

Series: Christmas at Grace 2021

Sermon #4

God's Final Message

Hebrews 1:1-4

Robert Morris – December 19, 2021

Good morning, Grace. Merry Christmas! My name is Robert and I'm one of the pastors here and I'm looking forward to being in God's Word with you this morning.

Now about fifteen years ago about this same time of year, I found myself in a really bad place emotionally, spiritually—you name it. It might actually have been one of the really low moments of my spiritual journey thus far. And there was a whole avalanche of life factors. I had a number of life circumstances that were not going my way. As I looked at it, nothing was going the way I wanted it to go. I had just finished up my graduate program and I was tired and fried and out of gas. I was lonely. Ministry was harder than I had expected it to be. And I just found myself in a bad place around the holiday season. You could see I had a tiny, shriveled Grinch heart towards the holidays.



Now I don't mean to make light of what was happening in my life, but it's actually a really good metaphor of what was happening in my heart and in my life. My heart was cold and small and bitter and broken, in some ways, around the holiday season. And so, I know some of you may have been through something like this before. And frankly speaking, some of you may be there even right now. I don't know how you walked in this morning.

But I want to share what happened to me. On the back side of that Christmas season I was sitting in the back of a church worship service in the very back row, because I had to sneak in late because I was attending to some ministry responsibilities. And again, I was distracted and fried—spiritually walking wounded. And I'm sitting there, and I don't know why I did this. To this day I don't know what prompted it, but I just kind of spoke out in what seemed like a moment of desperation and said, "God, are you listening? Would you speak to me? I need something. I need to hear from you."

And as I'm asking this and having this conversation between myself and God on the back row of a church service, the song changed to that famous Christmas hymn of "O Come, All Ye Faithful." And as the people around me began to sing, "O come, let us adore Him," something happened. And if you've ever had one of these moments in your life when you feel like the Lord is speaking to you directly, this is one of those moments for me. I genuinely believe that the Holy Spirit spoke to my spirit and said, "Robert, stop. Just stop. And come—come and adore me."

The Lord was kind to me that day and He reached into my world. He reached into my mess in a unique way and He spoke to me in this low, low moment in my life when everything else seemed to be broken and not worth it, and nothing going my way. God interrupted my life in a really beautiful way. He was kind to me.

And He got me through that rough patch, and on the back side of that I had some choices to make. And I made some choices about how I was going to spend the future Christmas seasons from then on out. I kind of made a vow to myself in some ways that as best I can, I was never going to let that happen again. I was never going to let the yearly reminder of God entering our world, of God entering our mess and doing something—I was not going to go through the motions again, as best I can, so help me God.

And so, I decided from there on out my Decembers would be about adoring. And so, what became one of my personal spiritual disciplines and yearly rhythms is that I would pick one verse of Scripture about Jesus and just meditate on it and feast my mind and my heart on it. If it

was small enough I was going to try to memorize it, because I just wanted to spend this season adoring my Savior.

And so, what I'd like to do with you today is that I would like to take you to the section of Scripture that I chose for myself at the beginning of this Christmas season. And out of the overflow of what the Lord has done in my own heart and life, I simply want to ask you to come alongside me and let's adore our Savior together this morning.

The verse I picked at the beginning of the month was **Hebrews 1, verses 1-4**. And so, if you have your Bibles and you want to turn there, that's where we're going to be this morning.

The opening verses of the Book of Hebrews tell us exactly who we're looking at, exactly who we're considering, exactly who we're celebrating this time of year. Because the baby in the manger is not just another baby.

So, here goes. I'm going to risk it here and see if I've got it memorized. Are you guys ready for this? Here we go. I did this mainly so that I would memorize it—the pressure of this moment right here. Okay.

“Long ago, at many times and in many ways, God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. He is the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of his nature, and he upholds the universe by the word of his power. After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.”

Okay, how did I do? Did I get it? All right. Well, let's do it—let's dig into this passage together today. Let's have some fun. As we do, I think it would be helpful for you to understand a few things about the Book of Hebrews as a whole before we dig into this passage. Because I think it's going to help you appreciate this even more.

