

He Came
To Give God Glory
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To Give God Glory Romans 15:7-13

If you have a Bible, and I hope you do, let me invite you to open with me to Romans 15. Tonight we're going to close out a month of looking at specific verses in the New Testament that outline why Jesus came – what we celebrate at Christmas. We have seen that Jesus came to free the captives. Jesus came to serve the helpless. Jesus came to destroy the devil. Jesus came to bring us life.

We saw last week, on Christmas Eve, we thought about how Jesus came to seek and to save the lost. And what we're going to look at tonight is the ultimate reason Jesus came. What I mean by that is that this is the reason that really sums up all the other reasons that's we've already talked about. Jesus came to do all these things for us to free us, to serve us, to seek and to save us, to give us life. But the question is, "Why did Jesus do all of that for us?" What I want to show you tonight is that He did all of that for us to the glory of God. The ultimate reason behind His coming is the glory of God.

Now this, in and of itself, is huge to understand, because we have a dangerous tendency – it's a subtly dangerous tendency, but it's dangerous nonetheless, to begin to view Christianity and the gospel through a man-centered lens. Always thinking about: What does this mean for me? What can Jesus do for me? My wants, and my desires, and my needs, and this is good to a certain extent, because Jesus came to serve us, and to give us life, and to seek us, and to save us. But if we stop there – there is where it gets dangerous – if we stop there, and the danger is we start to think that we are the end in this thing. That everything in God's universe centers on us. And that is simply not true!

Everything in God's universe centers on God. Even His most wonderful acts of mercy and grace toward us are ultimately not intended for us to be the end, but are ultimately intended for God to be the end. Everything revolves around the glory and the greatness of God, and the beauty of Christmas is that God has chosen to glorify Himself by becoming our servant in Christ – by seeking after us, and saving us in our lost-ness, and the beauty of the gospel is, God's desire for His glory involves our salvation.

So, what I want to show you tonight is a God-centered perspective of Christmas, and I want us to realize that "yes" in a very real sense Jesus came to serve us, seek us, save us, all of these things, but in an ultimate sense Jesus came for God. The intent of Christmas is not to cause us to think about how great we are that Jesus would come for us. The intent of Christmas is to leave us walking out of this month thinking about how great God is, because that's, more than anything, what Jesus is pointing us to in His coming.

I want to show you this. In Romans 15:7-12. Now the key verse here is verse 8. Kind of like we've seen, Luke 19:10, Mark 10:45, 1 John 3:8. These are the verses that have said, "This is why Jesus came." Well, when we get to verse 8, it's a loaded verse, it kind of spills over into verse 9, and this is the picture of why Christ came. But I want us to read this passage,

from 7 to 13 – Romans 15:7-13, and I want us to see why Jesus came, and how Jesus coming points us to the glory of God.

I want to kind of warn you from the beginning, the first part of our time together tonight are about a lot of turning in some different places in Scripture, and we're going to be in kind of some thick study. But I want to invite you to hang with me – hold on with me through it, and I want you to see how a God-centered perspective of Christmas is really, really good for man. I want us to see how that leads us to a hope-filled new year.

So, we'll start in Romans 15:7. Paul writes,

Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy, as it is written: 'Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name.' Again, it says, 'Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people.' And again, 'Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples.' And again, Isaiah says, 'The Root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him.' May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit (Rom. 15:7-13).

Now did you see it? Did you see how everything in this passage is ultimately aimed to the glory of God. He starts in verse 7, he says, “Accept one another...in order to bring praise to God” (Rom. 15:7). So it's not just “accept one another,” period, put an end on it and we'll all go home. No, it's “accept one another so that God might be praised.” Then in verse 8, “I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews (ultimately) so that,” the nations— “the Gentiles may glorify God for his mercy” (Rom. 15:8-9). Then he gives us this whole list of Old Testament quotations that show a picture of God getting glory and praise. Even before this passage, you jump back up to verses 5 and 6, and you see the prayer that Paul prayed for the Roman church there, “May the God who gives endurance encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Christ Jesus, so that”—here's why—“so that with one heart and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Rom. 15:5-6).

