

PECULIAR PATHS TO PERFECT PLANS

CHRISTMAS AS IS

Matthew 1:1-16 // Craig Smith

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CRAIG: Well I know at Christmas time I can be petty
And I know that I don't always get it right
But if God can love me when I am this messy
Maybe I can untangle all the lights
Because this is me, this is us
La La La
The first Merry Christmas free.

So, we're going to do something a little bit different today, I wanna look into a passage today that probably is not featured prominently in your Christmas celebrations in the past. You might not have ever heard it previous, in fact...well let me ask this, how many of you have ever made this commitment, many of you may be decided maybe January first this year's the year I'm going to read all the way through the Bible, how many of you have ever made that commitment? Alright, I'm curious how many of you have had the same experience I have which is this, okay gonna do it, gonna make this thing happen, day one, Genesis 1, check. Day two, Genesis 2, good to go. Day three, Genesis 3, cooking with gas now. Day four, that's a lot of words. You know I don't wanna burn out so maybe I'll break that over a couple of days and suddenly it's day 30, Genesis 5, alright Genesis, see Adam lived 130, and then he had Seth and Seth became the father of Enosh, genealogy, chapter six. We've probably all done that right? There's a good reason for it because here's the thing, like even if you believe with all of your heart what Paul says in 2nd Timothy 3:16, and that is that, all scripture is God breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, and correcting, and training in righteousness. Even if you believe that with all of your heart, the reality is that we still feel like some parts are a little bit more useful than others, right? And there's some parts that are a little hard to figure out how does that really bring life change? I mean when was the last time that you're like, "God, I need you to speak into my life, I need you to say something into the middle of this mess that I'm in."? And so Enosh was 927 years old and he had...that's what I was looking for. Probably not the kind of experience we've had and for that reason these things that we call genealogies, these lists of names we sometimes find in scripture, they tend to be the kinds of things we skip over really quick, but what I wanna say to you today that we shouldn't do that because genealogies are not what we think they are.

We think they are what I would call an example of simple history. By which I mean, just kind of a dry statement of historical facts, but the reality is that the Bible never gives us simple history. It never just gives us facts for the sake of facts. The Bible has all kinds of historical facts that genealogies or factual accounts, but they're not there just so you're able to go, okay, yeah, I understand these. These are the facts of the family line. No, no, no, there's always ways for God to tell you something about who he is, and what he's like, and I know that may not seem like a likely thing to get out of a genealogy, but it absolutely is. How many of you remember the movie "The Wizard of Oz"? Yeah? How many of you were scared to death of the stupid flying monkeys? The only thing scarier I think than the flying monkeys was meet with the giant talking head when they finally got to the wizards sort of palace and they met that big green floating giant head thing, but my favorite scene was while the head was going, Toto the dog ran up and grabbed the curtain and he pulled on it and you saw this little guy in the background, he was like spinning gears, and wheels, and things, and when he realized they could see him, do you remember what the wizards head said? It said, "Pay no attention to the man behind the curtain," but the Bible is the exact opposite of that. The Bible loves to pull back the curtain, but when it does it says look at what's going on behind the scenes, look at the God who's at work behind the scene, who's spinning the gears and spinning the wheels of history, and so, when the Bible gives us historical facts, it's really God's way of pulling back the curtain and saying pay close attention to what I'm doing behind the scenes. And what God does when he gives us historical facts is, he tells us something about who he is and what he's like, something that we need to know, and



that's true of all scripture and it's even true of the genealogies.

So what I wanna do today is maybe a little bit unusual, but I think by the time we're done you're gonna find yourself struck, not by a whole bunch of historical facts, but by the glimpse of God that even something as seemingly insignificant as a genealogy gives us. Something I think we need to hear, so if you got your Bible, I'd love to have you turn with me to the Gospel of Matthew. We're gonna take a look at one of these passages of scripture that we're very likely to skip over, but in fact I think if we read it faithful, we'll find that what we are getting here is the opportunity to unwrap Christmas itself. Matthew begins by saying, "This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah, the son of David, the son of Abraham," and what he's doing there is he's giving us the explicit purpose, the surface level purpose. He wants to make sure that we understand that Jesus is two things, number one, he's proper Jewish boy, he's a proper Israelite, he's descended from the family line of Abraham, and so he connects what he's going to say to Abraham. Second thing he wants to make sure that we understand is that Jesus is the son of David, he's descended from King David, and that's important because he's gonna tell us that Jesus is the Messiah. He's the long awaited savior, he's the promised coming king, and those prophecies that date back hundreds of years before Matthew wrote this all say two things, they say he's gonna be an Israelite and he's gonna be from the line of David, and so Matthew's saying, yeah, I wanna make sure you understand Jesus fits the bill, Jesus meets the requirements, Jesus is the Messiah, he's in the right lines. But that's just the surface level, that's just the kind of...honestly, it's the kind of whatever, I mean it's meaningful on some level, but it's not the kind of stuff that really grabs hearts in the way that what he goes on to say should grab hearts. It really begins to unpack the details, the very part that we're so prone to skip over, that we begin to see what it is he's telling us about who God is and what he's like.

