

CHURCH OF THE HIGHLANDS

Jesus at the Center

Full Transcript

Chris Hodges
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Welcome and Announcements

- 0:20 You you Come on, give Jesus all the praise, everybody. Oh, that's not good enough. Come on, give Jesus. Woo! That's a great report. And I think sometimes when we see all those big numbers, and for a lot of us who call Highland Zone, you can see in those kind of numbers for a long time, there is a numbing of the numbers. But having every single number is a person. I mean, if that 1361 people that got saved yesterday was your niece or your nephew or your daughter, you'd really be giving got some more praise. So I'm going to give you one more chance. Come on, everybody.
- 2:04 Oh, yeah. Woo. That's what I'm talking about with an exciting time. Good to see you guys today, everybody. Mary Christmas and let me look straight in the camera and say hello to all of our campuses. We are one church that meets in locations all across Alabama and Georgia. I love you. I pray for you still every single day. And then for all the men and women in the Alabama Department of Corrections, what an honor it is to bring not only this service, but everything that we are as a church, our small groups, the growth track, the dream team, baptisms, freedom ministry, everything that we are as a church comes right into those facilities. God bless you guys.
- 2:40 And of course, as always, we have people that are watching live online and later on demand. Grantsville, come on, say big hello to your church family, everybody, everybody. And by the way, if you're here for the first time at any of our campuses or here at Grant's Mill, you couldn't have picked a better Sunday, honestly, to see who we are, what we're all about. Because we live for these moments. We believe that God's got us on this earth to make a difference. I want to echo what Pastor Marcus already said to all of you guys what a blessing it is to be a part of a church family that actually gets it. You understand that this is not all about us and it's not supposed to be all about us and a lot of times church and faith can become that but we realize that we live our lives.
- 3:22 For the world and make a difference in this world and you are and I want to thank you. It's a joy, Tammy and I are as bought in as we ever have been. We're glad to be on this journey with you and now I get to represent just one part of our legacy offering and our legacy lanes and that is Highlands College and just very quickly, I'll just say what a difference you guys were making. There are great things happening on the campus. of Highlands College and as you give a portion of it is going to go to scholarships and facilities and all the different schools that we're building right now and I want to say a big thank you for that.

The Nativity: A Picture of What Matters Most

- 3:55 Today I'm going to bring you a message that is one that I've only taught once here at Highlands and it was more than 10 years ago so if you haven't been around that long then you have not seen this. For others of you you might remember this And of course, it's the new and improved version of it, but I want to share a little message around the nativity. So, at the home that I grew up in, my parents and my family were very much church people. We've been in church my entire life, never miss a sunny church in my

entire life. And my parents were very spiritual. I'm talking about my dad was a Baptist organist.