A God-Centered Christmas...

So, I want to show you how Christ coming brings glory to God, in five different ways based mainly on Romans 15:8 and the beginning of verse 9.

Jesus Came to Certify God's Integrity

First, Jesus came to certify God's integrity – to certify God's integrity. Now we're camping out here in verse 8. Paul says, “Christ has become a servant of the Jews” (Rom. 15:8) – that's the same picture we saw in Mark 10 a couple of weeks ago: “Christ came not to be served, but to serve” – “as a servant of the Jews,” and then I love this phrase, “on behalf of God's truth” (Rom. 15:8). Literally, Christ came “to show the truthfulness of God.” So the picture of Christ coming is Christ is pointing to the integrity and the truthfulness of God.

Now what does it mean for God to be truthful? What that means is that God in His character, in His attributes is true at all times, in every circumstance. Now that's kind a

vague, ambiguous picture, but, well, compare it with us. We are not true at all times and in every circumstance. I, in my own life, I want to be loving. At the same time, I know that there are times when I say things, or I do things, or I think things that are not loving. And that shows a lack of integrity in me. The deal with God is that is never the case. God is always loving. He is truly loving. His attributes are perfectly displayed at all times.

Now this is key, because sometimes we have a tendency to have a skewed picture of God, and we look, for example, at some of the stories in the Old Testament, and we think, "Well, sometimes God is just, and other times God is merciful." Or, "Sometimes God is wrathful, and other times God is loving." But that's wrong. God does not choose different attributes at different times, He is true to all of these attributes at all times. He is always just and always merciful. He is always wrathful and always loving.

Tozer, who I've mentioned before, said in his book on the attributes of God—*Knowledge of the Holy*—Tozer said, "All of God's acts are consistent with all of His attributes. No attribute contradicts the other, but all harmonize and blend into each other in the infinite abyss of the godhead." I wish I could write a sentence like that.

All of His attributes harmonize and blend into each other in the infinite abyss of the godhead. All that God does agrees with all that God is. The familiar picture of God is often torn between His justice and His mercy, is altogether false to the facts. To think of God as inclining first toward one and then toward another of His attributes is to imagine a god who unsure of Himself – frustrated and emotionally unstable, which, of course, is to say that the one of whom we are thinking is not the true God at all, but a weak, mental reflection of Him, badly out of focus. God being who He is cannot cease to be what He is, and being what He is, He cannot act out of character with Himself.

Now that's the kind of sentence in Tozer's book. So it just leaves you like, okay, I got a headache instantly. "God being who He is cannot cease to be what He is, and being what He is, He cannot act out of character with Himself."

What that means, He's pointing to us to the truthfulness of God, which means that in His character, in His attributes, God is always truly expressing His attributes. And you're saying, "Now what does this have to do with the coming of Christ?" Think of it. See Christ in His coming. See Christ on the cross. See the justice of God. Sin is severe, and it deserves punishment. See the wrath of God being poured out, and at the same moment, see the mercy of God, and the love of God towards sinners. In the picture of Christ, we see a demonstration of the truthfulness of God. He came on behalf of God's truth to show us God's truthfulness. The fact that God is true to His character, Christ comes to show us this.

Jesus Came to Vindicate God's Word

Second – take a step deeper – He came to certify God's integrity, and Jesus came to vindicate God's Word. He came "*on behalf of God's truth, to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs*" (Rom. 15:8). So Jesus came to show us that God is true to His character, and also that God is faithful to His Word.

Now this is where I want us to do some turning – we're going to turn to five different places in Scripture. I'm going to start by going back to Genesis – first book in the Bible – Genesis 18. Genesis 18, turn back there with me.

What I want to do is try to unpack in our minds what Paul means when he says that Christ came "*to confirm the promises made to the patriarchs*" (Rom. 15:8). What does that mean?

That Christ coming confirms the promise made to the patriarchs. You see the patriarchs are fathers of the faith in the Old Testament. Abraham, Isaac, Jacob – it's the whole story that we see developing in the book of Genesis. So what I want to show you, starting there in Genesis 18, I want to show you God's promises to the patriarchs. First to Abraham, and then to Isaac, and then to Jacob, and I want us to see how this all culminates in the coming of Christ.

