

When Will You Return?

Christmas Mixtape series

by Chris Famisaran

We have a new series called the Christmas Mixtape. Before I get to that, though, let's give a hand to all of you who came out to spruce the place up a little bit to look more Christmassy and also to our deacons and everyone who came out. Thank you for coming out and with our work be. We have another one next week. So we want to let you know if you have a desire to come help maintain the Lord's house. Amen. There's an opportunity not tomorrow, but the following week, next week on the 10th.

Christmas Mixtape. How many of you growing up? I know we've mentioned it. For me, before CDs, before Apple and Spotify Playlist, we had the tape deck, specifically the tape cassette. I remember going into the Virgin Records Store at Ontario Mills many, many years ago, and I would go, I couldn't afford CDs because I was a teenager, but I could afford cassettes. Remember going, I won't say which of my favorite artists were (cough U2). And I remember looking at all of these wonderful tapes, and I just wanted to buy all of them.

And I remember too, even a few years before that, when my family, we were living in Yuccaipa on the street called Cherry Wood Drive. And I remember my father, he bought CDs, but this was before like you could burn them onto CDs and have your own mixtape CDs. So he would play the CD. I remember, which I think it was, oh, who was the artist? Whatever. And he would press record, and I remember him, 'What are you doing? You're putting CDs, these songs on a tape.' Yeah. And then when he got into the car, I remember driving, we would go to Arizona because we had family and we'd be listening to all of these songs, and it would jump from artist to artist, maybe genres and it just was mind-blowing. But yet there's this affinity when I look back, mixtape, it warms my heart.

And we have many hymns that we can go back to. Some we're going to study today and their origins in the scriptures of where they come from. And as you sing, I hope that as you sing these songs, they'll have bigger meaning and deeper meaning. Let's pray. Father in heaven, thank you, Lord, for the opportunity to be able to come together today, to be able to study and to look at some of these songs in a fresh new light. Be with us in Jesus' name. Amen.

How many of you have animals? How many of you have dogs? How many of you, when you get home, your dogs greet you at the door? Almost, is anybody whose dog is just totally anemic to you? It's like, yeah, whatever, the owner's home, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. Okay, I'm sorry, Ben. I'm going to give you a little window into my home. When I get home, my dog, some of you have met him, named Jackson, is probably going to be on the couch or his little Ikea chair. That's his spot on the couch so he can either watch the door or the going outside, the front door or the door leading to the garage. And unless it's close to dinner time, he's not going to get up. My wife, on the other hand, as soon as it's about three o'clock, he's perched, and where is he looking? The door going into the garage, waiting in anticipation.

During the day, some days he knows she's going to call him home a little earlier. Some days, she's going to come home a little later. But still, even if he's napping, his face is always pointed towards the door going into the garage. Again, unless it's early dinner time. And as soon as he hears the gears to the craftsman garage door opener, he will start to howl. He will start to bark like a banshee. And it's so much

so that I'm worried that our neighbors may call Peter or animal control on us because he is so excited for my wife to come home. Anticipation. He's been waiting all day, as soon as she left he was anticipating already when is she going to come home.

Now, the Hebrews, the Israelites, had been anticipating for many, many years when would God come and rescue them from their misery. In fact, this misery started many years ago. We can see anticipation of Jesus' arrival begins in the book of Genesis chapter 3 verse 15. Does anybody remember what happened in chapter 3 of Genesis? Something very, very tragic happened. The Fall. And yet the beauty of this is that God already had a plan.

In fact, Genesis 3 verse 15, some of these verses we're gonna actually dive into. Some of them I'm just going to highlight because we got a lot to study, all right? So God says, 'And I will put enmity between you and the woman and between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head and you will strike his heel.' What is God saying here? There will be one who will come and save you and redeem you. When it says strike you, already alluding to what about Jesus' death.

