Surprising Hope — Delivery Transcript

Matthew 13:1–23 (CSB) · Wes Terry · Sunday, December 3, 2023 · *Advent 2023*

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All right. Well, thanks to Randy—or thanks, first off, to our team for leading us in worship. Did a great job as usual. And to Randy for leading us in that time of prayer. For those of you new to Broadview, Randy is on our pastoral team. So at Broadview we don't just have a senior pastor, but we have a team of pastors. Some of them are salaried and some of them are what are called lay pastors, which means they don't get paid to do the same thing that the paid pastors do.

So it's a rough gig, but thanks to Randy for serving in that way. And the ministry of pastors in any local church, as opposed to the ministry of deacons, is a ministry of prayer and a ministry of the word. When they first picked deacons in Acts chapter six, they said it's not right for us to give up this ministry of prayer and the word to get so tied up in waiting tables and taking care of practical felt needs. And so they elected deacons and in our church we have deacons that help serve those felt needs and practical needs alongside the pastors, so it frees the pastors up to devote themselves to prayer and the ministry of the word.

And so one of the things that our pastoral team will do on Sunday morning is lead us in those times. And special thanks to Randy for doing that this morning. It's a perfect setup for where we're going to be this morning in our sermon time. And so if you have your Bible, we're going to be in the book of Matthew, chapter 13. If you're new to Broadview, we typically go through books of the Bible and we had been going through the book of Genesis, looking at the life of Abraham and his faith.

But during Advent we pressed pause on that series so that we could look at Matthew chapter 13, which is really a series of parables from Jesus about the kingdom. And because Advent is at the end of the day about the second coming of Jesus Christ, I thought it would be fitting for us to learn about what that kingdom looks like when it comes, and how we participate in that kingdom even now before it reaches its fullest expression. For those of you—just trivial

knowledge, for those of you who are interested—the word Advent (I learned this because my son Blaze is taking Latin) comes from the Latin word *adventus*, which just means to come, or a coming.

And I want to challenge you, most people when they think of Advent, they think of Christmas, ergo, incarnation of Jesus, first coming of Jesus, and that's a perfectly fine way to think about it, but that's not the original meaning of the holiday or the tradition. The original tradition of Advent wasn't to focus on the first coming of Jesus at Christmas, but really his second coming whenever that day comes. And so what we're going to do over the next four weeks in Matthew chapter 13 is to anticipate his second coming and what the kingdom of God is going to look like when that kingdom comes, and how we participate in that kingdom even now, as it's somewhat of an already-not-yet tension that we find ourselves in today as believers.

The four themes of Advent are—today, Advent hope; next week will be Advent peace; the week after that will be our Advent joy; and then Advent love, Christmas Eve, December 24th, when we will light that fourth candle and final Christ candle. When you think about hope, there is a tendency to think about a lot of things, but when you think about Advent hope, it's a hope that is inextricably linked with the person and the work of Jesus Christ. And the hope that we have in Jesus is ultimately unlike any other kind of hope.

In the parable that we're going to look at this morning, it likens the hope of Jesus to a seed. In 1 Peter, one of the disciples of Jesus, when he wrote his letter, he talked about the hope that is in Jesus as a living hope. And people hope in all sorts of things, and there are things that are worthy of our hope that are around us today, but nothing is quite as worthy or quite as valuable or sufficient or life-giving as the hope that is in Jesus' name. The question is whether we will have the kind of hearts that can receive the unique hope that Jesus can give.

And that's what our parable is about. Just a word on parables. A parable is basically just an earthly story that has a heavenly or spiritual meaning. And Jesus told parables all the time. It was one of his most favorite forms of teaching the Bible. And one of the times that he was preaching these parables, specifically in Matthew chapter 13, his disciples had come up to him and asked him, why are you doing this? Because the parables that Jesus was teaching were connecting with certain people, but it was going right over the heads of others.

