

Worth Our Lives

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[0:00] Luke chapter 2, Luke chapter 2, I hope you've been as blessed as I have through the music. Brian, don't you ever apologize for singing that song? That and It Is Well is probably my two favorite songs and whatever else I think of later.

But I really, it is, it means the world to me. That song does, first time I ever heard him sing that, I was thinking, does he know Lorna Harris sings that? Is he going there?

And he went there and he does an excellent job and I appreciate that. And then we sang about, redeeming love has been my theme and shall be till I die. Think about that, folks.

Woo, that's a message there. And Josh, thank you so much, brother. Last man to let you down, Josh Hyatt, right there. He'll take care of you, brother. If you don't know him, he's a mortician. So anyway, he'll take care of you.

Y'all will get that later, won't you? Do you hear that? Kind of like the wave, you know, some people get it and then, you know. I want us this morning to close out our year together and to preface the new year by responding to the difference that the birth of Christ really makes in our world and in our lives.

[1:14] And I do that by reading my favorite part of the Christmas story. Now, listen, I know Christmas is over. And some of y'all are like me.

As we were opening up gifts around the tree, I thought, I didn't know I bought that. I wouldn't have bought that if I'd known I bought that, you know. So Christmas ain't over, but yet Christmas is over. And I get that. But there's parts of it that just stay with you. And Luke chapter 2, verse 15 through 20 is probably my favorite part of the Christmas story.

Don't know if that's theologically correct to say, but I'll just tell you that it is. Because it's about our response to it. What difference does it really make in our hearts and lives?

When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that's happened, which the Lord has made known to us.

[2:12] And they went with haste. They were hurrying. And they found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.

It means they told folks about it, folks. And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart.

And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen as it had been told them. It's my favorite part because it deals with how people were affected by witnessing the newborn babe and the happenings around Jesus.

And what a scene it was. How do you respond to that?

We treasure it. How do you respond to what Christ has done for us?

[3:35] We treasure it. It says Mary treasured all the parts of the event that she had witnessed. She took it in. I really think that if she had not paused and reflected, she would have been so overwhelmed, so overstimulated by the atmosphere and the guests and the activities and all of that, that she might have missed it.

But in the midst of all of that, she paused. As 2023 leaves us, and as 2024 comes, it is my hope that for 2024 that you'll make a commitment to pause spiritually in your life in a few different ways.

One is to pause weekly and faithfully be in corporate worship with the family of believers that you're part of.

The devil loves to side track us in this area. He loves to throw us off our game. And there's a reason why he likes to throw us off our game.

We need this, folks. I need this. You need this.

[5 : 03] And don't ever be mistaken that we need this and you to be a part of it. It makes a difference, I promise you.

We need the spiritual encouragement. We need the biblical confrontation. We need the rhythm of rest, worship rest, with the body of believers.

It's like milk. It does a body good, I'm telling you. Your body as well as this body, unless, of course, you're lactose intolerant. And if you are, that illustration probably don't work for you.

But it does you good. It really does. Now, that may sound for some like a selfish plea for my job security, but I promise you it's not.

It's the truth. And I have seen what happens when people wander away. I've seen what happens when corporate worship becomes less of a priority.

[6 : 05] When other priorities in your life get skewed along with it. And when it begins to affect your family, it begins to affect your witness.

It begins to affect your testimony. Always by more than you can ever see. Because the devil works in darkness and he loves to blind us in those areas.

To help us miss our blind spots. I promise you it makes a difference. But I want to be clear about something this morning. Church attendance does not make enough of a difference.

You need more than just corporate worship for this hour. It's not to take anything away from your commitment to be here, and I'm thankful that you're here. You have a lot of reasons this week to not be here.

You can come up with a lot of excuses to not be here. I'm thankful that you are. But you need to connect with folks more personally around the Word of God.

[7 : 15] And we try to promote, but I'm not going to bang a drum every week, I promise you, to let you know how strong it is for you, how much it will help you to be a part of a Bible study class on Sunday morning.

A smaller group we call Sunday school. To be a part of that and to grow together. The fellowship that comes from that. The outreach that comes from that.

What I call the in-reach. When people are hurting and your Sunday school class knows more about those circumstances than anybody else in the church, and they can wrap around you and love on you and how we're blessed in this church for that to happen.

It is needed. I promise you it's needed. And then to be faithful in the discipleship class.

