

Advent: The King's Highway

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[0 : 00] Good morning. Good morning, everybody. I love this time of year.

Every year, I know like many of you, I love that basically from Thanksgiving on, starting really the day after Thanksgiving, we all began to prepare for Christmas.

And you begin to see lights going up. You begin to see trees being set up. You begin to see stores advertising. And people start shopping and start, you know, thinking about what they're going to bake and what they're going to cook.

And all of the preparations begin. And I love the mood that that casts in the city. I think it's a beautiful time of year. And so I was thinking, you know, a lot of people are thinking about preparing for Christmas.

And so I'm just interested to know how people go about doing that. So I did a Google search, how to prepare for Christmas. And there were about several billion hits. One of the top hits that I really appreciated and got a lot out of was from Martha Stewart.

[1 : 04] She says, here's the article, get your home holiday ready in eight steps. I'm not going to give you all eight, but I thought a couple were pretty helpful. The first one is this. When decorating your entryway, so those of you who have an entryway, you should reinvent traditional red and green hues.

Because nobody needs that. We've been doing that for years. By pairing them with metallic and textural accents. So that's a pretty good idea. She says, low maintenance artificial greenery.

So not the real stuff that dies and turns into dust. But artificial greenery is going to ensure that your entryway always looks its best. Because one time we did put out real greenery and it looked good for a week.

And then it was just these brown sticks on our porch. And, you know, that's not a good idea. So another thing she says is this. For your Christmas tree, consider swapping ornaments for a light dusting of glitter.

And the addition of pine cone decor. So, you know, that's creative. I thought, like, everything in our house has a light dusting. You know, I'm not sure what it is. But we got that covered.

[2 : 09] So there's a lot out there on preparing for Christmas these days. You can find a lot of great information, helpful stuff online. It would have been different in the first century. If you had done a Google search in the first century, how to prepare for Christmas, you would have only gotten one hit back.

And that would have been Luke chapter 3. And it would have not come from Martha Stewart, but from a guy named John the Baptist. And John the Baptist is slightly different in his approach to preparation.

You know, Martha's pretty focused on the house, wanting to make sure the house looks good. John's focused on the heart and how to prepare our hearts for Christmas. And unlike Martha, it doesn't take eight steps.

It just says, well, you just really need one step. Repent. Repent. Repent. He says, if you want to prepare for Christmas, you have to understand repentance. And so we're going to look at repentance.

We're going to look at what John teaches us about repentance. We're going to look at Luke chapter 3, really through verse 20. We're not going to do an in-depth look because we're really focusing on just what we can draw from this passage about repentance.

[3 : 15] And we're going to see three things. We're going to see the nature of repentance. You know, it's often misunderstood. What is it? We're going to see the obstacles to repentance, the major challenges and why people don't repent more. What stands in the way of that?

And then ultimately the fruit of repentance. How do you know you've repented? What difference does it make in our lives? So the nature, the obstacles, and then the fruit of repentance. Let's pray. Lord, we thank you for your word.

We thank you that we have the freedom to gather in relative safety around your word. That we can proclaim your lordship. That we can sing songs of praise to you. That we can open your word and do so in safety. We thank you for this warm building.

We thank you for the shelter that it provides. We thank you for the amazing family gathered here. We pray now that you would honor your promise to be a God who is with us and who speaks. We need to hear your word.

Please, by the power of your spirit, in the name of your son Jesus, fulfill that promise in our midst. In your son's name, amen. So first of all, the nature of repentance. I love this passage because Luke gives us a really striking image.

[4 : 19] But I want to tell you a little bit about how this image is delivered and who it's delivered through. Luke starts this passage, this chapter, by giving us a kind of snapshot of the political and religious landscape.

And this seems just like filler information, but it's actually pretty important. Luke starts listing out in this text all of the people who are in charge from Tiberius down.

And so this would be, you know, this is Luke the historian, right? Not Luke the storyteller. This is Luke the historian. And so he's saying this is a very specific historical context when this message was first delivered.

It would be like us saying, you know, it was in the time when Donald Trump was president, when Muriel Bowser was our mayor. It was the time when Foley Beach was our archbishop and Steve Breedlove was our bishop.

It's sort of rooting us in a time and place. And if people back then were to have read that, they would have interpreted that. They would say, oh, oh, Tiberius, oh, that was that point in the history of the temple.

