

The Long Story of the Coming of Jesus

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! And to consider some of this Advent season together for us as a church, you know, each Thanksgiving, sports journalist Jason Gay puts out his annual Thanksgiving Touch Football Rules. It's one of the columns I look forward to every year as he releases it right before Thanksgiving, kind of how to prepare for the Touch Football game that's going to resume after the turkey meal. This year, since the CDC canceled Thanksgiving and Touch Football games, he wrote a different column that I thought was just pretty great. It said, rules for a Zoom Thanksgiving, how to handle family at a virtual holiday.

And I have to read a couple of excerpts because it's just too good to share. He said, my family will put off its annual Touch Football game. The world will be deprived of my blistering 45-second, 40-yard dash.

[1 : 30] And we'll eat turkey with my mother via Zoom. Hopefully next year it's back to normal. And we'll return to intercepting cousins, sacking uncles, taunting family newcomers, and treating our injuries with a bag of frozen peas.

In the meantime, here are a few weird 2020 rules for Thanksgiving. He says, so what now? It sounds like the 2020 move is a small Thanksgiving dinner with the people you live with and then a bigger virtual gathering on Zoom or another group chat platform.

We're in fact doing that with our family today. While Zoom is a pale substitute for a real family get-together, I say don't worry. The same people who made you cry every year in real life are perfectly capable of doing so over Zoom.

Another one is, if you attempt a virtual family get-together, mom must be given control of the mute button. Whomever mom wants to mute, mom can mute.

[2 : 36] Mom may love this option too much. It's possible all family gatherings will be now virtual. If you've called off the touch football game, I suggest a portion of the family Zoom call in which all former participants are allowed to talk trash about past contests.

Scores must be recounted from previous years. Unwarranted acts of aggression must be re-litigated. He continues, if you run into any technical difficulties, ask a third grader.

They've been on Zoom since March. Just don't ask Dabo Sweeney over at the last minute and then cancel the game. He does not like that.

Just ask Florida State. He continues later. He says, honestly, this Thanksgiving is probably best to avoid family discussions about thorny subjects like masks or lockdowns.

Stick to a safer subject like the election. Okay, he concludes, that's it. I told you this was going to get weird. I'm confident that next year when we do this, it will be all systems go.

[3 : 40] Big game. No hesitation. No rules. In 2020, grandma will be out of quarantine and she's out for revenge. You know, family gatherings are hard is kind of what he's getting at.

And a little guidance on how to handle them is much appreciated. But now that Thanksgiving is behind, we need guidance for how to handle Christmas. And you're thinking, surely he's insane.

Guidance for Christmas. Christmas is the most wonderful time of the year. Right? But if we're honest, it's hard to not get overtaken by the crazy of Christmas, by the overcrowding of our schedule, the overfilling of our tummies, and the going over the top to make everyone happy.

So, yes, I believe we need a little guidance for how to handle Christmas. Over the years, the church has celebrated that in the season of Advent to help us handle it. Advent is exactly what Lauren said.

It just means coming or arrival. And so Advent is a season in which the church anticipates and celebrates the coming of Jesus at Christmas. You know, it's a season to help us avoid the crazy of Christmas.

[4 : 51] But more than that, it invites us into something bigger than trees and tinsel. Something grander than gifts and gathering. Something better than what our Christmas offers us at Christmas.

It takes us back into the story of the Bible. Advent traces out the hopes and fears of all the people who have looked and longed and waited for the King to come.

It takes root in us, or it can, and situate us in this world that is not our home. Where we sing and eat and celebrate, but where we wait and long for the feast that will never end.

Advent is meant to change the way we live the rest of our life. To situate us in this world in which we're in between His first coming and His return.

So this year, for Advent, we're going to take a step back. So we did end the Proverbs series. One person complained to me. So I hope the rest of you liked it.

[5 : 54] But we're going to conclude that. We're going to look back in the Old Testament and trace out some patterns and promises about the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. But this morning, I'm going to attempt to take up the whole Old Testament in one pass.

My prayer is that the whole Old Testament would come to life. That it would not be just kind of these interesting little stories, but one grand story calling us to look to Jesus.

In so many ways, the Old Testament doesn't just set the stage for Jesus Christ. It calls us to hope in Him completely. So where we're going, in a word, the story of the Old Testament beckons us to a God.