This week is kind of one of our weeks where we emphasize all these new opportunities. Because we have new opportunities coming in January. If you've not been a part before and looked for a door to get into, hello, welcome.

[8 : 20] It's time. You know? I mean, there's a page full of them. And if that ain't enough, we'll come up with more. You know what I mean? I mean, we'll... Because I want you to be able to take a step deeper than where you are now.

Now, sanctification is the process of one who's given his or her heart and life to the Lord Jesus to become more like Christ throughout the rest of their life until they see him face to face.

And we want to do everything we can to help you become a disciple of Christ and grow in him throughout your life and not stop until you see him face to face.

And that's why we do what we do. If you're already there in Sunday school, for instance, then come back on a Sunday night or come back on a Wednesday and dig deeper.

Treasure what God has given you in Christ. But I challenge each one of you, take a step further in 2024. Not to more obligation, but to more growth.

[9 : 26] But even more than that, treasure what you have in the Lord daily.

Spend time in God's Word. Now, let me be clear. You may have a method and a procedure that you use daily to dig into God's Word, and that works.

And if that works, don't let it throw you off your game. You don't have to do what everybody else is doing. But let me tell you, the devil loves to stump us in this area.

He wants us to not pray faithfully. He wants us to not take time in God's Word daily.

And I promise you, if it's not a priority to you, it won't happen. It just won't. If it's not a daily appointment for you, it won't happen. Satan does not want you to be blessed.

[10 : 27] Listen to Psalm 1 that shows us how to be blessed. It says this, Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers.

Do you see the progression there? If you're walking in the wrong way for long, you'll stop and stand there, and if you're not, you'll plop down and get comfortable. That's what happens.

It's a drift, folks. But the one who's blessed don't do those things. But instead, his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night.

He's like a tree planted by streams of water who yield its fruit in its season, and its leaf does not wither. In all that he does, he prospers.

Why? Because he meditates on the Word. I want you to be blessed. I want your life to be blessed. And I know the difference that spending time daily in the Word of God will make in your life.

[11:37] I will say the effort of spending time daily in the Word of God is probably going to be the greatest emphasized effort at Pickens First Baptist Church in 2024. It's amazing to me to see how God has worked around that.

Let me tell you why. I came in almost 19 months ago, and I started with a sermon series called First Things First, and I told you right off the bat that I believe one of the first things in your life ought to be spending time daily in the Word of God.

We had bookmarks made that gave a reading plan, and those bookmarks are out, and they are on the offertory boxes on both sides of me as well as in the foyer.

If you've been to our introductory discovery class, you've heard me talk about that as well. I don't want to spend a lot of time on it this morning because I've talked a lot about it.

I will post a post on Facebook this afternoon that talks even more about it. I emphasized in 2023 that, and many of you join me in that if you're not already doing that.

[12:49] Jeff has two meetings a week with men who are reading the Word together and studying together. It's called D-Life. I encourage you to be a part of that. The difference that this year, the difference in this year is that God has stoked a fire under the ladies of our church in this particular area, and they have a plan, and they have a layout, and they have a system that ladies will help you succeed in spending time daily in the Word of God.

Dozens of ladies have signed up to be a part of this. It's called the Bible Recap. The Bible Recap has a, there's a, I mean, there's a brunch Saturday about it, you know.

So, I mean, the Bible Recap has a plan of reading. They have a podcast that they explain what you've read. They have, that backs up that plan daily.

They have a very good little commentary that explains what you've read that day in a very simple way. On top of that, there are at least five small group bunches that meet twice a month, or there's that quarterly brunch that I just mentioned.

All of that is to encourage you to read God's Word. And that kind of encouragement from one another will grow through the Word of God when you're having conversations around the Word of God, people grow in the Lord, period.

[14:15] Dozens of scores of ladies have signed up, and I encourage you to do that if you hadn't already. There's sign-ups in the four-year. And if none of that attracts you to God's Word, well, let me tell you about a man who lived 200 years ago in Scotland.

He was a great preacher with a godly life, and his name was Robert Murray Macheney. He loved the Lord and His Word and wanted God's people in it, and I think his picture makes him look a little sweeter than he really was, quite honestly.

He developed a calendar to read God's Word daily that puts you in four different parts of Scripture daily.

And when you do that daily, you'll read the Old Testament through once, you'll read the New Testament and Psalms twice a year. He also provided the option of taking two years to do it, to read through the Bible.