We also find 2 Samuel chapter 7 verses 12 through 13. Sorry. 'When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my name and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever.' What are we talking about here? Again, Jesus. In fact, if you go to Matthew chapter 1, there's a whole genealogy, a line of Jesus' ancestors pointing. So imagine being Israel for many, many years. And if you know the story, beginning in Abraham through many generations, Israel's relationship with God, it had its challenges up and down. Sometimes they were faithful, they were super hot and sometimes they would be lukewarm and then they just went off the reservation and they just went. They did horrible things and God would have to come back much like a good parent, bring them around. Okay.

And so at some point though, Israel had decided, 'I'm just going to do my own thing,' and God allows them to be taken into captivity to go to Babylon and eventually they return, but it would never be the same. And over time, they were taken over by another entity, in this case, Rome. You imagine a foreign entity, authoritarian, telling you how much tax you got to pay. You got to do this, you got to do that. How many of you like being told what to do? Not many of us, right?

And so we find a song that speaks to this, 'O come, O come, Emmanuel.' We just sang this. And Emmanuel is this, strictly speaking, is God with us. And the beautiful thing is Jesus desires to be with us. Now, let's go to the book of Isaiah, book of Isaiah chapter seven, verse 14. Isaiah chapter seven, verse 14. Okay. Well, there. It says, 'Therefore the Lord will give you a sign. The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and will call him what? Emmanuel.' Now we know in Matthew chapter 1, verse 20, an angel appears to Joseph and he says, 'But after he considered this an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream,' says Joseph's son of David, 'Do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife because what is conceived in her is from the Holy Spirit. She will give birth to a son. You are to give him the name Jesus because he will save his people from their, what?' Those of you who know the story, their sins. And all of this took place to fulfill what the Lord had said through the prophet. 'The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son and they will call him Emmanuel, which means God with us.'

What is it in your heart that you greatly desire? What is something that is just, it holds deep in your heart that you just want? For the people of Israel, desire for God to come and take them to actually not to take them, but to set them free from the bonds that they had been experiencing. They wanted a

Messiah to come and free them from their captivity. They wanted somebody to overthrow the government and to rule. As it says, we just sang, 'O come, O come is Emmanuel and ransom captive Israel that mourns and lonely exile here until the Son of God appear.'

Does it ever feel sometimes like we're just in exile, just waiting for the Lord to return? How much worse could it get? Yet every day we're surprised. I know one of the reasons why we're here is that we are longing for Jesus to return. And yet it says, 'Rejoice, rejoice, Emmanuel shall come to thee, O Israel.' Now God, in the form of the Holy Spirit, is with us. Amen? Praise the Lord. So we are not separated from God. Maybe physically we're not able to shake Jesus' hand, but the Holy Spirit is here. And then it continues, 'O come that wisdom from on high and order all things far and nigh. To us the path of knowledge show and cause us in her ways to go. O desire of nations, bind in one hearts of all mankind. This desire that we be one people, bid thou our sad deficiencies and be thyself our king of peace.'

And in the ninth century, when they would sing songs, they would sing songs, the Psalms and the scriptures. And there's this, oh, this, oh, it's an indication, a desire or a longing that the O is an antiphon. Okay. It's a short sentence or a phrase that's sung before a Psalm or a canticle. 'O come, O come, Emmanuel' is a song that expresses our longing and our desire for God to come and release us from this oppression, this overthrow to be able to set us free. The beautiful thing though is as you walk, as you look through the scriptures, you'll find that God, does he work in ways that we totally expect? Rarely, right? They expect a big, powerful figure to literally overthrow the government in the case of Israel, and yet that's not what God does. God comes though to be in relationship with us, but he does it in a way that we least expect. In this case, where was Jesus born? In Bethlehem. Is Bethlehem a great city to travel to? It was a small city, but yet it was predicted that Jesus would be born in Bethlehem. Let's go to Micah chapter five, verse two. Micah chapter five, verse two. Okay. All right. And it says, 'But you, Bethlehem, Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come from me, one who will be a ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old and from ancient times.' Okay. Micah, who's Micah? Micah's a prophet, one of the minor prophets.