And his disciples were saying, "If we're kind of building a movement and trying to get everybody in, how come you're preaching in a way that goes right over people's heads?" And Jesus' answer to that question is a really fascinating answer. I want us to look at that answer before we read our parable because it kind of sets up what Jesus wants us to glean from the message this morning. So he says in Matthew chapter 13, starting in verse 10, the disciples come up and ask him, "Why are you speaking to them in parables?"

And Jesus answered, "Because the secrets of the kingdom of heaven have been given for you to know, but it has not been given to them." I told you it'd be shocking. "For whoever has, more will be given to him, and he will have more than enough. But whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. And that is why I speak to them in parables because looking they do not see, and hearing they do not listen or understand. Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled in them, which says, You will listen and listen, but never understand.

You will look and look, but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown callous, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes, otherwise they might see with their eyes and hear with their ears and understand with their hearts and turn back, and I would heal them." So Jesus is creating a contrast between two types of people, and he says, the reason that I preach in parables is so that those who can hear will and so that the people who can't hear won't. And it sounds offensive and it sounds inequitable, which is very offensive in our culture, which is very pro-equality and equity.

And it's equal in the sense that everybody has the opportunity to hear, but it's inequitable in that not everybody has the same capacity to hear. And according to Jesus, what he does is he quotes Isaiah chapter 6, and he says, it's just like the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy that there will be people in the world who hear spiritual truths. And even though they hear them and hear them and hear them and see them and see them and see them, they never really understand them, never really receive them into their hearts.

The hope that is available to them, they never actually come to possess because of one determining factor. And the factor is the condition of their hearts. You know, if you notice that in verse 15—if you throw verse 15 back up there— he said, the people's heart has grown callous. Otherwise, I would heal them. In other words, the healing of Jesus is determined by our ability to hear what he says. But our ability to hear what Jesus says is determined by the condition of our hearts. And so if you're taking notes, the condition of our hearts determines the object of our hope.

It determines whether or not we have that life-giving, eternal hope that only Jesus can give. And this is what Jesus says, his disciples are blessed to be able to see and hear. Look at what he says in verses 16 and 17. Blessed are your eyes because they do see. Blessed are your ears because they do hear. For truly I tell you, many prophets and many righteous people longed to see the things that you see, but they didn't see them. And they longed to hear the things that you hear, but didn't hear them.

You see that little phrase there? They longed to see. This is why I'm calling today's message an Advent hope. Because in the Old Testament, the prophets of God and the righteous people of God, whether they be men or women, they were animated by this hope that God is going to keep his promise, that God is going to fulfill what he promised to do that what he said in Genesis 3:15 that we've looked at in the last several months about a Messiah who

would come and crush the head of the serpent and reverse the consequences of the curse, that that Messiah would come, and that what the Lord said to Abram about descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and being blessed to be a blessing and the nations of the earth being blessed through the promise to Abraham that God was going to keep that promise.

And that God's promise to David that on his throne there would be a kingdom that would rule forever and ever and ever, an eternal kingdom—an eternal King of kings, a Lord of lords — that that Messiah figure was going to come. That is what enabled the Old Testament saints to do what they did. They had that hope, and because they had that hope, they lived incredible lives. But Jesus says, what they were hoping for is here in me. Which would have been surprising to many of the people listening to Jesus because the hope that Jesus says you've been waiting for doesn't look like what you thought it was supposed to look like.

And it doesn't sound like what you thought it might sound like. Which is why it's very important you ask God to have ears to hear and eyes to see. Because the hope that is in Jesus, Advent hope, is a surprising hope. It doesn't always look like what we think it's supposed to look like, and it doesn't always sound like what we think it's supposed to sound like. And even today for us to receive the hope that Jesus alone can give may not look like what we think it's supposed to look like and it may not sound like what we think it's supposed to sound like.

So we need to ask the Lord to give us ears to hear so that the condition of our heart will be such that we can receive the hope that only he can give. And that's what the parable that Jesus is going to give is all about. It's called the parable of the sower. He tells the parable on the front end of what we just read, and then he explains the parable on the back end of what we just read. So let's skip up to Matthew chapter 13, starting in verse 3 to read the parable.