And the way it's laid out, you can easily do that. I love it because he gives me some New Testament daily, and I need that, and that does me good. I just want you to hear a few words from him this morning.

[15:39] He died in 1843, so he won't be here personally. And he was not yet 30 years of age.

Though he was young, he was called in Scotland and in surrounding areas the saintly Macheney. This is what he wrote to one young man.

He said, you read your Bible regularly, of course, but do try and understand it and steal more to feel it. Read more parts than one at a time.

For example, if you're reading Genesis, read a Psalm also. If you're reading Matthew, read a small bit of an epistle also. Turn the Bible into prayer. Thus, if you were reading the first Psalm, spread the Bible on the chair before you and kneel and pray, O God, give me the blessedness of the man. Let me not stand in the counsel of the ungodly. That's the best way of knowing the meaning of the Bible and of learning to pray. And he said, let our secret reading, because he has two different things.

[16:50] He calls some secret reading. It's for personal devotion. And he calls another portion family to where the family can join in for family devotion was his point.

But he says this, let our secret reading precede the dawning of the day. Let God's voice be the first we hear in the morning. Now, I'm a morning person, so it's easy for me to tell you that Jesus got up while it was still dark and got with the Lord.

Okay? But if Jesus had done it at 10 o'clock at night, I'd be in a mess. Okay? Because I'm done. You know, I'm done. That's just the way it is. And some of you are just the opposite of that.

And I get that. So whatever the best time of day for you, if you want to put on the armor of God and go to bed, go ahead. That's of little consequence, quite honestly.

But regular habits are of the most importance. He wrote a letter to his church, and I'm going to read parts of it. Because it summarizes a lot of what I want to share this morning.

[17:57] He said, My dear flock, the approach of another year stirs up within me new desires for your salvation and for the growth of those of you who were saved. God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ, which is a quote of Scripture.

What the coming year is to bring forth, who can tell? It's been long in my mind to prepare a scheme of Scripture reading in which as many as you were made willing by God might agree so that the whole Bible might be read once by you in a year and by feeding in the same portion of the green pasture at the same time.

I am quite aware that such a plan is accompanied with many dangers. And he lists the dangers. And I want you to hear this. Number one, formality.

We are such weak creatures that any regular returning duty is apt to degenerate into a lifeless form. The tendency of reading the word by a fixed rule may in some minds be to create this skeleton religion.

This is to be the peculiar sin of the last days, having a form of godliness but denying the power thereof. Guard against this. Let this calendar perish rather than this rust eat up your souls.

[19:19] So don't empty read. That's what he's saying. Number two, it could lead to self-righteousness. Some, when they are devoted their set time to reading of the word and accomplish their prescribed portion, may be tempted to look at others with self-deprecation.

Self-complacence, excuse me. Many, as I am persuaded, are living without any divine work on their soul, unpardoned and unsanctified and ready to perish, who spend their appointed times in secret and family devotion.

Just because you read God's word don't mean you're saved. That's what he's saying. This is going to hell with a lie in their right hand. Third danger is this, careless reading.

Few tremble at the word of God. Few in reading it hear the voice of Jehovah which is full of majesty. Some, by having such so large a portion, may be tempted to be weary of it, as Israel did of the daily manna, and to be read in a slight and careless manner.

And the fourth danger is a yoke too heavy to bear. Some may engage in reading with alacrity for a time. If you're like me, you may have to look that word up, and that means brisk and cheerful readiness.

[20:45] Some may engage in reading with alacrity for a time, and afterwards feel it a burden. Grievous to be born. They may find conscience dragging them through the appointed task without any relish of any heavenly food.

If this be the case with any, throw aside the fetter and feed at liberty in the sweet garden of God. My desire is not to cast a snare upon you, but to be a helper of your joy.

Don't be burdened down by this. More than anything else, God wants you. The advantages, however, is you read the whole Bible in an orderly manner in a course of a year.

Number two, time will not waste in choosing what portions to read. You already got a schedule. You know what to do. Third, parents will have a regular subject upon which to examine your children and servants, because all of these, the Bible recap, his, Macheney, this Bible bookmark, all of them

have a plan where children can read just a few verses, but they coincide with the verses the adults read, so you can actually have a conversation about that.

The sweet bond of Christian love and unity will be strengthened is another advantage. I said all that because Macheney says it better than I do.

[22 : 13] And that's exactly what my burden is, that somebody feel like that they're burdened down by something. They start out with great gusto and try to do that, and they get the Leviticus, and things just come apart on them.