- 4:29 Mom's saying in the choir, we're church people, right? And so when Chris misrolled around, he did that and made sure that, man, we're not going to focus on Santa or Frosty or the Grinch. I mean, it was Jesus. And in the center of the decorations, my dad did all the decorations. He's a musician and artist, so he was very, very creative. And so dad set up an activity. We had a big round marble coffee table about knee high. In the middle of our living room and the first thing he did before the Christmas tree for anything else the lights Dad set up his own activity. I'm talking about is it was even better than the one you're looking at?
- 5:08 I mean his wise man had actual clothes. I mean like fabric clothes. He built the barn with what he did Sawed limbs off of pine trees, made the forepost, made the roof, took the bark off of the pine trees and and trees and made it as the shingles, brought in hay and grass, and anyway he set it up, it was there every every every year. And he was a reminder for all of us, obviously not only what happened, the scene that happened on Christmas, but also just to remind us that it's all about Jesus. Can't I get a good amen, everybody, right? It is. We gotta make, we kinda have to fight for that to make sure it stays all about Jesus.
- 5:48 The origin of the Nativity actually is credited to St. Francis of Assisi when in 1223, he's the first one that actually, I think it was a live nativity with actual people, that he said, hey, let's set up the scene. And you know the scene, the player is involved. You got right in the middle is baby Jesus. And you got to say it that way, baby Jesus. And it's right there in the center of it all. And then of course you have his parents there, Mary and Joseph. And then you have the shepherds, right? They were the ones that God chose to give the first and the else between. So the first ones to hear that God, the Christ child was born.
- 6:29 He picked the working class. He picked the people who perhaps many theologians say were the most depressed that night, maybe the darkest. that night, but he said, I'm going to make that announcement. They're going to be the first to know. So they, after they heard the announcement, of course, they show up on the scene. And then we have the wise men. And we always had them in threes, even though the Bible does not mention the number of wise men that were there. We get, we make it three because there were three gifts. So there could have been scores of them. There could have been one. I don't know. Well, I guess there had to be two if they were men.
- 7:01 But anyway, The wise men were there, the mad jai, who came from the east and all their glory, giving gifts of gold, frankincense and murder. I hate to bust, by the way, your little nativity bubble here or your Christmas bubble, but they weren't at the Christmas scene. They actually gave these gifts, probably when Jesus was around two years old in that bumper. Anyway, so there you go, but we still put them there because it reminds us of the greater story that happened there. But there they are. And then, of course, you have barn animals because you know the story. Jesus actually grew up in a town called Nazareth. which is actually on the western side of the Sea of Galilee, northern part of Israel.
- 7:44 Bethlehem is actually south of Jerusalem, a couple of miles. And so there was a census, and you had to go back to the town of your family origin, and for them it was Bethlehem. They were the house and lineage of David. So they actually had to travel down to Bethlehem, and when they got there, you know the story. There was no room for them in the end, so the innkeeper said, hey, but you can use the barn, which by the way, again, hate to bust your bubble. Bards back then were not stables, like we would know

them. They were actually probably caves, and those don't make great intivities. But anyways, so there you go on that one, too.

8:18 So they were there. And of course, Jesus, because it was a barn, was put in a manger, which is a feeding trough. for animals. And so anyway, that's the nativity. You know that. And I grew up in a generation where the nativity was the focal point of Christianity. Even in the town square or a city hall, I remember driving through downtown Baton Rouge where I grew up and you could see nativities set up in government places. Of course, all of that's been removed for the most part. over the past 40 years or so with the culture war that we're in the middle of right now and that's a whole different message I'm not bringing today but I think it'd be great if the church could come alive again and I'm not necessarily trying to fight for

The Thesis: Jesus Included but Not at the Center

9:02 That you know it'd be nice but to get to make sure we don't let culture run away we got to make sure we still declare our God in the public square cannot hear a guy amen everybody it's all about Jesus okay And I am concerned about that to some degree, but I'm actually more concerned about how this scene is actually might be set up in your heart because in some ways this scene is a picture of everything that's in our life and all of us have our lives orbiting around something. So something in our life is the focal point of our life. There's something that, let me say it this way, that everything revolves around, and we have, it's like the solar system, we have these planets that circle around the sun.

9:49 And the sun, as the focal point brings all the energy, the life, the warmth, everything, really, we could not exist without what's in the center of our lives for a tire or a wheel that would be the hub. So all the spokes, everything else in my life is revolving around, in a center around, it actually fits fixates around, brings its strength from around the hub. You're only as strong as the hub. And the thesis of this little message that I wanted to bring to you on Legacy Sunday and in this Christmas season, we're right in the heart of it. And that is simply this, is that Jesus can be still included in my life and not be at the center of it.

10:28 So especially here in the Bible belt, and I'm hopefully gonna step on some spiritual toes today, all right? Because in the Bible belt, we all have a little Jesus in us. So even everybody, I call them cultural Christians. It's the lily and point set of crowd, right? It's the history of Christmas. They have no problem believing there's a God, no problem owning a Bible, no promising songs. But for the vast majority of people who would even call themselves Christians,

10:55 Jesus certainly is not the focal point of their life. He's just in their life. And some people think that's enough, that if he's just somewhere in here, then not to be in the middle, if he's just somewhere, that's good enough. The problem is, is our life gets messed up, right? And if your life is messed up or feels off, And things aren't working out, right? They don't seem right. Right? This down if you're taking notes. Maybe your life's not broken. Maybe it's just not set up right. So maybe there's nothing broken at all. You just have your whole life orbiting around the wrong thing. So I'm gonna set it up, like life sets it up sometimes.