God wrought, indestructible hope in Jesus. The story of the Old Testament beckons us, calls us to a God wrought, indestructible hope in Jesus. The story unfolds something that is God wrought.

The idea is something beaten and shaped by God. This story unfolds in so many ways over thousands of years. And yet it unfolds according to the ordering of God Himself.

[7 : 02] And it's indestructible in the sense that it crushes every obstacle and every sin in the way. And so we're going to break this out.

Five points. First one is God created everything. Therefore, the most important words in the Bible. God, what it's saying in the beginning, God, it's just saying God simply is.

Before anything that was made, God was and God is. But Genesis 1 continues and tells the story of creation. Look down there in verse 1. Even though God had no beginning, everything that was made did.

Everything that was created did. In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. God created everything with a word. It's a popular thing to say nowadays that I'm a creative.

And while some folks are definitely more right-brained than others and have an eye for things that others do not, there's a massive difference between creativity in a human sense and what God does here.

[8 : 03] All that we see, all that we create is derived from something we've seen or known before. But God creates everything without reference to anything. The theologians would say he creates ex nihilo, which just means create out of nothing.

Before there was nothing but God, but then he makes giraffes and brown trout, horseshoe nebulae and black holes, daylilies and fiddle-leaf figs. He creates all this wonderfully.

And in six days, he creates everything we see, and he calls it good. I mean, in so many ways, Genesis 1 is just a daxology. It's just a praise of all that God has made.

It's just rejoicing over all that God has made and pointing to how all of it is meant to be a theater of his glory. John Calvin puts this so well.

This is the only big quote I'm going to have for you this morning, but it's so important. He says in his institutes, he says, God daily discloses himself and the whole workmanship of the universe.

[9 : 06] As a consequence, men cannot open their eyes without being compelled to see him. Indeed, his essence, that means who he is fully, is incomprehensible.

Hence, his divineness far escapes all human perception. But, so we can't understand him, we can't know him, but upon his individual works, he has engraved unmistakable marks of his glory.

Wherever you cast your eyes, he addresses us now, there is no spot in the universe wherein you cannot discern at least some sparks of his glory. The universe is for us a sort of mirror in which we can contemplate God.

Who is otherwise invisible. There's so much there. But you get the idea.

Creation is God bursting into communication. He's communicating about who he is. Now, many religions have creation stories. But this quote helps us understand what's so important about Genesis 1.

[10:23] The first is that God does not need what is made. All other gods are made of human hands. But God makes everything with his hands. All that is made...

Now, obviously, we're using anthropomorphic language. He doesn't make things with his hands. He created them with his words. But all that is made is formed and founded and established by him. It's his workmanship.

What the Psalms say again and again. You know, and humankind can accomplish some incredible things. I was reading earlier this week about a marathon runner who averages 250 miles a week. That's nine marathons a week. That's incredible. But inevitably... I mean, the great feats that man can accomplish, man yet, is not the measure of all things.

Because man runs out of strength and gets weak. Man needs breath and food and sleep and water. And is weak and dependent on something outside of himself.

[11:21] But God... What that's trying to say in these opening verses, God is completely separate from everything he's made. And not dependent upon it. He does not need it.

He doesn't need food or water or sleep. He doesn't need anything he's made. He doesn't even need us to make him happy or content or accomplish his mission. No one said it's not good for God to be alone. Let us make some porcupines and poplar trees and politicians to keep him company. He doesn't need anything he's made. And yet, all that is made needs God. That's what's brimming through Genesis 1. Creation is a theater of his glory, is what Calvin famously said.

It's filled with unmistakable marks of his glory. There's no spot wherein you cannot discern some sparks of his glory. Why? It's because creation was designed for us to see and discern and contemplate the invisible God.

God is invisible, but creation puts his invisible attributes on display. Creation is, therefore, an act of revelation. It's general revelation, is what theologians would say.

[12:29] It's God trying to get a message across about his great power, his endless beauty, his greatness. In so many ways, the weight of the glory of creation is found in his excessive greatness.

A few thousand stars are not enough. Astronomers keep discovering just endless stars and galaxies beyond our eyes. A few hundred species of beetles are not enough.

There's 350 million species of beetles. Why? Because God is great. A few different cuisines are not enough. I'm so thankful to experience all sorts of different cuisine.

Why? To display God's endless love of creativity and variety. The whole earth is filled with seemingly endless displays of his glory, and all of it is underlying our utter dependence upon him. God who made the world and everything in it does not live in a temple made by man, nor is he served by human hands as though he needed anything. Rather, he gives all humankind life and breath and everything.