You know, it happens. There are brochures of Macheney's plan available right here at the foot of the stage on both sides as well in the back. If you'd like to do that, I'm not trying to sell it.

I'm just telling you that's what my personal journey will be this year. I just want you in God's Word because I think it'll be the best thing for you.

Some of you will do well to listen to it through an app, and you have a lot of capability to do that now. That's better than nothing. But don't just tolerate the Word.

Treasure it. Treasure it. Take it in. Whatever you do, do this. Before you read, pause and pray, please.

[23 : 18] Ask God to speak to your life. Ask Him to move in your life. And then I encourage you to write down how He works. You need a record of it from time to time.

The journals that I have on shelves have been a treasure for me. So how do you respond? You treasure it. Treasure what Christ has done for you.

And you ponder on it. The second thing you do is we share it. We share it. The shepherd's left telling folks about it. Verse 17 said they made it known.

And verse 18 says, And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. Get people to start asking questions because your life has been changed because of your encounter with Christ. It's fun to be at the manger, but you don't stay at the manger. Nobody did. Life moved on. And they returned. And as they returned, they left. Scripture says, Glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen.

[24 : 26] And it's my prayer that we leave worship that way. Not only congregated worship, but daily personal worship with the Lord. If God's moving in your life, if He's moving in your life, in the life of this church, and through His Word, share that with people.

God blesses such as that. And that's the proper response to not only Christmas, but to all Christ has done for us. To the Savior incarnate coming into the world to give us hope, to treasure, and to share that.

And before we go out and share it, let's treasure it. Let's treasure it today, right now, around the table of the Lord.

I can't think of a better way to close out the old and bring in the new. But I encourage you to be sure that you come before this table clean before the Lord.

I want you to listen to what the Apostle Paul says. Hear me clearly this morning. Whoever therefore eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord.

[25 : 51] Let a person examine himself then and so eat of this bread and drink of this cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself.

I like this verse. That's why many of you are weak and ill. Some have died. Don't look at me like that. I didn't say it. He said it. And the Word says it.

We need to be right. We don't need to be flippant with what we do. We need to be right. So I ask you today, on the last day of the year, do you know Christ?

Have you ever surrendered your life to follow the Lord Jesus Christ? If you've never done that, forget this. We're not worried about this. You need to surrender your life to the Lord Jesus.

You need to get that right. You need to ask him to forgive you of your sins, to come into your life and change you. And he'll meet you where you are and make you what he'd have you to be.

[26 : 57] And if you've done that, if you surrender your life to him, then let's take a moment, before we ever approach the table, let's take a moment to confess our sins to God and to walk away from them.

And if you can't do that, then don't take part. That's what the Apostle Paul is saying. It's not for the unclean. It's not a snack for the kids.

Children, if you've never publicly acknowledged your faith in Christ, you're not welcome to take this today. It's not a snack for your parents. Ask them about it at lunch.

Have that conversation. It's not for those who've made private decisions and never bothered to make them public through baptism. Does that mean that you have to be perfect?

No. If it does, ain't none of us taking it. We're all in a mess. It means we're clean and we're forgiven. [28 : 10] Forgiveness comes when we agree with God on what the state of our sin is. Not the way we see it, but the way he sees it and the way his word describes it.

So get clean. Get right. Follow his lead and treasure him today. He's honored by such and he blesses such.

With every head bowed and every eye closed, what do you need to do to be right today? Do you need to give your heart and life to the Lord Jesus? Do you need to make what's been private in your life public and tell folks that you've surrendered your life to the Lord but never publicly acknowledge that?

Or is there something in your life that's a hindrance to you? A sinful blockade that you need to get right before God? I'm thankful today that if the Lord so wills, you can do that where you sit.

Or we'll take a moment and you can walk down this aisle and come before this altar and give that to the Lord. I'm here to pray for you. Maybe God's drawing you to be a part of this church.

[29 : 33] What a wonderful way to end the year. Don't ever let this preclude that by any means. You follow the Lord. You do what God told you to do.

We'd love to welcome you. I'll explain all of that to you. I just want you obedient, folks. I want to be obedient. I want you obedient. Let's grow in the Lord together.

Lord Jesus, lead us right now as we sing, but more importantly as we obey you. Help us do exactly, Lord, what you'd have us to do. In Jesus' precious name. Amen.

Stand together if you will.