When Work Takes the Center: The Shepherd

- 11:31 Just go along with me, okay? Everybody? I'm gonna set it up where I'm gonna take Jesus. I'm not gonna remove Him by the way. He's still here. I'm gonna put Him over here. I'm gonna even move His parents out of the way. And I'm gonna put the shepherd here as the center of the focal point of our life. And let's just say that the shepherd represents your work life. It's your nine to five for you students or your school life. It's just what you do. Watch this in the vast majority of your life. For many of us, it's 40 plus hours a week that we give to our jobs. And watch this for a lot of us, and this is a different message.
- 12:05 I won't lean into this too hard even though it needs it. For a lot of us we're giving our best emotions and energy and the best part of us so we get home retired We don't have anything to give our family and sometimes we don't even at church like oh my god I'm tired tomorrow's Monday like you know and you're already already thinking about this Why because we do spend the most amount of time 40 hours plus here and and and we work hard to try to try to find 15 minutes a day with God in that right and And so, and then we get, we start living like that and we wonder why our lives are not working out right.
- 12:37 It's just simply because even though it's still 40 hours and maybe that can't change, we can't have our focus and our attention and our efforts in that. In fact, there's a great Psalm, Psalm 127 says, in vain. You're rising early, you're staying up late, you're working, you're going to work. And the Bible calls it toiling for food to eat. Your energy, you're toiling for food to eat. And the Bible is obviously saying, you can't do that for God grants sleep to those he loves. In other words, there's another way for you to have your life ordered so that you have the peace and the joy and the fulfillment, the things that you're looking for. Now, we've all done this, including the one talking to you.

13:19

Psalm 127:2

In vain you rise early and stay up late, toiling for food to eat — for he grants sleep to those he loves.

- 13:51 But I've had seasons where I, in Tamio, tell you she's right here on the front row that men have had seasons that where I'll let that take the best part of me. Even when I was leading the church, 2007 was the year we built the Grantsville facility, our first one, and I'm telling you, I gave more to it than I should have. And it cost me my family and ways that thank God God has redeemed all of that, but it was not a fun ride along the way. And we have to remember, and if you're taking notes, write this little phrase down, work is a wonderful gift. It's just a terrible God.

When Wealth Takes the Center: The Wise Men

- 14:24 I mean, thank God we have it so we can make some money. but it's a terrible God, and please don't make that the focal point of your life. Let's set it up a different way. Let's bring these guys to the center, okay? And honestly, if you didn't know, if you're not a Christian, you didn't know anything about this story, you would put them in the center, because my God, look at them, right? They're looking good. They've got the best clothes. They got all the mom, baby, you know, they got, they got, right? They're tall, they're

handsome, they're, they would have been the smartest. I mean, they're wise, men. They were magi, where we get the word magician.

14:59 They actually came from what is today, modern day Iraq, Babylon and the Old Testament. Probably influenced by the prophet Daniel, knowing that there was going to be a Christ child born. That would have been passed down for 600 years through the prophecies of Daniel. And now they show up. wealthy, and that's what they represent. They represent our wealth, our attainments, our success, our degrees, our education. Everything that we would say, oh my God, this is what defines our lives. And there's not a single person I know that would stand up and say, yes, man, the more I

15:35 Focus my life around my money and my bank account, the better my life is. Everybody will tell you, it's good to have it. Praise God for that. But man, when you make it the focal point of your life and the center of your life, it disappoints. And some of you guys have tried to climb the ladder success only to find out that it's leaning against the wrong wall.

