

The Way Forward

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[0 : 00] Good evening, everyone. I cannot tell you how glad I am to be here together. I don't know if you noticed, but it's been a tough week.

It's been a long week. Frankly, I can't imagine any place I would rather be than here. I wish we could have done this on Wednesday. If we had a space to meet in, we might have done just this. But by God's grace, we're here, so I'm happy to be here. I think no matter who you voted for, what your relationship was with the candidates, whether you abstained from the whole thing completely, I do think that we can all agree it's safe to say that this has been a traumatizing election for everybody.

I have a friend named Greg Thompson who said that in this election, everybody lost. And I think that most of us would agree on some level with that. But there's a lot of commentary out there on what has happened.

And so our interest tonight is not actually to add more commentary. There's some good, some bad. I'll leave it to you to decide and to read all of that for yourselves as much as you can handle.

[1 : 12] But we just sang earlier together that the light of the Lord and the word of the Lord would lead us. Lead us on by the light of your word. And then we prayed together that we would be able to, by God's grace, read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest God's word.

And so that's actually why we're here. It's to look to the word of God together. I want to say at the outset, I actually think that as hard as this time has been, I see a tremendous opportunity for the church.

Right now in our country, in this particular moment, there is a tremendous open door opportunity for the church. And so it's very important for those of us here who are part of this church, Church of the Advent, but for the church as a whole to really seriously ask together, what does the way forward look like for the church in this country?

What does it mean to be a Christian who has a faithful missionary presence in our culture moving forward? Because I believe that something has changed.

And so this is the question we're going to ask. And so we're going to turn to Scripture. And, you know, we've already been in the book of Daniel. And, of course, this past week, I thought and I prayed and I asked the Lord, so what's going to happen this Sunday?

[2 : 30] And we have this plan and we don't want to be an issue-driven church. We want to stick to the plan that we lay out months in advance in terms of preaching. And we don't want to be sidelined too often by current events.

And as I looked at this plan that we laid out long before we knew how things were going to play out, I really can't imagine a better place to turn in Scripture than the passage that we have planned for tonight, which is Daniel chapter 9.

Daniel is actually an incredibly relevant book. And chapter 9, I think, is incredibly relevant for this particular moment in time. Daniel, for those of you who don't know, is someone who's living in the 6th century B.C.

He's living in exile in a country, Babylon, that is responsible for wiping out his homeland. And he's living there as a stranger and as an alien. I think many Christians in our country maybe have lost sight of the fact that we are still exiles.

Still aliens. Still aliens. That this country is not the promised land. And so Daniel's in exile. In chapter 9, there's also just been a regime change.

[3 : 36] So that's also fairly relevant, right? It used to be the Babylonian administration under Belshazzar and he's no more. And now the Persian administration has taken over under the leadership of Darius.

So it's the first year of a new leader elect. Or rather, leader via conquest and murder. But this new leader is on the throne.

And Daniel, by this point in his life, is older. He's been working under various administrations in a high-level government-appointed position. And as wicked as some of you might think Donald Trump is, as much as we may complain about a man like that, he's nothing compared to some of the leaders under whom Daniel has served.

People who truly murdered and killed tens of thousands of people. And yet Daniel has been able to survive and remain faithful. And so in chapter 9, what we see is Daniel really giving us a vision for what I believe is the way forward for the church in our country.

This is not an exhaustive vision, but what we see in Daniel chapter 9, Daniel shows us two things that I think must be central for the church moving forward. Two characteristics. He is thoughtfully biblical and he is prayerfully repentant.

[4 : 54] In fact, as we'll see in a few moments, he actually goes to his knees and repents on behalf of the entire nation of Israel. I can't think of anything more appropriate.

So one last note before we get started. As I said, our interest is not in offering additional commentary to be taken into consideration. I encourage those of us here tonight who are Christians to understand that we're not here, especially this week, we're not here to hear the opinions of a straight, white, male Christian.

