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FIVE THEOLOGICAL TRUTHS

Christmas Eve

Matthew 1:18-23, Luke 1:26-30, 2:10-11

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, thank you for the special gift that we have a relationship with you. We celebrate that this time of year, but it carries on throughout the whole year. So for that we are grateful. We are thankful for what you've done for us and how it changes us. So Lord, now as we look at your word we ask that you would teach us through it, guide us, and direct us. I pray that you would cause each one of us to leave with some new ideas today, new thoughts that will empower us spiritually. Share your grace with us this morning. We ask in Jesus' name, amen.

The first thing I want to do is address our people on Facebook Live who can watch this service live. If you happen to not be here on a Sunday morning you can watch it on Facebook. I know that some of you couldn't come for various reasons and we just want to welcome you. We trust that this will be a merry Christmas for you and that God will do some very powerful things in your life on this special day. So I'm grateful that you could be tuning in and listening to this message. It's one that I think may touch you in a very special way in your life today.

I think God wants to do some good things in our lives continually. I want you to take a moment today and measure your spiritual health. I think there are five theological truths and we get these five theological truths not just in our head but into our hearts that can help us to be spiritually healthy. Now I allude to these five truths regularly as we're going through our studies and I say there are these five truths that are important. But I want to take time today to elaborate on them and I want to use the Christmas story, the story of Mary and Joseph and the others in the story, to illustrate these five truths and then take away some of the principles that we can then apply to our own lives.

So you'll be able to go away, I would suggest, able to deal with the challenges and the problems that you face in life because you're spiritually stronger than you would be if you didn't have these five truths. If you believe these five truths you will be a spiritually stronger person. It will affect so many areas of your life. It will affect how you deal with habits. It will affect how you deal with your speech, how you deal with your emotions, how you deal with your money, how you deal with relationships, how you feel about life, a purpose in life. All these things are important because we face challenges regularly. Being spiritually strong will enable you and empower you to be able to move forward. These are the five truths. I'm going to give you an overview first of all and then I'm going to take each one of these and go through them one at a time.

God is in control.

Scott Turansky - Calvary Chapel Living Hope

God is good.
Bad things happen and God doesn't always prevent them.
God has redeemed us.
We can live victoriously, a victorious life.

Those five truths when we embrace them into our hearts can change the way we live. It can empower a marriage, it can empower our parenting, it can empower our personal lives as we're living and dealing with the stuff of life. We need these five truths. Every one of us needs them. They're powerful. Let's look at them one at a time.

First of all, God is in control. Let's look at the story of Joseph receiving the message that he's going to be used by God in some particular way. So if we go to the Christmas story and read about Joseph it reads this way: *This is how the birth of Jesus the Messiah came about: His mother Mary was pledged to be married to Joseph, but before they came together, she was found to be pregnant through the Holy Spirit. Because Joseph her husband was faithful to the law, and yet did not want to expose her to public disgrace, he had in mind to divorce her quietly.*

I don't know if you can feel the pain there that he must be experiencing in his life. The challenge that he has to wanting to do what's right and being in love. Being in love and wanting to do what's right are often two things that are hard to put together. Because people who are in love sometimes do things that are not right. He wants to do what's right and he's in love, so he's struggling with these issues and he's wrestling in his heart. What am I going to do?

The passage continues – *But after he had considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream and said, “Joseph 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, and you are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins.” All 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 Immanuel” (which means “God with us”).*

I would suggest that this first theological truth that God is in control is what helped Joseph get through the challenges that he was experiencing in his life. It's the same theological truth that can help you and me deal with some of the stuff that happens in our lives that we didn't expect or things that we didn't count on or just don't fit into our lives the way we would think.

I'm sure that this isn't exactly what Joseph had in mind. He's planning to get married, things are moving in a direction, and now I would say he's very, confused, disappointed. You think about what feeling might be there for him in the midst of the situation. At some point in the midst of this there's some chaos in his life. It just isn't going the way he would like.

If you're a student and things aren't going the way you would like, you might feel the same way that Joseph felt. This just isn't what I planned on. I didn't plan to have to stay after school and work on this project. I didn't plan to have to give up my hours of what I was going to do to work on this assignment. I didn't plan to get a D when I thought I was going to get a B, if you're a student. If you're working or in a family relationship sometimes things don't go the way we expect.