Background on the Book of Hebrews

The Book of Hebrews is a very unique book and letter written to a group of newer believers with a Jewish background in the first century. They're most likely urban Christians in a very pluralistic environment. And their Christian commitment has begun to cost them something. It's begun to bring them some marginalization, some hostility, maybe even some suffering. And they're naturally wondering, *Is this worth it? Is this following Jesus thing worth it?*

Many of them have been ostracized from their synagogues, and so their spiritual community, their friends, their social networks, were gone now. And again, they're coming to grips with all that this is and wondering if this is worth it. *Maybe we should just go back to the "old way." It was easier, it wasn't as expensive.*

Now, I don't know about you, but that seems to be a temptation that I've had from time to time in my life as well. I've been there. Following Jesus is difficult. *I'm not sure about all this. I have some questions that I can't ever seem to get answered. I'll just go back to whatever system I was working before I met Jesus.*

And many of us will do this. And we'll even keep the name or the moniker of "Christian", but the reality of our life would point to this fact that we've gone back to these old ways, these broken cisterns that hold no water, like the Book of Jeremiah says.

And so, the author of Hebrews loves these people—you can tell. And he wants to help and encourage them. So, he's going to speak their language. He's going to use their rich history and their knowledge of the Old Testament, and he's going to quote it repeatedly and give them a grand picture of who Jesus was. He wants to point these new believers to the reality that Jesus was everything that the Old Testament was pointing towards. He's the epitome of all these concepts from your religious tradition. In fact, He's the better version of this. That's actually one of the big themes of the Book of Hebrews, that Christ is better, so don't give up. Stick with it. Go all the way.

So, it's into this context, and a context that I think you and I might be able to relate to that the author of Hebrews kicks off with this very poetic passage of Scripture in its original languages. It's really a majestically constructed sentence that any orator would be proud of, where the writer is going to introduce his readers to the surpassing greatness of who Jesus Christ is. And for us, I think it's going to serve as a beautiful and magnificent reminder of what it is that we're celebrating this time of year.

And so, let's take a look at these verses, and we'll work through them together this morning.

God Has Spoken

Verse 1 reads, "Long ago, at many times and in many ways. God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days, he has spoken to us by his Son..."

The first thing I'd really like you to see is that God has spoken. God has spoken, and Jesus is the final message. That's the main idea of this verse. This whole passage today, verses 1 through 4, is actually one giant, run-on, multclause sentence, built around this one clause—that “God has spoken.”

I haven't quite gotten over that yet, because I do think that the cry of the human heart, whether it's realized or not, is to hear and to connect to our Savior. Is there something beyond this, or am I just a bundle of chemical and physical reactions, living a forgotten, meaningless, and, far too often, short life?

And how amazing that God the Creator, God Almighty, wants to communicate himself. He wants to connect with us. He wants us to know who He is and have relationship with us.

He's not silent. It's frankly loud and clear in this passage that He has spoken to us in many times and many ways. There's a glorious grand variety and creativity in the way that God has spoken to us. He's not withdrawn and uncommunicative.

And the author of Hebrews uses this phrase—“many ways.” Another way you could translate that—it's very interesting—is “in pieces.” “In pieces”—He spoke in pieces, a little bit at a time, but just like a puzzle. It might be hard to put all the pieces together, or understand how this piece over here connects to this piece down here in the corner.

And then the passage turns on this word “but.” “But in these last days...” “But now ...” It's the end of fragments. Each prophet had expressed a small sliver of the truth of God, but no one had been able or was allowed to see the big picture, the whole thing. And the author says from now on, until the end of time (in these last days), there is no fuller, more final expression of God than Jesus Christ. He has spoken.

God has spoken, and Jesus is His final message.

Now let's pause here and consider this: that we could never know God if He did not speak to us, if He hadn't revealed himself to us. That only happens by Him coming down to us, not us transcending to Him. And that's really, frankly, the most beautiful part of the Christmas season, that God came to us, that He was not aloof or unresponsive, He has not been silent. He has spoken.

Friends, I want you to know that this verse, this idea here, can be an anchor for your soul. It can be a warm blanket on cold spiritual days ... that Jesus is the very communication of God.

He has not left us alone wondering. We don't have to worry about whether or not we can hear from God. He has spoken, and He's spoken to us through His Son.

And so, the author of Hebrews, naturally thinking of his audience who are tempted to go back to an old way, an imperfect system, back to their fragmented messages, at best, about God; he continues and says, *Look, if you're wondering if this message is going to be worth it or not, if it's worthy to follow, let me tell you why. Let me tell you why this message is worth listening to.*

Seven Truths About God

And that's where the rest of our passage is going to come in here this morning, because the author of Hebrews is going to run off seven attributes or truths about God. The best way to think of them is that these are seven bullet points on the résumé of the Son. And Jesus is the final word. He's the final message, and here's why.