I don't think that's going to lead us anywhere helpful. We are here to put ourselves under the word of God. And to consider whether or not this is the way God is calling us to go. So with that, I'll pray. Father, we thank you for your word. We thank you for the words that we sang together. That it is a light that leads us. And Lord, now we need you to lead us. And so we ask by your mercy that you would. We pray this in the power of your spirit, in the name of your son Jesus.

Amen. So the first thing we see is that Daniel is thoughtfully biblical. And I want to unpack that. In the first couple of verses, the first thing we see Daniel doing is he is reading and he is studying scripture.

[6 : 10] In particular, he's reading the words of the prophet Jeremiah. And he actually refers to this as the word of the Lord. So the idea that scripture is divinely inspired is not something that Christians later invented.

This is something that Daniel understood in the 6th century BC. And he's not only studying it. He's actually carefully and thoughtfully applying it to his life. He's using it to orient himself.

Right? So a pastor I love, John Stott, recently passed away. But he used to say that we need to live life with the Bible in one hand and a copy of the New York Times in the other. And what he meant by that is that we constantly need to be looking at the world around us.

And we need to be looking at scripture. And scripture is what enables us to orient ourselves. And to make sense of events as they are unfolding. And so that's exactly what Daniel is doing.

And actually what you see is that Jesus did the very same thing in his earthly ministry. You can scarcely find a page in the gospels where Jesus is not quoting scripture. If you want to understand this, you have to understand what's in this book.

[7 : 12] If you want to understand this, you have to understand God's word. And then in fact you see the apostles doing the same thing. If you want to understand the early church. If you want to understand where we've come from, where we are and where we're going.

You have to understand God's word. So what we see in these examples is that scripture is our true north. It's the plumb line. It's the map. It's the compass.

Right? Through stories and poetry and liturgy and historical narrative and all the various genres you find in scripture. There is a story that orients us. Where we've come from, where we are and where we're going.

One of the ways I believe that the church has gone off the rails. One of the ways I think that things have gone wrong.

Particularly in this country. Is that we are no longer as the church oriented by scripture. Scripture has assumed a more and more and more peripheral role in the life of most Christians.

[8 : 13] Now I know that some people hear that and they say, well, yeah, obviously that's true of liberals. You know, liberals, they totally disregard scripture. They hate scripture. But what about conservatives?

What about conservative evangelicals? Aren't they the ones who love scripture? What's interesting when you look at the research that's out there. I mean research would say on the one hand, yes, you're right.

Most liberal Christians tend to take liberties in revising scripture. Yeah, that may be true. But they say if you look at the evangelical conservatives, they may revere scripture.

But they sure as heck don't read it. And in fact, the research is a study that came out from Gallup last year. That concluded that the majority of evangelical Christians in our country are biblically illiterate.

Biblically illiterate. So the problem is, without scripture to orient us. If we are, in fact, and I know that many of us don't claim the word evangelical. But for research purposes, that's the most relevant sort of demographic category, right?

[9 : 18] But take that label with a grain of salt. I'm not necessarily assuming anything about how you label yourself. But if this is true, the problem is that without scripture to orient us, our faith inevitably begins to veer off.

It inevitably begins to veer either to the right or to the left. It becomes more and more and more distorted. It's like trying to navigate a ship without any stars, without any map, without any compass. What's going to happen? The currents eventually are going to pull you off course. And before you know it, you'll be sailing along, not in the direction you were meant to go, but in the direction that the currents are pulling you.

Right? So biblical illiteracy affects people on the conservative and the liberal sides of this issue. In other words, it affects everybody. Right? So on the one hand, biblical illiteracy is one of the main reasons that a huge number of people in our country who call themselves Christians actually subscribe to something when you look at their beliefs called moralistic therapeutic deism.

Moralistic, believing that life is really about just being a good person, living out the golden rule, being nice to other people. Therapeutic, God's main job is to make sure I'm happy, have what I need, feel good about myself.

[10 : 42] Deism, other than that, God's really not particularly involved in my personal life. He kind of minds his own business, and I mind my own business. So moralistic therapeutic deism. And so you need to think about that if there are a lot of people out there who think that Christianity is about that.

