what happened, right? "Is now the time you restore the kingdom to Israel?" And what did Jesus say? "It is not for you to know the times that the Father has said in his own authority." But what is your job? "Be my witnesses." Evangelism.

And in that of evangelism, here's the other side of evangelism. Those people who are reached with the gospel, they become a part of the Church and the Church is built. Right? Jesus said, Matthew 16, "I'm going to build my Church." I'm going to build my Church. So we're going to worry about the Church being glorious. We're going to worry about evangelism going out. And then I know as when God thinks that's done, then the kingdom comes. "The kingdoms of the world become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ." And we see the eschaton, we see the end. So that's his plan. And guess what? He's working that out.

Here's the other part of Christ's plan. Here's what he made very clear and I've quoted this a couple of times in the midst of this COVID craziness. Here it is. He said, even the twists and turns, I'm working out the necessary twists and turns because he said this and I've quoted it many times, but Jesus said, listen, "You're going to hear of wars and rumors of wars." You're going to hear of "famines and earthquakes," and the Luke account even adds the word diseases, pestilences. You're going to have pandemics. You're going to have the seismic plates, the tectonic plates shift, and you're going to have buildings fall down and earthquakes. You're going to have people get sick at high rates. You're going to have the Spanish flu. You're going to have now COVID-19. You going to have all these things that are going to happen.

You're going to have people who won't have enough to eat. You're going to have hunger and starvation. You're going to have wars. You going to have people get technology to build bigger and bigger weapons of warfare. You're going to have more people killed in war than ever before. That's going to happen. He says this. "These things must take place." They must take place, they're part of his plan. "Well, I don't like that." Well, you're not in charge. Right? Jay Vernon McGee said, get your own universe and you can do your own thing. But this is God's universe, right? So he's made it to where his plan is crooked paths and rough places. And he says that's part of the plan.

Now, I skipped a little phrase, if you know your Bible well, between the wars, rumors of wars, famines and earthquakes and these things must take place. He said, "Do not be alarmed." Don't be worried. Don't be afraid. Therefore, again, let me just re-emphasize, if you right now are afraid, that's the problem. And as Matthew 6 says, "Don't be afraid." Don't be afraid.



I remember preaching that passage in Matthew 6, do not fear, don't be anxious. It's a great passage. I preached it one time. One of the most memorable sermons in my mind was in 1999. I preached it and I said we need this passage more than ever because, of course, at that day the world is going to explode on January the 1st, 2000. Even Christian ministries there all about getting ready for it and, you know, build a bunker and here's how to have freeze-dried foods and, you know, make sure you get enough weapons to be able to fend off all the people who are going to want to get your stuff. The total dystopian craziness of what they said and, of course, they could take Bible passages to show, "Yeah, the Bible says is going to go from bad to worse. And here it is. What's really bad is we can't handle this move from 1999 to 2000 and so everyone was freaking out.

So I went to this passage and they thought, "Oh, here he is, pie in the sky." And here's the thing about that passage in Matthew 6, it's not pie in the sky. I let them know in that sermon and I'll never forget it, I said, "Do you know the context of Matthew 6? Do you know that generation of people, as there stood on the fringes of that group, Roman soldiers with the Western insignia of Rome on their breastplates as they stood around watching what these Jews were doing and then excising all these taxes from them and it went from bad to worse?" I know you picture butterflies. You go to the Mount of Beatitudes there in Galilee and you picture people playing at Jesus' feet and he's there throwing the football around. I mean, I don't know what you picture. But it might have been that, but Jesus knew where it was going to go. And where it was going to go is those Roman soldiers were eventually going to take their spears, sharpen them and go after the Jewish people who were in that crowd. The kids playing at the feet of Christ, many of them would be killed as the city was ransacked and not a single stone, as Jesus said, would be left one upon another. That's what happened to that crowd.

And yet, do you know the passage? Don't be anxious. Don't be worried. Don't be worried about tomorrow. He says tomorrow has got enough trouble of its own and no one knew that better than Christ. Do you think 2021 is going to be better? It might be. I pray it's green pastures and still waters. That's what I pray. I'm not a masochist. That's what I'm praying for. But, if it's not, I'm still going to preach the same sermon.

I remember I said something in that sermon, which is kind of ironic as I look at you in the parking lot today. I said even if January 1st, 2000 is an absolute nightmare, I said, "Meet me in the parking lot." That's what I said. I said meet me in the parking lot. Because you know what? As the church, we're going to do all we can. If half of us are dead because satellites fall out of the sky and everything falls apart, we'll meet here and we'll hunt for jackrabbits together and we'll do what we can to make it. That's what I said. And now, 20 years later, we're in the parking lot. [audience laughing]

And all I'm telling you is if it really gets bad that we'll be, as Christ said, "the little flock." We'll be a little flock. And he says, "Don't worry, for to you, I've been pleased to give you the kingdom." It's going to be OK. I have an eschatological plan that's working out. I got a plan that involves a lot of twists and turns. That's the plan I'm working on.