[5 : 21] And here's essentially what they would draw from this. They would say, oh, that was a time of political chaos, moral confusion, and religious darkness. That's what, if they read those names, they would say this is a time of political chaos.

This is a time of moral confusion. This is a time of religious darkness. And that third point is very interesting, religious darkness. God finally raises up a man to speak his word, but it's not a man in the temple.

That tells you the state of religion in that day. It's a man who lives in the wilderness. His name is John the Baptist. He's a wild man. You know, wears camel's hair, but not like the nice camel hair that we sometimes wear. Stuff is a lot nastier, a lot less fashionable.

He's eating locusts and wild honey. He's living in the wilderness. A lot of people think he's crazy. If you saw him, you might think he's a homeless person. And he raises up John the Baptist, not the kind of guy who would be invited to Martha Stewart's holiday party.

And yet, this is who God uses to teach the world how to prepare for Christmas, the very first Christmas. And Luke says, if you want to understand John, if you want to understand John's message, you have to go back to the Old Testament and read Isaiah 40.

[6 : 31] And that's what's quoted here. He says this, The voice of one crying in the wilderness. This is John the Baptist. He's the voice. And here's what he says. Prepare the way of the Lord.

Make his paths straight. Every valley shall be filled. Every mountain and hill shall be made low. And the crooked shall become straight. And the rough places shall become level ways.

And all flesh shall see the salvation of our God. This is a magnificent passage. Because the image is of someone coming. A king with such authority that creation itself is bending and folding and warping to accommodate him.

Mountains are being brought low. Valleys are raising up. Rough places are being made smooth. And reality itself conforms around this king.

It's a magnificent image. In the ancient Near East, here's the context of the image. When a king wanted to go out and travel and go on a trip or to survey the land, there were no roads really.

[7 : 36] There were some roads, but not many. And so for that king to go out and to go on the trip, literally people would go out ahead of the king and they would make a road. They would build a road.

The king's highway. You know, wherever that king wanted to go, they would build the highway so that that king could go. So they would do whatever necessary. They would fill in the potholes and they would clear away all the stuff that might impair the progress of the king.

Because the king is coming. It's the king's highway. Anyway, and whenever I read this, I'm reminded of a trip that I went on about 20 years ago. I went with a small medical team, some Christians who went to Nicaragua to work among the mosquito people who live in Nicaragua along the coast.

And I went with this team as just kind of somebody there to help out. And the goal was to get this truck full of medical supplies there and to spend a few days doing medical work there. And so we're going and I was so shocked to realize when we got there and we were driving out there with a truck, I began to hear some of the people talking about the way that these people were preparing for our arrival.

And there were no roads to get into their village. And so what they had to do was to actually come out days before our truck was scheduled to arrive. And they had to literally clear a road. So they had been out for days clearing fallen trees and brush and just clearing a path so that our truck could get through.

[8 : 54] And at one point we came to this really deep ravine with a river running through it. And it had rained earlier and so there was a lot of water in this river. It was a pretty deep ravine. And these people had been out since the previous day literally building a bridge out of logs.

So that our medical truck could get across this ravine and into the village and get those medical supplies to the people who needed them. And it was a shocking image but it's very much like what Isaiah 40, what John the Baptist, this image that they're trying to give us.

There's a need to clear a path. And so the point that I want to make is that this is how the Bible talks about repentance. Which is very interesting to me.

Because I think a lot of us think of repentance and we think of repentance as sort of hanging our heads. And feeling really sorry and feeling really bad and feeling a lot of guilt and feeling a lot of shame.

And repentance is about coming to God and trying to convince them that this time we're truly and really sorry. We really mean it. We really regret the bad things that we did. And we want to pull our life together now.

[9 : 57] And that's not the image that we're given here. According to this image, repentance means building the king's highway. That's what repentance is.

Repentance is building the king's highway. You know, those people in Nicaragua, they knew that those medical supplies would transform their lives. They knew that they were sick.

They knew that they needed that medicine. And they knew that in order to be able to receive that medicine, they had to clear the road. And so the point here is that repentance actually means admitting that we need the life-saving power and grace of Jesus Christ.

That we need that. That without it, we're lost. We have no hope. And once we realize that, we realize that when somebody announces Jesus Christ is coming, Jesus Christ is on his way, that the first thing we have to do is to clear a road.

We have to make sure that there's nothing standing in the way. We have to clear the road to our hearts. And so even the word repentance, metanoia, actually means making a U-turn in life.