Now, I'm gonna give you a clue about genealogies, because the reality is as we read genealogies, it's sometimes difficult to figure out why it should be significant, why there's meaning there, and so I wanna suggest that one of the ways that we read genealogies faithfully is we don't read them, we listen to them. The reality is that a lot of scripture was actually written with the expectation that it would be heard. The vast majority of people throughout history didn't have access to written scriptures, so they weren't reading it, they were listening to it, and sometimes authors wrote things with the idea that they knew most of the audience would hear it, and they wrote them so that things that would be heard would jump out. And sometimes there were things that we would miss if we were just kind of skimming through, so sometimes when we stop and we listen we hear things. In the case of genealogies, what you're gonna see here in Matthew, as well as in a lot of other genealogies in the Bible is that when you listen, you hear a certain rhythm to it. There's a certain cadence to the way that the story is unfolding, and I'm not saying you could dance to it, but it's definitely you can bob your head along and wait, there's a pattern. But at certain points in genealogy the pattern falls apart, it breaks. And when you're listening you hear those much more vividly. And it's those breaks that we're supposed to pay attention to. It's the breaks in the rhythm that are supposed to grab our attention and we're supposed to ask what happened there? And so I'm gonna do something a little different today. Rather than encouraging you to read along, we're not even going to put it on the screen, I'm gonna ask you to just listen. If you got a Bible in front of you that's open, go ahead to keep your finger there but go ahead and close it. And just listen. In fact, if you're not feeling too sleepy yet, close your eyes. And see if you can feel the rhythm and see if you can feel the breaks.

Abraham was the father of Isaac and Isaac the father of Jacob. Jacob, the father of Judah and his brothers. Judah the father of Perez and Zerah, whose mother was Tamar. Perez the father of Hezron. Hezron, the father of Ram. Ram the father of Amminadab. Amminadab the father of Nahshon. Nahshon, the father of Salmon. Salmon the father of Boaz, whose mother was Rahab. Boaz the father of Obed, whose mother was Ruth. Obed the father of Jesse. Jesse the father of King David. David the father of Solomon, whose mother had been Uriah's wife. Do you feel it? Do you feel the rhythm that's kind of going along? Do you feel it, but it broke at several points, right? And there was something similar in each of the breaks. What was it? It was mom's, it was mothers, which is very interesting in two different respects. Number one, Hebrew genealogies don't list women. I mean it's almost unheard of. Hebrew genealogies focus exclusively on the men. Matthew is a Hebrew writer. He's writing to a primarily Hebrew audience and so there's no reason in the world why we would expect to find women mentioned in the genealogy and yet he mentions women. The second reason it's interesting is the kind of women he mentions, because he doesn't mention all the



moms, did you notice that? He only mentions four specific ones. Four specific women and as a Jewish person reading this those names would have been reasonably familiar because they're prominent stories in the Old Testament. And I think what Matthew did when he mentioned these women he immediately would have called his audience's mind to remember these stories. Which is interesting because they're not good stories. They're not nice, neat, everything's in its perfect place, and everything's picture perfect kinda stories. They're pretty messy stories.