[13:34] So the rest of the Bible begins here, and it builds on who we are before this great God. The great God, this great God, is our creator and rightly our ruler.

He is the potter, we're the clay. He is the creator, we're the creature. The rest of the Bible upholds this principle. We are creatures made in his image and accountable to him.

He is the one for whom we are to live, and he is the one to whom we will give an account. Creation leaves no ambiguity. The story continues, though.

Point two, God does not wipe out the rebels. Go ahead and turn with me to Genesis 3. God does not wipe out the rebels. Now, we all know this story, right? Adam and Eve are in the garden enjoying all that God had created for them.

God says, there's only one thing you must not do. You must not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. And then this crafty serpent comes into the garden.

[14:35] At the end of verse 1 of chapter 3, he says, Did God actually say you shall not eat of any tree in the garden? Now, if you remember, like I just told you, God said you cannot eat of one tree.

But the serpent says you may not eat of any tree. So he's already subtly questioning God's goodness. Does God really want what's best for you? That's the serpent's temptation.

Are you sure God's not withholding something better? Are you sure God's not trying to keep you in your place? And so many of Satan's tactics usually boil it down to that question.

Is God really good? Well, Eve responds to the serpent. If you look down there in verse 2, the woman said, The serpent, we may not eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, you shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.

So she says we may eat of these things, but that one tree we cannot even touch. So you notice that she too has begun to exaggerate.

[15 : 46] That's not what was true. Eve is beginning to doubt God's goodness. That's what's going on in this passage. And at this point, already at this point, we should be outraged.

Because Eve should have responded at that moment. Are you out of your mind, serpent? Take a look around. This is Eden. This is paradise. God has made everything. He made me.

He loves me. I love him. He's given me all things to enjoy. Plants and food and sun and stars. More than that, he's given me a husband. I love him and he loves me.

How can I question his goodness? Are you out of your mind? The serpent comes back at him. The serpent comes back at him.

Look in verse 4 at her. But the serpent said, The woman, you shall not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it, of this tree, your eyes will be open and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

[16 : 44] And this is where things get really ugly. You're not really going to die. You're going to be like God. This is the real temptation.

It's not merely that the serpent is trying to get Eve to break a rule. The serpent is trying to tempt Eve to reject God's rule altogether.

What he's saying is if you eat, you'll be like God. You'll know good and evil. You won't need God to tell you what you can and can't do. You won't need him guiding you around.

You can decide for yourself what's best for you. Who needs God? Now, D.A. Carson says, We should not think that the serpent's temptation is nothing more than an invitation to break a rule or missing a mark.

That is what a lot of people think sin is, just breaking a rule. What's at stake here is something deeper, bigger, sadder, uglier, and more heinous.

[17 : 50] It's a revolution. It makes me God and thus de-God's God. You see the heart of that temptation there.

It's not merely knowing something. It's not God keeping me from knowing more about him or something like that. It's God keeping you from rejecting him altogether. And when she saw that the tree was good for food, she took it and ate it.

And she gave it to her husband and ate it. And sin enters the world immediately. The effects are just immediate and drastic. Immediate shame and fear. Open eyes are not what she thought, were they?

She was naked. She was ashamed. They were naked. They were ashamed. They were filled with guilt and shame. Suddenly, they were afraid of God. Yeah, interesting.

Fear of God never enters until this moment. Suddenly, they're afraid. Their relationship with one another is cursed. Husband will rule over her. And the wife will bite back at him.

[18 : 53] We'll try to usurp him. Their relationship with the world is troubled. The ground will bite back. Childbirth is painful. Can you imagine what it would be before? Disunity and division drive out peace.

The whole world is groaning is what Romans 8 says. Their relationship with God is broken. They're kicked out of the garden. They lose fellowship with God. Instead of fellowship with God, instead their hearts are continually turning from him.

And so, sin and death spreads to all men. You flip to Genesis 5. It kind of underlines this point. Sin and death spreads to all men. And we meet the first genealogy here in chapter 5.

And if you notice, the main thing you're supposed to take away from this genealogy this early in the Bible is that they all died. If you notice that genealogy, what sets it apart from the other genealogies in the Old Testament is, And they died.

And he died. And he died. And he died. Every death since that death of Adam and Eve in their sin cries out again that this is not a children's story or a nursery rhyme.