Now, as we go through these seven fairly quickly over the next few moments, I would love it if you could maybe listen to them and try not to listen to them in a purely academic sense, especially if that's kind of your natural tendency like it is mine. There's a lot here in what we might call Christology, and it could fill giant theological textbooks, and it certainly has. But rather, I would love it if for the next few moments you could let your mind and your heart marvel and worship and imagine. Maybe you could put yourselves in the place of these first readers, to whom this is an introduction to a message that they need to hear about why Jesus is worth it, why He's worthy to follow, why you should press on when it's hard, and why you shouldn't go back to those old ways and those old broken models.

And so, these are the seven things that you're going to need to know about this message so that you can press on. And so, he kind of runs through them. Here's the seven qualifications of the final message.

Jesus Is the Heir of All Things

“But in these last days He has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things...” Jesus Christ is the heir of all things. This parallels Paul's language in the Book of Colossians that we were in a couple of weeks ago with Kevin, where it says that “all things were created by him” and that, ultimately, all things were created “for him.” It was created for Him.

It's His. It's been given to Him—all the rights and the privileges of the kingdom of God are within His hands.

And the implication for us is that we can trust Jesus to deliver on all the promises of the Kingdom, because in the end, it's His. He's the heir. He's holding the bag. It's been written into the will. The Son can make good on His word, because in the end, He owns it all.

Through Jesus, God Created the World

Not only has He been appointed heir of all things, but through Jesus, God created the world. That's the next phrase there—"through whom also he created the world." The Son was the Father's agent in the creation of the entire universe. Before the beginning of time, the Son was eternal. This mirrors what the apostle John says in the first part of his gospel where he says, "through him all things were made that were made."

Jesus Is the Radiance of the Glory of God

Not only is He the heir of all things, and through whom the entire universe is created, but He's also the radiance of the glory of God. He's the radiance of the glory of God. That Greek word for "radiance" there is the only time that this word is used in the New Testament. And it's actually means this brightness or brilliance from a source of light, this intense brightness.

One way to think about it might be when you look at a really bright light. Let's say you look at the sun, for instance. And kids, I don't recommend that, but you'll get the point. If you look towards the sun, the brightness or the radiance of that light and the actual source of that light are too closely associated for you to even distinguish them. You can't just look at one. You only see both, it's so powerful.

The word here means "shining forth." Jesus Christ is literally shining forth to the world the very character and attributes and nature of God. That's why Jesus claims that He's the light of the world. And last week with Jeremiah, if you were here, we talked about this idea that there is a lot of darkness out there, and there's a lot of darkness in here that needs a radiant light.

And the readers of Hebrews would have been very familiar with this concept of the glory of God from their Old Testament. They would have remembered their history of the story of how their forefathers followed the cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night. It was this visible sign

of God's continuing presence with them. In much the same way, Jesus is a visible sign of God's presence with us.

Jesus Is the Exact Imprint of the Nature of God

So, not only is the radiance of the glory of God, but He is also the exact imprint of the nature of God. The next phrase says that He's the exact imprint of His nature.

