

“It Never Gets Old”
by Chris Ulrich
Sunday, December 18th, 2016

I'd like to ask Mike Alford to come up and lead us in prayer for the sermon this morning.

Mike: Lord Jesus, we just praise Your Holy name. Lord God, we have a lot to be thankful for, Lord Jesus, and, Lord, we want to remember our brother, Aaron Schemp, Lord God. I remember him when he got baptized, Lord. He is where we want to be, Lord God. We're living this life so we can make it to Heaven and be with You, Lord Jesus. We're all in different stages of our walk with You, Lord Jesus. We just want to make it to Heaven, God. Lord, we just pray that You'd bless the message today; bless the messenger, Lord God, as he lifts up Your name and help us to prepare the way, that we can hear, “Well done, thou good and faithful servant,” at the end of this life. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

Thank you, you may be seated. Good to see everybody this morning on this beautiful, cold day. I see Amy quite bundled up back there. And it was great hearing a lot of the songs: a lot of the Christmas songs, and a lot of the traditional hymns that we do; it was good to hear that. And we've gone over the verse of the month: Matthew chapter two, and verse ten, and Andy read it earlier:

Matthew 2:10 *When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy.*

This morning this service is about that, it's about that promise of God that God delivered to us, that God gave us. There's going to be three different points this morning:

- Promise Keeper
- The Word Was Made Flesh
- It Never Gets Old

1st Point – Promise Keeper

About twenty-five years ago, and I already probably told a little bit about what I'm going to ask, but, there was a movement that got started, and it made headlines, and it kind of coincided with about the same time I gave my heart to the Lord. I didn't follow them particularly closely or attend any of their gatherings, but they called themselves, “Promise Keepers.” How many remembers that group? I know that, their name, it kind of rang a bell with me. It was something that—it was kind of inspirational. I'd say that they seemed like a good and honest and wholesome organization. I don't think they're quite as popular now as they were then. It seemed to lose a little momentum, maybe on a national scale.

But, I know that, on a somewhat different level, and this is something I think a lot of us can relate to, especially those of us that follow sports—I'm not going to go too deep into this—but there is a guy by the name of LeBron James who plays basketball in the NBA. He's originally from Akron, Ohio, and he grew up in that area. He was drafted by the Cleveland Cavaliers basketball team, back in the early two-thousands. He played there several years. He got their team close to a championship—never actually got there. He ended up going to a different team. A lot of us know the story, but, a lot of people in Cleveland were really disappointed, pretty well heartbroken. Anyway, that city had suffered—like the Cubs—for a long time, with no sports titles in any sport whatsoever; we're talking about going on fifty years. So, a couple of years later he decided to come back to Cleveland, and, of course, the city was just rejoicing, and really happy about it, and he promised, “I'm going to bring the city of Cleveland a title.” Well, the first year, they didn't quite get there, but—for those of you that hate the Cleveland Cavaliers, I know some of you don't, I know it's not this city, and, personally, I'm not from Cleveland, but, I know that, a lot of us, we do follow sports, and I may have gotten caught up in that, a little bit,

but I don't think overly so, but, they actually won the title this last year. And, this was a promise-keeper. They actually won the title last June; they overcame what would be considered pretty insurmountable odds, playing against a team that had just broken record after record for victories. They were down three games to one in the finals—kind of like the Cubs, so, just putting that on a little bit of a parallel, there—but, what if he hadn't delivered on that promise? Think about that, I mean, I'm sure they would be doing one of those, “Well, at least you tried. At least he put forth some effort, and he did as much as he possibly could, because, you know, nobody stays forever. Nobody plays the game forever.”

But, I want to share a Scripture verse, from the Book of Isaiah, chapter seven, and this is a common verse, for those of us that read the Bible, that do know that, that have become acquainted, that study to show ourselves approved unto God.