[11 : 03] Now a lot of people hear that and they think, you know, I'm doing the bad things and then I make a U-turn and I stop doing the bad things and I start doing the good things. There's a lot more nuanced than that, right? Because this U-turn is essentially turning away from anything that could be an obstacle.

Anything that might block the road. It could be bad things, but as we'll see in a little while, it could be good things. Anything that is standing in the way. And John is saying that the time is here.

Look at your heart. Any obstacle, anything that's going to block your ability to receive Christ, you need to clear that out now. The time is nigh, right? And so this is the nature of repentance.

And so now what I want to do is to look at some of the obstacles that may be in the road that block our ability to receive Christ as he is intending to be received by us. For John's audience, the obstacle was fairly clear.

And if you follow down in the chapter, you'll begin to really see what John's focus is for his audience. Their obstacle, we might say, was the obstacle of entitlement. It was a sense of entitlement.

[12:09] They assumed that because they had been born Jewish, that they were automatically in. You know, surely when Christ comes, he would be honored to stay at my house, right?

And so they assumed that they were insiders with God. And, you know, most of us here aren't Jewish. Some are, but most of us are not. Most of us are not coming from that framework. But, you know, I talk to a lot of people.

And in 10, going on 11 years of ministry at Advent, I've talked to a lot of people and asked the same question to a lot of people. What makes you right with God? How do you know that you're right with God?

How do you know that you have a relationship with God? And I hear all kinds of answers, right?

Well, you know, I always just grew up going to church. I've always gone to church. You know, I grew up in a Christian home.

My parents were strong believers. I grew up with parents who really took faith seriously. So I take faith seriously. Well, you know, my dad was a pastor. And so, you know, I just always grew up. And I've always kind of seen behind the scenes.

[13:06] And, you know, I've always just been part of the church. Well, I don't know. I've always believed in God. I just, I remember always believing in God. I've never not believed in God. Well, you know, I really try to live the way Jesus wants us to live.

I care for the poor. My entire job is trying to end homelessness. You know, I worked for several years in, you know, in Central America trying to kind of do development work there. I really take the teachings of Jesus seriously.

And that's kind of what, you know. And I hear these answers. And they're all great things. They're all things that I would hope would be true of many people. But then I sort of ask again, okay, that's great. So what makes you right with God, you know?

All that's great stuff. But how do you know you're right with God, you know? John's response is a little less nuanced. He says, you brood of vipers. You brood of vipers, right?

Maybe I should be saying that, right? John's not necessarily concerned with growing a church. He's not trying to be, you know, he's not trying to be kind of like, you know, palatable to people. You know, John says, oh, really? Yeah, you're a bunch of snakes.

[14:09] And he's actually saying you're children of vipers. You're children of snakes. Which is a way of saying what in the Bible? You're children of Satan. This is what he's calling them.

Oh, really? You were born Jewish? Oh, really? You've always kept the law? Oh, really? You've always done good things? Oh, really? You've always cared for the poor? Oh, really? You believe that God exists and you've just never known a day when you didn't believe in God? You're a snake, you know?

You're a son of the devil. And that's calculated to shock people. It's calculated to shock them out of their spiritual complacency. Because what he's really saying is this. You have given in to the lie of Satan that has been told since the beginning of time.

Since Genesis chapter 3. What's that lie? You don't really need God. You can't even really fully trust God.

You're going to be better off on your own. You're going to be better off doing this for yourself. In fact, I think you have it in you. You have a lot of potential. I think that you have the ability to be your own savior.

[15:09] Heck, why not even your own God? It's going to be better for you. It's going to be better for God. It's going to be better for the world. This is the satanic lie. And he says if you've given in to that, then you're a child of Satan.

So he's saying don't dare assume that because your family were believers that you're in with God. Don't dare assume that because your parents were believers that you're in with God. Don't dare assume that because you grew up in church or because you do amazing good things for people who are needy or poor or marginalized that you're in with God.

None of that matters. You know, the implication is this. There are many, many, many, many people sitting in churches all around the world right now, including in this very room, who assume that they are Christians.

And they are not. And this is meant to wake us up. That's the entire tone of this passage. The point is clear. Without repentance, there can be no salvation.

Without repentance, there can be no forgiveness for sin. Unless we repent, we have no relationship with God. So, you know, somebody says, well, what about the prayer that we pray?

[16:21] You know, every week we pray that our children would never know a day apart from God. We just prayed it. That is a beautiful prayer. I love that prayer. But we should also pray that our kids repent.