Now Christ confirms these promises. So start in Genesis 18:18. This is God's promise to Abraham. He said to him – this is centuries before Christ came – “Abraham”—Genesis 18:18—*“will surely become a great and powerful nation, and all nations on earth will be blessed through him.”* That's a promise, and we can go to other places in Abraham's life – Genesis 12:1-3, Genesis 15, Genesis 22—where this same promise is reiterated. God says to Abraham, you're going to be a great nation, and through you all the nations of the earth are going to be blessed. That was His promise to Abraham.

Now turn over to Genesis 26. Abraham's son, Isaac, receives a promise from God. Now I want you to see how God reiterates that same promise to Abraham's son, Isaac. Look in Genesis 26:3. God says to Isaac, *“Stay in this land for a while, and I will be with you and will bless you. For to you and your descendants I will give all these lands and will”* – listen to this language – *“I will confirm the oath I swore to your father Abraham”* (Gen. 26:3) – the promise. *“I will make your descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and will give them all these lands, and through your offspring all nations on earth will be blessed”* (Gen. 26:4). Same promise that God gave to Abraham, He now gives to Isaac.

Keep turning to the right and you come to Genesis 28. God speaks to Isaac's son, Jacob. I want you to hear the promise that God gives to Jacob, the patriarch. Look at Genesis 28:13 Jacob, in a dream it says, *“There above stood the Lord, and he said ‘I am the Lord, the God of your father Abraham and the God of Isaac.’* (connection here, don't miss it) *‘I will give you and your descendants the land on which you are lying. Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east, to the north and to the south. All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring’*” (Gen. 28:13-14). Same promise, now reiterated to Jacob. “Your line is going to be a great nation. Through you all the peoples of the earth are going to be blessed.”

Let me show you one more with Jacob. Keep going to the right, and go to Genesis 35. I want to show you how this takes even a step deeper here in Genesis 35. These are the promises – when Romans 15, Paul talks about promises made to the patriarchs, these are the promises. Look at Genesis 35:9. A different point in Jacob's journey – in Jacob's life – the Bible says, *“After Jacob returned from Paddan Aram, God appeared to him again and blessed him. God said to him, ‘Your name is Jacob, but you will no longer be called Jacob; your name will be Israel.’ So he named him Israel”* (Gen. 35:9-10). So He named him Israel. This is the nation of Israel – the people of Israel – the tribes of Israel would flow from Jacob's line. *“And God said to him, ‘I am God Almighty; be fruitful and increase in number. A nation and a community of nations will come from you’”* (Gen 35:11). That's the promise we've seen over and over again. But then, looks at this: *“and kings will come from your body”* (Gen 35:11). So the picture is, through the line of Jacob of Israel, there will come a king – many kings.

Now there's so much more. I could show you the end of Genesis 49 where Jacob is blessing his sons who will represent the tribes of Israel. He says to his son, Judah, that there would come one from the line of Judah to whom the scepter belongs, and the obedience of the nations will be His. And these are pictures that God is promising the blessing of His people, the line of Judah. We could trace throughout the rest of the Old Testament, King David, who

would come from the line of Judah, to Solomon, and so and so on, all the way to the New Testament.

Now turn to one place in the New Testament, Acts 3:24, turn there. Obviously we are skipping over so much here. Even in the New Testament. What we've got in the Old Testament is these promises made to the patriarchs, and how God – the story of the Old Testament – is how God is continuing that promise line, such that when you get to the beginning of the New Testament (Matthew 1), you notice that before we even get a picture of the birth of Christ, what Matthew gives us is a genealogy. And he says, "This all started with Abraham. It came through King David, and now it comes through Christ." And Matthew saying – this is the promised king, that God promised to Abraham way back then. This is the king who is come. And when you get to Acts 3, what you see is Peter preaching a sermon to a crowd of Jewish people. Now I want you to listen to what he says. It almost sounds exactly like Romans 15.