15:56 Like it just, it just wasn't all, you got there and it wasn't all that. And there are some even the shrimp going in your heart, you're saying amen louder than you're saying it right now. In fact, the Bible even calls wealth, let me show you this first out of, first Timothy says, command those who are rich in this present world, not to be arrogant, watch this, nor to put your hope in wealth which is so uncertain, like it comes and goes and goes and goes. It's like you're fighting for it all the time, but to put your hope, not in that, but to put it in God, and reorder your life, who richly provides us with everything we need for our enjoyment.

16:34 And I warn anybody, myself included, that if this ever becomes what your life is like set up like, you're obsessed with your bank account, you're obsessed with it. And by the way, there's the other side of it. It's your obsessed with it because you don't have it. And now you go into debt and now you become a slave to it and it's ruining your life in that kind of a way. You just gotta be careful with your life set up with this kind of scenarios. Jesus is still there. But this is too much of a focal point of your life. I've been reading about the life of Steve Jobs, and before you judge me, I'm reading it for a very specific reason.

17:11 I'm reading a lot of books right now on people who have intense focus, because I'm trying to train our students in this quality that I think is missing in this generation. And I'm setting these people that had, you go looking up yourself, what they call signal versus noise. And they said all of us have a certain amount of our days that are very, very intensely focused hours. And then the rest of its noise. And for the average person, the noise is much greater than the few hours of intense focus. But what the most accomplished leaders had was the ability to make almost all their life signal. And they had the ability to eliminate I just heard Elon Musk say he doesn't go out to dinner.

17:51

1 Timothy 6:17

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment.

18:26 Quote down that I came with for you today, and that is that money promises you a lot, but it keeps you actually always wanting more. like it never can truly satisfy, which is why you can have it. You just can't have it in the center of our lives. All right, here's an open. I got to get moving. The clock's ticking. All right. And here's another setup. And we're going to put Mary and Joseph at the center. Jesus is still there, by the way. And Mary and Joseph represent your relationship, your family, your marriage, your kids. And you would even think, it even sounds right, family first. Like, wait a minute, that's the right way to set it up.

When Relationships Take the Center: Mary and Joseph

19:02 And it's not. I mean, we do need to prioritize family, but God's got to be first, not family. And what happens is if you have an overemphasis on the importance of relationship in an in an in a wrong way, you put pressure on those people to be something that only God can be. That's a fact. That's why two different groups of people can have the same mean person in their family. But if you had expectations of that person, you're filled today with unforgiveness and hurt toward them. And the same person who had the same type of person in their family don't have unforgiveness because they never put that pressure on them to be something that only God can be in the first place.

19:45 And that will preach. Somebody say, a good amen. That'll preach. That's why the Bible says in Psalm 127, unless the Lord builds the house. You're actually putting it all together in vain. And so a lot of us, I'm just going to say it straight, like we prioritize this, we have child centered homes. That's why soccer can come before church. That's why, and we've all done it, and I'm just telling you, it'd be a good time as we end this year and enter to a new and say, I'm not gonna let that happen. I'm just, I'm not gonna allow those types of things to interfere with the fact that if we don't keep Jesus at the right place in our life, it's gonna be a mess for us.

20:29 Years and years ago, I was at a pastor's conference, and we had a Q&A portion of the message of the conference, and people that got pastors are coming up, asking questions. I was there, John Maxwell, some others. And a guy walked through the mics and they passed Chris. Just tell me, make you happy. And what he was trying to say is, is, tell me about your marriage. Tell me about that. And the way he asked it, I decided to mess with him. Because it was just fun to do. I decided to answer the question by the way he asked the question. I said, no, she does not. And the whole crowd was, oh my god, he said it in front of us all.

21:10 And what he really wanted to know was was I happily married and the answer is that is yes, but Tammy can't make me happy. Like if I put all the pressure from my happiness on my spouse, and then if she doesn't make me happy, then I'm not happy.

21:24 I made her something that only God can be. Are y'all with me, everybody? Family is a blessing, but it was never meant to be my source or the center of my life. I'm just telling you. All right, one more. You think, well, they're in one more. All the people are gone. You have to watch this. I'm putting animals at the center.