So it says that he told them many things in parables, saying, consider the sower who went out to sow. As he sowed, some seed fell along the path, and the birds came and devoured it. Other seed fell on the rocky ground where it didn't have much soil, and it grew up quickly since the soil wasn't deep. But when the sun came it was scorched, and since it had no root it withered away. Other seed—number three now—fell among the thorns, and the thorns came up and choked it. And then finally still other seed fell on the ground and produced fruit.

Some a hundred, some sixty, some thirty times what was sown. Let anyone who has ears listen. So just real quick on the surface, Jesus is talking about four different types of soil. He says you've got a soil that falls on the path that's really hard soil, think asphalt or dirt road that hasn't been taken care of by the county commissioner very well. So it's just hard all the time. And that seed doesn't go anywhere. It's good for the birds can come down, pick it up, and eat it. You've got the rocky soil, which Jesus says is shallow soil, that's the main problem

of this soil, so that when the sun comes out, it scorches and kills whatever life was beginning to form in that seed.

And then you've got the thorny soil, which when I think thorny soil I always think mesquite trees in West Texas. And the thing about mesquite trees is they choke out the life of anything trying to grow around it, which is why if you got too many mesquite trees in your land is not any good for feeding cows, unless you want them eating mesquite beans, which I don't recommend. It just chokes the life out of the soil. And then you've got the good soil. And the good soil, what does it do?

It bears fruit. Now what Jesus says after this in explaining the parable is that these four different types of soil are likened to four different kinds of hearts that hear the word of God and respond to it in different ways. And so let's read his explanation now, starting in verse 18. So he says, listen to the parable of the sower. When anyone hears the word about the kingdom and he doesn't understand it, the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart. This is the one sown along the path.

And the one sown on rocky ground, this is the one who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, but he has no root and it is short-lived. And so when distress or persecution—look at this—comes because of the word, immediately he falls away. Now the one sown among the thorns, this is the one who hears the word. But the worries of this age and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word out, and it becomes unfruitful. But the one sown on the good ground, this is the one who hears and understands the word, who does produce fruit and yields some a hundred, some sixty, some thirty times what was sown.

And so you've got four different kinds of soil that represent four different kinds of hearts, just to help you remember them and because I love the letter S, I'm going to break them down under four categories. The hard soil represents what I'm going to call the stony heart. The rocky soil represents what I'm going to call the shallow heart. The thorny soil represents the strangled heart. And then of course the good soil represents the surrendered heart. And I'll explain why I give them the names that I give them as we go along.

Every soil is attached to one of two types of people. You've got people who hear the word and receive it and bear fruit, and then you got people who don't hear the word and don't bear fruit. There are ultimately only those two kind of people in the world. You can either be someone who has ears to hear or someone who does not have ears to hear. The wonderful thing about this parable is Jesus gives us three reasons why people who don't have ears to hear aren't able to hear. And that's why I think it'll be helpful for us this morning because every single one of us in this room is one of these four types of soil.

Now a lot of people preach this passage as a salvation passage. You're either a non-Christian or you're a Christian, and I think it works in that way. True saving faith happens when you

surrender your life to God. But the truth is you can be someone who has surrendered your life to God and allowed your heart to become stony or shallow or strangled. And so you may be here this morning and have soil that's characteristic of one of these three. And the truth is the way the reason you have the condition of the heart that you have is because certain enemies that exist in our world have infiltrated your heart and there are things that you can do to move yourself from a place of hardness or shallowness to a place of rich soil that will receive what the Word of God wants to deposit into you this morning.

So let's start with the first soil. I'm going to call this guy the hardened skeptic. And the hardened skeptic has a certain enemy in his life. If you look at the passage, this is the one that's on the hard path; birds come and devour it. Jesus likens the bird to the devil, so I don't know what kind of bird a devil bird would be. Maybe a crow, and certainly not a dove, right? But some kind of—first service I said a vulture, but I think they're not vegetarian, so it would be something like that.