He says in verse 24, we'll start there: *"Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers"* (Acts 3:24-25). Listen to this, *"He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed'"* (Acts 3:25). He goes back to the promise made to Abraham. And verse 26 says, *"When God raised up his servant"* – this is Jesus, His servant – *"he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways"* (Acts 3:26).

What Peter's saying is, you know these promises that God gave to the patriarchs long ago. Well, now God has raised up His servant, Christ, as the fulfillment of those promises. Which brings us all the way back to Romans 15. Paul says Christ came to confirm these promises that God had made, and the whole picture – don't miss it – the whole picture is, Christ's coming shows us that when God makes a promise, He keeps His promises. Those promises are sure.

I wish we had time, we could go other places like 2 Corinthians 1:20. Paul says, *"All the promises of God find their yes in [Christ]"* (2 Cor. 1:20). The Christ is a picture of the fact that God is faithful to His Word. Jesus came to certify God's integrity, and to vindicate God's Word.

Jesus Came to Demonstrate God's Mercy

Third – take it a step deeper – Jesus came to demonstrate God's mercy. Here's where it gets even more wonderful because the promise is not just for the Jewish people. Through the Jewish people, all the nations of the earth will be blessed. So Paul says Christ came *"to confirm the promise made to the patriarchs so that the Gentiles"* – the nations – *"may glorify God for his mercy"* (Rom. 15:8-9). And the beauty of it is that from the very beginning God had promised: "I'm going to bless the people of Israel so that all nations of the earth will be blessed." One preacher said, "The blessings of God's promises spill over the banks of Israel, and reach the nations." This is one of the points that Paul's been making all throughout the book of Romans, is he has been saying that Christ coming is for Jew and Gentile alike, and Jew and Gentile alike can be saved through Christ. This is not just for one people; this is for all peoples – Gentiles, the nations, every people – tribe, every language, every nation will glorify God for the mercy He has shown us in Christ. Christ came to demonstrate God's mercy, to Jew and Gentile alike.

Jesus Came to Unify God's People

Which leads to the next part, Jesus came to demonstrate God's mercy, and in so doing Jesus came to unify God's people because as a result of what God was doing among the

Gentiles, now Jews and Gentiles were united together in a way they never had been before. There had been glimpses of this throughout the Old Testament, but now in the Church we see a picture of the unity of peoples, and tribes, and nations – Jews and Gentiles – together as one.

Now in order to feel the gravity of this, we got to put ourselves in these folks' shoes. Like just imagine the Jewish people—people of Israel—for generations have tried to follow the law of God; had walked as a people who had been shown the affection of God, and many times had lived isolated in the middle of Gentile peoples. Isolated culturally. Isolated religiously. Isolated in many respects morally and ethically. There was a deep divide there as a result of generations.

Now, all of a sudden in Christ – in the first century, the picture of the church – now you've got Jews and Gentiles sitting next to one-another worshipping together. And the reality is, they had a hard time getting along. And a lot of the things we see in the New Testament, a lot of the letters we see are addressing some of the conflict that was going on between Jews and Gentiles. You can imagine – put yourself in the shoes of a Jewish person who – now you're around people who have isolated you, who are totally different from you culturally, and in the past religiously, have different backgrounds than you, thought differently from you, and in some senses have been enemies of you, and now you're worshipping next to one another.

The whole picture that Paul is saying here, when you get to verse 7 there, he says, "Accept one another." Christ has accepted Jew and Gentile alike, so you accept one another, and this will bring praise to God. And the beautiful picture that Paul is painting is that God gets great glory, not just when He is worshipped by one type of people, but God gets great glory when a multiplicity of peoples – when in diversity people come together accepting one-another, united in the gospel, resounding to the praise of His name. And the excellency of the King is seen when all different types of people come together to honor that king.

That's the picture: Christ came to make that a reality to unify God's people, which is exactly what he closes out with in this passage. Jesus came to certify God's integrity, to vindicate God's Word; He came to demonstrate God's mercy, and to unify God's people.