The first story is the story of Tamar. You may or may not know the story of Tamar. If you want you can read about her in Genesis 38, but I'll just hit the highlights for you. And I'll be honest, I'm gonna keep it as PG as possible. But this is what God's word says in chapter 38 in Genesis, he says that there was a man named Judah. Judah was the father of the tribe of Judah, one of the 12 tribes of Israel. And he had several kids. His oldest son was married to this woman named Tamar. But his oldest son, Genesis 38 says, was exceedingly wicked and God killed him. He put him to death for his wickedness, which left Tamar destitute. And traditionally in those days what would happen is the woman would then for her protection would be married to the next son in the line so that she would be cared for and the idea is that she would eventually out of this she would get a son and that son would care for her when she got old. It was sort of their social security network. And so she was given to the next son, but the next son hated the idea of giving her a child because he knew that the inheritance would be passed differently. He refused to do that. He refused to give her a son which is part of his wickedness and so he died. It's not looking good for the family at this point, right? It's definitely not looking good for Tamar, because the next youngest son or the next oldest son was so young that it really was inappropriate for her to get married to him. And so her father-in-law Judah said, "I'll tell you what, go back to your father's house and just hang out wait and when my next son is old enough then I'll get you and I'll marry you and we'll take care of you that way." And so she went home, but the problem was out of sight out of mind. Judah forgot about her. And so his next son grew up to the marriageable age, but he didn't send for Tamar. And so she languished in this destitute place and this desperate place and so she hatched a plan.

She heard one day that Judah was traveling not too far from where she was and so she dressed up as a prostitute. She put on a veil so he wouldn't recognize her and she sat by the road until he came by and apparently he stopped and he said, "Hey, you're looking pretty good. What do I have to give you to sleep with me?" And she looked and he had some personal items and she said, "Why don't you give me those kind of as a pledge that you'll pay in some other way." He said, "Okay, yeah," and he slept with her. And then he went on his way. And Tamar went back to her father's house and she was pregnant. And at some point in the future when it became impossible to hide that anymore, word got out Tamar's pregnant and word reached her father-in-law Judah. And Judah being a good father-in-law did what any good father-in-law would do when he heard that his daughter-in-law was pregnant, had an illicit pregnancy. He said, "Bring her out and burn her to death." He called for her execution. And he was there apparently when they brought her out. He was there to watch her burn and as she came out she said, "Hey, I just wanted you to know that the guy who got me pregnant is the guy who owns these." And she showed the personal items and Judah did one of those "oh, this changes things". And he said an interesting thing. He said recognizing his items he said, "She is more righteous than I since I wouldn't give her to my son Shelah." And that's an interesting thing. She's more righteous than I. Like we're talking in relative terms, right? Because there's not a lot of righteousness going on in this story. We've got a woman pretending to be a prostitute so she could sleep with her father-in-law, who gets pregnant, wants her dead, but then... like this is Jerry Springer stuff. Right? This is an incredibly messy story. This is the kind of story, I don't know about you, but if this is going on in your family line, this is the kind of stuff that you try to get past, right? It's the kind of stuff you try to sweep under the carpet, get behind the curtain. You don't want that out in public and yet Matthew went out of his way to make sure we remembered the story.

He also goes out of his way to make sure we remember the story of Rahab. She's the next break in the pattern. If you don't know the story of Rahab, you can read about her in Joshua Chapter 2. Rahab was an actual prostitute. Not pretending one, to be one, she was an actual prostitute. That's what she did for a living. And she was living in the city of Jericho when the Israelites came having been freed from Egypt. And they began to sort of scout out the land to figure out what it was gonna be look like to take hold of this land that God had promised them. And in Joshua Chapter 2, Joshua secretly sent two men into the land and he said, "Go look over the land and especially Jericho." And so they went and here's what it says they're going to spy out the land,



here's what it says. So they went and they entered the house of a prostitute named Rahab and stayed there. Which is a weird statement, right? I mean, go and scout out the land and so they went into a prostitute's house and stayed there. It doesn't sound like they were doing what they'd been sent to do. But while they were there, the king of the area heard that they were there. And so he sent word to Rahab and he said, "Bring those guys out." And but she went back to these men and she said, "We've heard what your God has done, and we're in terror because we know that he's going to give you everything that he promised and so here's the deal. If you'll look after me, I'll help you escape," and her house was on the edge of the city wall and so she lowered them down out of a window and they were able to escape and so when Israel came and the conquered the region, Rahab was brought into the family. So, so far we've got a woman pretending to be a prostitute being impregnated by her father-in-law and we got an actual prostitute. Again, the kind of stories you sweep under the rug, you get behind the curtain, and yet Matthew says, "Do not forget these stories."