[19 : 59] All week like sheep have gone astray and the wages of sin is down. And that's what Genesis 5 is saying, tracing through the heart of every human being that has ever lived except one,

Is this inherited guilt and indwelling idolatry.

Our deepest problem is not merely that we sin. Our deepest problem is that we stand downstream from Adam.

For in one man, Romans 5 and 1 Corinthians 15, all die. But most shocking about this third chapter of the Bible, More shocking than the sin that Adam and Eve committed is the mercy God showed them.

He didn't wipe them out. He didn't flush this universe down the tubes. He sought them. Look back in chapter 3, verse 8.

And when they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the cool of the garden of the day, And the man and the wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees. But the Lord God called to them and said, Where are you?

[21 : 16] I love that. God knows what's going on. It's not as if they've kind of fooled him and they're really hiding from him and really hidden from his sight such that he doesn't realize what's going on. But no, he's seeking them.

Where are you? And then in these curses that are so drastic, he promises to send a rescuer. Look in verse 15. He says, I'll put enmity between you and the woman, talking to the serpent, and between your offspring and her offspring.

He shall bruise your head and you shall bruise his heel. God says there'll be a war between Satan and men, but one day another would come and crush the head of Satan.

That's why I love that scene in the Passion when Jesus is in the garden of Gethsemane and he slams his foot down on the head of a snake. To say the serpent crusher is here.

Only a salvation wrought by God alone could rescue humanity from this desperate situation. Point three, God made an unbelievable promise to Abraham. God made an unbelievable promise to Abraham.

[22 : 17] Abraham, this really focuses on Genesis 12 through 50. If you flip with me to Genesis 12, you know, we kind of, we want to know what happens next. What happens next in our Bible, you know?

It seems like the story is just going along with God reacting as it goes. So people get worse and worse. So he sends a flood to wipe them out. And people kind of try to get up to God and they rebel against him.

And so he confuses the languages in the Tower of Babel in chapter 10 and 11. And so we should be asking, how's God going to relate to this people? I mean, is it just going to be this back and forth tug of war for the whole way?

How is God going to define his relationship to his people? And then he makes this unbelievable promise to Abraham. Look in chapter 12, verse 1 through 3. He says to Abraham, And so many theologians say there are three things in this promise.

They're a promise of people. He'll make of Abraham a great nation. People as numerous as the stars in heaven or the sand on the seashore.

[23 : 38] He'll give them land. He'll show you this land, the land of Canaan, a land of rest. He'll give them blessing. In you, all the families of the earth are blessed.

And if you notice already, God's eyes are on the whole world. He's after something more than just Abraham's family. Like you might be thinking, so what? People, land, blessing.

So it got to do with me. But the idea is this is not merely a promise. This is a covenant. God goes on to make a covenant with Abraham.

Now, a covenant in the old days was just a binding agreement between two people. People would covenant together. They would make an agreement. And it's more than a promise, more than I hope to accomplish that.

You know, or a pinky square with my hope to follow through. The idea is they'd make an agreement. And they'd offer a sacrifice in saying that if I don't come through, you can punish me.

[24 : 38] Sort of similar to cross my heart, hope to die, stick a needle in my eye. I mean, the idea is if I don't come through, something bad is going to happen to me. That's what a covenant is.

A binding agreement where we take on the responsibilities and the stipulations, the blessings and the curses of the covenant.

So God makes a covenant with Abraham. If you remember Genesis 15, I've hit this before, but just an incredible passage, incredible, strange chapter. God tells Abraham to go get some animals for

sacrifices, to take them, cut them in half, to kind of form an alleyway of these sacrifices, of these animals that are cut in half.

And then a deep sleep falls upon Abraham. Now, already this far in the Bible, lots of good stuff happens when people sleep. It's a theme that continues through the Bible. Well, Abraham is asleep. The smoking fire part and flaming torch pass through the pieces. The point is, Abraham was asleep and only God made the covenant. What God is saying there, with the flood still in the rear view mirror, is that in other covenants, both parties pass through.

[25 : 54] And both parties suffer when they're unfaithful, but not with my covenant. If my people sin and break this promise, I will not punish them.

All the curses of disobedience will fall upon me. I have promised to be your God. You will be my people, he tells Abraham. And I will secure my promise with the covenant of sovereign grace alone. Now, this is an unspeakable plan. And I love the way it immediately begins to work out. You know, Abraham does circumcise his family right after that as a sign of the covenant. And then the story continues.