Because if they don't repent, they will spend an eternity apart from God. This is a serious message. Right?

So, this is one of the obstacles that we have to face. This obstacle of presumption. Entitlement.

Right? One of the other obstacles in the road to our hearts, I think, is the obstacle of apathy.

Apathy. You know, there are times in my life when I wonder. And I think, you know, I'm a pastor.

Right? And I think about kind of my calling. And I just think, but you know, in my daily life, there are times when I really struggle to have any real sense of need for Jesus.

You know, shouldn't I have this daily awareness of my need for Jesus? Shouldn't I be modeling that for people? And I just think that I, there are times when I just don't feel it. You know, I feel like life's pretty good. And I don't really need anything.

[17:26] And I wonder, why is that? And then I realize, pretty quickly, most of the time, oh, it's because I've built my entire life to insulate me from need. Right? My entire life is built, custom built, to insulate me from feeling any sense of need at all.

And I think about the society that we live in. Right? I think about the fact that when I get a headache, I can immediately take a Tylenol. You know, I start to get a headache maybe, you know, 10, 15 minutes in. When it's really starting to kind of grow, I'm like, oh, I pop a Tylenol, it's gone. Don't have to worry about it again. You know, when I get hungry, I can go to any restaurant, any store. They're in every direction from where we live. You know, if I need to get somewhere, I can immediately jump in my car or jump on public transportation or jump in an Uber. If I want clean water, I can just turn on my faucet.

Right? Relatively clean water. Right? This is, this is the kind of society that we live in. Right? And I realize how many little decisions I make that I don't even think about. But the decision I'm really choosing is comfort.

Insulation from need. You know, we may go through a day, you know, this time of year, we may go through a day or a week where my biggest concern is that that Amazon package is not going to arrive before Christmas.

[18:33] That's the thing that's like stressing me out, you know. Or I may go through a day where, oh my gosh, I need to go to Costco, they might run out of rib roasts. I'm not even kidding. Right? Right? And for most people, many people in this city, many people around the world, many people throughout history, the biggest concern was just not dying.

You know, before sunrise. Just having clean water to drink. You know, just having enough food. Right? And so the difference between the common normative human experience throughout history and our experience in this society is vast.

And most of you know this. I don't have to tell you this. But what we need to understand is we need to see not just the bad things in our lives, you know, the things we know we need to turn away from, but also the good things.

We need to see those and treat them carefully. You know, I look, you know, I look at my amazing family and I look at the fact that we have transportation. I look at the fact that we have all these things.

We have this great house that we love and we see this house as like a provision of the Lord and yet I'm also terrified of it. I'm terrified of what it might do to my heart if I let it. Right?

[19:40] How it might insulate me. So the greatest obstacles to receiving Jesus, I believe, the greatest obstacles in the king's highway are not necessarily the most important. Not necessarily the bad things. I think they're often the good things.

They're the good works that we do because so many of us in this room are such good people.

They're the good works that convince us we don't need mercy. And they're the good blessings, I think, provisions of the Lord that we use to convince ourselves we don't need the Lord.

And I think that this is very often why God allows us to experience massive failure and suffering. We say, well, how could God let me go through something so hard?

How is God so unloving? How is God so unfair? How could God let this happen? When you need to build a highway through the mountains, what do you do? Well, sometimes you have to use dynamite.

Sometimes you have to use dynamite. And the hard thing that we have to wrestle with is this. Sometimes God loves you so much. Sometimes God adores you so much that he drops a stick of dynamite in your life.

[20 : 42] Because he knows that you're dying. You're withering on the vine. Right? As John says, the axe is laid at the root of the tree. He knows it's urgent.

And he's trying to blast his way in. And he says, oh, you didn't clear a road. You didn't clear the road. But that's not going to stop me. I'm going to blast my way in. And it's going to take dynamite. It's going to take pain. Right? So if you're somebody, like many of us are, if you're somebody who's struggling this holiday season, if you're grieving, if you're lonely, if you're depressed, if you're anxious, you know, this time of year brings up all kinds of things for people.

Don't immediately medicate yourself with booze or shopping or food or Netflix. Don't immediately medicate yourself. Don't immediately assume that God has abandoned you or that God is unfair or that God doesn't love you.

What I would encourage you to do if you're feeling those things is to sit with the pain. Don't avoid it. Don't run from it. Sit with it. Allow yourself to experience it.