He tells us about Ruth. She's the third break. Now Ruth, she doesn't seem like she quite fits the model that we've seen so far. It didn't seem like she quite fits the pattern. Because Ruth's a good girl right? There's a whole book that's dedicated describing her faithfulness and how God used it. The problem with Ruth is that she's not an Israelite. She's not a Jewish person. But you remember whose family line this is. It's the family line of Jesus and one of the things that Matthew said he wants to make sure we understand is that he is a proper Jewish person. And yet, here's another woman who's not Jewish and she's a major part of this family line. Okay, that's messy.

And then he tells us about another woman and it's interesting he doesn't even name her. He says David was the father of Solomon whose mother had been Uriah's wife. It's a really interesting way to say that. And if you know the story you may know her name. What's her name? Yeah, her name is Bathsheba. But it's interesting that he doesn't name her. Instead he says whose mother had been Uriah's wife. And the point again is don't miss the story. If he just wanted to skim over then he didn't have to say anything at all. If he wanted to just kind of like maybe just make you think for a moment he could just have said Bathsheba, but he stops. I mean, everything comes to a dead halt and he forces you to remember the story and all of its messiness. And it's an incredibly messy story if you don't know it here's basically the story.

David was made king of Israel because the Israelites wanted a king to lead them in battle. He wanted some, they wanted someone to go before them and fight their wars. And in 2nd Samuel Chapter 11 we find this sentence that in the spring at the time when kings go off to war David stayed home. And as the story unfolds I think we're splitting it to understand it because David was kind of drunk on power. And he was able to command and so David says go a lot in this story. So he sends his armies off. He says go fight the battles, I'll hold down the fort here. It's a power thing. He's able to do that. And he goes out in the evening, it says and he's walking and that's a key time because that was the time when the women of the town would typically do their bathing. And it was a private thing. They would do it in their courtyards. And you couldn't see into the courtyards unless you happen to be in a place above the houses. And we've excavated David's palace and we've realized that actually from his palace you could see directly down into the courtyards of the houses that were gathered at the foot of a hill. And so David was up there in the evening probably not accidentally. And he was walking and he spied a particular woman who caught his attention and he commanded some servants to come to him and he said, "Who is that?" And they said, "Well, that's Uriah's wife." And there's a rebuke implied in that because Uriah was off fighting the battle that David should have been in. That's Uriah's wife. And he said, "Go bring her to me." And they had no choice and so they brought her to him and I believe she had no choice but to come.

And story just gets messier from there. And she ends up pregnant. And she sends word to David, "I'm pregnant, what are we gonna do now?" Really what are you gonna do now. And David hatches a plan. He sends to the battle and he says, "Bring Uriah back here." I want a report from the battle and so Uriah comes and he says, "Tell me how the battle is going," and Uriah gives his report. And I imagine as David listens to the report he's like yeah, that's great, okay, okay, hurry it up, come on, come on. Oh that was great, okay thanks so much. I really appreciate you coming. Well, I tell you what? Why don't you go home and be with your wife? He's trying to cover it up. But Uriah won't go. Uriah refuses. He says, "Hey, how can I go to the comfort of my own bed and be with my own wife when the Lord's army, when my Lord's army is out in the field." There's a little bit of a rebuke complied in that too. It says I won't go and so David basically says, "Okay, fine. Here's the deal," and he gets out a scroll and he writes in



there orders to be sent to the commander of his armies and then he seals it and Uriah has to take these orders back. And what the orders said to the commander was I want you to put Uriah in the front of the battle, where the fighting is the fiercest, but give everybody else a signal. Make sure everybody else knows and when that signals given everybody's supposed to know that they're supposed to fall back, but he will be left alone. And so Uriah was put in the fiercest part of the battle and at the signal everybody else pulled back and Uriah was left in the front and he was killed. So we have a man after God's own heart. By the way, this is the reality of the people of God. We have this idea sometimes that God only chooses perfect people that God only has places and plans for those who've got their lives together. That's just absolutely not true. David is called a man after God's own heart even after this. And the reason is not because he was perfect, but the reason is that ultimately when he was confronted with his sin he repented. He confessed his mess. And he repented, and he was forgiven, and he continued to seek after God in spite of his failures. He considered this, continued to seek God in spite of the messes that he'd made and for that reason he's called a man after God's own heart. But he made a huge mess. He didn't do his duty, he forced himself on a woman and he had her husband murdered to cover it up. This is messy stuff.