Isaiah 7:14-15 *Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel. Butter and honey shall he eat, that he may know to refuse the evil, and choose the good.*

So, this is a prophecy from the Book of Isaiah, and I've often thought about this passage and, how when it was first spoken, I imagine there were probably plenty of non-believers or doubters out there and I'm sure they felt their doubt and unbelief was confirmed because they didn't see that happen in their lifetime, they didn't see it manifest itself in their lifetime, or even their offspring, even future generations. It wasn't something that happened right away. Think about that for a minute, because we have that luxury in 2016 of being able to point to that promise, and have that fulfilled prophecy that God did overshadow a virgin, and she brought forth a son. But, think about this, too: Every believer that was living at the time, they could only hope that what Isaiah was saying was true, even though they still weren't alive to see it happen. I mean, a lot of us, I guess if we were to draw a parallel, now, to this time, we talk about, “Jesus is coming soon. Jesus is coming back,” and, yet, we haven't seen it happen in our lifetime, and, yet we still say, “Jesus is coming soon. Jesus is coming back.” Because, the birth of Jesus Christ didn't Himself happen for approximately 700 plus years after that prophecy was spoken. That's a long time and that's a lot of generations.

Matthew 1:18-23 *Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost. Then Joseph her husband, being a just man, and not willing to make her a public example, was minded to put her away privily. But while he thought on these things, behold, the angel of the LORD appeared unto him in a dream, saying, Joseph, thou son of David, fear not to take unto thee Mary thy wife: for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost. And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name JESUS: for he shall save his people from their sins. Now all this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Behold, a virgin shall be with child, and shall bring forth a son, and they shall call his name Emmanuel, which being interpreted is, God with us.*

It's going to take faith; it's going to take belief, and, it's going to take realizing—and we've talked about this a lot—that, just because we weren't there to witness the crossing of the Red Sea, or, just because we weren't there to see the actual birth and life of Christ, doesn't mean we don't believe it. That's when we have to exercise our faith, and that's when we have to realize that God still deals with us in ways that are inexplicable, in ways that are profound, in ways that are life-changing in this day and age. It's not like it was all done back then! We're going to talk about that a little bit, later on in the service, but... We had a smaller than normal gathering this past Wednesday at Grandwood Park, for our monthly fellowship that we do, and I suppose a lot of that had to do with the weather, as it's been pretty cold, and the wind and snow, for the last few weeks, for sure. But, we did a few songs and Andy asked for people to share what the promise of Jesus meant to them. Terry Jones shared these verses—I mean, just right off the top of his head, just one right after another, and I got to thinking that, one mind and one accord, but, you know what? I've read these verses before, and, I think a lot of us here, we've read these verses as well, and we'll read them again. It's not as

though we just stop here, and say, “Well, I’m never going to read that again.” How many’s ever read something or saw something or watched something or did something, and you said, “I’m never going to do that again!”? There’s probably a lot of different things, whether it was like a good or bad experience, or just something that the timing is just gone. Maybe the timing of that experience is just, it’s passed, and we can’t go back to that. But we can’t forget this promise, or the first time that we experienced it, or understood what Christmas meant. And, I think a lot of that happens kind of early on, maybe somewhere between the age of, like, four and seven. I think that’s when you first start getting the understanding, “Oh, gifts for Christmas,” or whatever the case might be. Maybe now you’re getting to the point where you’re starting to give gifts. But, typically, I’d say it’s something that, we have those memories of our first Christmas, and it’s something that stays with us. And, it wasn’t just another type of holiday, but we also have to look at it like, what about that first Christmas after you first got baptized in Jesus’ name, after you were born again, and understood that this is what it really is about? To me, that was pretty life-changing, right there. It was 1988, and, I was down in Virginia, as a matter of fact, and, just, some of the songs, I mean, it all made perfect sense. All of those things that I had heard about, sort of in a peripheral way, or, sort of not really having much of an understanding about it, it was like, “Oh!” Do You See What I See, or, O Holy Night—I love that song. I mean, I could hear that again and again—not thousands of times, you know what I’m saying. But, it’s one of those things where it’s like, it touches my heart, and, I believe, it’s the same thing for all of us. There’s just something about some of those things that we hear, some of those things that we experience. But it’s a reminder that Christ Himself, He’s the ultimate promise keeper. He’s the one that shows us, through His Word, shows us in His life, shows us in the prophecy, whether it’s Old Testament or New; He’s the one that’s keeping that promise.