Jesus Came to Fulfill God's Purpose

All of that leading to this reason why He came: Jesus came to fulfill God's purpose – fulfill God's purpose. And what I want you to see is that there in verse 9, Paul brings in four different quotations from the Old Testament. I want to show you – I wish we had time to turn back to all these places in the Old Testament – but I want to show you – and you might write this down in your Bible, just kind of a little side note beside each of these quotations – I want to show you a progression that Paul gives us in these pictures that he quotes from the Old Testament.

The first time he quotes from Psalm 18:49. It's a song of David; a song of victory – King David. Psalm 18:49, it says, "*Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing hymns to your name*" (Rom. 15:9). So here's the picture. You might write it out to the side. This is the Jews among Gentiles – Jews among Gentiles praising God. The Jews are praising God among Gentiles. Jews among Gentiles, praising God. That's where the picture starts in Psalm 18:49.

Then the next quotation's from Deuteronomy 32:43. It's a song of Moses. And it says: "*Rejoice, O Gentiles, with his people*" (Rom. 15:10). So now it's not Jews among Gentiles, it's Jews with the Gentiles. Jews worshipping God and calling on the Gentiles: "Rejoice with

us." Jews among Gentiles first, and then now the Jews with the Gentiles together worshipping God.

Which leads to the third quotation; this one from another Psalm – Psalm 117:1, "*Again, 'Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles, and sing praises to him, all you peoples'*" (Rom. 15:11). Now that's a picture of the Gentiles praising God. "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles. Sing praises to Him, all you peoples." You've got the Jews among the Gentiles, the Jews with the Gentiles, now you've got the Gentiles praising God.

You see, that progression all leading to this last one from Isaiah – Isaiah 11:10, "*And again, Isaiah says, 'The Root of Jesse will spring up'*" (Rom. 15:12). Now that's a reference to Christ – the root of Jesse, coming through the line of King David. Christ will spring up. "*The root of Jesse will spring up, one who will arise to rule over the nations; the Gentiles will hope in him*" (Rom. 15:12). All this quotation culminates in a picture of Christ, the promised one who is come to the Jewish people – the root of Jesse – getting praise from all peoples, Jew and Gentile alike. So we've gone from Jews among Gentiles, to Jews with Gentiles, to Gentiles praising God, and now, in the end culmination, is Christ raised up and all peoples giving glory to His name.

And the beauty of it is – don't miss this – this has been God's design from the very beginning. God's design was to call a people out, to send His son to purchase a people from every tribe, and language, and nation – Jew and Gentile alike who would unite together in praise and glory to Him. And Jesus came to fulfill that purpose. Jesus came to make that purpose a reality. In Christ coming, He brought Jews and Gentiles – Revelation 7 reminds us, there's coming a day when every tribe, every people, every language, every nation, will gather around the throne singing praise to God for the salvation that has come through Christ.

It's what we sing in that carol—"He rules the world with truth and grace, and makes the nations prove the glories of His righteousness, and the wonders of His love." The whole purpose of God was to send Christ so that all the nations would glorify Him for His righteousness and love.

This is why Christ came. A God-centered meaning behind Christmas. Jesus came to show us that God is true. He came to show us God is faithful to His work. He came to demonstrate the mercy of God, to unify the people of God, and ultimately to fulfill the purpose of God.

Now I want to show you why a God-centered Christmas is extremely good for us. Because right after Paul develops this in verses 7 through 12, listen to what he says in verse 13. This is how he brings it all to a head. He says – his prayer: "*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit*" (Rom. 15:13). Now you saw it mentioned twice. You might circle it in your Bible; hope – "and the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace, so that you may overflow" – love that picture – "overflow with hope." Circle it there. God-centered Christmas; hope-filled New Year.

And a Hope-Filled New Year...

Now I want you to think with me, about how – about why – what we have just seen in Romans 15:7-12, causes us to have great hope in our lives, and specifically hope for us as

we enter into a new year. When I talk about hope, I'm not talking about hope the way the world talks about hope. I'm not talking about an empty wishful thinking that says, "Well, I hope the next year will be good. I hope the economy will rebound. I hope my job will be secure, or the job market will get better. I hope my relationships will be smooth. I hope the next year my health will be good. I hope that the political situation will be good. I hope that the world situation will be safe."