Again, any one of these stories is the kind of story that you're gonna go if it's at all possible let's just like not remind people of that. But Matthew stops us in our tracks. He forces us to hear these women. He forces us to remember these stories. He didn't have to. He didn't have to mention women at all. He goes out of his way to mention women who reminded us of these incredibly messy situations. Why? It's clearly intentional, what is it we're supposed to understand especially when we remember whose family line this is, this is Jesus. This is the pure spotless, perfect, Lamb of God, who can take away the sins of the world, this is who we're getting to and this is the family he came out of? Yeah. The reason Matthew reminds us of these stories, is because he wants us to understand that if God can bring something as perfect, pure, and as powerful as Jesus out of a family like this, he can make a miracle out of any mess. Do you see it? If God can bring Jesus, this pure, perfect, spotless, Lamb of God, if he can work a miracle like Jesus out of this family, he can make a miracle out of any mess. And I don't know what mess you're dealing with right now, but I guarantee there's one or two in your life that you're dealing with. It might be big, it might be little, it might be something that you created, it might be something that other people created for you, but we all have these messes, and sometimes we look at these messes and we're just lost. We're just stuck, we're feeling like we can't possibly get out of this, but our God wants you to understand that he's not put off by your mess. He's not in the least bit bothered by it. In fact, God looks at our messes and he doesn't go, "Oh my goodness, what do we do now?" No, God looks at your mess and he says, "I can work with that, I can do something there, I can do something that is better than you would have ever spotted, just let me in, just let me into the mess." See, here's the thing, it's probably not an accident that Matthew is the one telling us this story. It's probably not an accident that Matthew is the one who's giving us the opportunity to sort of unwrap this truth, because Matthew is a guy whose life was a mess too. Matthew was a tax collector, and what that meant was Matthew was a Jewish person, who went to the Roman Empire and said, "I will collect money from my own people and send it back to you." He wouldn't have been called upon by Rome to do that, he would've had volunteered for that, and so he voluntarily took money from his own people and sent them to the foreign oppressors, which meant that from the Jewish perspective Matthew was a traitor.

In fact, the New Testament often uses this phrase as people were talking about horrible people whose lives are a mess, they're called...it talks about tax collectors and other sinners. From the Jewish perspective, a tax collector was messed up, and he was washed out, and written off. Matthew is the kind of guy that nobody had a place for, that nobody thought there could possibly be a plan for. Matthew is the kind of guy that everybody had written off, except for Jesus. And here's the thing, it wasn't that Matthew came to Jesus and said I know my life's a mess but would you please let me tag along? Could I just be on the outer edges? Could I be on the fringe of your people? No, that's not what happened, Jesus went looking for him. Jesus found him at the tax booth doing his traitorous work and he said, "Stop this, come with me," and I'm sure Matthew just stood there and went, "You're talking to me? You want..." "Yes, come with me." And Matthew left that and he came with Jesus, and Jesus used him to proclaim the good news. Jesus used him to write one of the four Gospels. Jesus used Matthew to change the lives of millions upon millions of people whose lives will never be the same for all of eternity. And so as Matthew wrote down this genealogy and as he...through the power of the Holy Spirit. He mentioned these women and he reminds us of the stories that were part of the package that led to Jesus. Matthew was just realizing that God has always been doing something that he had personally experienced in his relationship with Jesus, and it's this, he had understood that Jesus loves to write into his story, those that the



rest of the world writes off. Do you hear me? Jesus loves to write into his story the very people that the rest of the world writes off.

And I imagine as Matthew was writing this down, he was reflecting on this experience that he personally has with Jesus, and going, “I can’t believe Jesus wrote me into his story, everybody else had written me off, but he wrote me into his story,” and then as he began to think through this family line, he began to go “Huh, this is not just something Jesus did on a whim, this is who God is, this is who God is,” and he began to understand it’s not that God doesn’t mind our messes, and that’s not anywhere near powerful enough. It’s not just that God doesn’t mind our mess, it’s not that he’s unwilling to get involved, he’s willing to get involved, but it’s not even just that he’s happy to jump into the midst of our mess, that’s not enough either. What we have to understand is this that God loves turning our messes into his miracles. Do you hear me? God loves turning our messes into his miracles. That’s not an excuse to make messes, okay? But it is a powerful call to invite God into the middle of whatever messes we find ourselves in, whether we created them or somebody else is. Because God not only doesn’t mind our messes, he loves making miracles out of our messes.