Now, as long as I'm talking about trusting in the plan, you ought to trust in the plan that's laid on your lap because there is a third component and that eschatological plan, the crooked paths of the evil in this world, that's part of his plan. But then here's the other thing. We have a plan. We are to be working out our salvation. We are to be doing what he asked us to do. And if that's evangelizing the world then we're going to do that. If it's building a church, that's what we're going to do. We're going to do what God asked us to do. That's the plan. So we're going to do our part.

In the context of Matthew Chapter 8, look at verse 18, if you still have that passage open. "Now when Jesus saw the crowd, he gave orders." He's good at that. He makes orders. He gives commands. He gives directives. "He gave orders to go over to the other side." And then they're doing it, verse 23. They got in the boat. His disciples followed him, they followed his orders and then we hit a storm. And all I'm saying is so far so good. The bad thing was fear.

My three kids never believed in the fat man scooting down the chimney on Christmas Eve. They never believe that. Partly because we always had a big fire going on Christmas Eve. The other part was that we had chosen early on not to be a purveyor of myths in our kid's minds, so we weren't going to push that on them. Actually, that was "stealing the mystique of Christmas." No, no, it was actually helpful because they knew that it really wasn't reliant on what they were going to get for Christmas, the note that they wrote and tried to send to the North Pole through the guy at the mall, they realized that if they wanted gifts from someone who was capable of giving them gifts, it would come from one who knew them best, who lived with them and they could communicate with any time at all. The relationship was important and that was an assurance.

I said, listen, you want to meet Santa Claus, look right here, OK? He's right here. And you can ask for what you'd like to ask for, but I know this, I'm going to give you something on Christmas and when you open it, like had happened many times, they didn't quite understand it. Dad in particular would give them gifts that they weren't quite sure what this was. What is this? And I like to have fun and I like to give my kids good things. Right? Just like the Bible says, I want that. So they would open things and sometimes they wouldn't know because I would try to kind of venture into new areas and things in their life. And I would just say this, most of the time when there wasn't a big "YEA!", there was a "hmmm," by noon, they had figured it out. Then it was like, yeah, this is great.

But it didn't happen every time. Sometimes I gave them things they had no idea and they look at that going, "It could be noon in June 25th, I would still not understand. That's not what I wanted." Well, I'll tell you what, I may have given them some gifts that they didn't really want that weren't on their list, their wish list. But I can say I gave them every year what they needed, right?

And I realize it's not fun sometimes for me to give them what they need, but if the need happened to correspond with that date, they got what they needed from me, along with some things they wanted. I'll bet a lot of things that you wanted God has given you in the last 10



years. But here's a gift we opened this year that a lot of us said, "I didn't want that. I hope there's a gift receipt. Take it back." You can't take it back. A lot of things that we get we can look back at within a year or two and say, "I see why that trial came, that was good." But even if you can't, even if by the time you live your Christian life and you're about to die, you say, "I still don't know why that happened to me in my family in 2020." You've got to trust the one who gives these gifts and say, I didn't fear, I didn't freak out, and I realize he's omnipotent and sovereign and I trust him. I hope you trust Christ this Christmas. It's the most important thing. And the indicator of whether or not you do is how you feel as it relates to these issues: worry, anxiety and fear. And what we need is confidence, courage and trust. I'm praying that for you this Christmas.

Let's pray. God help us, please, to be the kinds of Christians that can say to you on days that are hard that we believe, but please Christ, help our unbelief. Instead of freaking out saying, "God, why are you doing this?" Help us instead to say give me more faith to believe the things that I know are true, that you are a God that works out a plan, that you created all things, you oversee all things, and you will culminate all things one day in the establishment of the kingdom where everything is as it ought to be.

And so, God, we pursued the things that you've asked us to pursue, even if it's holding your hand in the valley of the shadow of death, we resolve right now, this Christmas week in 2020, that we are not going to fear, we will not fear. We're not going to fear evil because you're with us and we know "your rod and your staff, they comfort us." We thank you, God, at the end of this sermon that goodness and mercy are going to follow us. Those great Hebrew words, "Tov," "Hesed", those great concepts of the good that you want to give and you promised to give to your covenant people, they will overtake us as we dwell with you in the house of the Lord forever. God, bring that quickly to us and if not, we're made to wait and struggle and even suffer, we declare our trust in you this morning.

In Jesus name. Amen.