They don't understand the word, and then the devil comes and snatches it away. So what are the two enemies of this soil? The two enemies according to Jesus are one, mental obstacles. He can't understand it. And then two, satanic opposition. He's got mental obstacles and satanic opposition. So when it comes to the mental obstacles, this isn't someone who's got a learning disability. This is someone who hears the word, maybe even understands the word in terms of intellectual understanding. It's just that he doesn't care. An illustration that I've used in the past.

If you were a committed Christian walking with the Lord and someone from the mosque came up to you and said, hey, let me invite you to my mosque where you can find eternal life in Muhammad's name, you would hear that person and say, "Nah. No thanks." It would be like hitting on pavement. You have no desire whatsoever because it doesn't seem relevant to you. There is no world in which you could think that that would be relevant to me because I'm going this direction. And there are people in our culture, increasingly more and more people in our culture who are characterized by this kind of soil.

Yeah, I'll go to your church, I'll listen to the preacher, but I don't care what he says. It makes no difference to me. And maybe that would be you this morning. And this person—the problem isn't with the message, the problem isn't with the messenger, the problem is with the person who is hearing it. He has obstacles. He has hurdles, mental hurdles. Maybe your intellectual hurdle is you don't see how Christianity and science work together, or maybe your mental hurdle is I grew up in a church that was super legalistic and mean and cold-hearted, and I don't want any of that in my life.

Maybe your mental hurdle is a Christian was abusive to you or a so-called Christian was abusive to you and you have memories that are attached to the Christian faith that you just find it very difficult to overcome. Maybe they're more intellectual. The point is you've got

mental hurdles that have to be jumped for the word to even seem like something you're interested in. And then there's the case of this satanic opposition that I think of as little lies that Satan has woven into the fabric of our culture. Our culture has all these meta-narratives that we tell ourselves.

We have the big story that through arts and entertainment and books and philosophers and institutions like our educational system, they disciple us into the religion of the culture. And the religion of the culture is largely a secular religion that says there is no God. And so here are the reasons why God doesn't exist, why belief in God is nonsensical, and we imbibe that culture. Because Satan has been over a long period of time weaving those deceptions in. And it has created a hardness of heart in the hearts of many people in our culture.

So those are the enemies. What is the antidote? What does this heart need in order to have the seed penetrate? They, on the one hand, need someone who will do a little gardening who would do a little plowing up of that hardened ground. One of the books I read during the sabbatical that I would commend to you is a book by Greg Koukl called *Street Smarts* in which he distinguishes between harvesting evangelism and gardening evangelism. And you think of the illustration of Billy Graham, who would just preach a sermon on a crusade— honestly, I don't even think they were all that great of sermons— and thousands and thousands of people would get saved.

Now I shouldn't be talking because thousands of people aren't getting saved under my preaching. But for whatever reason Billy Graham would just say the words and man thousands of people would be saved. Were he preaching in this culture in this day and age, maybe his strategies would look a little bit different because in that culture at his time the culture of the West was largely Christianized, at least some form of Christian. Whereas today it would require a lot more pulling weeds and plowing ground and questioning assumptions because a lot of the people who reject Christianity reject it for reasons that are not good.

They're not sound doubts. There are answers to those questions and there are holes in their worldview that all it would take is someone to do a little bit of gardening. Someone to say, why do you believe that? Why do you think the universe is eternal? What are your explanations for the beginning of the universe? What reasons do you have for an irreconcilable conflict between what the Bible says and what science seems to present as true? There are answers to those questions and there's value to doing that gardening work. New Testament examples of this, one of the favorite passages of mine is Colossians chapter 4, verses 5 and 6, which says, be wise in the way you act towards outsiders.