There’s three things that we need to make sure that we never do. Number one, do not buy the lie that God’s love for us somehow depends on the quality of your life. Please hear me on this, God’s love for you does not depend upon the quality of your life. It does not depend upon having everything picture perfect, and having everything in its place, and having it all worked out, and then God loves you, that’s not the way, you got the order all wrong. You will never get yourself in a position and into a place where you’re perfect enough for God to love you, because God has already loved you, as much as he possibly could. And in fact it’s God’s love for us that transforms our lives. It’s God’s love for us that begins to make these miracles out of our messes, to bring these perfect gifts out of this incredible complication that we’ve wrought. Do not buy into this lie that the quality of your life is what forces God to love you, it’s not that way at all, God loves you as is, please hear that. God loves you as is. Second, do not ever think that your mess is beyond God’s redemption. Whatever the mess is that you’re facing, please do not ever make the mistake of thinking this one is too big for God, this one’s too messy for anything good to come out of it, this one’s too sticky to ever get cleaned up in a way that does anything positive, no, no, no, no, that’s a huge mistake. Do not make the mistake of thinking that your mess is beyond God’s redemption, it is not. Put it in his hands and you will be stunned by what he does.

Third, do not think that your mistakes have disqualified you from participating in God’s plans. Don’t make the mistake of thinking that because of the mistakes you’ve made you’re out, the best you can hope for is to be on the fringes, maybe God... he’ll take you with him, but that’s the most that you can hope for, no, no, no, no, you’re not dreaming big enough and you’re not understanding who God is. This is a God who loves to make miracles out of our messes, which means that the mistakes we make do not disqualify us from participating in what he’s doing. Matthew actually highlights that, it’s another one of the breaks in verse 11, he continued on and the rhythm is built, and we’re all kind of lulled into a false insecurity, then all of a sudden he says this, And Josiah the father of Jeconiah and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon, and the rhythm falls apart at breaks, with this mention of the exile at the Babylon, which is a reminder to the people of Israel, hey, we’ve screwed up in the past. In fact, their mistakes had let them out of God’s blessing, their mistakes had actually led them to lose their ability to inhabit the promise land. They had chosen to worship false gods, they had chosen to disobey God, they had chosen time and time again to walk away from God so that they found themselves outside of his blessing and ultimately they were exiled. They lost access to the land. They were slaves in foreign countries. But that was in the past. And so Matthew reminds us. At the time of the exile to Babylon what he’s reminding his audience is that time has passed, that’s not now. Their mistakes led them there, but God didn’t leave them there. They walked away from God, but God came after them and he brought them back. And he was using them again. Their mistakes led them there, but God did not leave them there. Your mistakes do not disqualify you. And maybe you look at the mess in your life and you begin to think something like this. You think, “Okay, it’s amazing that God loves me and that’s enough, he’s certainly not gonna be able to use me to make a difference in anybody else’s life, I’m too messed up. My past is too sticky, it’s too yuck for God to really use me in my neighbor’s life or in the life of my family. I’m just going to hope that God will send somebody else. I’m gonna asked that God would raise somebody else up to be a miracle in their lives.” And God is often looking at us going, “You’re that miracle. You’re the one that I want to use. You’re the one that I want reaching out. And we go, “I can’t, you know what I’ve done.” And God goes, “Yeah, I know what you’ve done, but your mistakes don’t disqualify you from



being a part of what 'm doing." Four do's, here's what you do.