This is how the world hopes, and I want to urge you tonight, not to hope in those things, because the reality is – and we know this – any one of those things could crumble in an instant. We know that when it comes to our health, any one of us is one day away from a diagnosis, and we never saw it coming. Aren't we? And our hope is not in the economy, the job market, or politics, or world situations. I want to urge you not to put your hope in these things. I want to urge you to put your hope in the glory of God. I want to show you why the glory of God is a supreme foundation for hope in your life.

Paul said earlier in Romans 5, when he was talking about suffering, he said – when we're suffering, he said, "*We rejoice in the hope of the glory of God*" (Rom. 5:2). What does that mean? How is the glory of God a spring from which hope flows? I want you to think about how the glory of God gives hope. Based on what we just saw, that Christ coming for the glory of God. Based on what we just saw in Romans 15:7-12, about Christ coming. Think about these reasons for hope in 2010.

God Will be True to His Character

First, in 2010, hope in this: God will be true to His character in 2010. God will be true to His character. Christ came to show us the truthfulness of God, and as a result we can know – brothers and sisters – we can know that no matter what happens in 2010 – mark this down – no matter what happens in 2010, God will be loving. God will be merciful. God will be good. God will be wise, and God will be just, and God will be sovereign – He will be in control of every single detail in 2010.

In a world where everything is unreliable and inconsistent and shifting, brothers and sisters, God is constant, and He does not change like shifting shadows. And all throughout 2010, we can hope in this: He will be true to His character, at every moment, in every situation, we can trust, and... This is the words of Paul, "Trust in Him."

God Will be Faithful to His Word

God will be true to His character. God will be faithful to His Word. This is what Romans 15 has taught us – reminded us. The reason I wanted to take us back and show us those different passages is because I want us to realize that when God speaks – when God makes a promise, He keeps it – guaranteed, He keeps it. God is always, always, always faithful to His Word.

Now, obviously, we don't have a promise – you and I don't have a promise – none of us have a promise in 2010 that our health will be good. None of us have the promise that our job will be secure. None of us have a promise that the finances will be there, and the world around us will be safe. We do not have promises like that. But what we have from God are promises that are far, far, far greater than these things. Just a simple journey through Romans shows us deep and abiding promises to hold on to. Sure, we don't know if we will have good health, or be in a good financial situation, or this or that, but we can know this – we do know this – Romans 8:28—God will use every single thing that happens in 2010, in your life, for the good of those who love Him, and have been called according to His purpose – guaranteed! He's going to use it all – even the worse things – He's going to use them for good in your life in 2010.

We can know based on Romans 8:15. *That no matter how difficult it gets, we have no reason to fear because we did not receive a spirit of fear. We have "received the Spirit of Sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father.' The Spirit himself testifies with our Spirit that we are God's children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ"* (Rom. 8:15-17), if we may share in His sufferings during 2010, and it's possible we might, but we can know that even if we share in suffering, one day we are going to share in His glory – guaranteed!

If God is for us in 2010, who can be against us? Romans 8:31-32. The reality is, even if we do get a diagnosis, whatever the cancer, or the tumor, or the trauma, or the trial, or the temptation, there is, we can know this: we are eagerly looking forward to our adoption through redemption of our very bodies. There is nothing this world can do to us that can take away that hope. God will be faithful to His Word in your life – guaranteed! Put your hope in that. Find joy and peace in that.

Don't look other places for hope; let Him be your hope. In Him... Christ – the faithfulness of Christ, the truthfulness of Christ – Christ is hope in our lives. Christ is the hope in our marriages. Christ is the hope in our children's lives. Christ is the hope in the world around us and among the nations, Christ is our hope.

God Will be Constant in His Mercy

God will be true to His character. God will be faithful to His Word. God will be constant in His mercy in the next year. Hope in this: God will be constant in His mercy.

"So that the Gentiles may glorify God for His mercy" (Rom. 15:9). We look in the New Testament and we see that oftentimes the Gentiles almost felt like second-class citizens; kind of left out of the picture, because they weren't there from the beginning in the same way the Jewish people were. And the picture is God showing that they are included in the wide wings of the mercy of God. They are brought in. And God is merciful to all peoples.