I like control in my life. In my house I put my socks in one drawer and I put my underwear in another drawer and I put my shirts in another drawer. I like control. When I open my drawer I like to see what's in it. Occasionally if my wife helps me put some clothes away and she puts them in a different place. If I open this drawer and something's in here I wasn't expecting then I can get a little bit like, "What's going on here? This isn't the way it's supposed to be."

Now some of us are a little more controlling than others when it comes to such things. And so that control that we have can get us into some trouble. Just imagine some of the people today that don't have a house to put their dresser in to put their socks and their underwear because there's a flood that's interrupted them or a fire that's taken their house. I can imagine that kind of chaos is much more elaborate than the one that I experience about where to put my socks and my underwear.

But all of us experience challenges because life doesn't go the way we would like sometimes. Challenges happen and we don't have the control that we would like. So what happens? We can get upset. It says he's considering this. He's upset about what's happening. He doesn't know quite what to do in the midst of this struggle. And in the midst of this, God brings something into his life that's going to help him be able to deal with it – an understanding that God is in control.

When we recognize that God is in control then it helps us deal with the chaos in life. That doesn't mean that God plans or that He causes the bad things that happen in the world. That's not what we're saying here. God doesn't cause the bad things that happen. But He has a master plan that uses even the evil things, even the bad things. He has his master plan and He is in control.

When we recognize that God is in control, it does something inside of our hearts that we can release some stuff. Maybe it's that control that we're holding onto a lot, but we release that, whatever is inside because God gives us something when we have this truth. We move this truth from our head. Yeah, we know that God is in control. But to think that He's in control of my life? He's in control of the situations around me? It does something for me and it gives me a greater sense of confidence that I can live today. A greater sense of confidence that I can handle life challenges, that God is in control.

Wow. It's such an amazing concept to think of. So in this story that we just read, it even goes back to the Old Testament to show that this is part of a plan, a bigger plan.

We have our own plans. We have our own ideas. We have our own control issues that we have in life, but we need to be able to submit those to our heavenly Father who is ultimate control and we can then live with confidence in the midst of the challenges that we face. I'm convinced that if we don't have these five things in our lives we end up with more emotional challenges, we find ourselves doing the wrong thing more often. Our relational problems increase. If we don't have these five truths in our hearts, then bad things happen.

Now I would suggest I look at my own life like they're like graphs. I need a little bit more of this one now. Oh yeah, I forgot about this one over here. So today maybe as we're talking about these, the Lord will put His finger on one of these things. You know, you really need to work on

this one. You need to really realize that I am in control or one of the other four that we're going to look at as well. When we get these things, we're more spiritually healthy, we're more fulfilled, we're more able to deal with the challenges of life. The first one is God is in control.

Let's go to the second one that God is good. Because knowing that God is in control doesn't make us feel much better if we don't believe He's good at the same time. But God is good. And of course it gives us this attitude of thankfulness. We talk about God being good.

I want to go to the story of Mary receiving the message that her life is about to change. Notice what's happening in Mary's life in Luke 1. *God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. Boy this is cool. She's getting ready to be married. This is super. The virgin's name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, "Greetings, you who are highly favored!"*

Now the word *favored* is our word that comes from the word grace or *charis*. It's good things. Grace is what we rely on to deal with life. Grace is certainly the gift of Jesus Christ who's a Savior. That's the gift of grace that we experience. But as Paul dealt with the normal challenges of life and asked, "Lord, would you take this thorn in the flesh from me?" God says no, *my grace is sufficient for you*. I'm going to give you the energy you need to match the situations that you experience. God's grace is such a treasure. It's the goodness of God that we receive in practical ways. No matter what the challenges are that you face, God wants to give you grace.