[21 : 50] Because chances are, if God is the God that the Bible says he is, it's not because God is angry at you. It's not because God is judging you. It's not because God is punishing you. Chances are, if you're experiencing that, it's because God loves you.

And it's because God is doing everything he can to clear the road for Christ to come all the way in and take up residence. Right?

So repentance is the king's highway. It's the king's highway into our hearts. And repentance means clearing the obstacles, clearing the way, opening the way for Christ to come fully in as savior and king.

And the way we know that we've repented, John says, if you go on down the passage, the way we know that we've repented is that we begin to see fruit in our lives. We, as he says, bear fruit in keeping with repentance.

And after he says that in verse 8, he begins to give them a number of concrete examples of what that fruit looks like. They say, well, what should we do, John? And he says, well, here's some examples. And we don't have time to go through example by example by example, but I'll just tell you this about the examples.

[22 : 52] They fall into three major categories. He says, if you have truly repented, if you've truly cleared the way, you've truly received the presence and the grace and the mercy of Christ, you're truly doing all that you can to allow him to define you and his mercy to remake you, then you're going to see evidence of that in your life.

And so he gives three categories of examples, and they fall into these three categories. Sex, money, and power. Sex, money, and power. And you ask, well, why these?

Why are Christians always talking about sex? Why are Christians always, you know? Are these worse than other sins? No, absolutely not. Aren't there a lot of things the Bible says? Yeah, absolutely, right?

So why these? It's because all of these categories are like barometers. You know, they're barometers. Sex, and money, and power, and specifically our relationship, and the way we think about each of these things.

These specific things, our sexual fidelity, the way we handle power, the way we use our heart, these are primal. These are deeply rooted forces. These come from the very core of our being.

[24 : 04] And so John is essentially saying, if you've truly repented, and this has gone down to the very depths of your heart, then we're going to see the things that emanate from the depths of your heart begin to change. We're going to see the way you think about sex, the way you think about power, the way you handle your money.

These are going to begin to bear fruit in different ways. This is what we saw in the early church. radically different view of sexuality, of money, of power, upside down, the opposite of the surrounding culture.

And so it's worth us asking ourselves, you know, not only do I want you, and I'm explicitly saying this, not only do I want you to think during this time together, have I repented? Because if you haven't, you need to. Have I repented? But you also need to be thinking, if I have repented, and if I am repenting, and if repentance is something that is a part of my life, do I see fruit coming out of that repentance, right?

So you ask yourself, no matter what life stage I'm in, do I pursue sexual fidelity in my life? Because I know that sex is this sacramental, beautiful reflection of the beauty of the gospel.

[25 : 04] Does that matter to me? And do I want to reflect that in my life? So, you know, whether you're married or single, you know, even if you're woefully addicted to pornography, you can repent and repent and repent every single day.

You can repent again and again and again and again. And somebody might say, well, it doesn't mean anything in that point. Yes, it does. Maybe the fruit in your life right now is just the fact that you're fighting it, right?

Maybe the fruit right now is just the fact that you want freedom, and you're striving for that in the Lord. So repent and repent and repent.

Continue to repent, right? When we think about the relationship we have with money, is there fruit in my life when it comes to my money? When I think about giving to the poor, do I discriminate between the deserving poor and the undeserving poor?

Or am I generous not because I think people deserve it, am I generous because I have so experienced the generosity of Christ in the depths of my heart? Right?

[26 : 12] Am I generous with the church community? Right? This is a great time to think about our relationship with money and the relationship with our primary church family, right? And I know, I don't know any specifics, and we have a system set up to keep me from knowing that, but I do know that there are some people in our church who are extravagantly generous.

And they're not necessarily the people that you would expect. You know, it's not the people who have the really high-paying jobs and married with kids and they own their own home who are, you know, it's not always those people.

You know, there are people who are at very different stages of life, right? You wouldn't think maybe would even be giving to a church who are giving extravagantly, generously. And we know probably giving in massively sacrificial ways.

And, you know, with just knowing that and the kind of general sense that I have of that, that encourages me more than you could possibly believe. It's one of the greatest measures of the spiritual health of a church.

I also know that there are roughly 11% of member households, members who actually have committed to giving, who have not given anything in the last year. Now, I don't know who.

[27 : 14] I don't know any specifics. And I'm not trying to kind of create any sorts of undue guilt or shame, but this is a very practical way to think, am I bearing fruit in keeping with repentance? Is my relationship changed with my finances, right?