Make the most of your time. Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you'll know how you ought to answer every person. So there's a sense in which if you want to minister to the ground of hardened hearts, you've got to be strategic. You've got to do a little more listening maybe than you do talking. You've got to do a little less judging and maybe

have a little more—you've got to listen long enough to know where the objections lie and then wisely know how to address those objections with the truth about Christ.

This kind of ground requires what Paul talked about in 2 Corinthians chapter 10, that the weapons of our warfare are not like the world's weapons. We don't use swords and bombs; we use arguments, we use truth, we tackle bad ideas and replace them with good ideas. We bring every thought captive and make it obedient to Jesus Christ. That's what this soil needs and that's what the church can provide. Second soil is the shallow heart, verses five and six, and the explanation of verses twenty to twenty-one. This is the rocky ground.

The problem is the soil wasn't very deep, so when the sun comes out it scorches it, you know, it withers away. And Jesus says this is the guy who receives the word immediately with joy. He's excited. "Jesus, you're going to make my life better. This is awesome." Problem is, he doesn't have any root. And so when persecution comes or when distress comes because of the word, immediately he falls away. So the enemies of this heart are shallow commitment and difficult circumstances. And really it's the second enemy that exposes the first enemy.

You don't know that you have shallow faith until difficult circumstances enter into your life and determine which way you're going to go. And there are many people in our culture who hear the gospel and they think to themselves, this is awesome. I can't wait to become a Christian. They say a sinner's prayer. They go and they get baptized. They are pumped and excited because Jesus is going to change their life. And the truth is he does, and will, because when you give your life to Jesus and you start living your life by God's design, your life will get better.

It's kind of like following the instructions in whatever you bought that has instructions. When you follow the instructions, the thing happens to work the way that it's supposed to work. When you do God's design, God's way according to God's creation and God's rules, he blesses it. But we also live in a broken world, which means just because we follow Jesus in a broken world doesn't mean our life will always be better. It will also sometimes be harder. And sometimes faithfulness to Jesus Christ requires confronting sins in your life and changing patterns of attitudes and actions and maybe doing things that are going to upset other people in your life.

And what that does is it invites persecution and it invites distress and difficult circumstances. And for the people who are characterized by this kind of soil, the fact that the seed never took root, the fact that the soil was shallow. He doesn't stand a chance. And so as soon as those hard times come, he's out. And so what does this soil need? What this soil needs is someone who would provide deeper discipleship, someone who would dig a deeper hole, show that the Christian life is not just about the sweet by-and-bye, the Christian life is about the here and now.

But the here and now is marked by a world of brokenness, and faithfulness in a broken world requires perseverance, and this is what perseverance looks like. But honestly, it's not just deeper discipleship, it's also something else. He needs a supportive community. He needs brothers and sisters who will come alongside of him and say, I know life is difficult right now, but you're not alone. I remember when I first became a—well, I got saved at a very young age, but I can distinctly remember when I first found it challenging to live for Jesus.

It was during my teenage years, and my sinful heart was wanting to do things that sinful hearts want to do, and so I did. And I remember having a mother that had a direct connection to God. And she would always have a way of finding things out. And I remember one of the conversations we had around the dinner table at two o'clock in the morning, when I was sneaking back into the house, and she said, "What is going on? This is not you." And I said a lot, but one of the things I said is, "I just can't do this by myself."

And this was a dramatic statement that only a teenager would say, but I said, "I'm the only one trying to live for Jesus"—which I obviously wasn't trying to live for Jesus. But my excuse was I can't do it because no one else is doing it. And there was some honest truth to that. There was a lot of the people in my youth group who were just not wanting to live for the Lord and so it was challenging. Even in the community of faith I had, I felt isolated, I felt alone.

And no one can live the Christian life in isolation; we need community. So one of the things that the church, the local church can do, and one of the reasons you should avail yourself, as Randy said in his prayer, to the resources of a local church, is because if your soil is characterized by shallowness, You can put yourself in environments that dig down deeper and provide a community that is rich and supportive that encourages you and keeps you accountable. You know, what do they call the California sequoia trees? They don't have roots that go down super deep, but they have roots that go super wide.