Know this, brothers and sisters – know this: There is not one detail that you will face in 2010 that your God is not already intimately aware of. And not one detail or situation that you will face in the next year, that God has not already promised to be there to hear your cry, or to bear your burden, and to give you every single thing that you need to walk through what lies ahead, so that in 2010 whether you walk through valleys or mountain tops, either one, you will find yourself glorifying God for His mercy. God will be constant in His mercy.

God Will Show His Love Through His People

Next, think about this: God will show His love through His people. We've seen how God has brought together different types of people into the church, and designed the unity of different types of people and His church around the gospel, to be a display of His glory.

Faith family here at Brook Hills – specifically here. God has designed us in the same way that Paul is urging these Roman-Christians, Jew and Gentile alike, God has designed us to accept one-another, to care for one-another, to provide for one-another, to love one-another in a way that shows the distinct community of faith, that resounds to the glory of God, not because everybody looks the same, or thinks the same, or feels the same, or dresses the same, because together we have been embraced by Christ, and captured by a glorious gospel. And we find ourselves around other people that maybe don't look like us, or think like us.

That's the whole point; it's not that we agree on every single thing. Chapter 14, Paul's been talking about it, people have differences in different things, but he says, "Accept one another. Love one-another. Bring praise to God in this." This is what makes the church beautiful. Not that we're united by the standards this world sets up. We're united by a gospel – we're a gospel-driven community.

I got an email recently from a college student in Chicago, who was originally from North Korea. And he's moving down to Birmingham for graduate school, and he was looking online for information about churches. And the day he happened to go to our Web site, was also – just so happened to be – the week when we as a church – and published on our Web site there – we're focusing our prayers on North Korea. Like God has this thing rigged.

So, he wrote me, and he said: "Reverend Platt" – I don't think anybody's ever called me "Reverend Platt," but – I've been called other things, but anyway, all right. "Reverend Platt. As I am looking at schools, the most important thing to find, to me at least, is a good local church to be involved in, and to serve in." Which if I can just pause for a second – a little mini-sermon to the side here – that's a good word. I know that there are high school seniors in process now of thinking through what's next, and freshman, sophomores, juniors already thinking through some of those things. Let me encourage you – parents and students – not to let church be an after-thought on a college decision. Let church be a primary thought on a college decision. Yes, academic credentials are important, geographic location—all the other things, but let me encourage you not to just think, "Well, I'll just find a church when I get there." No, look, and if there's not a gospel-believing, Bible-preaching, God-glorifying church, then be very concerned about going to a place where – as you will be challenged in your faith if you do not have a community of faith around you. This is huge. I'm so thankful for this kind of perspective in a college student.

So he writes,

A simple Google search led me to your Web site, and the first thing I noticed was the slide that said, 'Pray for North Korea.' And I was so moved and touched by that. I am a North Korean refugee that somehow, by the grace of God, escaped from North Korea and was adopted into a Christian home here in the United States. I have seen lots of Christians say a lot of mean, abrasive, and unloving things about my people, and they mock the poverty and oppression that my people live in. To see a church praying for my people is really moving to me. I just wanted to say, 'thank you' for having your church pray for my people, and somehow praying for the parents that put me on a boat to the United States.

And then he says, "I think if you would allow a Democrat to join your church, I will find a home at Brook Hills in the very near future, if you would allow me the opportunity. God bless you and your ministry." I wrote back and told him: "You are more than welcome here. And as evidence of the indescribable, unexplainable, unbelievable grace of God in this church, we actually accept Republicans here, too."

This is the picture of the church, isn't it? It's what God has designed. Not that we find our unity in political affiliation, or dress, or this or that – all the things the world defines organizations or clothes by. No, we're a gospel-centered community, united in the fact that we've been embraced by Christ. We've embraced Him. And that brings glorious praise to God. And God has designed for us to be that kind of community of faith with one another. And I pray that we will see the glory of God in that kind of community that we experience as a church in 2010.