You know, what's Christianity about? Well, being a good person, everybody goes to heaven. God just wants to make sure I have what I need and that I'm happy and that I'm not lonely. And other than that, sort of, you know, the rest is kind of in the details.

Right? Then issues like the uniqueness of Jesus Christ. Issues like is truth relative? You know, do all roads lead to the same place?

Right? Issues like gay marriage, which are very controversial. If that's your worldview, moralistic therapeutic deism, those things are not controversial. Right? They make perfect sense if that's what Christianity is about.

They make perfect sense. But on the other end, and this is a point I really want to make, we also see biblical illiteracy playing out among more conservative types. Right?

[11 : 47] Biblical illiteracy also results in conservatives veering off into intense nationalism. Right? Justifying xenophobia on lots of different levels.

Right? Coming to the place where your religion and your politics begin to merge and become confused and ultimately fuse into one. Politics and religion become the same thing.

Right? So 82% of Americans, according to one survey, 82% of Americans believe that there is a verse in the Bible that says God helps those who help themselves.

82%. Right? So if you think that that's what Christianity is all about, and that's what the Bible teaches, it's easy to see how many Christians would reject the idea of privilege.

Or reject the idea that they may be as white, that we as white Christians may have more privilege than people of other races and ethnicities. Right? Because God helps those who help themselves.

[12 : 51] You just need to work harder. That's what the Bible teaches. Right? A good number of people in our country, Christians, still believe that America was founded and continues to be a Christian nation.

Right? The Bible never teaches anything remotely like that. As it applies to the United States. And yet a majority of people think that. Well see, if you think that that's what Christianity is all about, it's

easy to justify keeping all the Muslims out.

Because this is a Christian nation. You can begin to see how this becomes a self-justifying cycle. Right? So the less we orient our faith by Scripture, the more distorted and misguided our faith will become.

It begins to veer off course until it's no longer recognizable as Christianity. And so as we look ahead, as we ask, what does it look like for the church to move forward in this culture?

We have to commit ourselves to being thoughtfully biblical. And I want to unpack what I mean by thoughtfully biblical. What that means is that we're not just reading the Bible.

[13:56] We're not just memorizing it. We're not just proof texting. But we're putting in the time and the energy and the hard work to actually understand what it's saying and how to apply it. Right?

So a few years back, you may be familiar with Nicholas Kristof, columnist in the New York Times. And I'm not sure where he is spiritually. He's not a Christian. But I wonder sometimes if he's kind of on a spiritual journey.

But he occasionally writes pieces about Christians. And they're not negative. They're actually and sometimes really defending even conservative Christians. And he wrote a piece a few years ago where he's trying to make sense of the fact that he says, You know, I have all of these conservative, theologically conservative Christians.

And yet I have some of these conservative Christians who really do seem homophobic. They really do seem motivated by hate. They get behind policies that I can't even begin to fathom. How do I make sense of that?

Because when I look over here, he says, At the same time, everywhere I go in all of my reporting to the ends of the earth, You know, whether it's reporting on malaria or violence against women and female genital mutilation Or ending human sex trafficking or any of these issues, He says, everywhere I go, sometimes the only people who are there are conservative Christians.

[15:11] Theologically conservative evangelicals. And he says, how do I make sense? What's the difference? And he begins to wonder if it doesn't have to do with thoughtful engagement of scripture.

And he actually makes this point that I never realized before. So I'll quote him. He says, Centuries ago, serious religious study was extraordinarily demanding and rigorous.

In contrast, anyone could declare himself a scientist. And they could go into business of, say, alchemy. And then he says, these days it's the reverse.

A PhD in chemistry is a rigorous degree. While a preacher can explain the Bible on television without mastering Hebrew or Greek Or even showing interest in the nuances of the original text.

So he's saying there's a difference. Right? So the implication of what he's saying is this. That thoughtful engagement with scripture produces thoughtfully engaged Christians.

[16:10] Thoughtfully engaged Christians. So the more thoughtfully biblical we are, The less we will fit into any of the labels that are out there.