And this promise, this covenant promise continues to be upheld in spite of human sin. And I just love these little themes that are held in to Genesis 20 and so on.

Abraham is a man of faith, but he lacks faith in some major ways. When passing through Egypt, he tells everyone that his wife, Sarah, is his sister. So they'll take him and not take him.

[26 : 56] Take her and not him. Even the Lord says, hey, don't take that woman. Not exactly a man of faith. And not exactly faith in the nation that would flow from her womb.

And he does this twice. And then Abraham fails to believe that God would provide through this barren woman. So he turns to his servant, Hagar. Again, Abraham turns out of faith.

Isaac does the same thing. He does the sister thing. And then he's like just a total wimp. But Jacob is this master scoundrel. You know, he has 12 sons. One slept with his father's wife.

One slept with his daughter-in-law. Ten of them decided to sell the 11 into slavery. The story of the Old Testament doesn't start looking better after the promise. It starts looking worse.

It looks like our family tree. The point is God works to uphold his promise despite human sin. And Genesis ends with the Israelites in Egypt.

[27 : 58] Point four, God established a nation through Moses. This is the focus of Exodus through 2 Chronicles. That's definitely the largest point of the Bible. God calls together a people.

If you remember, Exodus begins with the people stuck in Egypt. And they're kept in slavery for 400 years. They cry out to the Lord for deliverance, as it tells us in Exodus 2.

And their cries for deliverance reach the Lord's ears. And at just the right time, God sends Moses to deliver them.

Moses goes to Pharaoh and says, let my people go. And that doesn't go well, you know. And so began the plagues. One by one, the blood and frogs and gnats and flies.

Pharaoh continues to harden his heart as all these plagues. It's just kind of this battle royale between the Lord and Pharaoh's heart. And he's just bucking back.

[28 : 58] And so God promises the final plague. He promises to kill the firstborn of every household in Egypt as the final plague, yet provides a way out for the Israelites.

If you remember, every Israelite family is to kill a lamb and put its blood on the doorpost. Then as the Lord God comes through Egypt, he passes over the houses marked by the blood.

At midnight, the Lord struck them down. Finally, Pharaoh said he lets the people go. The people make a run for it immediately with Moses leading them out.

And as you know, Pharaoh changed his mind rather quickly and went to hunt them down. But while their backs are against the wall, the Lord delivers them through the Red Sea. In all this, what we're supposed to be seeing is God fulfilling his promise to Abraham.

God's creating a nation. He calls them out of the mountain to worship him. Exodus 19 says, God's saying, God gave them the ten commandments, God gave them the law in so many ways.

[30 : 43] As they were this new people, the law was not how they could gain acceptance before God. The law was something they obeyed because they were God's people. And so this law regulated how God was to live with them.

And just as God led them out with a cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night, he lived with them in the tabernacle as they wandered through the wilderness. Then he led them.

So he's kind of fulfilling everything he promised Abraham. He led them into the promised land. And this took quite a while. You know, a distance that should have only taken a couple of months, took them 40 years because of their disobedience and their ungrateful, ungratefulness.

And that's recorded in Numbers. And then in Deuteronomy, Moses stands on the precipice of the promised land. It's clear that he will not enter because of his unbelief.

And finally, the Lord leads them into the promised land through the courageous Joshua. The Lord drives out the other people. God's people receive the land that was promised and find rest from their enemies.

[31 : 45] You would think, is this the end of the story? I mean, they got the nation. They got the land. Then it's just the blessing that's going to come. But even though Joshua calls them to choose whom they are to serve, the people fail.

And judges, you know, they do what's right in their own eyes. They need a king to lead them and rule them. So God gives them Saul. He didn't work out.

God raised up another king after his own heart, King David. You know, up until this point, God had directed him in so many ways by his word, by prophet, by deliverer, by judges. But now he rules by king.

After taking out the giant Goliath, King David rules well and does what is right in the eyes of the Lord. He's a man after the Lord's own heart. He sets his throne in Jerusalem and secures peace. He's a great king.

He leads the people in battle and in the worship of the Lord. And his story is told in 1 and 2 Samuel. He leaves a great imprint on the nation of Israel.

[32 : 48] In so many ways, all of the kings are measured by David. Do they do what their father David did? They walk in the ways of their father David, just like we measure great presidents by Lincoln or by Washington or something like that.