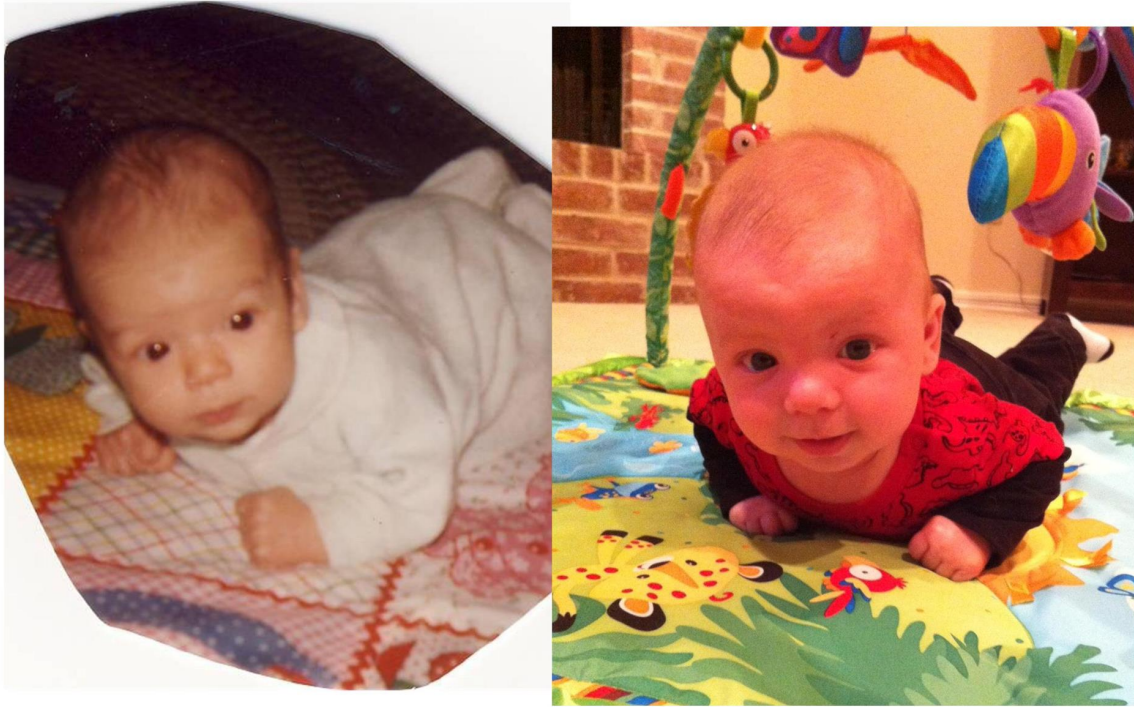
Some of your translations may say "exact representation" instead of "imprint." But He's exact. It's this Greek word—it's the word character. And the origins of that word are kind of like an instrument that was used for engraving, and later it was used for how coins were impressed. They were pressed with an image. Or when you put a seal into wax, it has the same shape of it.

The idea here is that the Son provides a true and trustworthy and exact picture of the person of the Father. He's literally God's stamp.

Now, when I thought about this phrase, it made me think of an inside joke we have in my family. In our house, my wife will often say something like this when she sees one of our children doing something great, but more than likely, not so great. We'll say something like, "Well, he is your son." Or, "You know, she's your daughter." And most of the time this is in reference to some kind of character trait or behavior that's being displayed, and one of us or both of realize, *Yeah, we know where they got that from.*

And with my son, Lauren would joke—especially in his early years—that my son is about ninety-two percent me—the way he acts, the way he thinks about the world, the way he hates losing and his competitive spirit. And I'll wonder ... I'll look at him and think, *Why is he acting that way?* And because Lauren has experienced me for so many years, she'll lean over and, most of the time, kindly say, "Well, you know he's acting like you, right?"

Now, I tend to think that ninety-two percent is pretty awesome. But, here's the thing ... I don't know, because I can't even be trusted to be humble in my own sermon illustrations. But here's the thing---my son looks like me.



Here's the proof. These are baby pictures of us, side by side. Okay? He looks like me. Not only does he look like me, but his character and his traits and his behavior often resemble me as well.

But here's the thing—he's not me. He's not me. Even inside our family, if we joke about him being ninety-two percent me, the reality is that there are a bunch of ways that he is much different than me.

Not so with Jesus. The Bible says that He's "exact." He's a one hundred percent representation of the Father; authentic, exact, and perfect.

And so, if you wonder what God is like, He's like Jesus. And if you wonder what Jesus is like, He's exactly like the Father. He talks like Him, He looks like Him, He reflects the Father's ideas, He does the kind of things the Father does. If you've met the Son, then you've really met the Father.

Jesus Upholds the Universe by the Word of His Power

Not only is this final word, this final message from God, the exact imprint of the nature of God, but Jesus also upholds the universe through the word of His power. He upholds the universe by the word of His power.

Can you imagine with me this for a while—that right now Jesus Christ is upholding the universe? He's sustaining it all. It's this idea that there's a continual organization and carrying forward of the created order to its desired end. The verb there is actually used in a present tense, because it means to imply that it's an ongoing and continuous action, that everything right now is being sustained by Jesus Christ. Nothing is excluded. He's moving it all towards His determined and desired end.

It makes me wonder sometimes what would happen if the word of His sustaining or upholding power was removed. What would happen if Christ relinquished that. If you think the world is messy and chaotic and frantic and disheveled and random now, imagine if the word of His sustaining power was removed. This fantastically precise universe that is so delicately balanced, down to the millimeter sometimes, and He sustains it all, and He is seeing it through to the end.