And because they're so intertwined, they can grow up to these incredible heights, and that's the blessing of being a part of a local church when your soil becomes characterized by shallowness. You put yourself in communities that surround you with brothers and sisters who are living the same way and can help you persevere. We cannot control whether trials will come into our life. That is not up to us. But we can promote perseverance by giving people communities that facilitate that kind of endurance. One of the things that we just started in our men's ministry that we announced during our men's event this last Friday were D groups.

Now I think you can get what I'm talking about in a small group. So if you're not in a small group, one of the reasons you should think about being in a small group is because it provides that community. But one of the things that these D groups allow for is that they are smaller than small groups, which means they're more confidential and you can be more

vulnerable. They're also closed, they're not open, which means once the group is formed, you don't have to wonder about some new person coming in and hearing all your dark secrets.

You build a layer of trust, a community of trust, so that you can go deeper and find greater support in community. And so this morning, if you say my heart is characterized by shallowness, one of the things you might consider is joining a group or maybe even joining a D group. And there's a sign-up sheet out there in the gathering place and you can use today if the Lord's convicting you to say you need a tribe, you need people who are going to support you to go out there and sign up.

It's one of the ways to minister to that kind of heart. How many more people need to come into our church and fall away from our church because their soil is characterized by shallowness? The third soil, very quickly, is the strangled heart. Matthew chapter 13, verse 7. It falls among the thorns. The thorns choke it out. This is the guy who hears the word. But the worries of this age and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word and it becomes unfruitful. I think we have to be careful here. The enemy of the heart is not a productive schedule or a busy schedule, and the enemy of the heart is not necessarily money, but rather it's anxieties and worries around that busy schedule and deceitfulness in the way you think about your money.

And so I'm going to call these enemies immobilizing worry and fear. It's not immobilizing—I'm sorry—sterilizing, sterilizing worry and fear because the problem with this person is unfruitfulness. And I'm going to call this person the carnal Christian. And I put "Christian" in quotations because we're not sure, right? And I think it's intentionally ambiguous to unsettle us a little bit. Am I or am I not really a child of God? Because Jesus says the way you know you're a child of God is by the fruit your life produces. 1 John talks about all of these proofs of how to know that you're a believer.

Over and over again, he points people to have their confidence in salvation based on the fruit that is produced in their life. It's not necessarily a prayer that you pray when you're young or a baptism that you had. It is ongoing trust and abiding faith in the Lord Jesus Christ that produces fruit in your life. You're not saved by your works, but your works are an indication that you're genuinely saved. So the lack of fruit in this Christian brings it into question. But it's not because of his money, and it's not because of his busy schedule, it's because those things have taken a priority in his heart that have supplanted his allegiance to Jesus.

In other words, he's seeking first after material prosperity, or he's seeking first after a certain social status or a certain productivity status or a certain rung on the ladder at work. And as a result of pursuing those things above his allegiance to the kingdom of God, his life isn't bearing fruit. Those things instead are choking it out. So what does this look like? It can look like anything. It can be good things. It could be the desire to be a wonderful mom or a successful dad, or an attractive single person.

It could be ministry. It could be wanting to do things for the Lord, but you begin to do so many things for Jesus that you neglect the fact that you're doing it with him, you neglect that relational aspect. And as a result, those things begin to choke out the spiritual life in you. And you can feel it happening if you've ever had this happen in your life. You wake up some days and you've just kind of lost the joy of the Lord. You've lost that abiding presence of Jesus Christ, and it's because there are things in your life that are choking it out.

So what does this person need? Well, they need loving accountability. The truth is the church can't control your calendar and it can't control your bank account, although I've heard of certain churches that try. You know, you can join certain churches and they're like, "Give us your checking account number and routing number and we'll take care of it." Okay, we're not that kind of church. So we can't control your checking account or your calendar, but you can. And what we can provide is loving accountability so that what you profess with your lips begins to bear fruit in your life.