They must have wondered with David, is this the serpent crusher? Is this the one who would bring everlasting peace? He was not.

As we know, the story continues. The next king is Solomon. He leads the people into even greater prosperity and builds a permanent temple in Jerusalem. But he marries 300 women. Not good.

The nation begins to decline. 1 and 2 Kings tell the story. Solomon's son Rehoboam ascends the throne. But the northern tribes rebel and make Jeroboam their king.

The kingdom is separated, divided. In the north, decline happens rapidly. Almost every king is bad. They're eventually conquered, kicked off the land, and carried into exile in 722 B.C.

[33 : 53] In the south, decline continues as well. Though led by many good kings, they have many bad kings too who fail to trust God, who lean on other countries for help, who fail to read the book of the law, who fail to tear down the altars to idols, and so on.

Finally, the south is conquered and kicked off the land. They're carried into exile in 586 B.C. And so the throne of David lies in rubble, and David's people are exiled in a foreign land.

Now, I know some of this may be making you want to fall asleep, but in so many ways, I think it helps us put our Bible together. I remember becoming a Christian, and I was actually talking to one of Buddy's daughters probably over some punch or something at some social gathering.

We were students at UT together, and she said something like, Well, you remember the exile. I was like, Oh, my goodness. What's the exile? I have no clue. I was like, Yeah, yeah, I remember the exile.

Oh, yeah. Bad time. I didn't know anything about the exile. And yet, I would encourage you, those dates, 722, 586, and 7, are massive.

[35 : 00] If you can just kind of put together a little timeline, it'll help you. It'll root you in understanding the Bible and understanding what God is doing to this story. So God establishes a nation through Moses, and then God restores hope through the prophets.

You know, throughout the history of Israel, there's numerous prophets. You remember Moses. You remember Elijah and Elisha and all them. But while the nation is declining, so this happens simultaneously to decline in the nation in the exile, God sends many more prophets to His people, and they essentially say two things.

God will judge, and God will restore. God will judge, and God will restore. You know, the prophets are a bit like Charlie Brown. Charlie Brown's this glass-half-full, pessimistic sort of guy.

Linus famously said, You're the only person I know who can take a wonderful season like Christmas and turn it into a problem. It seems that that's all the prophets are doing. You know, they've got their button stuck, and they can't unstuck it. But in actuality, these prophets are sent on the tough mission to continually expose the people's idolatry and warn them of coming judgment.

[36 : 10] The overwhelming theme of the prophets is God is coming, and God will judge. Before and after the exile, the Lord will judge you for your idolatry. The Lord will raise up nations around you to punish you.

What he's saying is, don't be surprised. When they come for you, I sent them. That's right. The Chaldeans and the others. I sent them. That's the message of Isaiah, Micah, Hosea, Jeremiah, Habakkuk, and others.

More than that, the prophets warned of a coming day of the Lord, in which every person will be judged. But they also said that God will restore. God's overwhelming promises to Israel are not going to be frustrated by their own sin or their own exile.

God's covenant promises will not be abandoned. Starkly embedded beside these prophecies of judgment are God's reputed promises of grace and mercy and restoration.

God says, I'll preserve a remnant. I'll be faithful. I'll place my king on the throne. Over and over again, when the people are without hope and without answer, God declares that he is working and plotting and prodding and promising that the best is yet to come.

[37 : 21] He says, I'll get a new people. I'll gather a new people, a new remnant. That's what he says in Isaiah 10. And then Ezekiel 34, he says, I'm going to go and find this remnant.

I just have to read this section because it's so wonderful. Ezekiel 34, several verses. He says, for thus says the Lord, behold, I, I myself will search for my sheep and will seek them out.

As a shepherd seeks out his flock when he is among his sheep that have been scattered, so I will seek out my sheep and I will rescue them from all places where they have been scattered on a day of clouds and thick darkness.

I will feed them with good pasture and on the mountain heights of Israel shall be their grazing land. There they shall lie down with good grazing land.

That's a sign of prosperity. That's what it's saying in the agrarian culture. Good grazing lands and on rich pasture they shall feed on the mountains of Israel. I myself will be the shepherd of my sheep and I will set over them one shepherd, my servant David, and he shall feed them.

[38 : 26] He shall feed them and be their shepherd. And I, the Lord, will be their God and my servant David shall be prince among them. I am the Lord. I have spoken.