In fact I believe God says this to each one of us – "Greetings, you who are highly favored." Not just favored. Highly favored. God wants us to have this identity that says I am special before God. I am highly favored. Where do I get that idea? Well I get it from Ephesians 1. When Paul is trying to help us understand this idea, he says we were adopted into the family, chosen before the creation of the world. Wow. What a statement. He's the one that can do far *exceeding above all that we could ever ask or even imagine*. That's the goodness of God. That's the favor. "You are highly favored," He says to Mary. But that's also true of you and me. You are highly favored today before God. He wants to give you good things. He's got grace waiting for you in your life. *The Lord is with you.*

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. I can imagine she would be troubled because I think sometimes here's what we say to God: "God, pick somebody else. Give your favor to somebody else. Leave me alone. I just want to go on with my life." But God says, "No. I've got something special for you." This something special for Mary is going to be different than what she had planned on. Remember she is planning a wedding. I don't know all about Jewish tradition and how weddings are planned and everything, but I've got to tell you, her mind is set on is a wedding and what's going to happen and this is actually going to change things for her. It's going to provide a challenge for her. Different things are going to happen in the midst of this.

But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; you have found favor (that's grace, that's the good thing) with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you are to call him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over Jacob's descendants forever; his kingdom will

never end.” Mary, I want you to know that God is going to do something in your life. It’s likely not what you had planned, but He’s going to do something that’s rather amazing in your life.

I would suggest God wants to do the same thing in our own life. He wants to do something that’s amazing. He wants to give us good. He wants to bless us. Does that mean all good things are going to happen to us? No. That’s what’s going to bring us to the next point. God is in control, God is good, and number three, bad things happen and God doesn’t always prevent them.

You just got to know. If you do not have this as part of your theological repertoire you’re going to find yourself disappointed continually. “Why did this happen to me? I can’t believe this!” We start developing this victim sense about life that everything is bad. Bad things happen and God doesn’t always prevent them.

I think about the Christmas story. I think about Mary who is on her way to Bethlehem and the contractions start before she gets there. Can you believe it? Frankly, it would be scary. Oh no. Joseph, the baby is coming. So they’re on their way, so what do they do? They go into Bethlehem. So first of all, the contractions happen. That’s not just a good thing. Bad things happen. Even in the midst of good, bad things happen. They get to the local hotel, which in those days an inn was just a big open area like this where people would be staying. It’s not like individual rooms. And the innkeeper is saying, “Look, I don’t have any more space.” A bad thing. There’s no space? She’s having a baby. I don’t have any space. So she ends up having this baby in a barn, in a stable. Bad things happen. Even in the midst of what God wants to do in our lives.

I mean you look at what’s going on in your life that you feel like this is a bad thing. Could God be using that in some powerful ways to demonstrate His favor on you? See, we have to have this balanced understanding theologically of life or we’re going to get upset continually. We’re going to feel discouraged, we’re going to feel upset, we’re going to feel like this is terrible. But even in the midst of the bad stuff that’s happening, God gives us the ability to talk to someone or to minister to someone or to reflect God’s glory even when we’re being mistreated.

When King Herod found out about the baby through the wise men, he was threatened by this and he decided he’s going to kill all of the baby boys two years old and under. I’m going, “Man alive. That is really, really bad.” Bad things happen continually in our world and when they happen in our world then it’s such a struggle, it’s a challenge. Because these bad things that are going on, we live with them. They are around us all the time. They don’t necessarily go away.

Your theological understanding must recognize that we have sin that has entered the world. And when sin came into the world, bad things happen. Sometimes they’re caused by us. We make bad decisions and we offend people and they get upset, or we make bad decisions and we get ourselves into trouble. So yes, we do the wrong thing sometimes. Our selfishness creates damage in other people’s lives and in our lives and so on. But sometimes it’s just the selfishness of other people or disease happen in our world. Bad things are there.

You know what I think this does for us? You see it on the screen already. I think it helps us recognize that we’re all broken people. The people that offend me or that I offend are all broken

people. It gives me this sense of humility and compassion just to spend time with people and say, “Wow, I don’t have to get so offended all the time because this is the way it should be and if he would do it this way then I wouldn’t have this problem.” No. There’s this compassion I have that makes me want to reach out to other people and care for them. It gives me a humility that makes me recognize I’m broken too. “If that person would change, or that person, this person,” and be judgmental and critical of other people. People who are judgmental and critical and hostile toward other people don’t recognize their own brokenness. If we would recognize that we are ourselves are broken, we would be much more humble and much more compassionate toward other people. It would just do something to us and it would change how we live in our lives. It adds just this whole other dimension to our theological toolbox so that we can deal with life experiences.