God Will Use Our Lives to Accomplish His Purpose

All of that leading to the last picture of hope – a facet of hope and the glory of God. We can know that in 2010, God will use our lives to accomplish His purpose. Here's the deal, we've seen, from the beginning of creation, God has a purpose to bring all peoples – Jews and Gentiles, people from every nation, tribe and language, tongue – literally, every people group together to glorify Him. And Jesus came to fulfill that purpose.

What this means is that as we give ourselves to that same purpose – making His glory known among all peoples of the world – we can be confident that we will not fail. Because it is the purpose of God. This is where I wanted to be honest, maybe even a little bit vulnerable, and as I think about 2009, there's a lot of things that I have learned in 2009, and clearly a lot more that I have to learn.

One of the things, though, that has stuck out to me in 2009, is that as long as we as Christians, and as long as we in the church, live to make the glory of God known among all the peoples of the world, and try to figure out how to live Christianity in Birmingham, Alabama, and be the church in Birmingham, Alabama, for the sake and the glory of Christ among all the people groups of the world – as long as that is our purpose, it will not be easy. It will not be easier at all, it will be harder. It will be more difficult. And Satan will not sit idly by while the people of God pursue the glory of Christ among all the peoples of the world.

I think about what God has done by His grace over the last year, and the stories are too numerous to tell. I think about the people who have been saved in homeless shelters, and women's centers, and prisons, and assisted living centers as a result of the grace of God in small groups in this faith family. I think about a whole host of individuals and families who have stepped up and said, "We, as a church, are going to make sure that every single child in our county is cared for when they are removed from their home because of drugs, or abuse, or a variety of other factors." What a picture! By God's grace, we're going to make sure that every kid in our county has loving arms around them at night.

I think about businessmen and businesswomen who have lead and leverage the companies to focus on urgent need in the world; stay-at-home moms who have organized ministries, and community, and among the nations. And then I think about, oh, the grace of God, even in just the past few months, the reality that there are hundreds of kids in the poorest country in the world, who today are thriving when they were starving to death. God is good.

I think about where we are going in the days to come as we focus on urgent need in Birmingham; communities that are great need in many different ways – difficult communities in many different ways. And I think about "The Radical Experiment"... What we wanted to do with our resources, sacrificing our resources, and taking steps that I – many of us – us as church – have not taken before.

There was a guy in Germany, a reporter for some Christian organization, who heard about "The Radical Experiment," and so he called me from Germany. And he asked me, he said, "Is this kind of risky?" I was like, "Yeah, I guess." He said, "Well, do you know what you're doing?" I said, "No, man! I don't." The reality is, as we do this in Birmingham and different parts of the world, and as we pray over the next year and raise up – send out hopefully, prayerfully, this time next year church planting teams to places where there is no gospel – the reality is it will not get easier for us, it will get harder, be more costly, will be more sacrifice, less safety at times. But I am finding great hope in the reality that as long as we are giving ourselves to the purpose of God that has been there since the beginning of

creation, that it may be tough and it may be difficult and it may be costly, but it will be worth it. And God will use our lives to accomplish His purpose.

So hope in this when it gets hard. Hope in this when it gets costly. Hope in this when it's not safe. Hope in this when the way of thinking and the way of life goes against everything in our culture, and even our church culture around us. Hope in this, God from the beginning has been making His glory known among all the peoples of the world, and as long as you and I are in on that purpose, we are guaranteed – guaranteed – to see that purpose finished. It's going to happen, and it will be worth it.

The Bottom Line...

And this is where it all leads to: Why Christmas? Why did Jesus come? Yes, He came to free us, and to serve us, and to bring us life, and to seek us, and to save us. But deeper than that, ultimately the reason why He came is the same reason why we live. The reason why Jesus came is the same reason why we live, and that reason is the glory of God.

And we are caught up in Christ with this grand overarching, unstoppable purpose, the glory of God among all the peoples of the earth, enjoying His glory, exalting His glory, being satisfied in His glory, savoring His glory, and spreading His glory among the nations. That is reason to celebrate a God-centered Christmas, and a hope-filled New Year.

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