I am Yahweh. I have spoken. I will do it. I myself will do it. I'm not going to lean on any other servant. No other shepherd is coming. I am coming.

I will gather my people from wherever they've been thrown. I will not just stop for Israel. I love the way he captures Isaiah 49.

I will be a light to the nations. The promise will not just be for Israel. People of every tribe, tongue, people, and nation will be grafted in to this new family of God.

This new remnant that has room for all the misfits in this family of God. That's what I'm doing and I will not be stopped. You know, in so many ways, this is why it's really unwise to get too caught up in politics in America.

[39 : 25] God has not made a promise to America. America is not the hope of the world. Be careful what you get worked up for. I love the way Mark Devers says it. Before and after America, there was and will be the church.

The nation is an experiment. The church is a certainty. Jesus cares more about who will be the future members of this church than he does who will be the next president of the United States. That's what he's built.

Incredible. Out of the rubble, God will restore his rule. That's what Isaiah 9 is talking about. This one that's on the throne of the day, the wonderful counselor, mighty God, everlasting father, prince of peace.

That this is the one that's going to sit on the throne of the increase of his kingdom, of his government. There shall be no end. That's just saying he will have no rival forever and ever and ever and ever.

And he will reign. He'll establish a new covenant, just as Jesus taught us in the Last Supper. This new covenant of his blood, of overwhelming grace.

[40 : 29] And he'll make his people completely clean. He'll cleanse them and cause them to walk in the fear of the Lord. Ezekiel 36 says he'll do this all for the sake of his name.

He'll do this all for his glory. The king will establish a new temple. The king will bring his people into the new heavens and new earth and will be their everlasting light.

And the story continues in the Old Testament. God's people returned from exile. You remember that with Haggai and Zechariah and Ezra and Nehemiah.

They begin to rebuild the temple. But they weep. Because it didn't have the glory that they thought it had before. A few more prophets come along and then they wait in silence.

God sends no prophet. God sends no king. God sends no answer. The people probably ask what we're tempted to ask.

[41 : 31] Is the Lord done? Has he abandoned his people finally? 400 years pass. America's been around for just over 200.

400 years pass. Then in the fullness of time there's a voice crying out in the wilderness, prepare the way of the Lord. that every mountain be made low, every valley be raised up.

The kingdom of God is at hand. Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world, his name is Jesus. Jesus ushers in the true creation, calling us from darkness to life, from death and life, and promising to bring in the new heavens and the earth.

Jesus is the true Adam who passed the test in the garden, always doing the will of his Father and crushing the curse of sin. He's given us his perfect obedience. Jesus is the true son of Abraham who left his throne above and went out to gather new people, every tribe, tongue, people, and nation. Jesus establishes the true nation of Israel, the only son of God cut off so that many might be adopted by faith. Jesus brings the true blessing, always obeying the Father so that the blessing of obedience might flow freely to those who come by faith.

[42 : 48] Jesus is the true rest who frees us from the weight of sin and prepares for us an eternal rest in heaven. Jesus is the true sacrifice. He is the Passover lamb, the perfect and innocent one who was slain so that death might pass over us.

Jesus is the true temple where we're all cleansed of all our uncleanness and invited to freely approach the holy God. Jesus is the true prophet who, like Moses, delivers us and tells us the good news of the gospel.

Jesus is the true priest who comes to offer himself as a sacrifice for sin. Jesus is the true king who comes in the line of David and establishes his eternal throne of truth and righteousness.

Jesus is the son of the living God. The whole Old Testament beckons us to establish our hope in him. That's what the story's about.

It's not merely setting the stage, just drawing all the lines so that we might see all the lines fulfilled in Jesus Christ. May our hearts be amazed by this great story and be established in the hope found in Jesus Christ this Christmas.

[43 : 56] Father in heaven, we cast ourselves onto you and confess our name. we pray, Father, that you would help us to establish our hope fully and completely on Jesus.

Lord, we approach this season with a wonderful sense of expectation and excitement. we approach it prayerfully and ask that you would come and cause us to love Jesus Christ more and more.

That as we're situated in this world between his first coming and his next, in this world, we're very aware that we're strangers and aliens. That we would live as people not duped by the things of this world, but live as those longing for another.

We praise you and worship you. We pray that you would help us these things. In Jesus' name.

Amen. You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.

For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com. Thank you. Thank you.

[45 : 29]