Yeah, we have to set limits on broken people sometimes to prevent them from hurting us some more. I’m not saying that we always have to take it or we have to submit to mistreatment or so on. Sometimes we have to set limits, but we do it with a sense of compassion and grace because we’re broken people too. If not, I could be in that same place as that person who’s mad or addicted or homeless or whatever. I could be in that same place if it weren’t for God’s grace. It gives us this sense of compassion that causes us to reach out to other people and appreciate what God has given to us. I think what that does then is it gives us humility and compassion that drives us forward.

But the theological truths don’t stop with the brokenness that we experience. We go further than that because we see that God has redeemed us. We recognize that God has redeemed us or He brings this grace of His into our lives even in the brokenness to do something in the midst of that. This is where life gets so interesting it becomes an adventure. It really turns into this responsive joy.

Look at the passage of the angels communicating the message to the shepherds when *the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy (that’s our word, that’s the result of understanding the redemption of God is great joy in our lives) for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.*

In our theological understanding and your understanding of life, you have to come to a place where you recognize you’re broken. Oh you may be fine. Maybe you have enough money. Maybe you’re able to do fine in life. But the reality is you start looking inside and you realize I am a broken person. I am broken in my heart. I need something outside of myself. I need a Savior. So ultimately what happens is that Christ died on the cross for us so that He could relieve us of our brokenness. He could give us redemption inside and bring wholeness into us. Yes, it is a wholeness that gives us salvation before God so that we can have eternal life. But it’s much more than that. God wants to take in the brokenness that we all experience in our lives and He wants to turn it into something redemptive.

If you’ve got pain, if you’re suffering, if you’ve got a challenge in a relationship, if your dreams are not met, God wants to bring this redemptive fresh air into that area of your life, and that’s what brings the joy so that we can go around saying, “Wow, I am so glad that I have been redeemed by God.” God continues to do this redemptive work in us and He turns us into these

little ministers that are able to share with other people because we have something to offer. Yes, we're broken too. Every one of us is broken. We don't come to church because we're the perfect ones. We come to church to encourage each other in the midst of our brokenness to receive the redemptive power of God. We need this truth. The truth about this redemption of God in our lives is really important. It affects the way I treat my wife, the way I treat my kids. It affects the way I treat those who I work with, those I come in contact with. Because I'm a broken person just redeemed and growing in God. That's the same message that other people could have and need in their lives as well.

The redemption of God is such a powerful witness of what God wants to do inside of each one of us. That's the fourth principle. God is in control, God is good, Bad things happen and God doesn't always prevent them, God has redeemed us, and then fifthly, we can live victoriously. What I mean by victoriously, we can live the fulfilled life that God has designed for us. Even in the midst of the brokenness, even in the midst of the challenges, we can live with that experience that God wants for us in our lives.

But it means that we have to obey Him. Just because God has redeemed the world, doesn't mean I have to experience it. I only get to experience it to the extent that I give myself to the Lord and embrace it and receive it. I can live the victorious life, but that doesn't mean that everybody is living that life. You only live it if you're able to receive that from God. God offers something to us. I like to describe it, as I have before here, that it's like a showerhead of God's grace. I can only receive the goodness and the grace of God if I'm willing to step under that showerhead and allow it to pour over me. That means I need to be obeying the Lord.

If you go through the Christmas story and you think about the obedience that people demonstrated, you have the wise men who were told to go a different direction and they did. They didn't go back to Herod and report back as they said they would. They went a different direction. They obeyed. You look at Mary and her story. She says to the angel, "*I'm the servant of God. Do whatever you want.*" What a statement that she makes. We look at Joseph who first of all takes Mary as his wife. In the midst of the rumors that will be said and the problems that are out there, he goes ahead and does the right thing. But also when God says, "Joseph, I want to take your family to Egypt," that doesn't look like it's in the playbook. Why am I going to Egypt? I thought I was going to raise my family in Nazareth. But he obeys the Lord and he goes to Egypt. God wants to do some great things in Joseph's family and in Joseph's life, but often it takes him in a path that he didn't expect.