And again, this is why groups are so valuable, because you can be honest about what's going on. You don't have to fake it and pretend because you're with people you don't have to be fake in front of anymore. Now I know in a setting like this everybody's kind of a little bit fake because it's a big room and you don't know anybody and maybe even in a small group you're a little bit fake because you haven't really figured everything out yet. But when you put yourself in relationship one-on-one with another brother or another sister, or you put yourself in a relationship one-on-one, and it's not just that they know your struggles, but you know theirs, all of a sudden there's loving accountability that can promote the bearing of fruit in your life.

And so maybe that's something that would be relevant for you this morning. You've got to fight for fruitfulness. You've got to take drastic action. Jesus said, if your eye is causing you to sin, gouge it out. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. Not literally saying cut off your hand and stab yourself in the eye, but he's saying you have to fight for godliness. You have to fight for fruitfulness because you are living in a broken world. And I've given you these things, I've given you these means of grace, if you'll avail yourself to them so that you can begin to receive the hope that I want to give.

Finally, you have the surrendered heart, Matthew chapter 13, verse 23. This is the heart that is sown on the good ground. This is the one who—notice this—hears and understands the word. And not only do they hear it and understand it, but they do it. It produces fruit and yields some 100, some 60, some 30 times what was sown. Now you can't determine how fruitful your life will be. But you can determine whether it bears some kind of fruit by having the kind of heart that hears God when he speaks. Because you're not filling your life with all kinds of other noise or choking your life with all sorts of other things.

But you're hearing God when he speaks. You understand what he says when he speaks. But more than that, you do what he asks you to do. In the surrendered heart, there is a relationship between hearing and keeping. And the reason I call this the surrendered heart is because the seed that bears fruit, there has to be a death to self in that kind of a seed. Paul said it this way in Galatians chapter 2, verse 20. I, Paul, I've been crucified with Christ. It's no longer I who live, but it's Christ who lives in me.

Jesus said in the Gospels, unless a seed goes into the ground and dies, it cannot bear fruit. So part of bearing fruit in the Christian life, part of being good soil so that you can receive what God wants to give, is there has to be humility. Spiritually, there's got to be a poverty of spirit, a recognition that I've got to empty myself and allow myself to be filled with Christ. Humility, submission, these are the prerequisites of bearing fruit. And that's surrender. That's saying I'm going to offer myself as a living sacrifice before the Lord.

I'm not going to be conformed to the pattern of this world, but I'm going to allow myself to be transformed by the renewing of my mind so that when God speaks, I hear what he says and I do it. Now Jesus says to his disciples, blessed are you when you can do this. Blessed are you when you have ears to hear and eyes to see. And throughout the New Testament, he attaches a blessing between those who hear and keep. One of my favorite examples of this, and with this, we'll bring it to a conclusion.

When I was preaching through the book of Revelation, we preached through the seven churches in the book of Revelation. And right before Jesus talks to the seven churches, in Revelation chapter 1, verse 3, he pronounces a blessing on everybody who hears the words of the book of Revelation and who puts them into practice. The ones who hear it and keep it, because the time is near. He also puts a blessing on the preacher. So something to think about. You can read the book of Revelation at the house. My point is, there's a connection between hearing and keeping.

But if you keep reading in the book of Revelation, one of the other things that you see is that there's not just a connection between hearing and keeping, there's also a connection and a blessed connection between keeping and hoping. So when you read the seven churches, they have certain things in common. They always get a word from the Lord to hear, and then for most of the churches—all but, I think, two—they get a challenge from the Lord that I want you to do something. And then it says to the one who overcomes—in other words, to the one who keeps my word— and then he'll give him a promise.

You'll eat the bread of life, you'll have a new name, you'll be seated in the heavenlies, all these different wonderful promises of hope. And so you see in the book of Revelation, and really through it's not just chapters two and three, it's throughout the rest of the book of Revelation, a connection between hearing God's word, keeping God's word, and having hope

in your life. So if you want Advent hope, you want the hope that only Jesus can give, then you've got to have a heart that can receive what Jesus is trying to say.