Right? We're not going to simply be conservative. We're not simply going to be liberal. We're not simply going to be progressive or traditionalist. We're not going to fit into any category. Because if you, you can proof text and cherry pick a verse here or there to support a conservative position. Or a liberal position. But if you begin to take the whole of scripture into account. What you will find is that it does not fit. It resembles some things about liberals.

And some things about conservatives. And sometimes progressive. And sometimes it's more traditional. It resembles these things. And yet it transcends all of them. It's bigger than any label.

And you say, well how do you know that?

And I would say because that's exactly what we see in Jesus Christ. Try to look at his entire earthly ministry. And try to label it. Try to fit it into a box.

[17:11] I guarantee you, you won't be able to do it. It's too big. You can't label it. And this is the reality of what it means to be thoughtfully biblical.

Right? Because the truth is, is that culture is constantly shifting. But if God's word does remain the same, then the world will be moving around us. I don't know if anybody knows this about Australia.

But recently there, it was in the news that the whole Australian GPS system needs to be updated. So the last time it was updated is in like the mid-90s.

And since then, because of plate tectonics, the entire continent has shifted five feet. Now you think that's not a big deal. But the next time you're in an Australian driverless car, that will be a huge deal.

Five feet makes a big difference. And so they have to update everything. Now what happened? Well, they laid out their GPS coordinates as a land-based system.

[18:13] Right? Fixed points on the land. Instead of using the satellite coordinates that are universal. Right? The satellite coordinates are fixed coordinates. They don't change. They're universal and they apply to everywhere.

But the fixed land coordinates don't. So you see the analogy here. Right? If you hold on to a fixed coordinate. Not in reference to what's right around you.

But in reference to this universal authoritative set of coordinates. If you hold on to that coordinate. Literally over time the land is going to shift under your feet. Right?

And one time stuff's going to be to the left of you. But then if enough time passes it's going to shift so much that that stuff is on the right of you. Literally the ground shifts under your feet.

And this is what you see in Christianity as culture shifts under our feet. You may not be able to imagine it. But there was a time when the Christian view of sexuality was incredibly progressive and liberating.

[19:13] When the Christian approach to women and the role of women was incredibly liberal. Nobody had ever said or done anything like that. When the Christian approach to slaves and eunuchs and children who had been left on hillsides to die as infants.

Right? Orphans. Right? The Christian approach to all of these things was incredibly liberal. Incredibly progressive. And now many of these same things. What? The ground has shifted. And now they look conservative.

And now they look traditional. It will not stay that way. Because the ground is always moving. If you're holding on to a fixed point. Right? So our country needs a church that is thoughtfully biblical. And rooted in something deeper than the last two or three hundred years. Something that will not move. Something that will hold firm as everything else shifts and gives way.

So this is the first thing. That's what it means to be thoughtfully biblical. And just to give you some practical, you know, what does this actually look like? It means recognizing that scripture is the authoritative word of God.

[20:14] That's what Daniel does. Jesus does. The apostles do. It means relying on the great tradition of our faith to help us interpret scripture. Right?

It means treating the Bible as a whole rather than cherry picking verses. Or proof texting our arguments. Right? It means studying the Bible in the original languages.

Or if you're not able to do that, relying on people who do. Commentators, pastors, teachers. Rely on those people. It means taking things like genre, original audience, context into account.

And then lastly, it means interpreting all scripture through the lens of Jesus Christ. Recognizing that it's all about him, as it says in Luke chapter 24. So this is what it means to be thoughtfully biblical. That's the first thing we see. The next thing we see is, I think, utterly breathtaking. As a result of what Daniel sees in scripture.

[21:10] And as a result of what he sees when he looks at his fellow Israelites. He knows the first thing he has to do. Is to go to his knees.

And to repent. But as I said a little while ago. He doesn't just do it for himself. He repents on behalf of the entire nation. Now that's hard for us to understand.

I want to give you a little context. In the previous chapter, Daniel has a vision that shows him that in fact things are not going to get better. They're actually going to get a lot worse. For a long time. Generations of suffering before they get better. And so we can assume that the whole reason he's even reading the Bible in chapter 9. Is to try to make sense of that. And to know how to be ready for it.