God is doing some amazing things, but it comes with obedience. And that obedience is really important for you and for me. Obedience sometimes means that we speak out and we say, "This is wrong what you're doing. I can't go on and let you do this. I'm going to take some action here." Sometimes obedience means I'm going to put up with you and the annoying behavior or I'm going to go in or I'm going to sacrifice myself for you. Sometimes it means I'm not going to be selfish, I'm going to let someone else have the first turn, or the best piece, or whatever it is. Sometimes obedience means I'm going to make some hard decisions about how I'm going to live. I might have to change my lifestyle (as I'm sure that Mary and Joseph both had to do) because I want to be obedient to God.

Changing a lifestyle may mean adjusting the way you live financially or the way you live relationally or how you entertain yourself or what you do with certain things. If you want to be used by God, if you want to experience the grace and the favor of God to meet the brokenness that you have, it often means living differently and making some hard choices. Once you're able to do that and you start receiving some of the gifts that God has that are waiting, then we can experience the victorious Christian life when we obey and we allow God to do that.

I put on there it's this vision, this sense of purpose that we have in life. See, I'm convinced that we have a spirit. I'm not talking about spirit in the sense of the Holy Spirit; I'm talking about every person has a spirit and that spirit that they have is this human thing. God placed a spirit in every person and that spirit is really that person where we feel this sense of purpose in life. Now you can get purpose by giving to the poor or serving in a thing or you can get involved in your work or something and your spirit can feel better because now you're kind of empowered or so on. But there's nothing that can empower you in your spirit as much as the power of God and His Spirit coming inside of you and witnessing with your spirit this truth that God wants.

Purpose in life happens in us most effectively when we embrace what God wants to do. God might radically want to change us as He did with Mary and Joseph in the story. Radically changed who they were, what they were going to do. It's not going to be easy. If you look at their lives and the things that happen, we don't even know what happened to Joseph after Jesus was about twelve years old. We don't even know. We have no story about him. But even Mary comes to the cross and her son is dying on the cross. Whoa. I'm sure that's not what she expected and I'm sure the heartache that she experienced in her life as she watched certain things happen was painful for her. But yet she had an understanding of God and what He was doing in her life and what He was doing in the world. She was able to trust in those things. We have something that we can trust in.

So the five theological truths are not just something we need to know or we learn about in Sunday school. These five theological truths we embrace in our lives. I think we embrace them in order to experience salvation at first because we recognize that I'm a sinner, I'm broken. I need the redemption of Jesus Christ and I accept Jesus Christ as my Lord and Savior in my life. That's the beginning of a whole road of applying these five truths in our lives.

So in my own life, if I find myself getting anxious about this or angry about this or upset about this, I need to go back and say, "Okay, where is it that I'm missing something here?" Because maybe I do need to do something to change my world and what's going on. But if it's tearing me up inside, if it's wrecking my life, then I need to go back to these five truths because I want to be spiritual strong. And the spiritual strength that we can enjoy in our lives provides something very beautiful in the midst of the brokenness.

We do know that the story ends in a great way because we know the last chapter of the story when Christ comes back for us. But in between now and then, there's a lot of challenges that take place. In order to deal with those challenges, we need these five truths in our lives.

I encourage you to take heart, listen to those ideas, and determine what is it you need to work on. Maybe you need to work on all five of them. But if one of them stands out, maybe you want to

spend the next month... There are books written about every one of these. You may just want to take some time and read the scriptures or study a book that's about the scriptures regarding these principles to help you understand more about what it means to be spiritually healthy in your life. That's what makes the Christmas story so special is we see God at work and good things are taking place in the midst of the challenges that they all experienced.

Let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Our heavenly Father, we come before you and thank you for your plan. We thank you that you're good. In our brokenness, Lord, we want to turn to you and receive from you so much. Lord, we ask that you would work your redemption plan into our lives and all of the nooks and crannies of places where we get upset and challenged and frustrated. Lord, we ask that you would teach us how to walk in that victory that you give us so we're not controlled by the circumstances, we're controlled by your Spirit and we can rejoice today. Thank you for your gift of Jesus Christ and what that means in a very personal way in our lives. In Jesus' name, amen.