And then lastly, he talks about power. And this is power is something that we all need to be taking seriously. What is my relationship with power? Most people in this room, relative to most people in the world, have an extraordinary amount of power and privilege.

Extraordinary power in this room. So what are we doing with it? How do we steward it? Are we actively thinking about how we use our power and our privilege to help those who don't have power, who don't have a voice, who don't have the ability to change their circumstances?

Am I actively using my privilege and power to help others who don't have it, right? Do I criticize, you know, those of you who are in charge, who manage, who lead, am I critical of the people under me? Do I demean them? Do I complain about them behind their back? Do I avoid conflict with them? Or do I see my primary role with those that are under my leadership, do I see my primary role is that I exist to serve them?

[28 : 27] You know, do I have a kingdom vision for leadership as servanthood and stewardship? You know, and what does that look like, right? And as you get promoted and as you're in more and more and more responsibility in your jobs, this should be the defining feature of your leadership.

Servanthood and stewardship of those under your care. Right? So these are the kinds of things that John is saying, very practical things. So repentance is not stop doing all the bad things and start giving my money away and start doing all that.

I don't want you to hear that. Repentance is this. I can't do that stuff on my own. That's the fruit. That's not repentance. That's the fruit. I'm not capable of that unless the king resides in me. And so repentance is clearing the king's highway so that the king can come in and begin to change me so that I begin to live like the king. And this is the image that John wants to leave us with. So I'll close by just sort of bringing all this together. This Christmas there are at least two possible ways we can prepare for Christmas. The one way is simply to focus on the house and the entryway and the Christmas tree and the greenery, fake or real.

[29 : 37] And listen, that stuff is fun and it matters and our kids love it and we should be doing that. But let's not spend all of our time and energy only focusing on the cookies and the roast.

Is there time this Advent season, which is what Advent is for, for us to prepare by examining our hearts? Right? Be examining whether or not we have ever repented, whether or not we need to repent again, recognizing that repentance is not just a one-time thing.

It's not, you don't say, well, when I was 12 at summer camp I repented and so that box is checked. Now repentance is something we need to do all the time as believers. Right? It's the posture of the Christian life.

We're always clearing the road for Christ. We're always turning away from sin. We're always turning toward and embracing him. But that doesn't mean we have to do it perfectly. Last little image I'll give you.

The parable of the prodigal son. We can repent. We should repent. We need to repent. But we're never going to get it right. We're always going to have mixed motives. We're never going to turn fully away from all of our sin.

[30 : 41] We're always going to do it in less than ideal ways. But think of the prodigal son. Right? Tells his father, I wish you were dead. Robs him of his money, essentially. Goes off.

Spends it all. Is sitting there and, you know, covered in pig dung. Miserable. Life's not worth living. Filled with regret. But what does he decide to do? He doesn't say, I have, you know, I'm so filled with regret.

And so heartbroken over the ways I wounded my father. I'm going to go back and I'm going to ask my father's forgiveness. His concerns are much more mundane. Much more fleshly. He says, I'm cold.

I have nowhere to live. I have nothing to eat. I'm starving. Maybe if I go back, I can finagle away into my dad's household and get a job there so that I'll have something to eat and a place to sleep.

It's so practical. It's 100% focused on his needs. There's nothing selfless about that. There's nothing altruistic about that. So he's like, maybe I'll convince my dad to give me a job. And he starts going down the road, right?

[31 : 39] And he's going down the road. And what does the parable tell us, right? The father, while his son is still a long way off, just leaves out, goes running down the road, embraces his son. His son doesn't have a chance to say, I'm sorry.

His son doesn't have a chance to say, will you forgive me? His son doesn't have a chance to own his sin in any way. Before his son has uttered a word, the father embraces him. And he puts a robe around his shoulders. He puts a ring on his finger.

He calls for the fatted calf to be slaughtered so they can throw a feast. Why? Because the son came hoping to get a job as a servant, but the father received him as a son, as a child.

Right? And this is the extravagant grace of God. We repent imperfectly for selfish motives because some guy on Sunday told us we needed to. We repent doing the best we can, but knowing we're misguided and imperfect.

And it's all kind of mixed up and muddled. It doesn't ultimately hinge on us getting it right. It hinges on the fact that we worship a God whose eternal nature is to have mercy.

[32 : 37] A God who is waiting to embrace us, to throw a robe around our shoulders, and to proclaim that we belong to him. Let's pray. Let's pray. Let's pray.