I’m going to look at our second point today, which is:

2nd Point - The Word Was Made Flesh

This is going to come from the Book of John. We’ve already made reference to the book of Isaiah and even though he prophesied of the coming of Christ, he never actually walked with Him. The Gospel of John isn’t really thought of—I think—as a Christmas-type message (at least ones that I’ve heard over the years), I think because it only briefly alludes to the birth of Christ. But it still does in a somewhat of a unique way and it seems to sum up his life in this next passage.

John 1:1-14 *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. He came unto his own, and his own received him not. But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name: Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth.*

And it does have sort of a summary of His life, just sort of, briefly, in that passage. “And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.” And, again none of us here were there to interact with Christ as He walked the Earth. We’re talking about thousands of years ago, but I think we’ve all heard someone say, or we’ve even said ourselves, “I know my life would be different, if I had lived my life and walked with Christ.” How many’s ever heard that expression before? But, I have to challenge that—I have to challenge it to others, and I have to challenge it to myself—and to think, “Would it really be that different?” I know that the people that He walked with originally were all Jews. I mean, in Israel, if you look at it from a historical context, but, if you look at it from the

standpoint of the population of the Earth: How many people, that were actually alive at Christ's time, actually did walk with Him—a very, very, very small population, compared to what the rest of the world was like. So, in the sense of, like, I'm sure there were lots of people that were alive in other parts of the world that didn't see Christ and didn't know much about Him. Now, we talk about the star, and the Wise Men that followed the star, so I believe there was probably a buzz in the world. There was probably, as that reputation, or, as that news started to travel: “Hey, did you hear what's happening in Israel? Did you hear what's happening on in Jerusalem? Do you know what's going on there?” And. Some people may have been like, “Ah, so what?” whereas others were diligently seeking to learn more about it. So, as far as this day and age, it's not that just because we don't have that visual of Christ in front of us, or walking with Him, side-by-side, that's where our faith is going to be put to the test. But the next passage, it tells us how Christ said that we will be blessed, despite the fact that we weren't actually physically there with Him.

John 20:24-29 *But Thomas, one of the twelve, called Didymus, was not with them when Jesus came. [This is after the resurrection of Christ] The other disciples therefore said unto him, We have seen the LORD. But he said unto them, Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe. And after eight days again his disciples were within, and Thomas with them: then came Jesus, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, Peace be unto you. Then saith he to Thomas, Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing. And Thomas answered and said unto him, My LORD and my God. Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed.*

We all have different experiences, and we've all had interactions with people throughout our life, but, are you convinced that Christ is the answer? That Jesus—He said, “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No man cometh unto the Father but by Me.” Are you convinced—whether you've seen a lot of miracles, or maybe you think, “Well, really, I haven't seen that many at all?” I think a lot of that comes down to perspective; we're going to talk about that a little bit in our next point. Because, we could have all the miracles, right in front of us, we want, right in front of us, and still say, “Ah, I don't believe it,” or, “I don't care.” I mean, that's what we see in society, a lot of times, nowadays, is that people are just defiant in the sense of, like, “I'm not going to believe it,” just because, intellectually, they've convinced themselves there just couldn't be a God that created all this. And, I think a lot of it has to do with, they just don't feel like they have all the answers, because there's a certain vulnerability in having faith. There's a certain vulnerability in feeling like, “I don't have all the answers; I don't know.” We look at what happened to our brother down in Virginia, and I have to say that he was good guy, he was a good friend, I mean, and I will even say this much: He put a smile on my face. I mean, he had sort of a zany sense of humor, just a quirkiness about him, it was like... And, I talked to Jim Bailey, who got to be pretty close friends with him, here, in the last several years, and it was sort of a mixed reaction, like, sadness, of course, but, also, thankfulness to God that he endured to the end. He made it to the end, and that's something that we all look forward to; the Bible talks about, “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints.” (Psalms 116:15) And that's something that's sort of a bitter pill to swallow, at times, especially, depending on how close we get to that person, or people, or family member, or friend, or whoever it happens to be. But, then, it's a matter of looking at it like, “He was baptized in Jesus' name!” He was baptized in June of 1984. I remember him telling me that, right around the time I got baptized. And, thinking, “Wow, that's something that you hold on, near and dear to your life.”