And Daniel knows that the only way to be fully open. The only way to be fully prepared for whatever God has in store for us. Is to make sure that there is no sin coming between us and God.

[22:08] That that hurts our relationship with God. So you have to deal with it. Get rid of it. Prepare your heart. And so that's what he's doing. That's what repentance is all about. And that word repentance, it's kind of a Bible word.

It simply means admitting our sin. Turning away from that sin. And really throwing ourselves on the mercy of God. And that's what Daniel says in verse 18.

He says, For we do not present our pleas before you because of our righteousness. But because of your great mercy. He's throwing himself and the nation upon the mercy of God.

And in verse 7 through 16 you see he's confessing and repenting on behalf of everybody. The northern and the southern kingdom. Both, right? Those who are near, those who are far. Government leaders and commoners. People who are alive and their ancestors, their predecessors, their forefathers. He's repenting on behalf of all of them. Now I know, I mean you may hear this and think, what in the world?

[23 : 10] You know, he didn't do any of that stuff. And you think about doing, you know, if we did that. Well I didn't do what? My grandparents, my great grandparents, I'm nothing like them. And I'm nothing like these people and I'm nothing like these people.

And I live my own life. And why would you make me responsible for everybody's stuff? I think to our sort of western individualistic ears, this really does not make sense.

Why would anyone confess and repent on behalf of other people? And the answer is this. Because this is what it means to bear one another's burdens.

Bearing one another's burdens is not just about helping, encouraging, helping somebody move out of their apartment. Bearing one another's burdens means sharing in the burden of sin.

Sharing in the burden of a broken relationship with God. Right? So Pastor Brian Chappell tells a story where he's in Senegal, West Africa.

[24 : 09] He's teaching a class. He gets done with the class, says, alright, thanks everybody. And he leaves and he goes off and I don't know, goes, eats lunch, does some sightseeing, whatever.

Comes back several hours later and every single student is still in the classroom. And they're all busily talking to one another. And he's like, what's going on? And he asks one of the other leaders, what's happening?

And the leader says, well, you don't understand our culture. He says, what is it? He says, well, when you were teaching, some people in the class understood you and other people didn't understand you. And so what's happening now is all of those people who understood are explaining it to the people who didn't understand.

And no one will leave until they all understand. No one will leave until they all understand. This is spiritual unity.

This is spiritual unity. There's a saying that comes out of, I think, South Africa. I am because we are. We're only as strong as our weakest member.

[25 : 14] We are all in this together. We cannot flourish unless all of us are flourishing. We are bound as one. Spiritual unity. Right?

So in the wake, I think, of such a polarizing election. In the wake of such a polarizing election. There is a strong temptation among believers, among Christians, to divide against one another.

Mark Galley wrote a great piece about this in Christianity Today. He says, Christians who voted for Clinton say, you care more about the balance of the Supreme Court than black men getting shot by police.

And those who voted for Trump say, the left gets more upset about careless rhetoric than the thousands of babies murdered every day. And then we walk away. And then we walk away satisfied that we are not like those other Christians.

It's pretty insightful. So what if instead of trying to convince everyone out there that we are not those kinds of Christians.

[26 : 17] That we're not that kind of Christian. That I don't even understand them. I have nothing to do with them. And what about, what if instead of doing that, we actually share one another's burdens, join together, and repent as one?

In other words, we own, we own that we are part of this whole. And it includes everybody. Everybody.

What if instead of taking to social media, it's very tempting to take to social media and to signal our virtue? You familiar with this concept?

It's been greatly overused in the last year since it was coined. And I think there's a fight over who coined it. But this idea of virtue signaling. In other words, subtle ways of letting people know how virtuous we are according with certain popular values in culture, right?

So normally it's expressed in the form of hating or disliking something, you know? I hate it when Christians don't care about the environment, you know? What are you really saying? I do care about the environment.