No, this is not just another prophet, the author of Hebrews would say. This is not just another ordinary message. This is the Son. This is the final message.

Jesus Made Purification for Sins

Not only is He the one who sustains all of creation by the word of His power, but Jesus made purification for sins. The next phrase there—"after making purification for sins ..."—this Savior, this Son, this Message—He made it possible for your grievances against God to be purified and gone forever by becoming the sacrifice himself.

The message of our world is so often: *That's your problem You fix it.* And this Savior says, *That's your problem ... and I'll fix it.* Something had to be done about sin, and He did it. And it leads to this forgiveness that's permanent and it leads to the very presence of God. He made purification for sins.

Jesus Sat Down at the Right Hand of the Father

And then finally, perhaps the most important bullet point on this list on the résumé of the Son—especially for you and I and our ability to have any kind of confidence whatsoever in our salvation—is that, not only did He make purification for sins, but after He did, He sat down. He sat down!

What an amazing thought, that the work is completed. The author of Hebrews here is no doubt referencing the priestly work in the temple that would have been very familiar to these Jewish believers. They would have been very familiar with the reality that the priest doesn't get to take a break in the temple. The wheels of sacrifice are always spinning, always going. There's not time for a break. The work is never really done. The shifts of sacrifice have to roll on over and over again ... tomorrow, and the next day, and the next day ... because the work is never really done.

And the author of Hebrews says, *Look, no, this final message, this one who made purification for sins, He did it and then He sat down. He's done. The work is finished. It's complete and fulfilled. There's no repetition needed for this saving act. No other sacrifice will ever be necessary.*

And for us, that has some really big implications. Because for us, there is no more reason now to struggle through self-effort or some kind of ritual system, wondering if your sins have been covered. For those who have trusted the Lord Jesus Christ, it's done. The King and the final message have sat down. There is nothing left to do on the to-do list for the purification of sins.

And so, the author of Hebrews in these first few verses says, *Look, let me tell you about this final and full message from God. Here's the résumé. This Son, this message, He's the heir of all things, through whom the world is created. He's the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature. He upholds the universe by the word of His power and He's made purification for sins. And then He sat down at the right hand of God.*

Final Thought: Jesus Is Superior

And so, naturally, the author concludes this passage with this final thought. The natural conclusion to this line of thinking that I've just walked you through is that this message, this word, this Son, is far superior to any other kind of message or word or person.

Verse 4, the last verse, ends like this: "...having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs."

The author wraps up his introduction to his book by using a word that he's going to use twelve more times throughout the course of this book—this word "superior," sometimes translated "better." He's better, or superior, in every way, because of the name He has. And the name He has is His Son. It's a superior name. This final message was His Son, and His name, His attributes and character, and the work He did and accomplished mean that He's superior in every way.

And so, men and women of Grace, this begs the question "So what?" Right? What are we supposed to do about this? If the baby in the manger is all of these things, then what impact should that have on my life? How do I apply this? What do I really do? What actions might I be able to take in light of what this passage of Scripture says?

And I think there are two potential applications that I came up with. I realize there may be others. There may be something even in the last half-hour that the Lord has placed on your heart in some way to apply. And if He has, I encourage you to follow through with that.

But if you're wondering how you can apply this or how you can respond to this, I've got a couple of suggestions for you this morning.

Application #1: Let's Listen

The first application is this: because God has spoken, let's listen. Friends, you have a message from the God of the universe in your inbox. And you don't ignore that kind of message. No one leaves an e-mail unread when the sender line says "God of the Universe." So, let's listen to Him.

And I know this is becoming harder to harder—to listen above the kind of noise in our world. And I think it's becoming even more difficult in our very individualistic, I-know-what's-

best-for-me kind of world that we live in. It's natural to ask, *Well, shouldn't God listen to me? Shouldn't He adjust to me? I mean, I know what's good for me. I know my truth, I know my experiences... shouldn't He adjust to me? I know my needs and my way of thinking. I know what I think is best. I've got this thing figured out. Shouldn't He adjust to me?*

I want to tell you today that that's the beauty of the Christmas season, my friends—is that He did adjust to you. That's the beauty of the incarnation, that He came to us in this undeserved, unmerited way. God adjusted himself to us in order to have a relationship with us. And now He asks us to surrender to Him, to obey, to listen, to become His disciples, to become more and more like Him in all of our lives. He's not asking us to do anything close to what He's already done on our behalf and for us. And He promises that His yoke is easy and His burden is light. And He promises that His way is the way that leads to a more abundant or more joyful life. That's His promise.