And the heart that truly hears what Jesus is saying is a heart that puts into practice what he's told you to do. And so you really can't get away, at the end of the day, from repentance and obedience, death to self, and living to Jesus Christ. And so as we think about what does it look like for God's kingdom to come on earth as it is in heaven, it looks like having ears to hear and hearts to receive the hope that Jesus gives. And when you hear it and receive it, you put it into practice.

Why? This is my definition of hope. Hope is doing what Jesus—hope is—how does it go? Can you throw it up on there? Hope is keeping God's word because God keeps his promise. There it is. That's Advent hope. Hope is keeping, and by keeping I mean doing. Hope is keeping God's word because you know God keeps his promise. And one day he'll come and he'll establish his kingdom forevermore, but until that day he's called you and me to be little ambassadors for Jesus, to live a kingdom within the kingdom, a city within the city.

To build lives that are attractive and winsome and wonderful because they are applying the blueprint of God's design onto their life and their marriage and their families and their careers. And that advances the kingdom until Jesus comes and establishes it in its fullness. So if you're here this morning and you're not a Christian and the word of God has fallen on your heart, and you'd say, "You know what, I came in here with a strangled heart, but the Lord has convicted me that I can't remain." Would you consider joining a group?

Would you think about maybe joining a church? We got our membership class this Wednesday at six o'clock in the music suite. Maybe for you it's you got a hard heart and you're only here because you're humoring your wife or your kids. Would you say, "Hey, I'm going to set up a meeting with the pastor. No one else has been able to answer my questions, but it doesn't mean he can't try"? And just see where it goes and see what happens. Most of us in here are probably to one degree or another being strangled because we live in such chaotic times and life is so challenging.

And so this morning maybe you need some loving accountability. But people can't hold you accountable if you don't tell them what's going on. So you might need to have a conversation with your spouse. Maybe you need to talk to your children. Maybe you need to set an appointment. Maybe you need to join a D group. The application is various, but the Holy Spirit has already spoken to your heart about what needs to be done. And so as we enter into a time of invitation, it's your opportunity to respond to the Lord.

If you want us to pray with you or for you, I'll be down here at the front to pray with you. If you want to make a public decision of making Jesus your Lord and Savior, you can come down to the front and do that. You can also, just right there where you're seated, fill out that

connect card and drop it in the box and it will be very private and we'll follow up with you this week. You can do that online by scanning the QR code that'll be up on the screen in a few moments.

But however you need to respond, you do that now as the Lord leads. Heavenly Father, we thank you for the hope that we have in Jesus. We thank you that it is unlike any other hope in this world. But because of that, so often we miss it. It goes right over our heads because we don't have ears to hear, we don't have eyes to see. And so, Holy Spirit, would you work in our hearts? Only you, the Holy Spirit of God, can do that supernatural work of softening stone, taking hardened cement and replacing it with a heart of flesh.

And so would you do that now as we respond and give us wisdom to know what it looks like and the courage to put it into practice? We pray as a church family that you would mark us as a community of hope. That when people come into this place, they don't just see people who have their lives looking different than the rest of the world in terms of their morality, but that their lives are different because of their confidence—the peace that surpasses human understanding. A hope that is unlike any other hope in this world that sustains them and keeps them and makes them joyful even in turbulent circumstances.

Would you produce this in us as your people so that as your people we can extend that hope to the ends of the earth? And we pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen. We're going to enter into a time of response. You can pray right there where you're seated. The altar is open if you want to make a public response. But we'll take just a few moments for you to do that. Lord, your word is not just a seed, but it is powerful and effective, that it is able to accomplish what you intend for it to accomplish.

And so we thank you in advance for how your word is going to go to work and do the work in our hearts to bring about glory to your name and goodness to our life. Amen.