When Pleasure Takes the Center: The Animals

- 21:44 Some of y'all say it. I don't have my animals at the center. I've seen your Instagrams, my people.
- 21:51 And you need prayer. I mean you really need prayer. In fact, of one of the fun things that Tammy and I do, we enjoy a little portion of our day, every day, every single day. Tammy and I sit together on the couch, hold hands, watch the Jeopardy. And then it usually turns into sports, which means Tammy checks out. She just doesn't like it. But she stays there. Thank God for that. She stays right there. But then she usually jumps on her phone, and it's nine times out of 10. It's Instagram. And so she's going through. And then when she sees something funny, she wants me to enjoy it like she does. Come on, guys, and it just not enjoyable.
- 22:24 **Psalm 127:1**
Unless the Lord builds the house, the builders labor in vain.
- 22:48 Don't do that, people. Don't do that. That's messed up. That really is. Right? It's just a, it's really true that I'm having fun, but the animals represent just the fun part of life. It's our, it's our sports. It's our, it's our shopping. It's our, for me, it's golf. It's the things, by the way, we rarely read the verse in 1 Timothy chapter 6. that you weren't supposed to give everything you have to the things of God. He had that in mind, you having some of the things you have for your own enjoyment. Just can't let it get out of order, but God does not mind you and just read the verse, right? But I think it's sometimes we take this too far, our hobbies and it happens every year.
- 23:30 I'm just gonna say it. It happens around this crazy thing in Alabama. We call football season. My God in heaven. I went to the iron bowl these years, kind of fun because I didn't have a dog in the hunt. I'm an L shoe tiger. Now, I will say this is a lot easier for me to preach, especially when your team's terrible, like mine is. Okay, I get that. Okay, but for those of you who have really awesome teams and you win and all that stuff, and it's annoying. And next thing you know, It's your whole life. I won't pass miles of empty tailgates going into the stadium. And I was actually like, and it's just who I am.
- 24:09 I'm a math person. I was doing the math. I'm thinking, there's millions of dollars that are on the ground right now. And now there's more in, and that's fine. I mean, enjoy yourselves. But it felt over the top. And I saw my Alabama folk. I got stopped everywhere. For some Alabama folks, they were there. And I can't say, rrrr, rrrr, but I tried. I really tried. And then as far as I can go anywhere to the outlet. But I'm just telling me, yeah, man, good luck, man. Oh, yeah, yeah, have fun. And I'm having this experience. And I'm just telling you, I mean, they may not be true for you, but it can get over the top.
- 24:47 It can get crazy. In fact, I joke with my pastor friends that an atheist in Alabama, somebody who doesn't believe in Bear Bryant, you know what I'm saying? Anyway. In Luke chapter 12, Jesus warned a guy, yeah, you know I better get to the scriptures fast, right? In Luke chapter 12, the Bible, Jesus warned the rich guy and says, he goes, man, I love my life. I got grain laid up. I got money in the bank. I can't even spin. Take like easy, easy drink and be merry. And God says, you're a fool, because this very moment, your life's gonna be demanded from you. And who's gonna get what you prepared? In other words,

everybody's gonna take your stuff that you built, y'all the money up for.

25:35 And he says, and this is how it will be for anybody who stores up things for themselves, but it's not rich toward God. Like, again, God doesn't mind you having it, but he does mind when you're wealthier there than you are here.

25:52 And pleasure is fine. But pleasure makes life enjoyable, but it was never meant to be the thing that can fulfill your life.

Putting Jesus Back at the Center

26:04 So in all the scenarios, Jesus was still there. Jesus was still in the picture. He just wasn't in the center. And what I love about what we do here at Highlands, is we don't have to convince you of what I'm getting ready to say. Life will do it. So let me say it this way. Go ahead and set your life up the wrong way and watch what it does for you. Like I don't have to preach this to you. Life will preach it to you. And some of you, your life's broken right now and it feels empty or messed up and if it doesn't, it's not working right, maybe it's not set up right.