And He's this final promise. He's all seven of the things that the author of Hebrews describes. And so, let's listen. Let's listen to Him. Let's have ears to hear.

And we've got to be careful not to do the kind of listening that I sometimes do in my home, that I get in trouble for, where I'm there and I'm listening—"Uh huh, uh huh"—but I'm not really listening. I'm somewhere else. I'm certainly not comprehending, and I'm certainly not going to take what I've heard and actually do something about it.

We've got to do the kind of listening that naturally leads to action, to obedience, to adjusting our lives to the one who came and adjusted to us first.

And so, God has spoken. Let's listen.

Application #2: Let's Adore Him

And then, the second application during this season is this: Could we together—could you marvel and just worship at the baby in the manger? The answer for your weary soul—and I know that many of us are weary, especially as we've come out of the last couple of years—the answer for your weary soul, friend, is to come and adore Him; to let your heart run wild with gratitude at all that Christmas represents.

And you may have to prompt yourself in some ways, like I have, and I encourage you to do that. Here are maybe a few options that you could use to kind of prompt your heart over the next few days as we celebrate this time of year.

- Maybe you could find a thought or a passage about this Savior and just marinate yourself in it. Have it as the thing you think about.
- If you're more musically inclined, you might want to find some music that stirs your heart and your affection for God, and maybe spend five or fifteen or fifty minutes and just get lost in it.
- You could start or end your day with some kind of reminder about who Jesus is. Maybe you could write it upon your mirror in your bathroom so that it's the first thing you see and maybe the last thing you see each day.
- You could continue to read the Christmas devotional that we're going through together as a church. If you're behind or you haven't even started, that's fine. Just pick up right where we are and join us.
- You can take my thing. Join me in Hebrews 1 if you want. In a couple of weeks, we can meet in the lobby and quiz each other about whether we have it memorized or not.

But when you look at his Savior, when you look at this message from God, this full and final message from Him, the natural and proper response is to marvel and to worship and to celebrate, and to exclaim, maybe like the apostle Thomas when he saw his resurrected Savior: "My Lord and my God."

Let me wrap it up and conclude this way. Men and women of Grace, are you still wondering if God still speaks? Are you in a place like I was fifteen-ish years ago—wrung out, worn out, beaten up, desperate, bitter, spiritually dry, grasping at straws, pleading with God to do or to say something; maybe wondering in the back of your mind if God is silent or unresponsive to your plight or the plight of humanity in general?

The author of Hebrews would say to you and me today, "He has spoken. He's already done it. He's spoken definitively and finally through His Son."

And we're not alone and we're not without hope, because this word, this final message—oh, it's some kind of news. And it's no longer fragmentary or incomplete or a shadow of the real thing. No more pieces—it's the full message.

And this message, this final and complete word from God is His Son. And He is the heir of all things. He's who the universe was created through. He's the radiance of the glory of God. He's the exact imprint of His nature. And right now, He's upholding the universe by the word of His power. And friends, He's made a way for sins to be purified. And when He did, He sat down at the right hand of God.

And He's better. Oh, friends, He is so much better or superior in every possible and imaginable way to whatever system you're working or attempting to do in order to achieve some kind of connection with God.

And so, because of all of this, let's listen. God has spoken to us through His Son, and so, let's listen. Let's listen in a way that leads us to action and lining ourselves up with what He's said to be right and real and true.

And then, let's marvel. Let's come together during these next few weeks and let's adore Him together. Let's worship Him in this season in maybe fresh and new ways. Let's work hard to put our hearts in the right pathways for us to be able to marvel at and worship Him. Because this baby in the manger is God's final and definitive message to all of humanity and to you and me.

Let me pray for us ...

God, we come before you amazed. We marvel and stand in awe of what we celebrate this time of year—Your Son—our final message—sent to us from a God who speaks and who has entered our world and entered our mess. And God, we are so incredibly grateful for this baby in a manger and all that He represents for us.

God, would you turn our hearts toward you this week, and the next week, and the next one after that? Help us to listen and act accordingly, because of the reality of who this final message was ... Your Son. And it's in His name we pray. Amen!