We covered three don'ts, here's four do's. Number one, do confess your mess. That's how we invite God into the middle of us. That's how we invite the God who loves to make miracles out of our messes into our messes. We confess them, we call them what they are. You've heard me say this before, but I love the simplicity of this because the good news of Christianity is simple. It's that salvation can be taken a hold of in just this. We confess our mess. We say, "God, I've done wrong." I don't care if you call it wrong or sin or mess. It doesn't matter, it's all the same stuff. We're saying I messed up. And then we say I'm sorry. That's not the way I wanna live and I don't want that to be true so I've messed up and I'm sorry. And then we say Jesus thank you for dying on the cross to pay for my mess. Thank you for rising from the dead. Please come into my life and take away my sin. And what we do at that moment is we actually take hold of salvation. We take hold of the gospel. We grab hold of the God who loves to make miracles out of our messes. Listen, if you've never done that and if you're hearing this right now and you're thinking yeah, that's not happened in my life. I'm still in my own mess and God's not in it. You can fix that right now. Right now in your heart simply say to God those five things. Say to God right now, "I've messed up, I'm sorry. Jesus, thank you for dying for me. Jesus, thank you for rising from the dead, please come into my life and forgive my sin." And if you just prayed that, you just took hold of forgiveness. Your sins are gone. You're messes have been wiped clean in God's eyes. And you've begun a relationship with God, you need to figure out what the next step is so please visit the welcome center or talk to one of the people down here after the service to let us know. But in that simple way, by confessing our mess and inviting God into it, he begins to work miracles. So do confess your mess. Do move forward. Do move forward in the knowledge and the confidence that you're loved. That's the gift of Christmas.

We didn't have to get it right to earn God's love. God loved us when we were getting it as wrong as we possibly could. So move forward in the confidence that you're loved. Don't hesitate to move deeper into your relationship with him or to get involved here at Mission Hills or in some other church. Don't hesitate to move forward because you're like, "Yeah, God's gotta do a bunch of stuff." No, God is in front of you saying, "Come, come. I love you now as much as I'll ever love you. Because I love you as much as you can possibly be loved." So move forward. Sometimes it's moving forward in the covers of love that actually it begins to get our feet unstuck from the messes that we've made. So do move forward in that confidence. Third, do anticipate God's redemption of your messes. Look for God to begin moving. Look for the miracle to begin growing.

My parents live in Ohio and my wife's parents live in Ohio, so when we go visit them and when we drive and when we come back, we have to go through an awful place called Kansas. And the people are wonderful, but if you have to drive through Kansas in the middle of the day when you're really getting a good look of all of it, it will suck the soul out of you. And as we're in Kansas as much as we're getting close to the Colorado border, I begin anticipating that I'm going to see the mountains, and what that means is I start looking for them. That's usually around somewhere about the Missouri line actually. I'm looking and I'm waiting so that I don't miss it, that first moment when I see the first hint of my Rocky Mountains. And when I begin to see them, I can feel my soul lift. As I begin to catch a glimpse of this incredible thing in front of me. In the same way, whatever the mess we're in, we're supposed to move through it anticipating that God's gonna redeem it. He's gonna do incredible things through it. And so we begin looking. Our eyes are lifted off from the mess to the horizon, we're looking for the signs that God is moving and as soon as we see them we begin to celebrate what God is doing. And we find that even more so we get unstuck from the mess we're in and we're able to move forward with joy. And finally, do share this good news with other people. We are loved by a God. It's not just that he doesn't mind our messes, it's not just that he's willing to get involved in the lives of messy people, we're loved by a God who loves to make miracles out of our messes. Who looks at the mess that we've made of things and he says, "You know what? I can work with that. I'm excited to work with that, let me in there."

We have to keep sharing that news. We cannot keep that to ourselves. This feels overly simplistic but it's a good practical way. You know what, on the way out there's a bunch of postcards out there that you can use to invite people to come to Christmas Eve. And it's a simple thing, but it's a concrete thing that I encourage you to do. I'd love for there not to be a single one of those cards left. And I'd love for not a single one of those to be sitting on counters come Christmas Eve. They should have been handed to people that you know need to hear this news. They need to unwrap what Christmas is all about, what Matthew has unwrapped



for us. The reality that we serve a God and we are loved by a God who loves to make miracles out of our messes.

Would you pray with me? Jesus, thank you. Thanks for loving us. Thank you for getting involved in our messes and thank you for the reality that Matthew tells us here. That we have a long history that we can look back upon that when we pull the curtain of history back we see a God working behind it who loves to make miracles out of our messes. Who looks at our messes and says, "I can work with that." Just let me in there. Lord, we invite you into our messes. Whatever they are, we invite you into them. We beg you to make miracles out of them. Lord, let us see the beginnings of the redemption of the beginnings of these difficult circumstances that we're in. Help us to move forward in this knowledge that we're loved by a God who makes miracles out of messes. And Lord give us courage to speak this truth with joy to those who don't know you in the way that we do, but they desperately need this miracle maker in the midst of their messes. In Jesus name, amen.