26:43 And so what do we do? We put Jesus back at the center of it all. And what we do is a church, if you're new here, is we actually are more than a Sunday in three songs and a great sermon or whatever, right? What we do is we help you reorder your life. We have programming and we say, hey, what'd you pray this prayer and mean it and put Jesus back in the center of your life? And then we take you on a journey and say, hey, you can have some pleasures, but this is where they belong. And by the way, in February,

27:13

Luke 12:19-21

And I'll say to myself, 'You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.

27:30 It says in Colossians chapter 1 and by the way, before I give it to you, it's a very, very, like most of the New Testament, it's incredibly practical. Like, it's only a four chapter, but you can read it in 12 minutes, the whole book of Colossians. And I'll talk about a lot of things. It changes subjects with every paragraph.

27:50 But chapter one is like this poetic, it's almost hard, it's almost even hard to let it in your mind. And then it gets practical so you have a tendency to go beyond that first chapter. And if you have a paper Bible, oftentimes you'll see a heading, it'll say, the supremacy of Christ, in other words, put Jesus at the center. which really is saying you can't get to the practical if you don't do this first. And here's what it says. The sun, Jesus, is the image of the invisible God. In other words, God sent him on the planet so that God you could not see could be seen. And he came to earth to experience everything you would ever experience

28:29 So that he could qualify to be your best friend. And then he gave his life on that cross, right? That's, he came, God came to earth, the first born overall creation. Watch this. For in him, all things were created. So your job, your family, Your money and your pleasures, they were all created by God, things in heaven

on earth, visible invisible, where the thrones or powers or rulers or authorities, watch this, all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all those things are held together. Let me say it this way, so if your life is falling apart, and some of you feel that way, then what you all you need to do is let him put it all back together.

29:21 And that's what I love about what we do here at Highlands. So how do you do that? Let me give you two things and we'll go. And the first is, you have to invite him to take his rightful place back at the center of your life. And you do have to invite him. In fact, in a few minutes, for those of you who do not have him at the center of your life, I'm gonna give you the chance in the privacy of your seat. or wherever you are at another location or online. You can say, Jesus, you're on the list, you're just not at the top of the list, and I'm putting you at the top of the list today.

29:53

Colossians 1:15-17

The Son is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. For in him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things have been created through him and for him. He is before all things, and in him all things hold together.

30:20 The best part of legacy offering is being able to say, I'm not gonna let this season be all about what I receive or what I give to others. I'm making sure this season, for heaven's sake, it's your birthday. I'm gonna make sure this season is all about you. And I'm giving you first. That's what I love about 21 days of prayer. We're gonna start our year saying God first. We're tithing our year with our time. And we're gonna give God the first of our life. Can I hear a good amen out there for anybody that's this? Yeah. And by the way, whatever I won't trust Jesus with will quietly become the center of my life.

30:56

Romans 10:9

If you declare with your mouth, 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.

31:11 And then you forget about him on Monday, Tuesday. No, no, he wants to be your hunting camp God, your mall God, your go to work God. I'm telling you, you're fooling yourself. If you think he's just going to let you show up and say, hey, to him on a Sunday.

31:28 So what do we do? If you want to really have a life that works out right, looks right. and it's healthy, you involve Him in everything. Proverbs says to this way, in all your ways, acknowledge Him and He will make your paths straight again. Put my last little quote on the screen guys, my life

31:50

Proverbs 3:6

In all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

32:23 Right there where you are whisper these words, say Jesus, forgive me, for having other things at the center of my life. And today I'm reordering it. Would you take your rightful place? Now, say it the way the Bible says, be the Lord of my life, because I do believe you die, you rose again. And today God, I'm gonna put my faith in my life and my hope all in you. Knowing you're gonna make everything else

around me work out right, when I set it upright, and I will give you all the thanks. In Jesus' name, in church, the hollet said a good.

33:08 Merry Christmas, everybody. God bless you.