And so this is hundreds of years ago. This is many many years before and if we go to Matthew, The Magi When they visit Herod It says when he had called together This is Matthew chapter 2 verses 4 through 6 when he had called together all of the people's chief priests and teachers of the law He asked them where the Messiah are to be born in Bethlehem in Judea they replied for this is what the prophet has written But you Bethlehem in the land of Judah are by no means least among Sorry Among the rulers of Judah for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel amen and So even before all of this God had a plan to be able to bring peace and joy relief and he would do it in such a way that it was unexpected. Did many of the things that Jesus did? Was it expected? He probably left many people scratching their heads. Why God? Why did you do it that way?

"So, let's go in front of you. Here are some hymn books. Okay? Pull them out, and I'm just trying to find 'O Little Town of Bethlehem.' I completely forgot to look up 135. Let's go to 135. On the top left and right are numbers. Well, there. Just briefly. We're not going to be able to get through the whole song because we have one more song after this.

'O Little Town of Bethlehem, how still we see lie above thy deep and dreamless sleep the silent stars go by. Yet in thy dark streets shineth there ever as the everlasting light; the hopes and fears of all of the years are met in thee tonight.' Again, anticipation. The hopes and fears Israelites—they did not have an easy path, right? And so here we see, though, that the tide is turning. There is hope, as it says, 'For Christ

is born of Mary, gathered all above where mortals sleep, the angels keep their watch of wondering love. O morning stars together proclaim holy birth, and praises singing to God the king and peace to men on earth.'

And yet, we also see how silently, how silently the wondrous gift is given, so God imparts in human hearts the blessings of his heaven. What a beautiful promise. No ear may hear his coming. We don't know when that will happen. But in this world of sin where meek souls will receive him still, the dear Christ enters in. Again, God came to earth. Imagine being at the Ritz and going to the worst hotel and place you could think of instead. Where do you want to go? Ritz or a very uncomfortable night's sleep? The Ritz, right? Yet God said, 'No, I want to be with my people.'

'O holy child of Bethlehem, descend to us, we pray. Cast out our sin and we see this sign of redemption, this desire to change. Be born in us today. We hear the Christmas angels, the great glad tidings tell. O come to us, abide with us, our Lord, Emmanuel,' again, this idea of God with us. Beautiful.

All right. Last song. Really quickly. The last thing that I want to talk about is Jesus has come to set us free. Amen. So, let's go to Isaiah. Isaiah chapter 61. Isaiah chapter 61, verse one. Isaiah 61, verse one. I hear some pages still slipping, moving, flipping.

'The Spirit of the Lord is on me because the Lord has anointed me to proclaim what? Good news to who? The poor. He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor and the day of vengeance for our God, to comfort all who mourn.' Okay. So, proclaim good news, bind up the brokenhearted, freedom, and release from darkness.

To proclaim the good news. Now, flip over a couple of chapters. Chapter 58. Chapter 58. And starting at verse six, it says, 'Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?' Y'all know what a yoke is. You know when you have two cows, two bulls, and you're trying to take care of your land. They would put the yoke on top of both of them so that it would be able to help steer and guide where you wanted the plow to go.

And here, if you were a slave or one who would work hard, there's this expression 'to break every yoke' is to see that you are no longer under darkness, you are no longer under sin, you are free. How many of you just feel so burdened, you're barely able to breathe? Because of the stress, the anxiety that's going on in your life, and all you want is just relief, amen? Especially during this time of the year. We're expected and obligated to spend as much money as you can so you can buy somebody something. And I'm not saying giving is bad, but yet when you are maxing your credit cards out to try to appease people and make people think you're great, you're only digging yourself into a deeper hole, a deeper debt. Just one example.

And yet, we find many years later, because Isaiah was written many years before Jesus came, Luke chapter four. What does it say? He goes up, Jesus gets up into the synagogue. He was in Nazareth. And when he had been brought up and on the seventh Sabbath day, he went into the synagogue, as was his custom, and he read the scroll from the prophet Isaiah. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written, 'The Spirit of the Lord, sorry, the Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to

proclaim new good news to the poor. Is this sound familiar? He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, to proclaim the year of our Lord's favor.'