We're going to look at the last section today, and the last section is:

3rd Point – It Never Gets Old

There's an expression that I imagine a lot of us have heard, through life, and maybe even used it ourselves: “Same stuff, different day.” How many's heard that one before? I suppose you've heard it, you know, with a different term attached to it; I know that's true. I mean, you get in these different environments,

and, you know, whatever it is, and you hear it. It's not a joke, it's just, that's the way life is, and things can get out of hand, at times. But I have to say that, even before I became a Christian, I never liked that expression, and a lot of it had to do with, it just seemed to have a spirit of hopelessness and sadness coupled with a little sarcasm attached to it. Not that I wasn't cynical, myself, at times, you know, as a youngster, but it always seemed like life offered more opportunities than just, "Ah, it's the same thing, it's just a different day. Ah, it's the same thing. Ah, I got nothing else. Ah, I just got to do this," and there was a certain anger, and wrath and all of that, again, with all of the hopelessness and sadness just sort of attached to that. But, I don't subscribe to that; I mean, I don't believe that. Whenever it tries to attach itself to me, I just have to shake it off. And, I would have to say, I guess, that the older we get, the more accustomed we get to routine. I was joking with Justin Ferguson a little bit earlier, I saw him in the hallway, and I was like, "Are you shaving yet?" "Yeah, yeah, I've been shaving two years." And I was like, "Yeah, I guess now that I look at you, you do look like you're about forty or so. Actually, now that I think about it, maybe fifty." He said, "Nah, nah." And I was like, "At least, in the next couple of years, you'll look like you're seventy, so, no big deal—you'll look like a young seventy." I was actually shaving last night, and I cut myself real good. When it's nice and cold like this, and you have to put on the aftershave—"Ahhh!" But, I have to say, and I know this might sound a little odd, but I don't mind shaving. I don't. I mean, it's not like, "Oh, forget this! I'm going to grow a beard down to here, like Duck Dynasty, or something like that. That's not the case; I'm not sick of it to that point.

The title of the sermon today is, "It Never Gets Old."

Proverbs 4:18 *But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day.*

And I think that every one of us feels some degree of routine; we kind of just talked about it, and the truth is that I don't think that we would want every day to be full of surprises. I mean, how many would like it if every day was just absolute total mayhem, and everything was just turned upside down, and the Earth was just—would you like that? But I appreciate this verse because whenever I fall back into the doldrums of monotony, I can lean on this promise. But I also look at that verse, right here, that it's a promise that we're closer to the finish line, as we get through each day. As we understand that life is going to go by us, whether we like it or not, but it's not a feeling of, "Oh, this life is passing me by." As a Christian, I don't feel like that. I mean, I feel like, yeah, there's times when we're going to have some regrets, but I think we really have to get over it. I mean, if I were to honestly assess and examine myself, am I regretful, at times, of things? Yeah, but you don't dwell there. A lot of it is just a matter of, "Well, I've got to get over it. I've got to get over it, and I've got to press toward the mark of the high calling in God."

2 Corinthians 4:16-18 *For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal.*

God is also faithful to guide us on our way whenever we have to make necessary adjustments, because there's plenty of bumps in the road, or things that go wrong, but, I think, being honest, you have to look at it like there's a lot of things that go right. I mean, we all made it here this morning; obviously our vehicles started and it's 9 degrees outside, but the sun is shining, so it's going to get somewhat warm. By the way, the coldest in the world I've ever see—this is a late ice-breaker— -24 on Christmas Day; this was 1980. Now, I've got to ask, who has seen a colder day than that? Boz, what was the coldest? "-46, Cedar Rapids, Iowa." Jose? "About two or three years ago, -40 degrees." That was windchill. Not windchill—have you seen it colder than that without windchill? Brent, from Minnesota? "A few years ago, it was 35 below in the Minneapolis area. Further North, it was like -50." Up there where Tom Hanson's from—I got it. I've heard those stories. Anyone else? Gerry? Another Minnesota guy. "-35 in Duluth, Minnesota, and with windchill it was like -50." Duluth, yeah, I can believe that. Vince? "1985 Chicago, it was -26" So, it's beautiful out, compared to that. That's the perspective, right there. My dad was stationed in Thule, Greenland; he was in the Air Force, in the fifties. Now, I know this

is something that gets said: Greenland is like the equivalent to Siberia. I asked him, "What was the coldest you ever saw?" and he was like, "-60." I think it was they built an air strip up there, just a military base, you know, just sort of protection from a nuclear strike. There was other people, and an early-warning type detection system. I was like, "Oh, my gosh." Fortunately, he was indoors, but I remember him telling us there were ten thousand men and only three women. Three women on that military base, and I was like, "Cheese!" That's pretty bad; that's pretty cold. They all got airlifted in, so that—the mail men were out of service at that point.