[27 : 21] And I care a lot more than all these other people. You know, I hate it when white people reject privilege. Reject the whole idea of privilege, right? What are you saying? Well, I, unlike other white people, I understand race way more, you know?

I care about refugees way more than other people do. I really get it. None of these other people do. That's virtue signaling. And it's so tempting to do that because we want our friends and family and everybody to know that we're not like those people.

But what if instead of doing that, what if we made it about signaling Jesus' virtues? We can only do that if we are one. We can only do that if we are unified, spiritually.

Right? This country is deeply divided. It's deeply divided. It's being torn apart. And the church has a huge opportunity to lead the way to forgiveness, to lead the way to reconciliation, to lead the way to healing.

We are better equipped than anybody out there. You want an institution that can bring about radical healing and reconciliation? There is nothing better than the church. No one comes close to the resources, the vast spiritual strength that we have to step into the gap.

[28 : 32] But we cannot do that if we are divided. So I think that we as a church need to recover our spiritual unity. Which starts by us being willing to repent as one.

Owning, sharing the burdens of our brothers and sisters on both sides of the aisle. On behalf of the whole church. And by the way, the Bible actually does talk also about good works in keeping with repentance.

So it's not just about saying we're sorry. But it's about committing ourselves to a path of action. A path of action. A repentant way forward.

Right? So what does that mean? I'm going to offer four brief suggestions of what this might look like. There are many, many, many more. If you think of things that I'm not saying, absolutely.

Absolutely.

Absolutely. I encourage you to reflect on the things that I'm not able to say. But I'll give you four examples to get us started. I think in light of the first point, we collectively as a church, as the church, need to repent of all the ways that scripture has been neglected, revised, or altogether disregarded.

[29 : 41] As Daniel says in verse 11, here's the core sin of Israel. Here's the core of it. All Israel has transgressed your law and turned aside, refusing to obey your voice. And we need to recommit ourselves to thoughtfully centering our lives under God's word and all that we do.

We need to repent of that. Number two, there are many, many vulnerable people in our community. Vulnerable people right here. Vulnerable people in this room.

People who, for the fact that they are racial minorities, religious minorities, LGBT people, refugees, immigrants. People who now are filled with fear.

Not so much or necessarily because of Trump himself, but because the kind of abusive behavior and rhetoric that we've seen from him from time to time.

People fear that now that he is president, that will then give license to some of his supporters who will then act out abusively toward people around them.

[30 : 43] And so there is a deep fear and a real fear of what might happen on a street corner. And there are people that feel that kind of vulnerability.

And we need to repent of all the ways the church has failed to protect the vulnerable. We need to repent of all the ways that the church has been complicit in allowing there to be a culture where anybody is vulnerable.

And we need to make sure that we here at Advent are a community where no one feels that fear. That we can be a place where people feel safe and protected and advocated for.

So ministries like Advent has a ministry to refugees. And we heard this week from Travis and Tiara who lead that ministry. Everybody, everybody in their ministry, all of this refugee community, everybody is wringing their hands in fear wondering what does this mean for them.

Right? They need our help. You know that the main word for hospitality in scripture in the New Testament, the main word is phylophenia.

[31 : 44] Now if xenophobia means fear of strangers, then what does phylophenia mean? Love, love of strangers. And who is a stranger?

It's anyone who doesn't have a place to belong in our society. Anyone who does not have a place to belong. Anyone who for whatever reason doesn't belong. They're vulnerable.

And we are commanded to show hospitality. We need to be a refuge for all such people. That's number two. Number three, our country remains divided by racial tension. We need to repent of all the ways that the church has been complicit in the racial tension.

We need to repent of all the ways that we have failed to build a reconciled community. Both corporately as a church and even as we look at our own numbers in Church of the Advent. Right? I mean, and this may be deep work for some of us, right? Because you may say, well, I'm, you know, I'm, I know I'm white, but I really care about, you know, racial equality. And I'm, there's nothing in me that's racist. And that may be true, right?

[32 : 47] But it also may be true that your privilege and your education is partly due to the fact that generations ago your family made a lot of money off the slave trade. Now that wasn't you. But maybe we need to repent on behalf of our families.