So, with all the things that we've said, we've talked about the first song, of course, 'Emmanuel,' talking about this anticipation of when will our God come and help us? Israel had longed for a king, a powerful king for God to save them. And he did come in the form of Emmanuel, God with us. But like a little town of Bethlehem, this little town is the one who would greet where Jesus would be born, unexpected. God's going to work wonderful, beautiful things in unexpected ways. His entrance was not expected. In fact, God, though he surprises us, he can do wonderful things from practically nothing or very little and do awesome, great things.

For those of you, perhaps, like the Israelites, maybe you're broken, you're weary, you're feeling exhausted. Does your blind, your weak, this yoke around your neck, Jesus desires to bring you freedom. And much like the Israelites who had been waiting and anticipating, we ourselves are also anticipating Jesus' glorious return. Amen? How are we going to live? Are we going to continue to live as we are living now? And how are you living? Is it faithful and true to God? Or is it faithful and true to me? What I want? Where are my thoughts? The things that I say, the actions that I take, they become who I am.

The other day, yesterday, I was on the freeway again. And I was driving down the 605 and there was a car all of a sudden had to brake suddenly. It was a big black truck because there was a car in the fast lane going, guess what? Take a guess. Take a gander. 40 miles. Not that slow, not that slow, definitely not speeding. 50 miles an hour. All right, you said it, brother. Because I was by myself, I couldn't get into the carpool lane. I had to stay behind. I thought maybe if I get in the middle lane. I thought I had a shot. I could go around. Nope, denied. So, I went back to my original spot. And this lady was completely oblivious that cars were passing her on the right. And so all of a sudden, the car in front of me goes around, the next car goes around, and finally, I get to go around. And me being curious, I watched in my rear-view mirror, seven cars. Immediately when they got to her, went around. And I thought, good grief, pay attention.

Later that afternoon when I had to go to the post office, there was a car in front of me. I won't name the name of the car. But the individual, there was there was a person in front, we were making a left turn. The person in front of the car. Sorry, two cars ahead. They went. It was green. Turn magnificent. And then the car in front of me—okay, come on. Let's go. Let's go. It's not like honk level yet, but you want to. And because they're just slowly edging forward, and I'm like, come on, let's go. Let's go. Slowly, the slowest left turn you could make, and there's no oncoming traffic because it's a T stop. Eventually, got around, and as soon as I could, I looked to the right. Nobody was coming around because it was too late left turn. I got around, and the person was not even looking up, looking at their phone. That's when I got not angry, but I got a little upset. Not because it was slow, but because of where this person's head was at. That's dangerous, right?

Now, how, in my desire to live for Christ, did I feel about that? I thought, Lord, forgive me for I have sinned with impatience, because I wanted to yell at that person, 'Get off your phone.' But is that Christ-loving? In a way, you could say, 'You're going to cause an accident.' But do I have to yell it with the intent that I wanted to? No. I could have said, 'Hey, please get off your phone.' When we're talking about living for Christ, okay, how am I living? Are my actions symbolic, representative of how Jesus would want me to live until He returns? Sometimes I have my good days, and sometimes it's like, Lord, I need a bull again.

And so, my friends, just like the Israelites who wait in anticipation for their Savior, for their Messiah, we too, as well, are waiting for Jesus to return. So may you love, as Jesus wants us to love, to love God with everything and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Know that God is with us. O come, O come, Emmanuel. And secondly, God can do amazing things out of nothing, just like being born in the town of Bethlehem. Could have gone to any other city, but no. He came and was born in Bethlehem, symbolic of God is going to do an amazing work. And thirdly, God has come to set us free, to not be captive.

So as we go through this December, this Christmas season, may you be blessed, may you know that you are redeemed, and you can be set free. God is with us. Father in heaven, thank you, Lord, for all that you are doing. May you lead and guide us in all that we do, help us to be faithful and true, help us to be loving and kind. May we wait with anticipation, Lord. As we have done for many years. And until you come again, give us strength, wisdom, and peace to know how to share you, to love others as you would love, as you want us to love, but also, Lord, may we experience that grace and love. In Jesus' name, amen.

Grace and peace, everyone.