But, I want to share a brief story—and then I'm going to be closing, but—this was in the military, this was on a ship. We had about 500 people, maybe 550. It was an oiler-type ship, which is basically a supply ship. It was really big—not as big as a carrier, but you're still stuck with a whole bunch of other people—all guys. After a while, everybody gets on each others nerves, and a lot of times what will happen is it's really bad. So, I remember, like, maybe a few months after being on the ship, we were on a Med cruise and—close to Italy, France, that area—there was another guy, and this wasn't anything where it was like a profound, or, like, this guy was like the commanding officer or, like—but I remember, there was a group that he was talking to, and it was it was sort of an off-hand comment. It wasn't like, "Okay, I'm going to follow you and tell everybody." It wasn't this type of setting. Maybe there was like five or six people there. But, I could see, as time went by, this guy getting more and more agitated and just, you know, frustrated with his surroundings, and, you know, a lot of people were new to the ship and so-on and so-forth. This was also before I was a Christian. And, it wasn't as though I agreed with the statement, but, the statement he made was, "I'm sick of people." And it was like—well, you could sort of take it like, sort of comically, or this guy's at the breaking point. This guy's reached the point of depression that you don't know what he's going to do to somebody else, you don't know what he's going to do to himself. And it's not like anything dramatic happened after that, like, "Oh, the guy unloaded on everybody," or, "He jumped overboard." Nothing like that happened, so it wasn't like it was a traumatic ending, or, anything catastrophic, we'll just say it like that. But, I'll say this much: I could relate to that statement—I didn't really agree with it, but I could understand the circumstances where you just get sick of it, you just get sick and tired—as the old expression goes—of the nonsense, or whatever way you want to put it, that you're feeling like, "I just can't take it; I can't take this any more." And, again, I don't agree with that statement; I don't feel that way, and I do believe that God gives us the power, when we do get to a breaking point, or whenever we do get to a point of depression, but when you look back at that verse in 2 Corinthians 4, I know it's not really a Christmas verse. I know it's not really a Christmas message, but to have the knowledge of this verse, it helps us every day. It helps us to not let our walk with God get stagnant, or get sick of prayer, or fellowship, or fasting, or reading the Bible, or doing the things that are something that, as far as like being a Christian, it's a part of it. It's a part of this life; it's a part of this life that we live. It helps give the ability to look past what's right in front of us and understand that each day we live right, we're closer than when we believed, we're nearer than when we believed. We're looking farther. It's not a matter of just being where we're at and just being content or satisfied. We're looking at it like—I appreciate what you shared, Andy, about looking at this ministry from a different level, like, "What is it that I need to do?" What is it we need to do, as far as fostering growth, as far as, like, continuing what we have, but also starting to see more miracles, starting to see more people get baptized. I know Bob Heirtzler shared with me a couple of months ago, he said when he got baptized, that year, there was two-hundred and seventy-nine people got baptized that year. And that's awesome! And there's probable a handful of people that's still remaining after that many years. And it's not always about a number, but it is about, like, tapping into the potential that God's looking for us to tap into. Not just being satisfied on the sidelines, but, doing what we have to do: Doing the visitation, having a prayer meeting, having the fellowship, reading the Bible, not just getting sick and tired of those things. Those things are needed, those things are needed if we want to continue to stay in the faith, but, what are we doing personally? And I have to look in the mirror on this, too, and say, what am I doing to make the ministry grow? What am I doing to make the ministry better? It helps us to understand the Christmas message, which is the message of Christ, throughout the year. We focus on it this time of year, but, if we focus on that, and we realize that, it's going to make sure that this message won't ever get old if we don't allow it to get old. Thank you for your time, and God bless you.