Maybe we need to have a kind of spiritual unity. And repent for those who did not. Right? The last thing that I want to say is this, and this may be the hardest for all of us.

Protests are happening all around the country by people who are rejecting and protesting President-elect Donald Trump.

And here's where it gets tough, because Scripture commands that we pray for our leaders. That we pray for our president. That we pray for the administration. And we don't do that because they necessarily deserve anything from us.

We do it because it's an act of trust in a sovereign God. A God who again and again and again and again in Scripture is able to use all things toward his good.

[33 : 51] We don't know how, we rarely do. But we're called to pray for that. To pray for him. So we need to repent of our penchant for faithless division. And we need to commit ourselves to prayer for this administration.

We need to pray for Donald Trump. We need to pray for his family. There are many, many more ways that we need to repent. And I encourage you to ask God what he might put on your heart.

This may sound like a lot. It may sound kind of overwhelming. But listen, this community is already doing a lot. And we're doing it very well. I've seen great strides in all of these areas.

But it's not your job tonight to solve all of these issues. That's not what I'm saying. That's not the job. Small steps. I actually think many of us have a great opportunity coming up in just a little while. It's called Thanksgiving. I don't know if your family is like my family. But oh my goodness. When I go home around that table. Around that table we're going to have agnostics.

[34 : 53] Atheists. Christians. Maybe even a little new age action. We're going to have. We have gay. We have straight. We have Trump supporters. We have Clinton supporters.

We have everything you can imagine. And they're all going to be there. And you don't know my family. But somebody may break a beer bottle. It could get ugly. Right? There's already a big email chain going around.

People saying please. Please let there be peace at Thanksgiving. Please. Right? So some of us are walking into these situations. We have a choice. What role will we play in that? How do we ensure that we go as ministers of reconciliation?

What does that look like? Right? So as this opportunity comes. We need to ask why does all of this matter? Why are we talking about this now? And here's kind of a core that I'll put out there as we move toward closing this.

This is just me. But I believe that contempt. And by contempt I mean the devaluing of another person's worth. In this case based on what they believe.

[35 : 57] I believe that contempt is at an all time high. And that it has arrived at toxic levels in our culture. Toxic levels. I think that both sides have learned how to weaponize shame.

And to use it. To coerce agreement. Both sides are doing this. And I think that all of this is threatening to rip our country to shreds. And the only antidote.

The only antidote for shame and contempt. Is confession and repentance. That is the only antidote. Do you want to be an agent of reconciliation and healing?

The first thing you have to do. Is to go to your knees. And confess all of the ways that you have been part of the problem. Only then can you begin to be a part of the solution. Try to honestly confess your sin to God.

And then get up and shame another person. Try to honestly confess your sin to God. And then to go to social media. And signal your virtue. It'll be hard.

[36 : 58] It'll be hard. Because confession and repentance humble us. And this brings us to the most beautiful thing about Daniel chapter 9. That in response to Daniel's prayer.

God sends Gabriel to answer his cries. And do you know what Gabriel says? It was right there at the end when Diana read it. He says this. Oh Daniel. I have now come out to give you insight and understanding.

At the beginning of your pleas for mercy. A word went out. And I have come to tell it to you. For you are greatly loved. Do you understand what this is pointing us toward?

It's just a preview of God's ultimate response to all of our repentance. Because the gospel tells us that at the very beginning of our pleas for mercy.

A word went out. The word went out. Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ. And just as Gabriel said to Daniel. For you are greatly loved.

[37 : 58] When Jesus came into the world. This was God saying to the whole world. For you are greatly loved. Jesus is God's pledge of love to this world. Jesus is God's promise of love.

That this world will one day be healed. And restored. The heavens and the earth joined together. All become one. All things drawn together. Under Jesus Christ. Ephesians 1.10.

Our country needs the church to be the church. So let's join with Daniel.

Let us repent as one. And let us get about the hard work. Of forgiveness. Reconciliation. And healing. For the good of our city.

For the good of this world. And ultimately for the glory of God. In the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.